

**DEEP DIVE**

# Color Scripting for Mood

*Planning the overall color palette of an image to create a specific emotional response before any detail is drawn.*

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Color scripting is a technique from animation and production art where the color palette of an image is planned before execution to serve the emotional and narrative goals of the work. Rather than choosing color intuitively, color scripting makes it a deliberate design decision tied to specific emotional outcomes.

## COLOR AND EMOTION BASICS

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Warm colors (reds, oranges, yellows) are traditionally associated with energy, danger, passion, and aggression. Cool colors (blues, greens, violets) suggest calm, distance, sadness, and mystery. High saturation suggests vitality or intensity. Low saturation suggests restraint, fatigue, or sophistication. These associations are cultural and contextual -- they are not absolute -- but they form the vocabulary of color scripting.

## DOMINANT, SECONDARY, AND ACCENT

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A color-scripted image typically has a dominant color (60-70% of the image area), a secondary color (20-30%), and an accent color (5-10%). The dominant color establishes the emotional key; the secondary color provides contrast and visual interest; the accent color -- often a complementary or high-contrast hue -- draws the eye to the focal point. This rule prevents color chaos while maintaining variety.

## COLOR SCRIPTS ACROSS A SEQUENCE

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In narrative work (comics, storyboards, animation), color scripts plan how the palette evolves across a sequence of images. A film might shift from cool, desaturated colors in the opening (distance, unfamiliarity) to warm, saturated colors at the climax (intimacy, peak emotion) to muted, quiet colors in the denouement (resolution, peace). This color journey is as deliberately planned as the story arc.

## EXERCISES

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Day 1: Choose an emotion (dread, joy, nostalgia) and paint a small study using only colors that support that emotion. Day 2: Repaint the same study using the complementary emotional palette. Day 3: Create a 6-panel color script for a simple story (morning, journey, arrival, conflict, resolution, night). Day 4: Study the color scripts published by animation studios (Pixar, Studio Ghibli) -- analyze their choices. Day 5: Paint a scene twice with two completely different color scripts and two different emotional intents.