



Colors | Define the system's color palette T296995

<https://phabricator.wikimedia.org/T296995>



The proposal is to detach the number in the colors' name from the colors' HSL value, and instead present a more **abstract scale** (all colors are, after all, replaceable) that represents and reinforces the relationship between colors in a more intuitive way: the higher the number, the darker the color.



The whole process to decide the new colors nomenclatures and numerals will be explained here.

In this Figma you will find all the explorations with colors nomenclature:

https://www.figma.com/embed?embed_host=notion&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.figma.com%2Ffile%2FE6hxGwEOs9YFVF4fFRyqSv%2FColors-Tokens%3Fnode-id%3D99%253A4551

Process to decide the colors nomenclature

1. Deciding color names

Studying our [current color palette](#) we realized that it was mixing concepts: some colors were organized by color usage names (Base, Accent) and others by simple color names (Green, Red).

COLOR PALETTE (DESKTOP AND MOBILE WEB)

BASE COLORS

Color Name	Hex	RGB	HSB	WCAG	Usage
Base100	#fff	255, 255, 255	0, 0%, 100%	AAA	Base background, Highlight from grey
Base90	#f9f9fa	248, 248, 250	210, 1%, 98%	AAA	Button/3D widget background
Base80	#eaecef	234, 236, 240	220, 3%, 94%	AAA	Disabled text input background
Base70	#d3d3d3	200, 204, 209	213, 4%, 82%	AAA	Disabled button/3D widget background
Base50	#c6c8ca	162, 169, 177	212, 8%, 69%	AAA	Highlighted border
Base30	#7f7774	114, 119, 125	210, 9%, 49%	AAA	Disabled elements text, Placeholder text, Active border
Base20	#54545d	84, 89, 93	207, 10%, 36%	AAA	Emphasized secondary text at level AAA need
Base10	#202122	32, 33, 34	210, 6%, 13%	AAA	Copy color, Buttons/widgets text
Base0	#000	0, 0, 0	0, 0%, 0%	AAA	Emphasized copy color, Active button/widgets text

ACCENT COLORS

Color Name	Hex	RGB	HSB	WCAG	Usage
Accent90	#eaf3ff	234, 243, 255	214, 8%, 100%	AAA	Hovered buttons, Active menu, Items backgrounds
Accent50	#3498db	51, 102, 204	220, 75%, 80%	AA	Primary buttons, Links, Page accents, Focus outlines
Accent30	#2980b9	42, 75, 141	220, 70%, 55%	AAA	Active buttons, Active links
Red90	#ffe7e6	255, 231, 230	2, 100%, 100%	AAA	Destructive actions - Buttons and Links, Alerts
Red50	#e74c3c	211, 51, 51	360, 77%, 87%	AA	Destructive active buttons and links
Red30	#c0392b	185, 54, 54	360, 80%, 53%	AAA	Destructive active buttons and links

SUPPLEMENTARY COLORS

Color Name	Hex	RGB	HSB	WCAG	Usage
Green90	#d5f5e3	213, 253, 244	167, 16%, 99%	AAA	Secondary link highlight
Green50	#27ae60	0, 175, 137	167, 100%, 88%	AA	Positive messages
Green30	#1abc9c	20, 134, 109	187, 85%, 53%	AA	Positive messages
Yellow90	#fff9c4	254, 246, 231	39, 9%, 100%	AAA	Warning messages
Yellow50	#fcf3cf	255, 204, 51	45, 80%, 100%	AAA	Warning messages
Yellow30	#f1c40f	172, 102, 0	56, 100%, 87%	AA	Warning messages

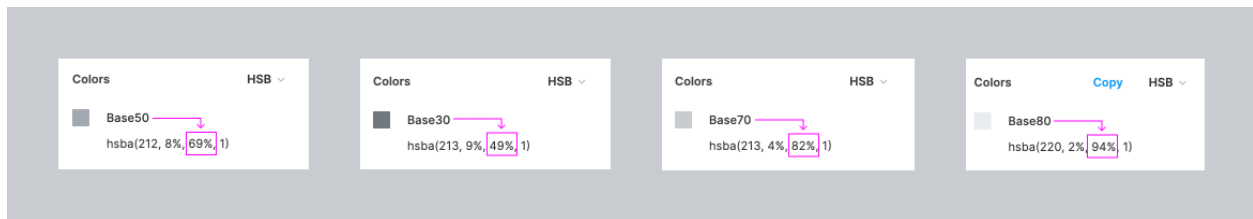
BACKGROUND COLORS

Layer 4: #d3d3d3
Layer 3: #eaecef
Layer 2: #fff
Layer 1: #f9f9fa

EXTRA OOUI COLOURS

#404244	OOUI/Hover	Hover icon
#202122 @51% opacity	OOUI/Disabled	Disabled state color when icon is with text=#202122, approx #8d8e8e in hex
#4477ff	Link hover	Progressive hover button background color
#ff4242	Destructive link hover	Destructive hover button background color
#54545d	Visited link	Visited link color

It was supposed that our current numbers were defined by the lightness of the color (HSL) but

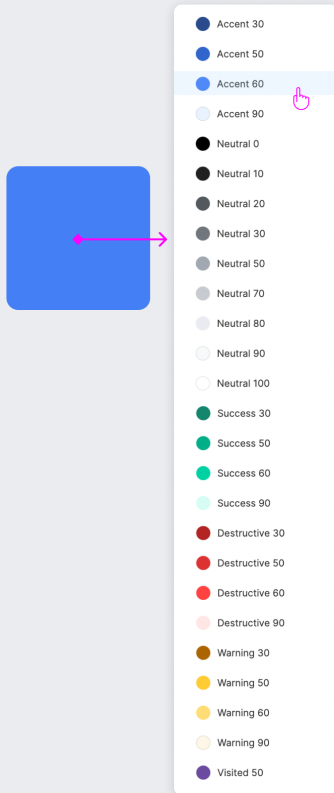


For this reason, we wanted the color palette nomenclature to have only one of these concepts applied. Therefore, I built these 2 palette proposals with each concept:

- **Option A:** color names ordered by color usage (Accent, Success, Destructive)
- **Option B:** color names ordered by simple color name (Blue, Green, Red)

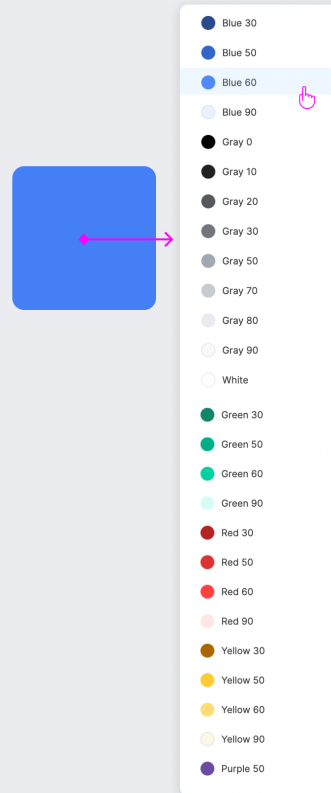
A

By color usage



B

By color name



During the Design Review on December 9th we presented quickly this Test A/B where the designers had to decide which of these 2 options were easier to understand for them and more coherent.



All designers in the Design Review agreed that **option B is more clear** and simply to use, and they said that option A was not clear enough because, for example, “Destructive” is not only used for delete, but for error and validation messages. So we decided to move forward with Option B.

Also, during this meeting we collected the following feedbacks about the gray scale organization: separate Black and White from the gray palette as they are not gray colors.

You can view all feedbacks written in [this doc](#) and all the [recording meeting here](#) (Bárbara).

2. Deciding color numerals

As we moved forward with colors organized by simple color names (Blue, Red, Green) the second step of the process was to organize the number of the projects.

Currently, our color palette numerals was organized with the lightest color the highest number, because this number pointed the brightness value ([HSL model](#)).

Our first thought when we viewed this order was that it was super confusing and talking with some designers, they felt the same. The number of the colors usually are ordered from lightest (0) to darkest (100) so the higher the number, the darker the color. The problem with our numbers is that we are doing the opposite (the highest number is our lightest color) and it creates confusion.

You can view here some Design System examples where the numbers are ordered from lightest (0) to darkest (100):

- [Material \(Android\)](#)
- [Carbono \(IBM\)](#)
- [Base \(Uber\)](#)

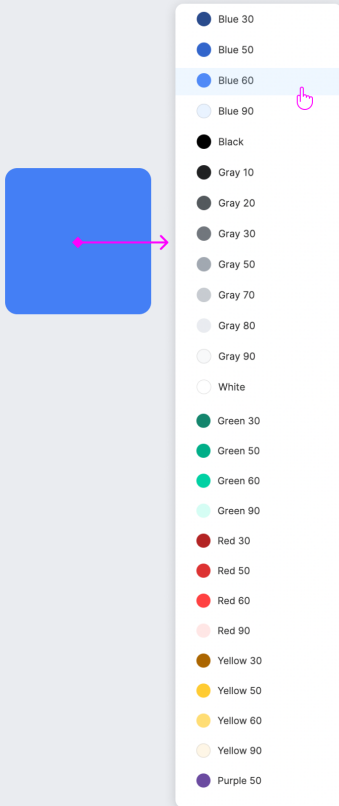
Test (1)

For this reason, we decided to make new versions of the colors nomenclature working on the numerals. We created this [new proposals](#) for study the color numerals:

- **Option A:** Lightest color corresponds to the highest number (current number order of our
- **Option B:** Darkest color corresponds to the highest number (0-900)

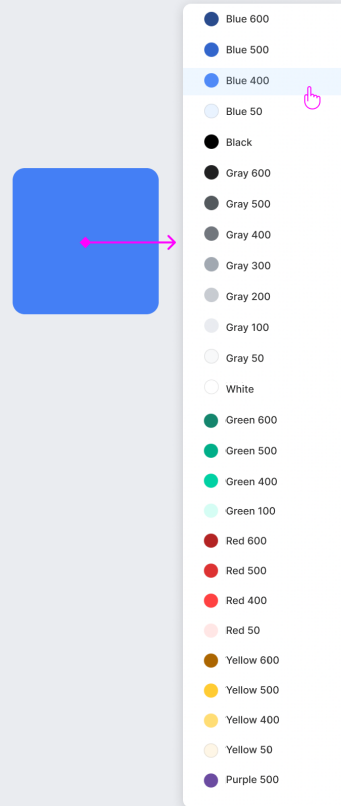
A

Lightest color - Highest number



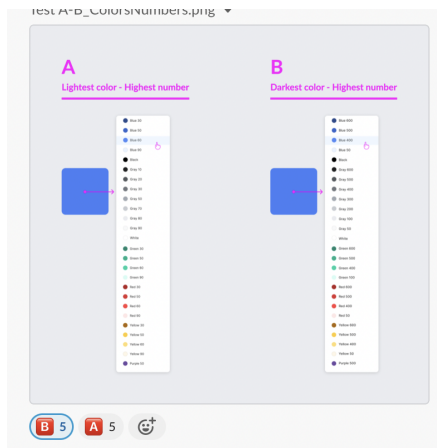
B

Darkest color - Highest number



WMF designers feedback

We tested this 2 options in a new quickly Test A/B in [#designprivate slack channel](#) and we received the following feedbacks:



- Rita Ho** 19 hours ago
Hi @bmartinez - awesome to see you make speedy progress on the colour nomenclature work. I did have a question though about when these changes will be made official and how it will be announced? Asking as I wonder if it could be held off until any addition or change of colours is done (possibly relating to the W3C colour contrast calculation changes) so that it is done in one announcement.
- Rita Ho** 19 hours ago
Also, I choose **A** mainly as remembering the existing colour palette that that this relates to Lightness of a particular colour per HSL model, which according to the Wikipedia article was developed to "more closely align with the way human vision perceives color-making attributes" (edited)
- Prateek Saxena** 18 hours ago
I am leaning towards **A** too. Not sure I completely understand the difference between the three digit and two digit numbers in **B** though
- Prateek Saxena** 18 hours ago
This was answered in the design review. Three digit numbers leave more space to add shades.
- Carolyn Li-Madeo** 18 hours ago
Is it possible to have space for shades while keeping with our current structure? Also I like the rationale for **A** but if it's hard for us to remember why we made the decision (it was for me!) then the naming might not be super obvious to users of the system.
- Carolyn Li-Madeo** 18 hours ago
All of this is to say, leaning slightly to B, but also curious if we can just change the numbers to be 50 500, 60 600, etc (eg. just add an extra 0 after each number to have some backwards consistency) Does this make sense?
- Robin Schoenbaechler** 18 hours ago
I choose **A** mainly because I'm used to it. Especially if the current system can be enhanced in a smart way "to have more space" for colors (+1 to Carolyn's question on that). I'm wondering though if too much space for colors is really healthy? Maybe reduced capacity pushes us to use colors more deliberately?
- Sneha Patel** 18 hours ago
I voted for **B** because logically it made more sense to go up the number as the colour got darker (meaning it has more colour in it). But I also like **A** because the two digit feels lighter to browse and for recall and so my preference would be to take the order of B but the two digit approach from A and I would think its fine if we have to add new shades in the future that are not round numbers.
- Sneha Patel** 17 hours ago
And agree with Robin on having reduced space will push us to use colours more deliberately.

It is no clear which option was better because people reacted with the same number of votes to both options. Some feedbacks were the following:

- I choose A mainly because I'm used to it.*
- I voted for B because logically it made more sense to go up the number as the color got darker. But I also like A because the two digit feels lighter to browse and for recall and so my preference would be to take the order of B but the two digit approach from A.*

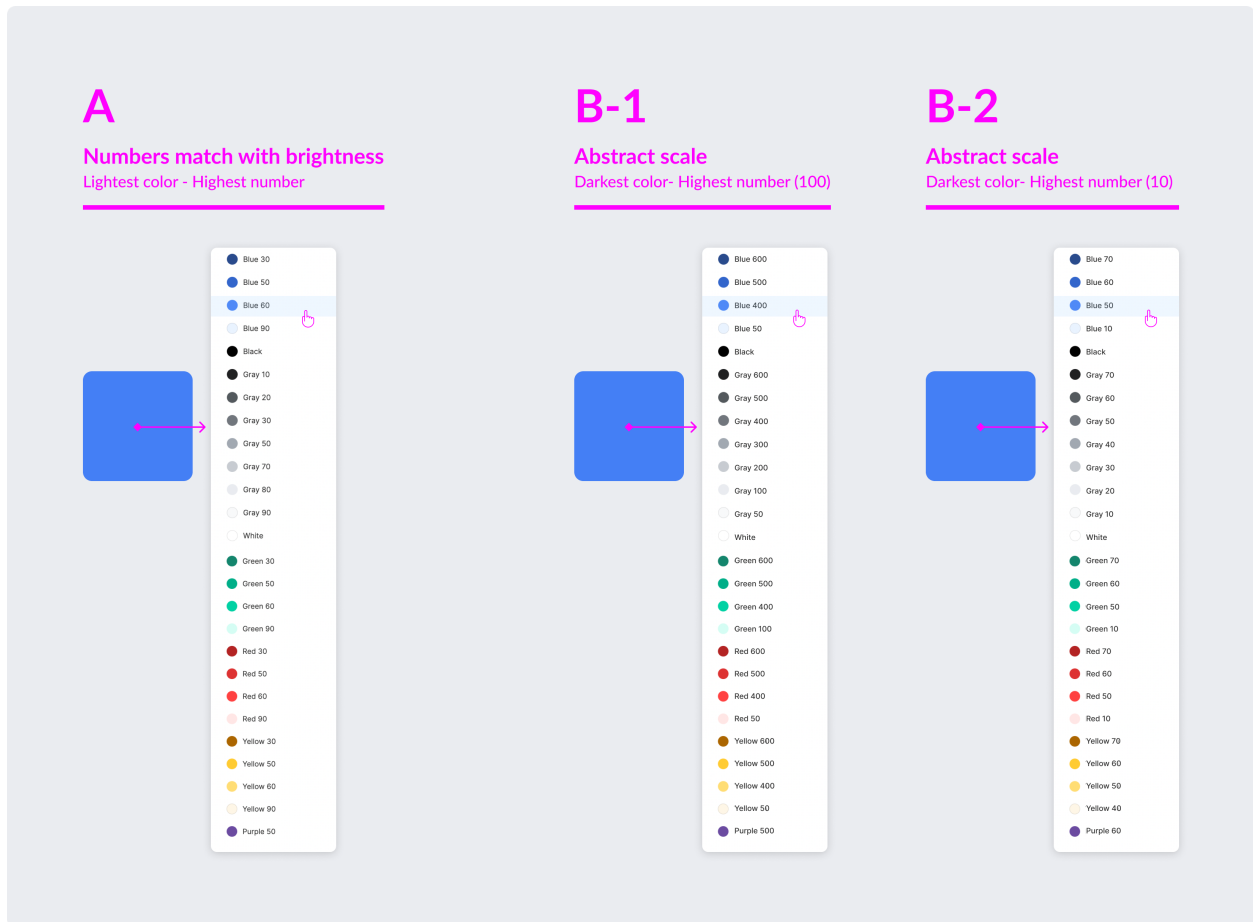
WMDE designers feedback

Feedback on numerical values of color palette. Both Elisha (German Wikipedia) and Erdi (Wikidata) from WMDE would rather go for what they consider the more intuitive approach, even if the number is not specifically tied to anything: the higher the number, the darker color. Elisha in particular mentioned:

- I had been confused many times when using the existing palette.*

Test (2)

As the first test results weren't enough clear, we decide to make a second test updating all the feedback collected from the first test. As many designers commented that the version with hundred numbers seemed complex, we decided to make a version with abstract scale (the darkest color the highest number) but using numbers from 10-90. So we tested the following options:



Designers were agree that B-2 option was much clear than B-1, and they commented that the order of the numbers (the darkest color the highest number) with only one 0 was much clear for them. They were agree with this new option that the new color scale could work for them.



You can read all the feedbacks collected during the *Design Practice & Systems Meetup* with this proposal in [this doc](#).



So we decided to move forward with the **B-2 option**. And with this decision, color nomenclature was decided: simple names (Blue, Green, Red) and numerals with darkest-higher scale.