Color Mixing Basics

The color wheel Before we break down how to mix paint colors, it's important to learn why colors work the way they do. So, let's start with the color wheel! The color wheel is a circular chart that displays how colors interact with one another. By reading a color wheel, you can determine what colors to mix with what. But first, it's important to understand how the color wheel is divided:

Primary colors consist of red, yellow, and blue, which are the only colors that cannot be mixed to create one another.

- **Secondary colors** consist of green, orange, and purple and are made by combining primary colors.
- **Tertiary colors** are yellow-orange, red-orange, red-purple, blue-purple, blue-green, and yellow-green and are created by mixing a primary and secondary color.
- **Complementary colors** are two colors directly across from each other on the wheel that "complement" one another, such as red and green.
- **Analogous colors** are any three colors that are side by side on the color wheel, such as yellow-green, yellow, and yellow-orange.

Warm and cool colors On the color wheel, there are two tones of color: warm and cool. Warm colors (yellow, red, and orange) are reminiscent of fire and are generally brighter, whereas cool colors (blue, green, and purple) are found more commonly in nature and tend to be duller. When mixed, the temperatures or tones of colors can affect the outcome.

- For example, mixing a warm red and warm yellow will make a bright, warm orange. Alternatively, mixing a cool red with a cool yellow will make a muted cool orange.
- Warm and cool colors can also be mixed together to create more unique tones. When mixing a warm and cool color, the undertones of the color will mix. For instance, a warm red mixed with a cool blue makes a cool maroon.

Lightening and darkening colors White and black paint can alter a color's tint, saturation, and shading. Tint and shade refer to how light or dark a color appears, while saturation is how "intense" or gray a color is. Experimenting with mixing in small amounts of white or black paint can allow you to create variations of basic colors.

- Similarly, you can also lighten paint colors by adding a little bit of yellow or darken them by adding a little bit of blue.
- Whether white and black count as primary colors is debated. For paint-making purposes, it's important to know that a variety of black shades can be created with existing paints, whereas no paints mix to create white.