

Colour Theory

Sir Isaac Newton developed one of the first ever colour diagrams, now referred to as a colour wheel, in the seventeenth century.



A **primary colour** is either:

Blue
Yellow
Red

These three pigment colours cannot be mixed by any other combination of colours – they are the first or primary colours within the colour wheel. They are located in the centre of the diagram.

A **secondary colour** is either:

Green
Orange
Purple

These three colours are formed by mixing two primary colours. They are located in the inside ring of the diagram.

A **tertiary colour** is either:

Yellow-orange
Red-orange
Red-purple
Blue-purple
Blue-green
Yellow-green

These tones, or hues, are created by mixing a primary and secondary colour, hence the two word naming.

How to create GREAT colour palettes

It is imperative that you continually immerse yourself in beautiful colour – pictures, tear sheets, objects and photographs of good colour that you LOVE. Pop them into a plastic sleeve and take them into the print rooms and dye lab with you – don't be precious! You want to recreate a wonderful palette that is as close a match to your inspiration after all.

Jargon and fancy vocabulary to understand and use

Warm colours

Derived from red, through yellow and orange and including brown and tan tones. These colours are warm, like a sunny holiday

Cool colours

Derived from blue-green through blue-violet and including most grey tones. These colours are said to be cool or cold, like a wintery day.

Complimentary colours

Colours that sit opposite each other on the colour wheel are said to be 'complimentary colours' - they make each other appear brighter and contrast against each other.

Analogous colours

Colours that sit next to each other on the colour wheel are said to be 'analogous colours' – showing off a key colour against clean and elegant tones.

Saturation

Saturation describes the level of colour intensity - to make a colour more intense or vivid we 'saturate' or increase its level of colour.

Toning down or 'Greying off'

'Greying off' or toning down a colour describes how you change its intensity to create a softer or duller tone. Greying off rarely involves throwing in black pigments.

How to Grey off colour?

The principles of toning down or 'greying off' are colour is super simple! For example:

You have mixed a bright yellow-green from your two primary colours (blue and yellow), but it's just too vibrant. It needs to be more subtle, but still bright. By adding a tiny flick of red-violet (its complimentary shade) the colour saturation will be counteracted by its complimentary colour.