



Tips & Demos

**Watercolor and Watermedia
painting tips & demonstrations
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How Color Value & Intensity Influence Dominance

Most successful paintings have an area of dominance or a focal point. This area stands out from the rest of the painting because the artist has arranged or orchestrated the color values, hues, and intensities in such a way that their contrast with the surrounding areas draws attention to that area.



When everything is equal in value and intensity, nothing stands out.

In this first example, everything is competing for our attention because every object and section of the painting is approximately equal in value and intensity. Our eyes don't know where to "land" or focus, because each area of the painting demands equal attention.



Now look at the second example. Where does your eye end up? Where does it return to over and over, even after exploring all of the painting?

If you said "the barn" you would be right! Here the intense red of the barn contrasts with the relative "dullness" or lowered intensities of the other colors, so that the barn becomes the focal point or the dominant element in the painting. If you want to use color intensity to create dominance, remember to use the "purest" color you can (i.e. not mixed with any other color).



In the third example, I dulled or lowered the intensity of the colors in the background of the painting, including the barn, and intensified the colors in the foreground, so that it pulls our attention to the grassy area at the bottom right area next to the road.

These color values are also lighter and warmer, and generally, lighter warmer colors will pull forward and attract more attention than darker cooler ones.



Finally, look at the last example. What is the dominant area or focal point here? If you said the sky area you would be correct again.

This is accomplished by making the sky the purest most intense color, and also the area with the most contrast in value. The colors in the rest of the painting have all been dulled or lowered in intensity. How do you lower intensity (or dull) a color? By mixing it with its complementary color. (see the color mixing tip, or go to www.handprint.com for information on color complements)