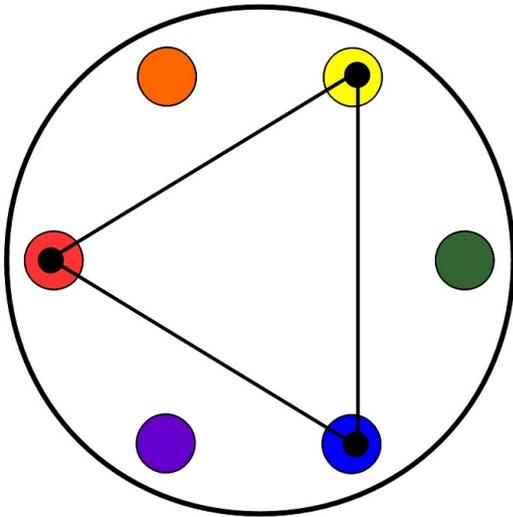




## Utrecht Art Supplies Temperature of Color

**Ask the Expert:** "I'd like to know more about warm and cool colors. Are some colors always considered "cool" or "warm"? If so, why does a "cool" color like blue look warm sometimes?"

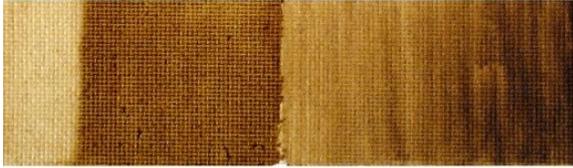
**A:** Perceived temperature is one of the most subtle aspects of color, one that can take some time to master. Some color systems essentially split the color wheel down the middle and designate all greens, blues and violets as cool, and all reds, oranges and yellows as warm.



On the color wheel, hues are considered cool if they are relatively closer to blue/violet, and warm if they are closer to red/orange. On the palette and in the practice of painting, warm and cool relationships are judged by relative juxtaposition, and depend heavily on which colors are paired together. Sometimes, one blue will appear warmer because it has a slightly more green cast than another, for instance. Sometimes, however, the difference is more subtle and hard to define.



In choosing a palette, it's recommended that a warm and cool version of each primary be included. This ensures a full mixing range between primaries and secondaries. For instance, a "warm" red such as Cadmium Red Light is particularly well suited to mixing toward orange, but not very good for mixing toward violet. Alternately, the cooler Alizarin Crimson provides very good magenta and violet mixing solutions, but is not very good for making orange.



The relationship of warm and cool also applies to neutrals. Different types of charcoal have relative temperature variations when juxtaposed. Compressed charcoal, for example, appears almost brown next to vine charcoal, which has a relatively blue character. How a single color is handled also influences its perceived temperature. The addition of white often results in a mixture that is cooler than the original hue.



*Vilhelm Hammershøi - Interior with a mirror (ca.1907)*

Artists can use temperature to convey mood and emotion, as well as to create a sense of realism. In representational painting, subject matter that

is illuminated by direct sunlight is often rendered as warm, while shadows are shown as cool. Portrait painters may employ blues and greens in shadows on skin to achieve a strong sense of realism. Interesting effects can be created by inverting this relationship, as well- window light can be rendered as “cold” to emphasize the warmth of an interior room.

Questions? [Ask the Expert](#)

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