

Color Combinations That Work

Complementary · Analogous · Triadic · Split-Complementary · Monochromatic

Complementary

Rule: Colors directly across the color wheel from each other.

Feeling: High contrast, vibrant, energetic — colors make each other look brighter.

Examples: Red + Green · Blue + Orange · Yellow + Violet



Use when: Signage, sports teams, holiday art, anything that needs to grab attention.

Analogous

Rule: Three or more colors that sit next to each other on the color wheel.

Feeling: Harmonious, natural, pleasing — found throughout nature (autumn leaves, ocean at sunset).

Examples: Red, Red-Orange, Orange · Blue, Blue-Green, Green



Use when: Landscapes, portraits, any scene that should feel unified and calm.

Triadic

Rule: Three colors evenly spaced around the color wheel (every 4th color).

Feeling: Vibrant but balanced. More varied than complementary but still harmonious.

Examples: Red + Yellow + Blue (primary triad) · Orange + Green + Violet



Use when: Children's illustration, graphic design, playful art — high energy with variety.

Split-Complementary

Rule: A color plus the two colors on either side of its complement.

Feeling: High contrast like complementary, but softer and less jarring. Sophisticated.

Examples: Red + Blue-Green + Yellow-Green · Blue + Red-Orange + Yellow-Orange



Red	Blue-Green	Yellow-Green
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Use when: A great 'safe' alternative to complementary. Most advertising uses this.

Monochromatic

Rule: One hue in different values (tints = add white; shades = add black).

Feeling: Elegant, unified, sophisticated. Focuses attention on form, not color variety.

Examples: Navy + Royal Blue + Sky Blue + Baby Blue + White

Navy	Royal Blue	Blue	Light Blue	Baby Blue

Use when: Portraits, minimalist design, when you want texture and value to do the work.