

Chalky White Issue / Limited Palette

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White is the “*killer color*.” It not only lightens, but it also cools and dulls color. Too much added white will make a color look chalky.

Beginners will sometimes end up with a lot of chalky color in their paintings. The chalkiness usually appears in the light colors, and therein lies the key. In order to make something lighter, we naturally think of white. In general to make a color lighter two options stand out and are my go to colors (White and Yellow) White can be a “killer color.” It not only lightens, but it also cools and *dulls color*. Too much added white will make a color look “chalky”. If white gets mixed into the shadows they don’t read correctly either and it’s hard to recover the shadow area once white has crept into them. Some of this can easily come from a brush that has been painting with white in the color mix. Much of the time when I’m painting and demonstrating for my classes I don’t clean my brush thoroughly between colors *however* If I have white in my mixture and I’m especially going into a shadow area a **THOROUGH brush cleaning is in order**. With white in the mix rich colors in shadows is hard to come by. Again keep in mind that white dulls color. You do have to use white and pretty often but just know you will have to probably warm it back up again with a warm color. Don’t be hard on yourself if you end up with some chalky color. Make mistakes and learn from them:) Keep painting. Ask for help. Warm it up again:)

Some whites are warmer than others. Going from warmest to coolest: flake (lead) white, followed by titanium white and then zinc white, which is the coolest. For a very warm white, sometimes you can use a very light tint of Naples Yellow instead of white.

If you confused.. Your not alone. It takes time but learning to mix by starting out with fewer colors (limited palette) and getting a good working knowledge of mixing with just a few in the beginning will be much easier and your understanding will progress faster especially when you will need to remix something to match what you mixed before. You’ll have less colors to choose from making that a LOT easier. I know... I get it.. All those lovely tube colors. There are colors I will suggest later on.

Much later on..

A split-primary palette laid out like in color wheel fashion in which there is a cool and warm version of each of the primaries.. So there would be a cool red and a warm red, a cool yellow and a warm and the same with blues. To lighten any color mixture, find approximately where it sits on the color wheel and then add a bit of lighter and thus warmer color from the left. For example, if you make an orange - cadmium yellow medium plus cadmium red light - and it’s not light enough, lighten it with white, but then warm it up again with a touch of cadmium yellow medium or even cadmium yellow light. (You’ll have to experiment.) Anytime you want a warm mixture, if you add white to it, you’ll have to add a warm light color to it to warm it back up. Again if your just starting out.. Stay with the limited palette. Your eye will get sharper in recognizing these subtle color shifts. It will come in time.

After that....

The split primary will get you a long way but eventually you might want to buy the tubed secondary colors. You can get most colors but not quite as saturated as they come out of the tube from the split primary palette. For tubed secondaries, I like cadmium orange, dioxazine violet (or purple), and phthalo green. It’s important to remember that, just as with the primaries, there are cool and warm versions of each. Conceivably, you could create a large but very workable palette that incorporates cool and warm versions of both the primary and secondary colors. It would have 12 colors . *I would never suggest someone new to color mixing start that way. This would be once your have been mixing from a fairly limited palette. I would prefer to see someone paint from a limited palette for a couple of years if they paint often then get more tubed colors if they want to. It’s certainly not necessary. Plein Air painters usually work from a limited palette when they are in the field. It’s the basis of learning color. Don’t bypass this limited palette learning tool.*

