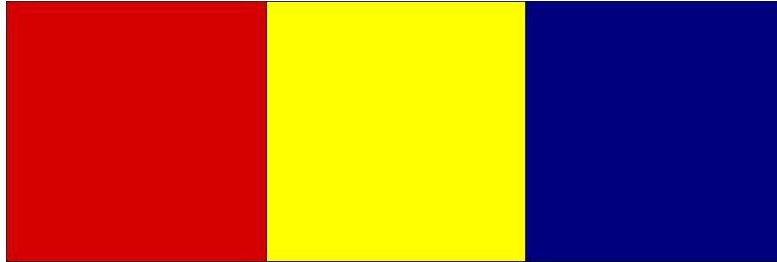


## Article 10 – Intensity and Saturation

The words intensity and saturation are used interchangeably when talking about color. For our purposes I will use saturation.



*Fully Saturated Hues*

Saturation refers to the purity of a hue or how bright or dull it is. When fully saturated it is a pure hue; like the colors on your color wheel. A saturated blue contains no white (to lighten it) or black or complimentary hue (to dull it). You might also hear the term “chroma”. When a hue is full chroma it is pure, or fully saturated.

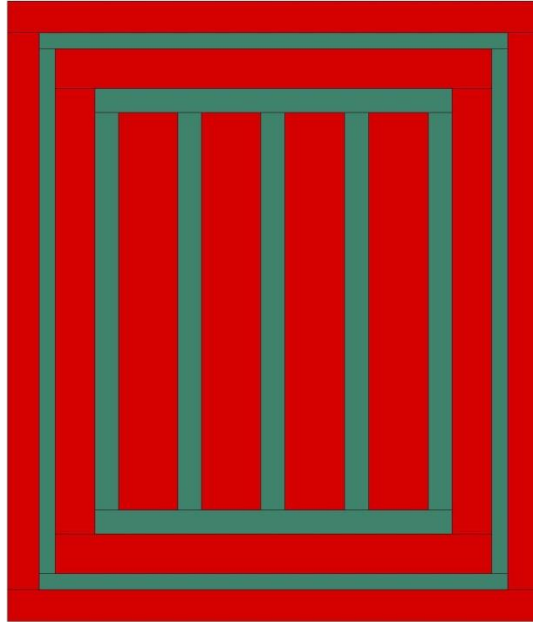
Black, gray and white can also be described by saturation. Black is fully saturated and gray is more saturated than white.

Simple. Right?

Yes, it mostly is but there are a few things to consider when using saturation in planning your quilt color palette.

Even within a palette of pure (fully saturated) hues, certain hues are more intense than others. This goes back to the articles on Value and Temperature. All of these traits of color and color perception work together so they have to be considered together for a successful composition.

Saturation/Intensity combines with value in our vision for interesting effect, particularly when 2 complimentary hues are placed next to each other. Traditional Amish quilts are a great example of this.



This simple Amish-style layout is done in fully saturated complimentary red and blue-green (Munsell system). The effect is a strong visual vibration that almost hurts your eyes. For this to work the compliments have to be of equal value.

You can also use saturation/intensity to create visual depth. The more saturated the hue then more the object comes forward visually. On a black background light pure hues advance. On a white background the effect is reverse. The value of the hue also comes into play. On a black background the lightest values will advance the most as in the case of the yellow in the quilt image below.



But on a white background the lightest value hues will recede the most. In this quilt sample it's the pink that advances. The green and blue are not fully saturated hues so they behave by value alone, receding more than the pink.



Another consideration is that the brighter and more intense a hue is the more it will dominate over the whole composition. When they are used in small amounts they attract and draw the viewer into the composition. How many times have you been told to add a “zinger” to your quilt palette? Often we simply think of that as bright yellow or acid green but it could mean adding a bit of pure red into a predominately non-saturated quilt. This is exactly the technique we often use to make string quilts become more than string quilts!



Saturation/intensity is just one more tool in our color toolbox. Next time we will look at transparency.