

# COLOR CONTRAST ALWAYS ATTRACTS

By Kent DuFault



<https://unsplash.com/photos/JE01L3hB0GQ>

*v2osk - Nikon D700, 14mm lens, f/22, 1/10<sup>th</sup>, ISO 100*

If you post a sunset picture (virtually any sunset picture) to the Internet, it will typically garner far more attention than almost any other style of photograph.

There are numerous reasons for this unlimited interest, but one reason that we will discuss in this Creativity Prompt is the incredible power of color contrast.

If you've been involved in photography for any length of time, you've likely heard about complementary colors.

Complementary colors are all about color contrast.

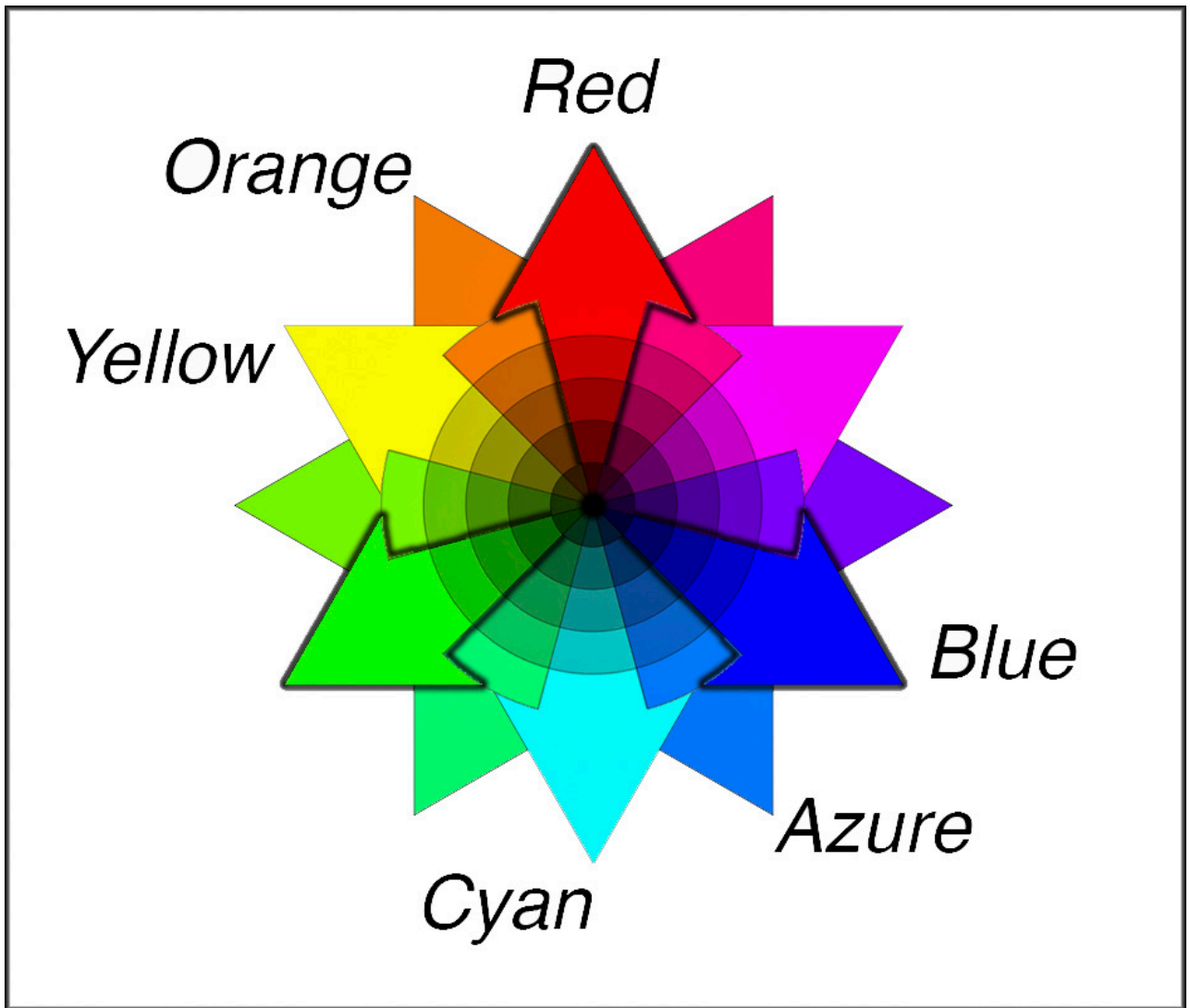


Illustration by Kent DuFault



#### Key Point:

Color contrast attracts the human eye, and the mind finds these color combinations pleasing. Two colors that are opposite of each other on the color wheel are complementary to each other. They have color contrast.

The sunset photo (on page 1) has the following color contrast combinations that are complimentary: red/cyan, yellow/blue, and orange/azure. It's like a smorgasbord of visual delight with color!



#### Key Point:

There are two popular color wheels that photographers primarily use: the RGB wheel and the RYB color wheel. Here is a comparison.

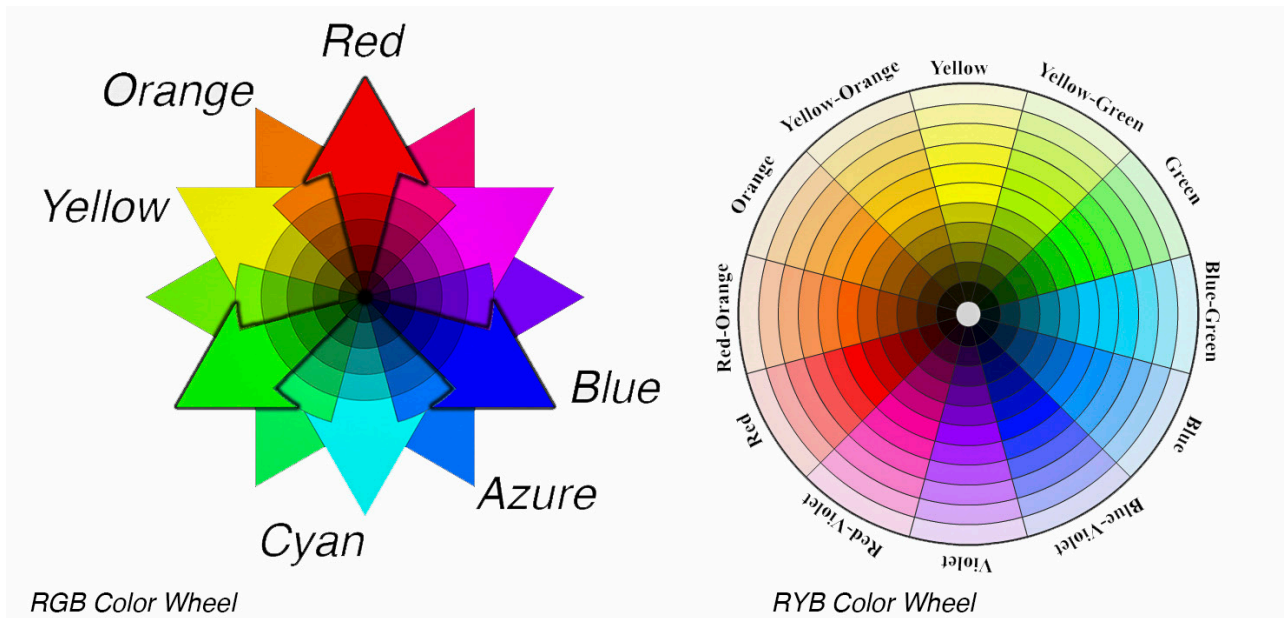


Illustration by Kent DuFault

The RGB wheel is based upon the additive colors of red, green, and blue. It is the basis of all colors used in electronics, including cameras, computers, televisions, and the Internet.

The RYB color wheel is based upon the subtractive primary colors red, yellow, and blue. It has its origin in the fine art of painting, which is why many photographers identify with the color contrast combinations found on

the RYB wheel, as they have become well-known throughout history.

**Critical:** You may be thinking, why is he discussing all of this about color wheels when the topic is color contrast in focal points. My reasoning is this. I want to make sure that you understand that complementary colors and color contrast extend well beyond the blue/yellow combination that every photographer is so familiar with.



<https://unsplash.com/photos/G7sWGEF8pRc>

*Julian Hochgesang - Huawei VTR-L09, 4mm lens, f/2.2, 1/100<sup>th</sup>, ISO 50*

This photo makes excellent use of color contrast to enhance a reasonably mundane scene. Plus, it brings up another significant point.

**Key Thought:** The colors **black** and **white** are complementary to every other color on any color wheel!



<https://unsplash.com/photos/JI05jisJP2c>

hhh13 - Sony ILCE-6000, 23mm setting on a zoom lens, f/5.6, 1/500<sup>th</sup>, ISO 100

The white door provides color contrast to the multitude of other colors within this photo. That contrast establishes the door as a very useful and potent focal point for the scene.



### Assignment:

Take advantage of your newly acquired knowledge about color contrast and use white and black colors as a focal point in your photos. Think about the two example photos (on page 4 and 5) to help generate your ideas.



<https://www.pexels.com/photo/fashion-beach-vacation-bikini-5952859/>

*Anna Shvets – left and right - No EXIF*

These two images of the same model illustrate using a focal point created by color contrast. It clearly demonstrates how a color contrast version can control viewer eye movement over an image that lacks it.

In the left photo, the color contrast provided by the swimming cap pulls the eyes immediately to the model's face.

We have the same model, same location, same swimsuit, and only the bathing cap was changed in the right photo. In this version (lacking color contrast as a focal point), she almost disappears against the swimming pool background.



### Assignment:

Find a colorful object that you will use as a prop. You can include people in your photos or not. It's up to you. Study the color wheels for colors that complement your chosen object. Now create a body of work where your object is a focal point to a subject that is a complementary color.



<https://www.pexels.com/photo/woman-being-caressed-4557467/>

*Anna Shvets - No EXIF*

Color contrast doesn't have to be "bang zowie" in-your-face to be effective. This example photo (above) shows how a well-placed and less dramatic color contrast focal point can still be commanding when it comes to gathering up some attention.

This type of lighting was created with a prism.

You can buy prisms at most art stores and some toy stores. Amazon has a prism set made explicitly for photography with four different shapes for under \$15 USD. That sounds like hours of fun for just a few dollars.

**I thought we would close this prompt with a couple of photos that I took, using color contrast as a focal point.**



#### Assignment:

Obtain a prism or several different prisms, and experiment with them in your photography. Keep the example photo in your mind as you set up your shots. Use color contrast created by the prism to move a viewer's eyes toward a particular location within your compositions.



Photograph by Kent DuFault

*Nikon F4, Ektachrome 64 film, 105mm lens, f/2.5, 1/125<sup>th</sup>, ISO 64*

The red stop sign provides a beautiful color contrast focal point to the subject, the boy on the school bus.

It also raises some interesting points of discussion about focal points, and color contrast as focal points.

- 1 Red and yellow are not complementary, so why is this color contrast? Two colors don't need to be complementary to provide color contrast. They simply **should not be right next to each other** on the color wheel. The further apart they are on the wheel- the more robust the color contrast will be.

So, while red and yellow are only two steps apart on the RGB color wheel- the dark (almost black) shadows surrounding the boy help to boost the color contrast effect.

- 2 Adding a shape to a color contrast focal point is like putting it on steroids. The form of the stop sign is highly recognizable. It also adds a story element. Combining all the pieces creates a fantastic storytelling portrait with a superb color contrast focal point!



Photograph by Kent DuFault

*iPhone 6 Plus, 4.15mm lens, f/2.2, 1/60<sup>th</sup>, ISO 32*

I took this photograph at my local shopping mall.

It was very quiet that day, and almost no one was there.

I looked up and imagined myself in the bowels of some intergalactic spaceship. I started taking some pictures that would support my imaginative view.

However, they lacked the cavernous effect that I could see with my eyes.

I spotted this brightly lit kiosk with contrasting colors on the second floor. It took a few minutes to find just the right angle.

My use of the color contrast focal point was crucial to the success of this picture. Hold your finger over the focal point, and you will see what I mean. The depth perspective collapses.



### Assignment:

Take everything we've discussed and create a body of work using color contrast focal points. Keep in mind the following.

- You can choose color combinations from both the RGB and RYB color wheels.
- Color contrast is created as long as the dominant colors in your photo don't lie right next to each other on the color wheel. The further they are apart, the more color contrast you're creating.
- When possible, combine color contrast with shape to enhance the effect.
- The colors white and black create a color contrast with every other color.
- Pick up some inexpensive photo prisms. You won't be disappointed with the various effects that you can create with them, including color contrast focal points.
- Taking what you now know about color contrast, you'll likely enjoy those fantastic sunsets even more!