The Secrets Of Color Mixing
“Made Easy”

Easy-to-understand information that helps you know what colors to use before you even pick up your brushes. Say goodbye to muddy color!

by Ethan Semmel

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Introduction:

Hello friend,

I thank you for purchasing this manual. I am delighted with your decision to learn more about color mixing.

There have been many books written about painting and color. You may even own a few of them. Some are good, some are not. I wanted to make this manual different than one of those books. I want this manual to truly help you.

There are also many ways to learn about improving your oil painting. You can do this in colleges, specialized art schools, weekly art classes taught by local artists, and private lessons to name a few.

But, if you don’t know already, there are things instructors try to teach you in a painting class that will not help you. There are too many of those things out there already and most important...

—I didn’t want anything like that in this manual.—

This manual is about helping you improve your painting by helping you to truly understand color. The way the painter must use color. And with that, to give you a procedure to be able to mix your colors.

I will not try to change your opinion about painters. Or try to get you to “express yourself”
For those of you who have taken painting lessons and classes you know this happens all too often. Many times you are not taught some type of procedure or system to follow. Instead you are told what you are doing wrong.

“Make this area more red” or

“I think this is too green”

are common examples of comments you may hear.

Sometimes you may hear a comment like...

“You should make that part of your painting lighter, or more orange”

but, you are not told how to properly do this.

and then you are left to wonder on your own just how to do it.

This will not be the case here.

This manual is about color and color mixing. It is about teaching you about the rules of color that the painter must follow.

I will refer to famous artists of the past quite often to explain things
clearly.

I hear questions about color all the time.

► “What do I mix to paint skin?”

► “What green should I use to paint trees?”

These are just a couple of very common questions that people ask about color.

When I began painting I had a hard time mixing skin color.

What I should say is...

...I had a hard time mixing the color of my own skin under one particular lighting situation.

Phrasing that statement in this particular way is something very important to understand. I will elaborate and explain this important point in greater detail later on.

To mix skin, I was told to use white and mix some yellow ochre with a little cadmium red into this.

There are so many problems with an answer such as this.

Let me go through a list of the many problems this answers has. Remember, my question was...
“What do I use to mix skin color?”

The number one problem is, all skin color is not the same!

You may think of skin color as the color you are most used to, your own.

But take a look around you...

...Everyone has a different skin color.

Are you of African descent? Your skin color will be darker than if you are of european descent.

You might say, “ah, ok. So what would I use to mix the skin color of darker skinned people?”

Again, this is very faulty.

There is no standard skin color, for light skinned people, darker skinned people, or anyone.

And that goes for anything, not just skin. Fruits, trees, animals and anything else you can think of.
Even your own skin is a different color in different areas of your body. And this goes for everything, not just skin.

Let’s take this example. Look at your hand...

When you make a fist, the color of the skin around your knuckles is different than the colors of your fingers.

Also, look at the color of your ears compared to the rest of your face.

They are a different color.

If you are in a room that does not have an electric light on, hold your hand out and look at it. Now, turn on a lamp in your room and put your hand very close to this lamp.

Doesn’t your hand have a different color?

If you say “no” then you do not understand what I mean by “color.”

If we use a different object as an example maybe you will understand it easier.

Let us use an orange. Everyone knows what color an orange is, right? Sure, even the name of the object tells you...orange.
But, to be a painter, you must see things differently than most people do.

Color to you must mean more than it means to the average person. There is much more to a color than just calling it, orange.

Put the orange on a table and look at it. Now hold it under a light and look at it. The color of the orange is different depending if it is closer or further away from the light.

This is the orange in a dimly lit room.

This is the same orange, with a bright light next to it.

Yet, in both places the color is, what is described as “orange.”
Understand that, as a painter, the object can be “orange” in both places yet you would have to use a completely different mixture of paint to paint the same orange depending how it is lit...

...and you are on your way to truly understanding color.

You see, color is much more than just calling something orange. As a painter you must learn that every color has 3 properties to it.

Understand what they are, how to see them and how to mix them, and you are on your way.

Many times, art students will think they have a problem mixing a certain color when this is really not the problem at all.

The problem is in really looking hard enough and “seeing” the right color.

With the procedures you will learn here, you will learn to truly see color as well as how to mix it.

I do suggest that you read this entire manual from beginning to end. At least the first time around. Then you can pick out certain parts and
re-read them.

I must also say something about improving...

I can guide you, give you information you need, give you truly good information that will help you.

But, I cannot make you paint. The truth is that most people who buy books probably do not read them very thoroughly if they do read them at all.

All the information you need on color is right here. I have tried to make it as easy as possible for you to understand.

This manual is made with over 10 years experience behind it.

Follow the procedures and you will know how to mix the color you are looking for.

Remember, just like anything else...

...the more you practice it,

the better you will become at it.

Some people are looking for a simple formula and would like a book
that said something like... “to mix an apple color use 2 parts cadmium red and 1 part white” ...or some formula like this.

I hope if you are one of those people that you give up that search, because painting is not done like that.

That is not the secret of color mixing.

And if you continue to look for formulas like this, you will never find them. They do not exist.

And I would make it a point not to skip over pages which, when you first look at them, you may think are “not that important” and feel it is something you do not need to know.

I always say this in all of my painting instruction products because this is something I have learned from experience. Sometimes you have the answer in front of you, but you don’t bother to use it.

Sometimes, the smallest bit of information will help you to get over that hurdle you are having.

Some advice as simple as “always keep your brushes clean” can help you so much.

You may think it is too simple and there must be some more complicated secret behind it. Well an answer such as this may not be the only problem you are having, but it can contribute towards solving your problem.
Here is a perfect example that relates to this.

A former student of mine would tell me that she couldn’t get nice clean color.

“How can I get my colors to look as nice as yours?” she would ask me.

She would have a paintbrush full of one color. After quickly wiping the brush once on a paper towel, which did not get the paint out of her brush, she would go back to her palette and pick up more paint on this same brush and then apply it to her canvas.

Needless to say the color would always come out a very muddy brown all over.

I would tell her again and again...

“Clean your brush. You must clean your brush and clean it well.”

“How can you expect to get a nice bright blue when you brush has dull yellow in it?”

The answer she would give me was “Nah, it’s ok” and she would just stumble along painting with a dirty brush...

and wonder why her color was not right.
You may laugh at this example, but it happens. Someone like this is a student who really cannot be helped until they decide to follow the procedures they are taught.

And until they are willing to put some effort into their oil painting.

Please, do not be like this. Do not dismiss something as not too important to make any difference in your painting.

Some very small piece of advice might hold the answer to clearing up some of the confusion you are having.

There are many secrets to oil painting. Color mixing has it’s own secrets. But it always comes back to the big secret of being able to think like a painter.

When you think of color the way a painter should be thinking of color, you have been let in on the secret.

Your job is to see things differently than most people.

This manual will cover everything about color, from choosing the right colors to use, to a set procedure to mixing the color you see or are trying to get.

And most importantly it will tell you “why?”

I will not just blindly say “do this and then that” and give you no reasoning for it.
You should be able to succeed without me there and knowing “why?” is the only way for you to do so.

After you have read this manual, you will have the information you need to mix just the color you are looking for.

You won’t need me to tell you...

“That should be redder” or

“Make that more blue”

Let’s get started...
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Color And Painting

When we paint in oils, we use color. And this color is wet color. This is one of the main differences between painting and drawing.

There is nothing wet in drawing.

If you use a colored marker, pencil, crayon, or any drawing tool...it is always dry.

Not so with painting, especially oil painting. Combining two wet colors will mix the two colors together.

You take the chance that these two colors will mix together and produce a color that you are not trying to get. This usually is referred to as muddy color.

Color is a most important part of painting. Getting your colors to "sing" and "glow".

Painters worry so much about getting “muddy” color.

“How can I get rid of muddy color?” people ask. “I mix my colors to try to get the right color and I always end up getting mud.”

This is probably one of the biggest concerns for painters.

You want people to tell you they love the colors in your paintings.
Usually color is what most people will notice first about a painting.

Not always, but many times.

I'm sure you have heard people, when looking at paintings say things like...

⚠️ “I love the colors of that painting.” or

⚠️ “I love the artists use of color.”

Color has been used throughout the centuries in many different ways, by many artists.

There are laws of color that must be understood if you are going to improve your oil paintings.

I will touch on an important subject here...

You must always remember that you are painting a picture. If you are painting a landscape, you do not have the materials of nature to make your landscape with.

**You only have paint that will represent a landscape.**

There are rules about certain mixtures of colors and how your oil paints work.

This is what we will cover here.
Color Has It’s Own Laws

Color. It is what many people think of when it comes to painting. If you think about a work of art that doesn’t have color you are probably thinking about drawing.

It is what charms most people about paintings. It is what scares most beginning painters. It is one of the main reasons why painting is different from drawing with pencil or charcoal.

Color follows certain rules that you must learn if you are going to paint well and use color as your friend rather than have it be something that causes you problems.

Vincent Van Gogh is famous for his use of color. He is known as a wonderful colorist. Some painters are known more for their color and other painters are known for their use of tones, and still others are known for their drawing and use of line.

In the next few pages we will take a look at some examples of painters that are known for their wonderful use of color, tone, and line (drawing).
This is a painting by the Spanish painter, Velasquez. He is recognized as a master of tone values.

There is very little color used at all in this painting.

A lot of the painting is made up of blacks and grays. Using such little color and a wide range of tones he was able to produce some of the greatest paintings in the history of art.

The only part where there is any strong color at all, is in the little red ribbons on the dresses of the girls.
It’s amazing how such a wonderful painting can have such little color in it.

This is a painting from the French Artist, Ingres. He is one of the most famous French artists of the 19th century.

He is most famous for his long sinuous lines. He would even change the outlines of reality if he felt it made for a more interesting painting.

An example of this are the arms of the woman. They are all curves and almost seem to contain no bones in them.
These “artistic” lines are the basis for his paintings.

Here is a painting by the French Artist, Pierre Auguste Renoir. He is an artist who is famous for his use of color.

What most people admire in Renoir’s paintings are his glowing colors. He takes such pleasure in the sheer material of oil paint.

Using it thickly and thinly and getting his colors to glow and “sing.”

Only something that a true colorist would now how to do.
Now, remember Vincent Van Gogh is considered a colorist. Painters of today still look to him for examples of how to use color.

Here is something interesting about color that you should really think about.

In the 1950’s movie “Lust for Life” (a movie about the life of Vincent Van Gogh) Vincent was teaching himself to draw.

There is a scene where he went to see his cousin (who was a successful artist of the time, named Anton Mauve) to show him some of the drawings he had been making. He was looking for guidance and advice.

Van Gogh, at this point in his artistic career, was only drawing. He had not begun to paint. Van Gogh was an artist for only 10 years, and for the first few years of his artistic career he didn’t even paint.

His cousin was impressed with what he saw. He then asked Vincent...

“Have you ever worked in color?“

Vincent’s reply was “No.“

“Well then you must start working right away in watercolors and oil, it will help your drawing.” replied Anton Mauve.

Vincent replied...
“I don’t know the first thing about color!“

Can you imagine? Vincent Van Gogh didn’t know the first thing about color.

Yes, this was a movie, but I could very well imagine this discussion to actually have taken place. His own letters show that he himself knew he didn’t know how to use color. They also showed all of the questions about color that he wanted answers to.

Van Gogh was just like every other art student. He was scared of color. He knew that there was much to be learned.

There are certain rules that you will need to know about color.

**Important Note:**

Always remember, you are making a “painting.” By this I mean that when you paint a landscape, you are not making a landscape. You are making a picture out of paint that represents a landscape.

You may paint based on nature, but your painting is something separate and different from nature. The materials you use to create your pictures have their own laws.

In nature, there is a law that if water reaches 212 degrees fahrenheit / 100 degrees celsius, it will freeze and turn into ice.
With oil paint, there is a law about color in that if you mix yellow and blue you get green.

**This is how it is and it will never ever change!**

Since you only have paint and do not have a tree, you must know all about the laws of your paints so you can use them in the best way possible.

I mentioned that mixing blue and yellow makes green. Painters use pigments. When you mix two pigments together, another color is formed. This is the first rule of the materials of oil paint that you must know.

**Red, Yellow, and Blue.**

I’m sure you have heard somewhere before that these three colors are known as the **primary** colors. Well this is true, but what does this really mean?

What it means is this...

**All** other colors can be made with mixtures of these three colors. Primary, meaning **first**. The first colors you must use to make your mixtures.

Before you can make any other colors you must have the primary, or
first colors. **Red, yellow, and blue.**

- A mixture of blue and red makes purple.
- A mixture of yellow and red makes orange.
- A mixture of yellow and blue makes green.

This gives you three totally new colors...

**Purple, Green and Orange.**

These three colors, which you get by mixing the three primary colors are called the secondary colors. You can guess why I’m sure.

Mixing the first colors (primary) produces the second batch of colors (known as the secondary colors). Purple, green and orange.

And there you have it. These are the only **6 colors that exist.**

This is true up to a certain point.

We don’t live in a perfect scientific world, therefore, **more colors are needed for painters to be able to mix all the colors that we want.**

It is more accurate to say that these are the only **6 color families** that exist.
Remember, you must start thinking about color in a way that is different from the average person.

A dark red and light red are both considered red by most people, but they are **different** colors to the painter.

**The World of Printing**

In the world of printing, meaning color pictures like you would find in magazines and books, **everything** is printed with mixtures of red, blue and yellow.

Or, more accurately, **magenta, cyan, and yellow**.

Magenta is a little more purple than what you may think of as red. Cyan is a little more green than what you might think of as blue.

Yet, even in printing, this three color system does not fully render colors as the theory of “**needing only three colors to make every other color**” says it should.

Therefore, **black** is also used. This is what is known as “**CMYK**” printing. Many of you have heard of this I’m sure.

K being black for “key” to help **adjust** the colors.
Magazines, billboards, postcards, etc. are printed with this CMYK process using just these four colors.

These colors are **not** mixed together like we do with paint. The way printing is done is the following...

Each color is used purely in tiny **dots** of each color. These dots are arranged in a certain order and are so small so they mix in the **viewers** **eye**. From these tiny dots, placed side by side, we appear to see all the different colors in the world.

The smaller the dots, the sharper the image looks.

If you look at a color picture in a magazine with a strong magnifying glass you will see the entire picture is made up of dots. Dots of red, blue, yellow, and black.

If you know something about “neo-impressionism” this may sound very similar to the technique of painting practiced by a group of painters called the **pointillists**.

The groups’ most famous example was George Seurat.

I'm sure you have seen the painting on the next page that shows a wonderful example of this type of painting.

It is one of the most famous paintings in the world.
In the bottom picture you see a detailed image of the painting where you can clearly see the dots of different colors that make up the complete painting.
The only problem with their method is that they could never make their dots as small as those used in modern day printing. And, they did not paint only with three or four colors.

They wanted to paint with pure colors, but they used more than three or four colors. They included the colors of the spectrum which as you may know, is more than three or four colors. Including colors like green and orange on their palettes.

So, if printing is done with four colors...

...and you see how colorful a magazine picture can be, does this mean that you only need to have a palette consisting of four colors? Red, blue, yellow, and black?

**Hardly!**

Joshua Reynolds (one of the most well known English painters of the eighteenth century) supposedly used only three colors plus black for some of his works.

Possibly, he used only four colors for the beginning stages of his works, but he certainly used more than just three colors for other stages of his paintings.

Titian was famous for laying in his paintings using only three colors white, black and red.
But, he used only this few amount of colors when he was in the beginning stages of his paintings. Not for the entire painting.

Note that this red was most likely and earth red like Venetian red. Not the bright cadmium red color like that of a traffic light.

This process of beginning your painting with a limited amount of color is a very practical idea that I will talk more about later on.

**The Myths About Black.**

There will be people who tell you black is not a color in nature and should not be used in painting.

This thought comes from the time of the impressionists who tried to eliminate black from their palette under the theory that black is not a color in nature and therefore it should not be included on your palette.

There are painters today who still follow this rule.

Renoir followed this for some time. He used a mixture of blue and dark red as his black. In real life however, this produces a dark purple and he never could get the full power that a tube of black paint can give you.

He realized this and he **re-introduced black** to his palette around 1890 never to eliminate it again. Calling it the “queen of colors.”
This is not something I am theorizing about. His own writings state this to be true.

Tintoretto (a famous Venetian painter of the 16th century) said “the most important colors are black and white.”

White gives light areas the brightness they need and black gives to shadows a richness and deepness that could not be achieved otherwise.

Note: Personally, I always have black on my palette and I consider it essential. I use Ivory black as it is the traditional black color.

Why would you want to make things harder on yourself and try to mix a black substitute when you can just use a gorgeous black paint produced from it’s own pigment?

I also prefer to paint indoors. So, my goal isn’t to try to copy the colors of nature (which some people say does not contain black). Of course, not everyone paints with the same goals in mind that I do.

Not Using Black

Now, on the other hand...

Yes, it is true Monet, many times, did not use black.

Especially in his later works, but his early work of the 1860’s did have
black in them. This is not a theory as chemical analysis of his paintings have proven that there is black in his paintings.

But, it is important to know **why**.

Monet’s later work is a very **personal** vision and he didn’t want to use black thinking he got more beautiful color without it.

He became more interested in getting beautiful colors and exaggerating the colors of nature.

**And he got just the results he wanted! Wonderful!**

He **understood** what black did and he decided (only with a thorough knowledge of **why**) to not use it.

Remember, he decided not to use black only because he **thoroughly understood his materials** and decided that the effect he was after would be easier to achieve, by **not** using black.

A very interesting contrast is Monet’s friend, **John Singer Sargent**, who for a time painted alongside Monet.

Sargent **always used black** and could not understand how Monet got along without using it.

Sargent was taught to paint using the painters of Spain from the 17th century as his model. These 17th century Spanish painters, like
Velasquez, used black **like it was going out of style.**

Remember the painting by Velasquez that you saw earlier.

Sargent was a **“tonal”** painter meaning that he was very careful about getting his tones of light and dark correct. Black was essential for his way of painting. For controlling his tone values as much as possible.

Monet was more of a colorist who wanted light and airy colors. Using black would have made this harder to achieve.

Both Sargent and Monet **understood their materials**, but both got to their end result using different colors.

For Sargent, black was essential. For Monet it was not. This just goes to show you that **everyone paints differently!** Even two painters who were painting side by side.

Everyone has a different goal in mind! But, good painters understand their materials and know when to use them and **not** to use them!

**Do not** just stop using black because somebody once told you not to.

If you want to produce a pastel-like effect and get some color effects in
your paintings that are similar to Monet’s, then not using black may be a good idea.

Renoir used black and Monet didn’t. They both had a different idea of the colors they wanted to achieve.

**They understood black.**

One decided it was a great help to use it. The other decided it was a great help to not use it. It is almost silly to have this discussion come up sometimes. But it does come up.

This whole debate about black began in the 1870’s when the impressionist painters began to become popular.

Even the painters who first began the debate didn’t like to discuss it. Many of them began using black again anyway.

Suddenly, **academic** teachers, who had always used black, began saying you should not use black. And then 15 years later they used black again.

It’s obvious they were just following what was in fashion at the time.
This debate is not something new, but for some reason many people feel this is such a key point. They feel the magic key to getting beautiful colors is to not use black.

Only painters like Monet truly understood why you should not use black.

You either use it or you don’t depending on the effect you are after.

**Just do not think you have an amazing secret if you do not use black.**

Understand what you have to use. Your paints. Your materials.

Decide if it will help you to do something or **not do** something. Will it help you achieve the effect you want by **using** something, or **not using** something? Such as using black.

Only a thorough understanding of color will allow you to know the answer to this question.

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**My Colors**

Let me now discuss the colors I use for my paintings.
The following list contains all of the names of the paint tubes that I use for my own paintings.

Now please don’t just copy these down and use these colors without understanding why I use these colors.

Remember, understanding why is the key to learning.

Flake White (Lead white, Cremnitz white), Cadmium Red, Alizarin Crimson, Crimson Lake, Cadmium Yellow, Chrome Yellow, Naples Yellow, Sap Green, Viridian, Terre Verte, Ultramarine Blue, Cobalt blue, Pthalo Blue, Cobalt Violet, Yellow Ochre, Burnt Sienna, Burnt umber, Raw Umber, Earth Red (meaning Venetian Red, or Light Red), Ivory Black.

Note: I do not use all of these colors at the same time! These are the colors I own and choose from them when setting up a palette. Some of these colors I barely use at all, like Violet and Pthalo Blue. Let me explain a little more.

I use Lead White all the time. It is the fastest drying white. This is a quality I personally like.

It contains lead, which is hazardous. However, if you are neat and careful it shouldn’t cause much of a problem.
I know and understand the material. I know the qualities it adds to my paintings, and I am neat when I paint. Therefore, this is the white I choose to use. It makes it easier for me to paint in the way I want.

**Note:** Lead white is **really dangerous** when it is in **powder form** because it can get into the air easily. You can inhale it and not even know it.

It is a very opaque color, a quality which I also like.

The key here is that using lead white makes it easier for **me**.

This does not necessarily mean it will make it easier for **you**.

Perhaps for the way that you like to paint, zinc white may make it easier for you. Only knowing the qualities of each white will answer this question for you.

I will go into this more later on.

**Why I use the colors I do**

This is the real question isn’t it? Why do I use these colors?

Is it just because I like them? Is it just a random choice? Certainly not. There is very important reasoning behind it.
There are only six color families in the world as science tells us. (By the way don’t get scared when I mention science. Some people hate to mix science and art so I will keep it to a minimum.)

In nature, white light is the combination of these six colors. Remember I said light, not pigments.

With pigments (paint), white is the absence of any color and combining the six colors produces black.

Theoretically that is...

These six color families are

- red
- orange
- yellow
- green
- blue
- violet.
Note: For all of you scientific people who know the spectrum, I know I am leaving out indigo as it is in between violet and blue. Also, something interesting is that using different mixtures of light is how your computer screens make variations of color. Also known as RGB color (red, green, blue) as opposed to CMYK that I talked about earlier.

But of course, the artist does not use light to produce color, but pigments.

Now, remember there are six color families. Well...

Important Note:

The colors on my palette are chosen so I can re-produce all of the colors in nature in light, middle and dark variations. This is very important!

When you paint a red object, you need to be able to paint that red in all variations of light and shadow.

A red object that is hit by light will produce different degrees of light and dark.

Yet, these degrees of light and dark are all still red.
Some parts will be a light red, other parts will be a dark red. But they are all still red!

You must be able to paint all different variations of this red. For that you will need a few paint tubes that are in the red color family.

For example, let’s look at an apple...

Take an apple and put it very close to a light bulb and it will be one color.

Take the same apple and put it in a dimly lit room and it will be another color.

But, to paint an apple that was very close to a light bulb, you would have to mix a different red than if you were going to paint an apple in a dimly lit room.
And this can be for the very same apple. And the color will still be a different mixture.

To paint the dark versions of red, you do not simply add black to your red to darken it.

You need to be able to paint all variations of one color and you need to be able to do this for all of the six colors.

Painting Colors In All Variations

The colors that I buy are chosen so I can paint all variations of a color. Buying one tube of red paint, won’t cut it. I could never reproduce all different variations of red if I only had one tube of red paint, such as cadmium red.

This is why I have different versions of each of the six color families. Each color paint is used to help me reproduce all the variations that I need for each of the six color families.

I will now go through the colors I use and explain how I use these colors to be able to represent the colors of nature in their light, middle, and dark variations.
Red

Light reds - I use cadmium red for my lighter reds adding white as I need it even lighter.

Middle reds - Venetian Red or the color known as “light red” are my middle value reds.

Dark Reds - Alizarin Crimson takes care of the dark values of my reds. Sometimes I add in a touch of Burnt Umber because Alizarin Crimson tends to be a little on the violet side.

I can also get my middle reds by mixing together my light and dark reds, Cadmium Red and Alizarin Crimson. As long as you understand the principle of color families, you can find more than one way to get to your goal.

Orange

Light orange - I use a mixture of my light reds and light yellows like cadmium red and cadmium yellow.

Middle oranges - I use mixtures of venetian red and yellow ochre (remember red and yellow make orange so mixing these together produces a middle range of oranges).

Dark Oranges - *Burnt sienna*, and *Burnt umber* are used for my darker oranges.
Personally, I prefer to mix my light oranges. Some people prefer to buy a tube of orange paint.

**Yellow**

*Light yellows* - I use Cadmium, Chrome, or Naples Yellow to represent my lighter yellows.

*Middle yellows* - *Yellow ochre* takes care of the middle yellows.

*Dark yellows* - I use *Raw Umber* and *Burnt Umber* for my dark values of yellow.

**Green**

*Light green* - *Viridian* mixed with white is one way I use to make my light greens. A mixture of blues and my light yellows, sometimes with white, also produces wonderful light greens.

*Middle green* - I can use combination of my middle yellows, like yellow ochre, with blues. I can also just use a similar mixture to my light greens, but with less white.

*Dark Green* - Mixtures of blue and dark yellows takes care of my dark greens. *Sap green* can also be used for dark greens.

*Ivory black* and yellows can also make wonderful greens.
**Blue**

*Light blue* - Ultramarine, Cobalt, or Pthalo Blue mixed with much white takes care of my light blues.

*Middle blue* - The same blues mixed only with a little white takes care of my middle blues.

*Dark blue* - The blue colors at full strength, or perhaps with a little black takes care of my dark blues.

**Violet/Purple**

*Light violet* - A mixture of blue and red with white takes care of my light violets.

*Middle violet* - I go about mixing my middle violets from either using my light reds and blue without white or I can use my middle value reds and blues mixed together.

*Dark violet* - My darkest reds and blues take care of my darkest value violets.

If I want darker accents in the darkest parts of a certain color I will add some black to the mixture as well.
You see, the colors I use have me covered for every version of a color I could want.

**Important Note:**

You see, I do not think of a color as brown.
I think of brown as a darker version of orange or yellow.
This is a very helpful way to think and makes the use of colors very logical.

I can now paint the 6 color families that exist in all different variations of each color.

**Red is a color family.**

A red traffic light and a dark red delicious apple are both in the red color family, but they are a different color.

...Got it?

**Knowing What Colors To Use Before You Begin**

Let’s take a real life example of this see how it would work. Watch how you will be able to know what colors you will use before you even begin.
For an example let’s assume I am painting the hair of a red-headed person. By having the proper colors to paint the different variations of a color family, I know what colors I will look to use...

Since a red-head really is orange as far as color is concerned I know I will have to use my variations of orange.

For the parts of the hair that are closer to the light I would need my orange in it’s light tone variation.

I might mix a light orange from Cadmium Red and Cadmium Yellow. If I needed it lighter I would add in white.

For the parts that are not in so much light but not in total shadow (The middle range of oranges) I might use a mixture such as Yellow Ochre and Venetian Red.

Or I could use my light mixture of Cadmium Red and Cadmium Yellow and simply add Burnt Sienna to darken the orange.

**Note:** There is not just one way to accomplish darkening a color. By understanding the principle of color families, you can use more than one way to get to your goal.

This would take care of the middle values. Usually the middle tones are what make up most of an object.
For the parts of the hair that are in **shadow** I may just use straight Burnt Sienna.

If this wasn’t dark enough I may add Burnt Umber to the mixture or maybe use Burnt Umber by itself.

You must always judge certain things about color with your eyes. Whether the color of this red-headed person is maybe a little on the **blonder side** or on the **red side**.

But, by understanding the laws of paint, I **know** what colors I will be using to achieve the effects I am after.

Do you see what I have done here? **If not, go back and read that sample again.**
Do you see what the possibilities are if you follow the logical thinking of keeping every mixture, whether light or dark, an orange color?

Every mixture is some form of orange. Some light orange and some dark orange. Yet all orange!

You might say...

“you used browns.” Yes, I have used brown, but remember, brown is a dark orange.

Of course this is just a general example. There are all variations of redheads. And depending on the color of the light and other slight variations, the color will be different for everyone.

The point I am trying to make is how I already know in my mind what colors to think about using. And I will adjust these colors if I feel the person’s hair is redder or blonder.

For example...

...if the person was a redhead, but their hair color tended to be a little on the blonde side.

You may use cadmium orange and mix in a little cadmium yellow because their hair color tended toward the blonde side.
You would do the same thing for the middle oranges. Perhaps mixing cadmium orange and burnt sienna together, then mixing in a little yellow ochre to get the orange more towards the yellow, blonder color that you see.

Using yellow ochre keeps the yellow the same middle tone as the mixture of cadmium orange and burnt sienna. If I just used a light cadmium yellow, the tone would be off. It would be much too light.

By understanding the rules of color I am off to a good start and know exactly what colors will be my base. There is no more guessing involved. By understanding my colors, I know just what to use.

Let’s take another example using a different color.

For this example we will use a yellow mug as the object we are trying to paint.

Let’s say that I feel chrome yellow is the best yellow to paint the cup in the light areas.

Let’s take the light areas first.
For really bright areas of the cup I may use white and add chrome yellow to it. Chrome yellow by itself I will use for the areas that are in light, but are not highlights.

To paint the yellow as it turns darker I could take chrome yellow and darken it by adding yellow ochre to it.

When I feel the mixture of chrome yellow and yellow ochre is right I will paint with this mixture.

Ok, now the yellow gets **even darker**. I take the mixture I just used and add Raw Umber into it.

Maybe a lot of Raw Umber is not needed.

This you have to judge for yourself. There is no magic formula for this except to use your eyes.

Once again the point is I have now created a whole yellow range I can use to paint that cup.

These above examples are good examples of how to mix color and **not get “mud”**.

Maybe one time you have tried to paint something like a yellow cup and tried to add black to your yellow to paint the dark areas of this cup
You are changing color families when you add black to yellow. This will produce a color you are not looking for. In the case of adding black to your yellow, you would get a green.

It’s a nice color, but it is not the color you need or want. Therefore, you call this color, “mud”

There are more complicated procedures such as if the yellow is a little more orange than you will have to adjust your mixtures and add other colors, but you will always be keeping the mixtures in the same color family.

Mud comes about when you use a color that is not in the same color family.

For instance if you were painting a yellow object, but used a color that was in the blue family somewhere on the cup. This would look muddy.

This is another example of thinking differently. If you don’t currently think of all the colors of nature as being variations of only 6 color families, change your way of thinking now so you do think this way.

It will help to make color mixing much easier for you. You will be thinking about color like a painter should.

You will be thinking about color...
in terms of your materials. Your oil paints.

This is so important!

Remember, you don’t paint with nature. When you paint an apple, you have colored paint to represent this apple.

Go back to the section on the colors I use and study them. Are you missing a way to mix full variations of all of the 6 color families of nature?

You must have a way to mix a complete variation of all 6 color families. If you do not, you will have to buy the paints that allow you to do this.

But before you buy your oil paints, read this next section.

The Best Colors To Purchase

There are so many colors that are available for you to buy. To make it as easy as possible, I will cover the oil paints you should look for step by step.
I will cover them in six categories. All staying in their color families. It is a good way to get you to start thinking this way.

It is very important to think like this. It will make it much easier for you to mix colors. It will help you to know what colors to aim for before you even pick up your brushes to paint.

It takes a little while, if you aren’t used to it, to think of browns as dark oranges and dark yellows

Always remember that you only have to work with 6 colors, the primary and secondary colors. These can be in varying degrees of light and dark.

Try this the next time you are going to buy paints.

Next time when you are buying colors, say to yourself, “I need some paint tubes of a dark orange”. Of course, for this, you will need to get yourself a burnt sienna or burnt umber.

**Reds**

**Cadmium Red.**
This is the traditional red. Sometimes it is sold under the name Vermillion or French Vermillion. It also comes in variations like cadmium red light, medium, and dark. Do not concern yourself with getting all the variations, you can mix them yourself.
I prefer cadmium red light as it seems to be the brightest one and again is the traditional color. If it has been used for centuries, there must be something right about it.

**Note:** Remember my motto of *Trusting tradition.*

- Tradition means that something has already been tested.
- An answer has been found and used for years.
- Trust these answers. Don’t try to re-invent the wheel.

**Alizarin Crimson / Crimson lake.**

This is a very transparent dark reddish purple. Such a beautiful color. Especially because of it’s transparent qualities.

It is really impossible to mix a color like this for yourself with other pigments.

Alizarin crimson and crimson lake are basically the same color, but crimson lake has the reputation of fading over time.

The paint is made by adding a dye to colorless pigment. And you know how dyes are delicate and can change over time and fade.

This happens to Crimson Lake. But as far as what the color looks like, they are just about the same reddish / violet color.

If you can’t find alizarin crimson, crimson lake is fine to use.
Venetian Red.
Another traditional middle red color. Sometimes it is sold under the name “light red” or “earth red”.

A wonderful dull red with very strong tinting power. Adding a drop of it to a mixture can turn your whole mixture venetian red in color.

Oranges

Cadmium Orange.
A very good basic orange color. You really don’t need anything else for your light oranges if you do not want to mix them yourself from yellows and reds. I prefer to mix my oranges with cadmium reds and cadmium yellows. Some people may prefer to have an orange right from a tube. If you like to have an orange tube of paint for your light areas, this is the one you should have.

Burnt Sienna.
A very traditional dark orange (brown). Is is somewhat transparent and has been in use for centuries and is a standard of most people’s palettes. It is also not an expensive color.

Burnt Umber.
Another very traditional dark brown. It is similar to Burnt Sienna, but even darker. Another standard that is very useful and has been around for centuries.
**Yellows**

**Cadmium Yellow.**
The basic Yellow that I use. It is an expensive color like all of the “cadmium” colors. It is a yellow that is a little more orange than chrome yellow for example and just a superb color.

**Chrome Yellow.**
This yellow is lighter (more towards a lemon in color) and not as orange as cadmium yellow. If made according to it’s traditional formula it will contain lead which worries some people. Many modern variations of this color do not contain lead.

**Naples Yellow.**
A complicated color. It was used for years in making caucasian flesh tones. The color used to contain lead so a modern substitute was made that is really not the traditional form of Naples Yellow.

There are a great many varieties of Naples Yellow that you can buy in tubes. It is one of the colors that has the greatest variety depending which brand you buy.

The traditional form of Naples Yellow is a definite yellow color. It is not the strongest color in the world, but it is a clear yellow. Sometimes you will find some modern Naples Yellows that can look quite “muddy” and dull. This is not the kind you want.
Zinc Yellow.
Another lemon-like color that is not very oily. For that reason, it dries quickly and is very popular with some people.

Indian Yellow.
A very transparent middle yellow color. Indian Yellow in the tube contains a lot of oil which can lead to the color turning dark over time. It is also fairly expensive.

Raw Sienna.
Similar to Indian Yellow as well as Yellow Ochre. It is also very transparent and it needs a lot of oil to make it into paint. It is not a very stable color as it will turn dark over time. It is not very strong as far as tinting strength goes, but it can be great if you want to use a middle yellow transparently.

Yellow Ochre.
An inexpensive and standard color. A durable color. And one of the most traditional of all colors. Essential for painting all types of yellow objects. I would buy this in large quantities. Luckily it is not an expensive color at all.

Raw Umber.
A very dark yellow. It comes in many varieties with some brands tending toward a green and some being almost gray.
Greens

Sap green.
This a dark yellow green that is transparent. A very good color for painting landscapes, and if you like transparent qualities in oil paint, it is hard to beat.

Viridian.
This is a bluish green. A very traditional green. And you can tell I trust tradition. A very strong color and a great basic green.

Terre Verte.
Another complicated color. By that I mean it can also be known as veronese green or Green Earth. Ignore the name. Concentrate on what the color is good for.

I use it for painting things like skin when a hint of green is needed. It is a dull green and not that strong. It gets overpowered in mixtures by the other colors. But I find it suits the purpose I use it for quite well.

Blues

Ultramarine Blue.
The basic blue I use. Again it is a traditional color. I cannot do without it. It is strong, permanent and a “must have”.

**Cobalt Blue.**
This color is similar to Ultramarine blue, but it is not as strong. Warning, it is a very expensive color. I tend to use it less and less. I feel I can get all the qualities I could get from Cobalt Blue with Ultramarine Blue. It is slightly lighter in color than Ultramarine Blue.

**Pthalo Blue.**
A greener blue. One of the strongest tinting colors I have ever seen. A little of it in a mixture will turn everything blue in color. The color could almost be called aqua.

**Prussian Blue.**
This color is very similar to Pthalo Blue. It is very strong. It has been around longer than Pthalo Blue.

**Cerulean Blue.**
This color is quite popular with many people and could almost be called sky blue. I prefer to mix my light blue with Ultramarine and white, but some people like to use this color.

**Violets**

**Cobalt Violet.**
I usually mix my own purples and violets. But if there is ever a purple color I am trying to get that I cannot get by mixing, this color will usually do the trick. It is very expensive.
Manganese Violet.
Very similar to Cobalt Violet in every way.

Blacks

Ivory Black.
The traditional black. It is a little bluish and is transparent. Well tested and reliable as it has been around for many centuries.

Lamp Black.
Another version of black. Made with soot.

Peach Black.
Another good black to use.

Whites

Lead White.
Sometimes called Flake White. The oldest white and yes it is made from pure lead pigment in it’s purest form. Modern day lead whites are usually mixed half lead white and half zinc white, but still sold under the name of lead white, Flake white or Cremnitz white. It dries fast, is traditional and is a very heavy pigment because, after all, it’s metal.
Titanium White.
Many people’s favorite white. It has wonderful opaqueness, but does not dry as fast as lead white. It is a relatively new paint. Lot’s of times the tube called titanium white is actually a mixture of Titanium and Zinc White.

Zinc White.
The slowest drying of all the whites. Also the least opaque. I do not really use it much as it does not suit my style. But if you don’t want your paintings drying overnight, this is a good choice to use.

Use this guide as to the colors you choose for yourself.

Drying times are important, and I have tried to point out the different drying times of the different colors.

All oil paint does not take the same amount of time to dry.

Some paints dry faster, some take longer to dry.

White for instance varies a great deal with drying time. If you like to have your paint dry as quickly as possible, you should not be using zinc white as the main white for your paintings.

Notice I did not cover colors such as “Geranium Lake”, or “Flesh”.


These colors are mixtures that the paint companies sell to basically confuse you and get you to buy more colors than you really need.

They feel if the color has a cute name to it, people will try them out.

They are targeted for the hobbyist.

Since they continue to make these paints, I am sure people are buying them. Everyone wants to try new colors especially with attractive names.

**You do not need them!**

In addition, many of these fancy named colors are just mixtures of the standard colors on this list. Companies mix them together, add in some white and sell them as a separate color.

In other words, you are probably mixing these colors on your palette anyway when you are mixing your other paints together. Just like the paint companies do.

So, if you like to paint flowers, do not think that having the color called “Geranium Lake” will help you.

The same goes for buying “flesh tint” if you like to paint people a lot and you think it will help you paint skin color.
The Two Ways To Use Color

In oil painting, color can be mixed directly or indirectly.

Direct mixing is when you try to mix the color you need right from the start. Without any underpainting to guide you.

Indirect painting is when you have an underpainting to use a guide for your tone values for your color. When you don’t do it all in one step.

Most modern day painting is done with direct mixtures of color. I suggest you try both ways to get your color.

Indirect painting is more complex “in theory”. Actually direct painting is the harder way to go. The reason for this is because you have to get many more things correct in one shot.

Of course this means you increase your chances for getting something wrong as well.

The Three Properties Of Color

When mixing color you have 3 parts that you must think about. You can get these 3 parts right or wrong.

First Part
The first thing to get right about a color is the family that it is in. In other words, is the color red, blue, orange, etc.
This is the easiest part to get right.

**Second Part**
The tone of the color. This refers to the lightness and darkness of the color. Once you have decided the color family, you must determine the right tone of the color.

**Third Part**
This is probably the most complicated part. The strength of the color. A color can be strong or dull. What this refers to is if the color is used pure or if it is grayed down. Colors are not used all the time at their maximum strength. In other words, straight from the tube...

...like color in a stained glass window.

Even when you mix a color with white you are taking away its strength and graying it down. It is just a lighter gray.

You must determine these three things about every color you mix.

When you get these three things correct, you have just found the “right color”

Every color has three parts to it. Remember that always.
This is why color is actually the least important part you need to get right to produce a convincing 3 dimensional image.

This can be proven very easily. If you take a painting and reproduce it in black and white, you will still have a convincing feeling of the image being in space. Of it being 3 dimensional.

Notice in the above two images. The image on the right is just as convincing as a three dimensional image, but there is no color.

I will not say that color is the least important part of painting. I for one love painters who are referred to as “colorists”, but as far as producing a 3 dimensional image, drawing and tone values are more important.

Always remember, color mixing has 3 parts to it.
It is not just something as simple as...

“How do I paint flesh color?” or

“What do I mix to paint an apple”

There is no such formula. It would be silly to try to make a formula for this. There is so much more to it than that.

What can be made into a system is your thinking process.

The steps you will use to get the color you need. Once you know this, you will be able to mix any color that you see or need.

Now, going back to the two methods of applying color...

directly and indirectly...

Do you see why it is harder to use direct color? When you have no underpainting. You have three things to get right. If you get just one of them wrong, your color mixture will be off.

This gives you a way to think. Take it in steps.

Think of getting these three things right and you will get the “right” color.

When you become more advanced you can go more on instinct, but
when you are learning or trying to improve, it is good to follow a procedure. It makes things much less confusing for you.

And now for the thinking procedure you should use.

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**How To Think, Step By Step**

1) First, determine the color family you need. This is the easiest step as it is pretty easy to tell if something is in the yellow or blue, or one of the other six color families.

2) Next you are going to mix the proper tone for the color you need with a gray.

This “getting the right tone” is the most important step.

You can even use a gray made from black and white.

You can mix black and white together until it matches the tone of what you are after.

Sometimes you will use a lot of white and only a little black. Sometimes it will be just the reverse. More black and a little white.

Sometimes people like to mix a gray by using the colors that are opposite each other on the color wheel.
This is a diagram of a color wheel.

And the colors that are opposite each other are...

- Red and Green.
- Orange and Blue.
- Yellow and Purple

These colors that are opposite each other are called complimentary colors.

**Mixing them together cancels each other out and produces gray.**
Now, remember, every color also has a tone. If you mix a dark blue with a light orange you will get a gray, but not necessarily the tone of gray that you are looking for.

This is because the blue and the orange also has a tone to it. A degree of lightness and darkness.

So, if the tone values are different, you are not only combining different color families, but also different tone values.

Just like if you mixed black and white.

Now, if you have not done this before it may take some getting used to. When you see an object in color and have to match the tone of that object without using color, it can get confusing.

Squinting will help a lot here.

If you squint you can eliminate much of the color from your sight. So can concentrate on just the tone.

You must compare the tone of your object with the tone of gray you have mixed.
When you are satisfied that you have mixed the right tone with gray, it is time to go to the next step.

3) After you have mixed the tone of gray that you need, you need to mix this same tone value using your pure mixtures of color families.

This would refer to mixing colors that are in the same color family together. Like cadmium yellow with yellow ochre.

You mix them together to match the tone of the gray that you just mixed in step 2.

You will now have two mixtures. One in gray, and one in color.

But, both of these two mixtures should be the same tone.

If you were doing this to mix a yellow you would mix cadmium yellow together with yellow ochre until you got the right tone.

If you need it darker you would add more yellow ochre to the mixture.
If you needed it light, the mixture would contain more cadmium yellow.

This you have to judge with your eyes. With practice, like anything else, it will become easier for you.

4) You will now get the proper strength of the color by combining these two mixtures you have made in the last two steps.
You must make a decision about the color you are trying to mix. Is the color grayer or full strength (more pure).

If the color you are trying to mix is more pure, and doesn’t seem to be grayed down very much, start with your mixture of pure color and slowly mix the gray into it.

If the color is very dull, start with a gray that is the right tone you need and add color into this gray. Keep adding more of the color into the gray until you have the color you need.

**Important Note:**

Two important points to remember...

1) If you mix a gray and add colors into this, get the gray the right tone first!

2) Don’t use the same gray tone for every color.

See what you have done here? You have taken care of all the possible problems of color in a step by step procedure.

- You have decided upon a color family from one of 6 that exist.
- You have made the proper tone for the color you need.
You have made this color the right strength by controlling the amount of gray that is in the mixture.

This may sound confusing, but when you see it in action it will make much more sense.

You will see this procedure in action here.

It will be step by step and you will know how to incorporate this procedure into your own color mixing problems.

Let's take an image of a flower and try to mix a color that we need to paint it.
For this example we are going to mix the violety red color of the outside of the petals using the step by step procedure I have gone over.

It is the color the arrow is pointing to.

**Step 1**
First you need to determine the color family that you are going to mix. Well, I said that it is a violety red color. So this is the answer to that question.

This should be easy enough to figure out. It is violet, but it definitely is a red violet.

We have our first step taken care of.

**Step 2**
This step calls for mixing this tone using some type of gray. I want to keep this example fairly simple so I will use plain black and white to make this gray
By taking all of the time it takes, and using helpful tricks such as squinting, I determine that the gray you see is the proper tone. I start with white and slowly add some black into it to come up with this particular gray tone.

I could have gotten this gray using colors that are opposite each other on the color wheel, but I chose to just use black and white.

Take as much time as is necessary to make sure that the gray is the right tone.

**Step 3**
I have to now mix this tone value of this gray using color. I look to use colors in the violet family, but added with red. Remember, I said that it is a red violet so I am adjusting the mixtures as is necessary.

By mixing my alizarin crimson and cadmium red with some blue I get
this color which seems to match pretty well.

Remember, this is not an exact science. And this is not a formula. I am not doing something such as mixing one part cadmium red with 1 part pthalo blue or something of this nature.

I am judging, with my eyes, everything I do. But, with this thinking procedure, I know exactly what to do next.

So here are our two mixtures side by side.

Not bad if I say so myself. The tones (degree of light and dark) seem to be pretty close.
Remember, there is no rush. Take as much time as you need to get the two mixtures as close in tone as possible.

I now have the proper color family, the proper tone (in gray and in color) and now I must get the proper strength of the color.

**Step 4**
I will now combine these two mixture to get my final color.

Looking at the color of the flower, it really is very strong. It hardly looks grayed down at all to me.

Let’s see how I combined the two mixtures...
Do you see how I have slowly mixed the two piles together?

I have now completed my process of mixing. and can paint with the proper color.

You can see where the arrows point to at just how close you can get just by following this simple procedure.

When the color changes slightly I would simply change my mixtures slightly.

You Must Have Patience
When you first begin to mix your colors this way, it will take some time. After all, if it is new to you, you will have to make it a point to think about each step.

Do I do these exact steps when I paint? Do I say to myself, ok step one what color family do I need. And step 2 and so on...

No I don’t.
But, this is only because I have been using this procedure for a long time and I now do it without thinking about it.

By instinct.

The same thing will happen to you.

Let’s look at an example of a painting and see how the colors may have been mixed.
I chose this painting as an example because the colors are very subtle and they contain a lot of gray. This graying down of colors confuses many people.

The color of the skin is very dull.

If you tried to mix these colors straight from the tube without dulling them down your painting would look *harsh* in color.

You would lose all of the subtlety that is in this painting.

You would have loud strong colors all over the place. Many people notice this problem and try to gray down the colors or take away the strength of the colors.

It is this process where muddy color is usually created.

This painting may have been started with very gray colors and at the end, accents of stronger color were painted into it.

The beginnings would have looked something like the next image.
Most of the face is in shadow except for a strip of light on the right side of the woman’s face. (From the viewers view, this is the left side of the face).

A very simple method would be to mix black and white until you get the tone right. You could paint with this gray and later add stronger colored paint over this gray foundation.

As the painting got further along, colors could be made stronger and less gray and more color would be added into the mixture.

What you need to learn is that strengthening of color, especially strong color accents, are part of the details.
They are only painted towards the end of the painting process.

The very strong colors like on the lips and ear would come last of all with less gray, if any at all being used in the mixture.

Let’s look at two images side by side and see how the beginning of the painting is grayer and in the final painting, some strong color accents have been added into it.
The arrow in the bottom image points to where all of the stronger color accents were added on. These are the parts of the painting that contain very little if any gray mixed into them.

Do you see the process of using less color first and adding color as you go? This will divide your problems into tone and color.

When thinking about tones, you can concentrate more on the drawing. Then towards the end of the painting you can get stronger in your color.

The example you just saw uses the color mixing procedures I talked about, and also covers how you can separate color from tones in a **thinking process**.

Starting with color that is very grayed down and building up to stronger color as you go along.

But, you can also truly separate the thinking process in your technique, not just in your thinking.

A monochrome underpainting is made especially for this purpose.

With a monochrome underpainting, grays are already on your painting. If you paint your color over this gray foundation thinly, the grays will show through, automatically graying down your color. The thicker you apply your paint the less the gray underpainting will show through.
The following picture will show a perfect example of this.

![Image of a painting with arrows indicating thick and thin paint application.]

The black arrow points to where the color has been painted thickly to cover up the gray underpainting. The white arrow points to where the color has been painted thinly. This lets the gray underpainting come through and play a role in the final look of the painting.

This is the method of indirect painting that I referred to earlier.
What you are doing is separating the problems of color in different layers of paint.

This let’s you concentrate on only one problem at a time. Separating your problems like this can make it so much easier for you.

When you concentrate on only one problem at a time, you can give it your full attention.

When you try to do three steps at once that we talked about earlier, **there are so many more things that can go wrong.**

With an underpainting, you do not think about color. You are thinking of tone alone.

You can pick a simple mixture...black and white, umber and white, or other combinations and use just these couple of paints to control all of your tones.

If you are using umber and white you can simply add more white or umber into your mixture depending whether you want your mixture darker or lighter.

You could even do this right on your painting surface while the paint is wet! After all, when using two colors, you should have no fear of making mud!

After you have made your underpainting, and have taken care of the
problem of tone, it all gets so much easier from there.

In the next stage, your tones are all right there to guide you. Sitting on the canvas ready to help you add the color layers over it.

Remember, if you choose to paint alla prima (going for color right from the beginning) take it in stages.

Ask yourself these questions...

1) “Is the color right?” meaning is it a red orange or a yellow orange.

2) “Is the tone of the color right?” meaning is it the right degree of lightness or darkness.

3) “Is it the right intensity?” meaning if it is a pure form of the color or a grayed down version.

These are the 3 things you have to get right when you paint color all at once.

But, remember, breaking it down into steps makes these problems much easier to solve.

When you have a process for thinking in paint you will have much less of a chance of getting stuck with something you cannot figure out.
**Summing it All Up**

When you are painting any subject matter, you are confronted with so many different colors that you have to mix.

You see the final product in front of you, but you have only these clumps of colored pastes on your palette.

![Your oil paints.](image)

Start thinking differently. You’re job as a painter is to see things differently than most people.

Where someone sees an object as turquoise, you must always see the object as a painter does.

What color family does it belong to?

If it is in between two color families like “turquoise” is between blue and green, this is how you should think of it.

Remember, you will always have to use your eyes to make small adjustments, like my example of the red-headed person.

Color families will not always be pure. And you must adjust your mixtures accordingly.
You will know if this turquoise color is a dark or light tone and if it is grayed down or more pure.

Always think of color in it’s three principles.

- Color family.
- Tone value
- And intensity of strength of the color

If your color is not right, you now have a checklist to search for the problem.

When you mix your color and it doesn’t seem right to you, you will check the three properties of colors and find out which property is off.

Perhaps you didn’t gray down your mixture enough.

Maybe the color family was orange but an orange that was on the redder side and you did not add any red.

The most important thing is that you will not be helpless before color now.

And asking...

“How do I mix that color?”
I also strongly suggest that you try separating the problems of color in your technique as well.

If you have not tried using a monochrome underpainting before, it is a great help to the painter.

It was used for centuries by most of the artists you see hanging in museums.

Check your stock of oil paints. Do you have the proper colors to be able to mix all 6 color families in all variations of light and dark?

Are you missing a way to make a middle yellow?

Are you missing a way to make a light green?

These are problems right there that you now have the answers to.

Don’t just wander aimlessly and mix your paints together hoping the right color will turn up.

Use the thinking procedures you have learned here and say goodbye to the wrong and muddy color.

I wish you luck.

Sincerely,

Ethan