

Points on value and color when planning your painting.

Are you a tonalist or colorist painter? A tonalist painting requires more emphasis on value and less on color while a colorist painting should use less extreme value contrasts with color temperature and intensity of contrast doing the work.

The time of day and the weather change the color of the atmosphere which in turn changes the color of everything it touches. A warm sunny day is filled with an orange/yellow to yellow/green light. A cloudy day may have a cool blue to blue violet light and a sunset would radiate a hot red/pink to orange light. Just after sunset violet is often seen in the atmosphere. A night scene might have a cool dark green or dark blue/purple light. The light of the day effects all the colors in the painting and to achieve a convincing natural landscape you must keep the light consistent in your painting.

The color of light also effects the color of the shadows in the painting. Most shadows have a little of the split complimentary color (the color one step removed from the complimentary) of the light source in them. Yellow light benefits from violet in the shadows. A blue light needs some orange in the shadows.

You can paint the foreground with the strongest intensity of color. Middle ground colors need to be mixed with the color of the atmospheric light and they need to have their intensity balanced so that they do not come forward too aggressively. As the objects move further back in space, you will have to tint or darken and gray your colors to simulate the atmosphere between the foreground and the far background.

We discriminate and visually order what we see in this sequence:

The viewer first becomes aware of differences in contrast (value)

Then the viewer perceives differences in hue with opposites most prominent

Finally, the viewer becomes aware of differences in saturation of hue (color)

Value is our visual key to how light is moving over objects. Without a difference in value we would see everything as if in a fog. The gray scale helps us determine values. You need to organize the painting so that the point of interest has the most contrast of value. This is called zoning.