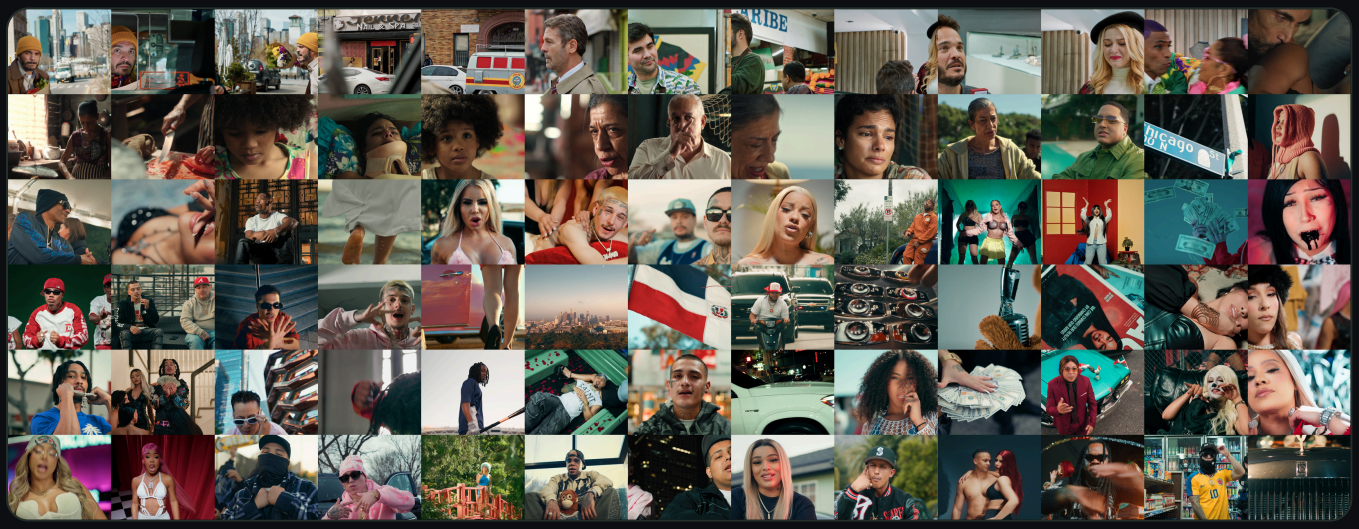
PRACTICAL GUIDE

Color Palette

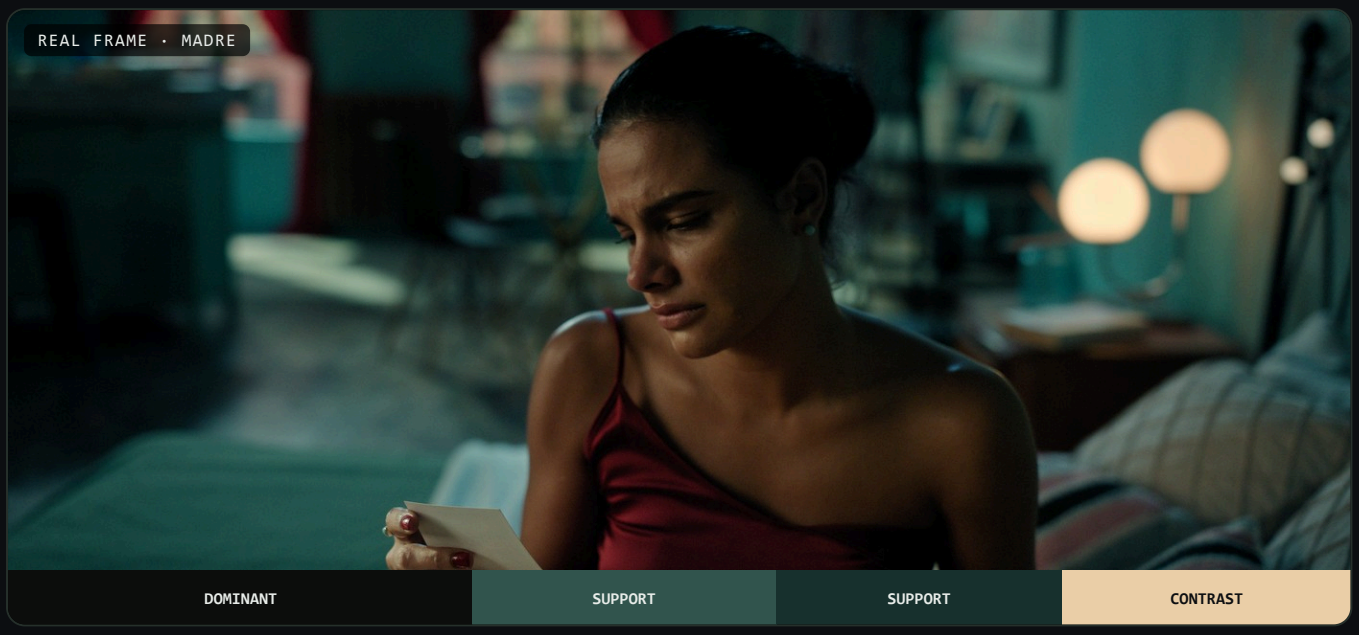
How to design the palette of your film or music video in pre-production



by Luis Taveras · Colorist

What is a palette?

It's the group of colors that will tell your story. It's not about using a lot of colors, but about using the right ones, always the same ones, and with intention. Under every real frame in this guide you'll find its palette, taken from the image itself, so you can see how color is spread across a real film.



Madre · teal dominates the room and the red top is the contrast: your eye goes straight to her.

The three roles of color

- [ ] **Dominant:** the color you see the most (walls, sky, atmosphere). It sets the main emotion.
- [ ] **Supporting:** one or two colors that go along with it (furniture, wardrobe, floor) without competing.
- [ ] **Contrast:** the color that guides the eye to what matters. Small, but decisive.

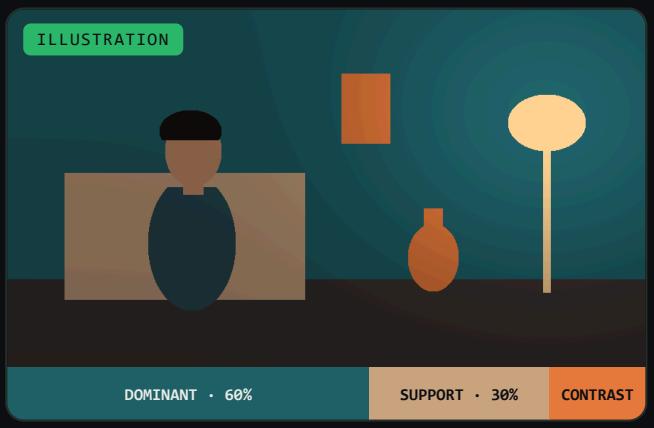
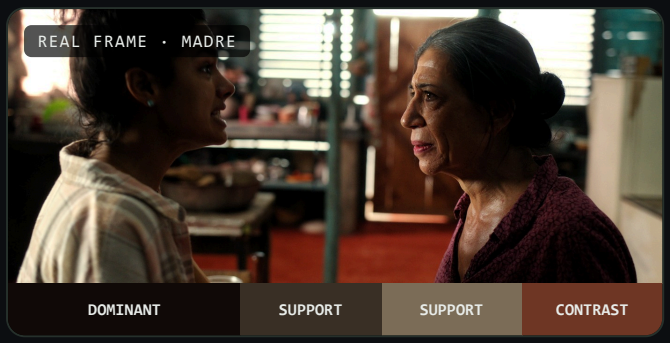


Illustration from the video: teal wall (dominant), sofa and floor (supporting) and the orange objects (contrast).

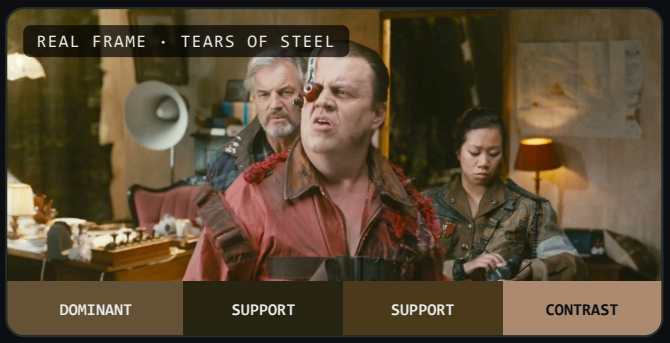
The 60-30-10 ratio is a design reference, not a rule: use it as a starting point.

What each color says

WARM · ORANGE, RED, YELLOW

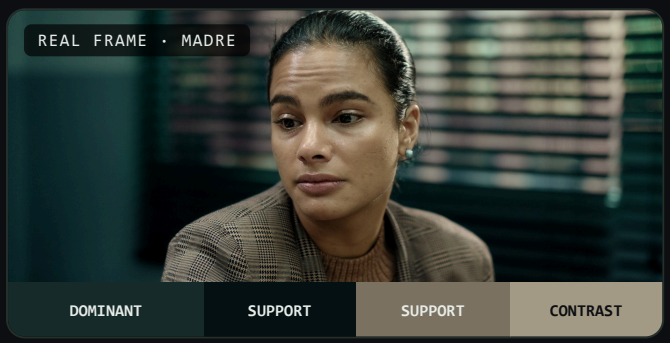


Warm · orange, red, yellow. They draw you in and convey nostalgia, passion or warmth. *Madre*, the kitchen.

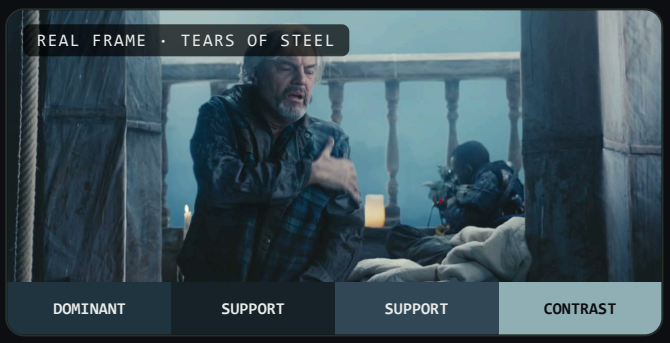


The same warmth in another film: a workshop full of oranges and reds. *Tears of Steel*.

COOL · BLUE, TEAL

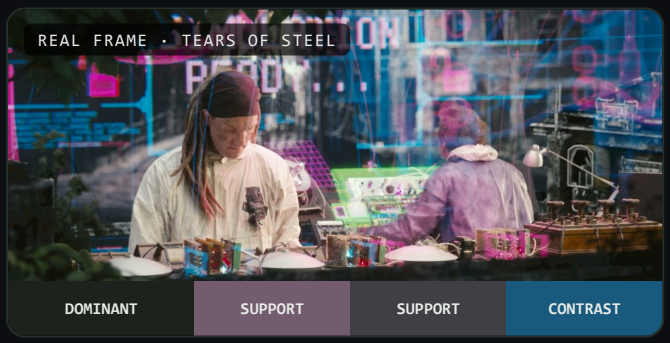


Cool · blue, teal. They push you away and convey loneliness, tension or mystery. *Madre*, the office.

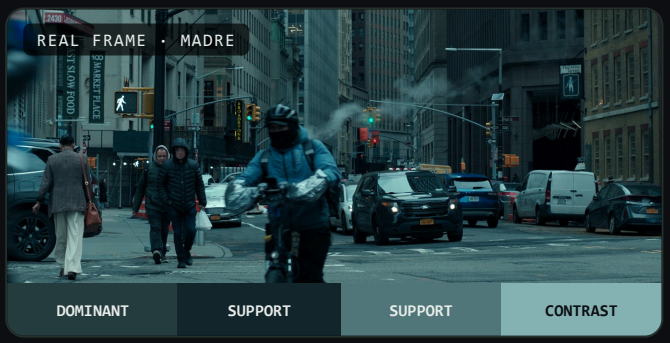


Muted blue and grey: cold, tension, danger. *Tears of Steel*.

Saturation tells the story too



Highly saturated · intense, youthful, eye-catching. *Tears of Steel*.



Muted · serious and real. *Madre*, New York.

Frames from *Madre*, color graded by Luis Taveras. *Tears of Steel* (2012) and *Sintel* (2010) © Blender Foundation · mango.blender.org · durian.blender.org · CC BY 3.0 license.

Other films, same rule

You don't need a big budget to have a palette. In *Sintel*, an animated short by the Blender Foundation, the palette changes with the emotion of each moment of the story.

SINTEL · THE PALETTE FOLLOWS THE EMOTION



DOMINANT | SUPPORT | SUPPORT | CONTRAST

Hope · warm sunset, orange and gold.



DOMINANT | SUPPORT | SUPPORT | CONTRAST

Danger · cold cave, dark teal.



DOMINANT | SUPPORT | SUPPORT | CONTRAST

Loneliness · snow with almost no color.

The lesson

Pick a palette for each moment of the story and respect it in wardrobe, set and lighting. When the palette changes, the audience feels the story changed, even if they can't explain why.

Tears of Steel (2012) and *Sintel* (2010) © Blender Foundation · mango.blender.org · durian.blender.org · CC BY 3.0 license.

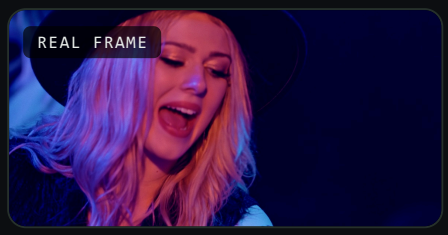
Two films, two palettes

The same colorist graded both, but each story asked for its own palette from pre-production.

LA FÁBRICA DE BODAS · COMEDY



DOMINANT SUPPORT SUPPORT CONTRAST



DOMINANT SUPPORT SUPPORT CONTRAST



DOMINANT SUPPORT SUPPORT CONTRAST

Vivid colors, lots of pink, turquoise and yellow: everything feels like a party and a farce.

MADRE · DRAMA



DOMINANT SUPPORT SUPPORT CONTRAST



DOMINANT SUPPORT SUPPORT CONTRAST



DOMINANT SUPPORT SUPPORT CONTRAST

Teals and earth tones, restrained saturation: skin always natural and emotion up front.

Frames from *La Fábrica de Bodas* and *Madre*, color graded by Luis Taveras.

The palette in pre-production, step by step

- [ ] **Read the script or listen to the song** and write down the emotion of each scene or section.
- [ ] **Gather references** from films, photos and paintings, and build a mood board.
- [ ] **Define the palette** for each scene or character: dominant, supporting and contrast.
- [ ] **Share it** with direction, camera, art, wardrobe and makeup: everyone works from the same palette.
- [ ] **Shoot camera tests** with the real skin, wardrobe and locations, with that camera and that light, and a color chart.
- [ ] **Prepare a show LUT** so the on-set monitor shows something very close to the final look.
- [ ] **Check on set** that nothing leaves the palette or steals attention by accident.

No colorist in pre-production?

The production designer protects the palette: they choose fabrics, paints and objects that respect the agreed colors and share it with wardrobe, makeup and camera. Ideally, the colorist and the production designer work together from the start.

Music videos

The palette can change in each part of the song —cooler in the verses, warmer and more saturated in the chorus— but everything has to feel like one single piece, and the artist always has to look good.

Skin comes first

The palette should never fight with skin tones. If the background and wardrobe are well planned, the skin stays natural and the look shines.

Your palette

DOMINANT · #_____

SUPPORTING · #_____

SUPPORTING · #_____

CONTRAST

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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

Planning your next project?

I'd love to collaborate with you on the palette and the color from pre-production. Write to me and watch my demo reel.

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#colorpalette #colorist #colorgrading #preproduction #productiondesign #cinematography #luistaverascolorist