

The Colour Wheel

The colour wheel is designed so that virtually any colours you pick from it will look good together. Over the years, many variations of the basic design have been made, but the most common version is the 12 colour wheel based on the RYB (RED, YELLOW, BLUE-VIOLET) colour model as illustrated below:



As a tool for artists and artisans, including bead and jewellery designers, reading a 12 colour wheel helps to identify the relationships between different colour hues aiding the user in picking complementary colours.

At the core of this relationship there are the three primary pigment colours – RED, YELLOW and BLUE, which cannot be mixed from other colour elements.



Primary colours can be mixed together to provide three secondary colours – ORANGE, GREEN and VIOLET.



Finally, the remaining six colours on the wheel are known as tertiary colours, namely RED-ORANGE, YELLOW-ORANGE, YELLOW-GREEN, BLUE-GREEN, BLUE-VIOLET, and RED-VIOLET. These are created by mixing a secondary colour with a primary colour and this is why the hue is formed of a two word name.



Combining Colours

How you combine colours is the most important aspect of colour theory. Personal taste remains key but there are guidelines that can be used to make a colour combination that is interesting and aesthetic to the eye. Traditionally, there are a number of colour combinations that are considered particularly pleasing. These are called colour schemes or harmonies and they consist of two or more colours which have a fixed relation in the colour wheel.

Colour Schemes or Harmonies

Colour schemes are created using symmetrical shapes around the wheel; they make combinations that are balanced and harmonious. As the shapes rotate, the combinations change, but the spacing of the colours in each combination does not. It is the symmetrical spacing that consistently ensures a harmonious combination.

There are 15 different colour schemes with which to combine different colours:

1. **Monochromatic** colour schemes are those based on only one colour and that colours respective hues (tints, tones and shades). This can work well when a piece of jewellery combines a mixture of light and dark shades as well as different surface finishes, textures, shapes and sizes.



2. **Analogous** (or related) colour schemes uses three to five colours that are adjacent to each other on the colour wheel – providing a very harmonious and sophisticated look because all the colours share a common colour. Select a single colour on the wheel then move one segment to the left or right of that colour. The result will not be an overkill of a single colour but instead will promote colour harmony. Analogous colour schemes work well when it is difficult to truly match a colour. It is usual for one of the three colours to predominate.



3. **Complementary** colour schemes are made up of two colours that are directly opposite each other on the colour wheel – these colours contrast each other in the most extreme way and help to make each colour more vibrant and bright. Select a single colour on the wheel and move directly across the wheel in a straight line. The corresponding colour is complementary. Complementary colours complete each other through opposition. In design, if a certain colour is predominant the best way to control that colour is by using its complement. So an over abundance of orange is offset by using blue; yellow is offset by violet and vice versa. However, this is one scheme where it is important to get the proportions right. A 50/50 mix of two opposing colours can be less pleasing to the eye than using a small amount of the complementary colour to accentuate the colour of the main beads. Also because the colours will be opposites of each other you will find that one of the colours is a warm colour while the other is a cool colour. It is far more pleasing to the eye to have the warm colour in smaller amounts than the cool colour, rather than the other way round.



4. **Analogous Complementary** colour scheme utilise related hues lying adjacent on the colour wheel with a hue directly opposite. This gives a more restful effect than using complementary colours.



5. **Dual Complementary** colour schemes are made up of two colours side by side and their two complementary colours opposite them on the colour wheel.



6. **Near Complementary** colour schemes combining your starting colour with the colour to the right or left of its complement producing a more interesting two colour combination.



7. **Split Complementary** colour schemes use a colour plus the two colours adjacent to its complementary colour. This scheme combines the effect of the powerful complementary scheme with a variation on the analogous scheme. Chose a key colour then go directly across the colour wheel to find its complement but instead of the complement, use the two colours that you find next to it. Split complementaries are subtle and very effective in creating a balanced approach. However, as with the complementary scheme, it is important not to have the same amount of each colour. It is much more pleasing to the eye for either the main colour or the two split complementary colours to dominate.



8. **Triadic** colour schemes use three colours that are evenly spaced around the colour wheel. A triad colour scheme organizes colours in regard to purity. Select a spot on the colour wheel for example red. To complete the triad, draw an equilateral triangle. Wherever the points of the triangle meet, there is a relationship. In this example the other points meet at blue and yellow. This confirms the primary colour theory of RED, YELLOW and BLUE. Likewise by selecting ORANGE and tracing another equilateral triangle the remaining two points are VIOLET and GREEN which are also known as secondary colours. This method creates relationships based on purity of colour. If you are trying to affect a balanced design then consider a triad colour scheme. If green is highly evident use purple with it. Once again though you need to be careful with the proportions. Ideally one colour should dominate, with the second colour used to a lesser degree and just tiny amounts, or accents, of the third colour.



9. **Modified Triads** are created by choosing three colours on the wheel, each with only one space separating them instead of the two spaces used to create complementary triads.



10. **Complementary Triads** are formed by combining any two complements with one of the two available colours midway between them on the wheel.



11. **Rectangular Tetrads** or tetradic colour schemes use four colours arranged into two complementary pairs forming a rectangle. This is one of the most difficult colour schemes to balance as care needs to be taken to prevent it becoming a jumble of colours. It can look best where one of the colours dominates and the other three colours are used as accent colours only.



12. **Square Tetrads** colour schemes are similar to the rectangle but with all four colours spaced evenly around the colour circle.



13. **Multi colour** schemes use matching values from each colour around the wheel, so twelve colours are in unison.



14. **Neutral** schemes use shades of browns and tans. Colour is neutralized by mixing it with its complement.



15. **Achromatic** schemes use no colour, just shades of grey, black and white (also known as grayscale)



Mood Colours

In addition to illustrating how colours can be combined the colour wheel also groups colours into warm and cool colours.

Warm colours, such as red, orange and yellow are considered exciting and vivid. When used in a piece of jewellery they have a tendency to look tighter and to appear larger.



Cool colours such as green and blue are calm and restful. They have a tendency to look more dispersed and to appear smaller next to a warm colour. They often work well as a background colour.



By understanding the appeal of colours at different times beads can be used to reflect feelings and moods as well as appealing to seasonal markets for example green and red at Christmas.

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