PRACTICAL GUIDE

False Color

How to nail perfect exposure on your camera or monitor



PURPLE | BLUE | GREEN | PINK | YELLOW | RED

by Luis Taveras · Colorist

What is false color?

False color paints every area of the image according to how much light it has. Instead of guessing by eye — on a screen that almost always lies— you see right away what is well exposed, what is clipping and what is getting lost in the shadows. It is the same information a waveform gives you, but on top of the picture.

How to use it in 5 steps

1. Turn on false color on your camera or on-set monitor.
2. Find your main subject's skin: it is your most important reference.
3. Adjust the iris, ISO, ND filter or lighting until the skin falls in its zone.
4. Make sure nothing that matters is red (faces, wardrobe, key details). A sky or a practical can clip if it's a creative choice.
5. Turn false color off before framing or judging the final look.

Reference legend

0–4	**Purple** Clipped black: no detail	4–12	**Blue** Shadows about to lose detail
38–50	**Green** Middle gray (18%)	56–68	**Pink** Well-exposed light skin (≈1 stop over gray)
88–97	**Yellow** Highlights about to clip	97+	**Red** Clipped white: no recovery

Approximate values in signal % (IRE). Every brand defines its own: check the table on the next page.

Skin comes first

Light skin usually reads pink, about one stop above middle gray. Darker skin usually falls near green or between green and pink. Don't force every skin tone into the same color: respect each one.

Each brand's colors

Every manufacturer uses its own legend. This is what their manuals and documentation say.

Canon

OFFICIAL MANUAL

Cinema EOS (C70, C300, C500…)



Purple = black clipping · Blue = just above black clipping · Green = 18% gray · Pink = 1 stop over 18% gray · Yellow = just below white clipping · Red = white clipping. Everything else shows in gray.

RED

OFFICIAL MANUAL

«Video» mode (V-RAPTOR, KOMODO, DSMC2…)



Purple 0–4 · Blue 5 · Teal 10–12 · Green 41–48 · Pink 61–70 · Straw 92–93 · Yellow 94–95 · Orange 96–98 · Red 99–100 (IRE of the video output).

RED

OFFICIAL MANUAL

«Exposure» mode



Desaturated image with only three warnings: purple = underexposed (read from RAW), green = IRE 41–48, red = sensor clipping (read from RAW).

ARRI

STOP-BASED

ALEXA (Mini, LF, 35…)

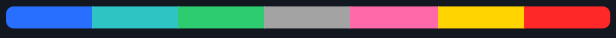


Zones are computed in stops for the selected ISO, not fixed IRE. It uses green for middle gray and pink for skin, and no purple for super-black. On the ALEXA 35, false color reads from LogC. Check your model's table in ARRI's manual.

Sony

STOP-BASED

VENICE · BURANO · FX6



Sony is pushing EL Zone: colors by stops of light from 18% gray (15 one-stop zones, plus half stops around gray). Check your camera and firmware legend.

Blackmagic

CHECK YOUR MANUAL

Pocket, URSA, PYXIS…



Uses its own legend with light and dark grays besides the colors. Middle gray reads green and light skin reads pink. Exact values change by model: check your camera's manual.

Atomos

3 MODES

Ninja · Shogun



Three modes: «Atomos» (IRE bands, with a % scale), «ARRI» and «EL Zone». With a RAW signal, false color is computed on the camera's log. Turning it on disables on-screen LUTs.

SmallHD

CONFIGURABLE

Cine 7, Indie, Ultra…



The threshold for each color can be configured and saved as a preset, to match your camera's legend or the way you work.

Sources: Canon manuals (cam.start.canon), RED documentation (docs.red.com), Atomos support, forums and technical press on ARRI, Sony and Blackmagic. Legends change with firmware: always confirm on your own gear.



Luis Taveras

COLORIST

Luis Taveras is a colorist, member of the Colorist Society International, with five feature films and more than 500 music videos. His credits include *Madre: a dos centímetros de ti*, winner of five awards at the 2025 New York Dominican Film Festival, and *La Fábrica de Bodas*, which premiered at the United Palace in New York. For him, color is the last place where a film can still change its emotion, and the skin always has to feel true.

5	500+	10
feature films	music videos	years in the craft

What I do

- Color grading for film
- Music videos
- Commercials and brands
- Cinema mastering and delivery (DCP)

Member, Colorist Society International · ID 98523302

DGCINE Film Agent · SIRECINE AC-PTA 18224

Got a project?

I'd love to collaborate with you on the color. Write to me and watch my demo reel.

DEMO REEL	vimeo.com/1224666204	WEBSITE	luistaverascolorist.com
EMAIL	contact@luistaverascolorist.com	INSTAGRAM	@luistaveras.colorist
YOUTUBE	@LuisTaverasColorista	LINKEDIN	luistaveras-colorist
IMDB	nm18370016		

#falsecolor #colorist #colorgrading #cinematography #cinematographer #davinciresolve #luistaverascolorist