

Designing With Color



When designing your website, one of the most important factors to consider is color. Choose wisely and you'll attract the attention of your target audience, set the appropriate mood, and send the right message. Choose unwisely and you'll turn users away—no matter how professional your layout or how interesting your content.

But how do you select a color palette that's right for your site? In this tutorial, we'll demystify the process and show you a few different ways to find the perfect color for your projects.

You'll learn how to:

- Create a color scheme from a photograph.
- Use color theory to create a range of palettes.



Designing With Color

While the use of color is quite personal, our aim is to help you choose colors that are not only visually pleasing but also reflect the content of your publication.

Choosing colors

Designers use many different methods to choose colors for their documents and websites. In the following example, we based our color scheme on an image that we wanted to use on the Master page of our site. As mentioned previously, you might also take colors from a company logo or some other ‘signature’ image.


Alternatively, you could use an image that does not appear on the site, but which contains a range of colors you find particularly attractive and which portrays the mood and message you want your site to convey to your audience.

If you want a more structured approach, you can even employ a little basic color theory! A quick Internet search will provide you with lots of information on this subject—try searching on “use of color in Web design” for example.

In this section, we’ll step you through the following approaches:

Example 1: Find an image or photograph that portrays the mood or message of the document or site—this may not necessarily be related to the content—then choose a range of colors from the image.

Example 2: Choose a ‘base’ color (you can take this from an image that will feature in your publication), then use color theory to find colors that harmonize with it.

 Don't underestimate the importance of color choice when designing your website.

No matter how professional your layout or how interesting your content, incorrect use of color can result in pages that are ugly and/or difficult to read.



Example 1: Using an image or photograph

Suppose we're creating a brochure for a health spa. The first thing we need to do is think about the image we want to portray. We associate health spas with calmness and tranquility—it makes sense, therefore, not to use harsh or vibrant colors in our layouts.

- 1 Choose a few images that suit the mood. You could use a photograph, or an image found on the Internet or in a book or magazine (you'll need to scan the image so that you can open it on your computer).

The color palettes of the following photographs all reflect the mood we want our brochure to convey.

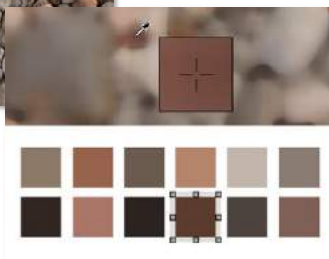
Looking at these images, it's obvious that they fall into two distinct groups: one group contains various shades of blue along with natural and more muted tones; in the other group, softer earth tones predominate.



- 2 At this point, you (or your client) must decide which color palette to use. For this tutorial, we'll assume that our health spa client prefers the muted tones of the 'pebbles' close-up photo.
- 3 You can now follow the procedure outlined in the *Color Schemes* tutorial to create your custom color scheme (see *Creating custom color schemes from scratch*).

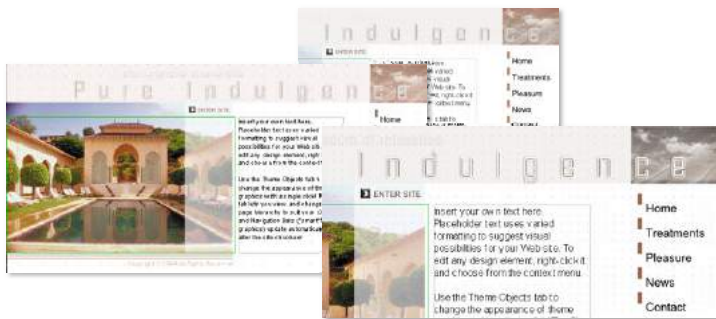


We suggest you start by creating lots of squares and fill them with a range of colors from the image.



When you have a good selection from which to choose, play around with the swatches and try different groupings before settling on your final five scheme colors.

- 4 If the choice is not obvious to you, create several different schemes using variations of your color swatches. You can then switch between schemes to see how the look and feel of the publication changes.



💡 Can't decide which color palette to use? It's a good idea to create a WebPlus color scheme for each palette, and then 'mock up' a page using each scheme.

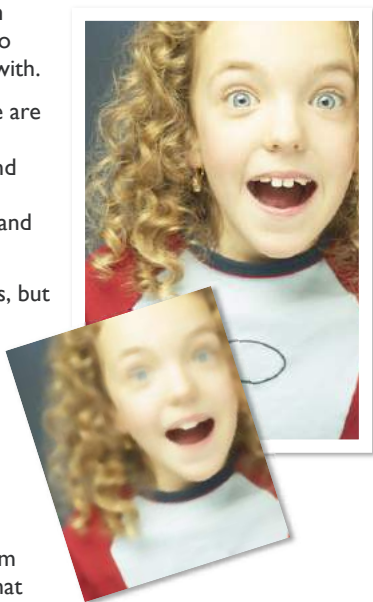
You might also do this if you're designing a site for a client and want to present them with a few options from which to choose.

Example 2: Using color theory

This method starts with the selection of a ‘base’ color. You can choose any color you prefer.

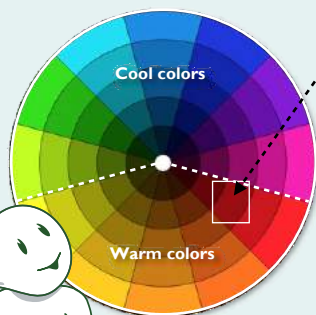
In our example, we’ll take our base color from a photograph that will feature on the website of a fictitious holiday company.

- 1 Follow the procedure outlined in the *Color Schemes* tutorial to extract a wide range of colors from your image.
 - Don’t forget to add the **Median** adjustment first in **PhotoLab**, to create blocks of color to work with.
 - Start with the ‘big’ colors. These are the ones you see first when you glance at the image: skin, hair, and shirt. Then extract the ‘small’ colors—mouth, eyes, highlights and shadows.
 - You need a good range of colors, but don’t overdo it or you’ll find it difficult to make your selection. You might only extract eight or ten colors, or you might find you need more. The exact number will vary depending on your image.
- 2 Group your results by color, then sort each color group by value from dark to light, deleting any colors that are too similar.
- 3 Select any one of your colors as your ‘base.’ Locate the color on the color wheel to determine whether it is warm or cool, and to see its relationship to other colors.
 - Our **warm colors** are found in the red areas of girl’s shirt, and in her hair and skin tones. Choose from these colors if your aim is to give a softer, gentler look and feel to your publication.
 - Our **cool colors** are derived from the blue and white areas of the shirt, and from the eyes. These colors are generally used when a more serious or business-like approach is required.



- 4 Using your base color and its position on the color wheel, you can now start to create a range of color palettes. There are several approaches you can take, including:

- Analogous
- Monochromatic
- Complement
- Split complement



The Color Wheel

The color wheel is a basic model. It is meant as a guide only, so don't worry if you can't find an exact match for your color.

Once you've located your base color you can see its relationship to other colors and can then create a range of color palettes that will work for your website.



Analogous color palettes

Analogous colors are extracted from the two sections that sit either side of the base color section.

These colors all share the same undertone—in our example, red-orange, red, and red-purple.

Analogous color combinations are great for Web design as they are harmonious and very easy to work with.

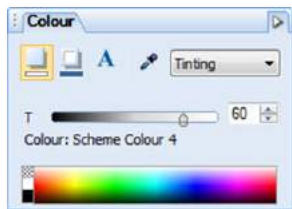


Monochromatic color palettes

Monochromatic palettes consist of the dark, medium, and light values (the shades and tints) of your base color.

You can choose your color swatch values from the WebPlus palette, and then further increase the contrast by adjusting the **Tint** value on the **Swatches** tab.

- A shade is made by adding black to a color to darken it.
- A tint is made by adding white to a color to lighten it.



Complement color palettes

You'll find the complement colors directly opposite the base color range. Generally, the complement (in our case, the green range) is used as an accent.

These palettes provide extreme contrast, conveying energy and excitement. While often used in printed media, you should be wary of using this palette in Web design as such highly contrasted colors tend to be jarring to the eye when viewed on screen.



Split complement color palettes

The split complement colors are the analogous colors of the complement itself.

Less jarring than the complement, this combination provides a more subtle contrast and a more harmonious palette.

In this example, the base color red would be used as the accent color in our design layout.



Mixing palettes

If you're feeling adventurous, you can also combine palettes to create some interesting effects.

For example, try contrasting your **base** color and its **analogous** colors with the **complement**.

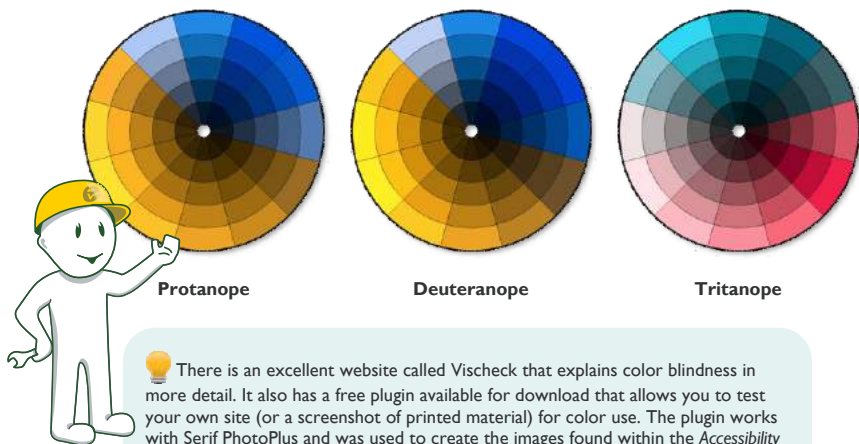


Alternatively, you could combine your **base** color and its **complement** with the **complement's analogous** colors.

As you can see from our illustrations, each palette creates quite a different effect when applied to the same layout. Which one you choose depends on the message you want your publication to convey to your audience.

Accessibility

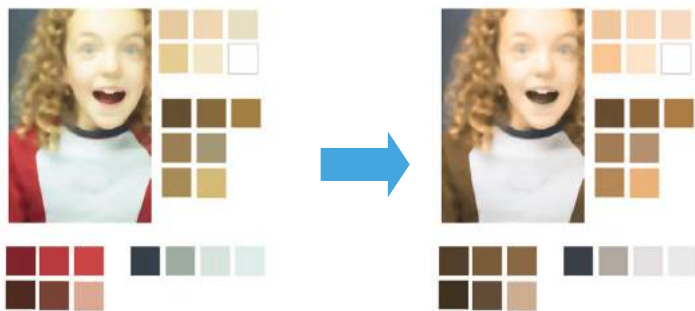
When choosing your color schemes, it is worth bearing in mind that a small percentage of the population cannot differentiate between certain colors (the most common being red and green). To illustrate this, here are a few examples of the color wheel when viewed by someone with one of the three main forms of color blindness, protanope, deuteranope, and the rare tritanope:



There is an excellent website called Vischeck that explains color blindness in more detail. It also has a free plugin available for download that allows you to test your own site (or a screenshot of printed material) for color use. The plugin works with Serif PhotoPlus and was used to create the images found within the Accessibility section of this tutorial.

Visit the site at <http://www.vischeck.com/>

The following sample image serves well to illustrate the care needed when deciding on color schemes. This example simulates deuteranope color blindness, the most common of the three types mentioned here. Notice how the browns and the reds appear almost identical.



That concludes our tutorial. We've covered a lot of material here; we hope you've enjoyed working through the exercises and have learned something along the way. You should now be feeling comfortable creating your own color schemes from scratch, and understand a little more about effective use of color in design.

Have fun experimenting!



Color Scheme Designer

Here you can create a complete color scheme in minutes—choose your base color from the color wheel, select a **Spread** type, e.g., Complimentary and Analogous, and click **Populate**. WebPlus does the rest for you based on color theory principles! For more information on how to use the **Color Spread** pane, see online Help. To learn more about creating and modifying WebPlus color schemes, see the **Schemes** tutorial.

