

Name: _____ Date: _____ Period: _____

MIXING OF COLORS

Few colors in nature are visually pure. In all likelihood, you'll find a color slightly bluish, reddish, or yellowish. Pure colors are normally used in posters only, or in dyeing textiles.

Let's say you need a very dark red. Take the darkest you have - alizarin crimson - add a little blue, green, or black, or a drop of each. By "little" I mean that all you do is touch green, blue, or black with the corner of your brush, and mix it into the alizarin. Add more, if necessary. (I advise you to look every time you do anything in art, and ask yourself if you are doing the right thing.)

Suppose you want to obtain a lighter red. Is it to be brilliant or mellow, warm or cool, pinkish or yellowish? Don't just add white to make it lighter. White turns alizarin crimson into pink, a rose color, while it makes peach out of cadmium red. You may have to combine alizarin, cadmium red, orange, and yellow for a warm red of high intensity. By adding white, instead of yellow, you'll have an equally light and bright, but cooler red. Whatever you mix, test every brush stroke before adding more paint.

To mix or modify any light shade, begin with the lightest hue close to it. For a pale green, take white and add a touch of phthalo green. If it isn't the right shade, add a pinpoint of cobalt, phthalo blue, or ultramarine blue, whichever gives you the desired effect; if it isn't bright enough, dip a corner of your brush in light yellow, and stir it into the green. Colors are stronger in some brands than in others, and artists don't work like pharmacists, weighing each ingredient on a scientific scale according to a prescription. Mix the colors on your palette, but the final proof is in the painting. Look at each color as you place it next to, or on top of, other colors.

It's possible to mix a pint can of household paint with half a can of another color, but this isn't the way in fine arts. You aren't preparing a pale of paint for painting your kitchen, where you must be sure to have plenty of paint, thoroughly mixed in order to prevent dirty streaks. In fine arts, you can always change a mixture if it isn't just right. The wrong color won't kill the painting the way an incorrectly filled prescription might kill the patient. One of the beautiful features of working in color, in any medium, is to experiment, to watch the results, to see how the smallest bit of another color can help or harm your painting.

MAKING COLORS DARKER

Making colors darker also has a pitfall. Your first idea may be to add black. Although red, blue, green, and brown can be made darker by adding a little black, try to add another dark hue: ultramarine blue to red or green, alizarin crimson to blue.

Even if you do add black, it's usually better to mix it with a drop of some other dark hue too. Yellow can be made darker by mixing it with yellow ocher, but it will no longer be really yellow. Black turns yellow into a dirty green. Ocher can be deepened with burnt sienna and a bit of black.

USING BLACK AND WHITE PROPERLY

Brought up on the tradition (or superstition) that black is not a color, but a lack of all color, many artists work without it. Nobody recommends the use of plain black over large sections of your painting; not even Goya's famed "black paintings" in the Prado Museum in Madrid are jet black.

Add a little red, blue, or green to make your black warmer, or cooler, and to take away that flat, papery appearance it has when applied to a large spot. A black dress is not truly black all over; it has lights, shadows, and reflections that break it into many different shades.

Too much white in any color makes it what we call "chalky," a fully descriptive expression, because such colors do appear to have been smeared with white chalk.

Too much reddish blue in a dark color will cause an "inky" impression, as if you had spilled ink on your painting. Such a spot appears to be a big hole in your picture, something that doesn't belong there. Watch out for such exaggerations.

EXERCISE IN COLOR MIXING

Here's the most practical and sensible method of finding out what color mixing really means:

1. Take a six or eight inch wide strip of canvas, paper, or whatever support you like, and paint an inch of every color you have.
2. Go from top to bottom, leaving about an inch of space between colors.
3. Rub a small amount of white into each color, but leave about one-third of each stripe intact. Compare the mixtures with the original hues. As I've already said, alizarin crimson becomes pink; cadmium red turns into peach when the white is added; you have to add a great deal of white to cadmium yellow before you can notice the difference; white creates entirely different shades out of every blue. The same varied effects occur when white is mixed into any green, yellow ocher, burnt sienna, cobalt violet, or any other color you may have.
4. Rub an additional amount of white into each color, and you'll see further interesting variations.
5. Now mix every basic color with all the other colors. For instance, add cadmium yellow light to all your colors; cobalt blue to all your colors; phthalo green to all your colors; and so forth. A vast array of colors and shades is at your disposal, opening up a vista of a sumptuous world of color. After some experience, you'll be able to obtain every imaginable shade of every perceivable color.