Quick guide: find your undertone in 8 steps

MAISON BEAUTY CO

Before you start: your undertone has nothing to do with how light or deep your skin is. Any skin tone can be cool, cool neutral, warm neutral, warm or olive.

The steps

1. **Find good light.** Stand next to a window, in indirect daylight with no direct sun. Turn off the lamps: mixed light casts a different color on each side of your face.
2. **Start with clean skin.** No foundation, blush or bronzer for at least half an hour beforehand. Cover your hair and clothes with a white or gray towel.
3. **Get these fabrics: 6 pairs, plus a third, neutral fabric for red.** T-shirts, scarves or plain matte fabric scraps all work, about 16 in (40 cm) across, enough to cover you from chin to shoulders. Look for the fabric closest to each swatch. The same color name looks different in every store, so go by the image, not the name.



Red, with three fabrics. The one that gets the strongest reaction: a bluish red, a balanced (neutral) red and an orange red.
Green. A third vote from a different color family.
Muted. If you're neutral, it shows which way you lean. It also helps spot olive.

Pink. Confirms what you saw with red, in a lighter shade.
White. Helps tell cool neutral from warm neutral.
Metallics. Only to confirm at the end; they don't decide. Lamé fabric or metallic gift wrap works.

4. **Test pairs 1 to 5, one at a time.** Hold the cool fabric under your chin for 2 or 3 seconds, switch to the warm one and alternate three times. For red, alternate all three fabrics: hibiscus, strawberry and poppy. Go with your first impression: the eye gets used to a color within seconds.
5. **Look at your skin, not the fabric.** Watch for this:
    - **What we're looking for:** skin looks more even and radiant, with a little healthy color in the cheeks and lips. Redness, spots and under-eye circles soften, the whites of the eyes look clearer and the jawline looks defined. You see your face first and the fabric second.
    - **Temperature signs:** if you look **gray or ashen**, that fabric is too cool for you. If you look **yellowish, orange or "muddy"**, it's too warm. These are clues, not rules: gray can also show up with a fabric that is very light, very dark or very muted.
    - **Signs it isn't your color, with no fixed direction:** redness or spots that stand out, darker under-eye circles, deeper shadows around the nose and mouth, more visible lines or texture, colorless lips, a greenish cast or "washed-out" skin. They only tell you that color isn't right, not which way to go.

- **Note:** if you see the fabric before your face, the color is too intense for you. If you look flat and tired, it's too muted. Neither one is about temperature.

6. **Write down which fabric wins in each pair and read your result:**

If...	Your likely undertone
Hibiscus red beats **strawberry red** and **poppy red**. **Bubblegum pink** and **pine green** win too, and **optic white** flatters you more than **ivory white**	Cool
Strawberry red flatters you more than hibiscus and poppy. In pair 5, **mauve** wins and, in the white pair, **optic white** looks as good as or better than ivory. **Silver** confirms it	Cool neutral
Strawberry red flatters you more than hibiscus and poppy. In pair 5, **soft terracotta** wins and, in the white pair, **ivory** looks as good as or better than optic white. **Gold** confirms it	Warm neutral
Poppy red beats **strawberry red** and **hibiscus red**. **Coral pink** and **moss green** win too, and **ivory white** flatters you more than **optic white**	Warm

Are you also olive? Olive isn't a fifth result: it's a gray-green veil that can sit on top of any of the four. Add it to your result (for example, "warm neutral olive") if you notice this: **poppy red** and **coral pink** make you look orange, greenish or sickly, **hibiscus red** and **bubblegum pink** make you look gray, and **mauve** or **soft terracotta** flatter you more than those bright reds and pinks.

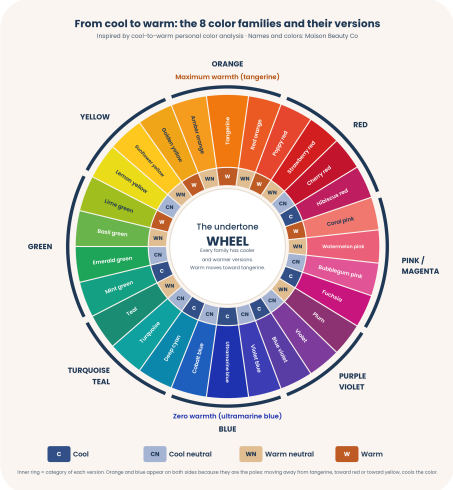
If the pairs contradict each other, repeat the test another day in different light. If it still comes out the same, go by the red pair.

7. **Get a second opinion or take photos.** Take a photo with each fabric, in the same spot, in the same light and with no filters, and compare them side by side. You can also ask someone to choose without telling them what you're looking for.

8. **Confirm with foundation.** Swatch three stripes on your jawline: one cool, one neutral and one warm foundation in your depth. Wait a few minutes, because some foundations change color as they dry, and check them in daylight. The one that disappears into your skin confirms your undertone.

Common mistakes

- **The vein test.** Veins look blue or green because of how skin scatters light, not because of your undertone. It can't settle the question.
- **"I burn in the sun, so I must be cool."** That measures how your skin reacts to the sun (your skin phototype), not your undertone.
- **"My skin is deep, so I must be warm"** or **"my skin is fair, so I must be cool."** Depth and undertone are two different things.
- **Comparing fabrics from different families** or very different lightness. Always compare the two fabrics in the same pair.
- **Testing under bathroom or store lighting.** Artificial light is misleading. Use window light.
- **Starting with gold and silver.** Many neutral people look good in both. Use them only to confirm.
- **Relying only on the letter on the foundation.** Brands don't use the same codes. At MAC, for example, W is pink and C is golden, the opposite of most brands.



The undertone wheel: every color family has cool and warm versions. The fabric pairs come from here.

The categories, the fabrics and the skin signs are professional color analysis convention, not study results. The third, neutral fabric follows the method of the 12-season systems. The rule of repeating the test and going by the red pair is our own criterion. Swatch colors are for reference.