

FEBRUARY 4, 2020 1/BLOG/COLOR-THEORY-VALUE

Color Theory: Are you blinded by color? Value vs. Hue (Alcohol Marker, Colored Pencil) (/blog/color-theory-value)

COPIC MARKER (/BLOG/CATEGORY/COPIC-MARKER), COLORED PENCIL (/BLOG/CATEGORY/COLORED-PENCIL), COLOR THEORY (/BLOG/CATEGORY/COLOR-THEORY), IMPROVE YOUR COLORING (/BLOG/CATEGORY/IMPROVE-YOUR-COLORING)



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- What if I made the sky a bluish violet instead of true blue?
- What if I switch from Kelly Green leaves to Olive Green?
- Would the dog be a golden retriever?
- Maybe it's a peach tree?

This is a common mistake, substituting one blending combination for a slightly different one.

Let's call it the "Frustrated Subbing Method":

We randomly substitute color combinations, hoping to blindly hit upon something pretty.

And it doesn't work!

Why?

Because we're substituting one hue for another, ignoring the more important aspects of color:



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back to your eyeball.

Value is the amount of visual punch aimed at your retina and your brain; but it's based on a color's brightness or opinion.

A high value color is a high light bouncer. These colors tend to be lighter (which I know is a relative term). We give them a high number on the value scale because they're high bouncers. So a value of 9 is a high bouncer and thus a high value. Pure white would be a 10 on the value scale.

Psst... ever wonder why we call bright spots "highlights"? Remind?

A low value color is a low light bouncer (which you could call dark). Low numbers = low bouncing = low value. Pure black would be a 0 on the value scale.

And now all the ladies who'd had their hair professionally colored suddenly understand the term low-lights.

I know, we started this article talking about why it's so hard to make attractive color palettes and now I'm taking you on a detour through ValueLand?

Pelence grasshopper. I'm getting there.



Vanilla Beans is a FREE 2 minute read, every Saturday

FINALLY!

When I thought we'd never get here.

What does all this talk about value and hues have to do with why you have trouble creating attractive and beautiful color palettes?

Remember when I said that you sat down and colored?

- blue sky
- green tree
- brown dog
- red apple

And you thought that looked childish, so you switched it for:

- periwinkle sky
- olive tree
- yellow dog
- orange peaches

And the color palette still looks dumb?

What did you really do?

You basically subbed one hue for another hue.

Why didn't it work?

Because your color palette problem had nothing to do with hues!

You could sub hues in and out all day and still never hit on anything pretty.

Beautiful color palettes have almost nothing to do with hues.

We've all had this experience before— you see a color palette that is three murky greens, a drab gray, and some terrible orange that nobody would ever wear, and yet you kinda like the way they look together????

Blinded by Hues



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What is a hue?

You've heard the word hue before even if you can't define it for a friend. Lots of art tutorials and videos use the word hue. It's a way of saying color, right?

Most people think **hue** and **color** are synonyms; different names for the same exact thing.

But they're not the same.

All hues are colors but not all colors are hues.

Look around you: everything you see has a color, right? Your desk is white, your mug is yellow, your wall is blue.

Color is a generic word for how we interpret different wavelengths of light.

Hues are different.

Hues are a specific kind of color.

Let's pretend there's a rainbow in the sky. If you could reach up and grab a handful of color from the rainbow, what you'd have in your hand would be a hue.

A hue is 100% pure unadulterated color.

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Copic is upsidedown



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The Copic Flip-Flop

Before we go further, I must apologize to Copic readers. I know my definition of value has many of you confounded.

Copic Amy said it backwards. High value colors are dark and low value colors are lighter!

Hope Copic lend!

Some of you know my Drunk Guy at the Copic Factory theory, how the Copic numbering system only makes sense until it doesn't?

Yep, the drunk guy strikes again.

He flipped the value scale. He flipped a number 9 on a low value color and put a 0000 on the highest value possible.

Damn drunk guy! This is why you'll hear me in videos correct myself frequently.

High value... I mean low. No, I said it right the first time.

Sometimes I forget who I'm talking to.

Copic numbers are the reverse of the value scale that the rest of the art world uses.

That's partially because the Copic scale is not totally a value scale but that's a digression for another day.

Just remember: when you visit Copicland, value is topsy-turvy.

Do you really understand value?

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Balanced value



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Pleasing color palettes are not magical hue combinations.

Pleasing color palettes are a balanced selection of values.

Confused by Hues?



As an alcohol marker beginner, you follow marker recipes given to you by instructors or bloggers.

Colored pencil beginners do the same thing, relying on proven color combinations and the advice of other pencil fans.

But as you improve your coloring skills, you try to invent your own color palettes.

Sadly, this is where a lot of colorists decide they can't color well without the help of a tutorial or class.

Many intermediate colorists pretend to be beginners because they don't color well alone!

They regress back to using prepared color palettes even though they're capable of inventing their own.

Why?

Creating color palettes is hard when you're Hue Confused!

I've written about color palettes before. I'll link below so you can catch up.

But today, I'd like to talk about something I see a lot in the coloring world.

Most colorists focus on hue to the detriment of everything else.

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Rainbows in your hand



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A hue is the reddish of reds, the cleanest yellow, the purest blue.

But also the characterist charcoal and the most tangier turquoise.

A hue has no black, no gray, and no other color added to it to neutralize its vibrancy. It also hasn't been tinted with white or stretched thin with water, solvents, or mediums.

In common usage, we tend to use hues as master names for color families: Reds, greens, blues—generic classifications.

But an actual hue is a true color.

Crisp and clean with no caffeine. No additives, fillers, or artificial preservatives— that's a hue.

Value is not "darkness"

A value is different than color or hue.

And watch out, this is where a lot of coloring instructors reveal that They're good at coloring but not so good at teaching correct information.

Color theory stuff feels very mind-bendy, but the answer to your color palette problem is slowly coming together here.

One more point before I knock your socks off with the solution.

As I said before, value is commonly misunderstood. You can tell light colors from dark colors, so you stop listening when color theory people mention measurements, desaturation, reflectivity.

You just stopped listening, right?

Come back to me, baby.

Yes, you stopped listening, right? Come back to me, baby.

All colors have a real value and an implied value.

The **real value** is what you're seeing here in my grayscale crayons. Every color has a value that matches an established value on a neutral gray scale. A blue that is a value 4 matches a value 4 gray which also matches a value 4 green.

Flipping a project to grayscale shows you THE GRAY SCALE— meaning the actual color values.

Pop Quiz time! Looking at my grayscale crayons, which crayon was red?

Uhm... why the hesitation? Just put your finger on the red one.

Why are you hesitating? Just put your finger on the red one.



Value is useful for more than blending combinations!

Look, Copic offers you a wonderful time saver—

Use this marker trio and you'll never have to guess which markers blend well!

But by offering you a shortcut, Copic licks you into some truly terrible ideas:

- colorists think hues are the secret to depth & dimension
- colorists think hues are the secret to realism
- colorists think hues are the secret to pleasing color palettes

Hue, hue, hue, hue. Hue all the live-long day.

What's that saying about problems? "If you only have a hammer?"

Copic sells lots of hues— but now you think the solution to every problem is a new hue.

Hue Subbing can never improve a bad color palette.

This leads to unnecessary frustration.

Color is only a small part of a good color palette.

If you only look at hue, you're missing the important stuff! So let's stop beating our heads against the wall, eh?

Let's look at Hue Confusion.

BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO COLOR PALETTES
HTTP://WWW.VANILLAARTS.COM
/BLOG/COLORPALETTE-101

ADD NEUTRALS TO YOUR PALETTE
HTTP://WWW.VANILLAARTS.COM
/BLOG/ADD-NEUTRAL-TO-YOUR-PALETTE

COLOR WHEELS FOR COLOR PALETTES
HTTP://WWW.VANILLAARTS.COM
/BLOG/COLORWHEEL-101

A PALETTE MISTAKE HTTP://WWW.VANILLAARTS.COM
/BLOG/PALETTE-MISTAKE

How most people pick color palettes

Here's what I suspect is happening at your coloring desk. You find a stamp and start coloring logically:

- the dog is brown
- the tree is green
- the tree has bright red apples
- the sky is blue

You realize after 10 minutes of coloring that your project looks kinda childish.

Something's wrong with the colors you're using— they feel wrong but you're not sure why.

Let me tell you, this is where a lot of coloring instructors reveal that

They're good at coloring but not so good at teaching correct information.

Notice that when I described a hue, I resorted to fantasy? Reach up and grab the rainbow.

Unlike hue, value is NOT a dreamy concept.

Value is scientifically measurable.

I ask my students to think of value as strength or weight because that immediately makes them think of something that can be measured.

Many coloring tutorials define value as darkness but that's wrong.

Dark is a relative—your idea of dark isn't consistent.

Darker than what? Is sunshine yellow darker than cloud blue? Is Kelly green darker than magenta?

Value is concrete, not abstract or relative. Value can be measured.

Most artists use a standardized value scale like the neutral or Munsell style key.

https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B007924M44/ref=as_li_tfcamp=1718q creative=1333&realtime=184-B007924M44-U7T8B4C-CODE-book-kind=indigo&pf_rd_p=3248c7c7-3107-4073-b2d3a4g-vanilo6-201 but some art supply companies create their own value scales (more on this in a minute).

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Value is measurable



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Value is basically how much light a color bounces

Many of you guessed wrong because implied value is different than real value.

In our heads, we think of yellow as pale. A yellow lemon in reality might actually measure darker than blue jeans or grapes but our brains are programmed to assume yellow is lighter than every other color.

Implied value is a mental quirk which ruins our judgement.

This is why it's hard to find the red crayon in my grayscale photo. Your brain is looking for something "dark" because red seems like a dark color. But the red marker I used was a medium value (Copic R44).

Psst... some of your assumptions are making important color palette decisions for you!

Recommended Supplies

FOR MARKER, PENCIL, & WATERCOLOR PROJECTS

https://www.vanillaarts.com/recommended-products/

Check out Amy's favorite art supplies, click above.

Why is it so difficult to create your own color palettes?

You swap the hue but don't change the value.

The value is what looks wrong. Value imbalance is what triggers the "awwww" reaction. Hue swapping can't fix the value problem.

The most juvenile color palette you could invent is 5 hues all at a level, same exact value.

5-5-5-5-5 looks like Barnum & Bailey whether you're doing it with primary colors or the blandest indigo-coral-gray combination.

If every color in the palette is a similar value, the palette is guaranteed to look immature—because it IS immature!

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More than blending



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How to create attractive color palettes using value

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