

The Effects of Light

A few definitions and descriptions for this broad topic.

- Value refers to the various levels of light and dark in your painting.
- When sunlight illuminates an object, that object will have a light side and a shadow side.
- On a sunny day there is one dominate light source, the sun, and a secondary light source, the blue sky or ambient light.
- Look for your lightest and darkest notes in the image you want to paint and make that note on your canvas. All other values in the scene will have to fall between these two.
- As Objects recede into the distance, they become lighter and less saturated in color.
 - Look at the trees on your next walk or drive and notice the differences in brilliance of color and value from those close, middle ground, and distance.
- Objects close up have sharper edges and value contrast than those in the distance. Atmosphere gets in between near ground and background, and it cools distant shapes.

There are six possible **sources of light in a painting**.

1. On a sunny day there is one dominate light source, the sun. Where the **sunlight** strikes a form, warm color is indicated.
2. Secondary light source, the blue sky or **ambient light**, which will produce cool colors as the object turns away from the sun.
3. The third source of light is **overcast light**. Overcast light, happens when we experience an overcast or cloudy day. Because the light source is now coming from the overcast sky, through layers of clouds or fog, the light source creates a cool temperature shift in the objects it illuminates.
4. The fourth source of light; **reflective light**. Reflective light is light which has bounced off one object onto another. The warmth or coolness depends on the color of the object reflecting the light. Reflections off of water tend to reduce the value range, dulling the image as lights reflect grayer and darks reflect lighter.
5. The fifth source of light is **moonlight**. Moonlight changes in the course of each night. A full moonrise just after sunset will be warm, showing the sun reflection through the atmosphere. But by midnight, the moon overhead shines bright and cool white-blue.
6. The sixth source of light is **artificial light**. If painting a nocturn (nighttime painting) look carefully at sources to determine if they are light or cool.

We can better comprehend the science of light, by understanding the opposing properties of light. The opposite of light is dark, sunlight equals light and shadow equals dark.