

B B C BITESIZE

Everything we see is made up of colours. Understanding how they work is an important part of art and design.

The colour wheel shows pure colours or hues. There's the primary colours. You can mix them to make secondary colours. When you mix a primary and secondary colour together you get tertiary colours.

Colours that are next to each other on the colour wheel are analogous or harmonious colours. They seem to blend together making them easy on the eye.

Opposite colours are called complementary. They contrast with each other. Mixing one colour with a complementary hue will change its intensity. A pure colour is bright and intense. Mixing with a contrasting colour makes it muted or subtle. Intense colours stand out and attract attention. Muted colours start to blend.

Value is how light or dark a colour is and it can be altered by using tint, shade and tone. Tint is any colour mixed with white. Add black to a colour to create a shade. And adding both black and white gives a tone.

If you use just one colour's tints, shades and tones this would be described as monochromatic. Piet Mondrian's work combines the most basic elements the primary colours plus white and black.

There are no shades, tones or tints. It's flat blocks of intense primary colour. Warmer reds and yellows dominate. The result feels bold and, especially at the time it was made, it would have seemed modern and urban.

In this Winslow Homer watercolour we mostly see white and blue. But Homer used tone to create shadows and tints for reflections on the water. Cool, harmonious colours create a sense of calm. Small amounts of intense red create contrast and emphasise key details.

This is a poster advertising soap from 1897. Alphonse Mucha used analogous colours based on red and orange. The overall effect is muted and harmonious. Using the blue-green for contrast makes the orange feel more intense. This helps the pale skin tone stand out. The warm tones are soft and feminine to appeal to the target market. Remember, Mucha's design is trying to sell soap.

Colours or hues all have different value, intensity and temperature. They can be harmonious or complementary.

Understanding colour can help you interpret other people's work and express thoughts, feelings and moods of your own.