THE POWER OF COLOR

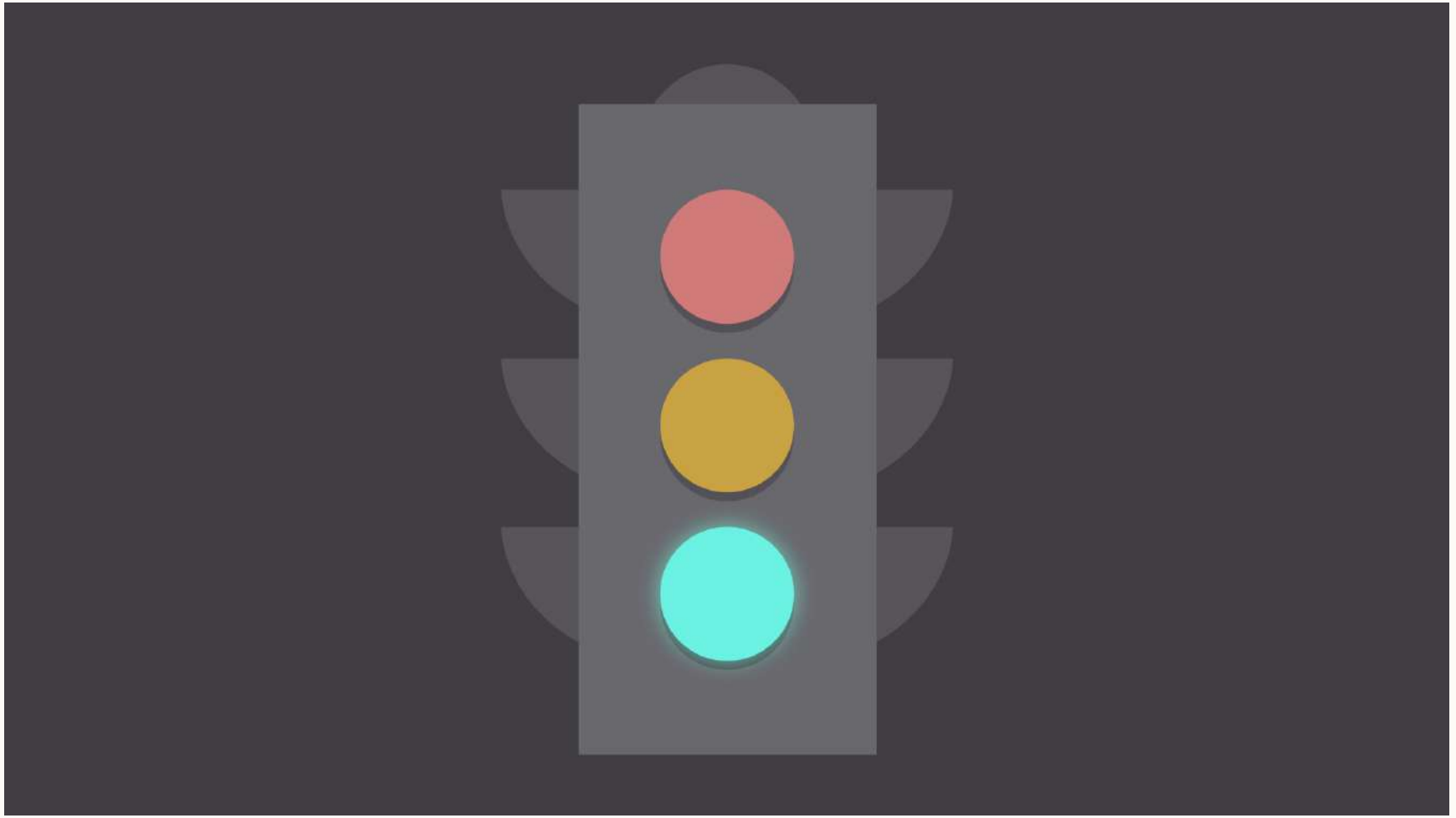
Mrs. Smith

Photo 2

How do we know which colors look good together and which ones don't? The answer is simple: Color theory.

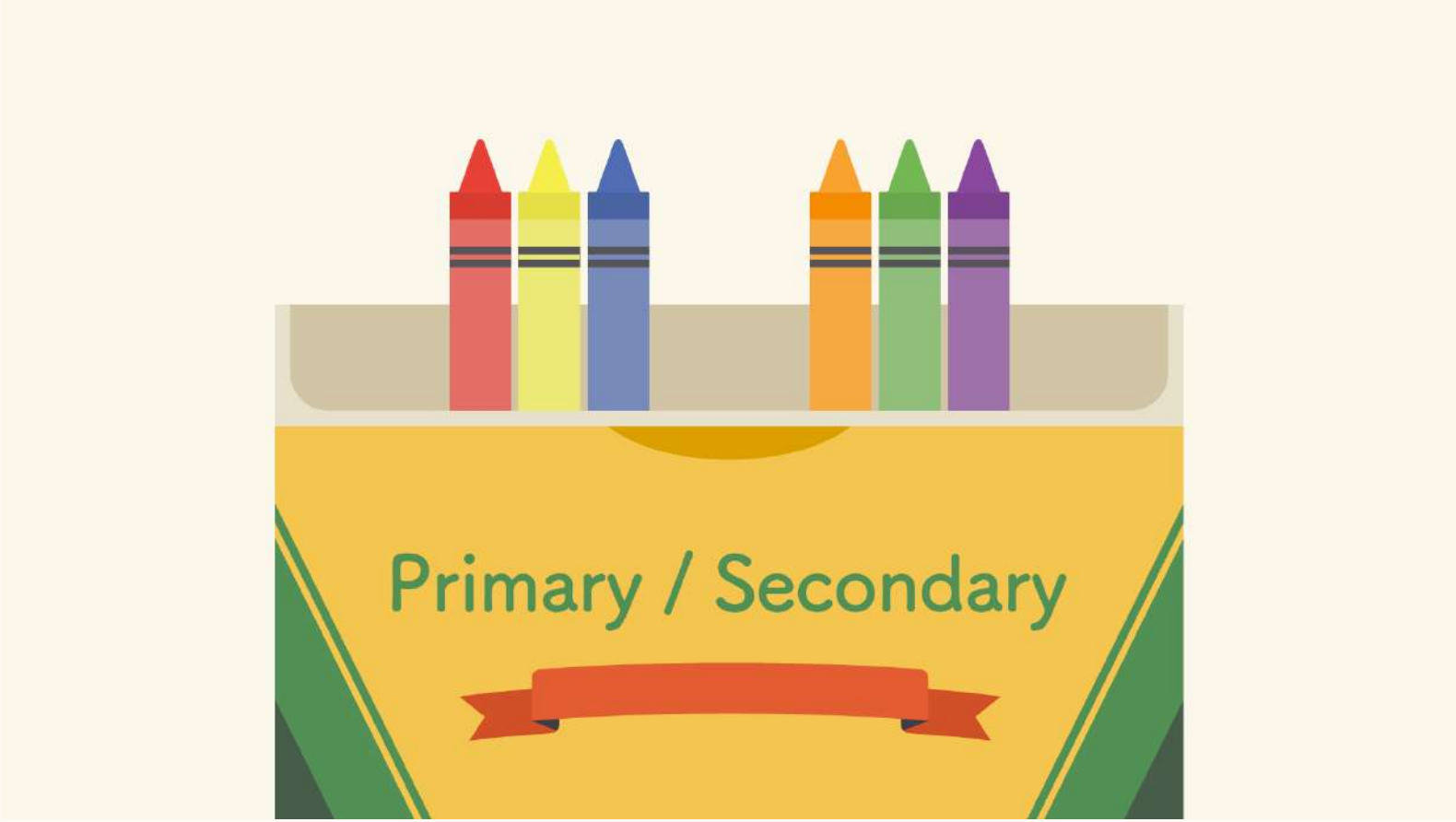
This is interesting… I PROMISE!

Color plays a vital role in **design** and **everyday life**.
It can draw your eye to an image.
Sometimes it can trigger an emotional response.
It can even communicate something important without using words at all.



Color basics

Let's start at the beginning with a refresher on the basics. Remember learning about **primary and secondary colors** in school? Then you already have some knowledge of color theory.

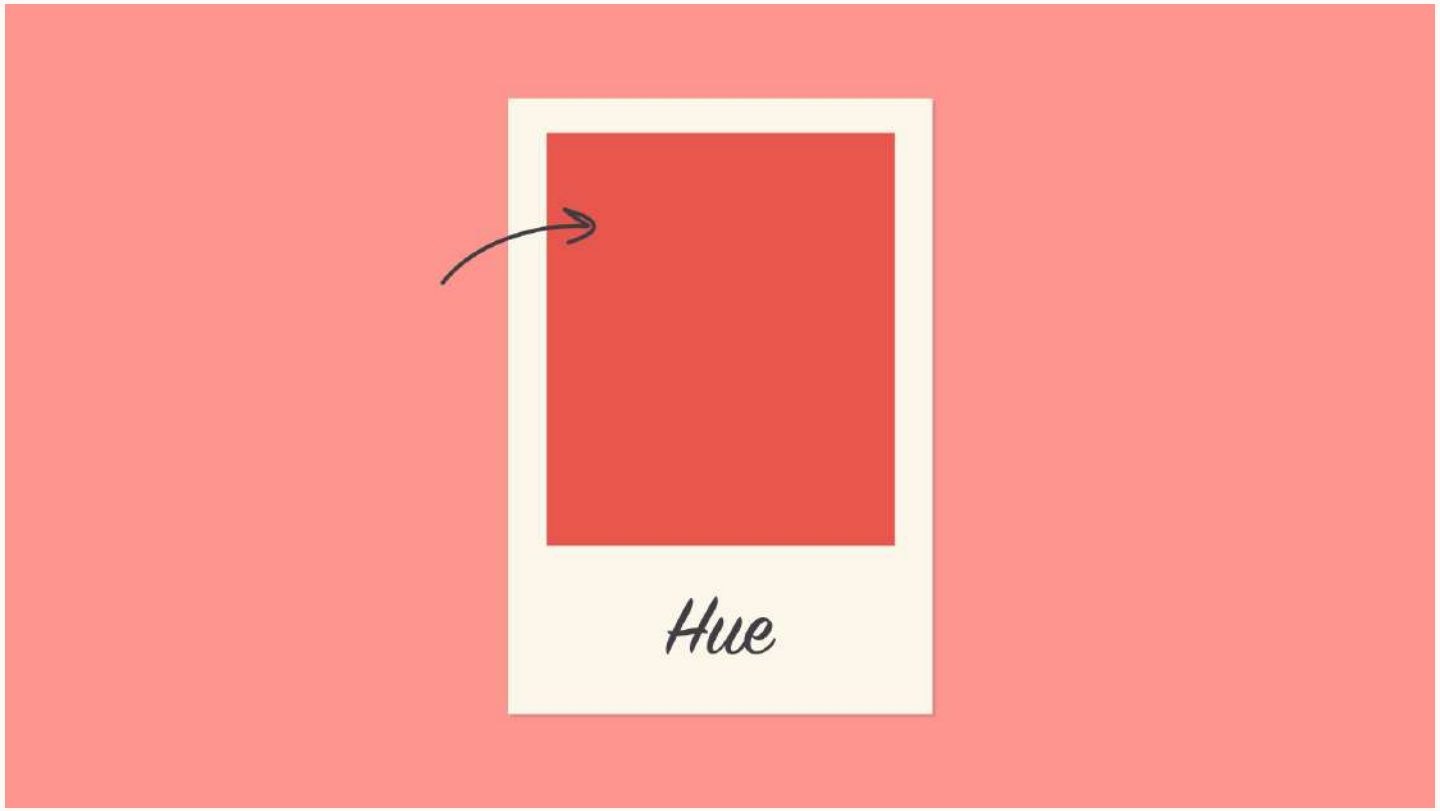


A closer look

Hue, Saturation, and Value… ring a bell?
Think about the little paint chips when you are choosing a color.

Hue

Hue is the easiest one; it's basically just another word for color. You might describe the hue (below) as coral pink or light red, depending on your interpretation… and the way the screen projects it. (for another day)

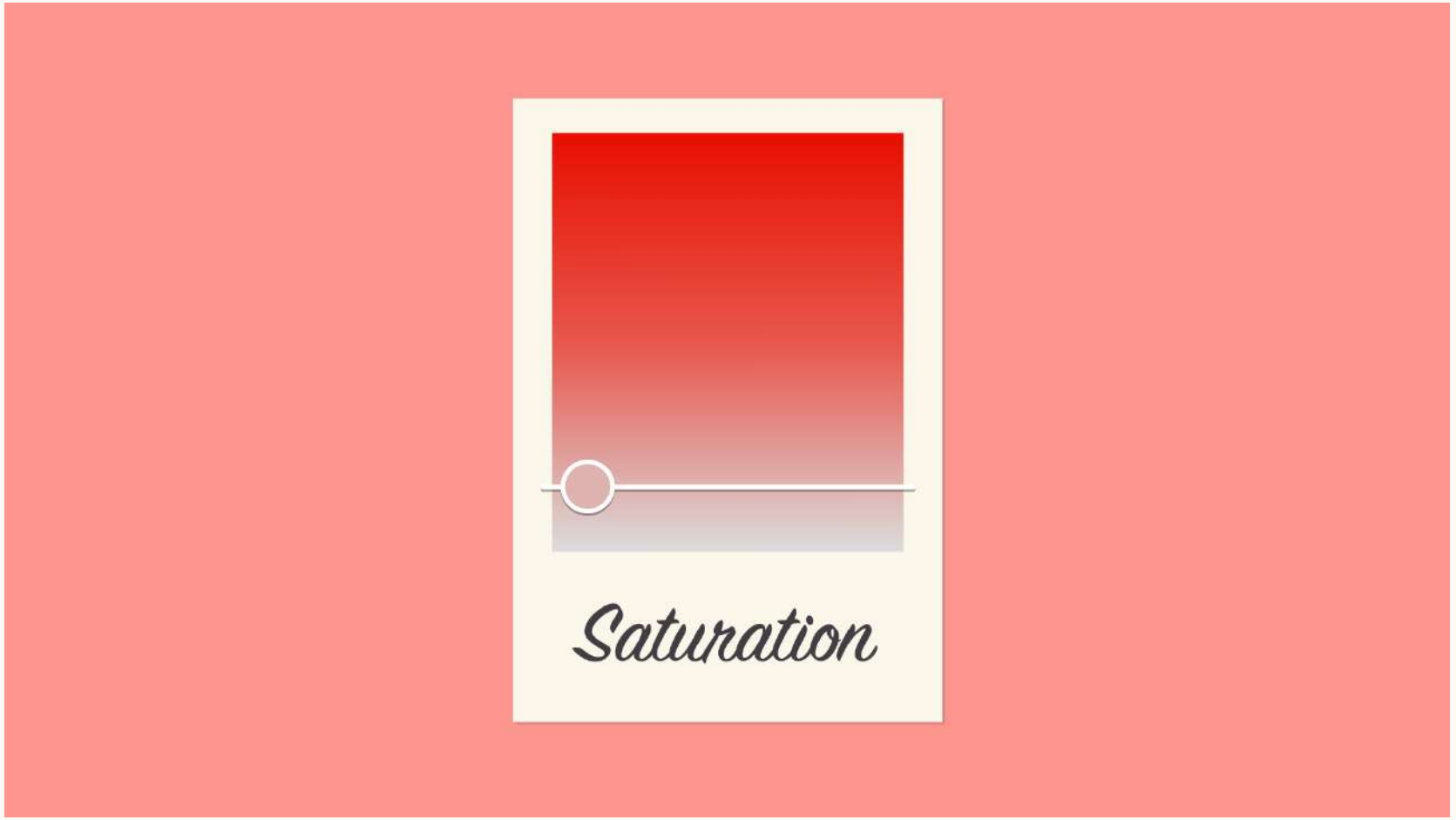


Saturation

Saturation refers to intensity—in other words, whether the color appears more subtle or more vibrant.

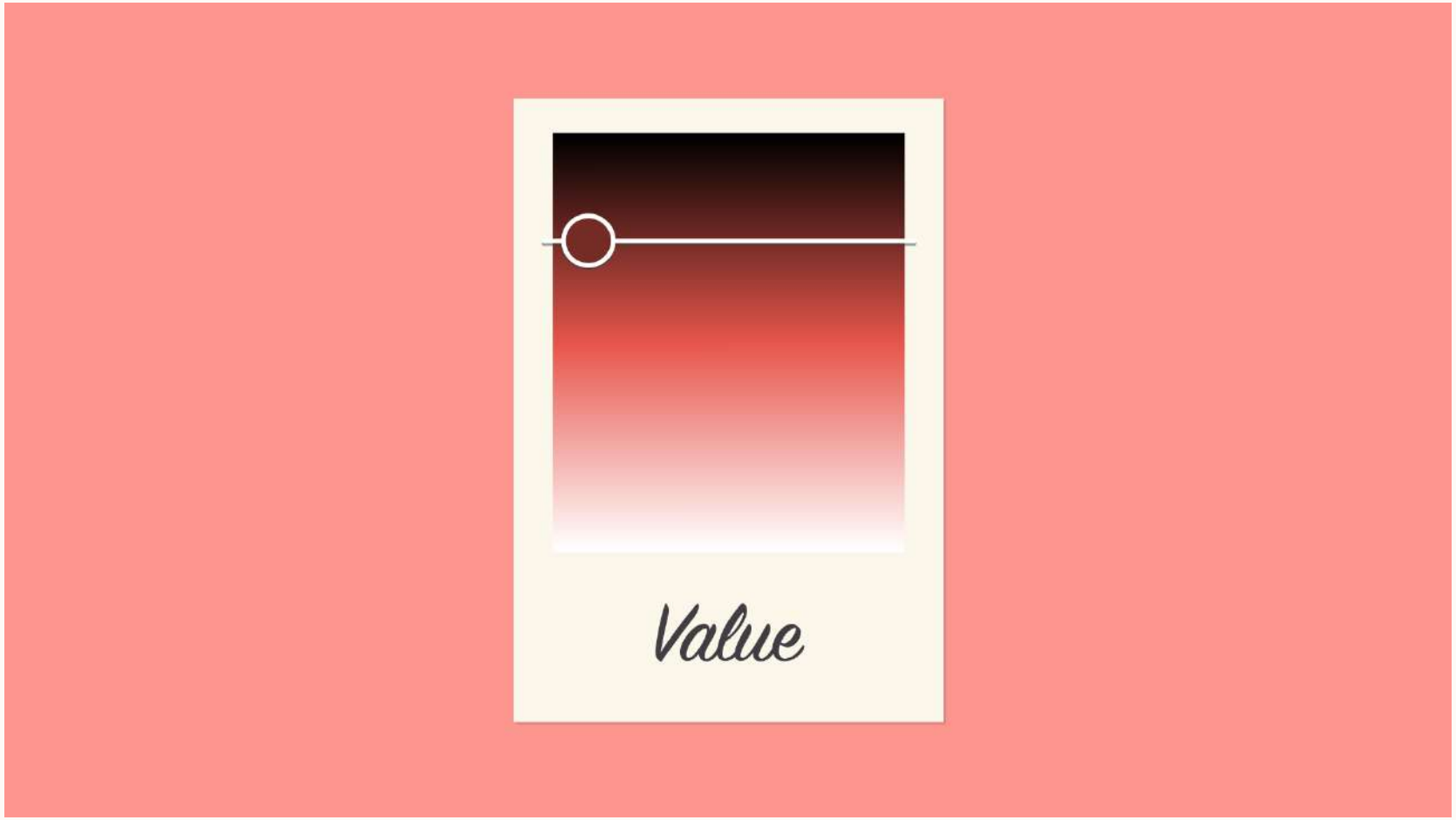
Highly saturated colors are brighter or richer.

Desaturated colors have less pigment and therefore less oomph.



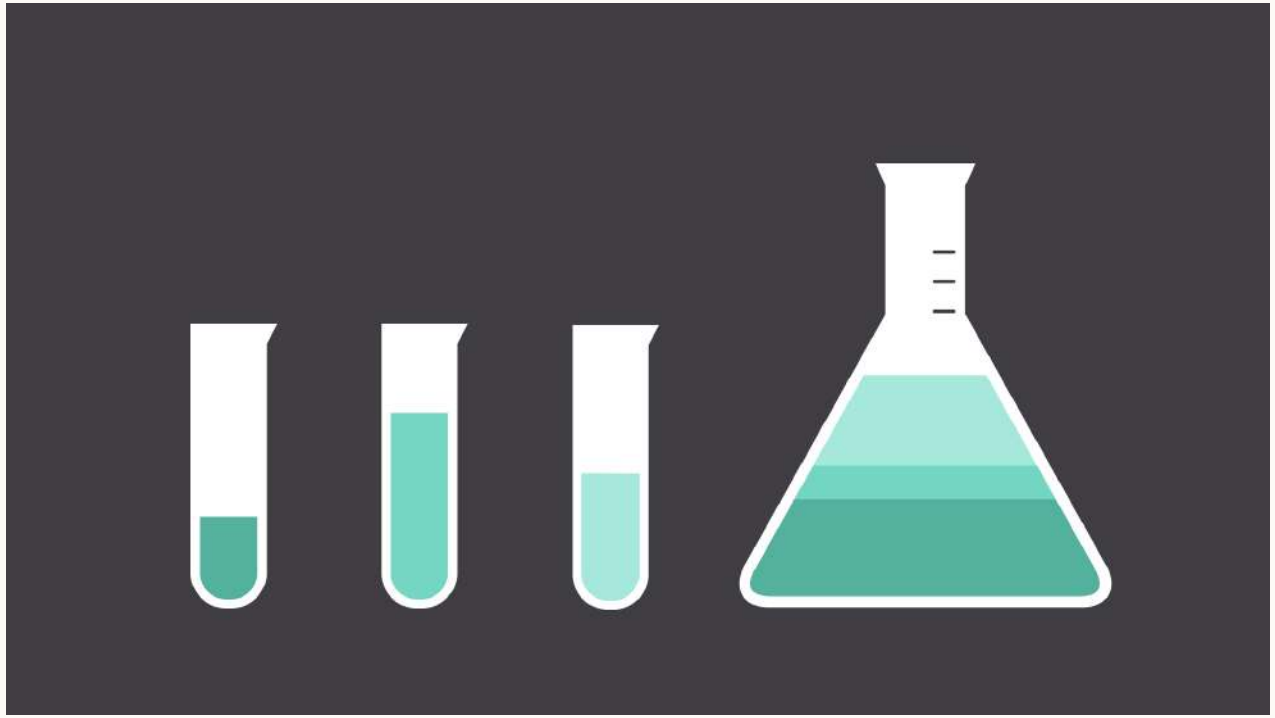
Value

Value has to do with how dark or light the color is, ranging from black to white. As you can see below, this gives us many different shades, from a deep reddish brown to a light pastel pink.



Creating color schemes

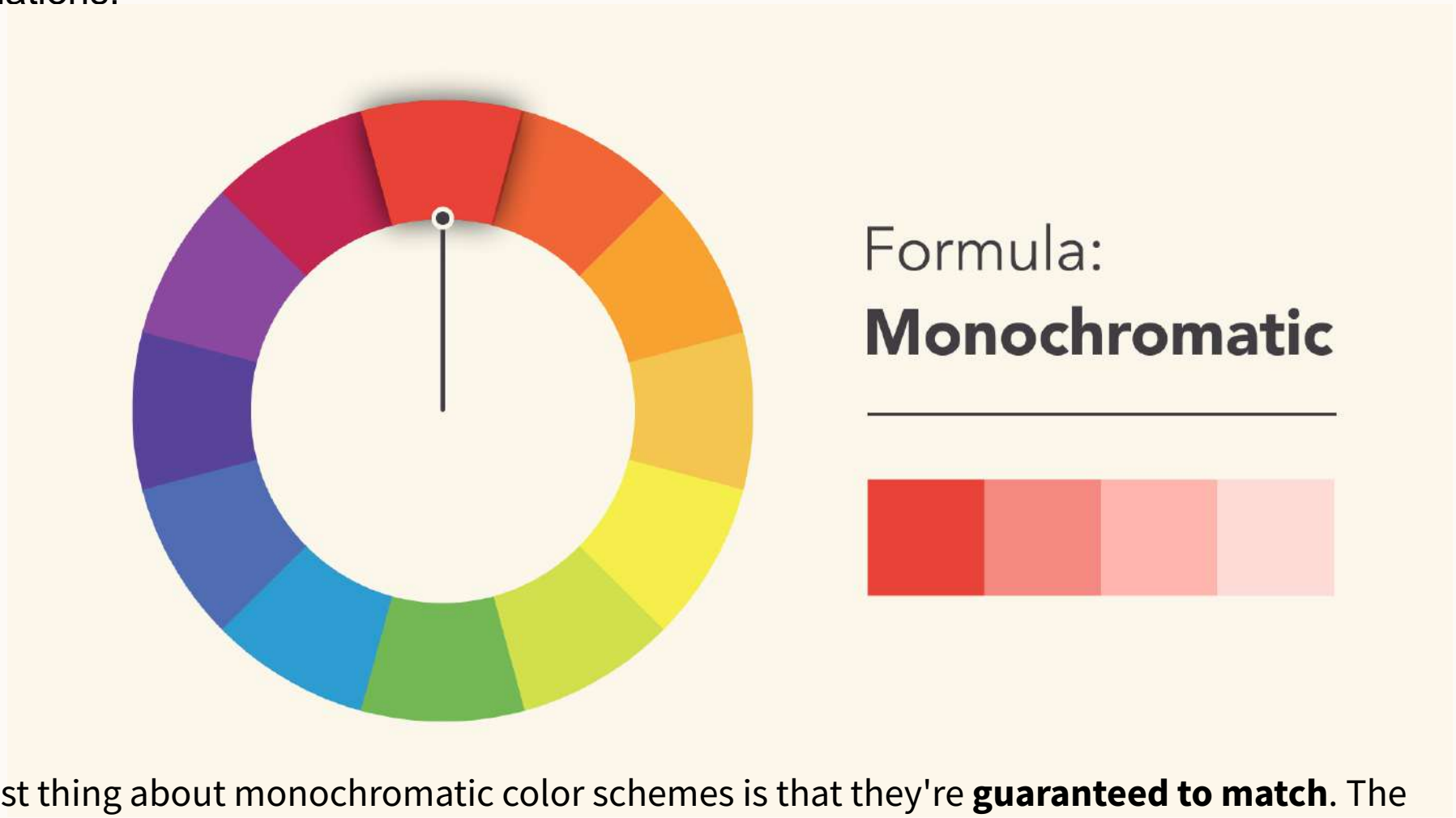
So how do we put this all together to create professional-looking color schemes? There are formulas based on something called **color harmony** that can help.



The possibilities are endless

Monochromatic

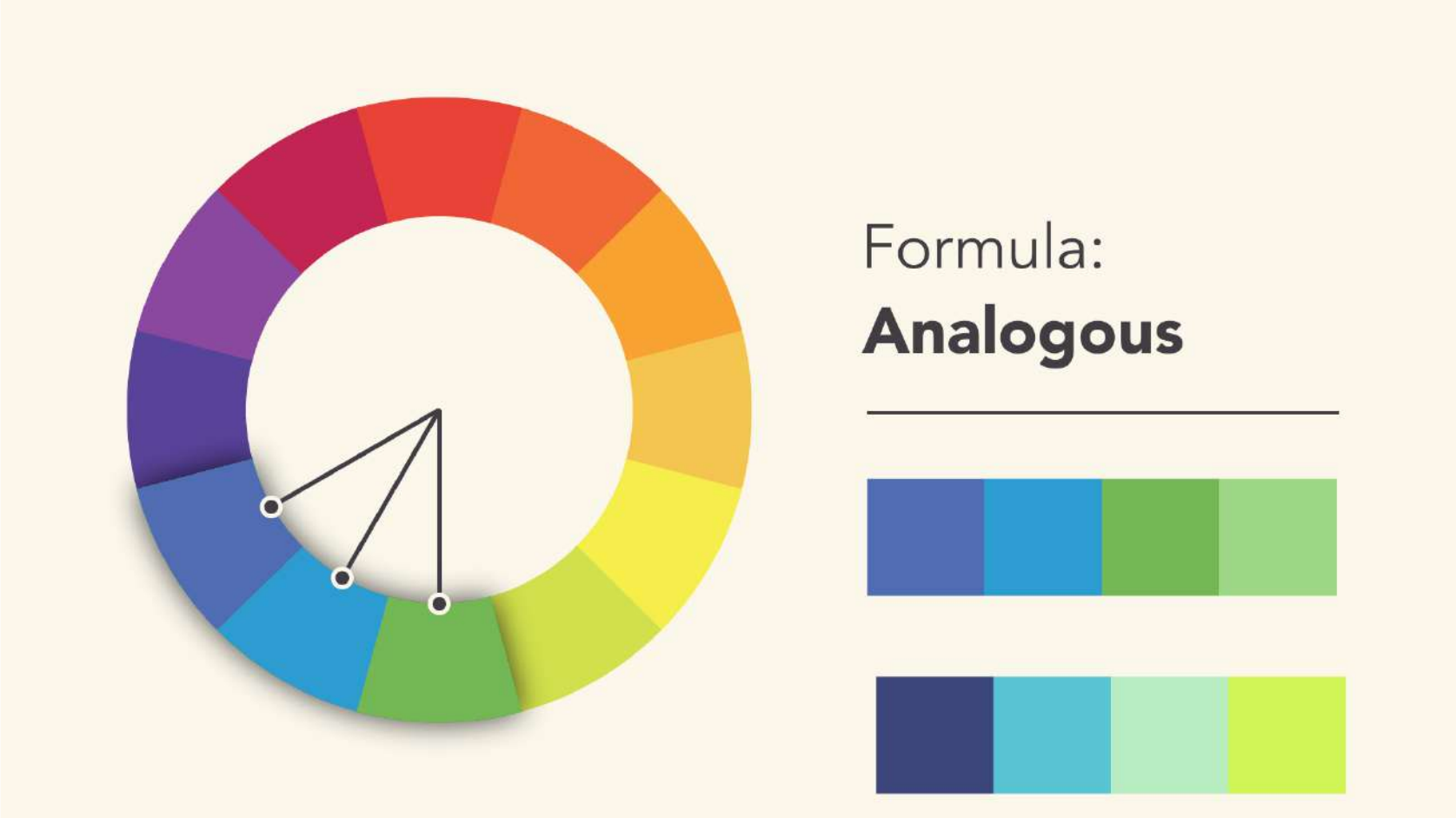
The easiest formula for harmony is monochromatic because it only uses one color or hue. To create a monochromatic color scheme, pick a spot on the color wheel, then use your knowledge of saturation and value to create variations.



:TIP: The best thing about monochromatic color schemes is that they're **guaranteed to match**. The colors suit each other perfectly because they're all from the same family.

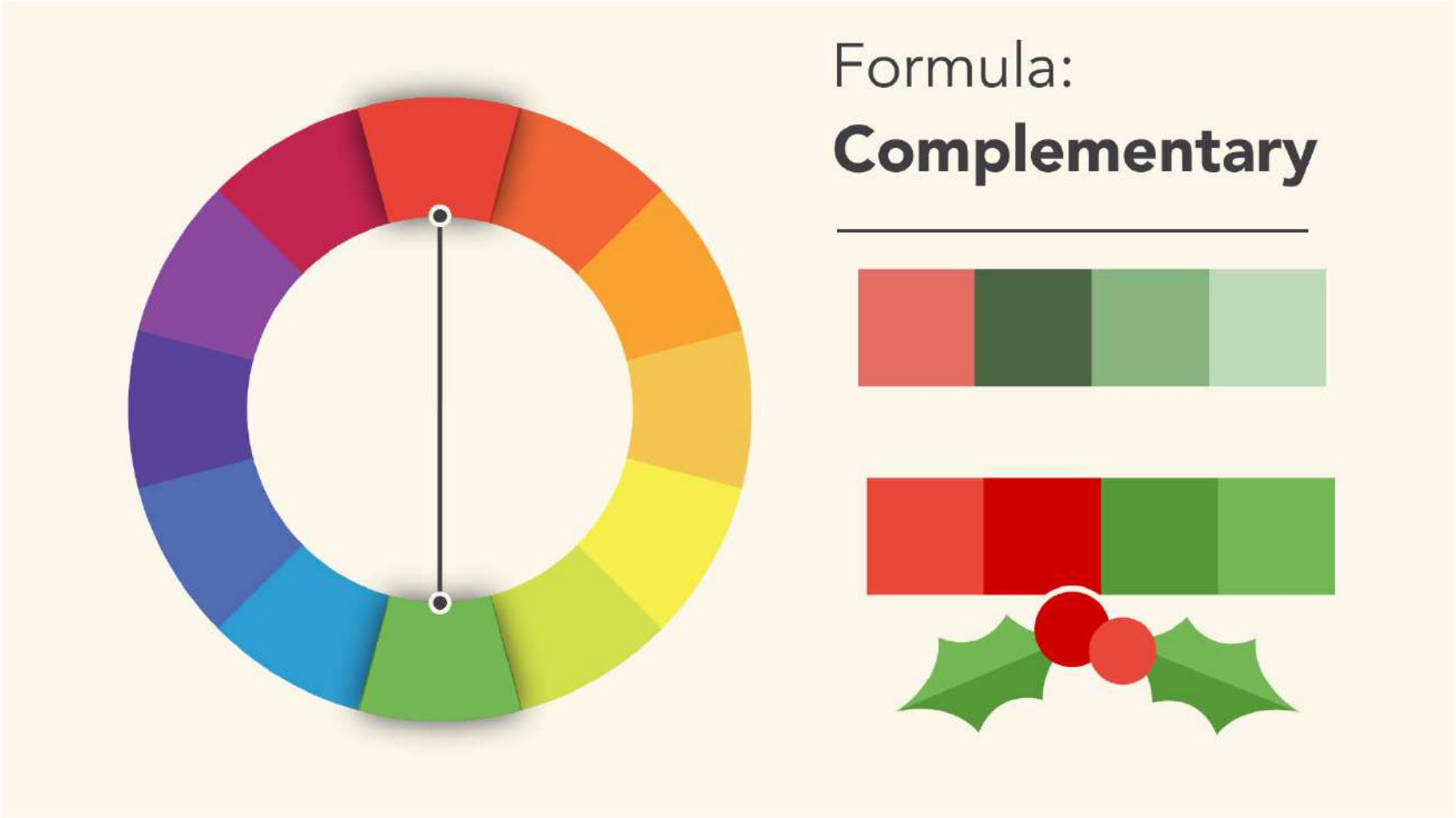
Analogous

An **analogous** color scheme uses colors that are **next to each other** on the wheel.



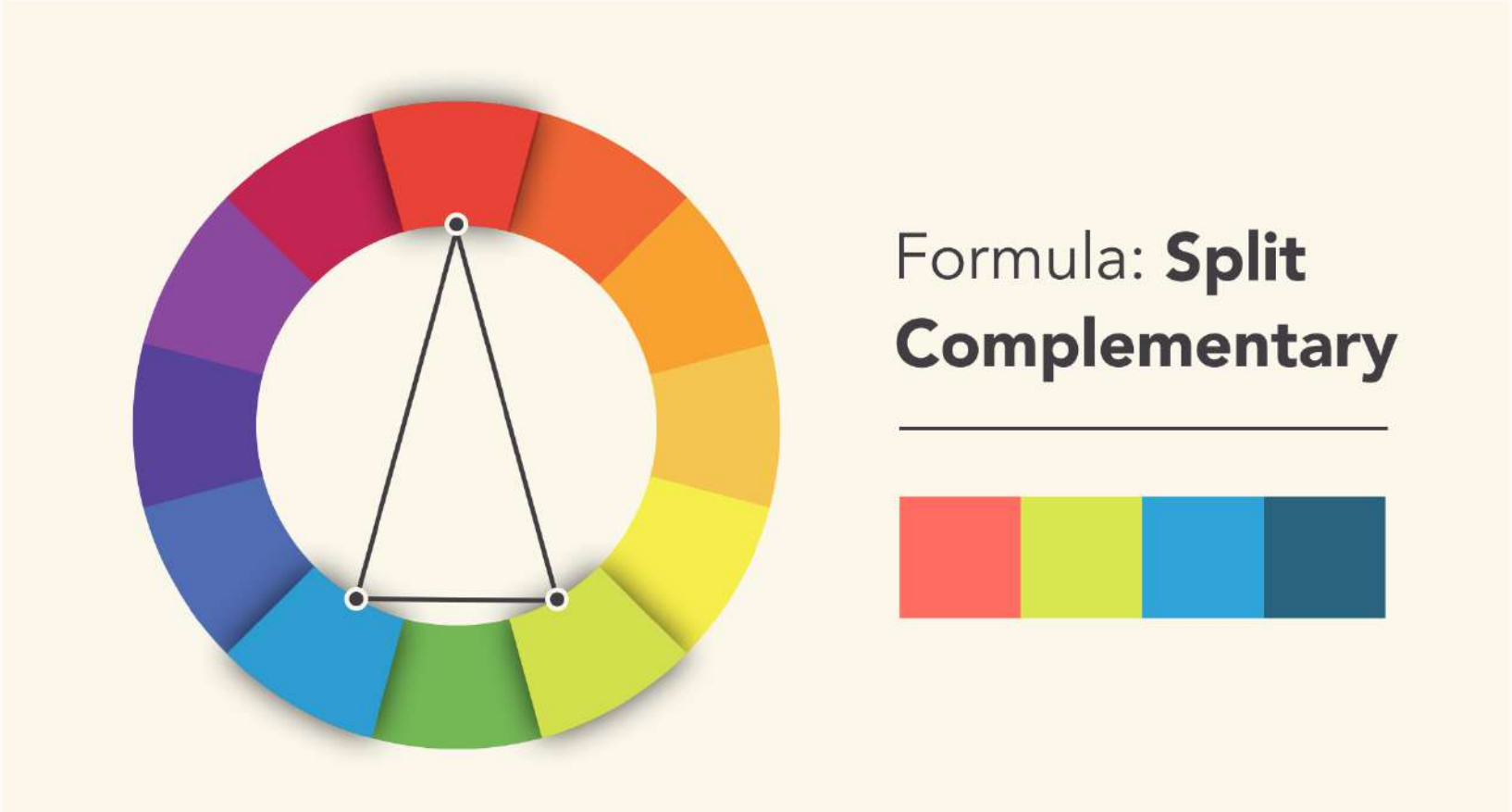
Complementary

Complementary colors are opposite each other on the wheel; for instance, blue and orange or the classic red and green.



Split-complementary

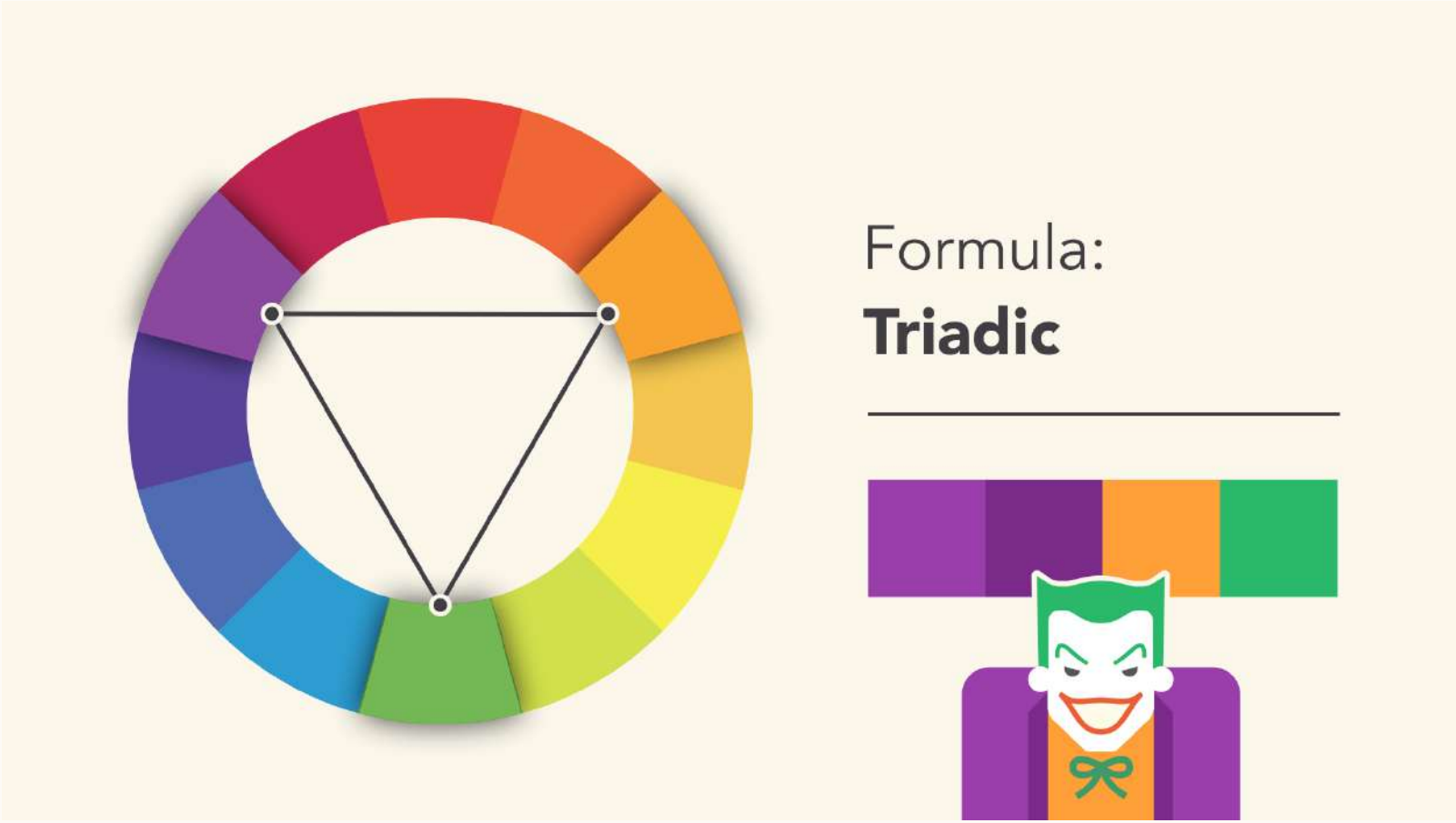
A **split-complementary** color scheme uses the colors on **either side of the complement**.



:TIP: This gives you the same level of **contrast** as a complementary color scheme but more colors to work with (and more interesting results).

Triadic

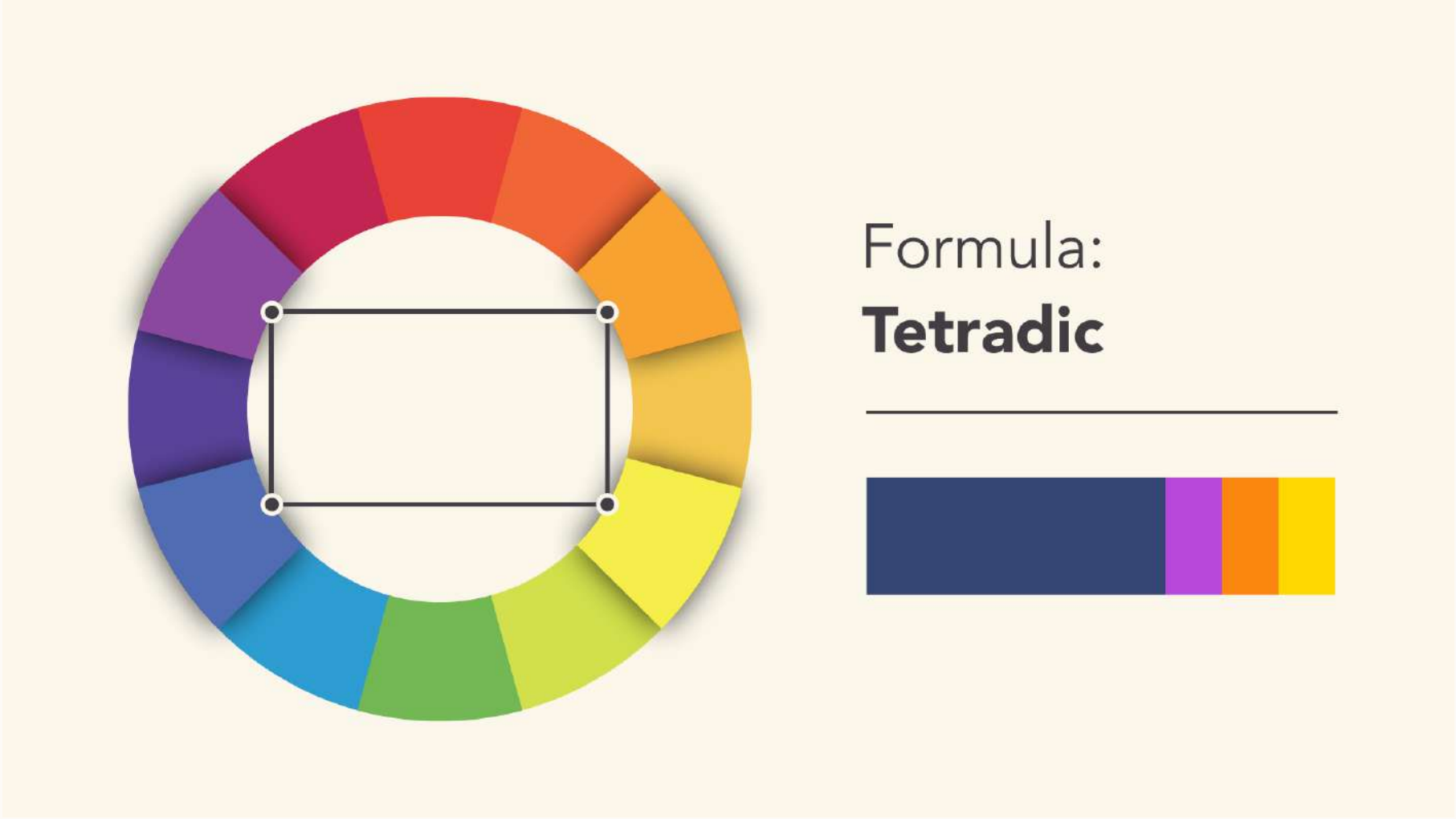
A **triadic** color scheme uses **three colors that are evenly spaced**, forming a perfect **triangle** on the wheel.



:TIP: These combinations tend to be pretty striking—especially when they include **primary** or **secondary** colors—so be mindful when using them in your work.

Tetradic

Tetradic color schemes form a **rectangle** on the wheel, using not one but **two complementary color pairs**. This formula works best if you let one color dominate while the others serve as an accent.



Enough of the recap…
Now for the interesting & fun part!

Avoiding common mistakes

There are a few classic dos and don'ts when it comes to color. For instance, have you ever seen colors that seem to **vibrate** when they're placed next to each other?

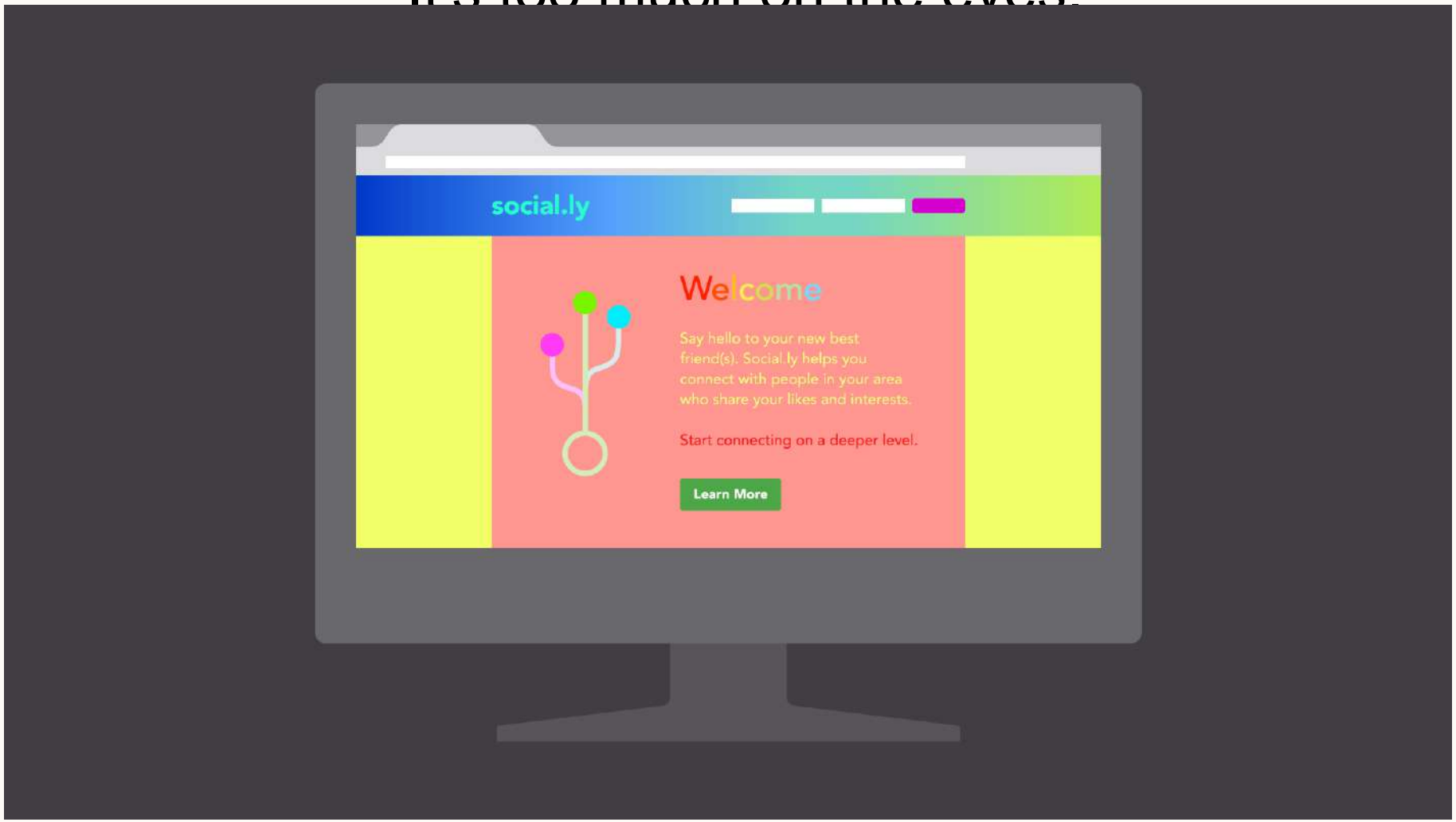
The solution is to tone it down — literally . Start with one color, and try adjusting its **lightness, darkness, or saturation**. Sometimes a little contrast is all your color palette needs.

Side by side view

Readability is an important factor in any design. Your colors should be legible and easy on the eyes, especially when working with text.

Sometimes that means **NOT** using color—at least not in every little detail.

It’s too much on the eyes.



Neutral colors like black, white, and gray can help you balance your design, so when you do use color, it really stands out… less is more.

Choosing the right colors

Every color sends a message. It's important to consider the tone of your project and choose a color palette that fits.

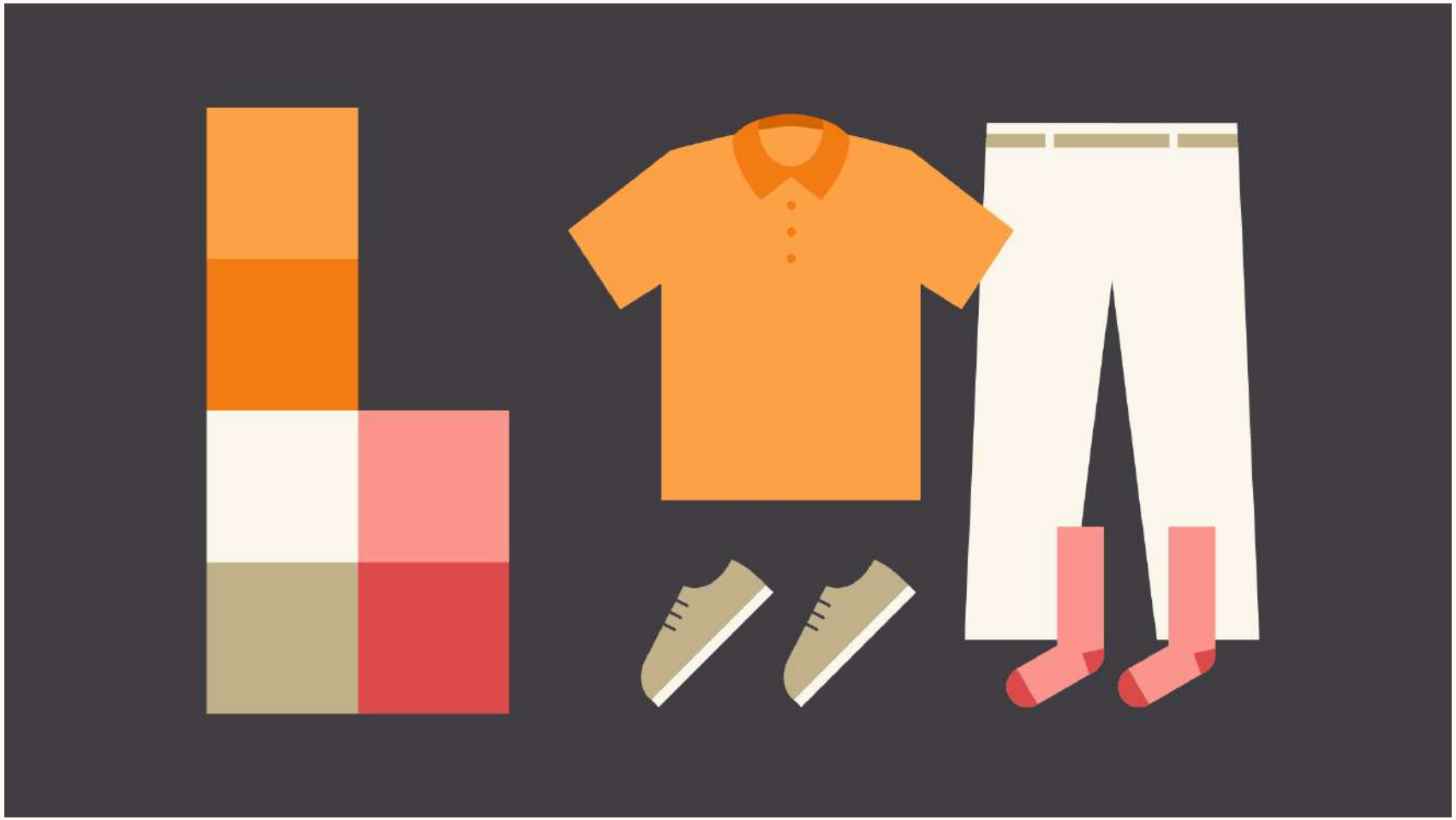
Bright colors tend to have a fun or modern vibe.

Desaturated colors often appear more serious or businesslike.

Sometimes it just depends on the context.
With practice and creativity, there's no limit to what you can do.

Putting it all together

Everywhere you look, there's color, color, and more color. It can be intimidating to use it in your work, but it doesn't have to be. Just keep **experimenting** and remember what you've learned about **color theory**. Soon, choosing great-looking colors will feel like second nature.



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