



## **Tips for Combining Colors**

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The world of color can be both inviting and daunting...

We drool and slobber as we view the beautiful array of colorful yarns in our Local Yarn Shop (LYS). Yet when it comes to picking from that vast array of color, we freeze. Some yarn enthusiasts seem to wade in, picking out luscious colors seemingly without effort. Others perspire and groan at the thought of whether the skeins in their

hands will look good together or not. Some relish the task of combining yarns and colors, while others wince. The key is to have a sense of freedom and confidence when it comes to color. Most of the time we just need “permission” to go ahead and choose what we like. But other times we need categories for HOW to think about color. Knowing what these categories are and a few principles of color will help you gain that freedom and confidence you need to enjoy picking out skeins of yarn. Here are several frameworks to help you make sense of the color world, and make the “choosing” a bit easier:

### **Anything Goes**

Choose colors randomly (either from your stash or LYS) and simply allow their hodge-podgeness to be the prevailing color scheme. No color is “wrong” here. Choose which color comes next either without thought, or by asking yourself, “What color do I want to put next?” “Which color would look good next to the previous one?” I love this method of colorwork. It feels very “green” to use up odds & ends this way and not try to make everything “matchy”.

### **Value Combo**

Stated simply, **value** refers to how light or dark a color is. We also think of this as the “shades” of a particular color. It is easy to see that white is a light value (or shade), black is a dark value/shade, and grey would be a middle value/shade. Apply this to the use of one particular color and you have a multitude of color schemes to work with. If you love purple, choose values/shades of purple from light to dark. You might choose one grouping to be dominant...for example: choose mostly light to mid-values of purple and just a few dark values of purple. Or choose mostly dark purples with a few lighter ones here and there.

## **Color Wheel Cues**

Take cues from a color wheel and certain aspects of color theory. One option is to choose all primary colors (blue, red, yellow). Another option is to choose all secondary colors (purple, green, orange). Yet another option would be to choose complimentary colors (red/green, purple/yellow, blue/orange). Again, it is helpful to think in terms of dominance...what do you want to be the dominant color? So if you like the secondary color combo, you might choose mostly greens, with a few purples and oranges thrown in. Or if you like the purple/yellow complimentary colors, then you might choose mostly purples with a few yellows mixed in. There are many ways to use a color wheel for help; these are only a few. **The main thing is not to be enslaved to it.**

## **Artwork & Graphic Design Cues**

Use fine art paintings or photographs from home décor/fashion magazines to help you in your color choices. Fine artists and graphic artists grapple with questions of color and therefore take some of the guesswork out of choosing. If you own or see a painting in which you love the colors, take it (or a photo) to your LYS. Hold yarns up to the artwork to pick just the right colors. The same is true for magazines where you have lovely photos of decorated rooms or pretty outfits whose color combinations appeal to you. Be sure to ask yourself questions like “What color(s) is dominant?” “How many colors are combined? And in what way are they combined?” Answering these questions will aid you not only in which colors to choose, but how much of each color to purchase.

## **Dominance and Temperature**

What in the world do these words have to do with color? Well, I’ve already talked about dominance a bit...it boils down to this guideline: A little of this, a lot of that. Whether you are talking about value, complimentary colors, textures, (anything really), your yarn project will make a stronger statement if you choose a majority from one area and a smidgeon from another. In terms of temperature in colors, you have warm colors and cool colors. At a basic level, temperature refers to warm colors being reds, yellows, and oranges, while cool colors are blues, greens, violets. Yet even within the green range, you have warm greens and cool greens. Same goes for the reds, blues, yellows, etc. So applying dominance to warm/cool colors could mean that you choose mostly warm colors with a few cool colors here and there. Or, you might choose mostly warm greens with a few cool greens here and there. Aim for having 75% (or more) of a project’s yarns be either cool or warm, with the remaining 25% (or less) be the opposite. When a project’s color choices teeter on being 50/50, the look ends up being kinda “blah”, there’s less “sparkle and snap”.

## **Building on a Multi**

There have been so many times when a gorgeous ball of variegated yarn has jumped out at me and been the inspiration for other color choices. Use this ball of yarn as the foundation or building block for all the other colors you choose. It’s fun to walk around your LYS with a basket and this one skein, tossing in colors that match or complement the one variegated yarn. (Our “dominance” guide here works beautifully: you have a little bit of variegated yarn, with a lot of solids...cool, huh?)

### **Notes on Texture**

Yarns come in so many textures from smooth to bumpy, rough to bulgy, furry to silky, and every other imaginable texture. I love ‘em! But the key to loving them is **moderation!** Too many of the furry sorts, and you end up looking like an animal. Use them sparingly and VARY the textures, sprinkling them throughout the smooth or relatively smooth counterparts.

### **Notes on Stitchwork**

If you have a pattern that uses a lot of stitchwork (for knitters this would be anything other than stockinette or garter; for crocheters, this would be anything other than single, double, half double, or triple crochet stitches) then take care to choose yarns that will “show off” your work. Variegated and highly textured yarns will hide all your effort! Use smooth or relatively smooth yarns to highlight the beautiful stitches. You can still apply all of the above to your choices in color.

**The overarching principle in all of this** is to ask yourself...”Do I like it?” If you do not like the colors that are slipping through your hands on a project, you will not derive nearly as much enjoyment from your knitting/crochet project.

**\*\*Now, go forth in freedom and confidence to  
choose yarns that delight your heart!**