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Color for Clothes
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COLOR
for
CLOTHES

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Extension Division
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COLOR FOR CLOTHES

MARJORIE EASTMAN

IMPORTANCE OF COLOR STUDY

One of the most interesting clothing problems is that of choosing becoming colors and using them in pleasing combinations. It is a question that cannot be settled once and for all, but must be met each time one makes or buys any article of clothing. Skill in solving various color problems as they arise is an essential factor in achieving the well-dressed appearance everyone desires.

Choices of color are usually determined by likes and dislikes or by the fashions of the season. Neither of these is a reliable guide unless based on a knowledge of color principles. The fact that one likes a color or admires it when worn by some one else does not necessarily mean that it will prove becoming to her. A fashionable color may be most unflattering, regardless of the saleswoman's assurance that "everyone is wearing it this season."

To have a reliable basis for color choices, it is necessary to learn the language of color and the relationship of one color to another. Every woman should form the habit of analyzing colors and studying their effects upon each other as well as upon herself. Such a study will give her a new interest in color wherever it is used and will help her to solve color problems with greater satisfaction to herself and pleasure to others.

HOW COLORS DIFFER FROM EACH OTHER

Color selections are made interesting—and sometimes difficult—because of the almost unlimited variety of colors available. An analysis of these variations reveals the fact that colors differ in three ways. An understanding of these three differences is important because each has its effect upon the becomingness of a color.

1. **Hue**—When asked to describe a color, one naturally mentions first its name or hue, such as red, blue, or green. It is well known that a ray of sunlight is broken up into a band of colors as it passes through a glass prism. Although the colors in this rainbow band blend together more or less, it is possible to distinguish five principal hues: red, yellow, green, blue, and purple. In the color wheel these five basic colors are arranged in the form of a circle. Other hues are obtained by combining any one of the five principal colors with one of the colors next to it in the circle. For example, reds which have some of the neighboring yellow hue mixed with them are called yellow-reds, and those on the other side between red and purple, are red-purple in hue. The color wheel also includes purple-blue, blue-green, and yellow-green hues.

By studying these various hues and testing their becomingness whenever possible, one may learn which are most flattering. For example, yellow-red may be more becoming than purple-red, or blue-green a better choice than yellow-green. A slight change in hue often has a decided effect upon becomingness.

In addition to the hues mentioned above, there are three neutrals, black, white and gray, so-called because technically they show no color. In practical use, however, it will be found that gray fabrics are not neutral, but have a slight tinge of blue, yellow, or pink.

2. **Value**—The word value is used to describe the lightness or darkness of a color. In any color there may be a range from dark tones to light tones, such as light blues, medium blues, and darker blues, until finally a blue so dark that it looks almost black is reached.

A neutral value scale begins with white, the highest value, and goes through various light, medium, and dark tones of gray to black, the lowest value. In color language the light values are called tints, and the dark values shades.

An understanding of color values is helpful because light and dark values of the same color vary in becomingness. A person who can wear dark green may not find a medium value of green becoming, and perhaps the person who looks well in a medium blue may not be able to wear pale blue.

The use of different values is one way of bringing contrast into a color scheme, as will be seen later.

3. **Intensity**—Colors differ in still a third way. The intensity of a color tells its brightness or dullness. Two tones, such as two medium blues of the same value, may look different because one is a bright, intense blue and the other a dull, grayed blue. A range of intensity from bright to dull is possible in any hue.

Intensity has a great deal of influence on the becomingness of a color. The most vivid colors are less generally flattering than those which have been grayed enough to soften them somewhat. Intense colors give brilliant, interesting effects if rightly handled, but as a rule should be used only in small amounts to give contrast or accent to a costume. Colors that are grayed, yet colorful enough to be interesting, are safer choices for use in large amounts.

Popular names for colors, such as henna, pink, tan, do not appear in the list of hues, but each can be accurately described by the use of the three color terms explained above. Henna is yellow-red; pink is a light value of red; tan is yellow-red of dull intensity and light value.

COLOR MEANINGS

Colors vary in the impressions of force and warmth they give.

Attention is attracted by red and yellow-red more quickly than by blues or greens. Red and yellow seem to advance toward one, while blue, green, and purple have a tendency to recede and blend with the background.

Although hues containing red and yellow are most noticeable, the intense tones of any color are more conspicuous than the duller ones. For example, a bright blue of medium value is more forceful than a soft, grayed blue of the same value.

Light values are usually more advancing in effect than are dark values of the same color.

Large women might well give thought to this difference in impressions given by colors, making their selections from the less conspicuous values and intensities of their becoming colors. Notes of brighter or lighter color, if needed, might be introduced in trimmings or accessories.

Red and yellow also give an impression of warmth, probably because one unconsciously associates these colors with flame and sunlight. Blues, found in nature in sky and water, are the coolest colors. Greens may be either warm or cool, the blue-greens being much cooler than the yellow-greens. Red-purple gives a warmer effect than does blue-purple.

COLOR FOR THE INDIVIDUAL

Color choices for each individual are influenced by occasion and season of the year as well as by personal differences such as size, personality, and coloring of skin, hair, and eyes. In considering each of these factors it is well to remember that "things to be used together should seem to belong together."

1. **Occasion**—When buying a new dress, one may well ask "Does this color belong to the occasion on which I plan to wear it?" Ideas as to the suitability of colors for different occasions change somewhat with changes in fashion and are likely to vary with the customs of the community in which one lives. Generally speaking, however, bright gay colors are considered appropriate for parties and other festive occasions, while more subdued tones are suitable and practical for general every-day uses. Clothes planned for street, travel or business wear should not be dull and drab, but neither should they be conspicuous for vividness of color. For such occasions one might use soft but colorful hues in medium or dark values; enliven neutral hues with touches of bright color in accessories; or use prints that have enough vivid color to relieve any monotony in the general color scheme of the costume.

2. **Season**—Dark, subdued colors are usually chosen for winter clothing and light, gay colors for spring and summer wear. An exception to this is seen in the dark "sheers" that are worn during warm weather. The sheerness of their texture lightens the effect of heaviness and warmth these dark colors would otherwise give. Since some colors are warm and others cool in effect one may expect to see warm colors worn in winter, and cooler colors in the summer. This is true to a certain extent. It will be found that blue is almost always a fashionable spring color. Vivid intensities of warm as well as cool colors are used for summer sports clothes, and in such cases suitability to occasion rather than season has influenced the choice, for brilliant colors harmonize with activity.

The gay, colorful prints which invariably appear with the spring seem particularly well suited to this season of the year.

3. **Size**—It has been noted that warm, advancing colors call attention to the size of the wearer because they stand out conspicuously against the more or less neutral background in which they are worn. White and other light values used in large amounts also make the figure appear larger. Since this is true, black might be thought to be ideal for the large woman. It is not usually the best choice, however, because it emphasizes the outline or silhouette, showing up any imperfections in the figure. In most cases, dark values of blue, brown or green will prove more becoming and more flattering to the figure.

4. **Personality**—Colors as well as people have personality. Light, soft colors are dainty, intense colors aggressive, and deep rich colors dignified. The dull, dark tones of any color are more quiet and subdued than the lighter, brighter tones of the same color.

Since "things to be used together must seem to belong together," the woman of strong energetic personality may wear rather intense colors and striking color combinations, while the woman of strong but reserved character will be more suitably dressed in deep, rich tones which harmonize with her dignity.

Small, dainty women usually feel at home in dainty colors. The quiet type may prefer the softer, grayer tones and the gayer, more active type may select lighter values and brighter intensities of the same colors.

Although in general the most successful colors are those which express the same qualities as personalities do, this analogy should not be carried too far. For example, the person who is over-retiring may withdraw even further into her shell when wearing clothes as retiring in color as she is in personality. Although she would be eclipsed by an entire costume of intense color, some notes of it may help her to overcome her shyness.

5. **Personal Coloring**—No doubt everyone has had some clothes so becoming in color that she enjoyed wearing them as long as they lasted. Probably, too, everyone has at some time made the mistake of buying a dress that she afterward disliked and wished she might discard because of its unflattering color.

An appreciation of what makes colors becoming or unbecoming can not be gained by memorizing ready-made rules, but only by obtaining all the information possible about color and applying that knowledge over and over again whenever one has to make a choice of color.

After studying the variations in personal coloring of skin, hair, and eyes of different people, and recalling the variations possible in any one hue by changes in value and intensity, it is easy to understand that rules for selecting color can be only general guides and that each person is an individual problem.

In analyzing personal coloring one is likely to notice the color of the hair first and to speak of people as blonde or brunette depending upon the value (lightness or darkness) of the hair. As skill in recognizing color differences is gained, variations in warmth and coolness will be noted also.

Golden-yellow hair is warmer than hair of the duller ash-blonde hues. Among medium tones, red-orange hair, commonly called red, is the warmest. Browns which have a red tinge are warmer than the duller, more neutral browns. Black hair is warm in effect with the exception of the cooler blue-black tones which are often accompanied by blue eyes.

Differences in warmth and coolness can also be recognized in the color of the eyes. Brown eyes are definitely warm, and blue eyes cool. Green and gray eyes are cool rather than warm, and hazel eyes are intermediate.

Although the hair and eyes may be noticed first, the skin coloring has most to do with becomingness. Close observation will show that the basis of the skin color is a light, grayed yellow-red. There are many variations, from the cool fair skin with a faint violet-tinge in the shadows to the warm ruddy complexion, which has a decidedly red tone, with brown notes in the shadows. Yellow is the outstanding hue in a sallow skin.

Although most people can not be classified exactly, two types that can be recognized as definitely warm in coloring are (1) the typical brunette with dark brown hair, brown eyes and red-orange coloring in her skin and (2) the person with red-orange hair, brown eyes, and creamy skin with red-
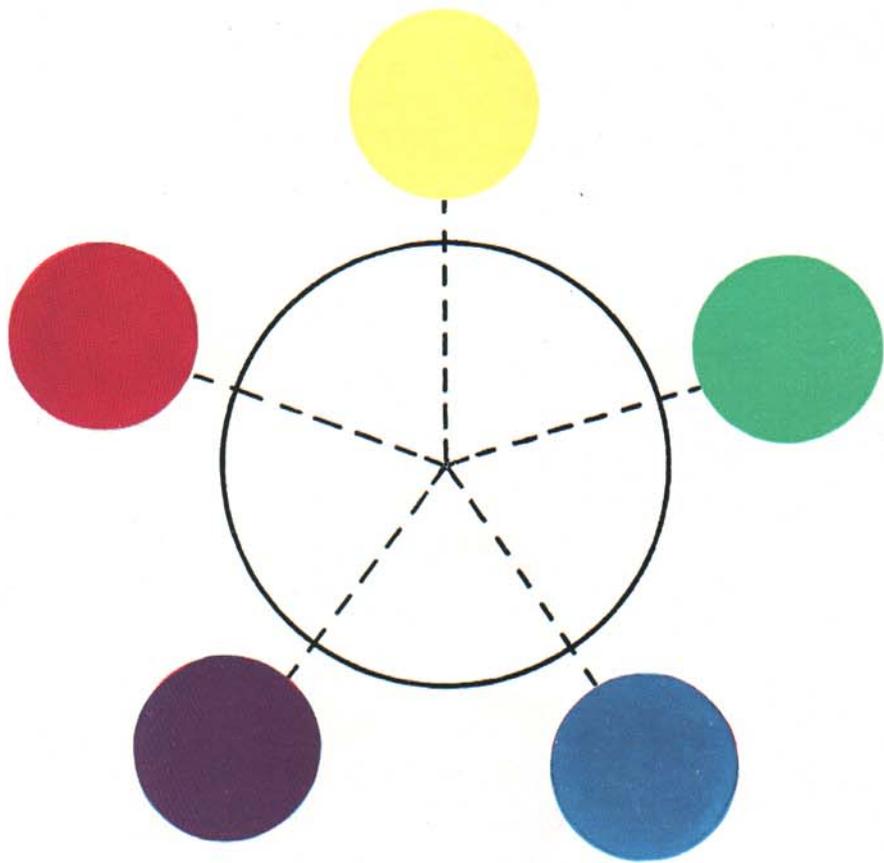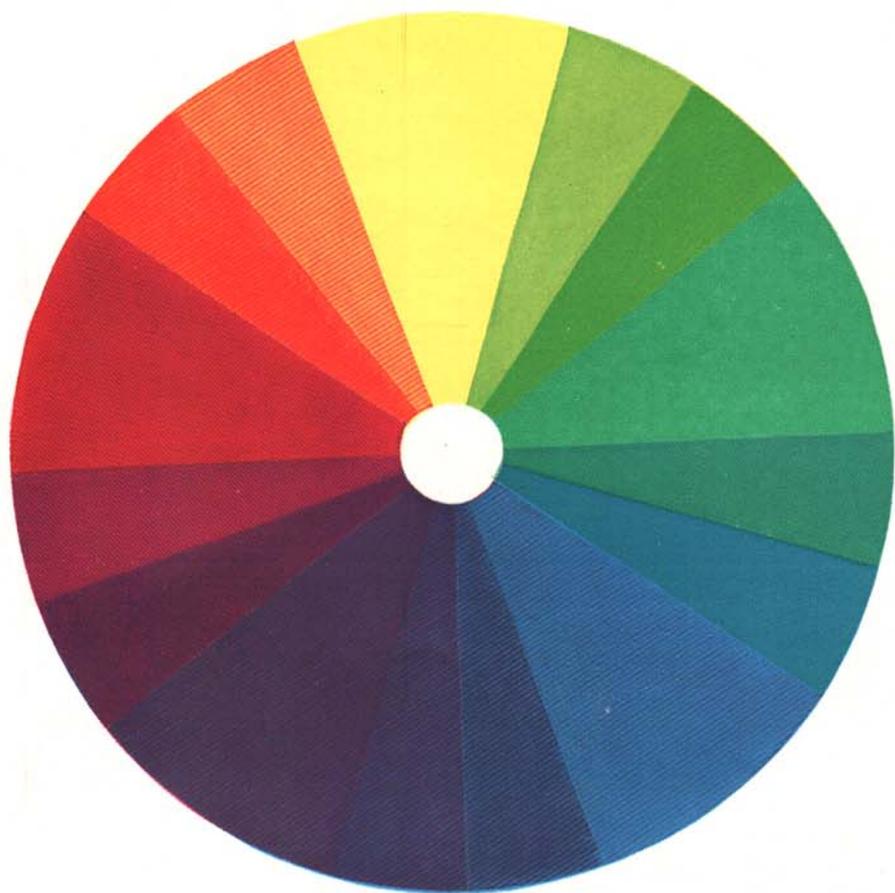
A color wheel to show the principal colors.

A value scale from white to black.

To show intensity ranging from bright to dull.

A color wheel to show color relationships.

orange flush. If the "red-haired" person has blue or gray eyes, her coloring is somewhat cooler in effect.

Probably the best example of the cool type is the typical blonde with yellow hair, blue eyes, and fair skin with a slight tinge of violet in the pink flush of the cheeks. Variations of this type include those people with ash-blonde hair, green or gray eyes, sallow or pale skin, and those with white or gray hair. As the hair turns gray the coloring becomes cooler, and it may be necessary to revise one's list of becoming colors.

The majority of people are intermediate in coloring, that is, they belong somewhere between the definitely warm and the definitely cool types. The skin tones are neither decidedly warm nor cool, the hair is medium brown, and the eyes blue, brown, green, gray, or hazel.

Still other combinations are possible. For example, some people have a warm skin with cool hair and eyes.

6. **Becoming Colors For Various Types**—A becoming color is one which makes the most of one's coloring, bringing out pink tones and subduing excessive yellow or red in the face, adding life and richness to the color of the hair, and emphasizing the color of the eyes.

Although there are no hard and fast rules for achieving this result, some general suggestions about the effect of colors may be helpful.

(a) It is usually more satisfactory to choose colors that are related to one's own coloring. People of the warm, brown-haired type are likely to find their best colors among the warm hues, and people belonging to the cool type will find cool colors more generally becoming. This does not mean that any warm hue she might select will be becoming to a person of warm personal coloring, nor that all cool hues will be equally good choices for those of cool coloring. In each case the right hue, value, and intensity must be chosen.

The warm red-haired person may select warm tones which blend with her hair, or she may prefer to emphasize her hair by the use of contrasting colors in grayed intensities. Red hair is cheapened by decided contrast, but red glints in brown hair may be stressed by using complementary blues and blue-greens.

People in the intermediate group have a great variety of colors from which to choose because their coloring is neither definitely warm nor cool. If they have clear complexions and some value contrast in their own coloring they can wear practically any color if it is chosen in the right value and intensity.

The right colors for a gray-haired woman are determined by the coloring of the eyes and skin as well as by the hair. Purple and violet, so often considered becoming to gray-haired women should not be used if the skin is sallow, because they emphasize yellow. A woman of warm coloring may find that she can add dull cool colors such as dark blue to her list of becoming colors when her hair begins to turn gray and that she may substitute dark rich tones, such as wine-reds, for the brighter warm colors. As a rule, softer and richer tones are more becoming as one grows older. They are more kindly to the complexion than are the bright colors which show up lines and wrinkles in the face.

If the skin as well as the hair grows whiter with age, older women will find that many soft light tones of blue, green, violet and pink are becoming.

(b) *Effect of Intensity*—An intense color reflects color upon the skin, either the color itself or its complement, that is, the color directly opposite it on the color wheel. Bright blue, purple-blue and purple tend to reflect yellow into the face, so these colors should be avoided by those who have a sallow skin, especially if the skin looks unhealthy or is uneven in texture.

Green is becoming to many people because it reflects red, hence brings out color in the face. It should not be used by people of ruddy complexion. A good rule for those who have any undesirable color in the face is to avoid the complement (opposite) of that color in its brightest intensities.

Since vivid colors usually are overpowering, another good rule is to use dull rather than bright intensities to bring out a color one wishes to emphasize. For example, blue eyes are intensified by soft dull blues more successfully than by vivid blues unless the vivid tones are used only in small amounts.

(c) *Effect of Value*—Dark values take away color, therefore black is a poor choice for people who are pale or sallow because it makes them look pale and tired and emphasizes sallowness. In fact, black is a generally unflattering color unless relieved by wearing a becoming color next to the face. Dark values may be used to tone down a complexion which is too ruddy.

Light values add color. This helps to explain the becoming effect of wearing light tones next to the face. They make the hair look darker and richer by contrast, and bring out the color in the complexion.

Values which are too nearly alike are monotonous, and the person who has little value contrast in her own coloring needs it in her clothing. For example, the person who has light hair and eyes and a rather colorless complexion looks "all the same color" when dressed in tan, gray, or other neutral tones. Color contrast for this type of person can be obtained by using soft colors of medium or dark tones. If light values are used, touches of dark value near the face will be found helpful in relieving the monotony.

(d) *Effect of Texture*—The same color in two different textures will often vary in becomingness as much as will two different hues. Smooth, shiny surfaces are less generally becoming than soft, dull textures. Texture is an important factor for the large woman to consider because lustrous materials such as satin attract attention to the size of the figure. The relation between texture of material and complexion is also important. Fine textures may make skin of coarse texture look even coarser by contrast.

COMBINING COLORS HARMONIOUSLY

Observation and experience show that certain color combinations are pleasing and others uninteresting or even offensive. Since one is constantly combining colors both in home furnishings and in clothing it is helpful to know how to do this harmoniously. A study of the color harmonies which have proved successful through the years should result in improved judgment with regard to color combinations.

1. **One-hue Harmony**—The simplest color scheme is made of one color in varying intensities and values. A dress of tan and brown or of light and dark green is a one-hue harmony. In order to be successful, this type of harmony must have enough difference in value and intensity to avoid monotony. For example, several medium blues combined in a dress will be much less interesting than a dark blue with accents of lighter blue.

One-hue harmonies may be obtained by combining two different textures of the same color as in using the two sides of a crepe-backed satin. In this case interest is centered in the play of light on the two textures of the material.

2. **Analogous Harmony**—An analogous harmony is made by combining hues which lie next to each other on the color wheel, such as blue and blue-green. Analogous colors blend well because they have a common hue, and they offer more variety than do one-hue combinations. Thought must still be given to differences in value and intensity, for if the analogous hues used are too nearly alike the result may look as though one tried to match the colors and failed.

3. **Complementary Harmony**—This harmony differs from the two already described in that it is a combination of contrasting rather than related colors. A study of the color wheel shows that those colors which are in greatest contrast lie directly across from each other on the wheel. They are yellow and purple-blue, yellow-green and purple, green and red-purple, blue-green and red, blue and yellow-red. Combinations of these colors have interesting possibilities but must be handled carefully, since they intensify each other when placed side by side. This makes complementary color schemes difficult to wear unless both colors are grayed or unless one grayed color is used for the main area of the dress and the other color in strong intensity used only for accent.

4. **Accented Neutral Harmony**—In this type of harmony the main part of the dress is black, white, or gray, with a color used in trimming or accessories, for example, a white dress with a green tie or a gray suit with a blue blouse.

CHOOSING YOUR OWN COLOR SCHEME

When buying a new hat, coat or dress one should do more than choose a becoming color and a combination (if more than one color is used) that is harmonious in itself. The color should also harmonize with the clothes already on hand. For example, one might buy an attractive brown dress only to find that it did not look well with the gray coat and black shoes with which it must be worn.

The selection of one color as a foundation or background color for the entire wardrobe is an aid to both good taste and economy. Dark, neutral tones of blue, green or brown make good foundation colors. Gray or black may be used if becoming. One foundation color need not mean monotony. For example, if blue were chosen, there is first of all a wide range of light, medium, and dark values as well as bright and dull intensities to choose from. One might also use blue with the neutrals white and gray; blue with its neighboring colors or with its complement of yellow-red; prints which harmonize with blue. The same accessories could be worn with any of these costumes.
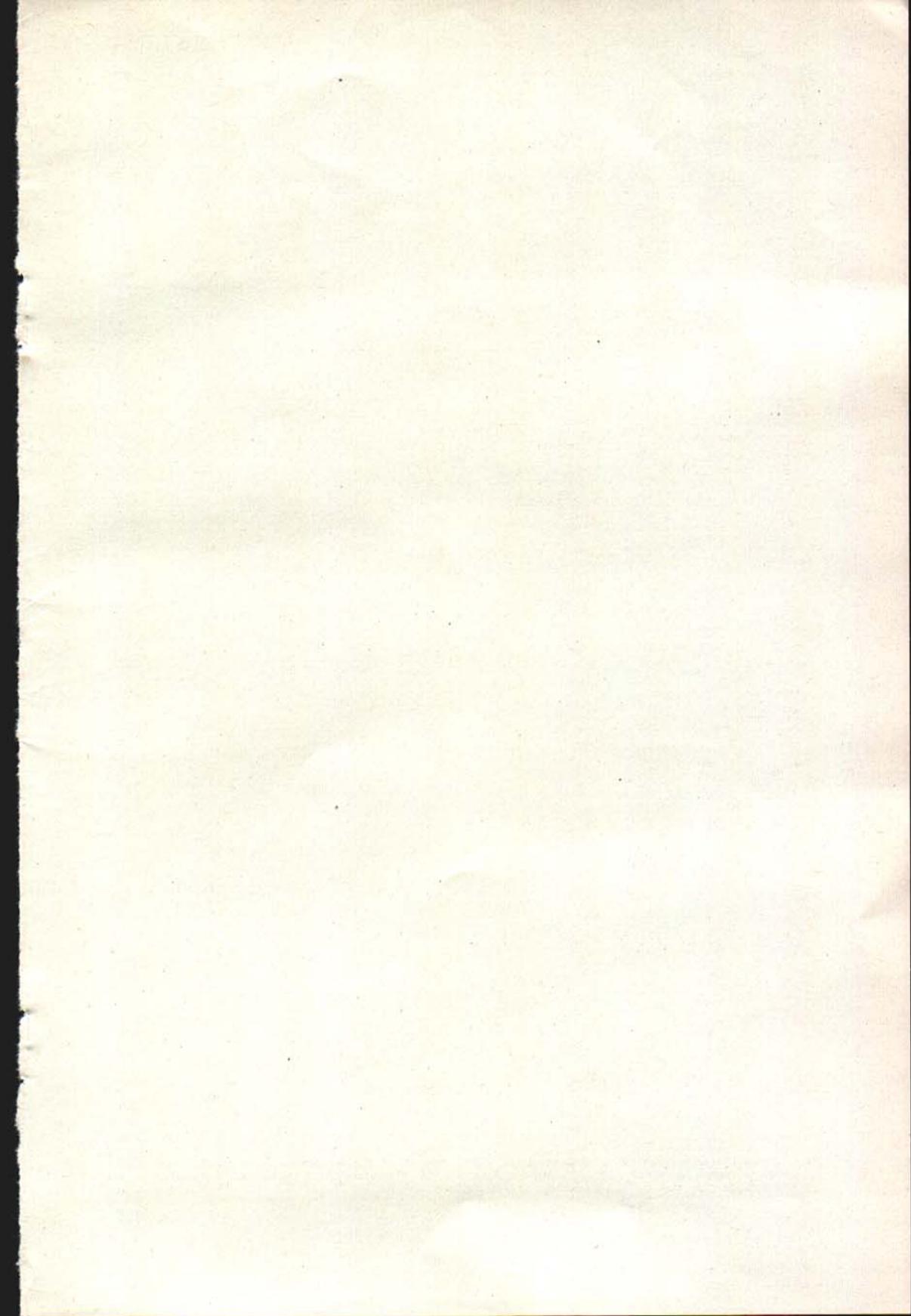
GAINING SKILL IN THE USE OF COLORS

1. Study colors wherever you see them. Using scraps of cloth, paper, yarn or ribbon compare them with the colors on the color wheel to determine their hues as exactly as you can. By analyzing many colors as to hue, value, and intensity, one develops skill in recognizing and matching colors.

2. Study harmonious color schemes. Notice what hues were combined. Is there a definite relationship between them? Do they vary in intensity? In value?

3. Experiment with the becomingness of colors for yourself whenever you have the opportunity. If you have color prejudices or set habits try to substitute for them a knowledge of colors and an appreciation of their effects upon your personal coloring.

Study other people who are wearing becoming colors. Analyze their coloring and the colors they are wearing to see if you can discover reasons for the becomingness.

We should not be discouraged if our color sense does not improve all at once. Appreciation and skill in the use of color are matters of gradual development for each of us. The more we learn about color and the more often we apply that knowledge thoughtfully, the easier it becomes to make the right choices.