

A MAN'S GUIDE - COLOR & CLOTHING

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Edition 2 – August 2012

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STEP 1 - CARING ABOUT COLOR

The fact that you're reading this article means you're already making progress on Step 1. Because the first -- arguably the most important -- step in any wardrobe improvement is caring about it.

Anything you put your attention into will grow and improve. You probably know that from other areas of your life. Learning about color and improving your wardrobe will translate into success in other areas of your life too.

Color and color coordination is one that's tough for a lot of guys to get into. The existing literature is usually written for women's fashion specifically, with a few paragraphs thrown in on some male or gender-neutral styles.

These don't usually take most of the colors in the traditional male wardrobe into account, and when they start talking about "seasonal palettes" guys really start to lose interest. No shame there.

But the lack of real discussion means that you have to motivate yourself to learn about color and its role in men's fashion. We've got all the information you'll need here in this article -- it's just a matter of wanting it.

So before we go any further, here are a few simple reasons to start thinking harder about color than you have been:

Reason #1: Understanding Color Means No More Obvious Mistakes

Let's be honest -- it doesn't take an art critic to know when someone's outfit just isn't working. You might not be able to put your finger on why someone seems a little hard on the eyes, but you can tell. Most humans have a good natural instinct when it comes to color. We know when something is off even though we might not know why.

A lot of what we think of as "looking sharp" is just avoiding basic mistakes and not following every new fashion trend. Clashing colors aren't always obvious or garish -- it's possible to wear something that doesn't work in a very subtle way. People will still notice, subconsciously, and be a little put-off by it.



A good grasp of color basics lets you avoid those obvious mistakes. A lot of things become obvious in hindsight, real "why did I ever do that?" moments. And you won't do them again. So that's a good start.

Reason #2: Color Lets You Guide People's Eyes

We all have features we'd like to emphasize and features that we'd just as soon people didn't notice. Part of dressing sharp is figuring out how to emphasize the good and downplay the not-so-good.

Color plays a *huge* role in determining where your eye goes. We're genetically conditioned to prioritize some colors over others. That's why emergency signals and advertisements favor bright colors that don't appear in nature very often -- it's a message to our backbrains saying "hey, look over there."

Obviously, that doesn't mean wearing a pair of neon green eyeglasses because you think you have good eyes. But by learning the subtleties of lights and darks and the way colors interact with one another you can perform all kinds of optical illusions.

Add a few inches of height, lose some pounds, have a more athletic build -- they're all things you can do with the right clothing. Or at least they're things you can convince people you've done, even if the body underneath stays unchanged...

Reason #3: Colors are a Jedi Mind-Control Trick

Okay, not really. But there are psychological elements to choosing your color, and they do have real, provable effects.

We "like" certain colors more than others. We also react differently to some than others. Reds enliven us; browns reassure us. It sounds complex (and the science of it is), but you don't have to understand which neural pathways are firing to take advantage of people's



natural reactions to certain colors.

A deep understanding of color therefore has you ready to not only look sharp, but to be controlling the mind of every person looking at you. And that's pretty cool.

Reason #4: Understanding Your Colors Makes Shopping Easier

When you understand what colors suit you, you'll find that shopping gets much easier. Instead of being overwhelmed with a ton of clothes, you'll be able to zero in on what is going to look good on you and ignore the rest. And that saves time and money, which we all want to do.

So we hope you care about color now, even more than you did when you picked this up and started reading. But what do you need to know to take advantage of all that color can do for you?

Read on. We've made it simple, digestible, and targeted directly at men and menswear specifically. And we promise we don't ever talk about "seasons" or "being an autumn."

STEP 2 - UNDERSTANDING COLOR AS IT AFFECTS YOU

"Your" colors meaning your inherent natural coloring -- the colors in your face, your skin, your hair; your eyes. All put together we get what's broadly called your *complexion*.

There are about a thousand different ways to describe someone's complexion. Most of them are totally subjective. Are you "ruddy-faced?" I don't know. Probably neither do you. It's okay -- it doesn't matter. There's only a few things you need to understand about your complexion:

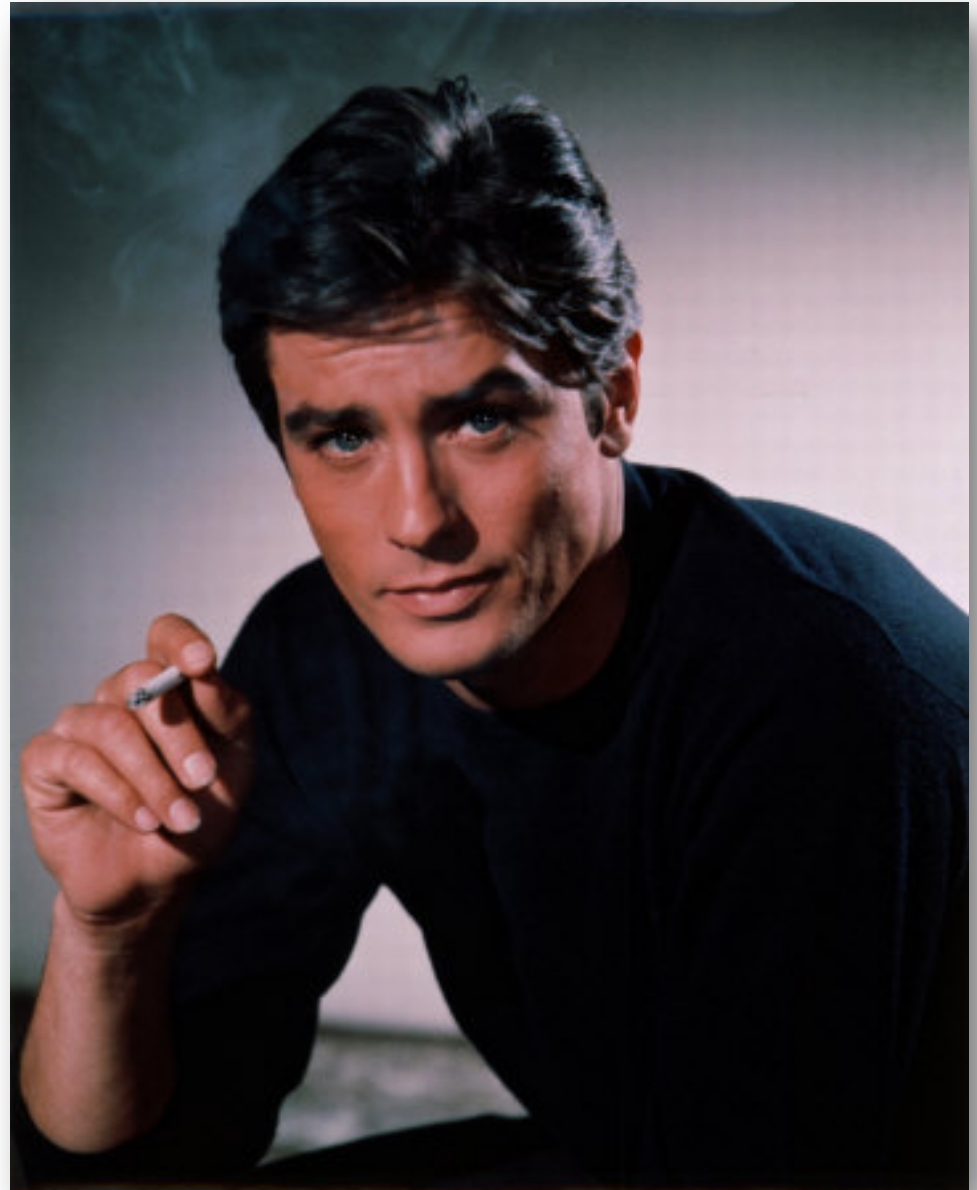
Effects of Complexion and Contrast

The biggest overall impression your complexion makes has nothing to do with the specific colors in it. Instead, it's based in *contrast*.

Contrast is the amount of difference between one color and the next. A very fair-skinned man with light blonde hair doesn't have a lot of contrast between his hair and his face. Someone with the same pale skin but bright red hair has more contrast, while someone with the light blonde hair but very dark brown skin would have even more.

Your first step toward understanding color is knowing how much contrast you bring to the table naturally:

- *High-contrast* men are those with extreme changes in color. An older black man with dark skin but whitened hair is high contrast; so is a gentleman with pale, untanned skin but naturally (or dyed) black hair. Smaller details can also add contrast, such as a dark-skinned man with very light blue eyes.



- *Low-contrast* men have little change in the deepness of their hues. Light blonde hair, blue eyes, and fair skin are low-contrast. So is dark skin with black hair and brown eyes.

- *Medium-contrast* falls between the two. Swarthy skin with dark hair but green or blue eyes (a common Mediterranean complexion) is medium-contrast, as is the classic British redhead with pale skin that flushes easily, light eyes, and bright orange hair.

This overall complexion will end up being a yardstick for the amount of contrast in your own outfits. High-contrast men need a bit of contrast in their clothes as well, while very low-contrast men can be overpowered by too much clashing of color.

Obviously, this isn't a precise scale. A lot of men may find themselves somewhere in between one end of the extremes and the other. But it's the useful starting point for everything else, and it helps eliminate certain looks, so know your complexion!





Need Help Discovering Your Contrast?

Take a photograph of your face and then photocopy in black and white (or take a black and white photograph and print it out).

Look at the gray scale above and then look at your skin, eye and hair color and match each to a value on the gray scale. If you feel that your skin color is a 2 (far left) and your eye color is a 9 (far right) then you would have high contrast between your skin and your eyes.

If your hair was a 3 or 4 then you would have a very low contrast overall and you'd know that it would be best to wear combinations of clothing that also have low contrast.

Effect of Skin Color

Complexion, which we just talked about, is your overall "color scheme" if you want to think of it that way -- it's the way all the different colors (hair, skin, eyes, etc.) interact.

Each piece also plays its own role. Your skin color shows not just in your face but also your neck and hands, and potentially feet and ankles as well in the summer. It's the most "framing" color in your complexion -- the one that the most pieces of clothing are going to border.



Be thinking about your skin color when you think about contrast. If you're a dark-skinned man who's looking for more contrast, a light-colored shirt provides that just by virtue of its contrast with your skin.

Skin color is also going to have an effect on which colors look more natural on you. Try to have a good sense of where you fall on the spectrum:

- *Dark-skinned men* can include many African-Americans, but also men from the Asian/Indian continent, dark-skinned Mediterranean men, some Hispanics, and even the occasional deeply-tanned Caucasian. Dark skin contrasts with white or light-colored clothing, blends more naturally with deep hues like royal purple or hunter green, and can sometimes overpower pastels altogether.
- *Light-skinned men* run the gamut from your run-of-the-mill Caucasian skin to lighter Asian and Hispanic men. Light skin contrasts with dark colors, matches pastels and other light colors, and tends to look completely washed-out against too much black.
- *Medium-skinned men* have some color but no real deep darkness. It can be hard to find clothing that contrasts. A medium-skinned man who needs some strong contrast is likely going to end up looking at black and white, the most extreme options, or else at very deep or very light colors.

A lot of guys already have a natural understanding of this without realizing it. There's a reason you'll see a lot more black men than white wearing deep purple suits or vivid orange shirts. So have it in mind as a conscious awareness as you're thinking about your physical coloring.

Skin Tone

Skin tones are categorized as 'warm' or 'cool', which is determined by the undertone.

Look at the picture to the right – Jay Z is cool toned – go back a page and look at Kanye West – he has a much warmer tone.

You might have a 'blue' undertone to your skin, which would make you 'cool'. Or, you could have a yellow or red undertone to your skin, which would appear more 'warm'.

Look at your wrists and palms (or the back of your ear in a mirror). Your undertone will either be red based (pink or rose), orange based (peach), or violet/blue (light violet or mauve).

If your palm and ear skin tone is dark or you're having trouble 'seeing' the colors in your palm, look at your gums to determine the undertone. You will see either red based (pink, rose or burgundy), orange based (peach or coral), or violet (mauve or plum).

This is a bit of a difficult concept to see at first and you may need a friend to help you (the attractive woman at the department store makeup counter is an excellent resource here☺) as it's a key concept to understand your coloring. It helps explain why one shade of blue or green or whatever color will look good on a person and another shade of the same color won't look nearly as good.

An interesting note about jewelry – cool colored men look best in silver and warm toned men look best in gold. If you own jewelry – look at what pieces you were drawn too naturally – often times this can be used to help determine your tone as you grew up with an affinity for it. This doesn't apply to jewelry received as a gift or a wedding band chosen by our wife – although I insisted on silver never knowing it was perfect for my cooler tone!





Effect of Eye Color

Eye color makes more of a difference than most people think. When you're dressed plainly it stands out distinctly. When there's more color and contrast in your outfit it's another element that plays into that -- and can ruin the whole effect if the colors are wrong.

- *Blue eyes* are the brightest natural eye color. They'll stand out in any dark outfit. Sometimes that works (its part of why Daniel Craig is so striking in the James Bond tuxedo -- but keep in mind that's all black and white, with no colors to clash). Other times you need to be careful. Blue eyes are an awkward fit with colors that are close but not quite a match or a direct contrast, like greens and purples.
- *Green eyes* are similar to blue but a bit darker, meaning they offer less contrast with dark colors. They're a bit odd next to blue clothing, making the typical blue oxford dress shirt and similar colors a less-than-ideal choice. Green-eyed men may need to go a little further afield or work with red-tones like pink and oxblood.
- *Brown eyes* are the darkest and don't usually stand out unless you're dressing very lightly. Brown looks good with most colors but odd with plain black or white, so if you're wearing a black jacket be sure to have a bit of color in your shirt and tie.

Other, rarer eye colors (hazel, gray, etc.) fall somewhere in between the more common ones. Decide which you're closest to and see how those rules work out for you -- it may take some trial and error in front of a mirror.

Colored contacts with non-natural eye colors will, obviously, be extremely attention-grabbing and offer unique matching issues.

It's probably best not to play around with those until you've got the basics under your belt!

The color of our eyes is not always as simple as 'blue' 'green' or 'brown'. If you look really closely at your eyes (a magnifying glass can help), you will probably see a variety of colors. For example, if you have blue eyes, you might have flecks of yellow, green, or white in addition to the blue. You could have flecks of grey or a surrounding halo of white or grey. And the color of the 'blue' can be very different from person to person -- some people's eyes are an intense sharp blue, others have a softer watery blue.

Knowing all these details about your eye gives you clues as to what your color temperature is (warm or cool) and the other complimentary colors that will be flattering to you. These are accent colors that you will want to introduce into your wardrobe.

Effect of Hair Color

Hair color is endlessly variable with dyes. Rather than try to take each color individually just have a good awareness of your hair's two basic characteristics: is it *light* or *dark*, and is it *solid* or *varied*.

- Light and dark should be obvious. Some hair falls in an odd middle ground -- a natural redhead or a light brunette ("muddy blonde") may not be quite light or dark. In these cases, your clothing tends to bring out whichever end of the spectrum it's from: dark clothes will make your hair seem darker, and light clothes the opposite.



- Solid hair is easier to match and offers no natural contrast. Varied hair (either because of natural graying or because of a varied dye job like bleached tips) adds to the overall level of contrast in your complexion.

If you go for a bright, non-natural color, be ready to treat it like another piece of clothing. If your hair's blue, all the rules for blue clothes apply to it. And, of course, it's already eye-grabbing, to the point that you should be thinking carefully about whether it's going to be appropriate in *all* situations you'll find yourself in.

Hair color is a very big determinant of your color temperature (whether you have predominantly warm or cool coloring). Even if you have a lot of grey in your hair you could either be a warm grey or a cool grey. You could have a warm skin tone, but with very cool colored hair, which will look much better in cool toned clothing.

It's the total sum of skin/eyes/hair that determines your overall color temperature and whether or not you are predominately 'warm' or 'cool'.

Putting it All Together

So what should we take from all that? It's a lot to think about -- and we haven't even started talking about clothes yet. This is just your natural body coloring. Focus on the basics:



- Understand what your overall *complexion* is and how much contrast it offers. Try to match that general level of contrast in your clothing as well.
- Avoid things that are going to "fight" visually with your skin color. Don't wear overpoweringly dark colors if you have pale skin; don't wear light pastels if you're deeply colored.
- Understand that your eyes are going to have an effect despite their size. Think of them as one more piece of clothing -- if your outfit would clash with a piece of clothing the color of your eyes, it's probably clashing with your eyes.
- Know how much contrast and how much darkness your hair is adding to your overall appearance. It doesn't touch your clothing (although longer hair might reach the collar in the back, or even lower), but it's still being contrasted with it when people view you from any kind of distance.

Putting them all together you should have a very precise picture of yourself, *sans* clothing colors: how much contrast there is overall and what colors you've got going on from your natural complexion.

That's the framework you're going to be building on. Ready for the next part? Now we bring clothes into it.

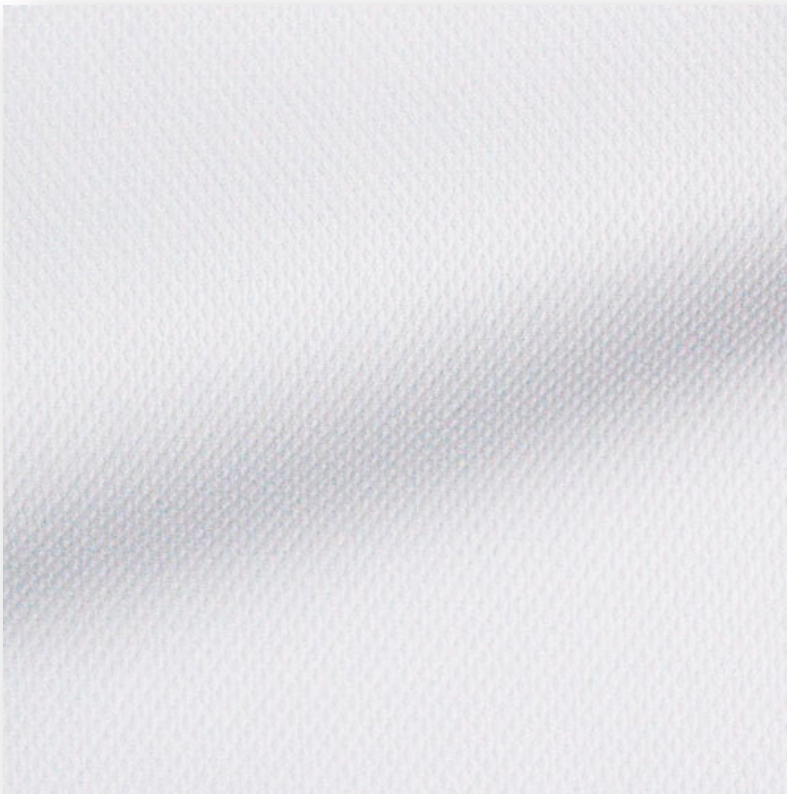
STEP 3: INTRODUCTION TO THE TRADITIONAL MEN'S COLORS

A lot of men start thinking about color by asking the wrong question. "Does this shirt go with my tie" and things like that matter -- but they're not the most important questions.

It's easy to get caught up thinking about the accent pieces. They're often the most vibrant, so that's where we think of clash as happening.

Realistically speaking, most of your appearance is determined by what are sometimes called "core" clothing pieces. Your shirt, your trousers, and your jacket are the three big core items. They make up 80-90% or so of the cloth on your body on a normal day.

That's where the attention needs to start. And, because pieces of clothing that big usually have to exercise at least a little visual restraint, they tend to come in just a handful of familiar color families.



So while it's useful to think about things like the "color wheel" when you talk about color, be aware that it's not representative of most men's closets. Your wardrobe is likely to be biased heavily toward these most basic colors, the ones you want the best understanding of possible:

White

Plain white shirts are the dressiest shirt for day-to-day or business wear. Every man's wardrobe will probably include at least one.

White mostly only shows up in shirts (and in unseen underlayers). You might see a white suit at a wedding or on an older gentleman (particularly in the American South), or a white tie on a blues player, but most of us can safely stick to thinking about shirts.

Here's the basics on a white shirt:

- They contrast with just about everything. If you're trying to keep low-contrast and wearing a white shirt you'll need light-colored trousers (khakis) and jackets (camelhair, light gray wool, etc.) to pull it off.
- Colors show up brightly on white, so your necktie will stand out if you

wear one. Go for colors that are deep but not bright, like royal blue and forest green.

- White means high contrast but no clash. It goes with pretty much everything. Think of it as a blank slate that you can build on with other colors.

- If your coloring is predominantly warm, choose a creamy white or a shirt with some texture to it instead of a stark, cool white. If it's hard to find this in a readymade shirt, consider having custom made shirts. Warm-toned whites or a bit of pattern/texture will suit your coloring a lot better. If your coloring is predominantly cool, then go for crisp, stark whites, with little pattern or texture, whenever possible.

A lot of dress shirts won't be solid white, but rather white with a light pattern on top of it. Just treat these as the extra colors demand. You're still building on a plain white slate; you've just started a little earlier.

Gray(charcoal & dark)

While we're on the formal side of business wear, charcoal gray is going to be most guys' go-to color for dress suits. It's also a good staple for odd (unmatched) trousers. This one's an easy one:

- Gray's a shade of black rather than a color. It's effectively neutral in terms of clash and matching, and a little more moderate than black or white in terms of contrast. It goes with just about anything.

- Brighter colors stand out best against gray, so be thinking reds, yellows, etc. for accents like a pocket square. A deep blue or purple will get lost, although if you're shooting for a muted affect that perfect.

- Mix grays with caution. Either wear a matched suit or wear a jacket of a distinctly different color with gray trousers (or no jacket at all, of course). Too much gray can suck the life out of your natural colors and signals a very somber and serious mood.

You might see gray shirts here and there, but your basic understanding of this color should be as something for suits, jackets, coats, and trousers.



Navy Blue

If you're not into gray your other option for formal business suits is navy blue. Like charcoal gray, it's also a good trouser color. It's a little more colorful, though, so it handles a bit differently:

- Blue's a natural match (a *complementary color*, in fact, meaning directly opposite on the color wheel) for orange and yellows. Gold-tone accents go great with a blue suit. So does khaki -- a blue blazer and khakis is a classic business-casual look.
- Reds and greens are the oddest-looking clashes with blue. Some shades will work if they've gone dark or light enough, but steer clear of vivid reds and greens with a blue suit or trousers.
- Blue is a youthful color. Younger men want to steer clear of navy suits, which make them look a bit baby-faced, while older men can definitely benefit from the effect.

As far as other pieces of clothing go, you're likely to see ties with a navy blue base color, and probably some striped blue-and-white shirts as well. These are fine to work in with a blue jacket or trousers if you're a low-contrast man -- shades of blue work well together in an outfit, as long as there's some shirt color (like white) to separate them.



Light Blue

You won't see a light blue suit anywhere outside of a 1970s costume party, but the light blue shirt is a staple piece of menswear. (All right, the suit comment was a little unfair -- you do see powder blue suits at weddings from time to time, but they're certainly not business wear). Know your light blue shirt and love it:

- Oxford cloth (made with interwoven white and blue threads to make the lighter color) is the traditional material for blue shirts. It's light, comfortable, tough, and easy to maintain, so stick with it.
- Blue shirts were originally a working-class garment, hence "blue-collar worker." While they've moved up in the world, they're still not meant to be worn with your best business suit. They do, however, make people automatically associate you with work and labor -- always a good impression.
- Like the darker navy blue, steer clear of purples and greens and lean toward shades of orange and yellow (or other, darker blues if you're a dedicatedly low-contrast dresser).

Unlike the dressier white shirt, your blue shirts can go anywhere from an office setting to working on a ranch. Be ready to match them with every time of outfit you wear.

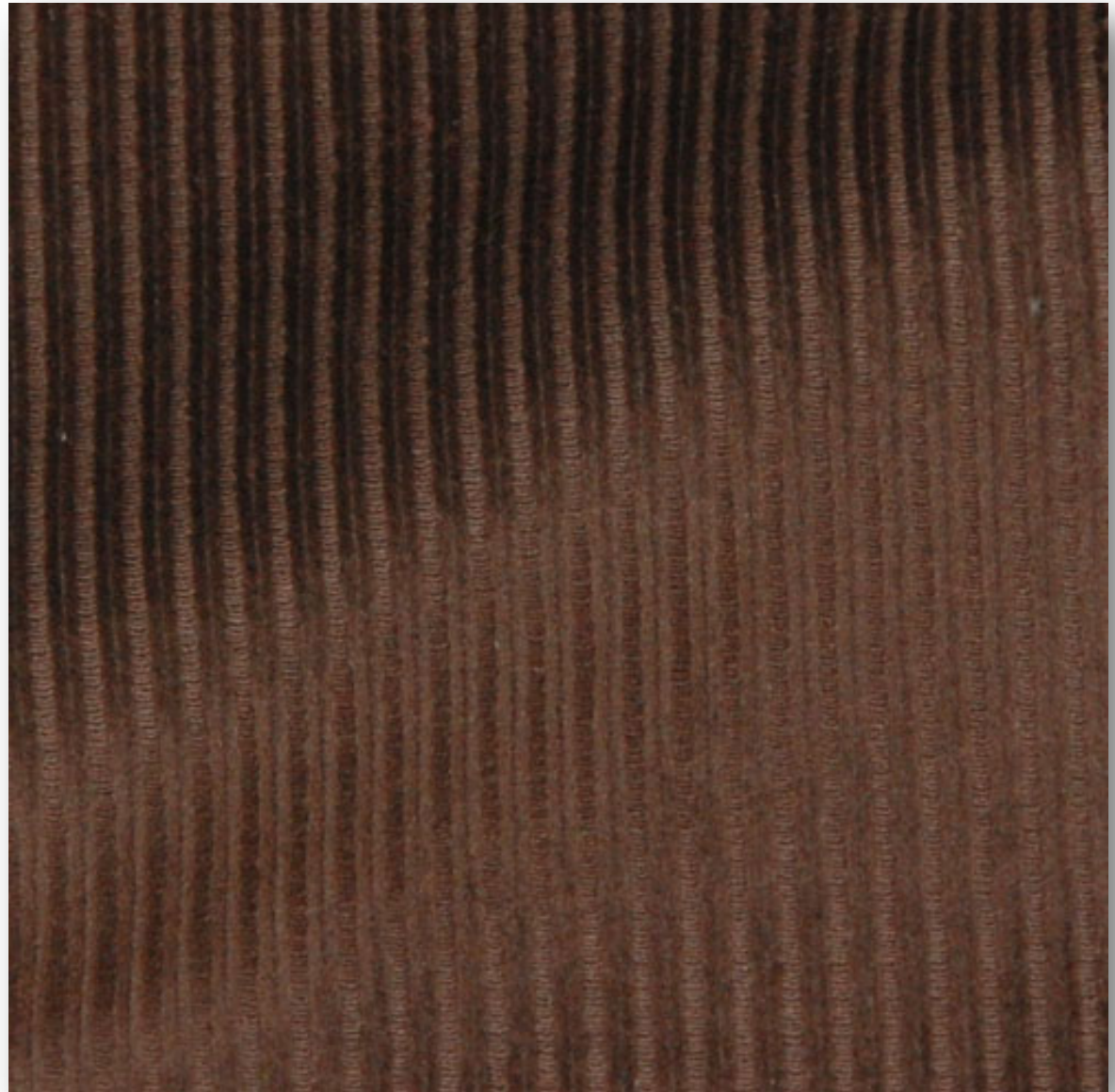


Brown

It's easy to think of brown as an accent color for shoes and belts. Men with decently varied closets should also know it as a trouser and jacket color, and potentially a casual suit color as well. Browns can range from very rich chocolate corduroy to orange-leaning tweed, but they all follow the same basic rule:

- Brown doesn't clash with much. It's a blending of all the colors (in a loose sense), so it goes reasonably well with all of them. It can read as orange to our eyes depending on composition, however, so blue is always a good match.
- Psychological studies show that people associate brown with trustworthiness, making it a great choice for anyone with a sales pitch.
- Because it reads as multiple colors, brown's a little "busier" than a stark primary color. Wear it with more muted shades to avoid clashing. A bright, solid tie or similar accent would be a bad choice with brown.

In all its forms brown makes for a casual color. The dressiest shoes should be black, not brown, and the most formal jackets and trousers will be navy or charcoal. But for a more relaxed look you can't beat brown wool trousers, jackets, and even suits.





Indigo (deep blue)

The darker blue that's passed navy and moved toward the violet part of the spectrum is called *indigo*. Indigo is also the name of the plant used to dye the first blue jeans, and it's where we still get our idea of what blue jeans should look like. So unsurprisingly this is a color you'll mostly be seeing in denim:

- The darker the indigo, the more formal the garment. If you want jeans dressy enough to wear with a sports jacket look for a deep, rich indigo that's almost midnight colored.
- Lighter indigos are good for jean jackets or work shirts.
- Some jeans will have "contrast stitching" in a lighter color -- great for men who want more contrast in their outfits. Orange or yellow stitching is best.

It's rare to see a true deep indigo in anything except denim. The only other place you're likely to see it would be a midnight blue tuxedo, a less-common but acceptable alternative to black in formalwear.

Black

Black is associated with formality, and it's still the staple of black tie ensembles, but apart from that a man rarely wears a black-dominated outfit.

Because it can overpower lighter complexions and doesn't contrast well with darker ones, it's rare to see black as a suit color. You'll mostly run into it in casual jackets and jeans.

- Solid black is slimming. It's a good color for sport jackets and trousers on larger men. Slender men, on the other hand, want to wear blacks with texture or patterns broken up by pinstripes or a similar pattern.
- While it's overwhelming on its own, black is a good, neutral accent color. It's the go-to standard for leather accents in business culture. Plain black ties are a little stark for anything but a deliberately high-contrast look.
- You might occasionally see black shirts, especially short-sleeved button-front summer shirts and polos. They're fine on lighter-complexion men who want the contrast, but they heat up fast in the sun.

If you're tempted to go with black as your dress suit color - consider a charcoal gray instead - it's equally formal without being quite so stark. Some dressers would even argue that black's inappropriate for anything but true formalwear, although that viewpoint is fairly dated these days. Regardless, there are very few events where black would be appropriate and a charcoal gray or midnight blue wouldn't be.





Tan/Khaki

There's a whole family of colors that fall into the general tan/khaki umbrella (technically speaking, most people would consider tan to be more brown and khaki more yellow, but they read similarly enough visually to be lumped together).

Most men will wear these as trousers and jackets. Khakis are universally familiar dress-casual pants, and camelhair has made a yellow-brown jacket a common sight as well. The visual rules for either one will be the same:

- Khaki is reasonably neutral. It looks okay against both lighter and darker complexions -- the only people that might have trouble would be very fair-skinned, light-haired men, who could look a little washed-out in all light colors.
- You're far enough into the yellow/orange side of the spectrum for blues to be the ideal match. Khakis and a blue blazer or navy trousers and a camelhair coat -- equally irreproachable.
- Khaki makes a good base for a light-color, pastel-leaning spring or summer outfit. Khaki pants and a white-based shirt with colored stripes or checks look breezy and relaxed.

It's worth playing around with a few different pairs of khakis (or tan jackets) and finding the particular shade that suits your complexion best. You'll see cloth running from pale, almost whited-out yellow to something close to olive drab.

Grays (light)

Once you get out of the deep charcoal gray that's used for strict business suits gray becomes a less common but still useful menswear staple. The traditional "gray flannel trouser" is usually at least a few shades lighter than a charcoal suit.

Light grays are fine for suits, trousers, jackets, and even the occasional shirt. It's an odd duck with a few unique advantages:

- Gray tones give you the same neutral base of white or black with much less contrast.
- You can shed some formality by using a light gray in the place of a white or black piece.
- Like charcoal, grays don't clash directly with anything from the color wheel. The only thing to avoid wearing them with is too many other shades of gray, black, or white.

So while your wardrobe probably won't have a whole lot of light gray pieces, it's worth knowing about the color and keeping it in mind. A lot of more casual wool garments like sweaters can also come in shades of gray, and follow the same rules.

All the Rest

The brighter colors that we haven't discussed specifically here are what you'd think of as traditional accent colors. You're unlikely to find a suit or a shirt in bright red, for example.

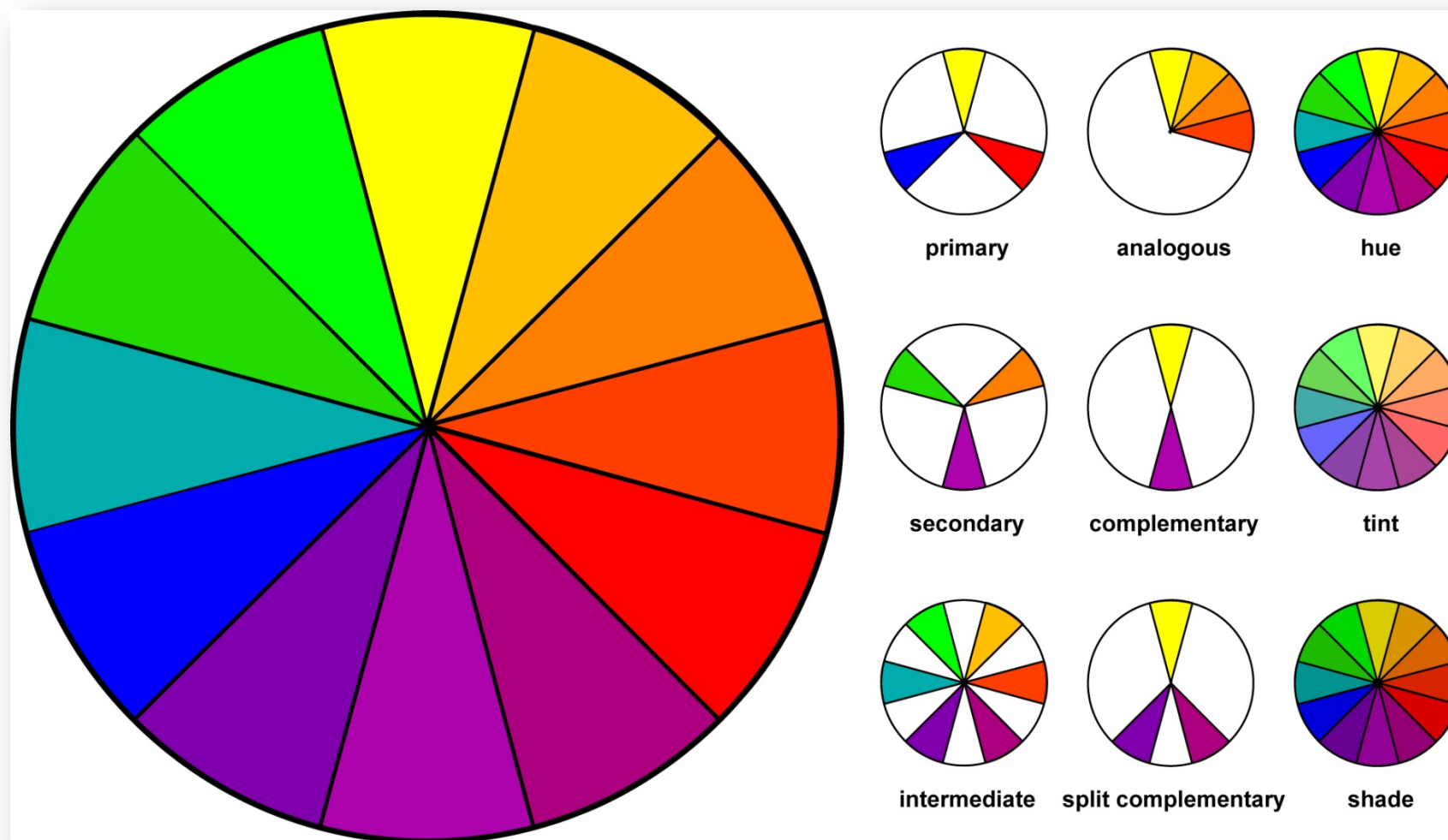
For help putting the brighter colors and these menswear staples together, we'll turn you to our next step -- Understanding Color Relationships.



STEP 4: UNDERSTANDING COLOR RELATIONSHIPS

The last step gave you an in-depth introduction to all the main wardrobe colors of menswear. Now it's time to talk about using more than one at a time -- putting the core colors together with each other and with the brighter accent colors.

We're not going to get theory-heavy here. There's a lot of science behind how our eyes perceive color and why certain combinations look better than others. But you can get away with just knowing the basic color wheel:



Think of this as your cheat-sheet for "do these colors go together?" moments. You can think of all color combinations in terms of two basic relationships:

- The relative position of the colors on the color wheel, and
- The light/dark contrast between the colors.

Those two factors are going to determine whether a combination "clashes" or "matches." (It's more accurate to say "coordinates" than "matches," in most case, since matching colors would technically be ones in the same shade.)

So while your wardrobe isn't going to represent the color wheel -- almost all of your core items will come from just a few colors, plus the outside shades of black, white, and gray -- you can use the wheel to evaluate particular color combinations and accent choices.

High-Contrast Combinations: Complementary Colors

There are a couple different strategies for combining colors. One is the high-contrast route: going for colors that are natural "good looks" but very distinct from one another.

Your guides to those natural combinations are *complementary* colors. Complementary colors are two colors that are directly opposite one another on the color wheel.

Human eyes see these colors as "fitting" together. They make the most natural combinations and they also create the most natural contrast between one another.

- Blue/orange and blue/yellow combinations (which one blue is directly opposite from depends on the color wheel you use; there can be differences depending on how the "primary" colors are defined, and that's more science than you need to dress well so we'll leave it at that). Think navy blazers and khakis, or blue jeans with brown (orange) sports jackets.



- Red/green combinations like pink shirts and olive trousers or green-on-white check shirts with red ties.
- Purple/yellow combinations like a lavender shirt under a camelhair jacket or a yellow-on-white striped shirt with a deep purple tie.

These relationships can play out in different places in your outfit. You can get the complementary color contrast with just a few pieces. If your suit is one solid color, just a necktie and a pocket square is more than enough to make a clear complementing statement.

Low-Contrast Combinations: Analogous Colors

Analogous colors are ones directly adjacent to one another on the color wheel. These are the ideal combinations for men that want a low-contrast "matching" look.

Analogous color schemes are best when they use multiple shades of similar colors. That way there's still variation without generating too much contrast. The outfit doesn't have to be monochrome to work well, as some popular combinations show:

- Camelhair blazer (yellow) with a thin green-on-white check shirt (reads as light green) and a darker green necktie.
- Navy blazer, blue oxford shirt, and dark wash blue jeans.
- Light khakis, brown-and-white striped dress shirt, darker brown decorative belt and shoes.

It's less common to see full suits paired with analogous shirts and ties -- that can get overwhelming quickly, since the suit itself is such a big, solid block of one color. Adding a shirt and tie in the same color family can start to look a little "novelty." A white shirt can help break things up without introducing a new, clashing color.

Working in Black, White, and Gray

The color wheel stops being useful when you talk about shades of black and white.



Working those absolute colors in follows a few basic rules:

- Black, white, and gray don't naturally "clash" or "match" with any colors. They're essentially neutral, and can be worked into any outfit.
- What you need to be thinking about instead is levels of brightness/darkness. A white shirt stands out more in an outfit made up of deep, dark colors than it does in one made from light pastels.
- Pair white with darker colors and black (or dark grays, like a charcoal suit) with lighter ones when you want contrast. Pair white with lighter colors and black/dark gray with darker ones when you want to avoid contrast.
- Break up these stark, absolute colors with patterns as needed. A bit of pinstriping or a light, colored check helps minimize the visual impact of black or white.



You'll generally want an outfit that's either mostly grayscale or mostly color -- an even mix of black/white and brighter colors looks a little odd. So be thinking dark gray suits with white shirts and a colored tie, or else colored trousers/jackets with patterned shirts and maybe just a black belt and shoes.

Working in Shades, Tints, and Tones

There's a sort of secondary family of colors that are made by mixing color wheel colors and then either darkening them (adding black/shading), adding brown (toasting), lightening them (adding white/tinting), or muting by adding gray (toning).

These aren't quite as easy to place, and they can make coordinating your outfit a little harder. Take each one as its own color and think about how to make it work:

- Where you can, find the color wheel color that it's most similar to. A bright brown is basically an orange, for example, while a light khaki is essentially yellow.
- Some tones will mostly be grayscale. You can treat them like black/white elements --



they're not going to clash with anything directly, but they can get odd if you're mixing in crisper blacks and whites elsewhere in the outfit.

And in many cases these "tones" are actually made by multiple colors of threads all interwoven, as with many woolen tweeds. These are less "colors" and more patterns made by many colors.

Therefore, it's time to move away from how to match solid colors and into our next topic -- matching patterns made from multiple colors.



STEP 5: UNDERSTANDING PATTERNS AND TEXTURES

If you take a look in your closet, the odds are that most of the clothes there aren't actually a single solid color. (If they are your wardrobe might need some varying.)

An interesting outfit usually needs at least a little patterning going on. Sometimes that's very obvious -- like the pattern printed on a multicolored tie -- and other times it's as subtle as a bumpy, ridged weave that gives the cloth a varied texture.

Even a lot of the clothes we think of as single colors aren't. A pair of blue jeans is made with interwoven white and blue threads. A gray tweed jacket usually has four or five different shades intermingled. And those all need to be treated just a little bit different from a true solid.

Understanding Patterns

It's important to differentiate between *patterns* and *textures*. Patterns are made by the interaction of colors, usually dyed but sometimes natural. They can be woven in directly or dyed or printed onto a blank piece of cloth.

A paisley necktie with four or five different colors is a patterned item. So is a white shirt with a very light grid of blue squares. An outfit with more than one patterned item -- and most of your outfits will probably meet that description -- needs to take some basic rules of pattern-matching into account:

- All colors get counted. That is to say, if you're planning an outfit of complementing blue and orange/yellow-tone colors, a white shirt with bit of light green striping still counts as breaking the theme. It'll stand out more than you think it will. Go with plain white or something that uses one of your theme colors instead.
- Each piece of patterned clothing should have a distinctly different *scale*. Very fine pinstripes in a suit can go with a broadly-striped necktie, but not with a shirt that has fine, pinstripe-width checks.
- Never match two very similar or similarly-sized patterns next to one another. A plaid jacket over a checked shirt is too similar; the same jacket over a striped shirt is fine (as long as the colors work together, of course).
- The best outfits will use patterns to "reference" the colors in the core items. A necktie might have a base color that contrasts with the jacket but have small dots or figures in a color similar to the jacket, for example. These don't have to be exact color matches, just in the same general family.

The important thing is really just to be aware of your patterns as bringing multiple colors to the table and making sure you're not bringing in a small accent that throws the rest of the outfit off. Don't drop a red note into the middle of a purple-and-yellow outfit, even if it's just a line in a multicolored check somewhere.

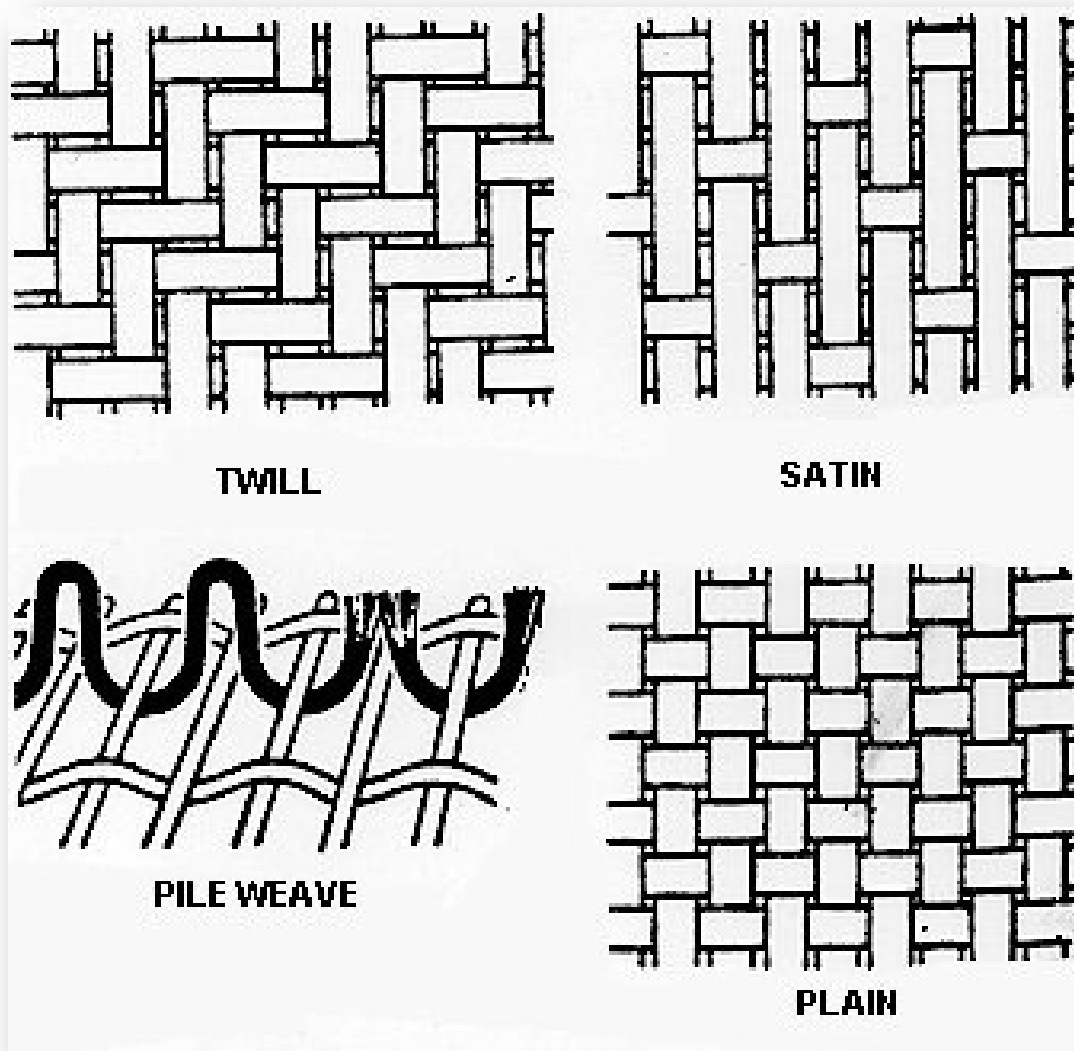


Understanding Textures

Textures are a little bit different. They're created by the actual physical weave of the cloth rather than a dye or print. The texture doesn't add any color, but it does change the way the eye registers a color.

A garment with a textured look is more visually "busy" than the same color on a plain, flat surface would be. A gray herringbone jacket seems more patterned than the exact same color in a plain-fronted weave. Blue jeans are another good example -- even though we think of them as just plain blue our eyes are registering the business of the diagonal lines in the weave, making them a little more eye-catching and casual.

Textures are a good way to make solid colors a little more interesting if your outfits seem too plain. On the flip side, if you're looking a little cluttered you should consider some smooth surfaces to tone the full appearance down a little.





STEP 6: PUT IT ALL TOGETHER

Keeping track of everything we've written here all at once is tough -- and we kept it as simple as possible!

The good news is that you don't have to. You can apply all the knowledge we've given you here by asking yourself a few basic questions before you put an outfit together:

- How much contrast do you want in your outfit? More contrast is more eye-catching, but also more overwhelming, especially for men with low-contrast complexions.
- How formal do you want to look? More patterns and brighter colors are less formal.
- What do you want people to feel when they look at you? Different colors prompt different responses.
- What are your own physical characteristics and complexion? These are going to affect the colors you'll want to base your wardrobe on.

Go back through our chapters as needed to make sure you're achieving all your goals. It should be easy to put the colors you need together -- all without learning any formal systems or talking about seasons.



6 Color Tips To Live By

We threw these in as a bonus. Regardless of what you're dressing for -- country wedding, boardroom meeting; urban nightclub -- these are rules that'll always serve you well. Maybe post them up by your mirror? We'll leave it up to you.

1. No more than three shades of a single color in any outfit. Doesn't matter if you're low-contrast, high-contrast, or something in between -- three versions of a color tops. And usually you're better off with two, unless you're deliberately trying for a single-color themed look.
2. White, black and gray -- pick two of them maximum, with the exception of your leather shoes/belt. You never want to wear something like a charcoal suit, white shirt, and black tie.
3. When in doubt, complement. If you just don't know what goes with a color, look at the color wheel and go for the color directly opposite it. These are the most natural matches.
4. If you're wearing denim on the upper half of your body you're not wearing a tie. No exceptions.
5. Pocket square and tie can share a color family, but should never be a matched pattern or the exact same, solid color. The pocket square is there to add interest, and it's not doing that if it's just repeating the tie.
6. Leathers and metals are two things that should always coordinate throughout the outfit. If you have black shoes your belt and watch should be black too; if you have silver cufflinks don't wear a gold tie bar. A wedding band gets an exception and can be worn with everything.



STEP 7: EXAMPLES FROM FILM

This section was made possible by contributing image consultant [Cori Burchell](http://www.coriburchell.com/) – she has dressed many of Hollywood’s top actors and brings twenty years of color experience to the table. She can be reached at her website <http://www.coriburchell.com/>

It is possible to be more strategic about how you use color depending on the situations you will encounter in your day and also to understand a bit more about the psychological meanings associated with various colors. I also wanted to introduce some of the special tricks costume designers use to keep actors looking great and supporting the characters they play.

My experience in costume design for feature films has taught me the importance of using color to evoke and create emotions in the viewer.

Every costume in a film is carefully thought out (as are all the visual elements of films). What is the overall mood/style of the film? What color room will the actor be in? What color will the upholstery of the furniture be? What will the interior of the car look like? What is the actor’s coloring going to be in the film -- will he be wearing a wig or changing his eye color with contact lenses?

All these questions are asked because the costumes need to fit in with the ‘world’ the character lives in as well as look good on the actors. But the important thing to understand is that you can do the same thing every day with the color choices you make for your own wardrobe.

By selecting colors that are harmonious with your personal coloring and complementary to your hair/skin and eye color, you are evoking positive emotions in your viewing audience: the people you encounter in your day. And if you choose colors that aren’t flattering to you, you’re going to do yourself a disservice.

Colin Farrell

Let's take a look at an example with Colin Farrell. The first image is Colin in costume for *Total Recall*. The colors really work for him -- he has strong, sharp coloring and is predominately "cool," so the Costume Designer chose cool tones for Colin.

He wears mostly black, charcoal, grey and varying tones of blue in the film. The colors look right in the 'world' of the film and they give us the impression of a strong, sexy, confident man, which is important for his character, because we need to believe he can actually do the things he does in the film.

Compare this with the second image: Colin in character for "Horrible Bosses".

Ignore the wig with the bad comb-over and the extra body padding for a moment...just take a look at the effect of the color of his shirt.

This soft, muted green-yellow is a challenging color for anyone to wear, but it is especially bad on someone who has cool coloring like Colin has.

That is exactly why the Costume Designer chose it! She wanted us to really dislike this character and instantly be repelled by him. This shirt fights against Colin's natural inherent coloring and does the trick quite well I think!



Richard Gere

Let's look at another example with another actor Richard Gere. In his personal life Richard prefers to wear solid dark colors -- black or navy blue. What is interesting in this series of photos is that as his hair has changed color and gotten more grey, so has the level of contrast in his appearance. His hair was the dominant factor giving Richard a high contrast look when he was younger and had dark hair. Notice now that he is completely grey, there isn't the same contrast between his skin, eyes and hair and he seems to be overwhelmed by the dark colors he is wearing (in the first picture). He needs to choose colors that are not as stark -- more mid-tone or brighter colors. The level of contrast is too high for him with all grey hair.



Ryan Gosling

The final example is also 'warm' versus 'cool'. The first image is Ryan Gosling in costume for the film 'Drive' wearing a mid-tone blue coverall, with medium contrast. This is a 'warm' blue and Ryan has warm coloring, so it complements his skin tone nicely and goes great with his bright blue eyes.

Compare this to the next photo of Ryan in a black suit and white shirt, both with high contrast and cool tones. This combination doesn't do as much

for Ryan's look as the coveralls, which are much more complimentary. The black and white is too high contrast for him. It overpowers him and the color is too 'cool', so he looks a bit washed out.

Ryan tends to wear a lot of navy, blues, and mid to light tones of warm grey - great color choices for him.





Step 8: Energy, Personality and Hidden Meanings

One of the hidden and little known elements to choosing colors that will compliment you is to consider your energy level and personality. Colors can have an effect on us physiologically and psychologically (more 'Jedi mind tricks').

Color and Energy Levels

If you are a high energy, vibrant kind of person, then intense bright colors like orange, turquoise, or bright yellow are going to suit your personality and will support your energy level. If you're a more subdued person, those colors would actually be draining for you. You would be better in softer more muted tones: softer peach, watery blue, or pale yellow.

Color Messaging

Colors also have attributes associated with various personality and character traits. These are subtle and subliminal messages that can help support your message and communications. Imagine having to give an important presentation to your colleagues at work. Visualize giving the presentation wearing a navy blue suit, and then wearing a bright yellow jacket! The message and attention will be completely different with each choice. And depending on the nature of the presentation, you might want to factor your color choice in along with your presentation skills.

The subliminal messages associated with various colors:

Blue/Navy - Traditional, stable, sensitive, refined, tranquil, good-natured, conservative, calm, responsible, honesty, integrity, trustworthy, hardworking, organized, logical

Black - Good listener, interested in others, sophisticated, high authority, power, assertive, mysterious, sensual

White - Fresh, clean, hopeful, reliable, artistic, expressive, skeptical, questioning

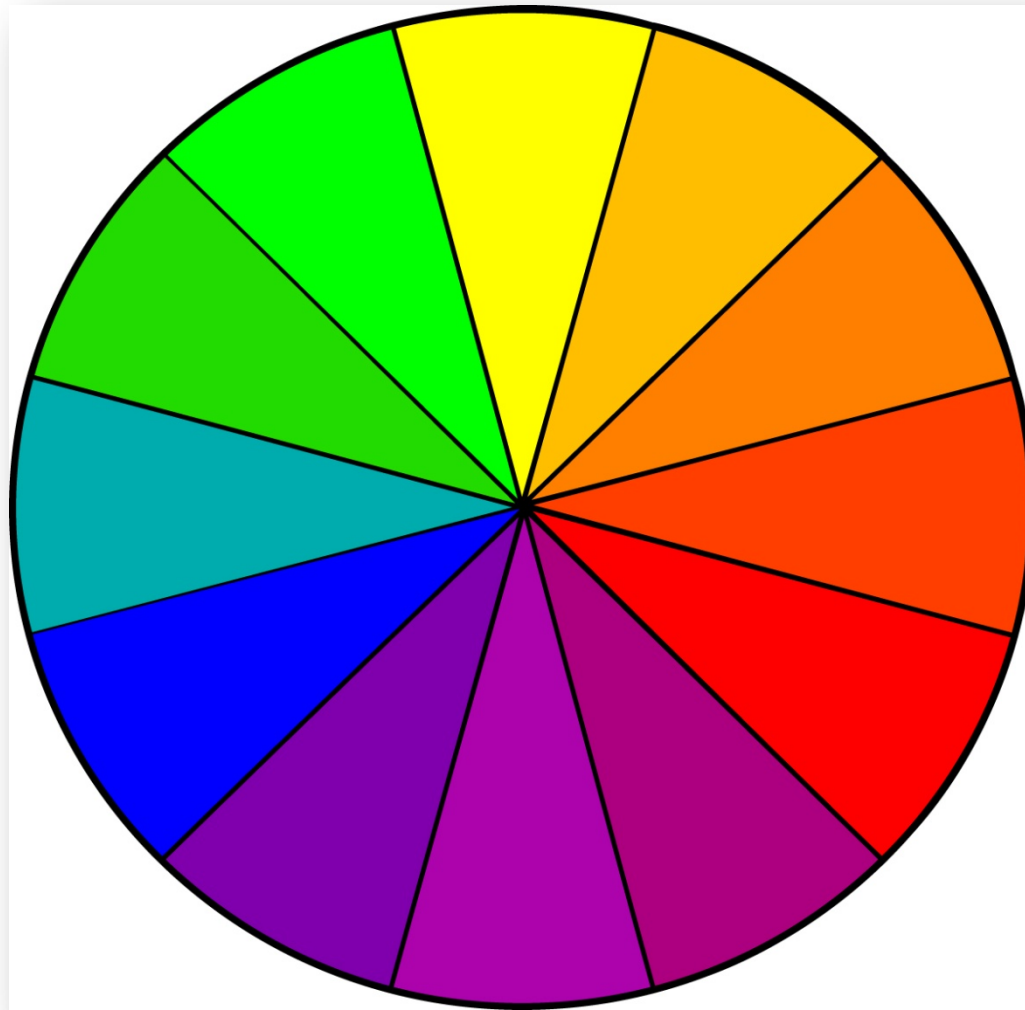
Tan/Cream/Camel - elegant, approachable, inoffensive, trusting, calm, elegant

Brown - stable, secure, natural, persevering, slow to change, loyal, helpful, empathetic, comfortable, down-to-earth, industrious, thrifty, practical, no-nonsense

Charcoal Gray - strength of character, authoritative, refined, controlled, calm, cool

Burgundy/Maroon - classic, refined, elegant, formal

Red - dramatic, self-assured, active, high energy, courageous, intense, passionate, active, challenging, impulsive, dynamic, extroverted, positive, energetic, outgoing, good luck



Orange - social, fun loving, enthusiastic, thoughtful, bright, optimistic, wise, outgoing, fun, discrimination, good conversationalist, exciting, glowing, religion

Yellow - creative, outgoing, bright, cheerful, optimistic, warm, uninhibited, intellectual, inspired, spontaneous, philosophical, theoretical

Green - nurturing, friendly, kind, peaceful, helpful, dependable, practical, cautious, precise, balanced, logical, ambitious, stable, frank, restful

Violet - sensitive, unusual, psychic, spiritual, exotic, has strong sense of inner self and life direction

Pink - quiet, refined, artistic, universal color of love, will exhibit lasting devotion to people, places and ideals

Purple/Plum - artistic, mysterious, charming, dramatic, entertaining, aloof, creative, witty, temperamental, regal, diplomatic, sophisticated

Additional Reading

[Antonio's Premium Style Information Courses](#)

[The Classic Style Guide at A Tailored Suit](#)

[Real Men Real Style – Menswear Advice Website](#)

[Real Men Real Style's You Tube Video Channel](#)

[Art of Manliness – Men's Style Section](#)

[Professional Image Stylist Cori Burchell](#)

