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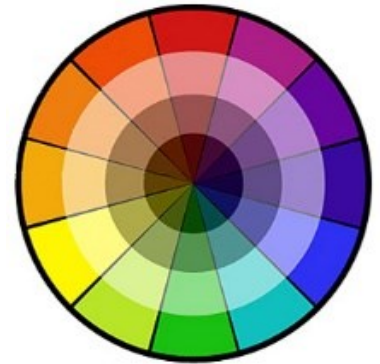
by Chris A. Paschke CPF, GCF, May 2026

## "Color Tints, Tones & Shades"

Color provides stimulus that activates visual consciousness and reaction through emotional response. In framing, it is used to accent or harmonize with the art and to assist in creating an overall mood through the use of matboards, moulding, fabrics and surface design. Color should never be used solely for its own character or emotive reaction, but always in relation to the image or object being framed, and never to simply match the sofa.

### Color Terminology

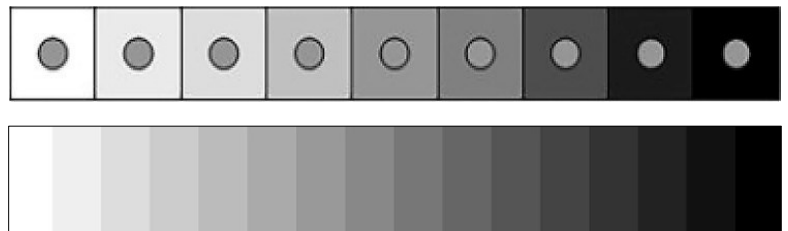
Black, white and gray have always been considered neutrals, but all tinted, toned and shaded colors are neutrals, with every color on the wheel having its own tints, tones and shades in the color spectrum. Since both black and white are classified as neutrals then any mixture of the two also produces neutrals as gray. The average person distinguishes 30-40 gradations between white and black while those with high visual acuity may be able to see as many as 150 gradations, so these variations are vital to design.



The addition of white to any hue (base color) creates a *tint*, adding gray creates a *tone*, and black creates a *shade*.

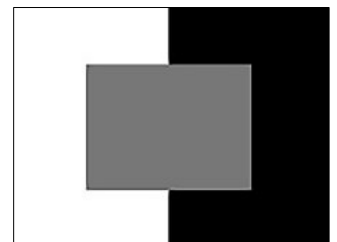
**(photo 1)** The color wheel outer ring is the base *hue*, the pure color itself, described using common color names of red, yellow, blue, purple, orange, and green. The second ring has white added, tinting all the hues. The second ring adds gray which tones all the hues, and the innermost ring has black added making them all shades of the original hue. As color becomes grayer it appears less bright, duller, and more muted. Each of the twelve hues plus all of the many tints, tones, and shades make up the colors on a color wheel.

Colors on the gray value scale have no hue and are therefore called *achromatic*. **(photo 2)** The sample shows a middle gray progressing from white to black, and although the center gray dot remains the same, it appears to shift from darker to lighter as it moves across. Hue identifies the family to which a color belongs, and chroma describes how vivid or muted a color appears. Blacks, whites and grays are the *achromatic* colors. They lack both hue and chroma—having no color family—but they are still colors. The gray scale white to black illustrates the vast number of subtle changes available.



**(photo 3)** In the visual arts middle gray is a tone that is halfway between black and white on a lightness scale, typically defined as 18% reflectance in visible light.

**(photo 4)**



*Monochromatic* color schemes are created from a single hue family with use of all its tints, tones and shades. *Complementary* colors are those primary and secondary hues opposite each other on the color wheel (red and green; purple and yellow; blue and orange) and the blending of complementary colors should produce neutral gray, with no dominant family base. And in some cases the resulting color may be much more pleasing than by the addition of black to darken, or white to lighten. This is evidenced by the rich, earthy, forest green that is produced by adding primary red to primary green when painting florals and landscapes.

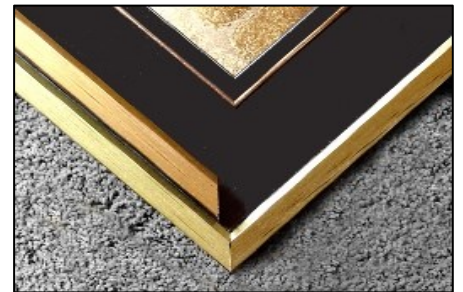
### Hue Bases

Hue is a color's pure essence. Black, white, and gray are not hues, but neutrals without a place on the spectrum. Since primary colors cannot be created by mixing other colors they are the beginning, the base, the parent of all other colors as red, yellow and blue bases. The secondaries are then created from those primaries, and depending on how much of either color is added the base the new color will shift closer to one of the primaries, making it the dominant base. If red

and yellow are equally blended they create the hue orange. If more red is added the color becomes a red-orange, having more red base. If more yellow is added it become yellow-orange, with more yellow base.

Metallics all have color bases, just as hues, having the same warm and cool tendencies, and identifying the color base helps select the correct color family to create a unified frame design.

**(photo 5A/B)** When rose gold leaf is in original art only red base mats, accents and frame should be selected because use of yellow or blue base colors will feel visually off. The same is true for other metallics such as silver and pewter which may be either warm red base or cool blue base. A side note about metallics is their possibility to light shift over time.



The original 1985 framing is a double black rag mat with pin-striped liner mat, matching rose gold fillet and cap frame. By 2015 a significant fade is seen in the outer frame where the red dye in the gold paint has faded to a yellow base appearance, no longer matching the art and fillet. The real gold on the limited edition will never color shift and it appears the fillet inside the framing package has been protected by the UV glazing and real gold leaf.

### Value and Chroma

*Value* describes how light or dark any color appears, being measured by how close a color is to white (is higher value) or to black (is lower value). Pure hues don't all have the same value. Yellow is naturally lighter than violet, while blue is darker than orange. *Chroma* measures how much of the pure hue it contains versus how much it's been mixed with other colors. High chroma means it is a pure, intense, vivid color, while low chroma meaning it is a muted, grayed, dusty color. Fire engine red has high chroma, while Dusty rose has low chroma. Both are red base, but one is pure, while the other is mixed with white, gray, black, and/or another hue. So, Light blue vs. Navy blue have the same hue, but different values. Bright red vs. Brick red have the same hue, but different chromas.

### Tints, Tones, Shades

The lighter the color, the higher the value; the darker the color, the lower its value. When white is added to a hue it becomes a *tint*. It may be mixed with just a touch of white, or with so much white that the base is very faint, but all are tints of the same color base hue. On the color wheel only one mid-range tint is shown for each hue. A *tone* of a color is created when a hue is blended with gray, subduing that color. On the color wheel only one tone, which is meant to be midway between the hue and Middle gray.

A *shade* is a darker value of a color, made by adding pure neutral black. Just as with the tints and tones, a hue may be mixed with just a touch of black or with so much black that you are hardly able to detect the color base hue, all are considered shades. Since white, gray, and black are achromatic, they have no family base to impact the new colors. Red, yellow, blue, and green hues added to black are what make the final shades of color based blacks, not the black itself. These shades are most often recognized in clothing when trying to match a black blazer to black slacks, which are really a red based black blazer to blue based black slacks.

### Pantone

Domestically and globally, designers look to Pantone for their annual trend palettes. In November 2025 they launched their new tints, tones and shades palettes featuring *New Age Pastels* (tints), *Blended* (tones), and *Shadows* (shades) as the three to watch as new Pantone color chips. This year was a bit of a surprise when they announced *Cloud Dancer* as their 2026 COTY, as "a billowy, balanced white that embodies a sense of calm and tranquility in a chaotic world." **(photo 6A-B)** Indeed the three palettes are good examples of three white, gray, black variations, and you can fairly easily determine the color family from which they came.



Psychology aside, it is a slightly grayed off white, very neutral, pairing well with natural materials, and most tints, tones and shades, as their palettes suggest. Pastels have been featured in home interiors, art and framing for a long time, but

these tints are considered more sophisticated allowing them to be introduced into design without taking center stage or overpowering the base design. Their Shadows palette is a series of tones and shades that will also fit well with almost anything. (photo 7)

### Neutral Frame Design

Though decorating trends come and go, neutrals should always be a staple when designing. Framing for the art will stand the test of time and in our eclectic world of design, finely framed and protected art will always fit in, framing with neutrals is always a safe alternative to trending.

A white living room may appear all white but at close inspection will have tints and shades of white with a base color family of red, yellow or blue that can warm up or cool down the neutral room allowing for visual transitions from walls to flooring, accent carpets, furniture and artwork. The most effective design concept may be a monochromatic neutral with a pop of color, which can lend itself to interior design, fashion and framing.

END

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Photo 1 – The color wheel outer ring is the base hue. The second ring has white added tinting all the hues. The second ring adds gray which tones all the hues, and the innermost ring has black added making them all shades of the original hue.

Photo 2 – The Gray Value Scale sample shows middle gray progressing from white to black, and although the center gray dot remains the same.

Photo 3 - The gray scale white to black illustrates the vast number of subtle changes available in transition, while only showing a neutral gray with no base hue.

Photo 4 - In the visual arts middle gray is a tone that is halfway between black and white on a lightness scale, typically defined as 18% reflectance in visible light.

Photo 5A/B – A) Metallics also have color base hues, having the same warm and cool tendencies as shown by these red, yellow, and blue based mat corners.

B) Real 22k gold leaf art was framed in 1985 when the frame matched the red based color family. The red dye in the frame's gold paint has faded and now appears to be a yellow base gold which no longer matches the art and fillet.

Photo 6A/B – A) Pantone COTY 2026 *Cloud Dancer*, a slightly grayed, off white, neutral white...tone.

B) A minimalist Pantone living room showcasing their COTY as a "balanced white that embodies a sense of calm and tranquility in a chaotic world."

Photo 7A/B/C – Pantones *New Age Pastels*, *Blended*, and *Shadows* palettes easily showcasing the addition of white, gray and black color transitions.