

Creating Color Harmony

By Malcolm Dewey



Why is Color Harmony Important?

Color mixing and color harmony go hand in hand. But beginners mainly focus on color mixing. Trying to get the basic color mixes correct.

Color harmony however is more subtle. It is possible to mix many colors and still fail at a harmonious painting.

This lesson aims to throw light onto this idea of harmony so that you can consider harmony of colors when you paint.

What is Color Harmony?

Color has three main qualities: hue, value and saturation. Hue is the color's name or what it looks like; value refers to how light or dark a color appears; and saturation refers to how much of the color is visible. For example a color straight out the tube is 100% saturated.

Hue, value and saturation are inseparable. But beginners mostly focus on hue. The name of the color. So if the grass is green then green is the extent of the solution when it comes to color selection.

Color harmony means that the colors are related and look correct in relation to each other.

The color wheel is a great way to understand this concept. It shows all of the primary, secondary, tertiary, and complementary colors. The colors on the outside circle are the primaries (red, yellow, blue), while those inside the circle are the secondaries (green, orange, purple). Tertiaries are the colors between the two circles (violet, brown, gray)

How to Create Color Harmony?

The color harmony is a combination of colors that makes the painting look like a unified entity. Made up of colors that belong together. The colors do not distract from the viewer's experience.

For me creating harmony is best when the following is adhered to:

1. Use a limited palette of colors, and use them well.

Primaries, white and earth colors.

2. Mix color from this limited palette

Hue and value come first, then

3. Desaturate color to fit the circumstances, nature of light, of your scene

This means altering the intensity of the original color.

4. Understand the basics of color theory and how to use it in your work.

When it comes to color harmony in your scene, you must first decide what is the quality or nature of the light. Is it warm, cool and so on.

If you want to convey calm and tranquil softly lit scenes, you might consider using hues of light blues, greens, and grays. On the other hand, if you want to capture a warm scene, you should choose hues of reds, oranges, yellows, and violets. You already narrowed down the choices to those that fit the quality of the light. Now you have a direction when it comes to mixing colors.

Understand the Color Wheel

The color wheel is a great way to understand the relationship between colors. It's also an easy way to remember which colors are opposite each other and which ones are next to each other on the wheel.

What are the primary colors?

The primary colors are red, blue and yellow. They can be mixed to create all other colors in the spectrum. The three primary colors make up a triangle on a color wheel.

What are complementary colors?

Complementary colors are the opposite of each other on the color wheel. For example, red and green, blue and orange, yellow and violet.

Complementary colors work well together. It is often said that to see a color properly it must be in the presence of its complement. One shows off the other. However keep one significantly dominant otherwise these colors can clash.

What are analogous colors

Analogous colors are colors that are next to each other on the color wheel. For example, yellow, green-yellow, and green are categorized as analogous colors.

What are tertiary colors?

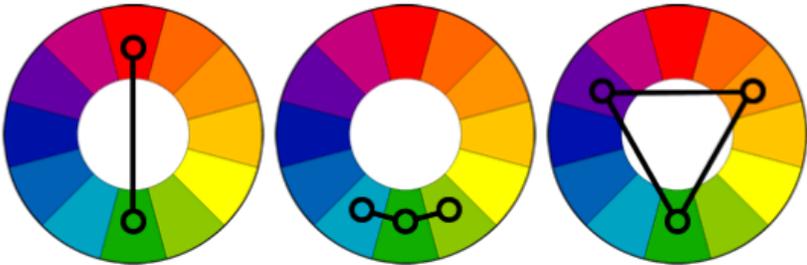
Tertiary colors are those that have been created by mixing primary and secondary colors. They can be made from any combination of the three primary colors, but they are not as common as secondary or complementary colors.

What are gray colors?

Gray is a neutral color, and as such, it can be used to create many different shades from warm to cool.

Gray color is not mud. It is colorful. Look at the hundreds of colors in a paint swatch stand at your hardware store. Most of those are grays.

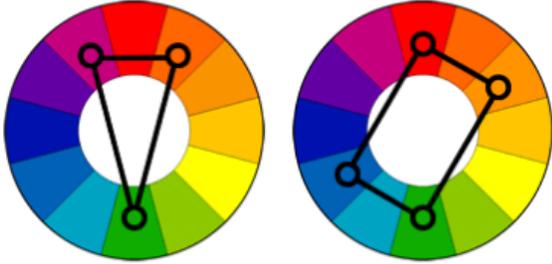
These gray colors are very important as nature is mostly made up of grays. Mixing colorful grays makes a big difference to the natural vibrancy of your paintings.



Complementary

Analogous

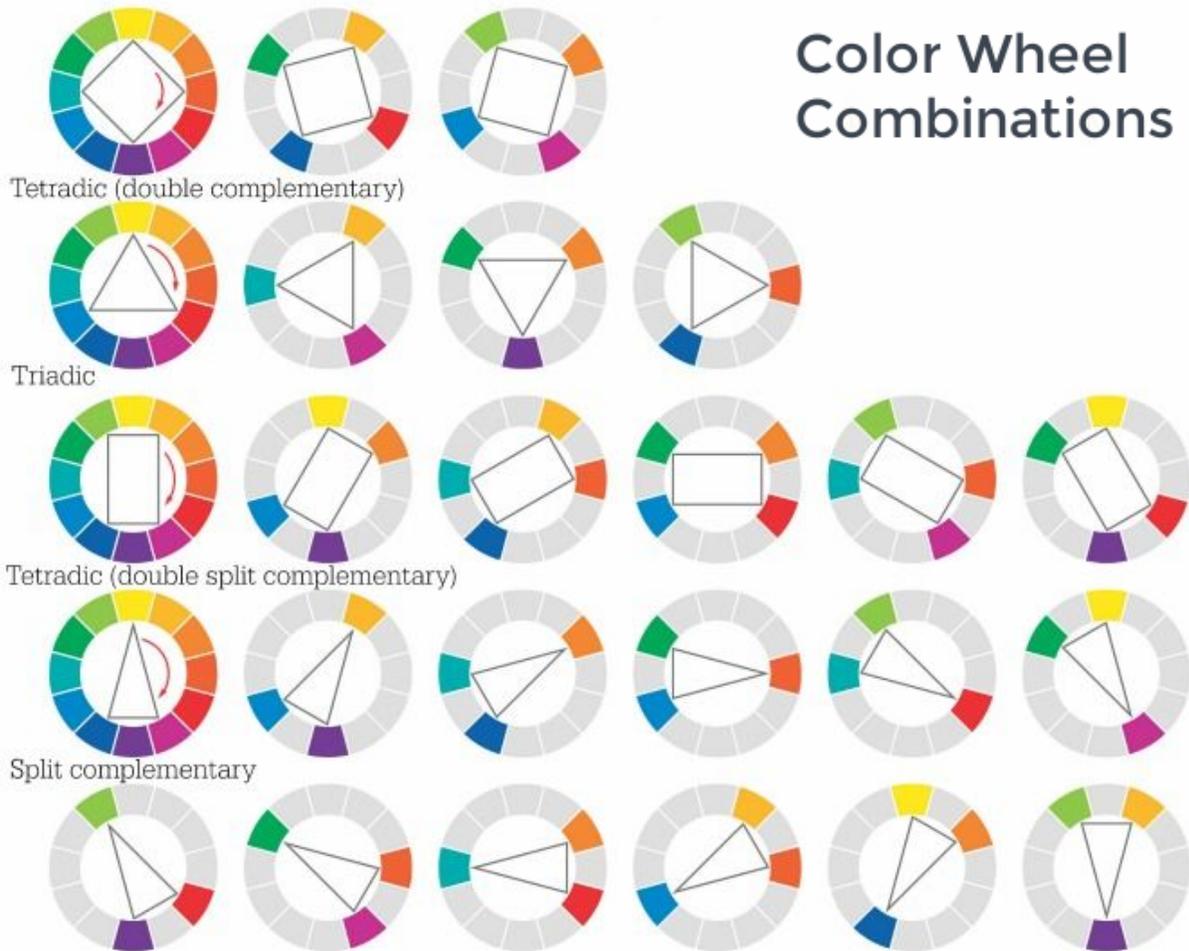
Triadic



Split Complementary

Tetradic

Color Wheel Combinations



Same Color Family

All of the above can be a little confusing at first. That is why I stress using a small palette of colors to begin with. Mixing Color from your limited palette means that your mixes are already in harmony with each other. This is automatic and has a profound influence on how your painting looks.

Simply throwing paint tube colors at your palette leads to a mixed salad of disharmony.

There is more to this topic, but it mostly relates to practice. Only through practical work interpreting the colors for every scene will you learn the recipes to the colors you need.

Malcolm Dewey Fine Art