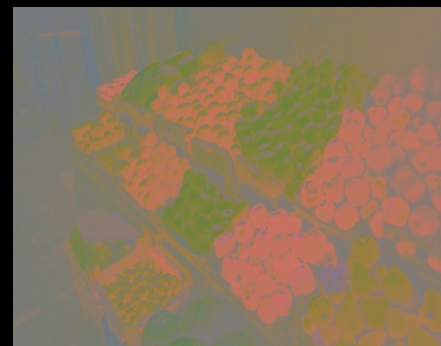
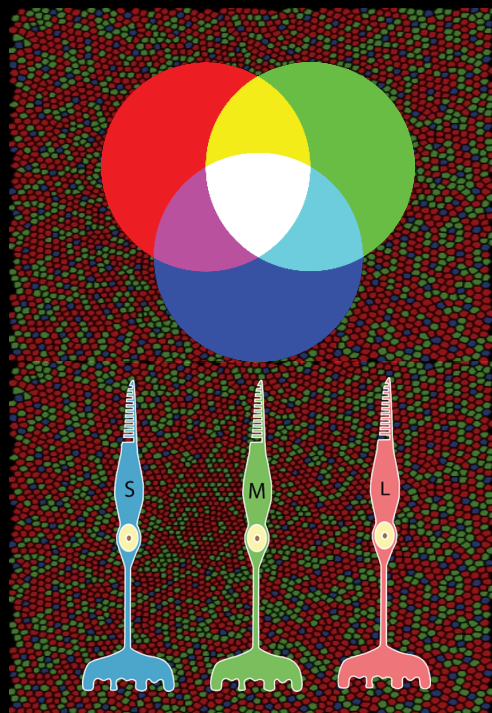


# Human colour vision processing from eye to brain

Andrew Stockman

Image Processing Laboratory  
VIPLab Seminar



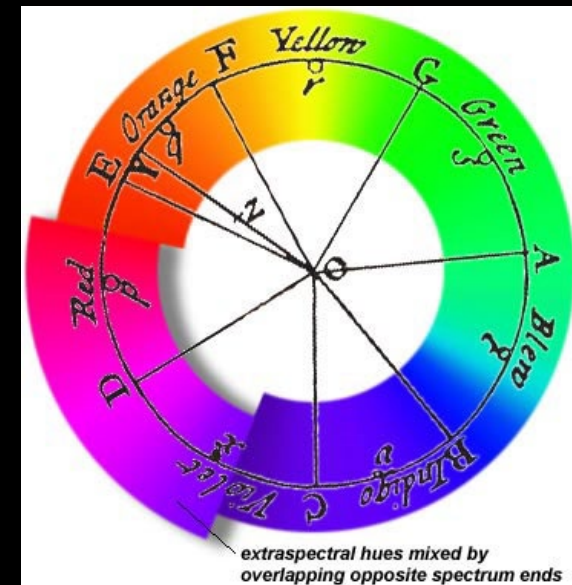
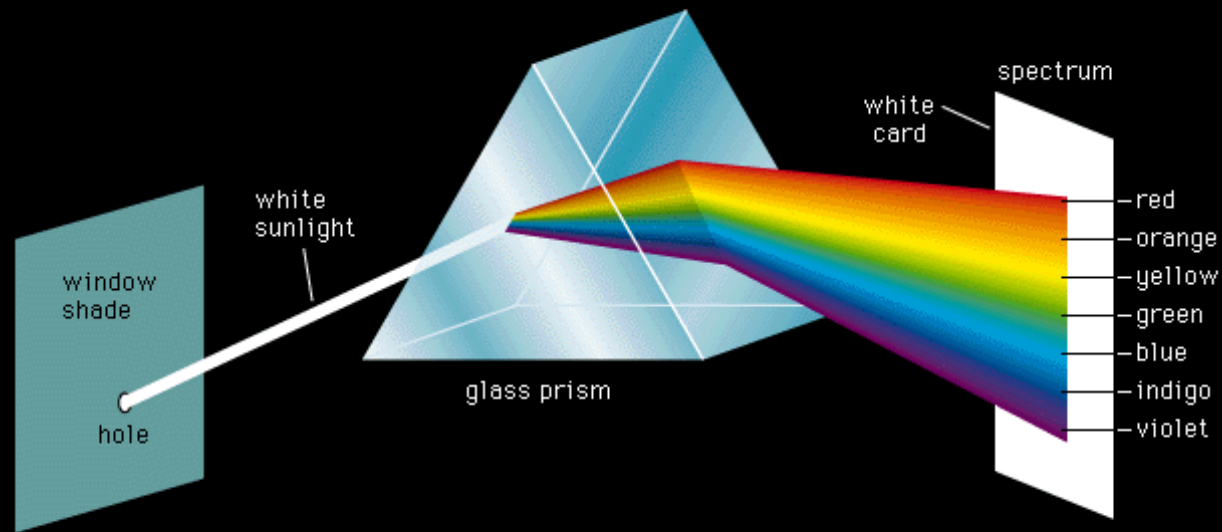
# OUTLINE

- ▶ Basics of colour vision
- ▶ Trichromacy and Univariance
- ▶ Encoding colour
- ▶ Cone spectral sensitivities
- ▶ Postreceptoral chromatic and achromatic vision
- ▶ Colour after-effects
- ▶ Colour constancy
- ▶ Colour contrast and assimilation
- ▶ Colour and cognition
- ▶ Colour vision deficiencies

# BASICS OF COLOUR VISION

# Light

400 - 700 nm is important for vision



©1994 Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc.



How dependent are we  
on colour?

No colour...



Colour...

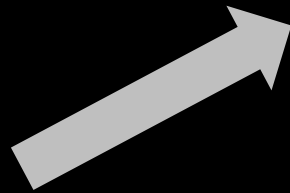


Colour is important because it helps us to discriminate objects from their surroundings.



But just how important  
is colour?

Split the image into...



ACHROMATIC COMPONENTS



CHROMATIC COMPONENTS



# CHROMATIC COMPONENTS



*By itself* chromatic information provides relatively limited information...

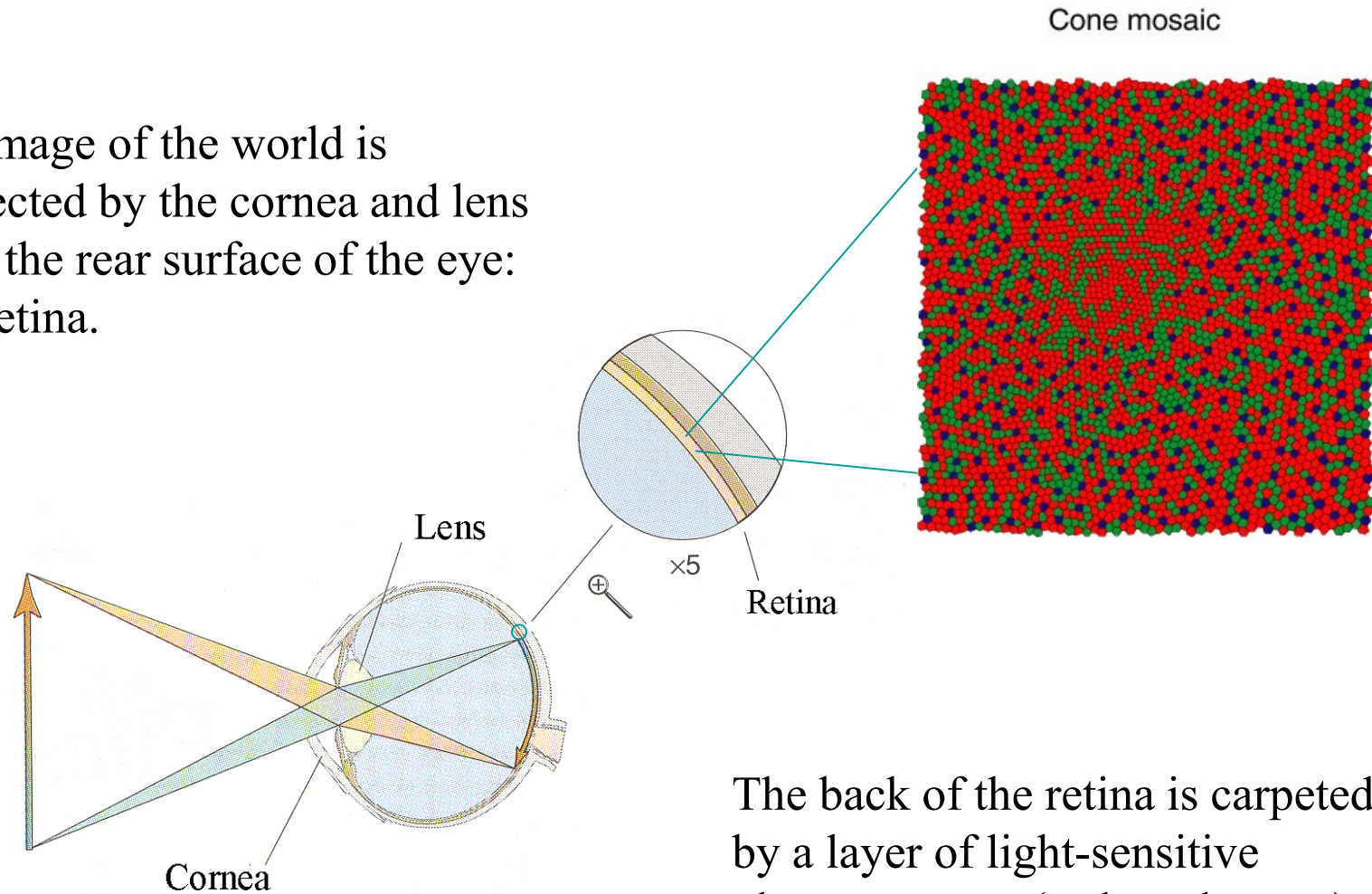
# ACHROMATIC COMPONENTS



Achromatic information important for fine detail ...

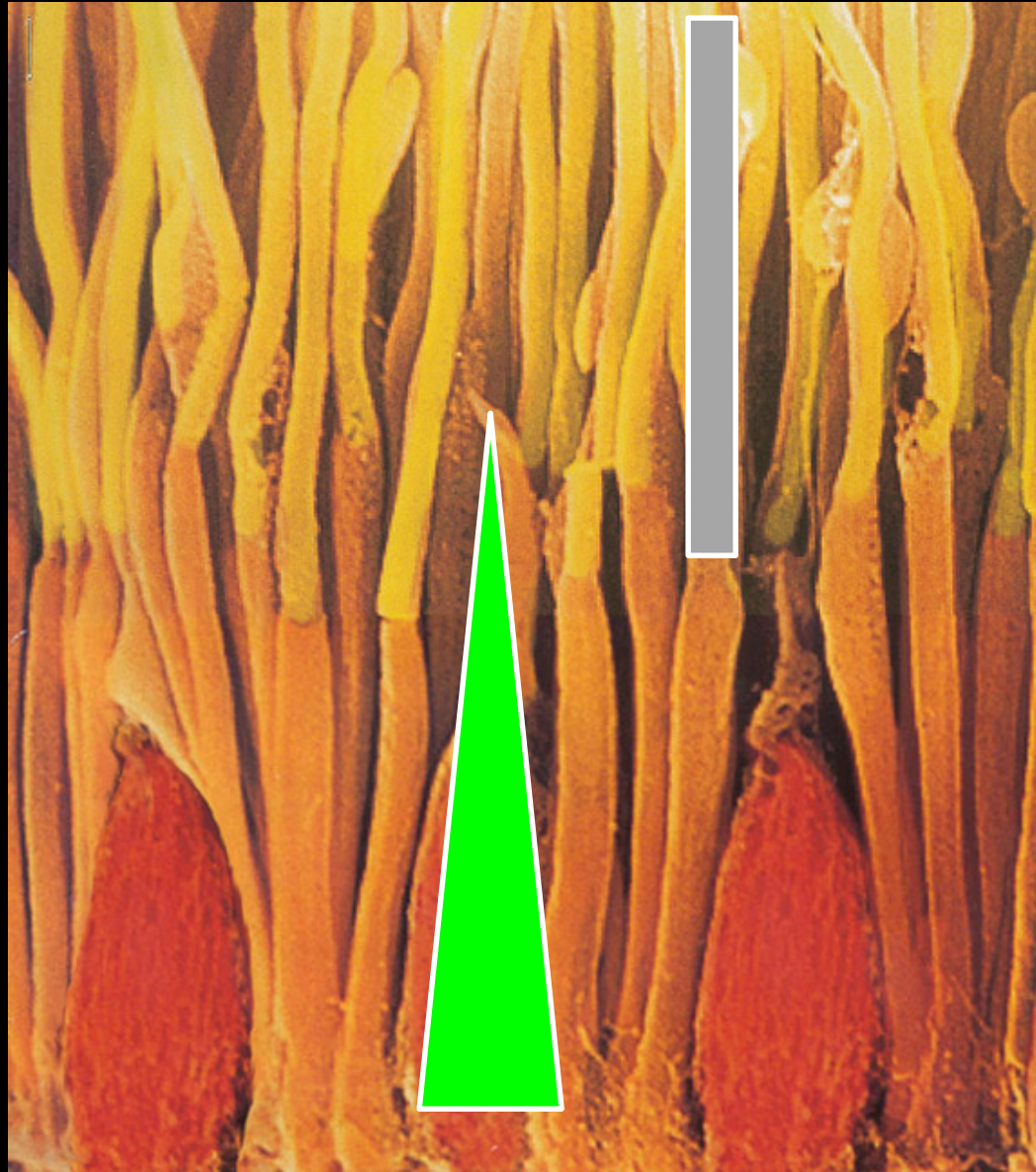
# How do we see colours?

An image of the world is projected by the cornea and lens onto the rear surface of the eye: the retina.



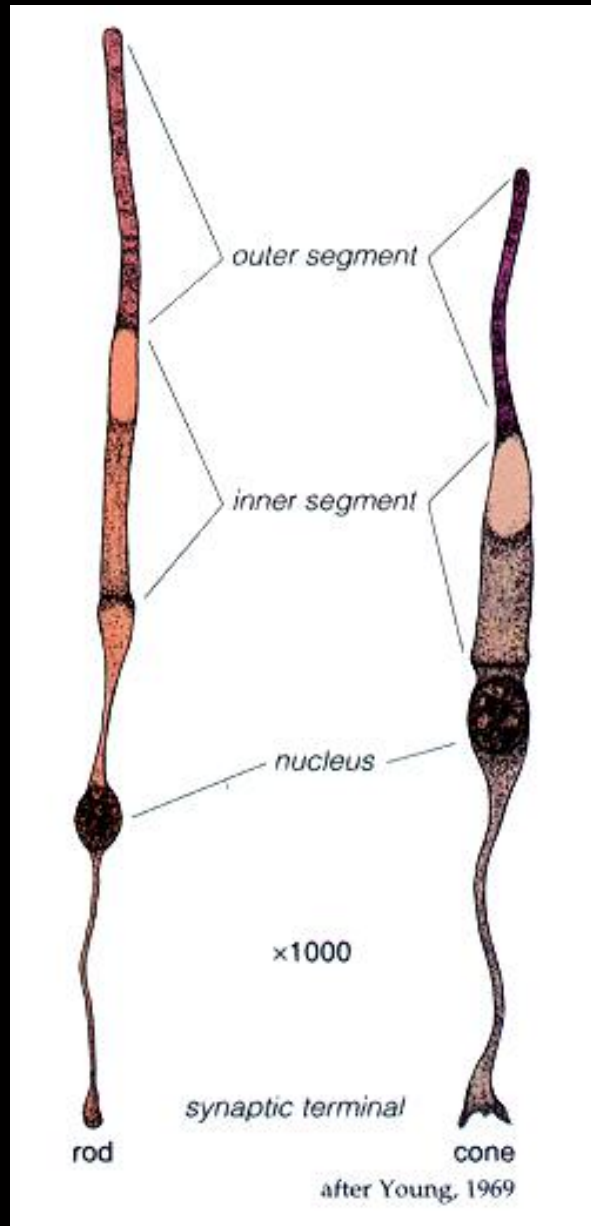
The back of the retina is carpeted by a layer of light-sensitive photoreceptors (rods and cones).

# Rods and cones



*Fig1b. Scanning electron micrograph of the rods and cones of the primate retina. Image adapted from one by Ralph C. Eagle/Photo Researchers, Inc.*

# Human photoreceptors



## Rods

- Achromatic night vision
- 1 type



Rod

## Cones

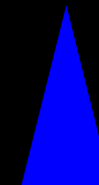
- Daytime, achromatic *and* chromatic vision
- 3 types



Long-wavelength-sensitive (L) or "red" cone



Middle-wavelength-sensitive (M) or "green" cone

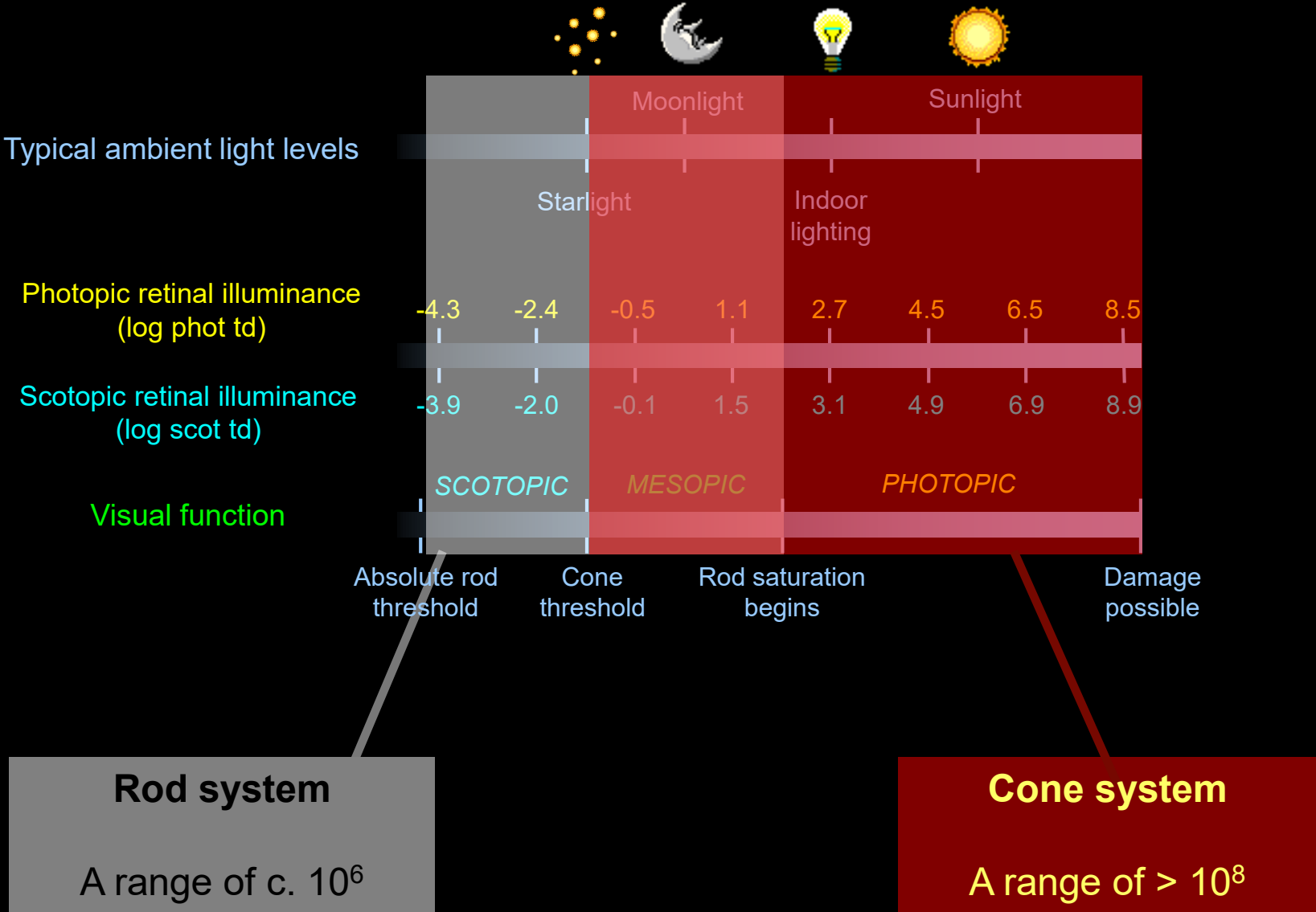


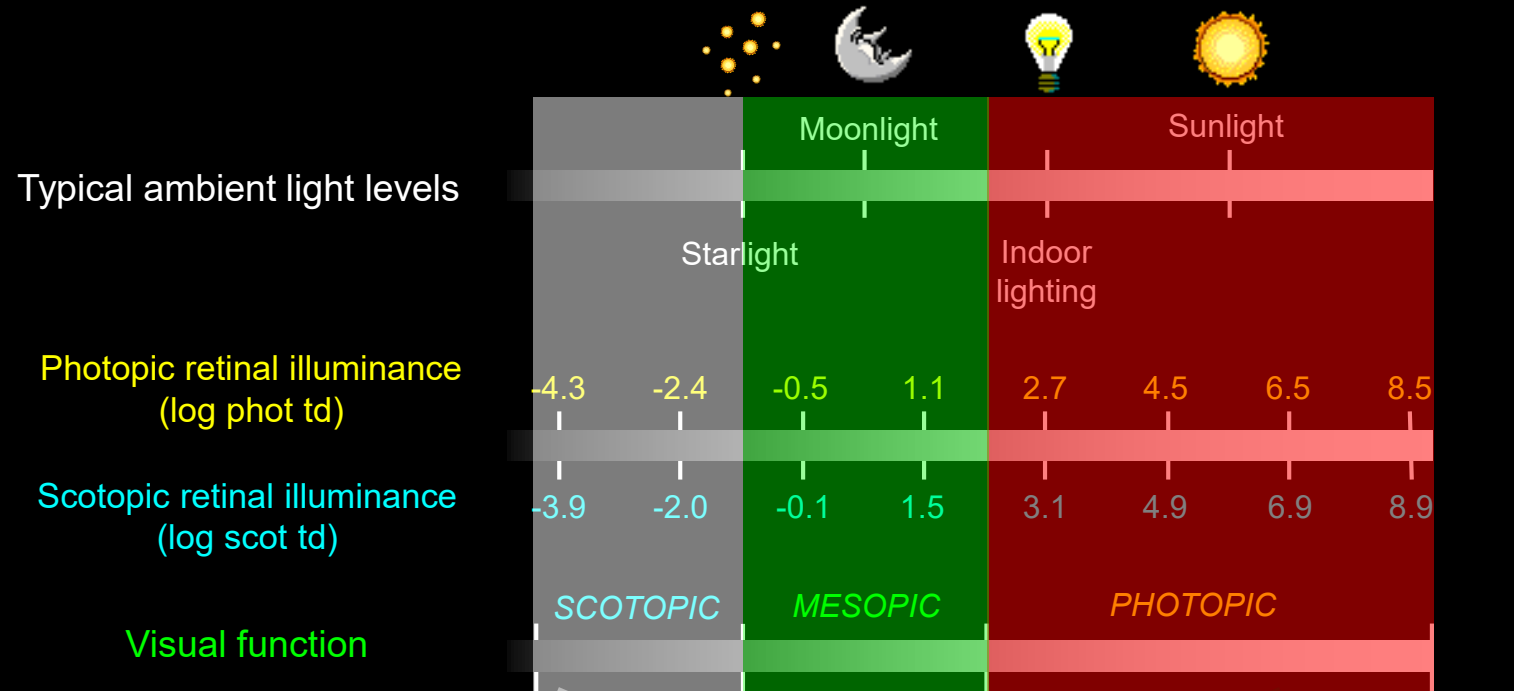
Short-wavelength-sensitive (S) or "blue" cone

Why do we have rods and cones?



# Rod and cone systems are optimized for different light levels





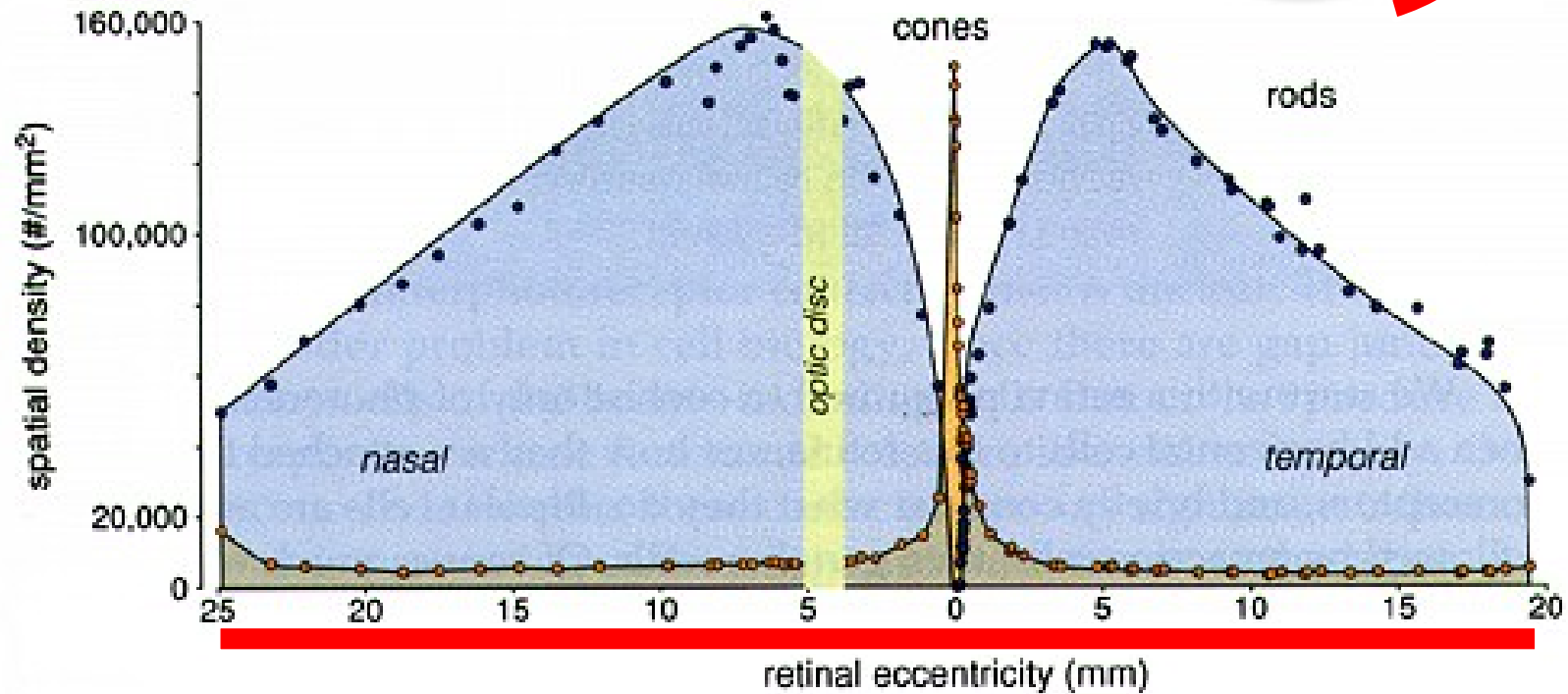
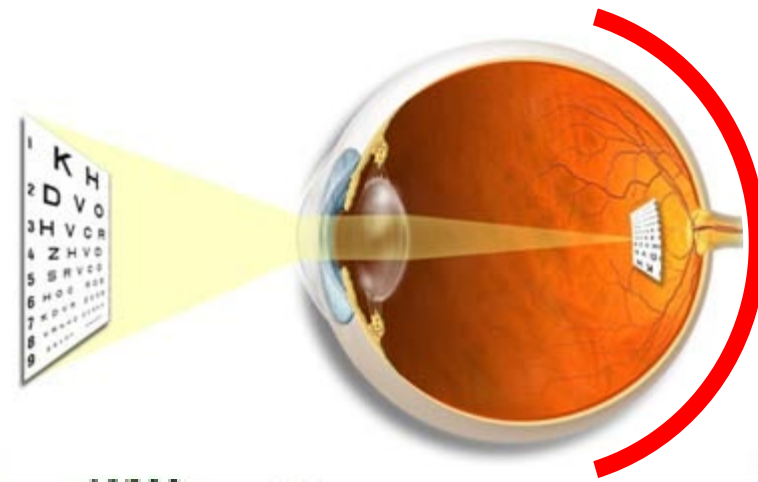
Absolute rod threshold      Cone threshold      Rod saturation begins      Damage possible

**Scotopic levels**  
 (below cone threshold)  
 where rod vision functions alone.  
 A range of c.  $10^3$

**Mesopic levels**  
 where rod and cone vision function together.  
 A range of c.  $10^3$

**Photopic levels**  
 (above rod saturation)  
 where cone vision functions alone.  
 A range of  $> 10^6$

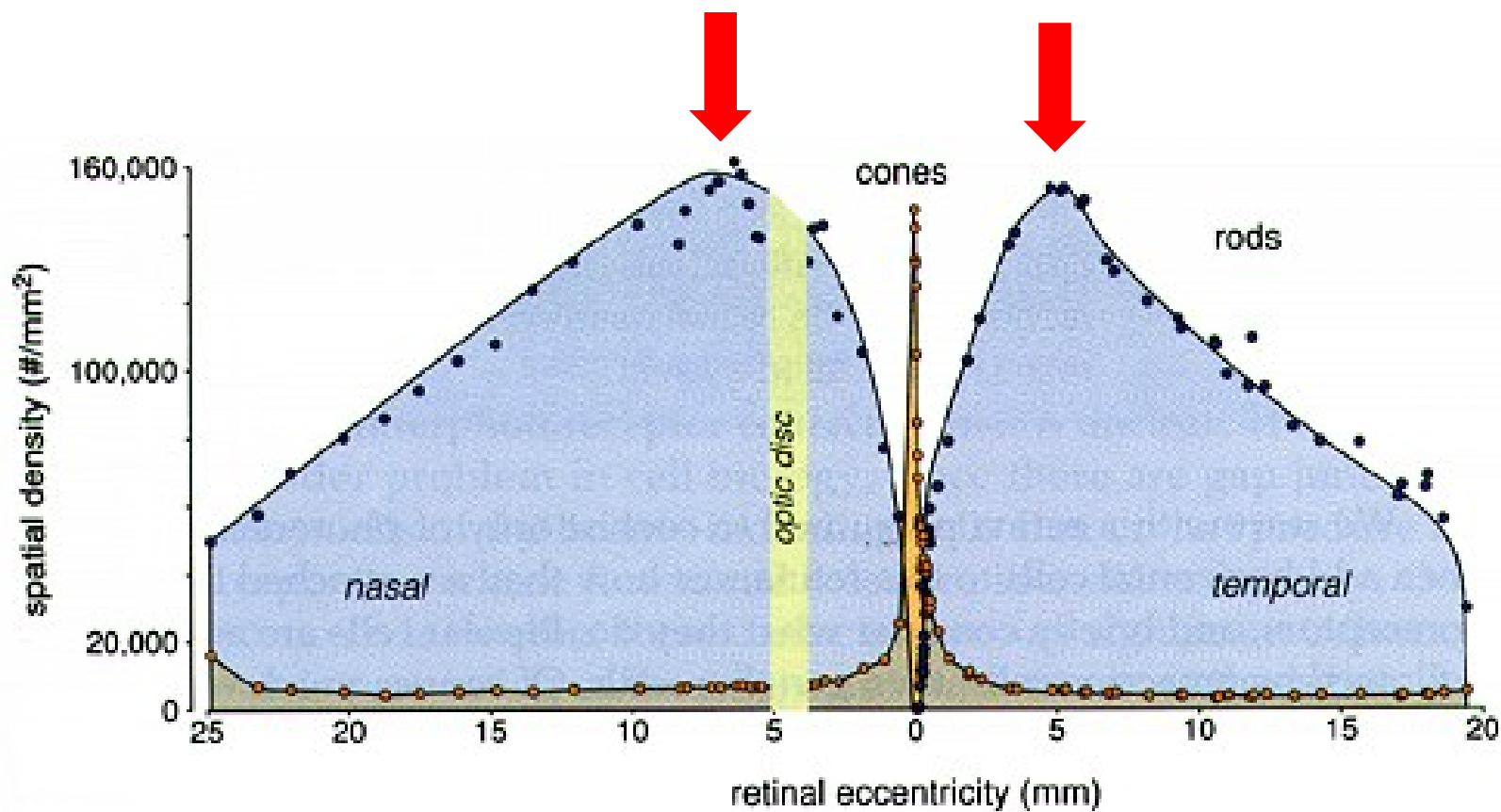
# Rod and cone distribution



after Österberg, 1935; as modified by Rodieck, 1988

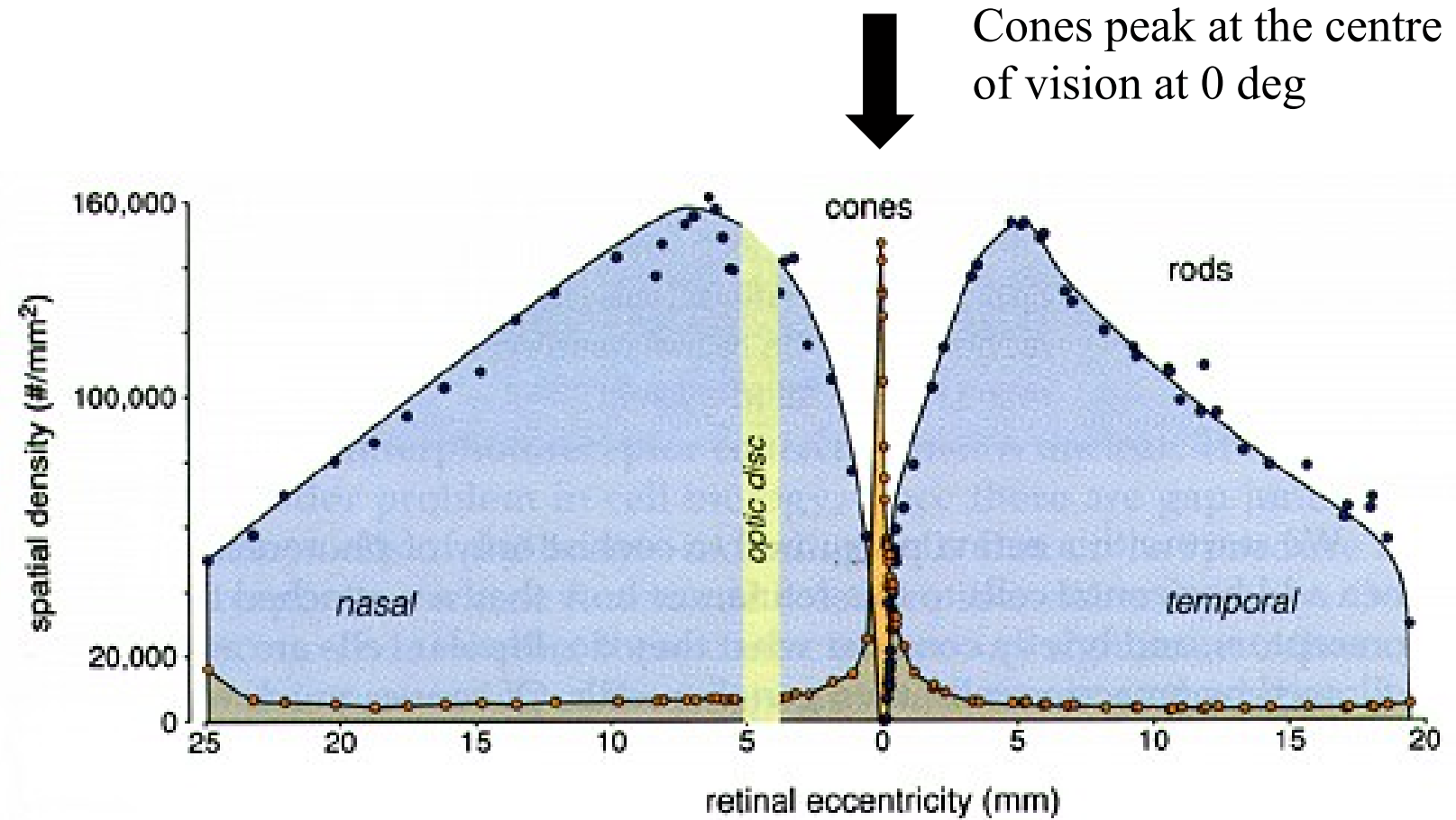
0.3 mm of eccentricity is about 1 deg of visual angle

Rod density peaks at about  
20 deg eccentricity



after Østerberg, 1935; as modified by Rodieck, 1988

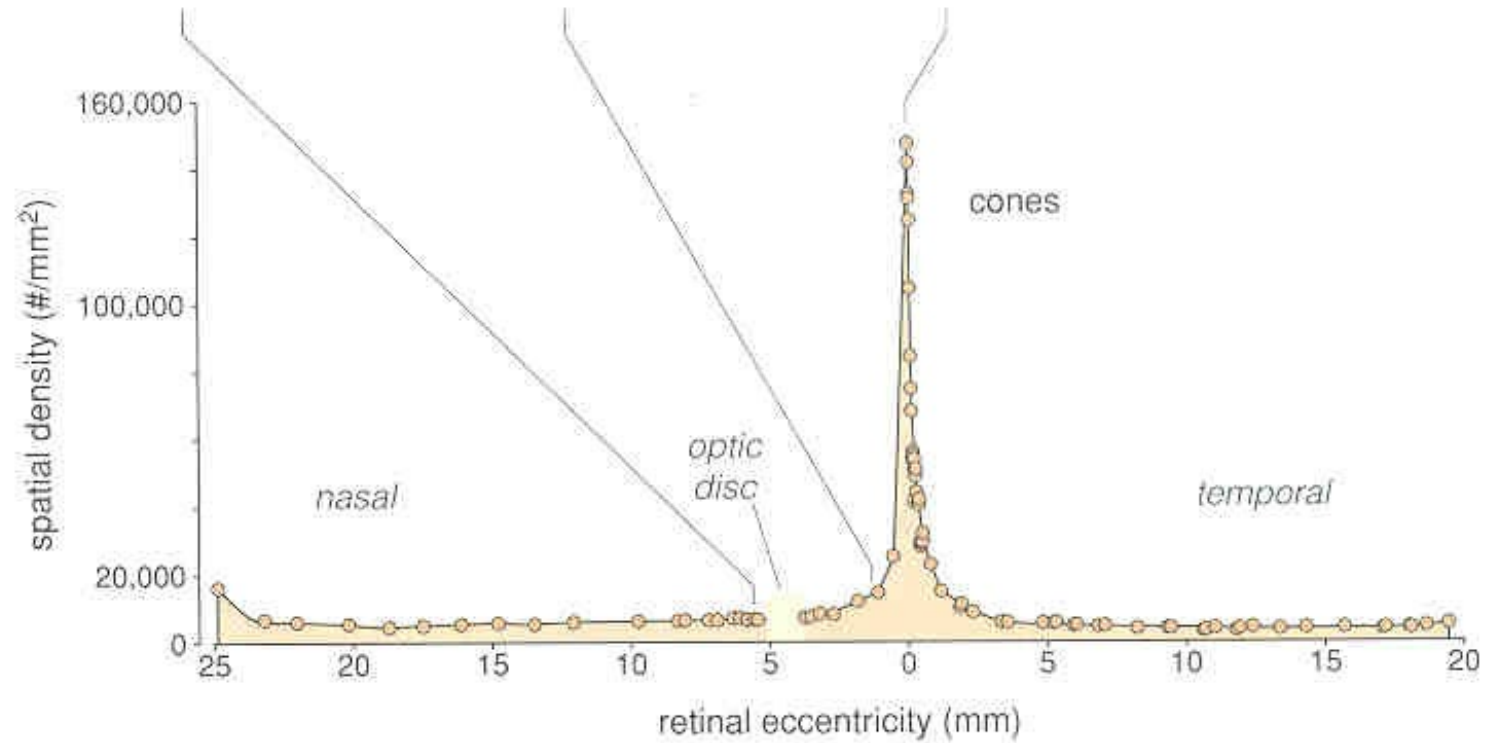
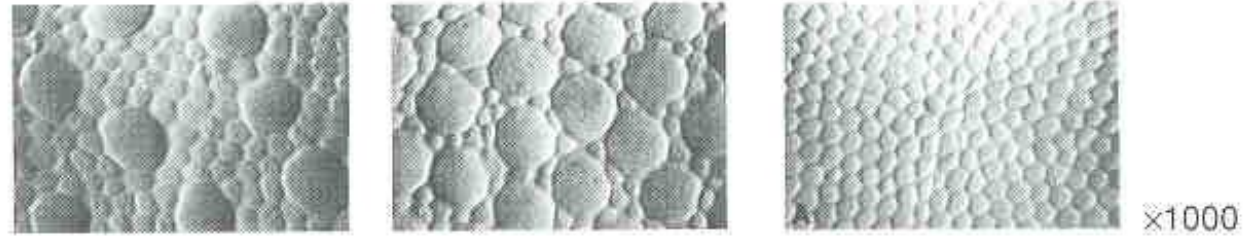
At night, you have to look  
away from things to see  
them in more detail



after Østerberg, 1935; as modified by Rodieck, 1988

During the day, you have to look at things directly to see them in detail

## Cone distribution and photoreceptor mosaics



after Østerberg, 1935; as modified by Rodieck 1988;  
micrographs from Curcio et al., 1990

Original photograph



## The human visual system is a foveating system

Simulation of what we see when  
we fixate with cone vision.



Are the colours that we see...

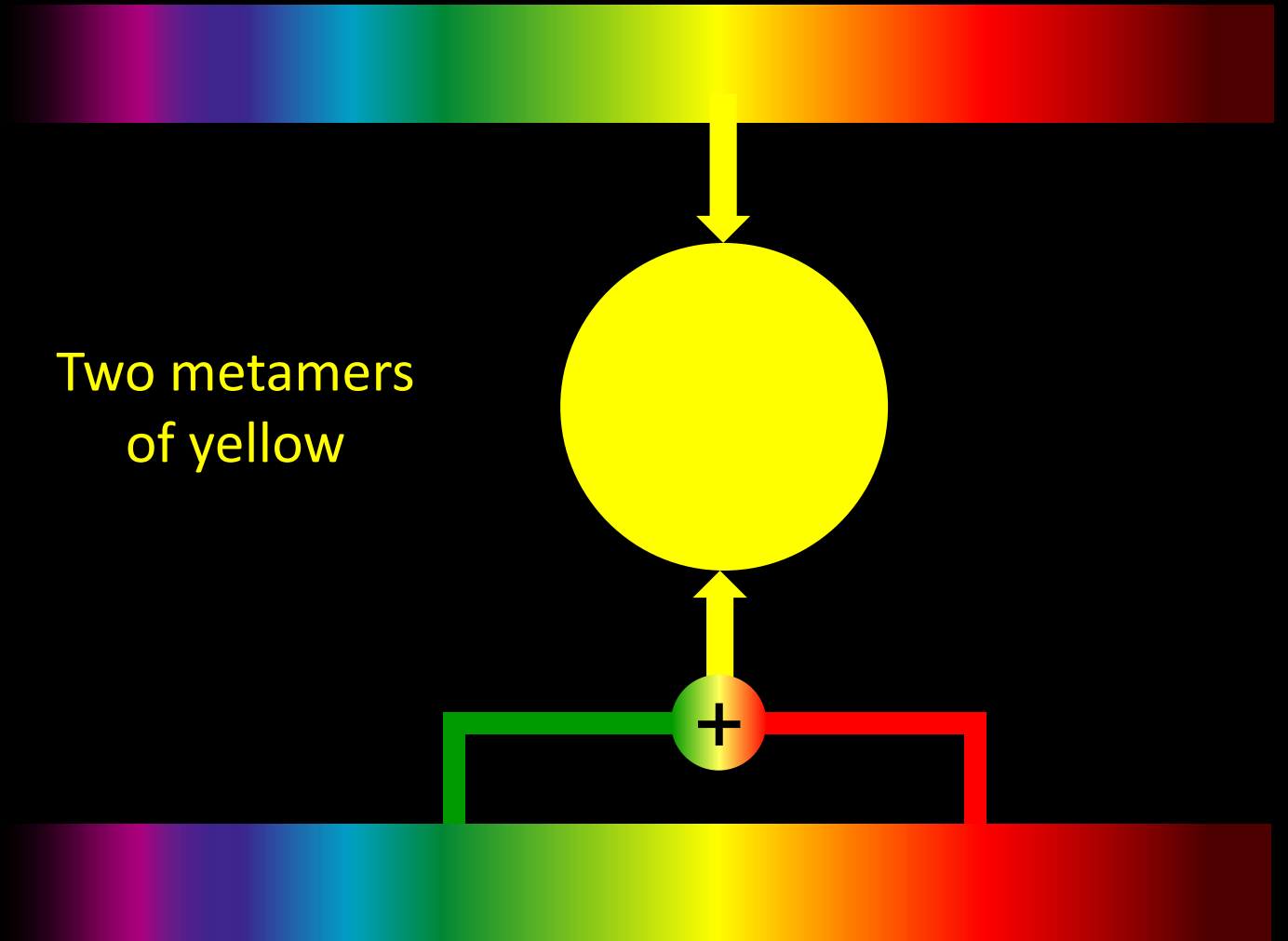


a property mainly of physics or biology?



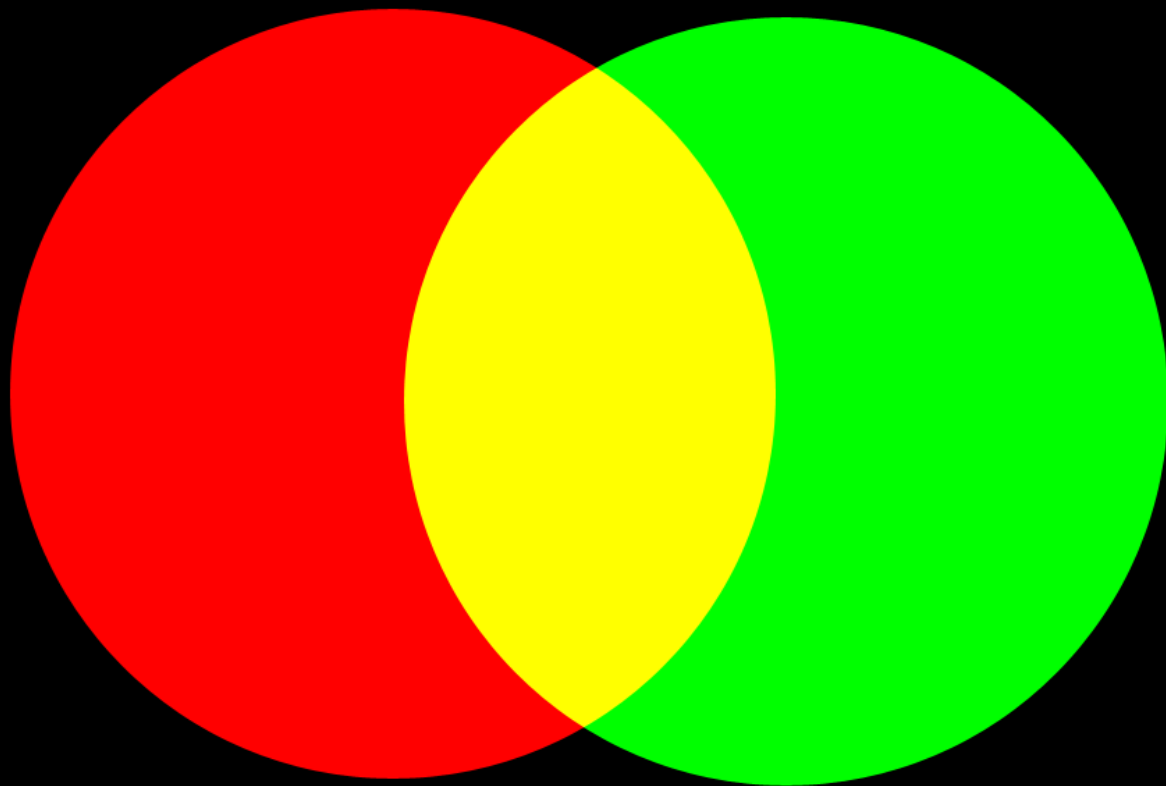
Colour isn't just  
about physics

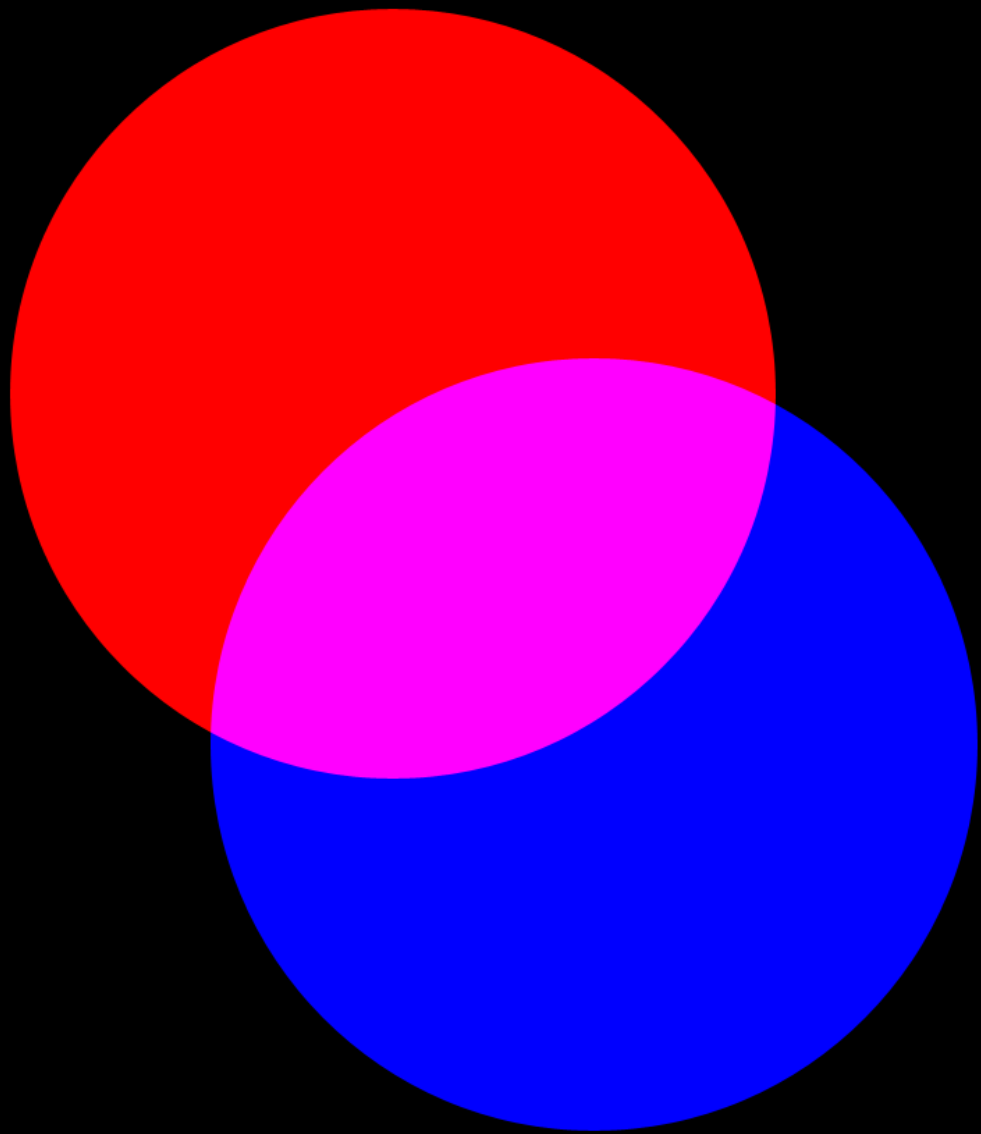
For example:

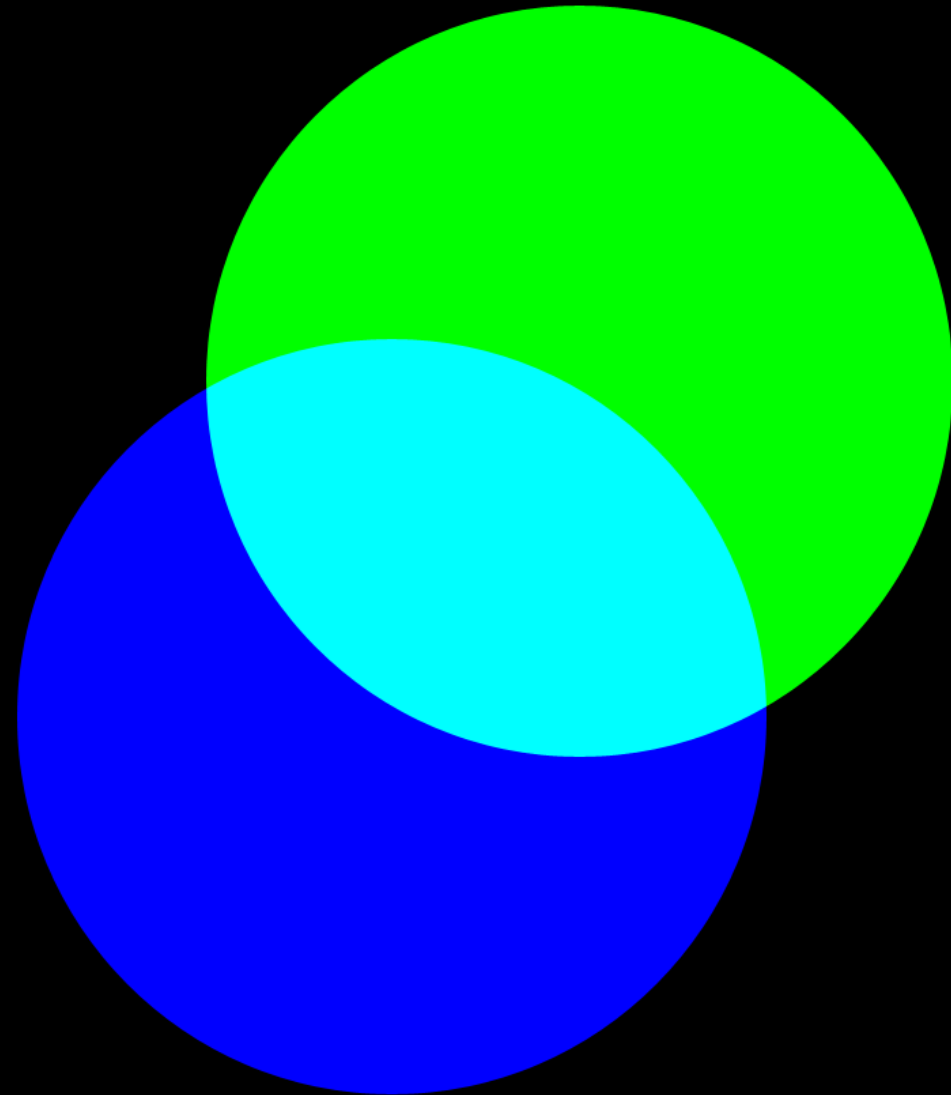


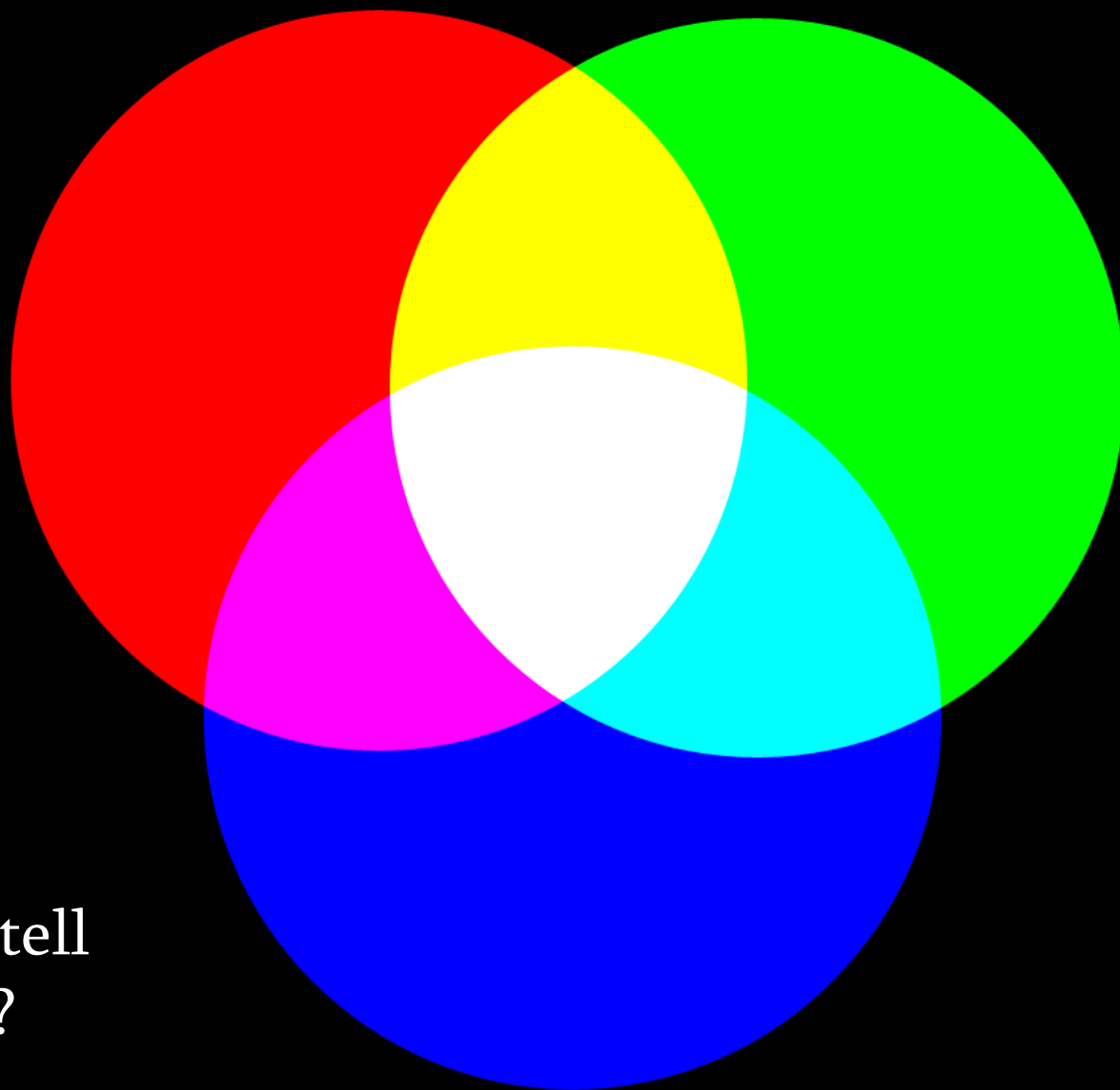
though physically very different, can appear identical.

There are many other such  
metamers or matches...

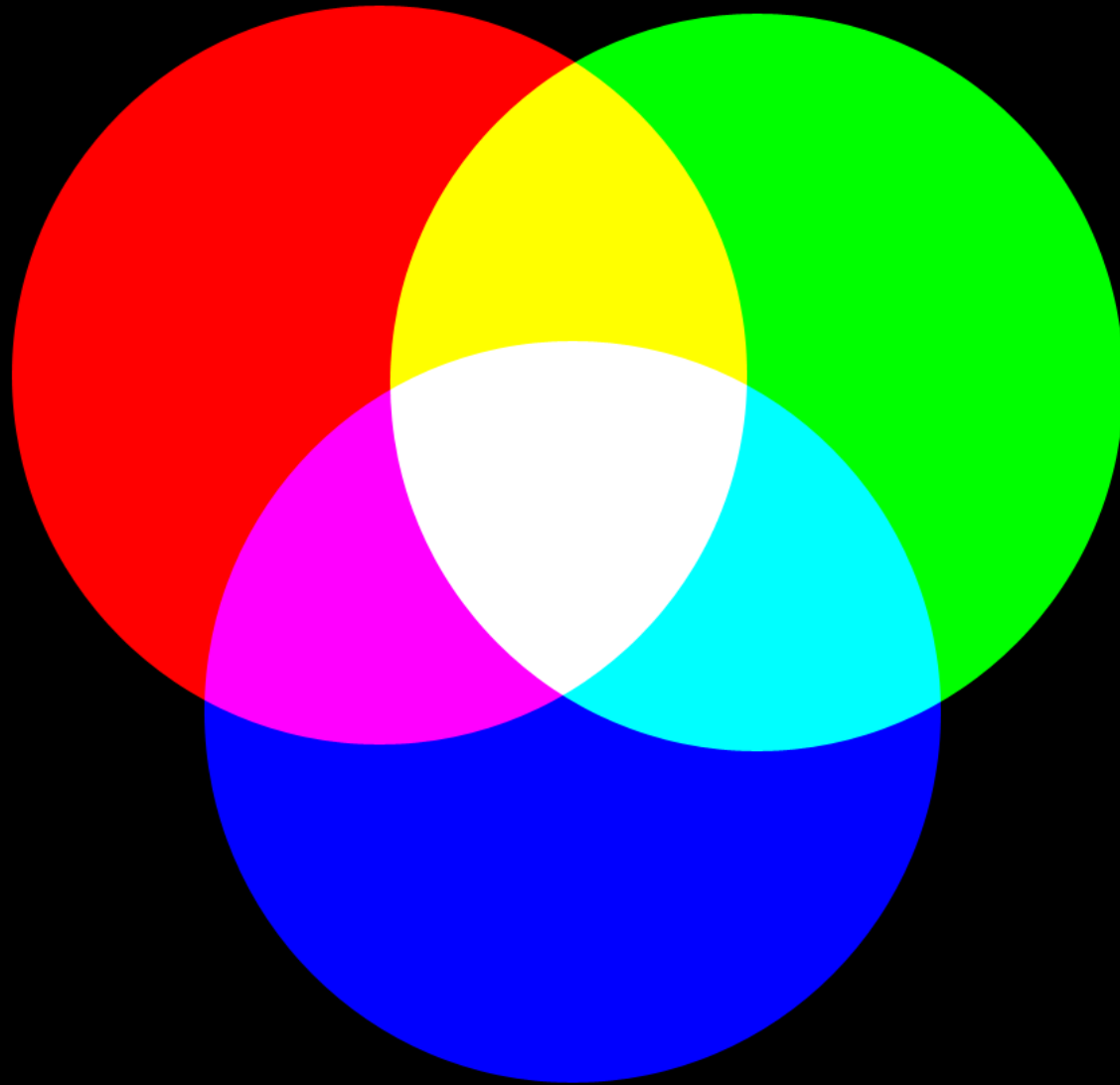




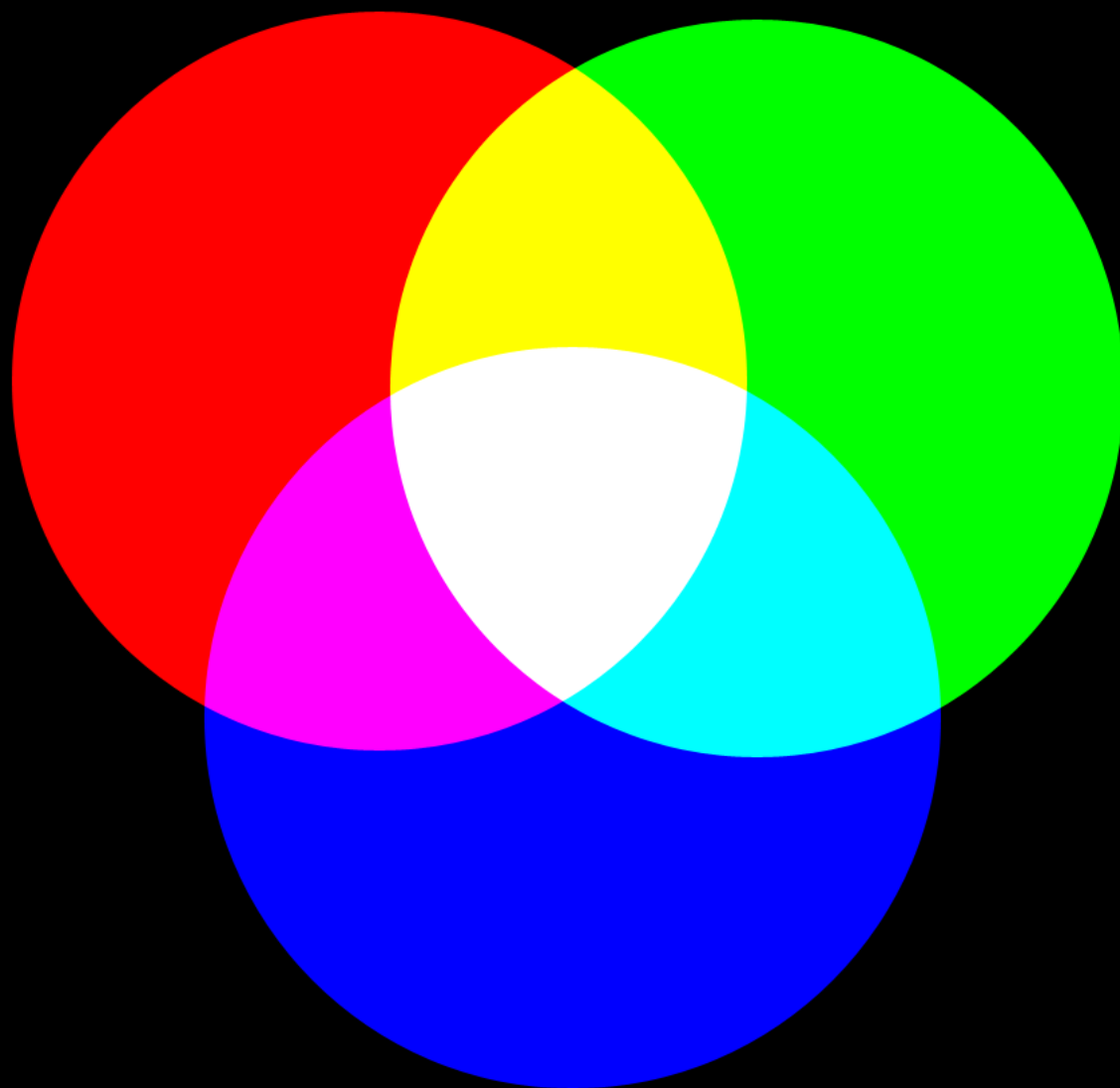




What can colour mixing tell  
us about colour vision?



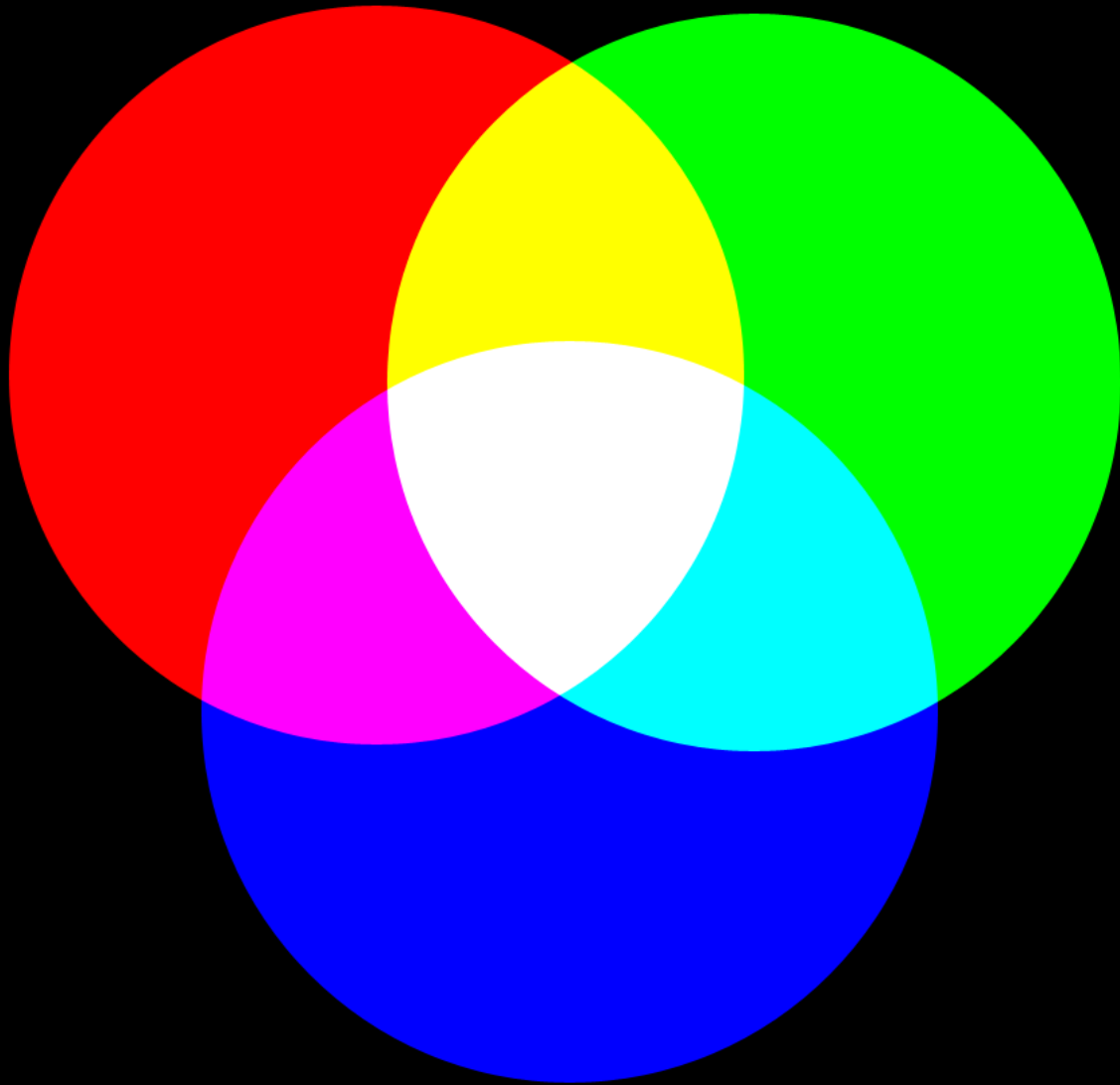
Before we knew about the underlying biology, additive colour mixing done in the 19<sup>th</sup> century revealed that colour vision was...



TRICHROMATIC



# TRICHROMACY AND UNIVARIANCE



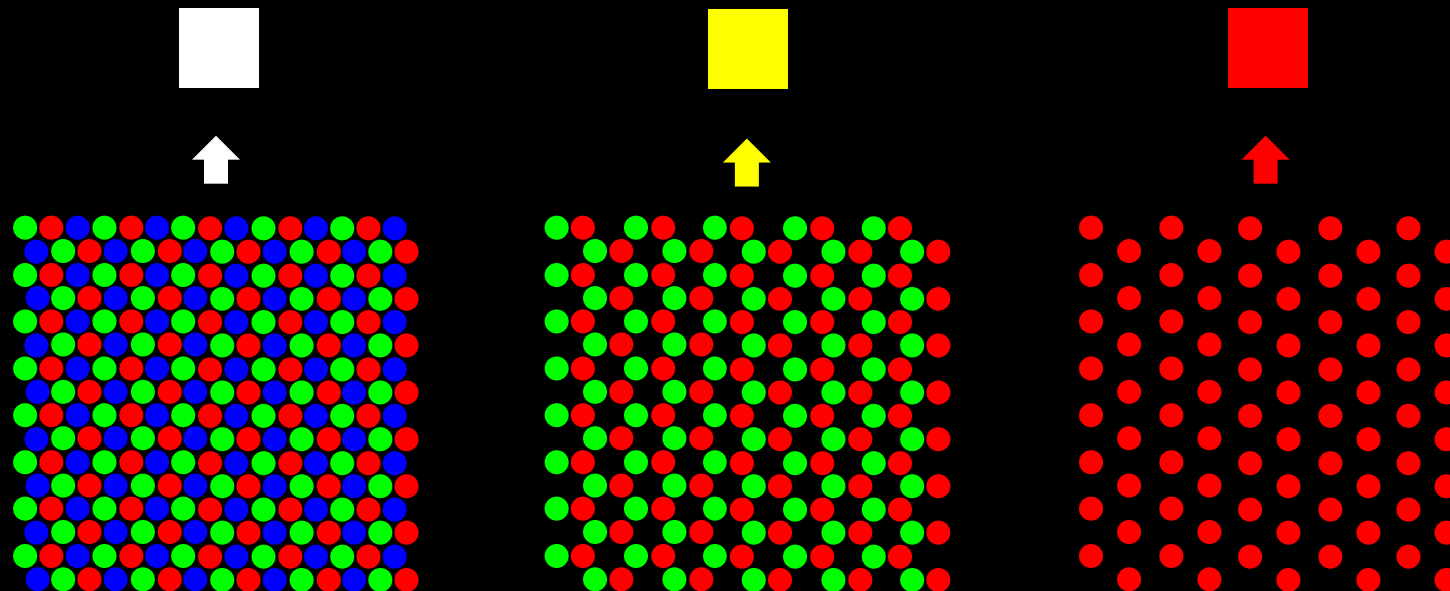
Trichromacy means that colour vision at the input to the visual system is relatively simple.

It is a 3 variable system...

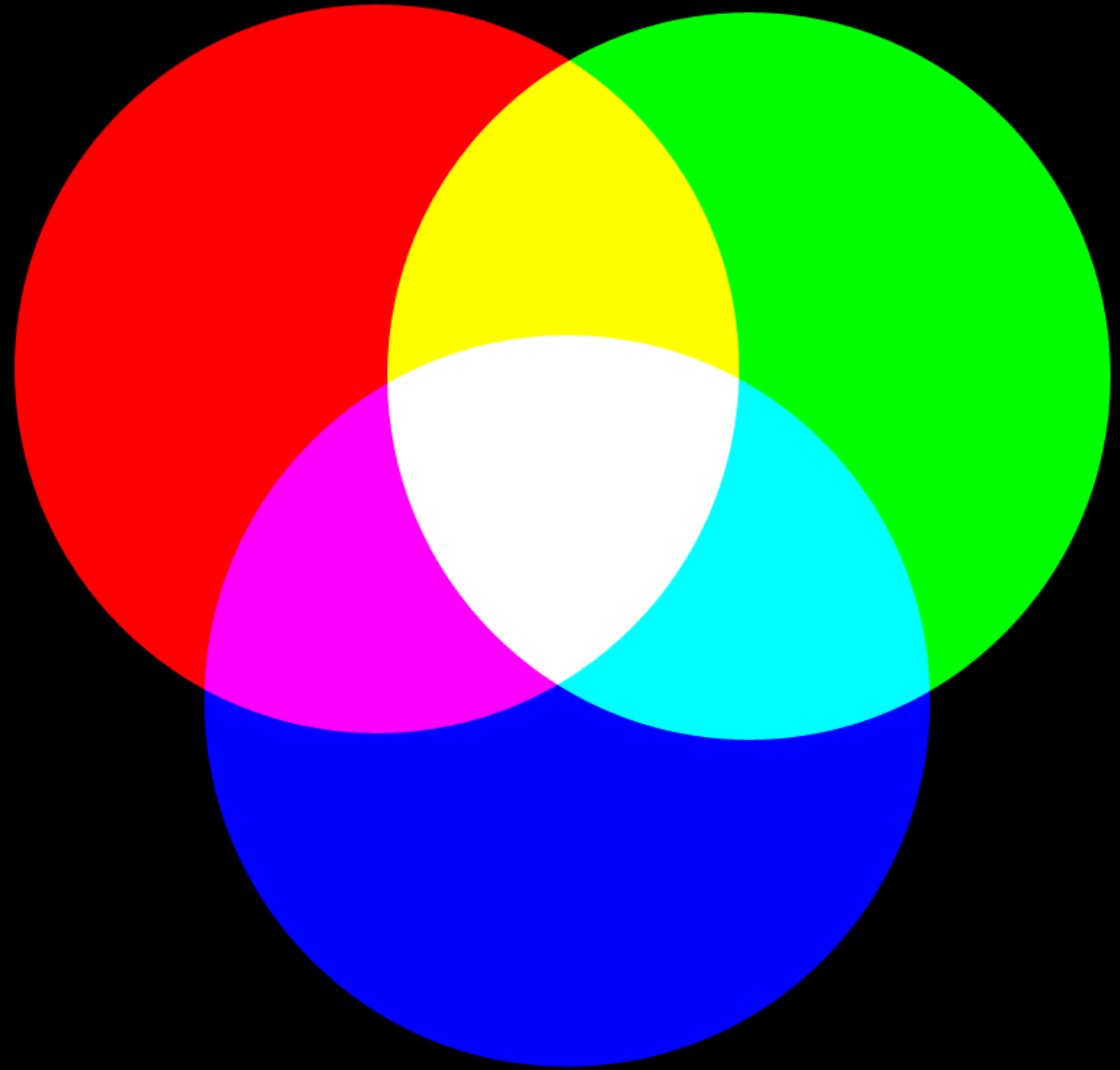
# Colour TV

Trichromacy is exploited in colour reproduction, since the myriad of colours perceived can be produced by mixing together small dots of three colours.

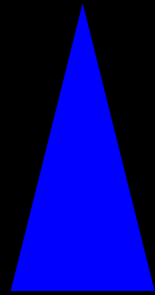
The dots produced by a TV or projector are so small that they are mixed together by the eye and thus appear as uniform patches of colour.



Why is human  
vision trichromatic?



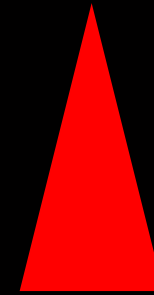
The main reason is because just three cone photoreceptors are responsible for daytime colour vision.



Short-wavelength-  
sensitive or “blue”



Middle-wavelength-  
sensitive or “green”



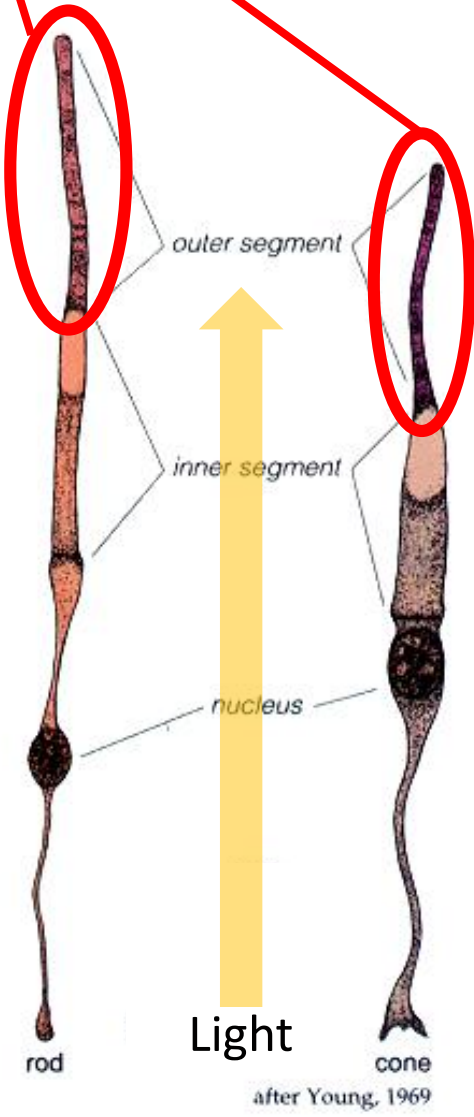
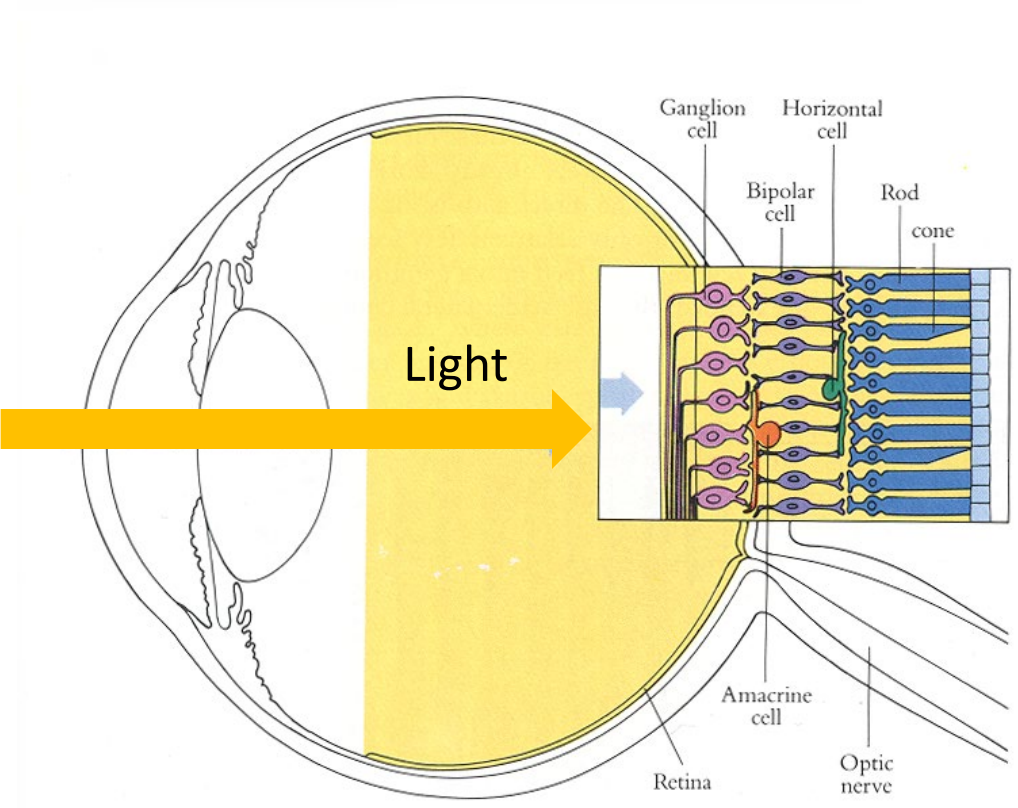
Long-wavelength-  
sensitive or “red”

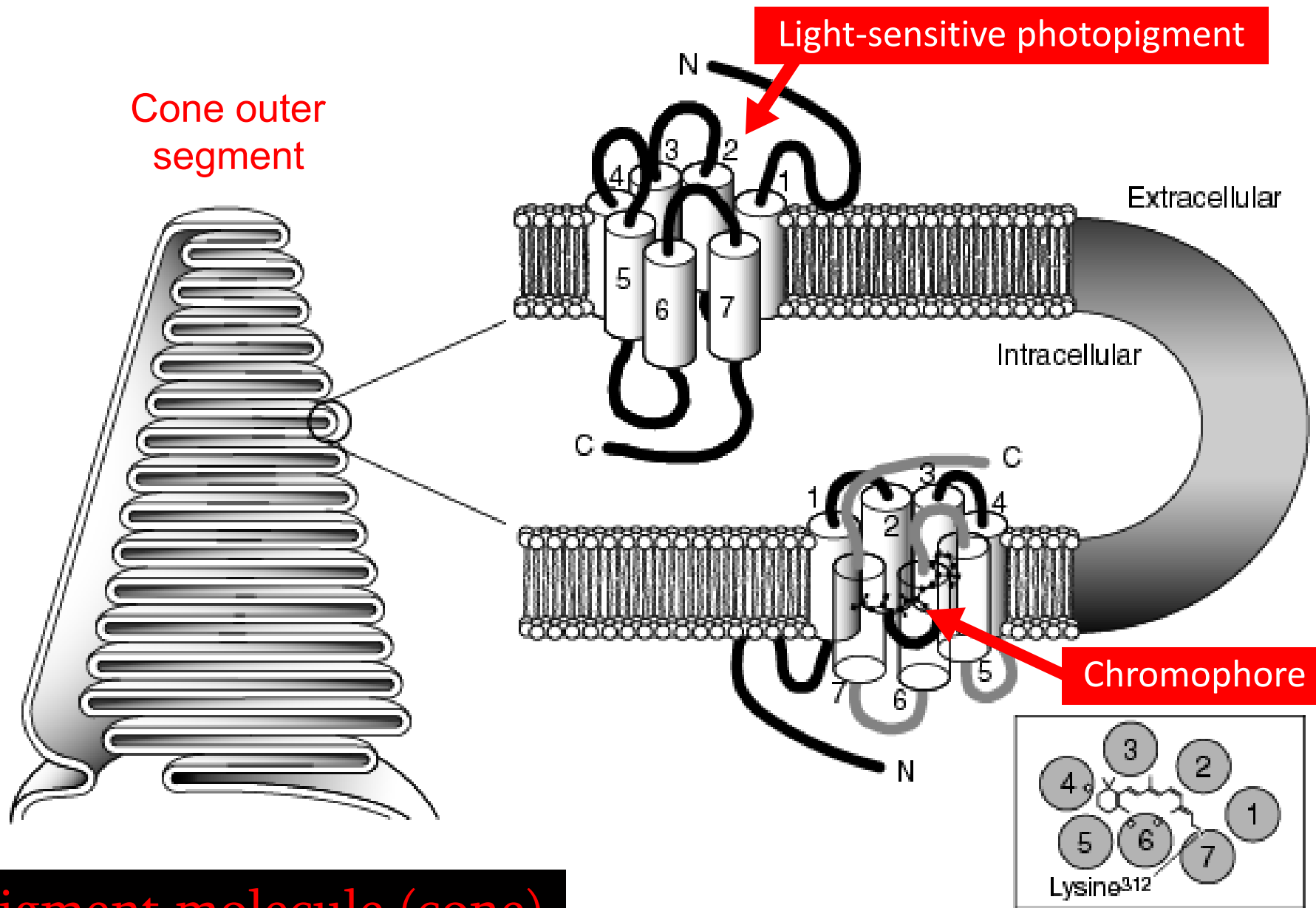
And because each one produces a UNIVARIANT output.

# UNIVARIANCE

Univariance can be explained simply at the molecular level by the interaction of photons with the photopigment molecules in each photoreceptor...

The light-sensitive photopigment lies inside the rod and cone outer segments.



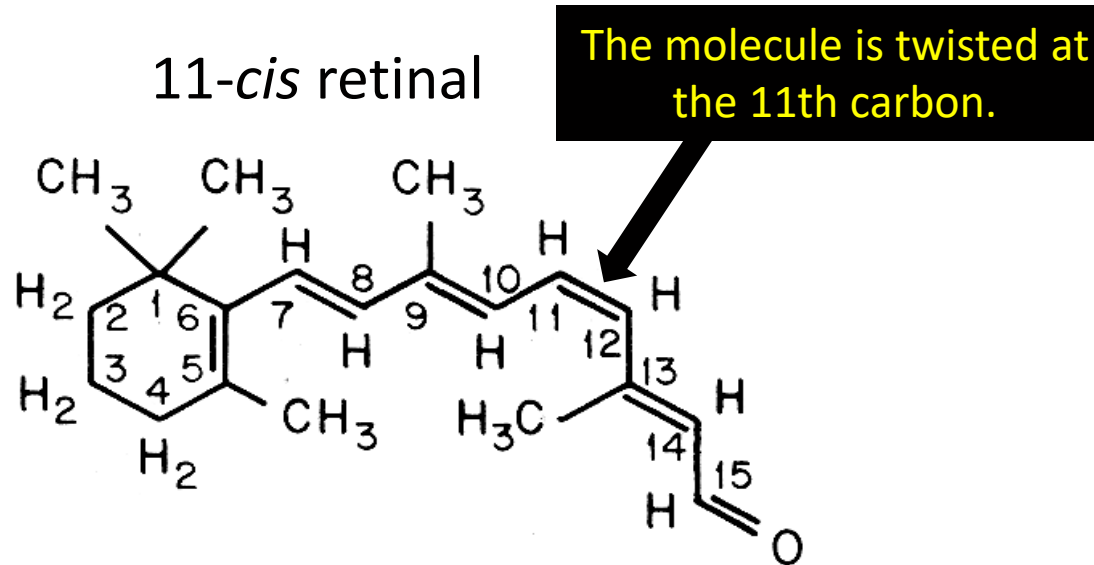


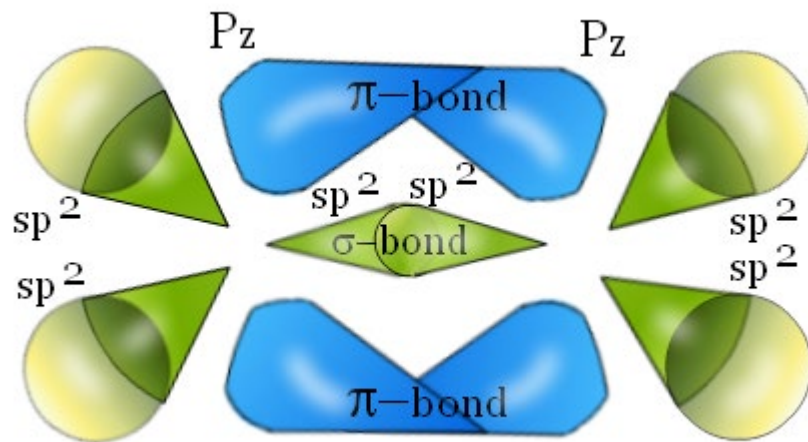
Photopigment molecule (cone)



# Chromophore

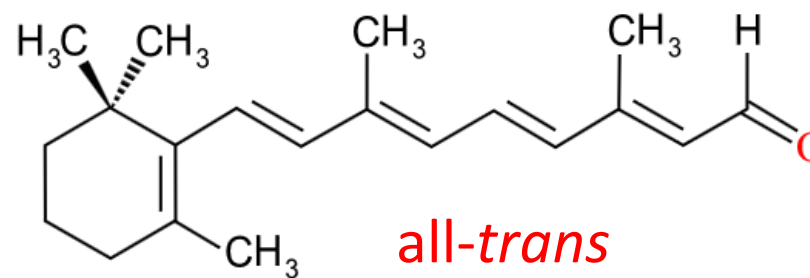
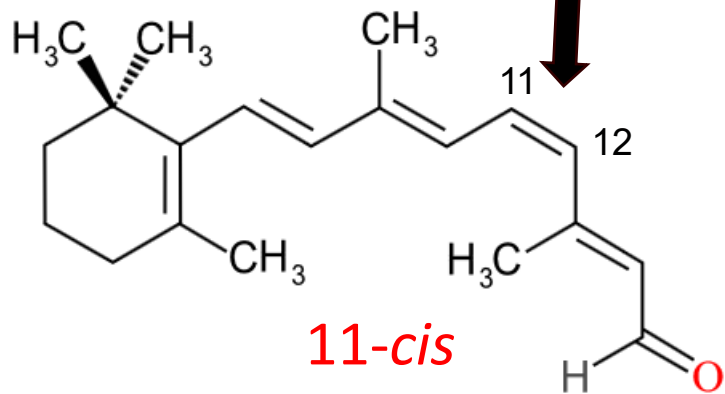
(*chromo-* colour, + *-phore*, producer)  
Light-catching portion of any molecule





The double bond is made up of a  $\sigma$  and a  $\pi$  bond.

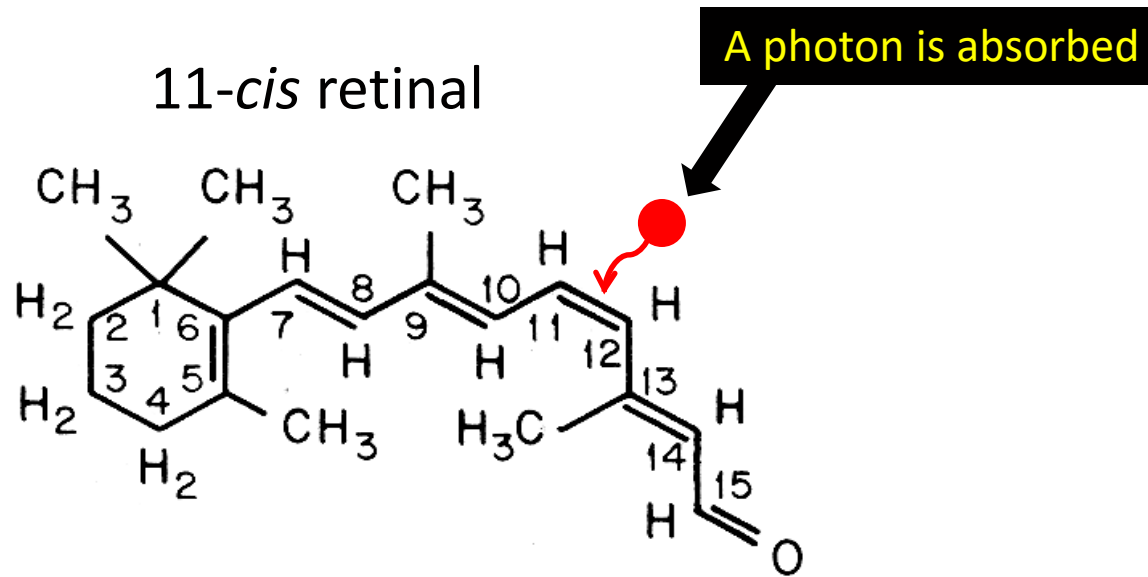
Together, they prevent rotation around the double-bond axis.



Therefore there are different "stereoisomers".

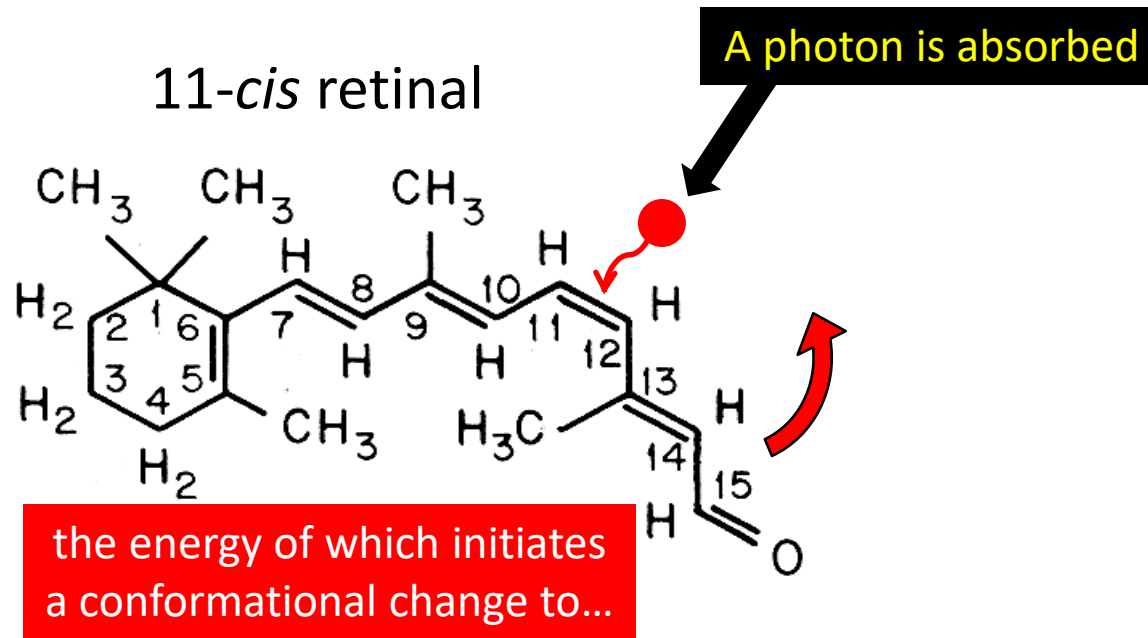
# Chromophore

(*chromo-* colour, + *-phore*, producer)  
Light-catching portion of any molecule



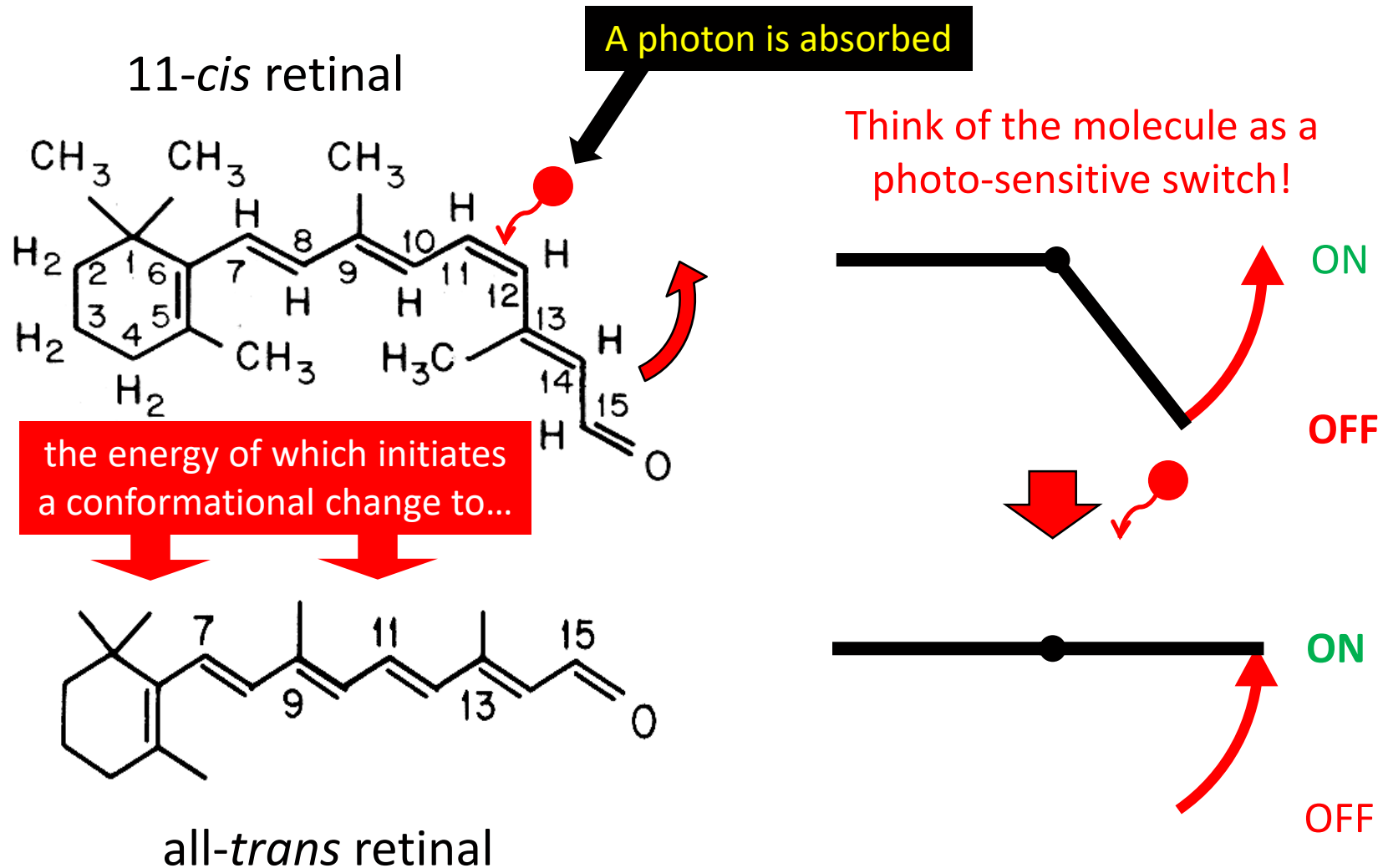
# Chromophore

(*chromo-* colour, + *-phore*, producer)  
Light-catching portion of any molecule



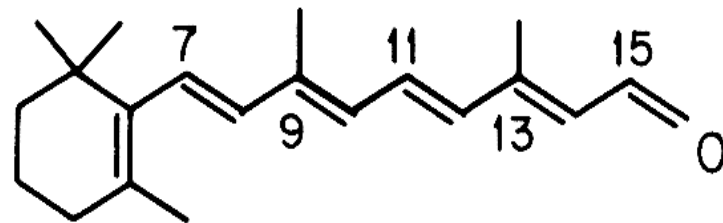
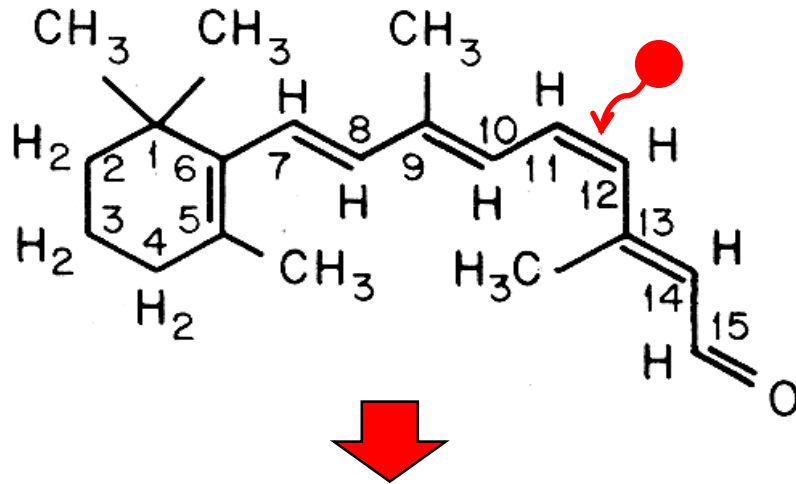
# Chromophore

(*chromo-* colour, + *-phore*, producer)  
Light-catching portion of any molecule



# Chromophore

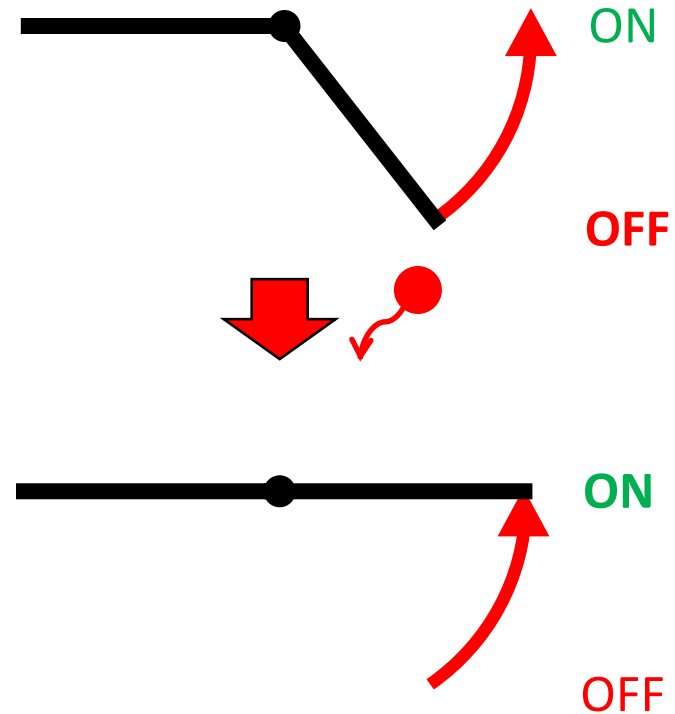
11-*cis* retinal



all-*trans* retinal

Crucially, the event is binary or “all or nothing”.

If a photon is absorbed it has the same effect as any other absorbed photon, whatever its wavelength.

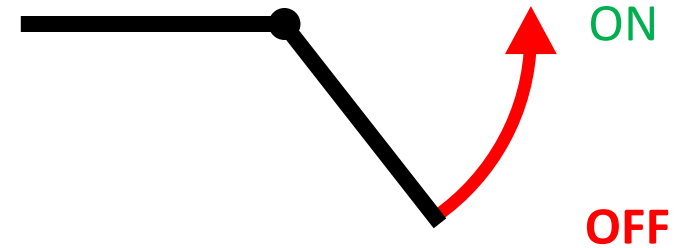
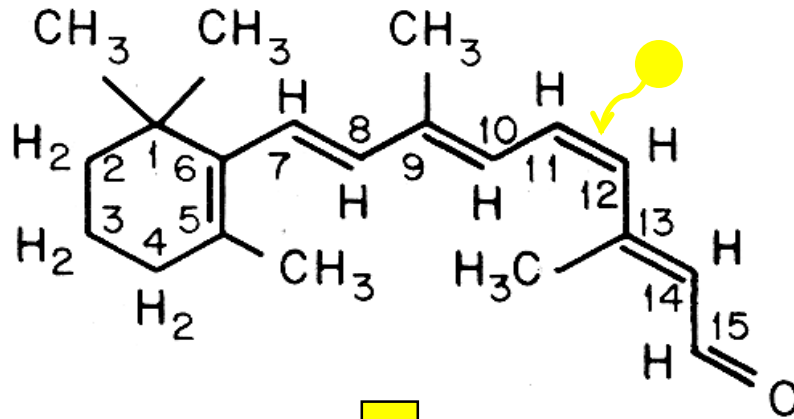


# Chromophore

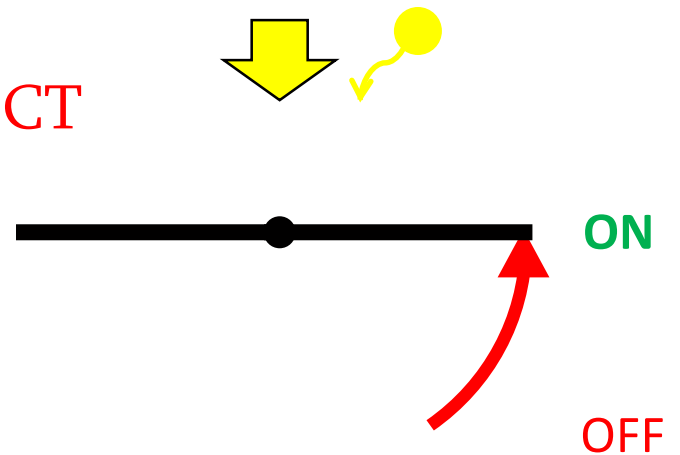
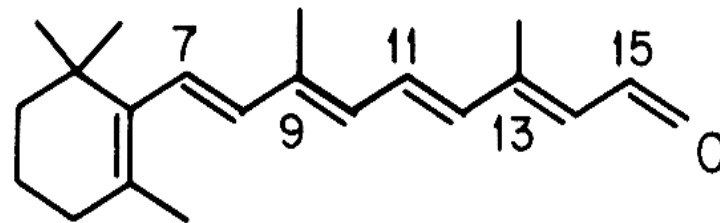
Crucially, the event is binary or "all or nothing".

If a photon is absorbed it has the same effect as any other absorbed photon, whatever its wavelength.

11-*cis* retinal



SAME EFFECT



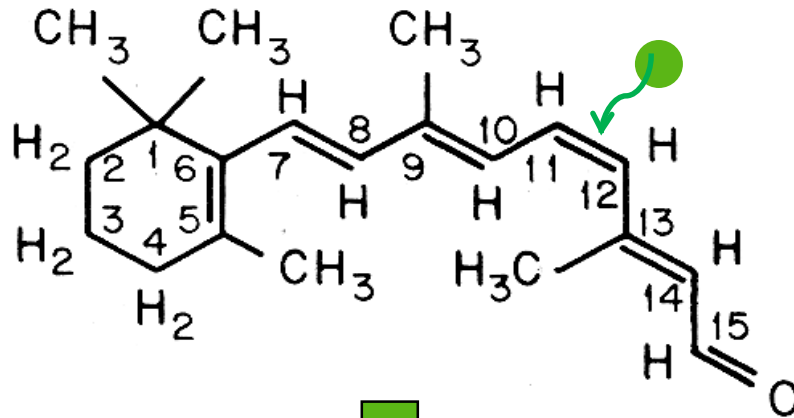
all-*trans* retinal

# Chromophore

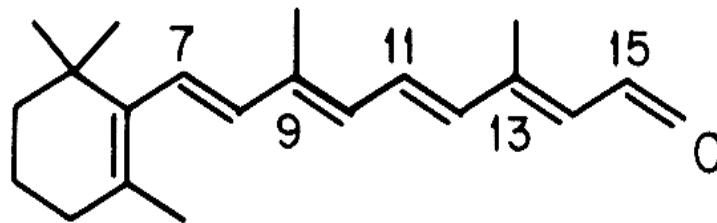
Crucially, the event is binary or "all or nothing".

If a photon is absorbed it has the same effect as any other absorbed photon, whatever its wavelength.

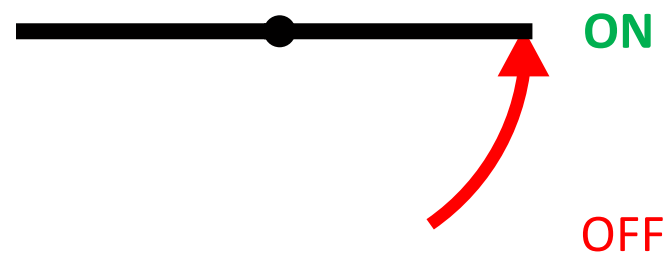
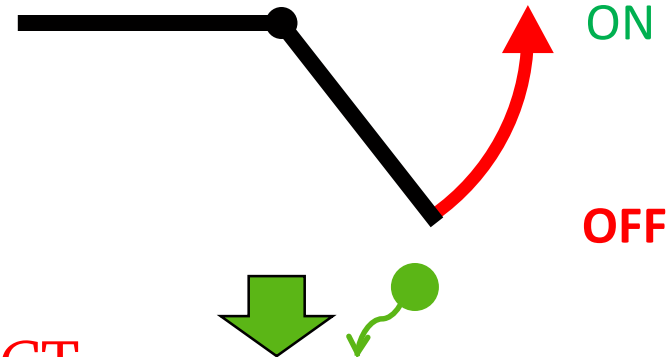
11-*cis* retinal



SAME EFFECT



all-*trans* retinal



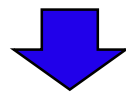
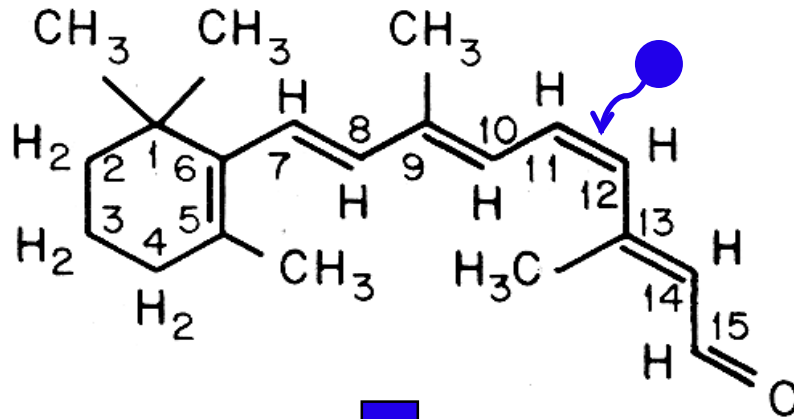


# Chromophore

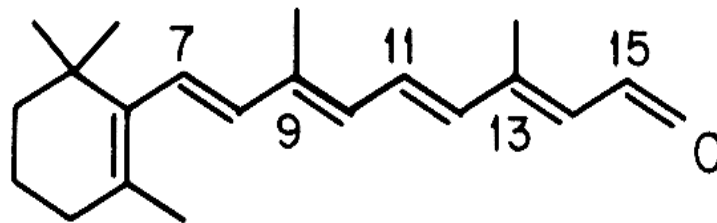
Crucially, the event is binary or “all or nothing”.

If a photon is absorbed it has the same effect as any other absorbed photon, whatever its wavelength.

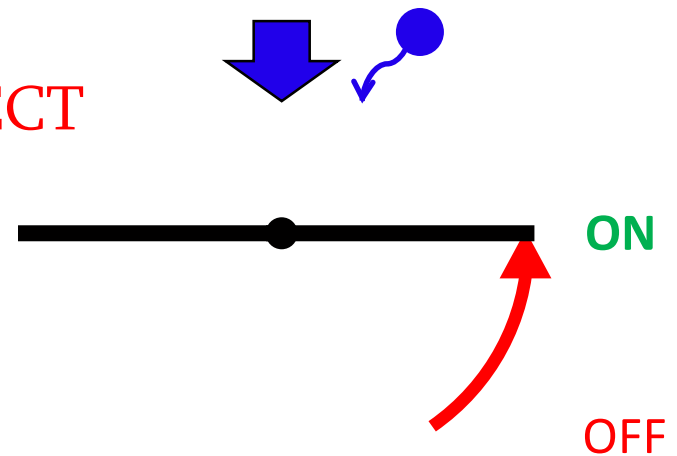
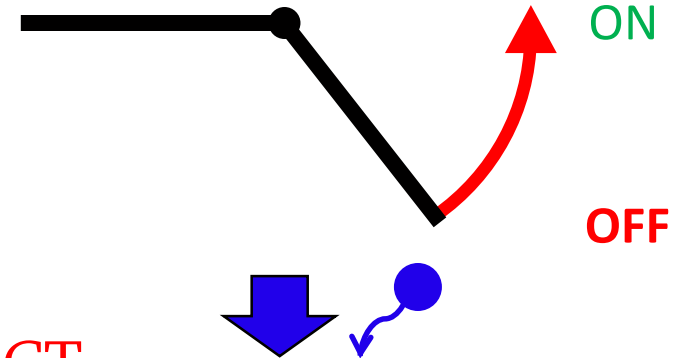
11-*cis* retinal



SAME EFFECT



all-*trans* retinal

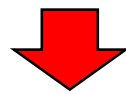
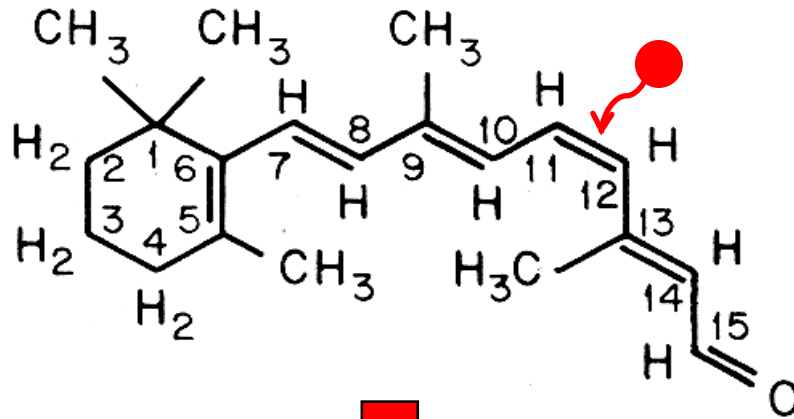


# Chromophore

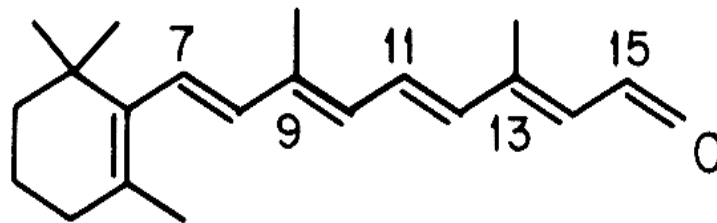
Crucially, the event is binary or “all or nothing”.

If a photon is absorbed it has the same effect as any other absorbed photon, whatever its wavelength.

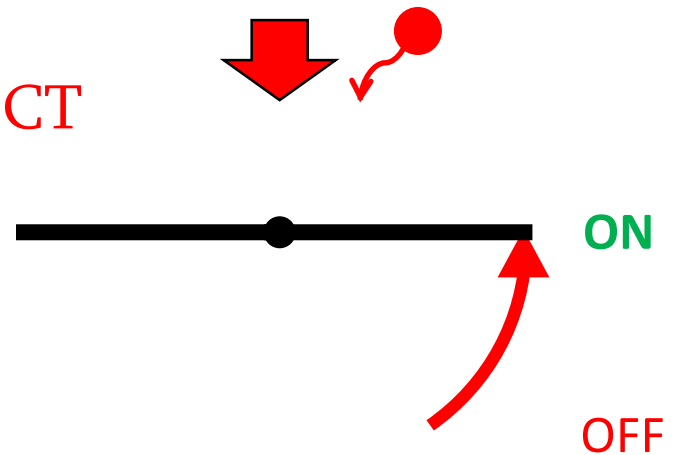
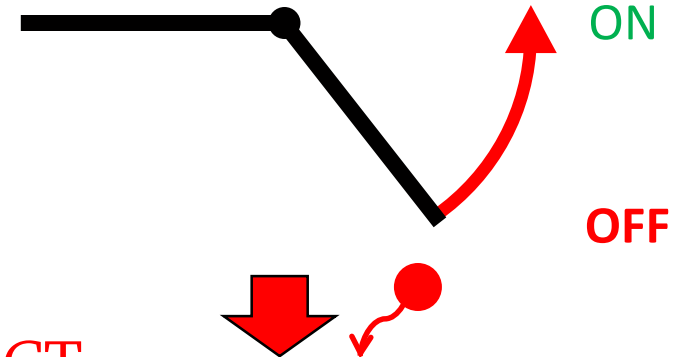
11-*cis* retinal



SAME EFFECT



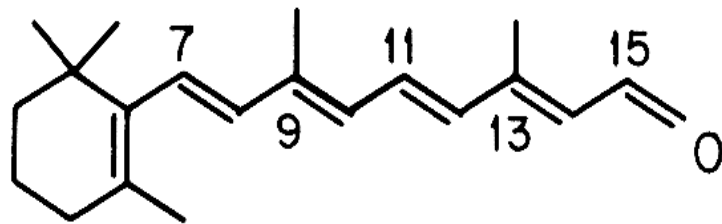
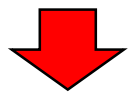
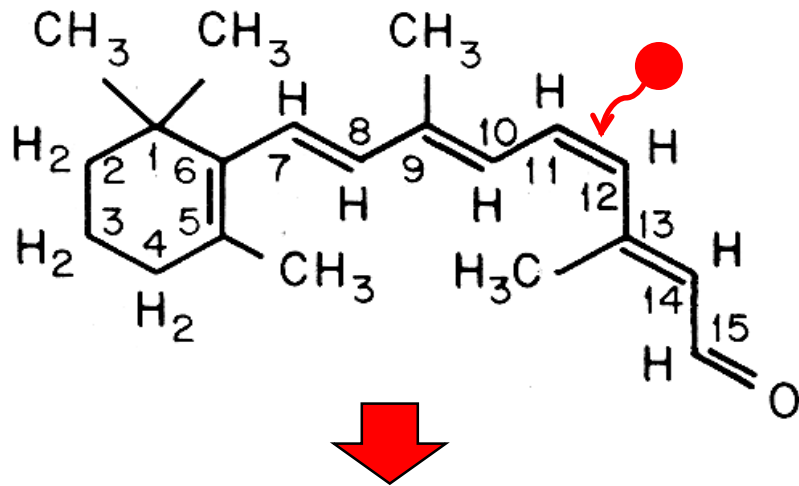
all-*trans* retinal



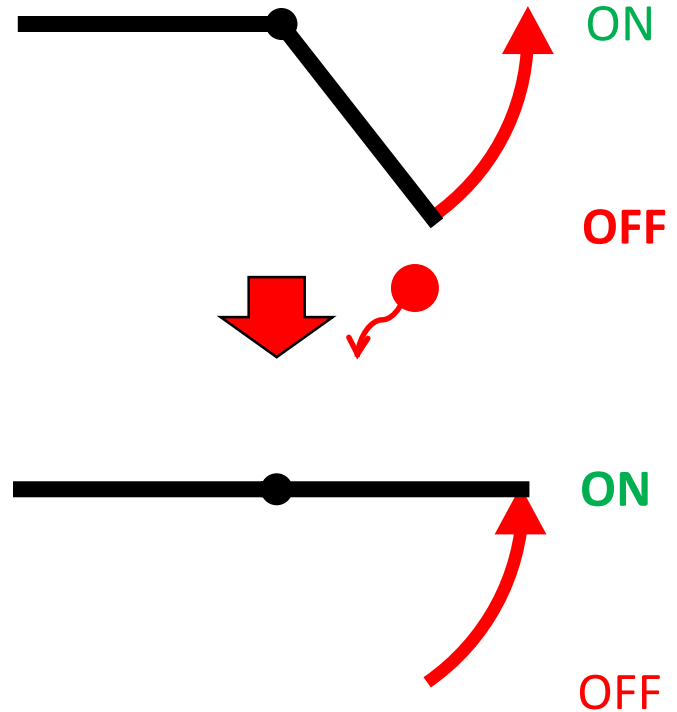
# Chromophore

Can this process encode wavelength (colour)?

11-*cis* retinal



all-*trans* retinal

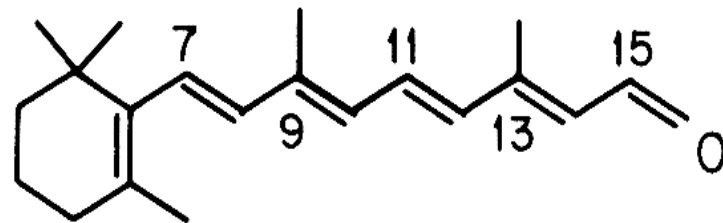
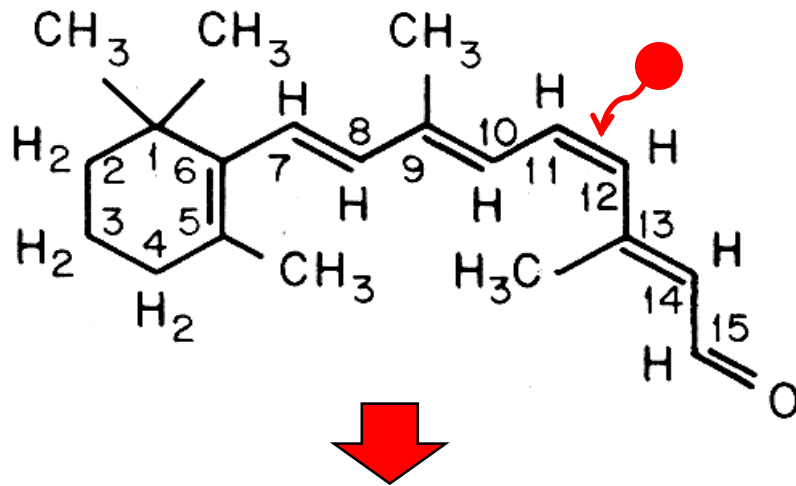


# Chromophore

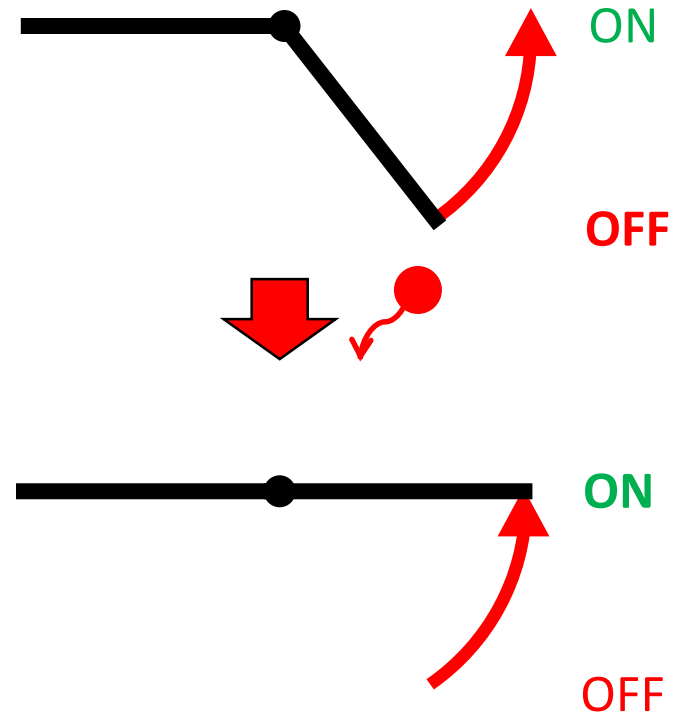
No, it cannot encode wavelength (colour)!

It is “UNIVARIANT”

11-*cis* retinal



all-*trans* retinal



Vision at the photoreceptor stage is relatively simple  
because the output of each photoreceptor is:

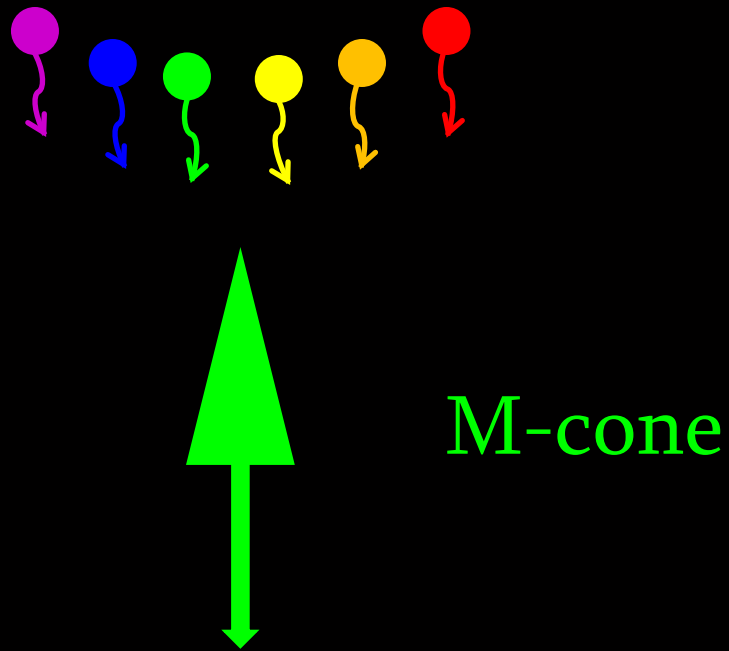
“UNIVARIANT”

What does univariance mean in practice?

Use Middle-wavelength-sensitive (M) cones as an example...

# UNIVARIANCE

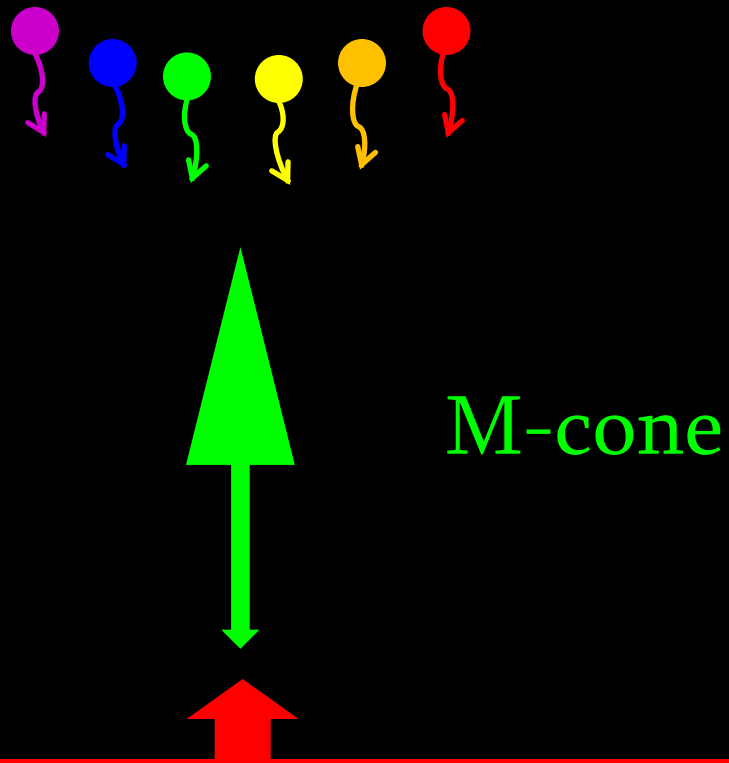
Crucially, the effect of any absorbed photon is *independent* of its wavelength.



*Once absorbed* a photon produces the *same* change in photoreceptor output whatever its wavelength.

# UNIVARIANCE

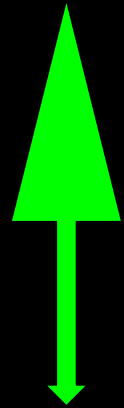
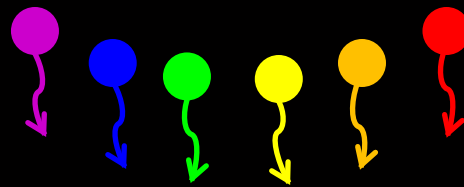
Crucially, the effect of any absorbed photon is *independent* of its wavelength.



So, if you monitor the cone output, you can't tell which "colour" of photon has been absorbed.

# UNIVARIANCE

Crucially, the effect of any absorbed photon is *independent* of its wavelength.



M-cone

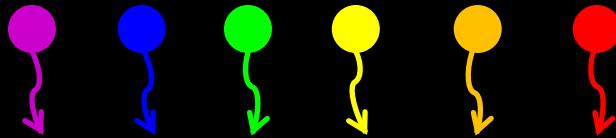


All the photoreceptor effectively does is to count photons.

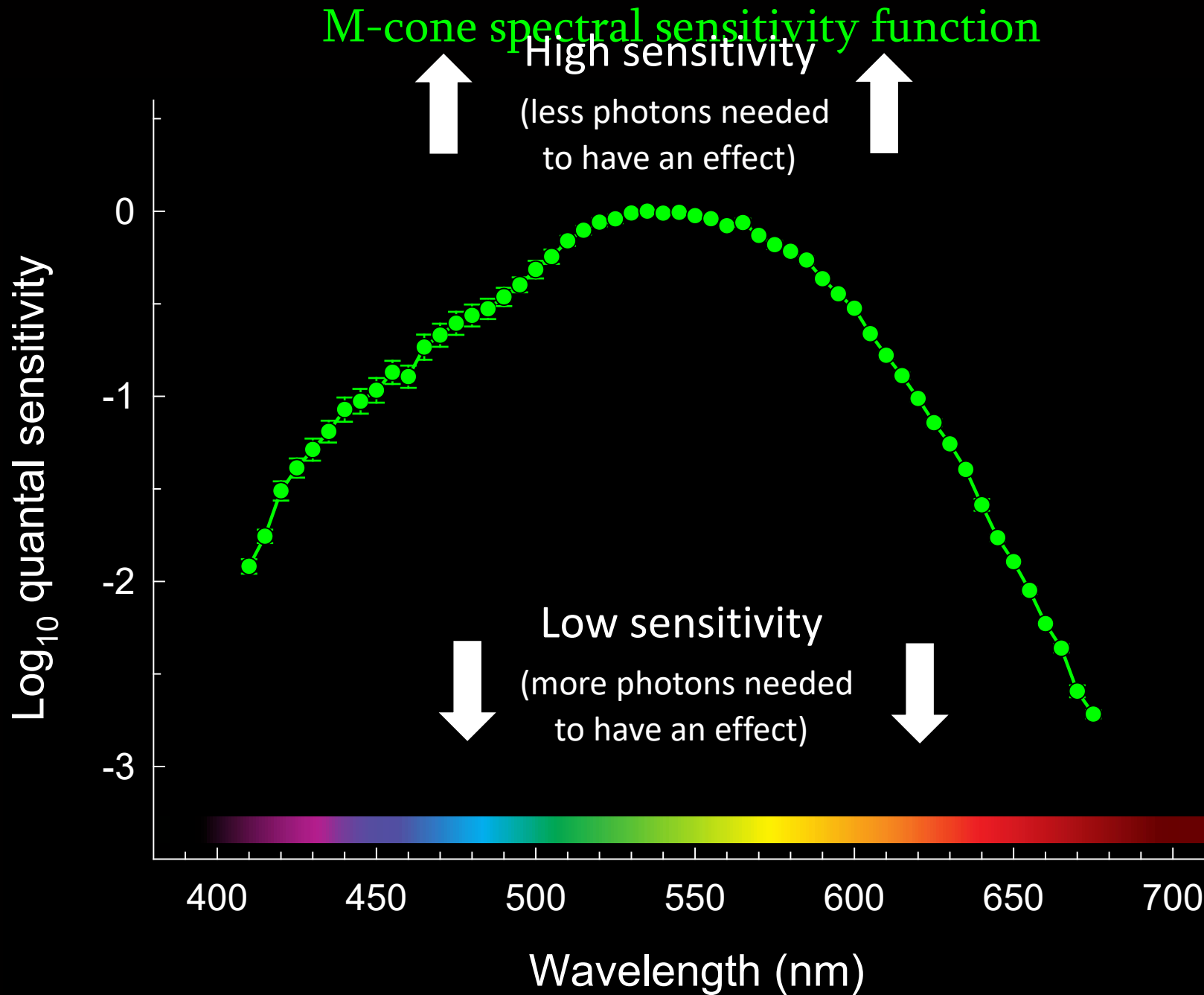


# UNIVARIANCE

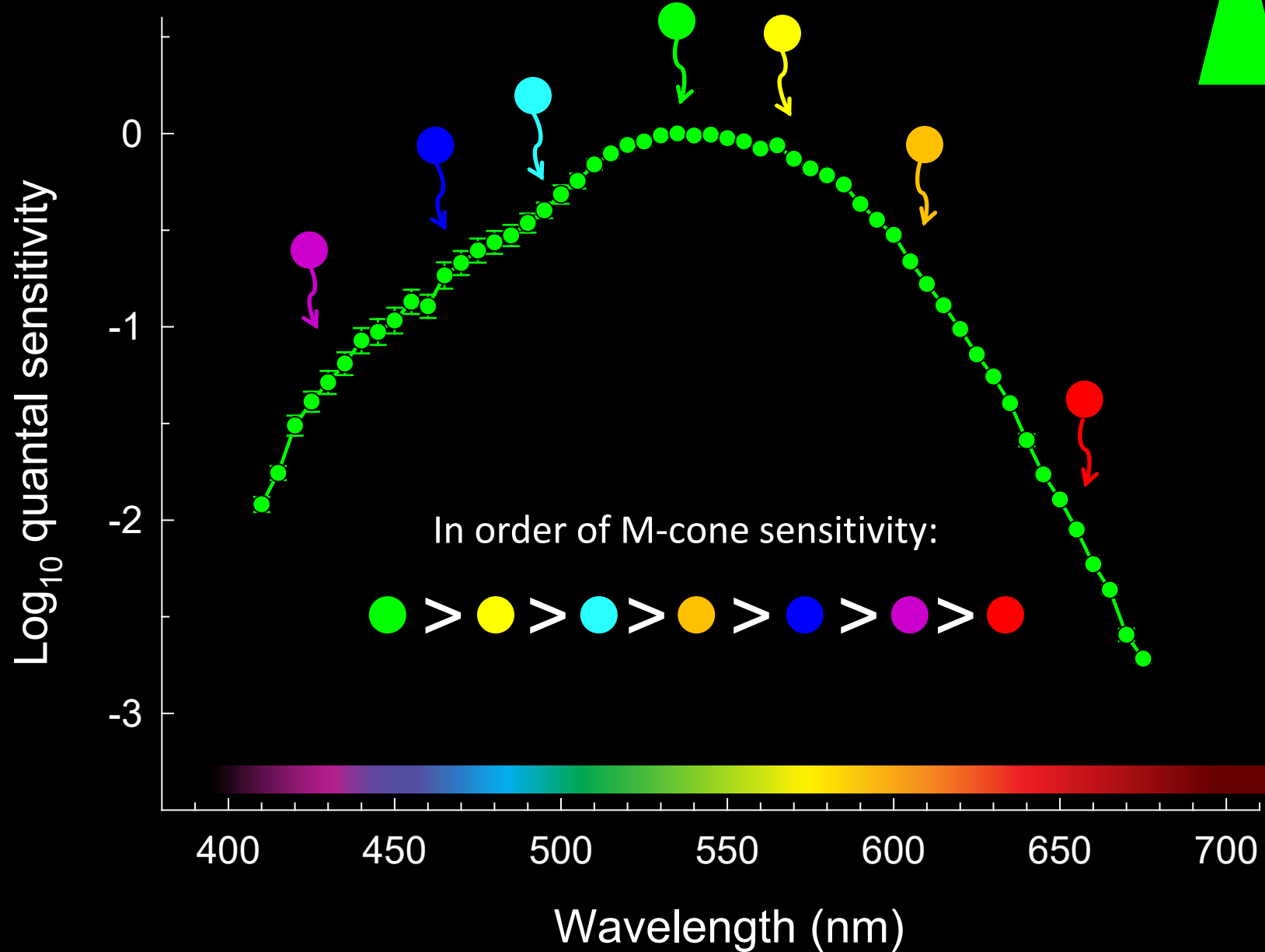
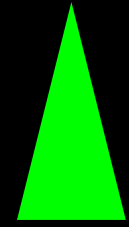
What does vary with wavelength is the **probability** that a photon will be absorbed.

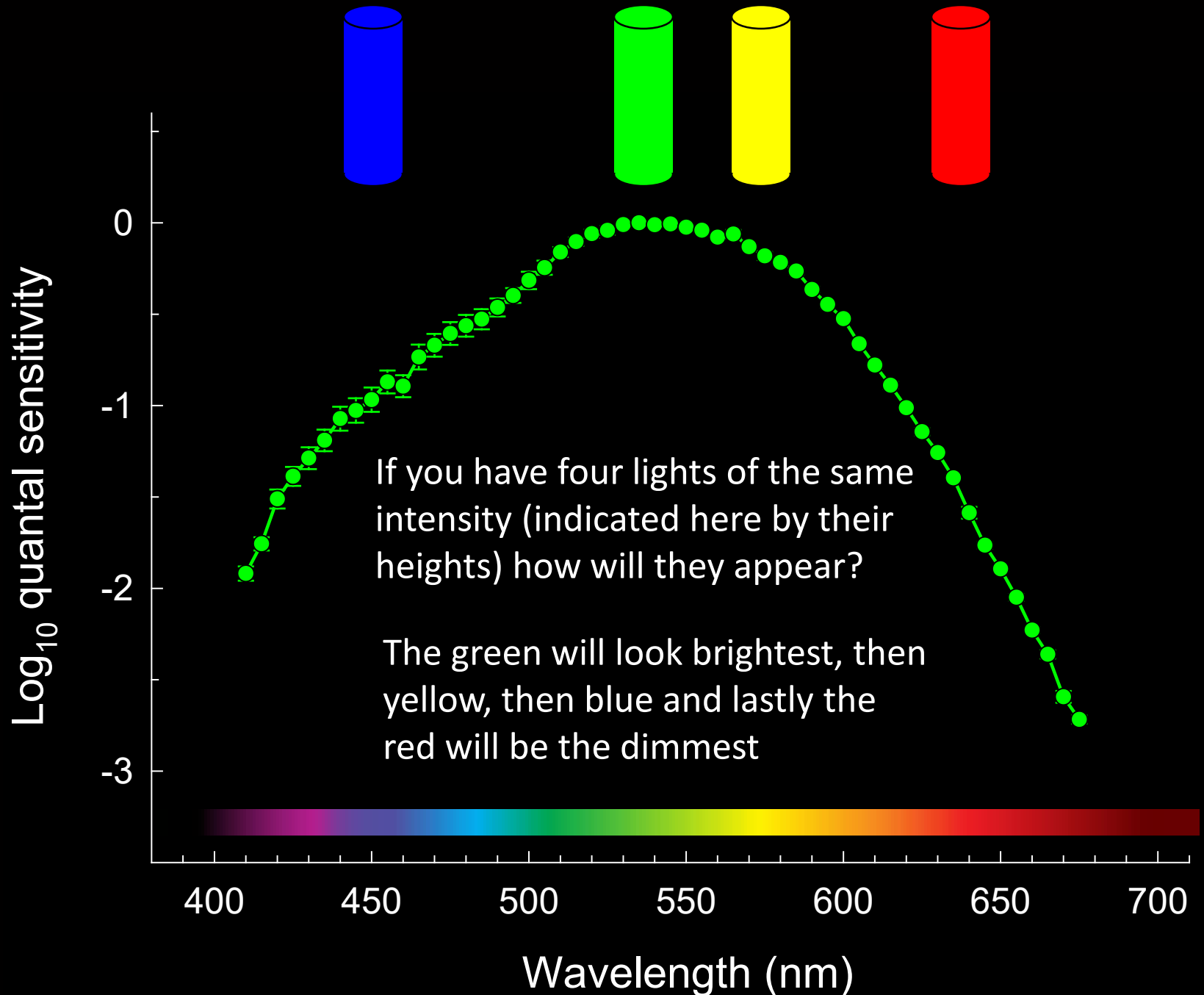


This is reflected in what is called a “spectral sensitivity function”.



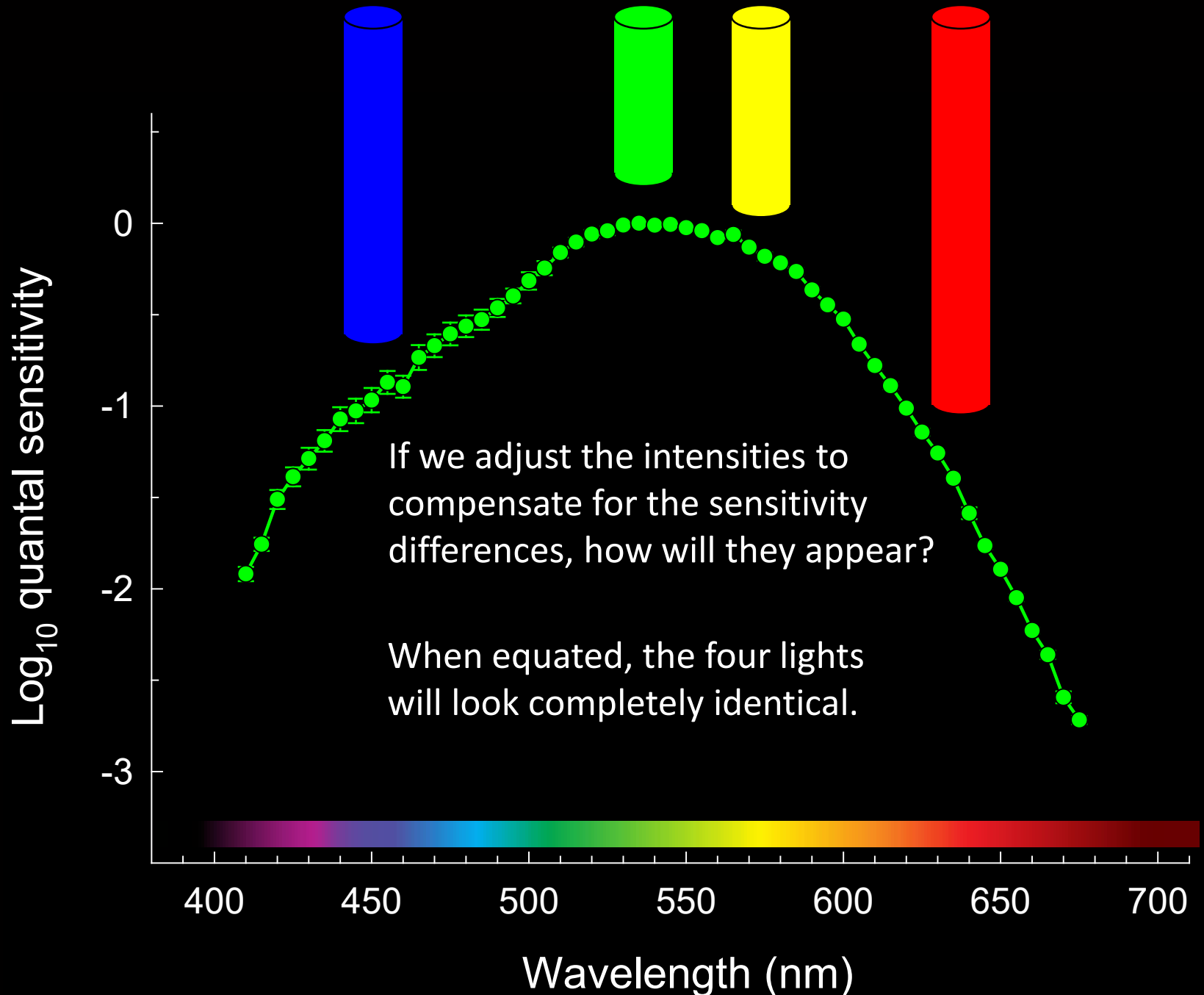
Imagine the sensitivity to these photons...





If you have four lights of the same intensity (indicated here by their heights) how will they appear?

The green will look brightest, then yellow, then blue and lastly the red will be the dimmest



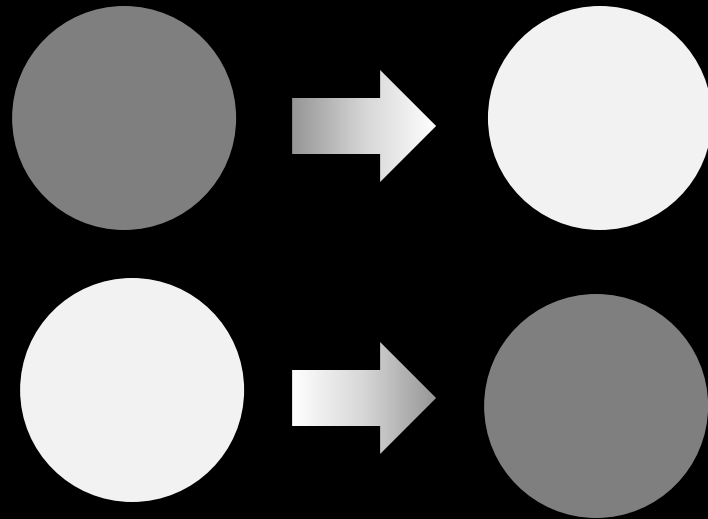


M-cone

Changes in light intensity are confounded with  
changes in colour (wavelength)

# UNIVARIANCE

A change in photoreceptor output can be caused by a change in intensity or by a change in colour. There is no way of telling which.



Colour or intensity  
change??

Each photoreceptor is therefore 'colour blind', and is unable to distinguish between changes in colour and changes in intensity.

# Univariance

If a cone is  $n$  times less sensitive to light A than to light B, then if A is set to be  $n$  times brighter than B, the two lights will appear identical whatever their wavelengths.



If we had only one photoreceptor, we would be colour-blind...



Examples: night vision, blue cone monochromats

## Protanopia (missing L-cone)



With two, we  
are dichromatic:

## Tritanopia (missing S-cone)



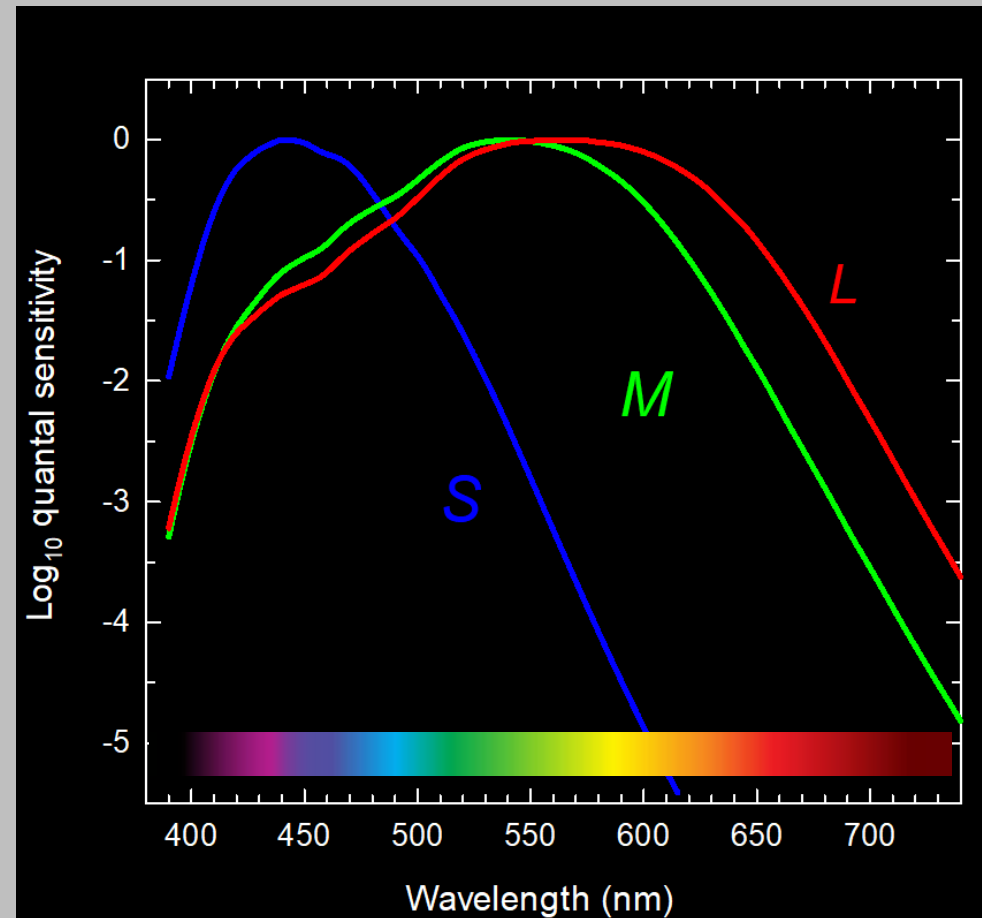
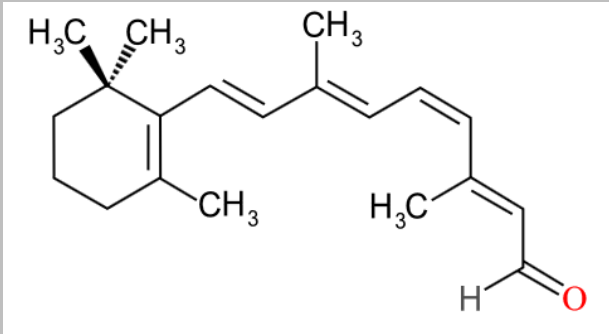
## Deuteranopia (missing M-cone)



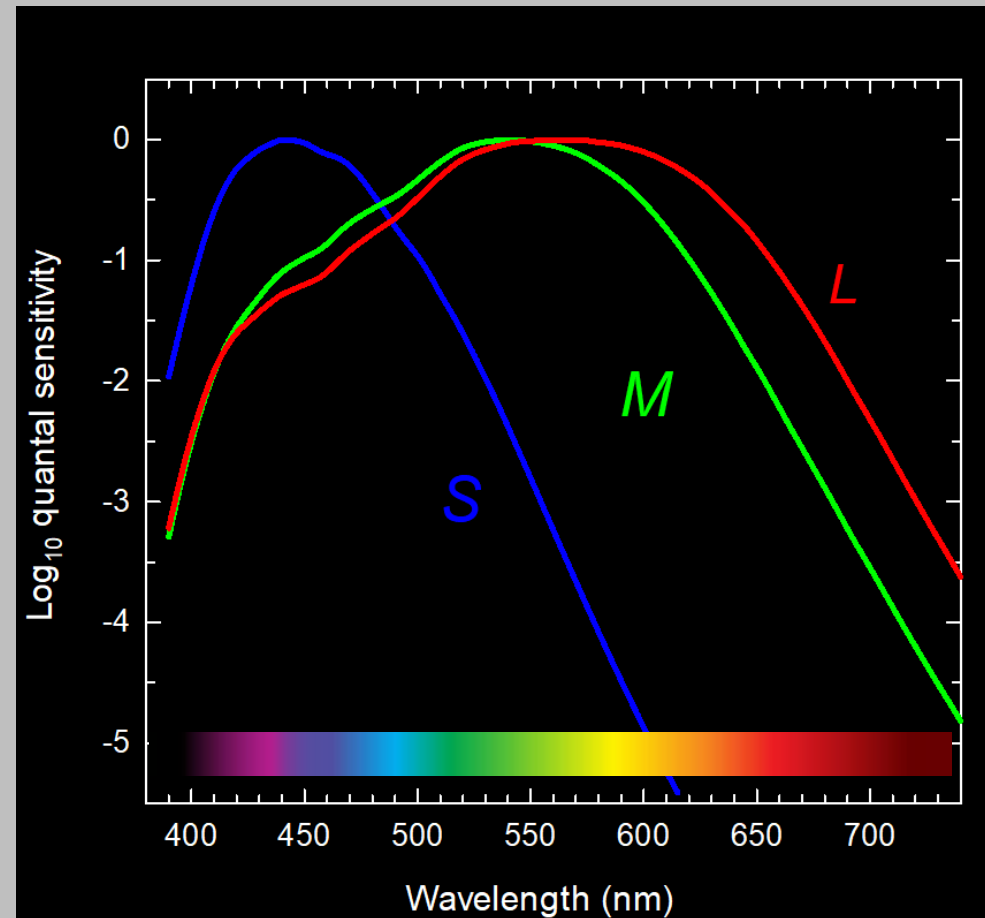
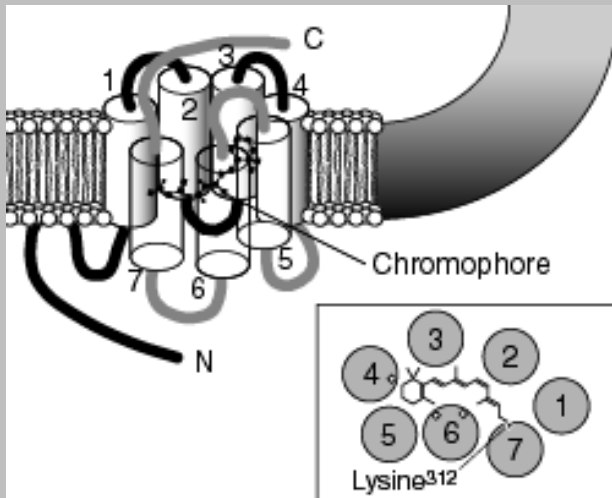
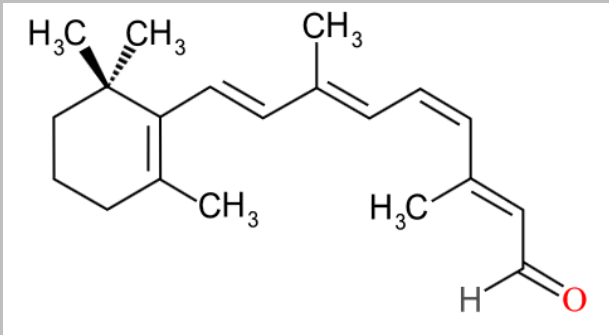
With three cone photoreceptors, our colour vision is trichromatic...



The three cones (and rods) have different spectral sensitivities, but they have the same chromophore (11-*cis*-retinal), so why are the spectral sensitivities different?



They are different because the amino acids in the opsin molecule surrounding the chromophore are different and change the initiation energy.



$$E = hc/\lambda$$

$$h = 6.62606957 \times 10^{-34} \text{ J}\cdot\text{s}$$

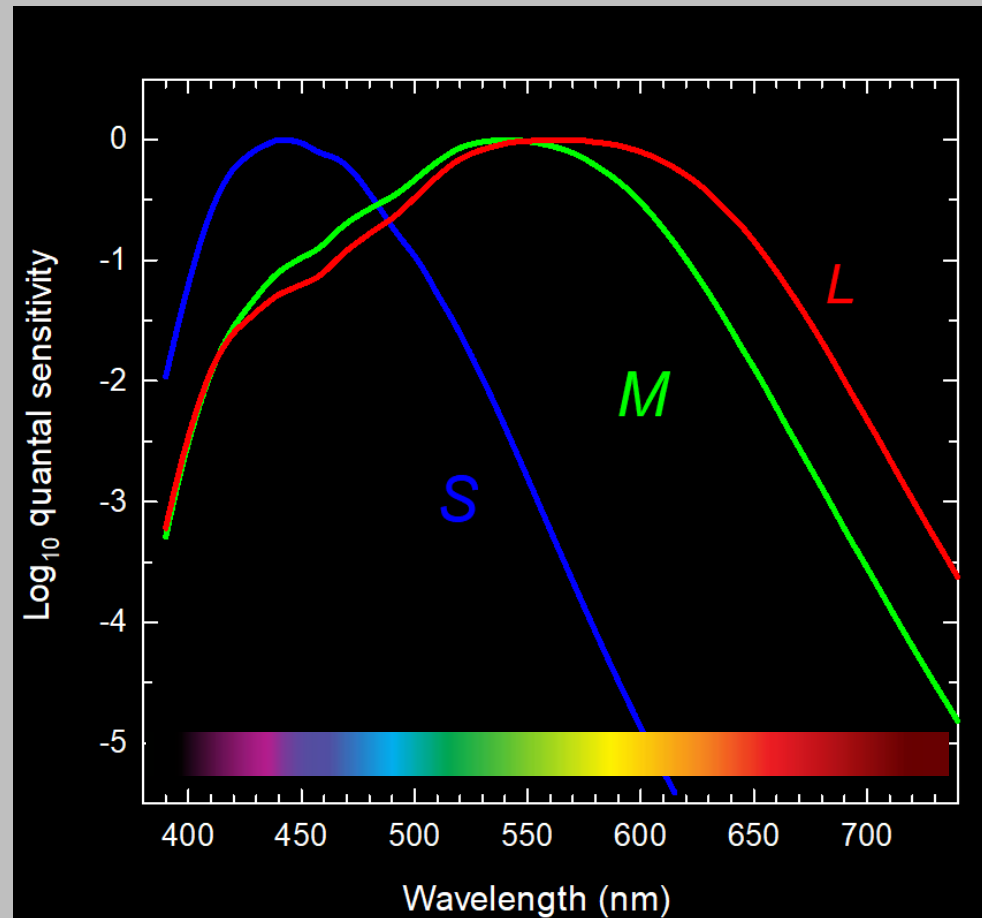
$$c = 2.99792458 \times 10^8 \text{ m}\cdot\text{s}^{-1}$$

**S** 421 nm  $4.72 \times 10^{-19} \text{ J}$

**M** 530 nm  $3.75 \times 10^{-19} \text{ J}$

**L** 559 nm  $3.55 \times 10^{-19} \text{ J}$

We can calculate the initiation energy from the peaks of the spectral sensitivity functions (at the retina).



The spectral sensitivity differences between the M- and L-cone, for example, are due to three amino acid substitutions.

Amino acid position

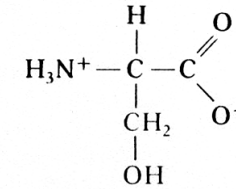
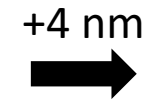
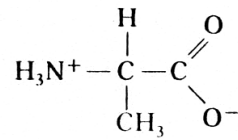
M-cone

L-cone

alanine

serine<sup>OH</sup>

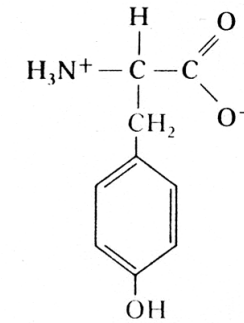
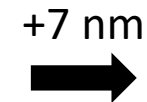
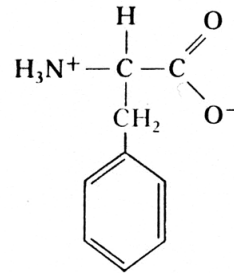
180



phenylalanine

tyrosine<sup>OH</sup>

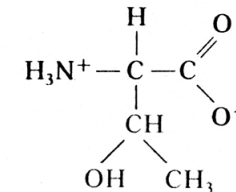
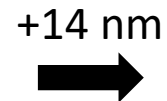
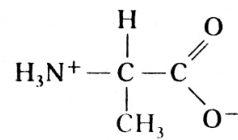
277



alanine

threonine<sup>OH</sup>

285

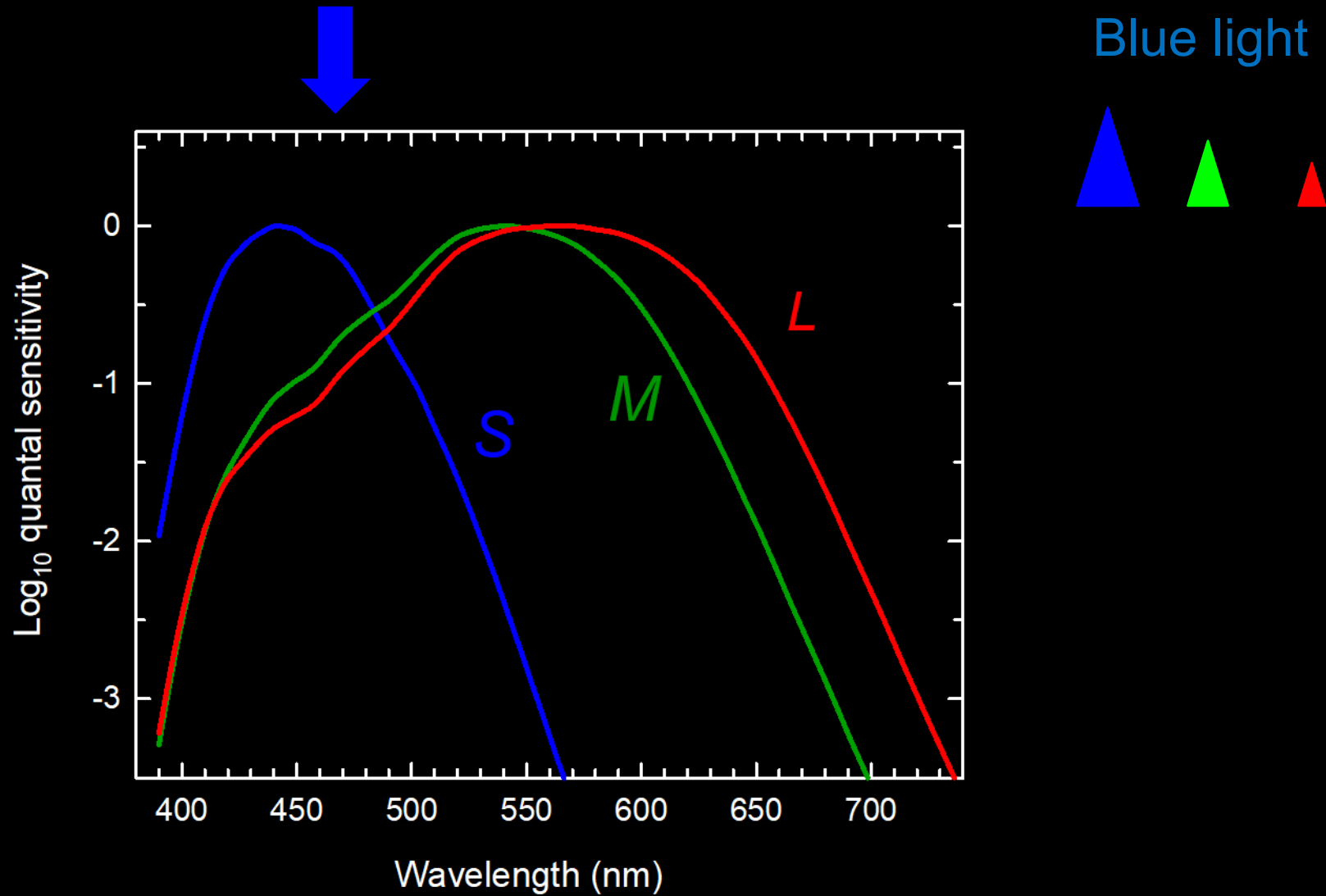


So, if each photoreceptor is colour-blind  
(univariant), how do we see colour?

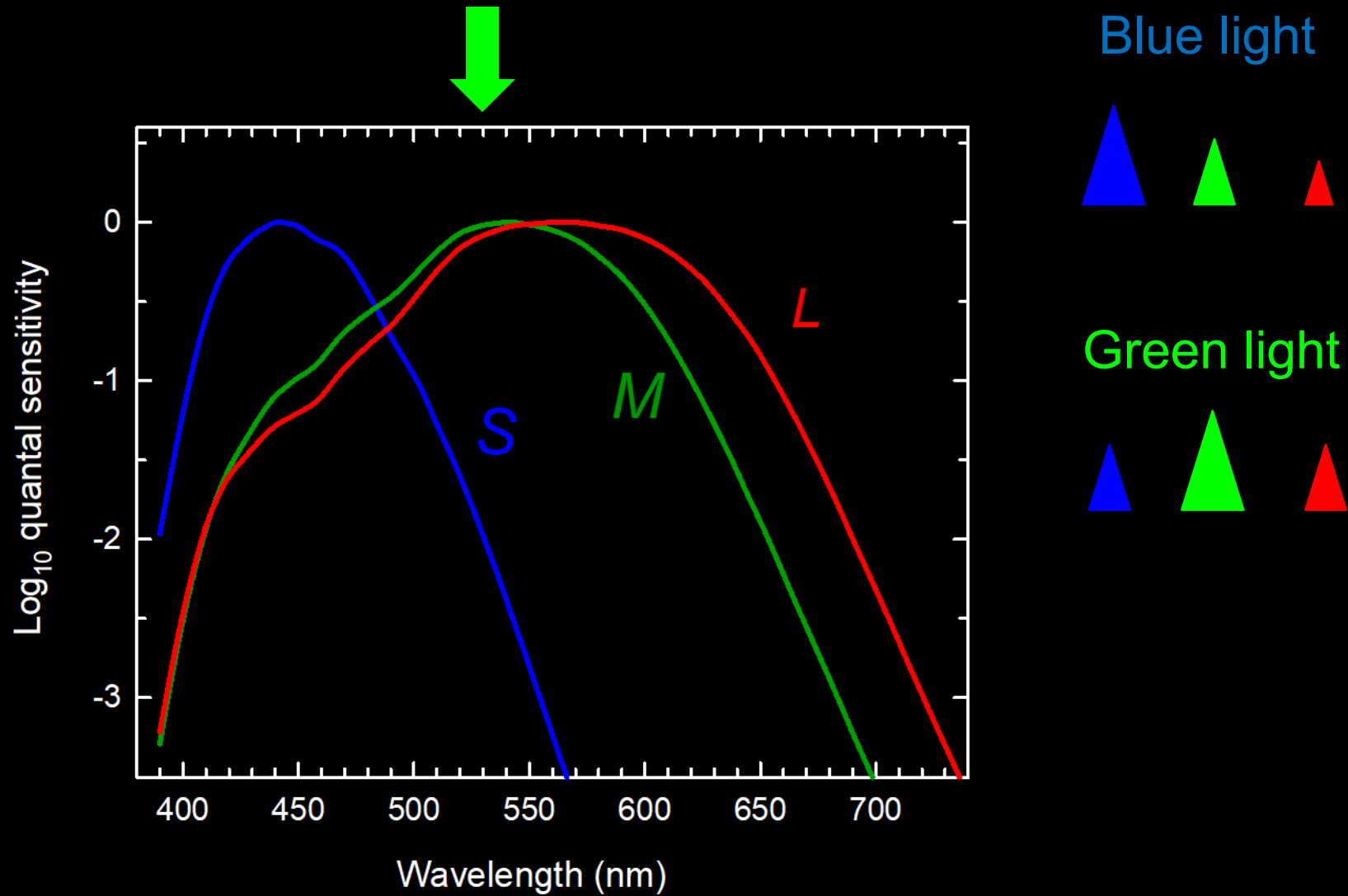
Or to put it another way: How is colour  
encoded at the input to the visual system?



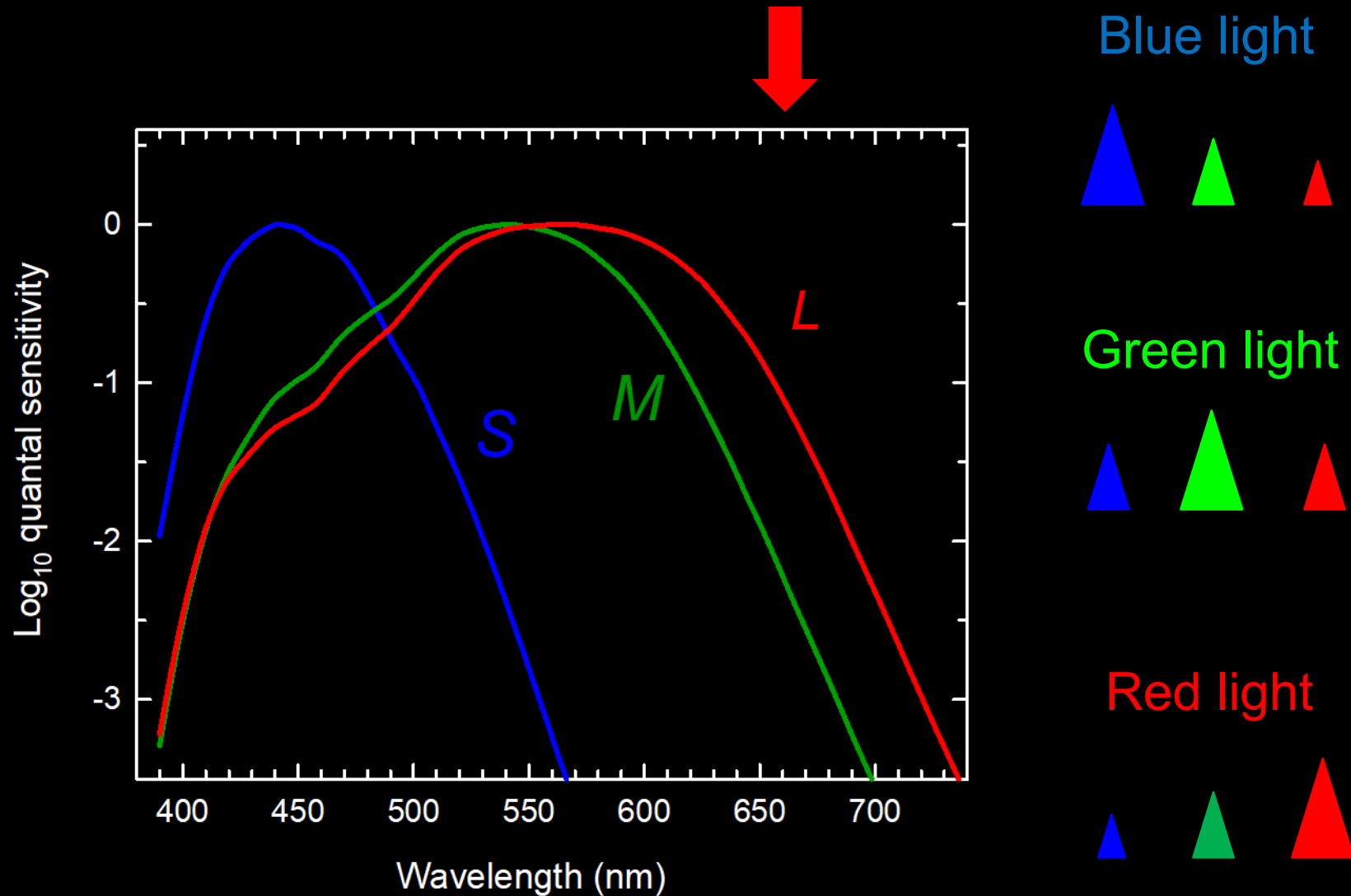
Colour is encoded by the relative cone outputs



Colour is encoded by the relative cone outputs

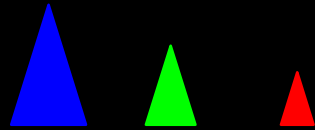


Colour is encoded by the relative cone outputs

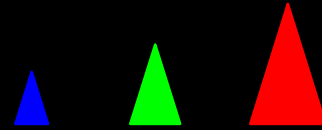


# Colour is encoded by the relative cone outputs

Blue light



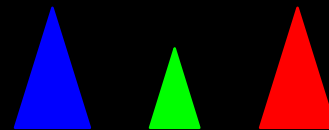
Red light



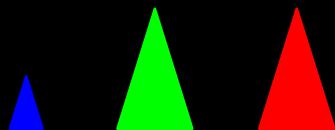
Green light



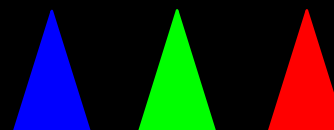
Purple light



Yellow light

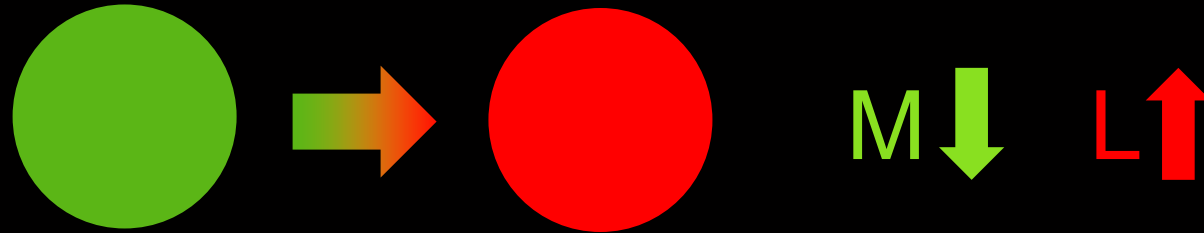


White light

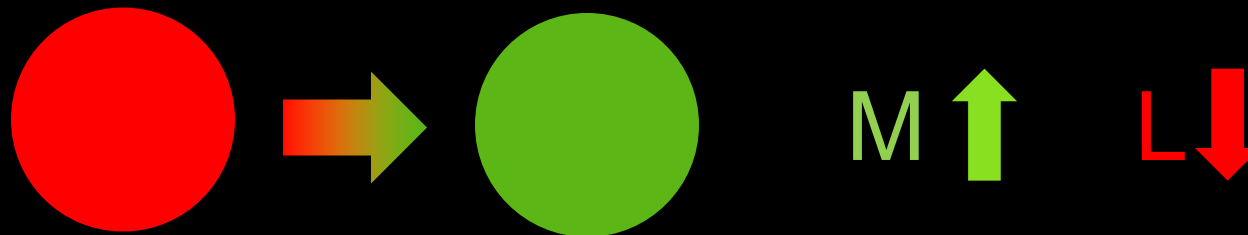


# TRICHROMACY

A change in colour from green to red causes a relative increase in the L-cone output but causes a decrease in the M-cone output.



A change in colour from red to green causes a relative increase in the M-cone output but causes a decrease in the L-cone output.



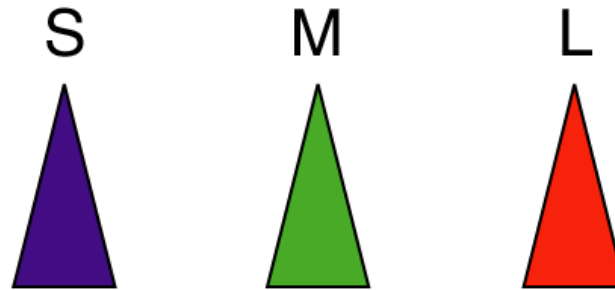
Thus, colour can be encoded by *comparing*  
the outputs of different cone types...

## Trichromacy actually means our colour vision is limited

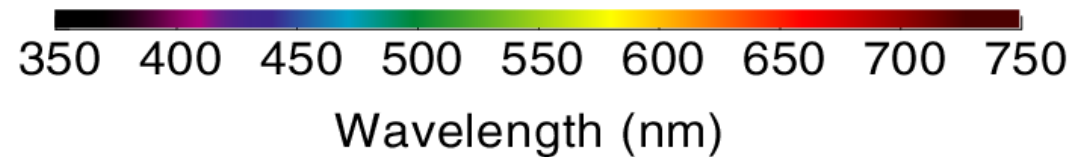
- 👁️ We confuse many pairs of colours that are spectrally very different. Such pairs are known as metameric pairs.
- 👁️ Many of these confusions would be obvious to a being with 4 cone photoreceptors—just as the confusions of colour deficient people are obvious to us.

# DETERMINING CONE SPECTRAL SENSITIVITIES

In other words...



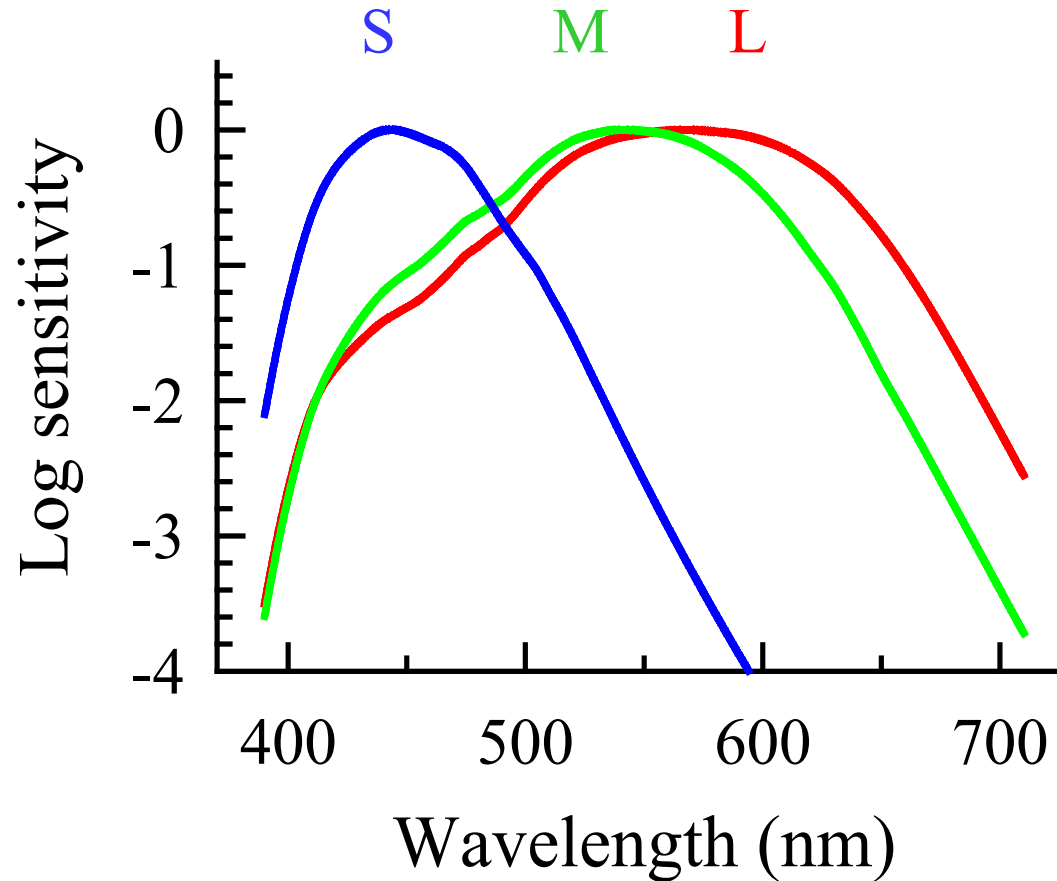
How can we measure how the sensitivity of each cone type varies with wavelength (or spectral colour)?





The cone spectral sensitivities overlap extensively throughout the spectrum.

Consequently, we have to use special subjects or special conditions to be able isolate the the response of a single cone type.



## M- and L-cone measurements

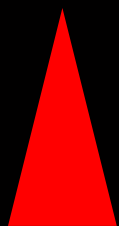
Use two special types of subjects:

- ▶ Deuteranopes
- ▶ Protanopes

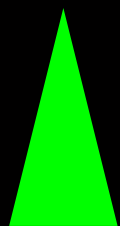
Normal



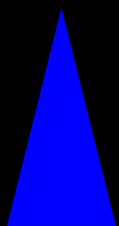
Protanope



L



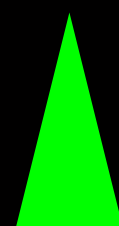
M



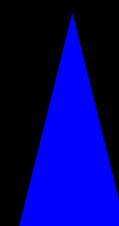
S



L



M



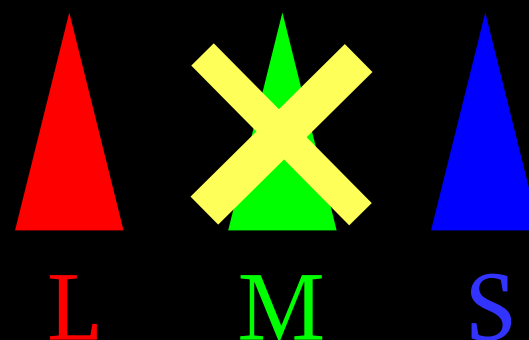
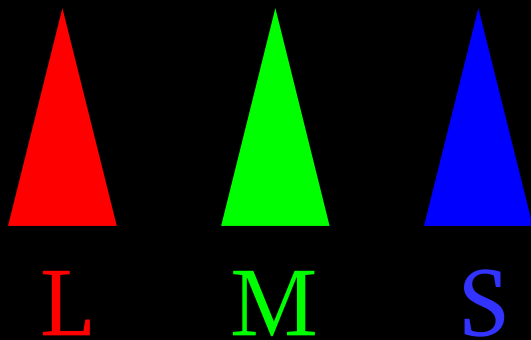
S

Protanopia

Normal



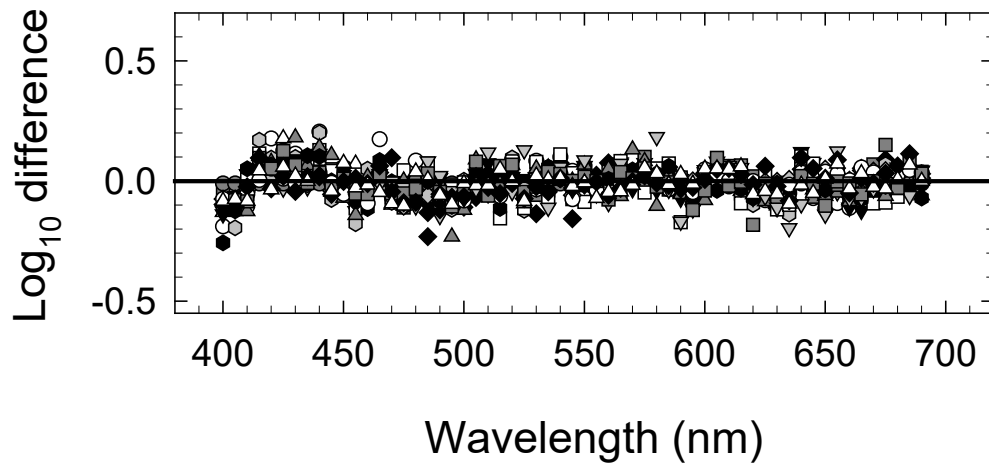
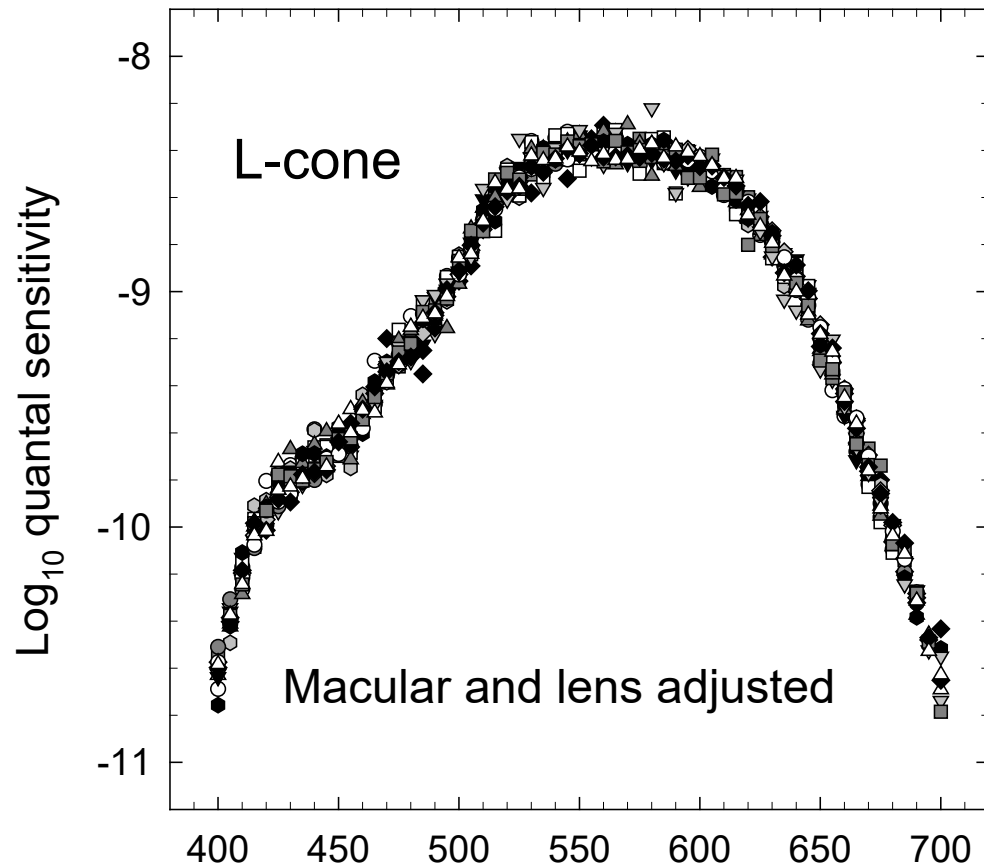
Deuteranope

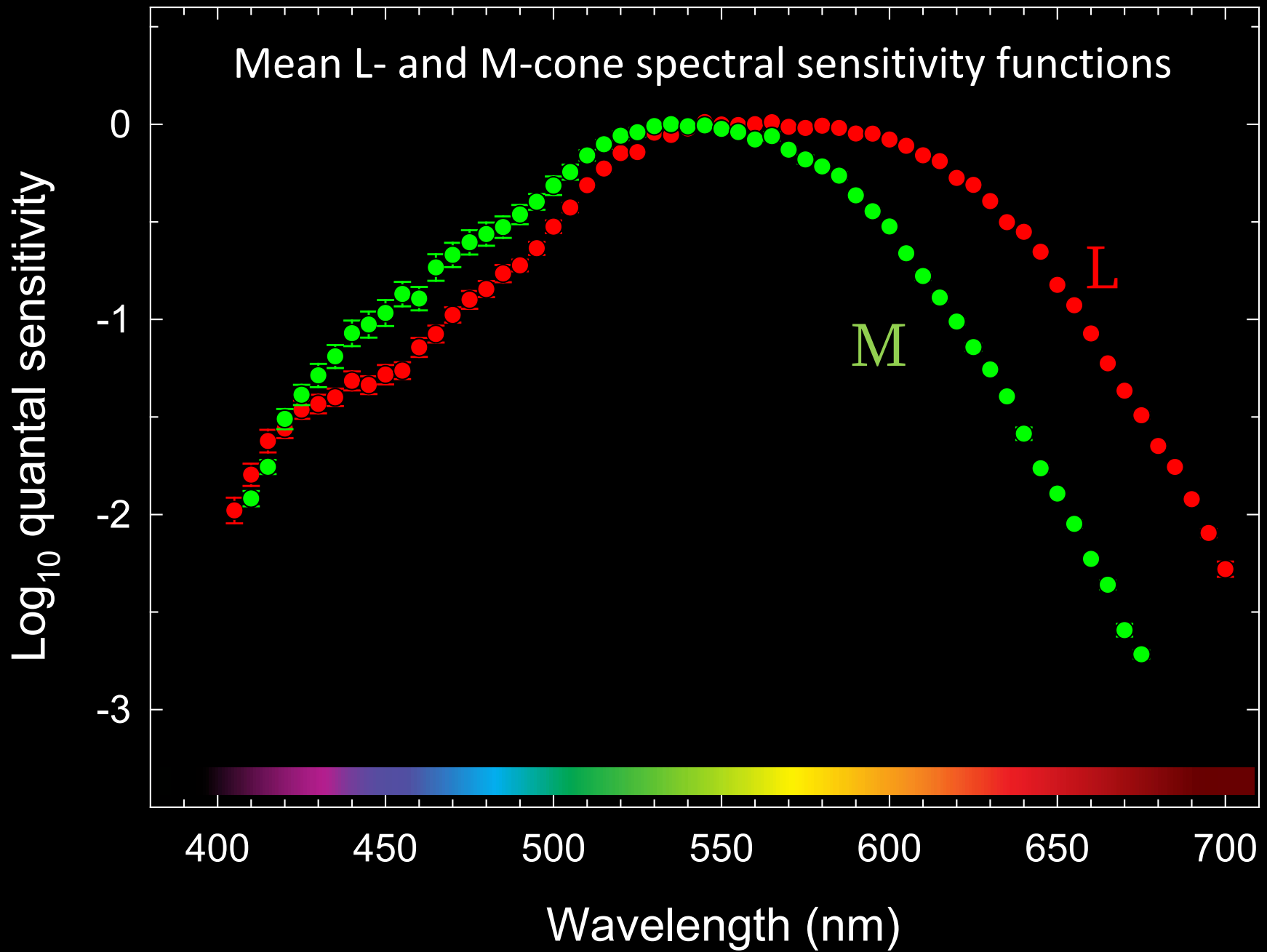


Deuteranopia



(Adjusted) L-cone  
data





# S-cone measurements

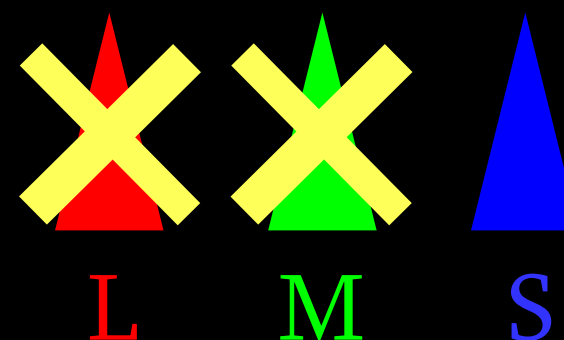
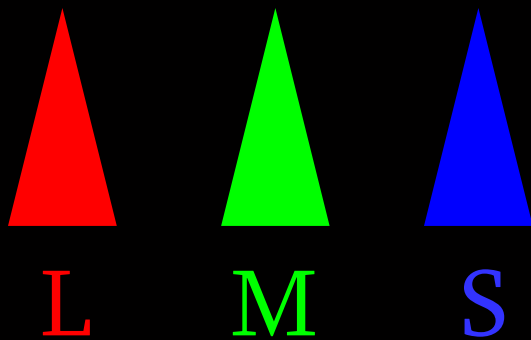
Two types of subjects:

- ▶ S-cone (or blue cone) monochromats
- ▶ Colour normals

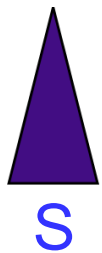
Normal



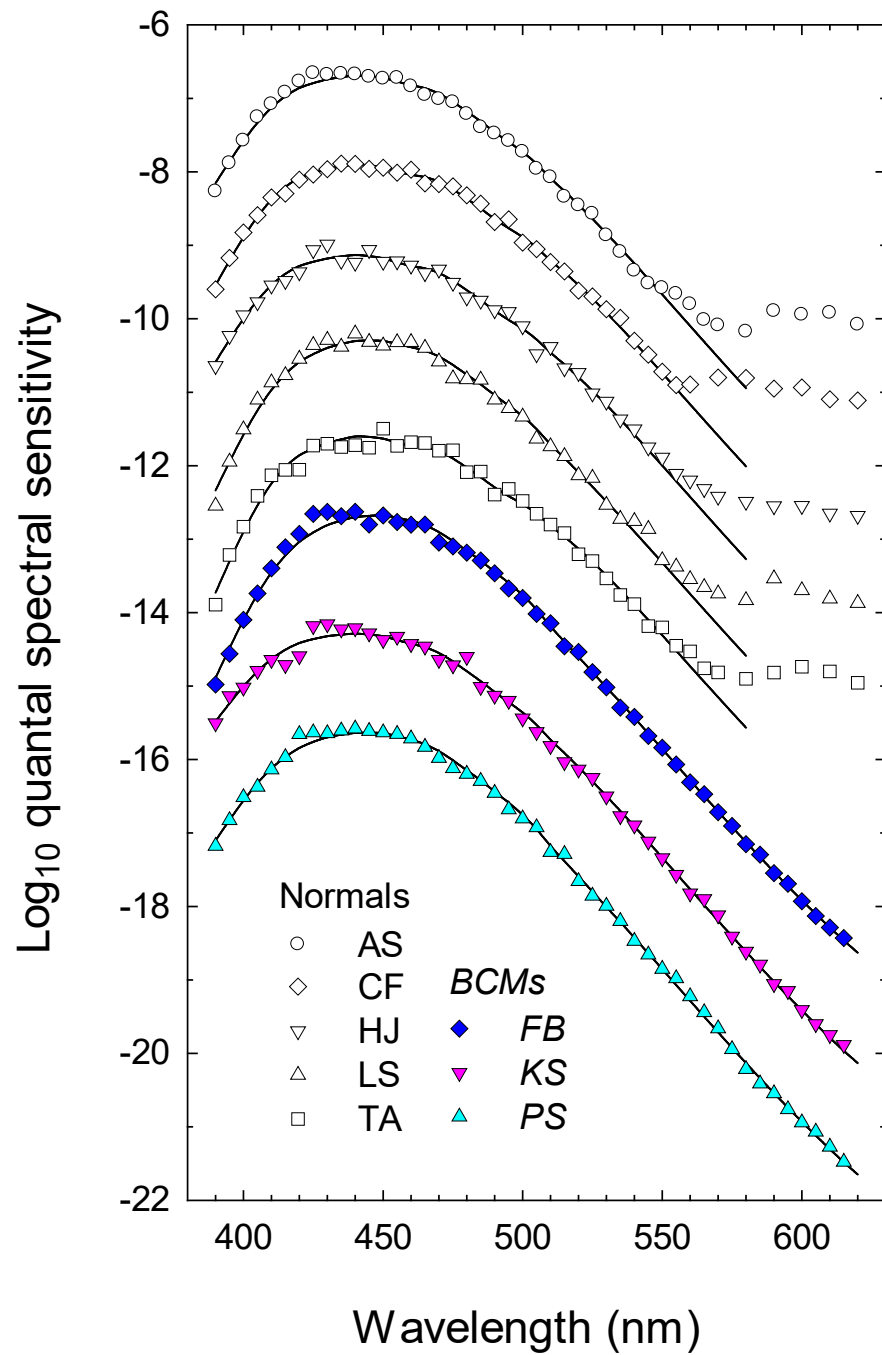
S-cone monochromat



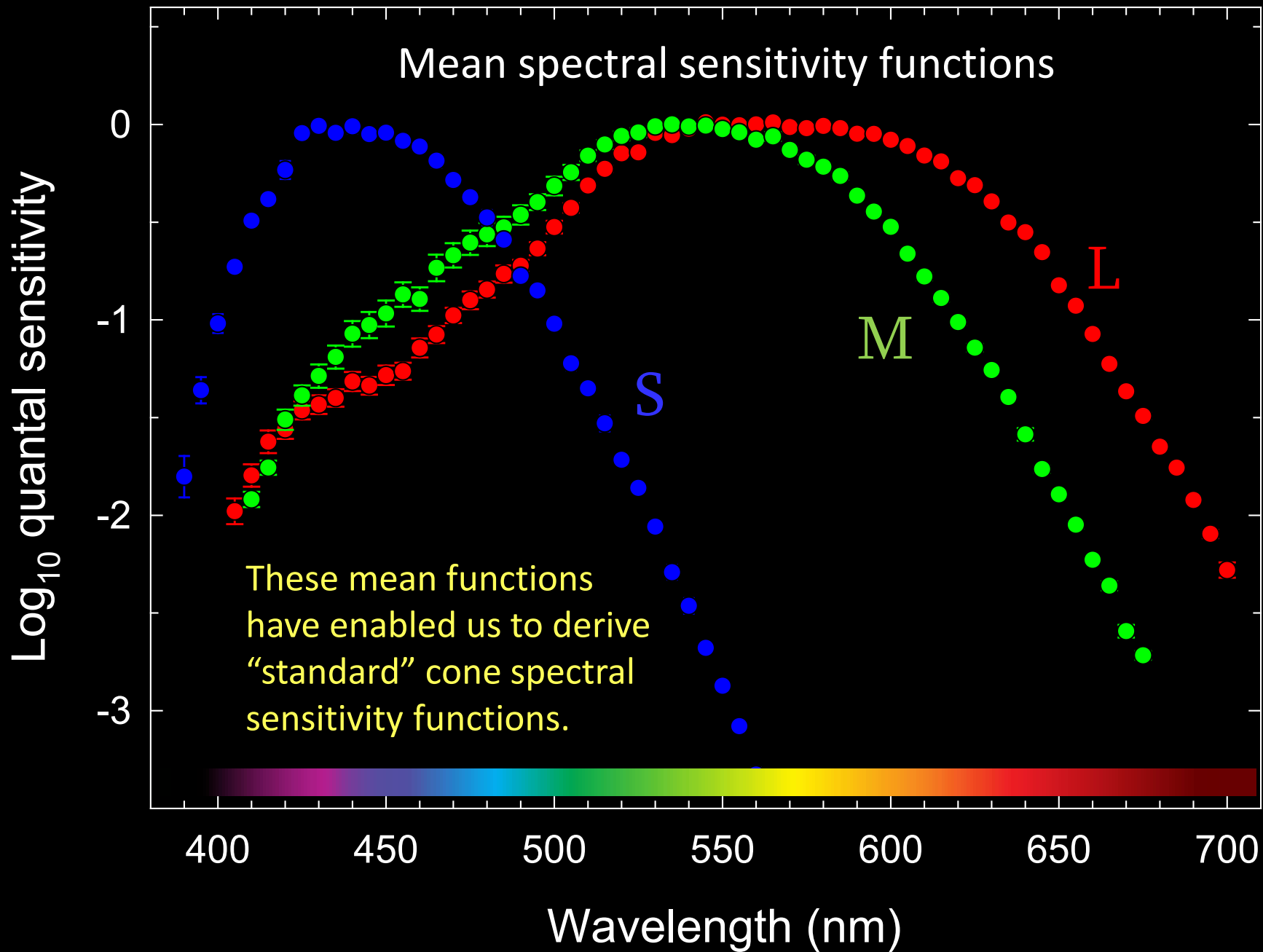




## S-cone data



The Normal data were obtained on an intense orange adapting background that was there to suppress the L- and M-cone sensitivities.



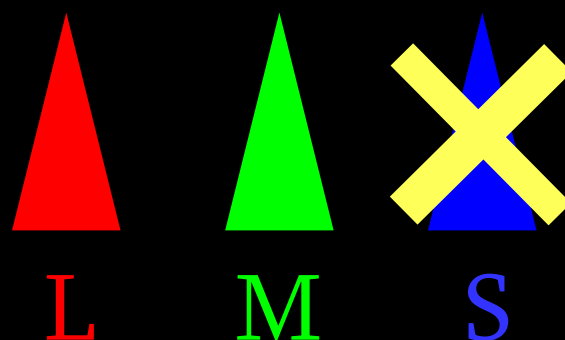
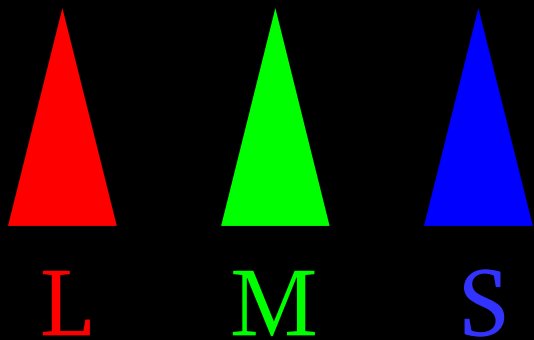
## Why study spectral sensitivities?

- ▶ A knowledge of the spectral sensitivities of the cones is important because it allows us to accurately and simply specify colours and to predict colour matches—for both colour normal and colour deficient people (and to understand the variability between individuals).
- ▶ Practical implications for colour printing, colour reproduction and colour technology.

Normal



Tritanope



Tritanopia

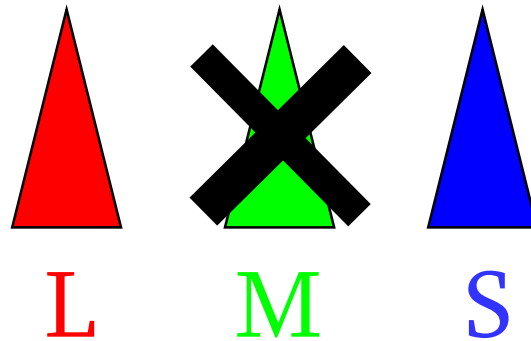
## Deuteranope



Credit: Euro  
Puppy Blog

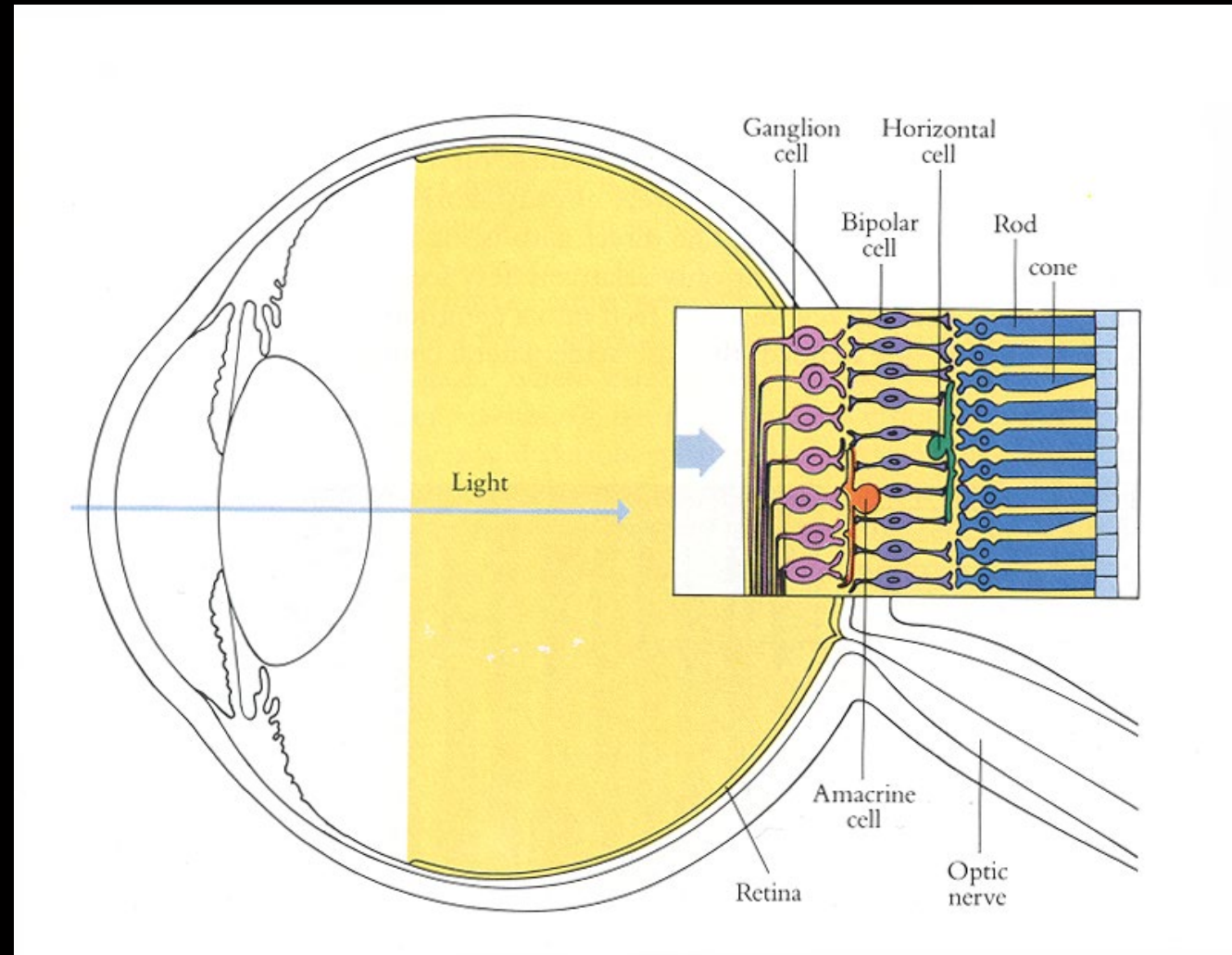


Dogs are dichromats with  
only two cones peaking at  
429 and 555 nm

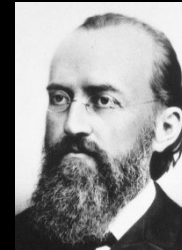


# POSTRECEPTORAL COLOUR VISION

But what happens next (i.e., how is colour encoded after the photoreceptors)?

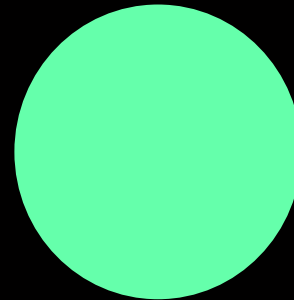


# Colour phenomenology



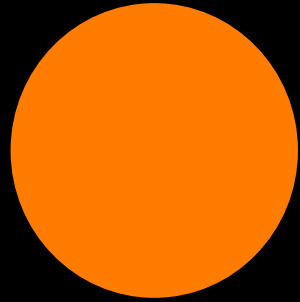
Can provide clues about how colours are encoded after the photoreceptors...

Imagine a single patch of colour inside a dark surround



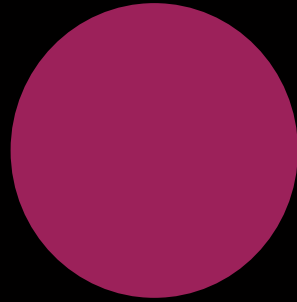
- ▶ Which pairs of colours can coexist in a single, uniform patch of colour?
- ▶ Which pairs can never coexist?





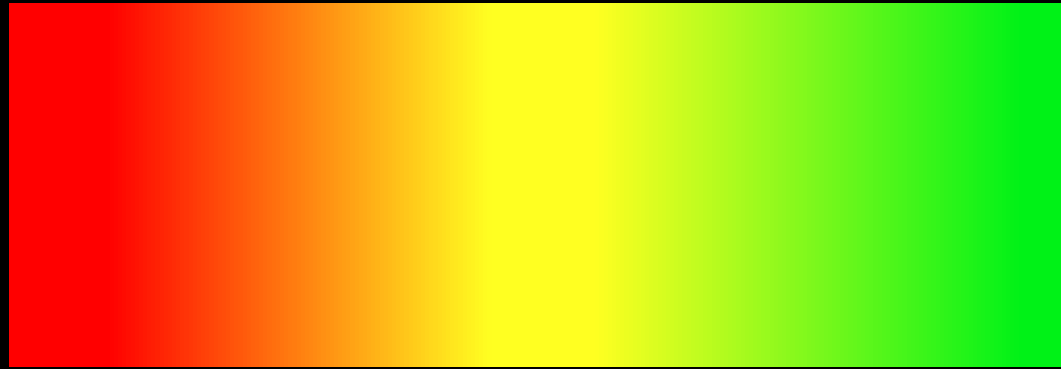
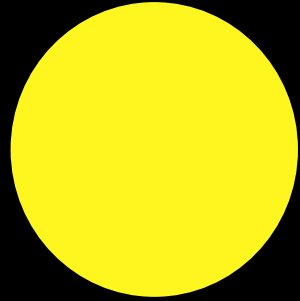
Can a single patch be reddish-yellow?





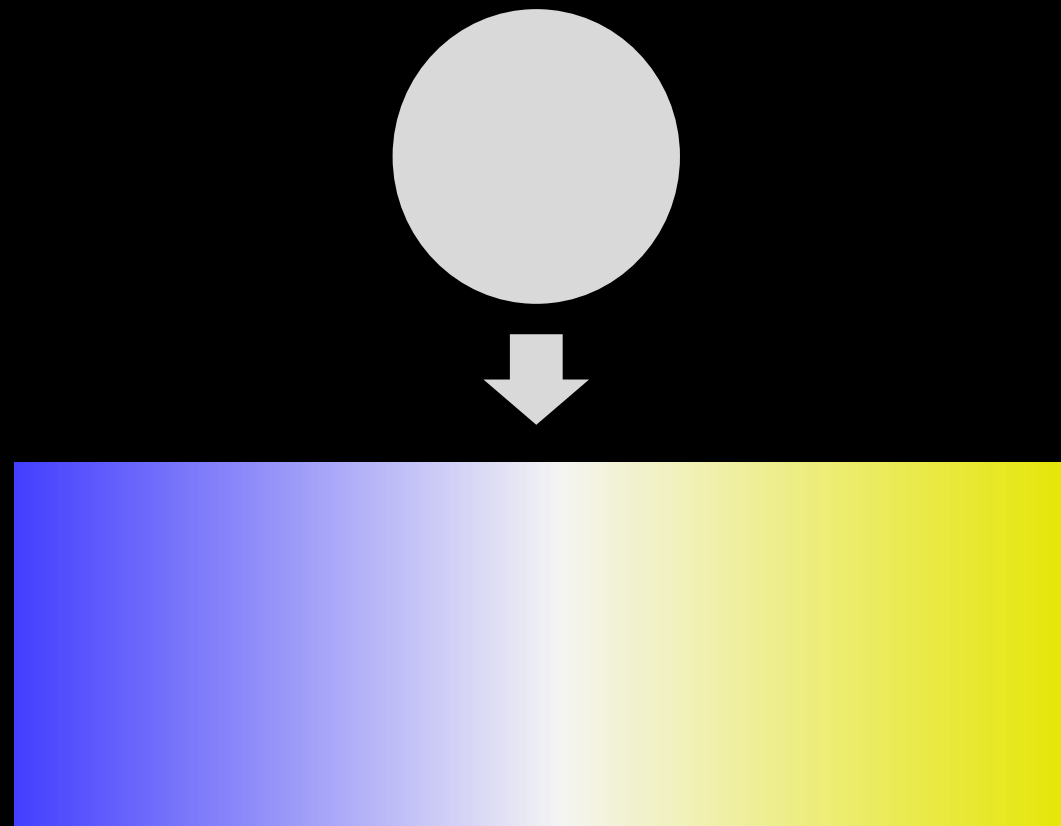
Can it be reddish-blue?





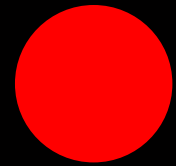
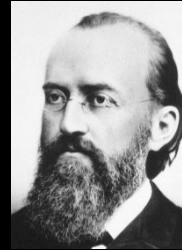
Can it be reddish-green?



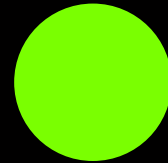


Can it be bluish-yellow? **X**

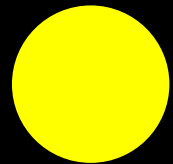
# The colour opponent theory of Hering



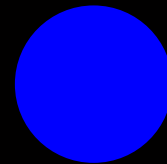
is opposed to



R-G

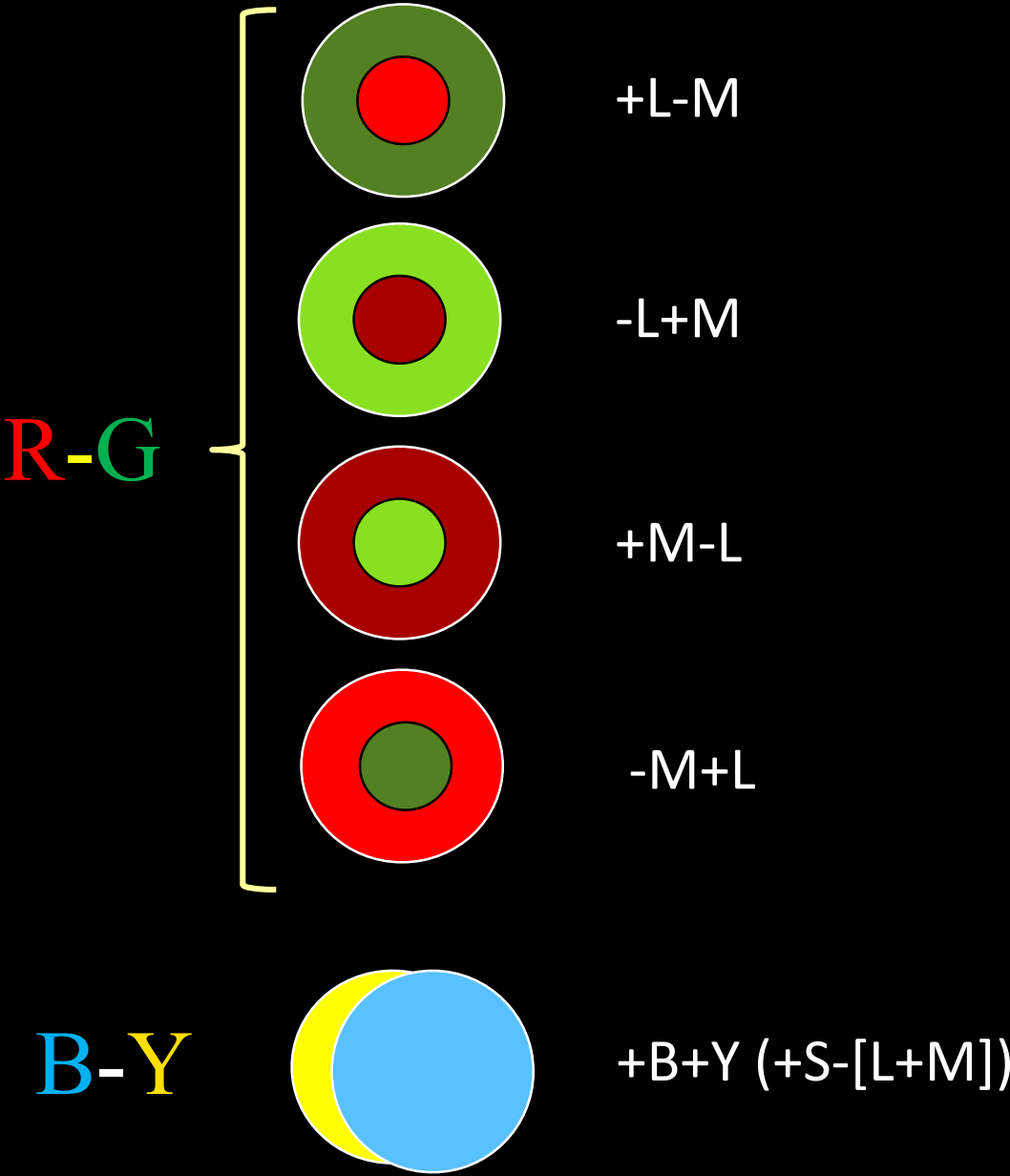
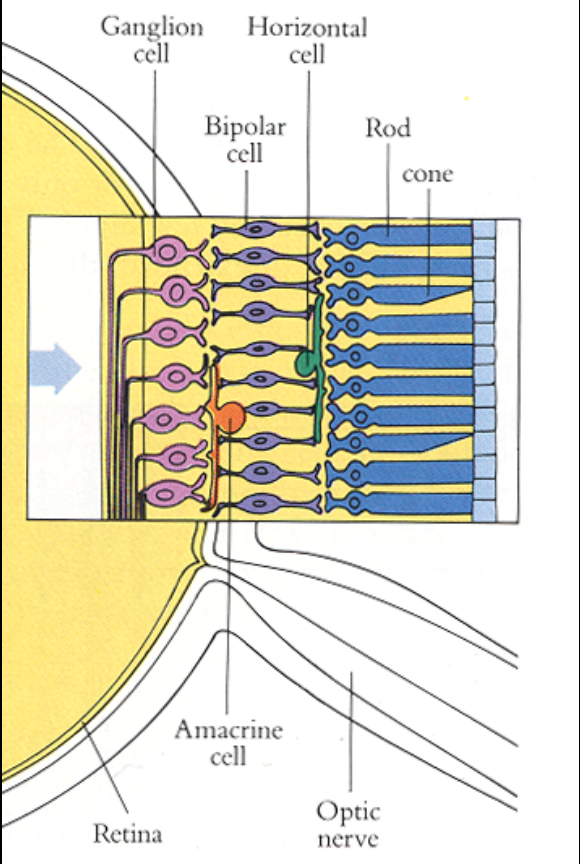


is opposed to

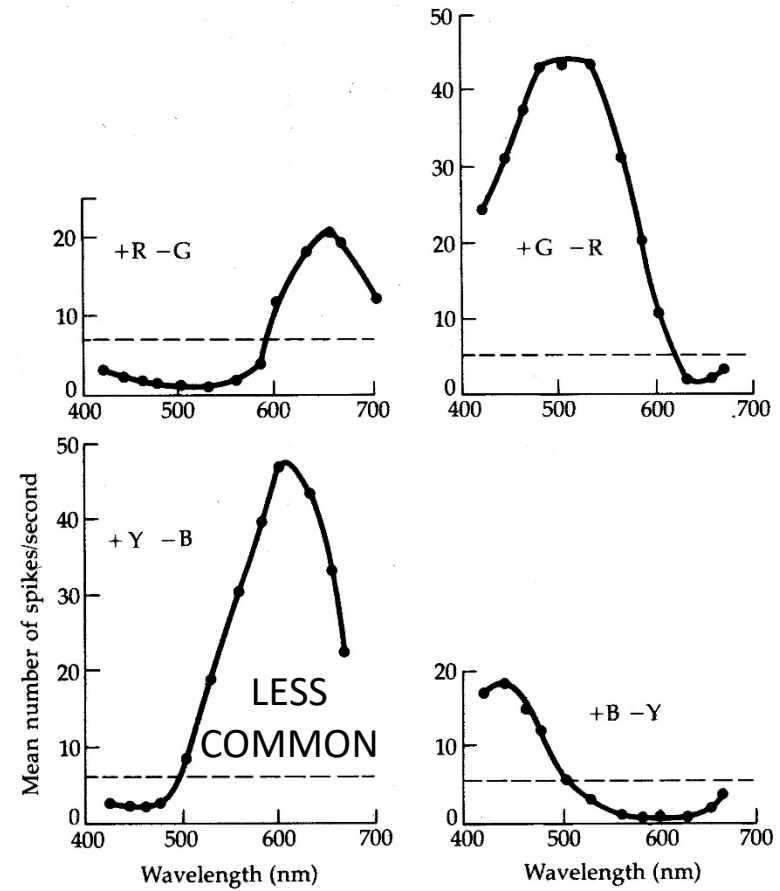


Y-B

Cells in the early visual pathway oppose the signals from different cone classes and can be loosely classified as “red-green” or “blue-yellow” opponent:



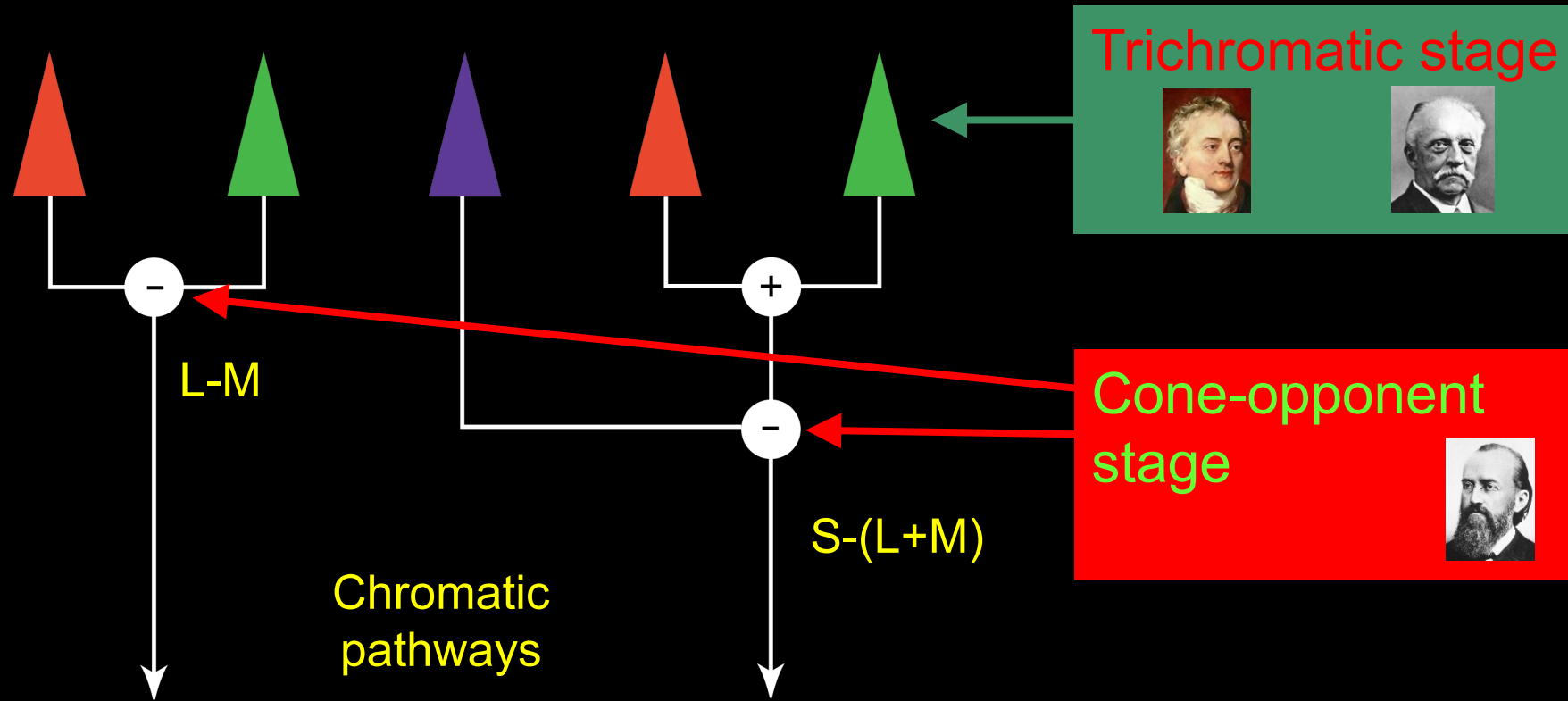
# LGN cell responses



8 AVERAGE FIRING RATES of large sample of cells of each of six LGN cell types as a function of wavelength. Top four cells are spectrally opponent ones and bottom two are spectrally nonopponent cells. The cells on the left are, in principle, "mirror images" of those on the right.

# Standard (basic) psychophysical model

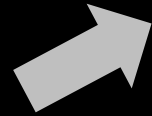
[Based on Boynton (1979)]



Chromatic pathways [L-M and S-(L+M)]  
that produce a chromatic percept.



So that's colour (chromatic) encoding, but what about "luminance" (achromatic) encoding?



ACHROMATIC COMPONENTS



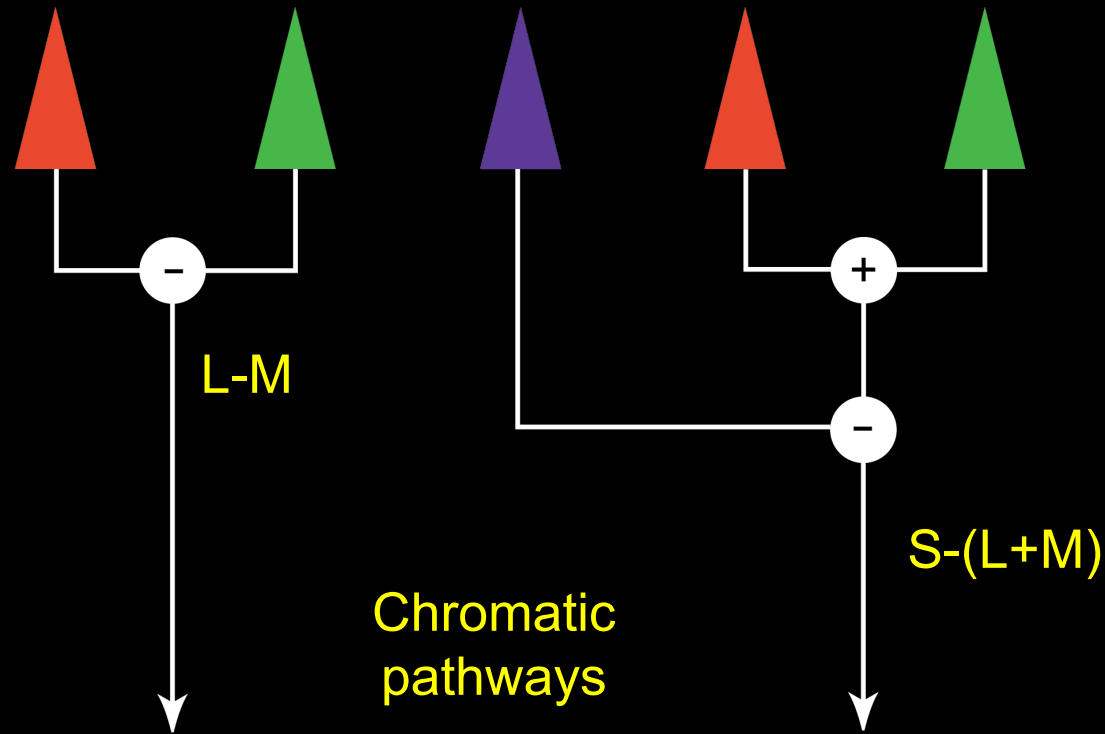
CHROMATIC COMPONENTS



# Chromatic and achromatic pathways

# Standard (basic) psychophysical model

[Based on Boynton (1979)]

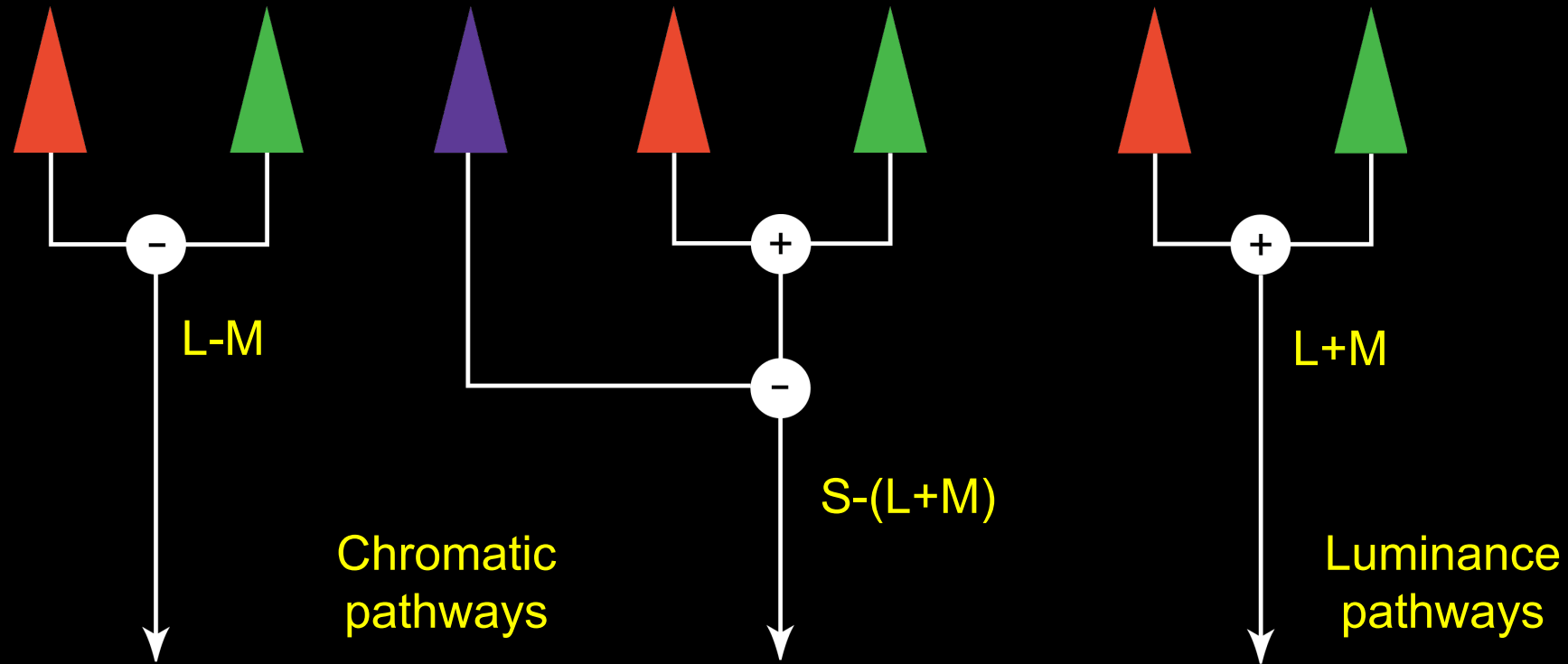


Chromatic pathways [L-M and S-(L+M)]  
that produce a chromatic percept.

In addition to the  
chromatic pathways  
there are also luminance  
pathways...

# Standard (basic) psychophysical model

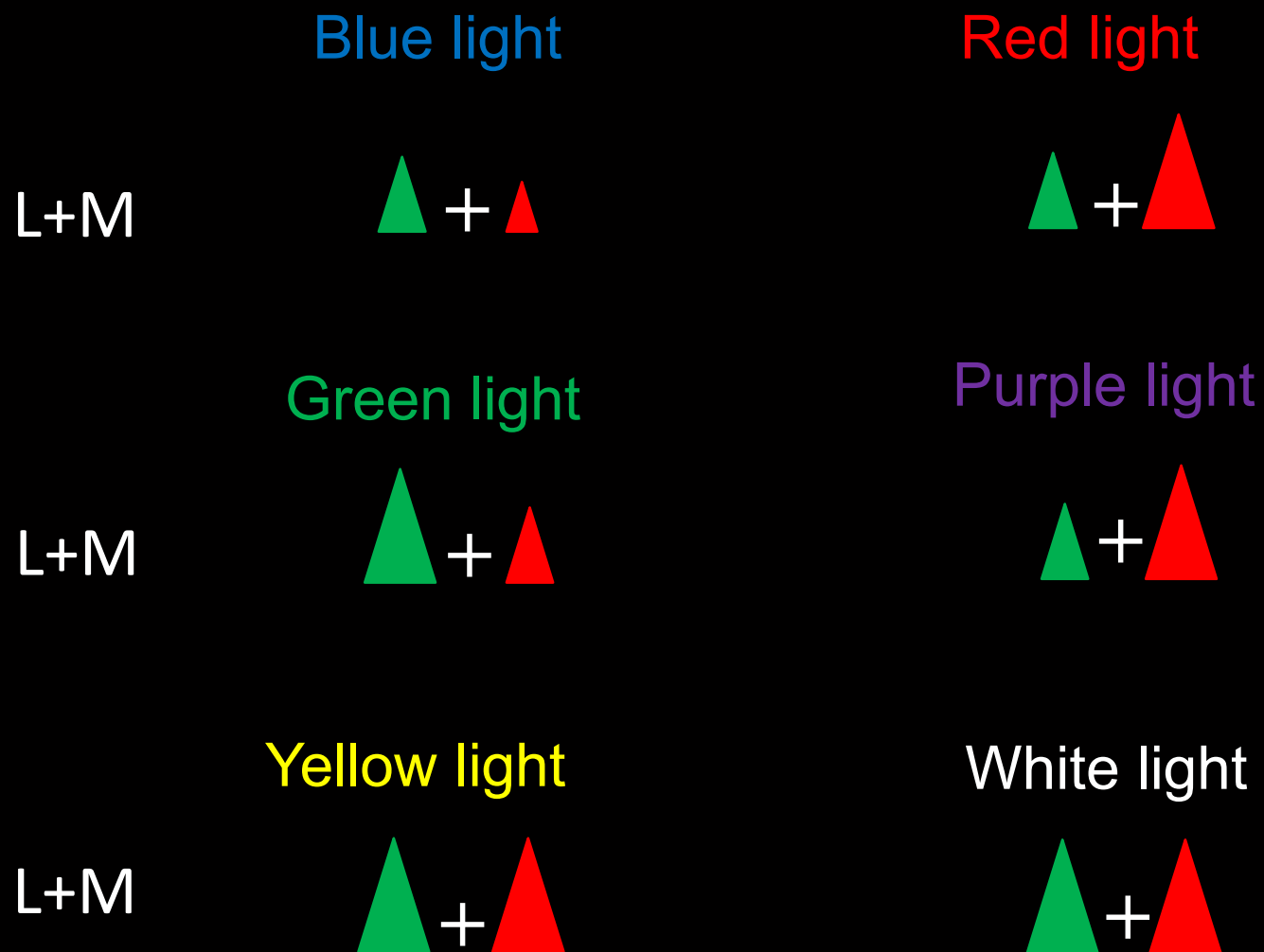
[Based on Boynton (1979)]

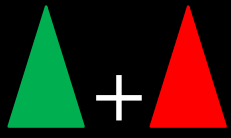


Chromatic pathways [L-M and S-(L+M)]  
that produce a chromatic percept.

Luminance pathways (L+M) that  
produce an achromatic percept.

Luminance is encoded by **summing** the L- and M-cone signals:





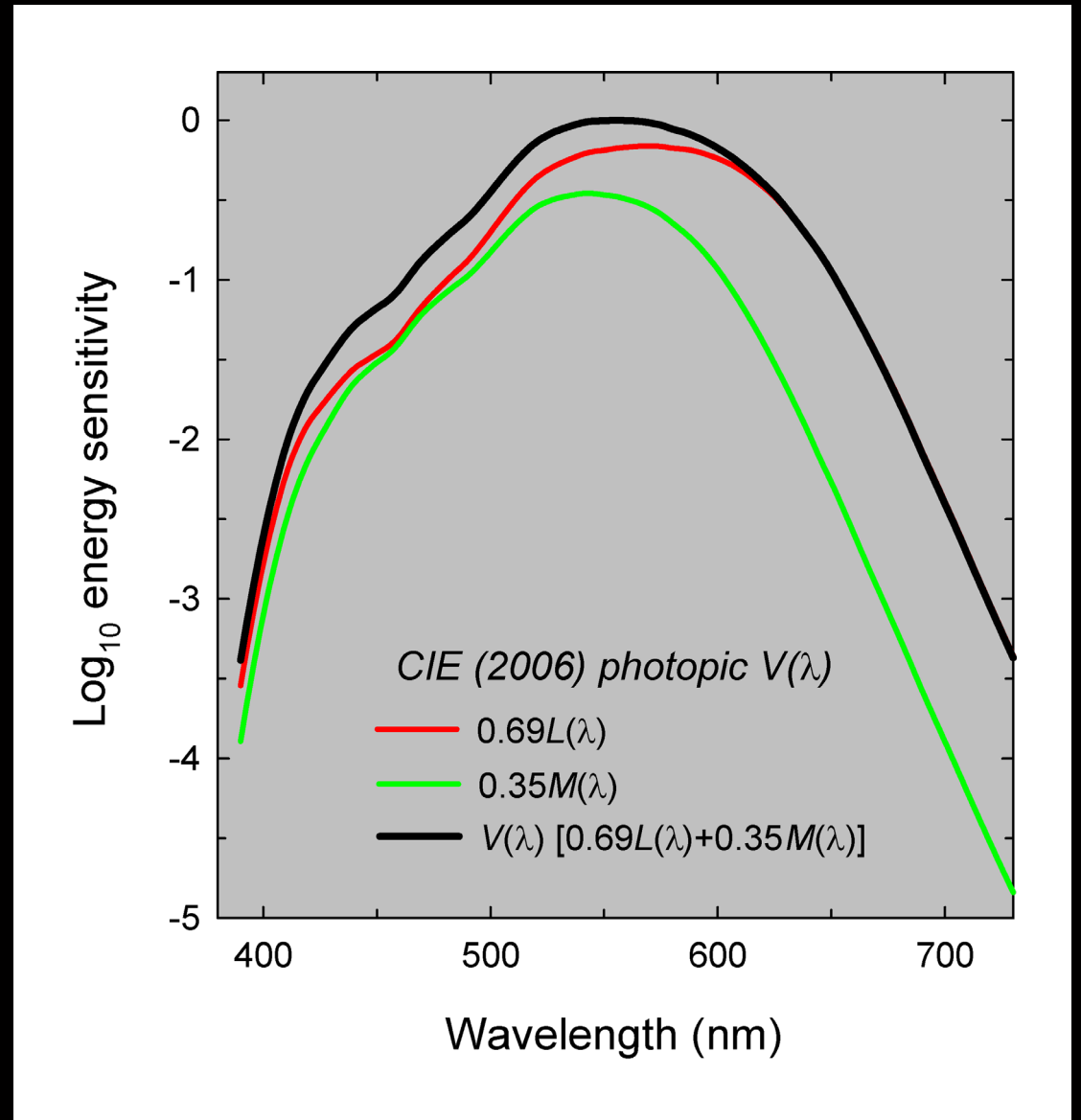
# Assumed characteristics of the luminance pathway

Little or no S-cone input! (Just L+M)

Typically L-cone > M-cone input (2:1)

Ratio of L-cone to M-cone inputs highly variable across individuals.

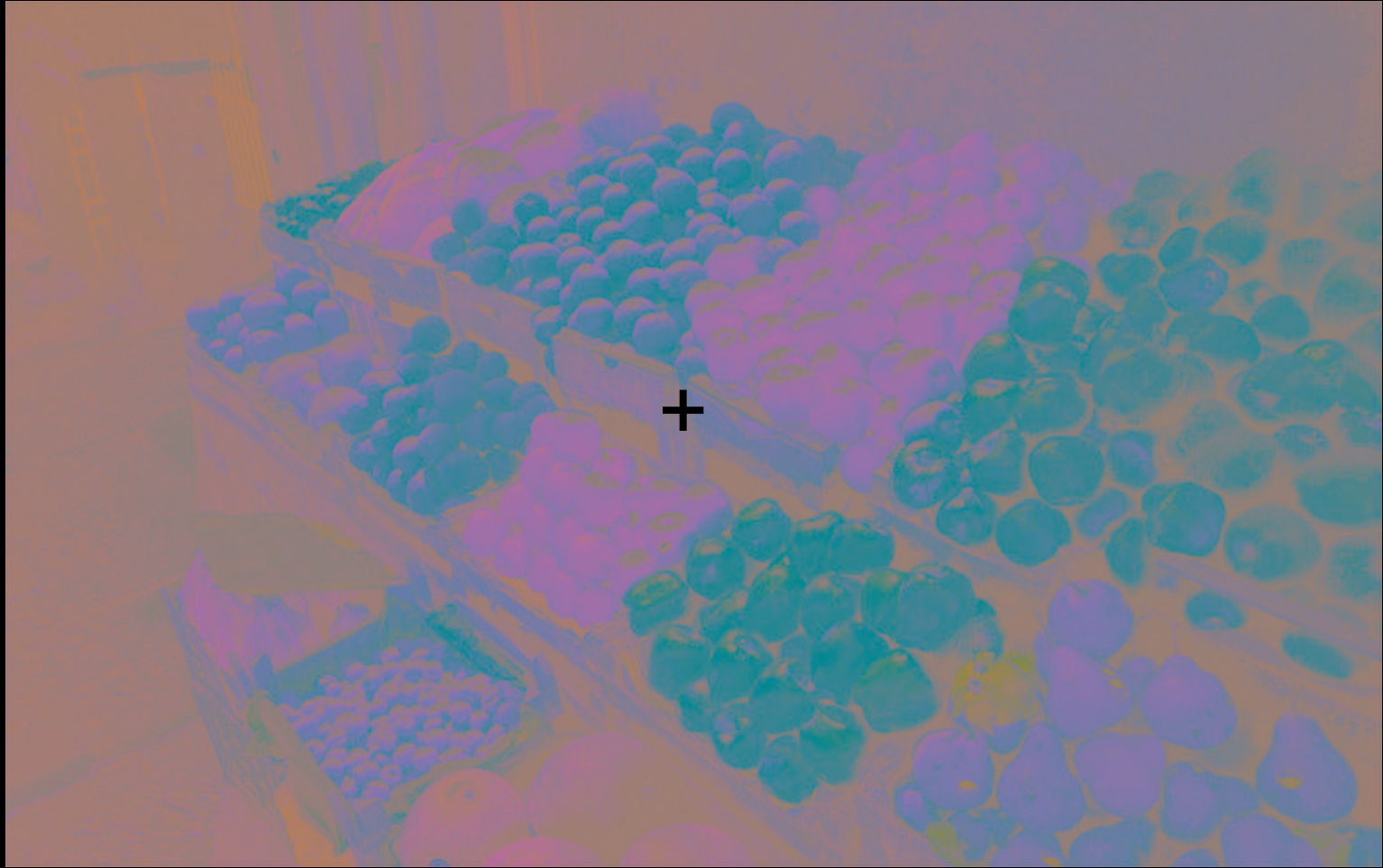
Spectral sensitivity is known as  $V(\lambda)$  or the photopic luminous efficiency function and defines lux,  $\text{cd}/\text{m}^2$  and trolands.



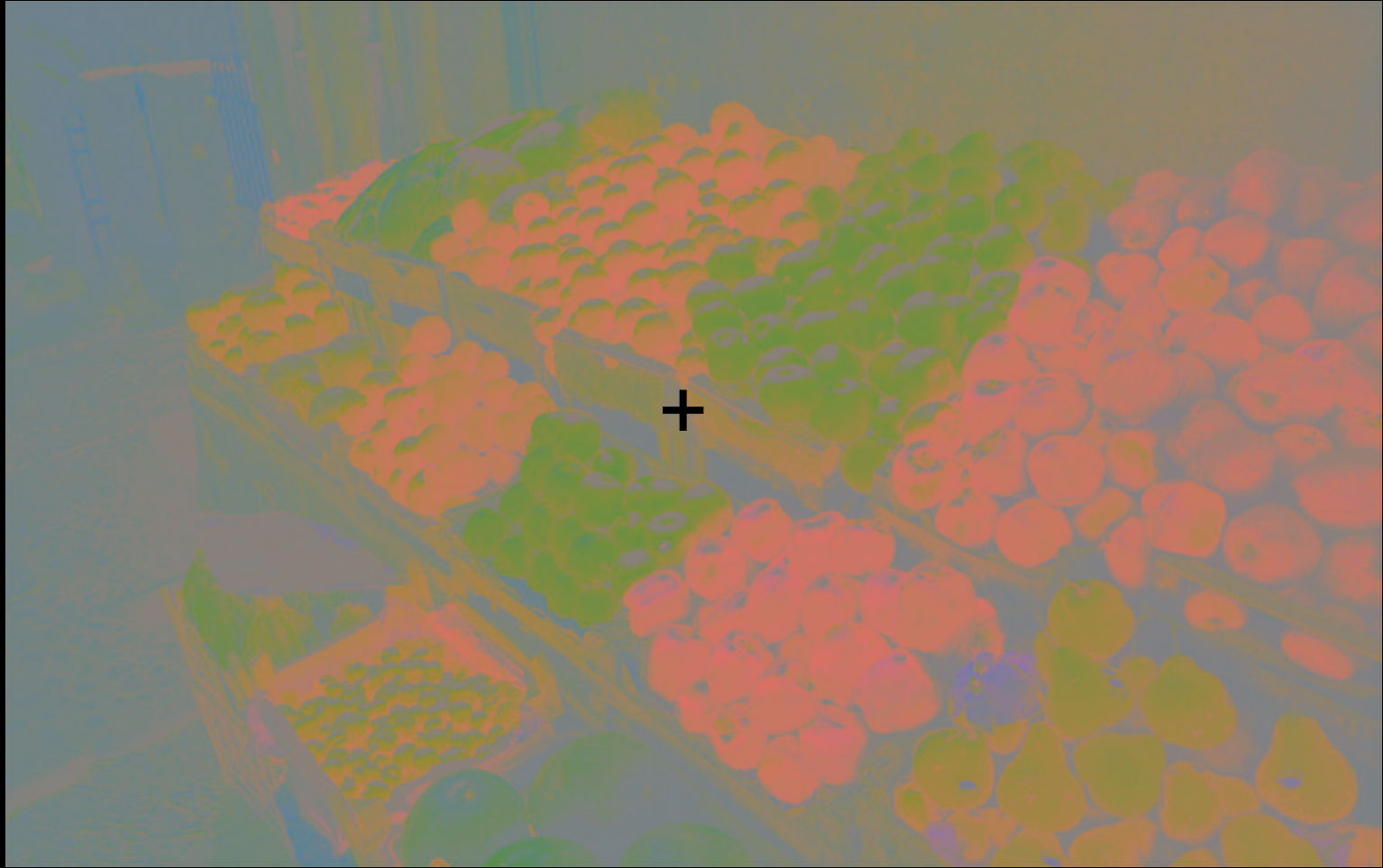
Colour is in many ways secondary  
to luminance











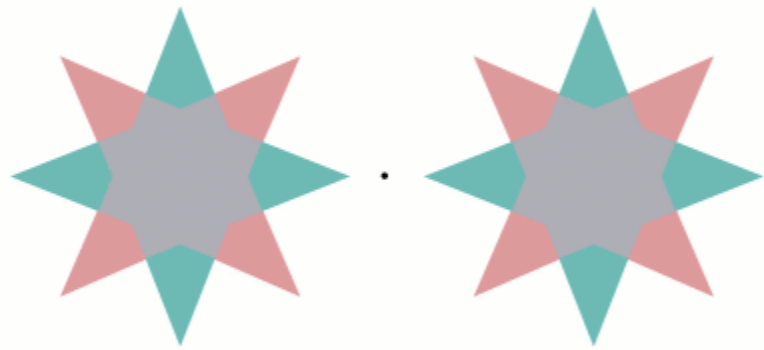




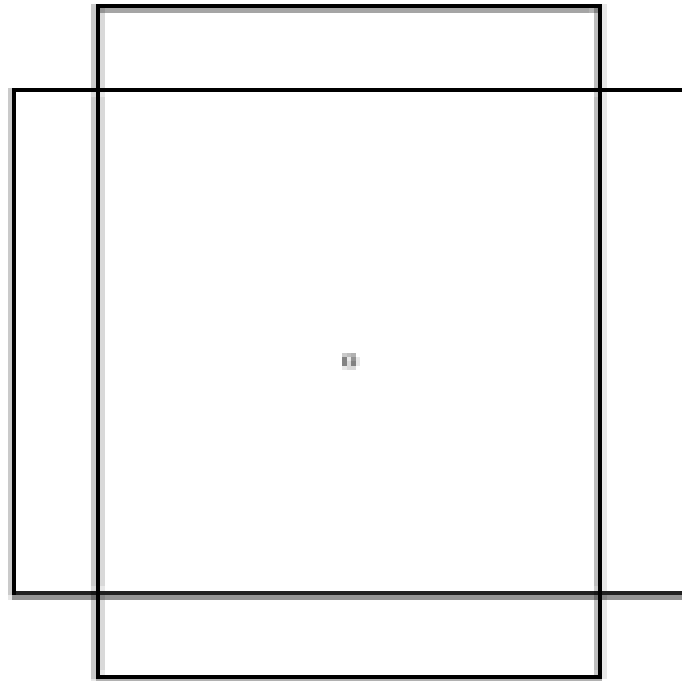
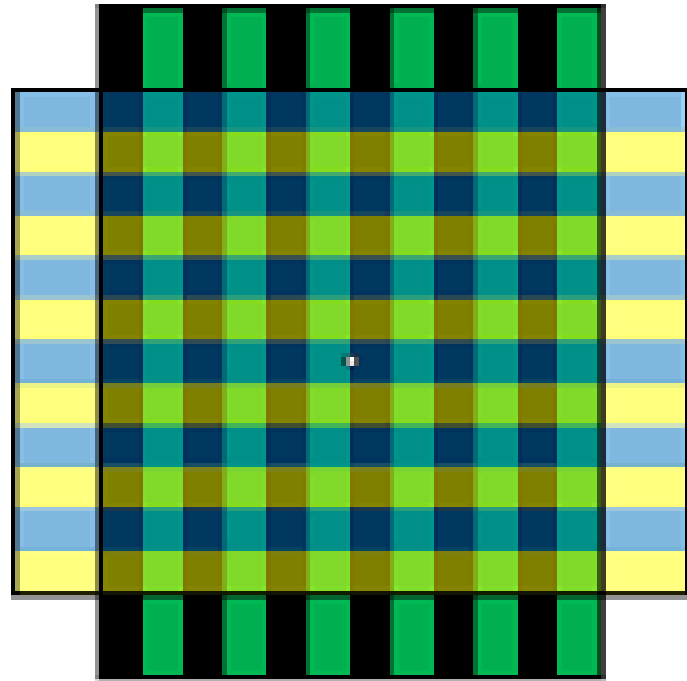


G. Seurat (c. 1889-90)  
*Le Chahut*  
[The High-Kick, Can-Can]





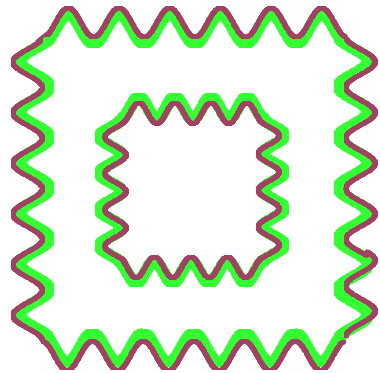
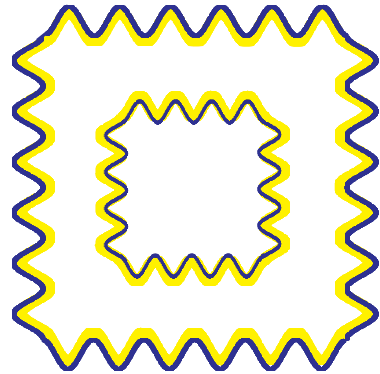
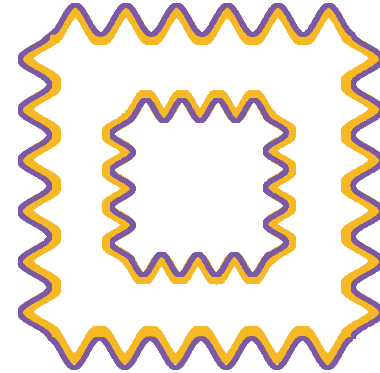
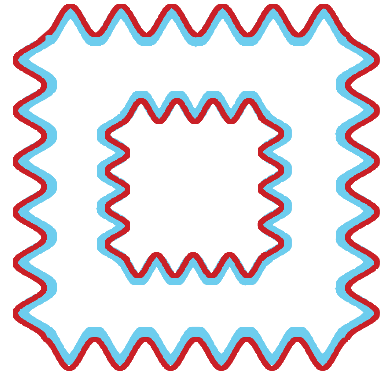
Rob van Lier, Mark Vergeer & Stuart Anstis



Peter Tse



Watercolour  
effect



So far, we've mainly been talking about the colours of isolated patches of light. But the colour of a patch depends also upon:

(i) What precedes it (in time)

**COLOUR AFTER-EFFECTS**

(ii) What surrounds it (in space)

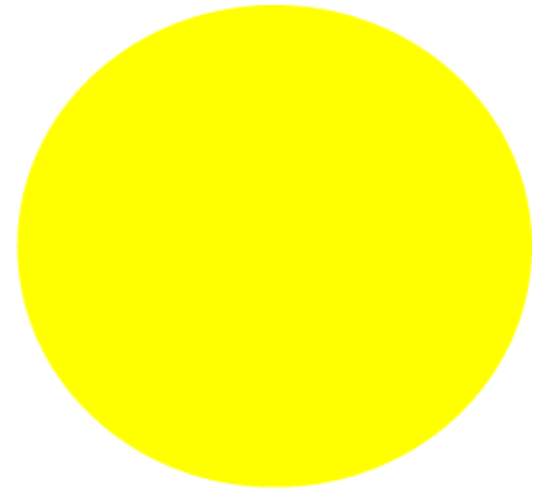
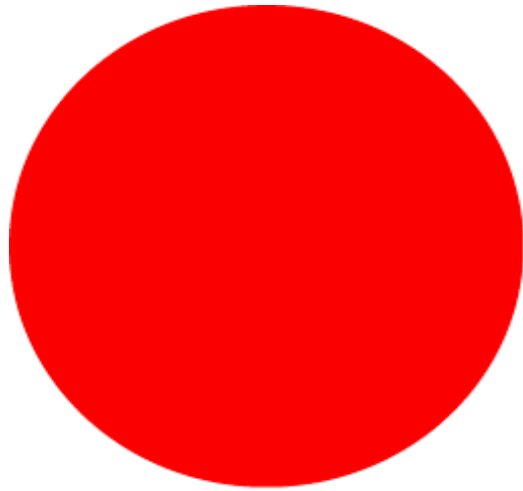
**COLOUR CONTRAST**

**COLOUR ASSIMILATION**

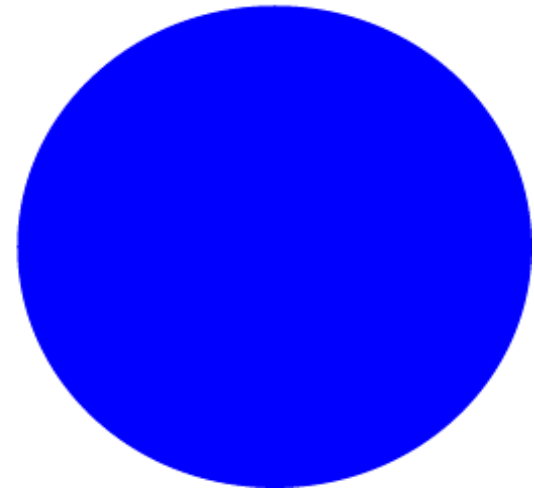
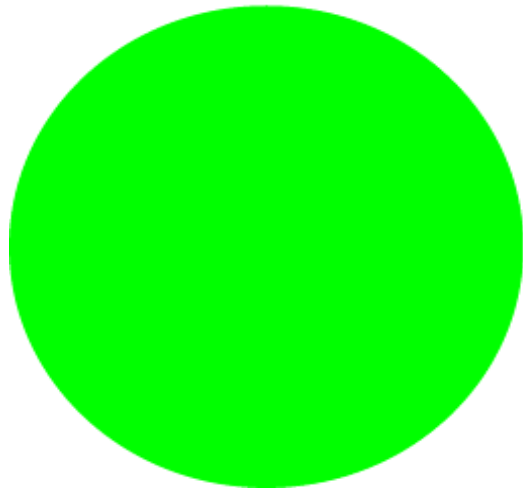
# COLOUR AFTER-EFFECTS

(what precedes the patch)

Colour  
after-effects



+



+

You don't have to see things for  
them to produce an after-effect...



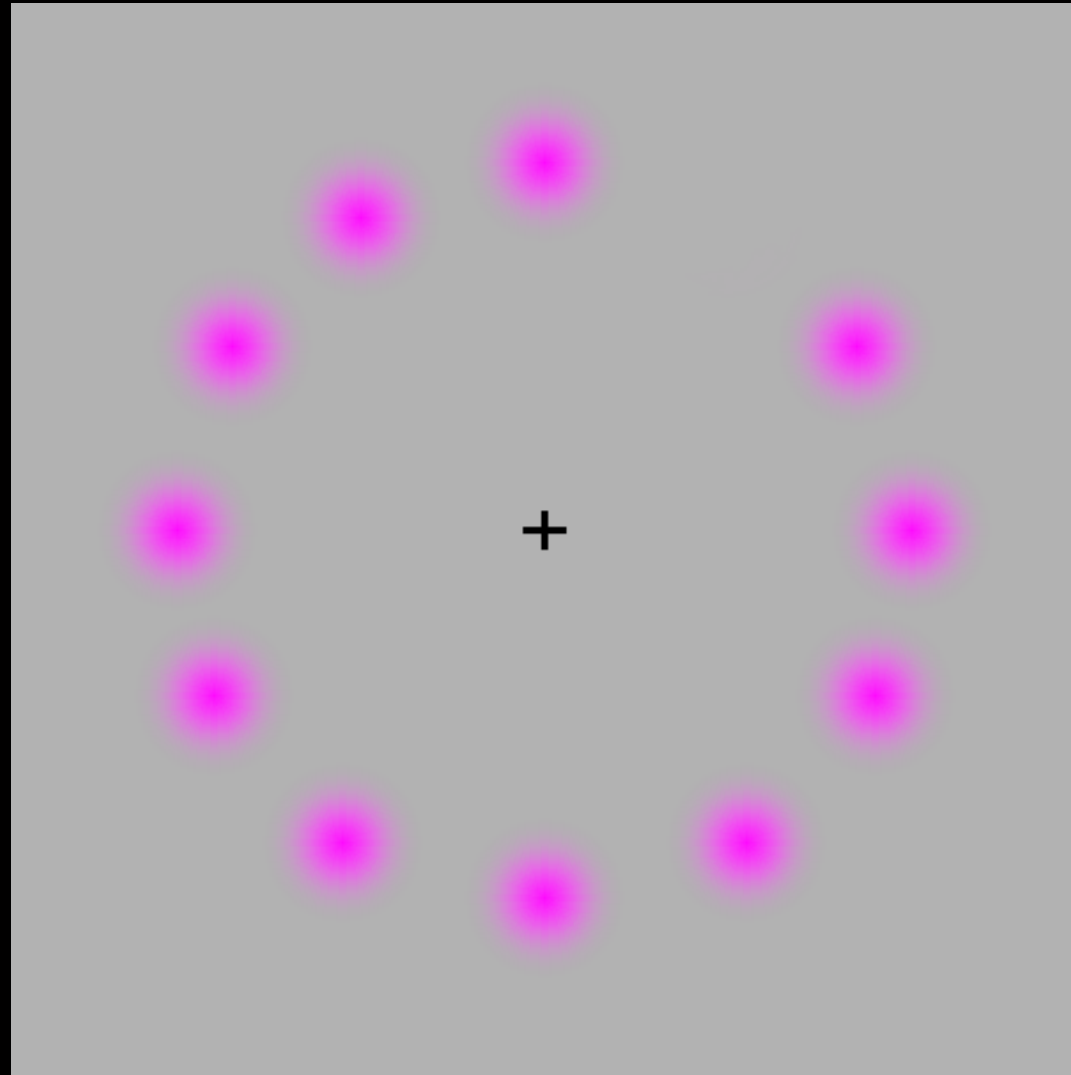








# Lilac chaser or Pac-Man illusion



Jeremy Hinton



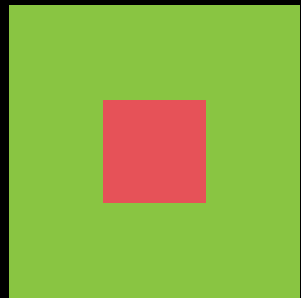
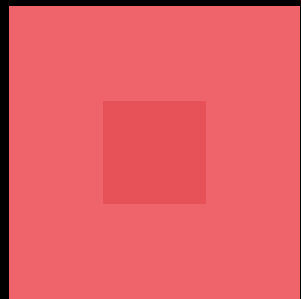
# COLOUR CONTRAST

(what surrounds the patch)

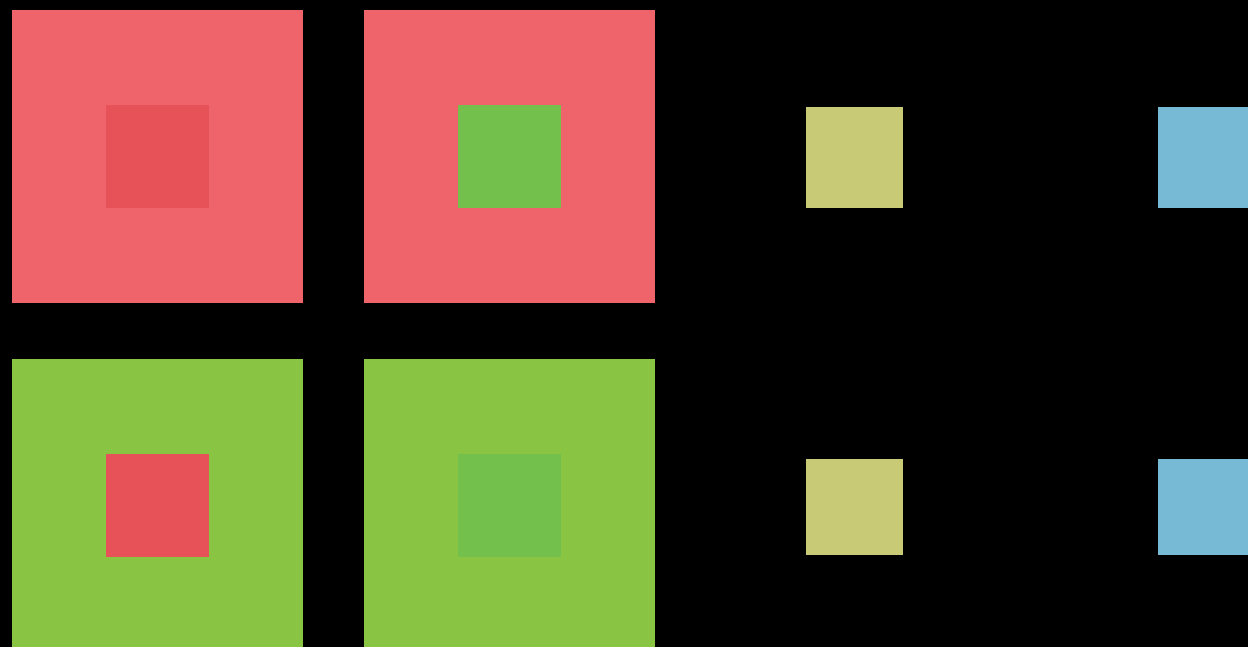
## Colour contrast



# Colour contrast

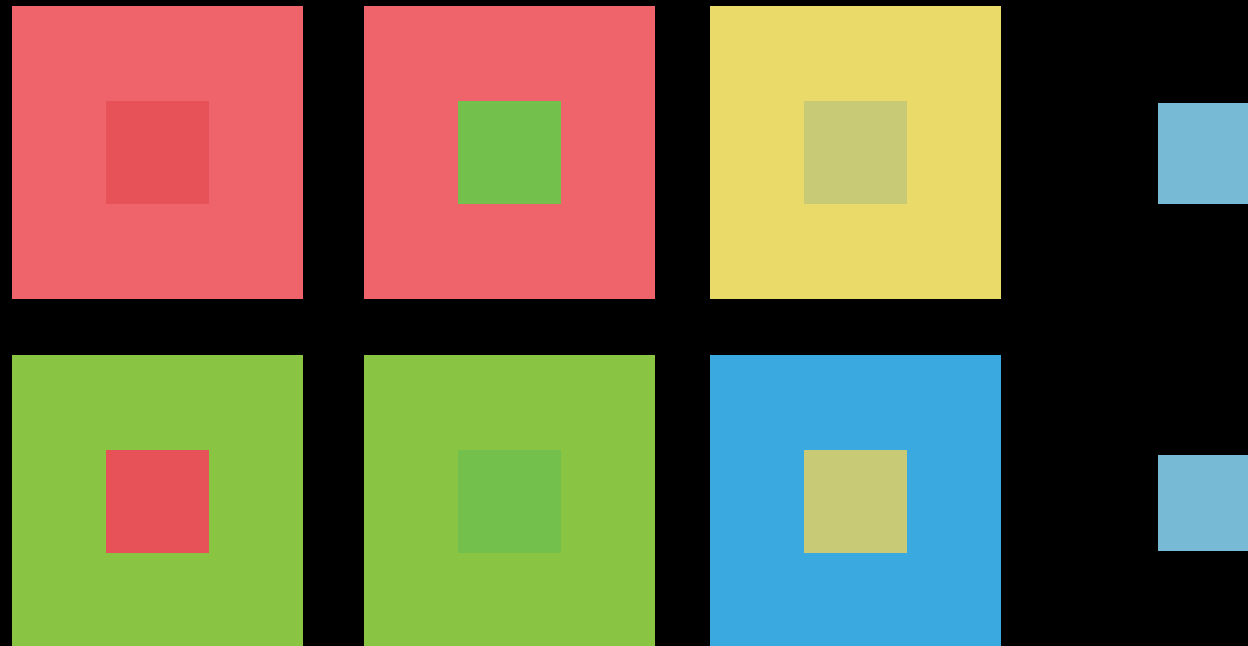


# Colour contrast

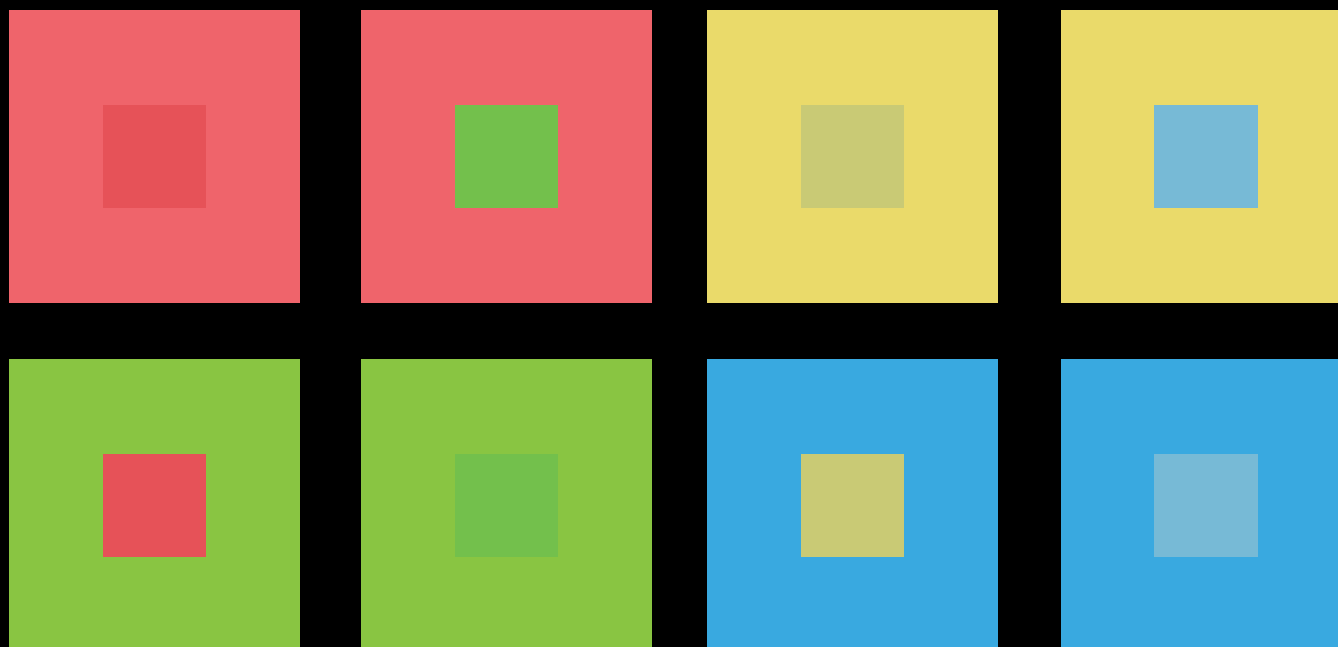




# Colour contrast



## Colour contrast





The Night Cafe in Arles, by *Vincent Van Gogh* Watercolour, 1888.



Claude Monet, The Regatta at Argenteuil, c. 1872  
Musée d'Orsay, Paris

# Colour contrast can enhance colour appearance

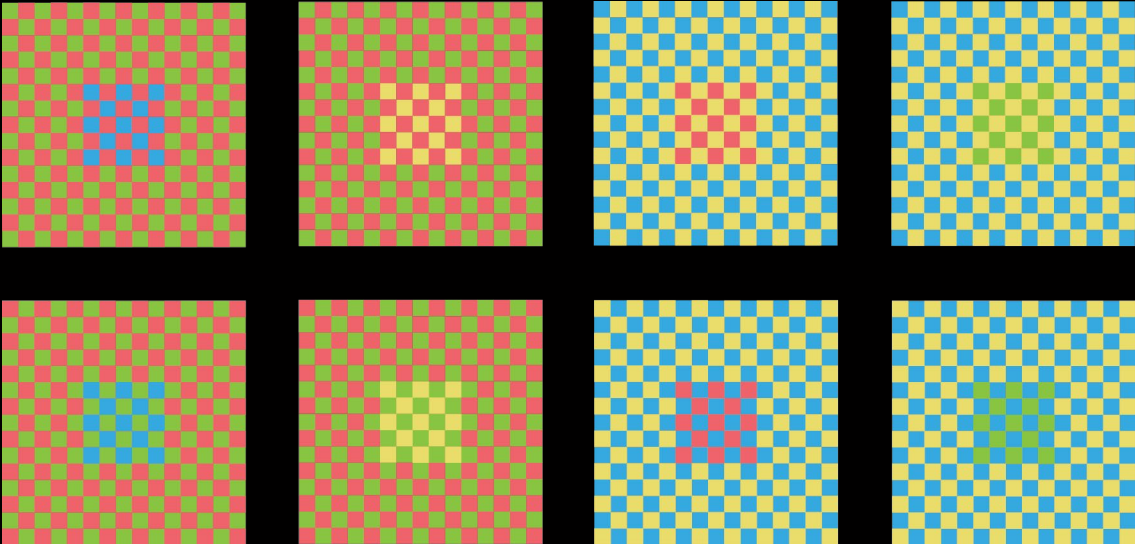
Chevreul circles

# COLOUR ASSIMILATION

Colour assimilation

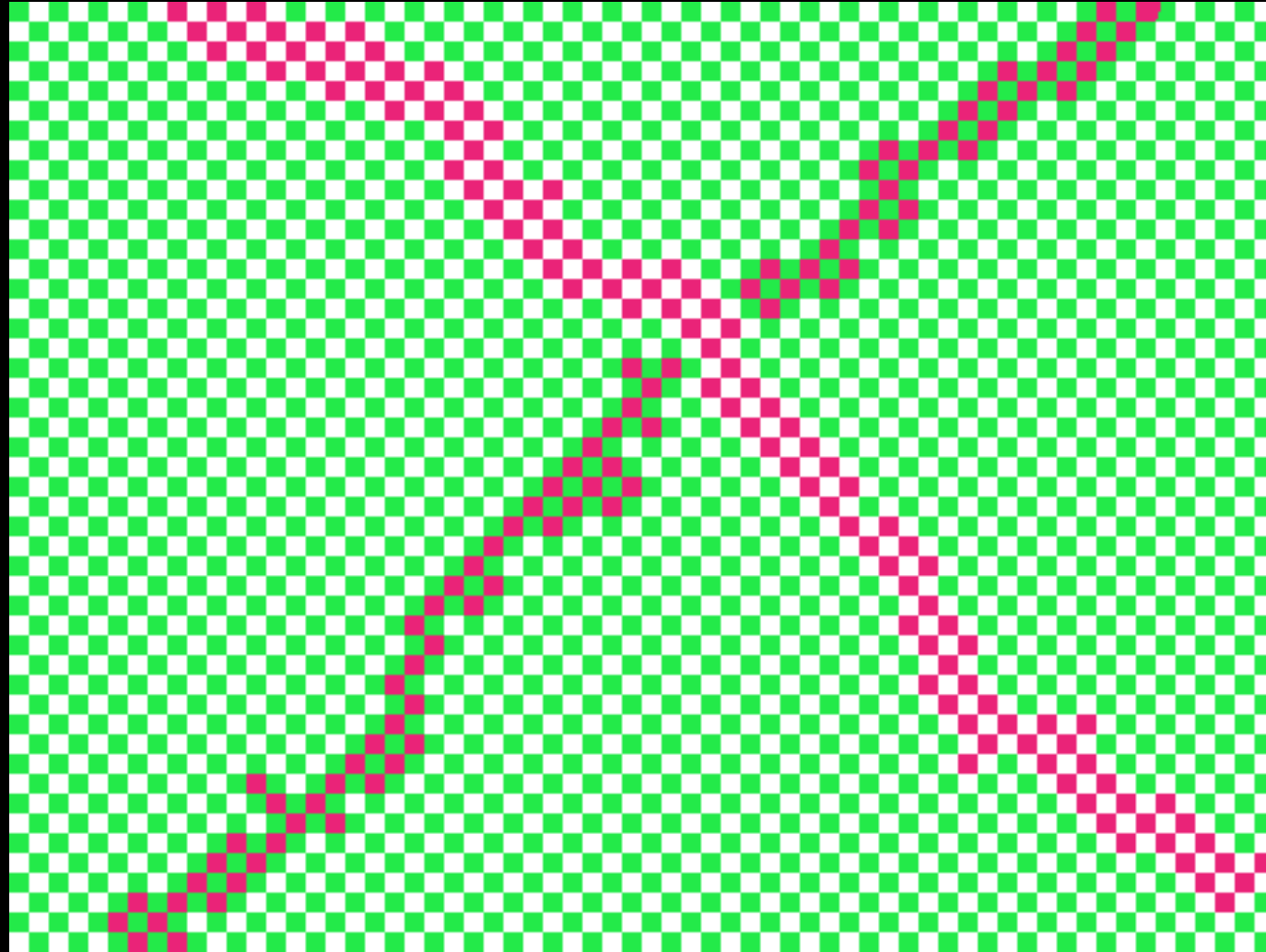


# Colour assimilation

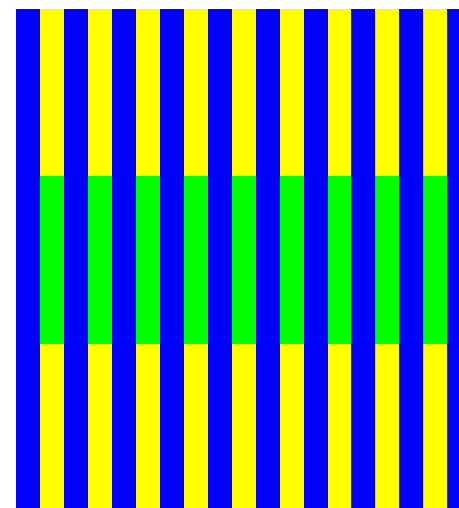
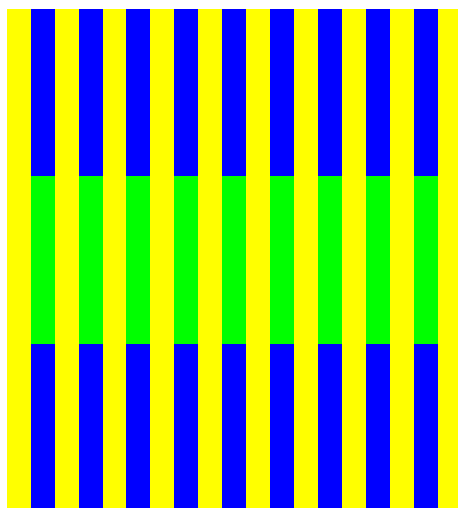
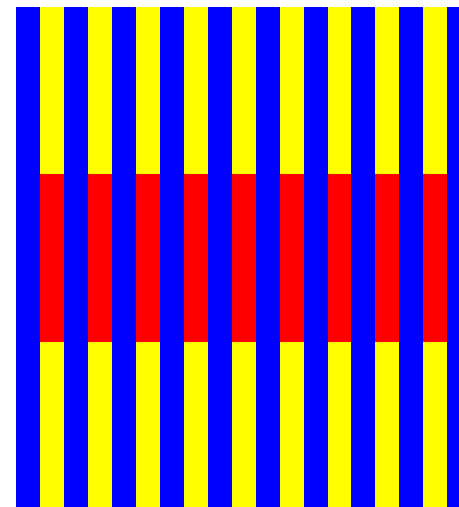
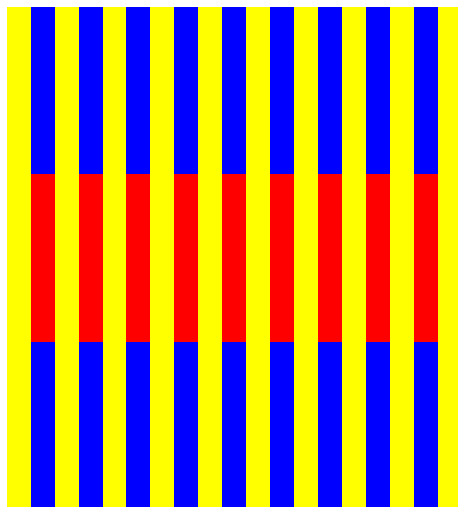




## Colour assimilation



Munker  
illusion



# COLOUR CONSTANCY

# Colour constancy

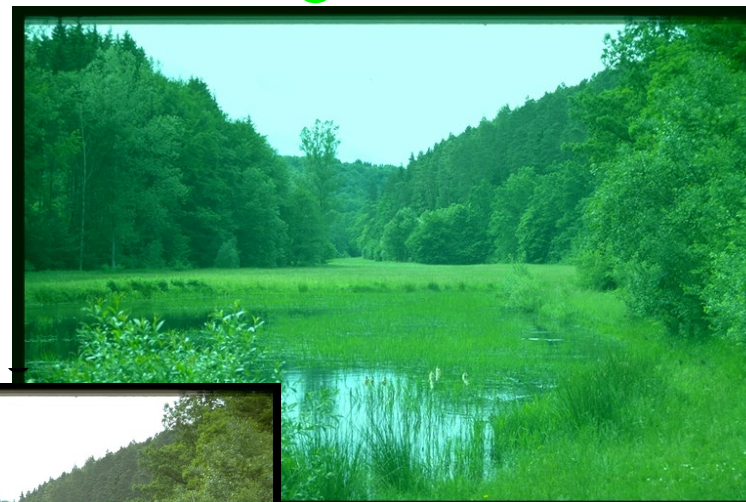


# Colour constancy

red



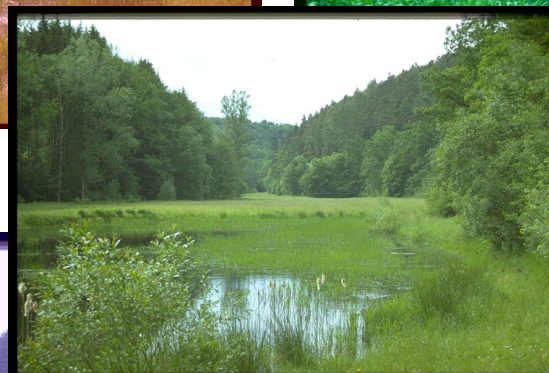
green



blue



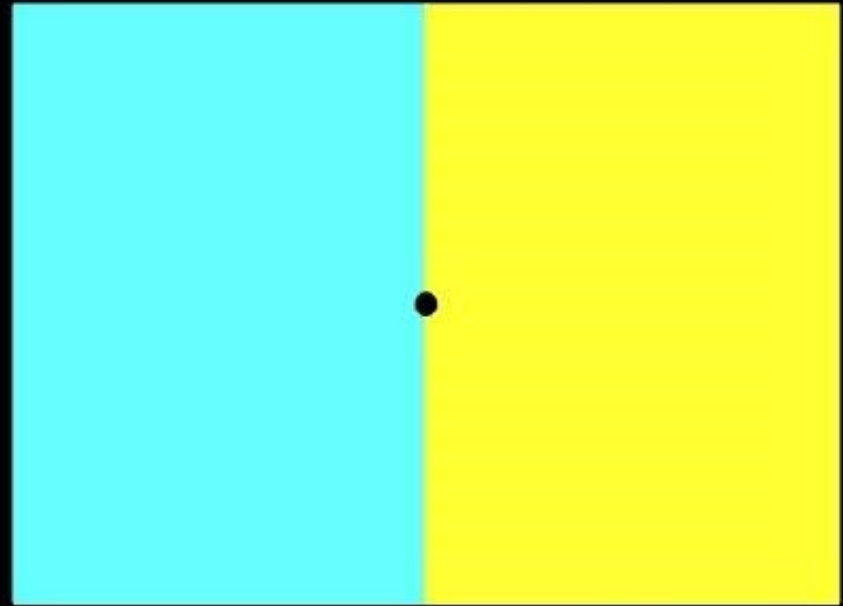
yellow



Credit: Gegenfurtner

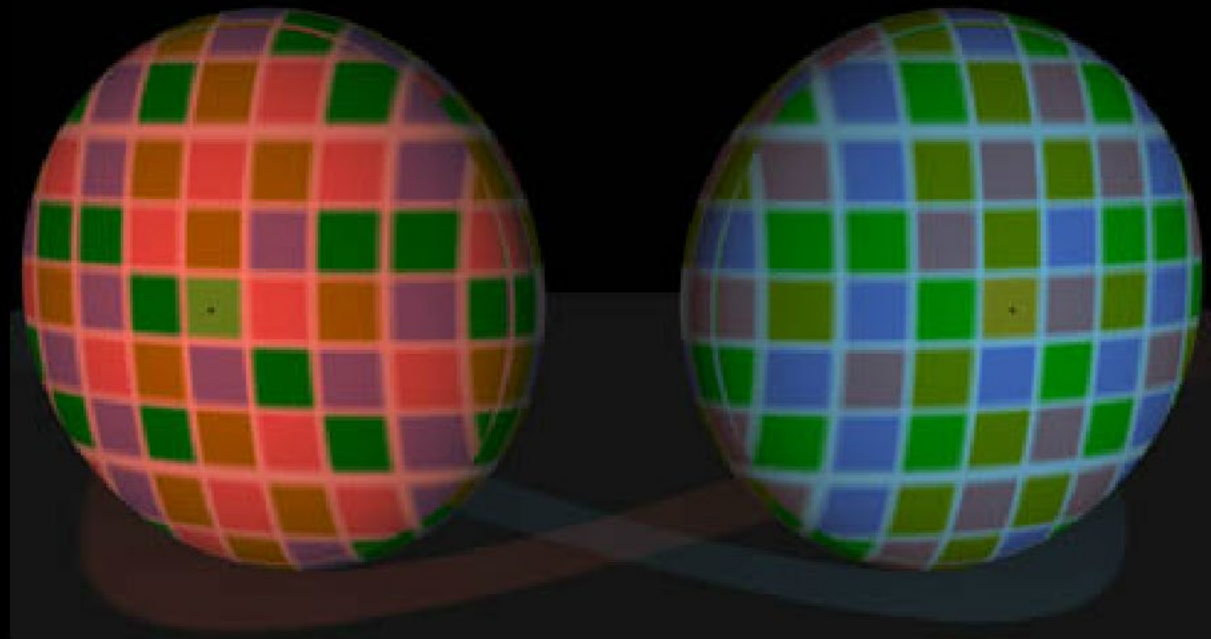
# Chromatic adaptation and colour constancy

The change in colour appearance following adaptation is due to chromatic adaptation. Chromatic adaptation is adaptation to the colour of the ambient illumination.



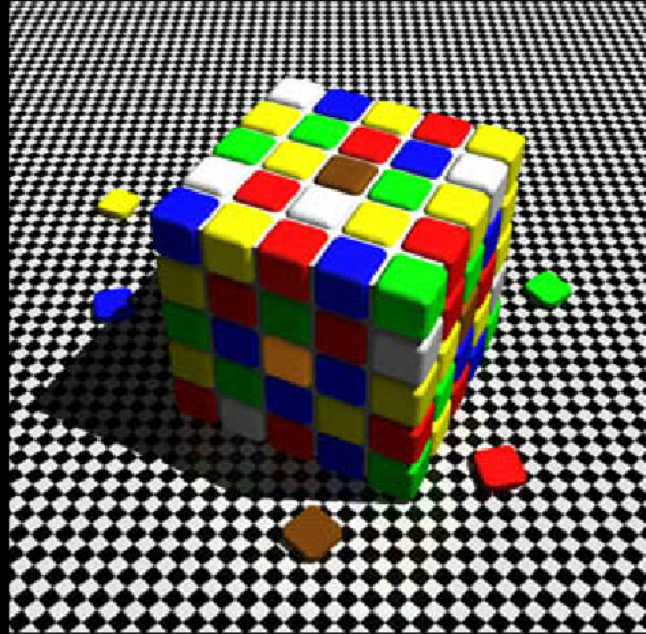
# Colour and the illuminant

► Show mask



# Colour and brightness

THE EFFECT OF COLOR ON BRIGHTNESS PERCEPTION



The color of the "brown" Chiclet-like square in the middle of the upper face of the cube is identical to the "orange" square in the middle of the shaded face. To prove this, click on the "Play" button (top) to view an animation in which all but the center two squares are covered by a mask, or click on the "Move mask" button (bottom) to manually position the mask over the center squares.



[From Lotto, R. B. & Purves, D. The Effects of Color on Brightness. *Nature Neuroscience* 2, 1010-1014 (1999)]



The dress...



The dress...



[www.wired.com](http://www.wired.com)



# COLOUR AND COGNITION

# Stroop effect

Say to yourself the colours of the **ink** in which the following words are written -- as fast as you can.

So, for **RED**, say “red”.

But for **RED**, say “green”

Ready, steady...

# TEST 1

RED

GREEN

BLUE

YELLOW

PINK

ORANGE

BLUE

GREEN

BROWN

WHITE

GREEN

YELLOW

PINK

RED

ORANGE

BROWN

RED

WHITE

BLUE

YELLOW

WHITE

ORANGE

GREEN

BROWN

RED

How long?

# TEST 2

BLUE

PINK

WHITE

RED

BROWN

BROWN

RED

BLUE

GREEN

ORANGE

YELLOW

BLUE

RED

ORANGE

WHITE

BROWN

RED

GREEN

WHITE

RED

RED

PINK

BLUE

GREEN

WHITE

How long?

# COLOUR VISION DEFICIENCIES

Normal



Deuteranope



Tritanope

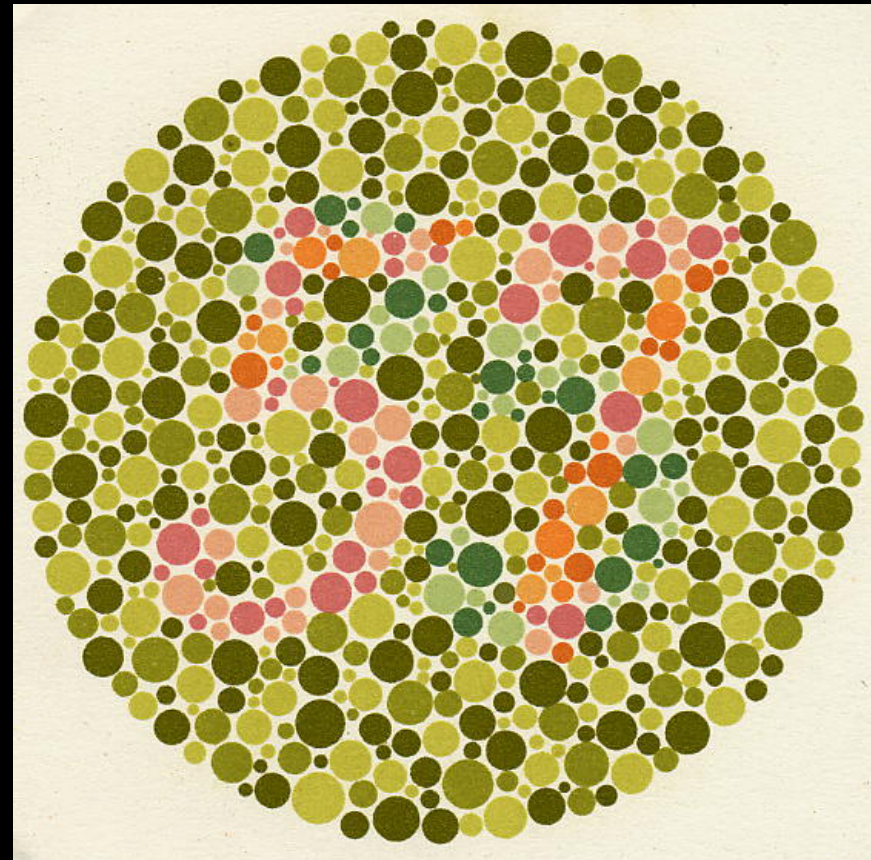
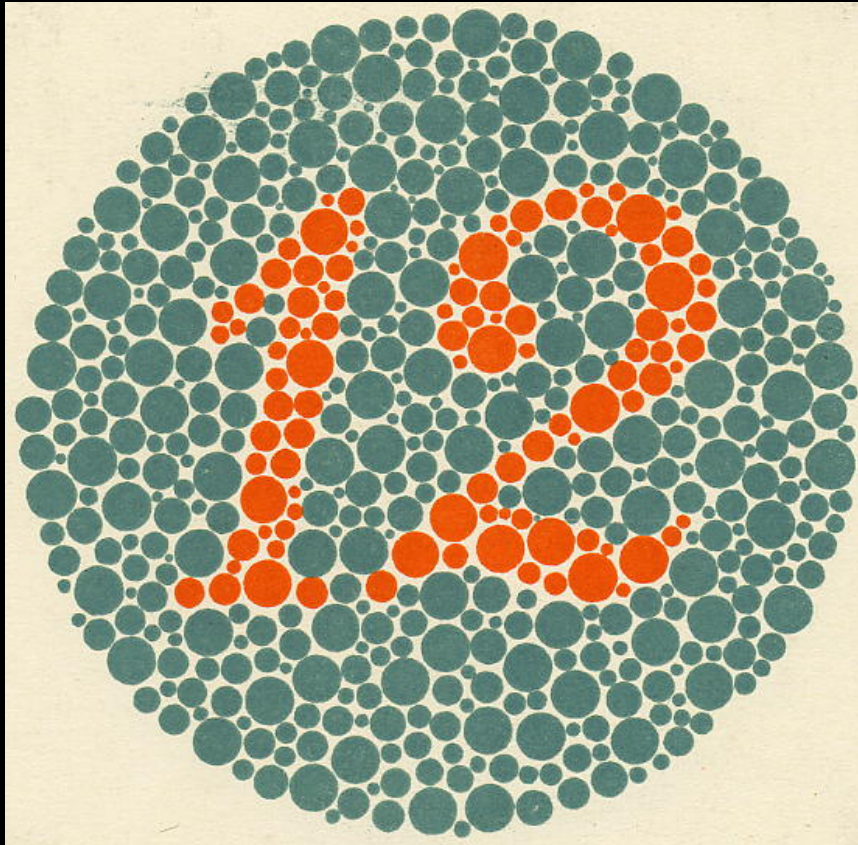


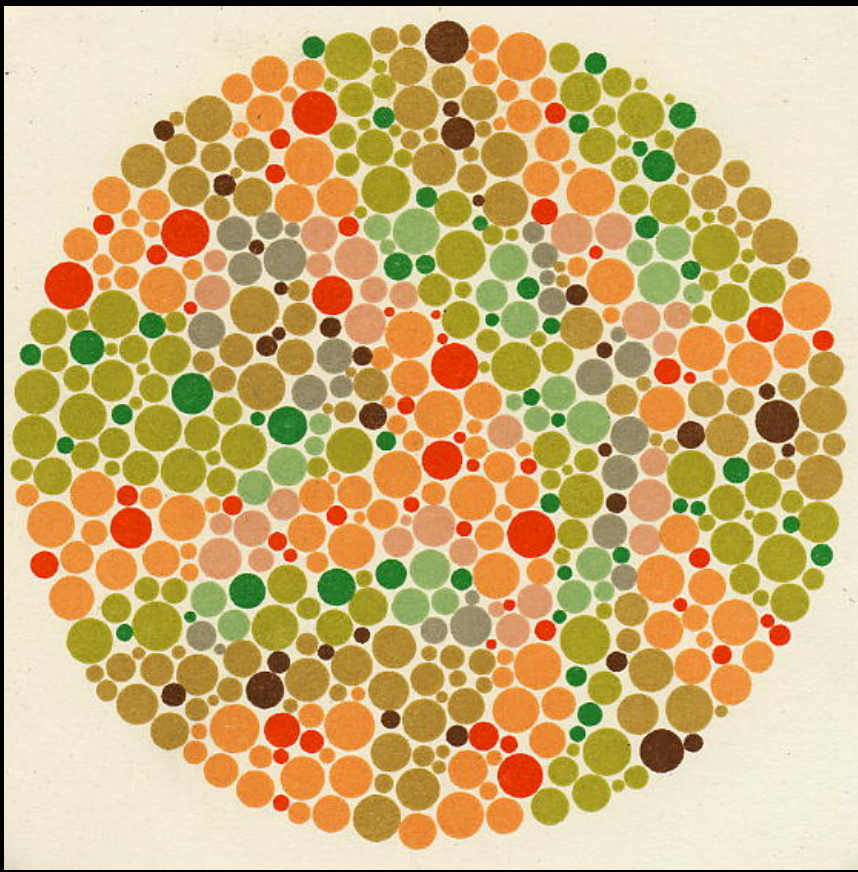
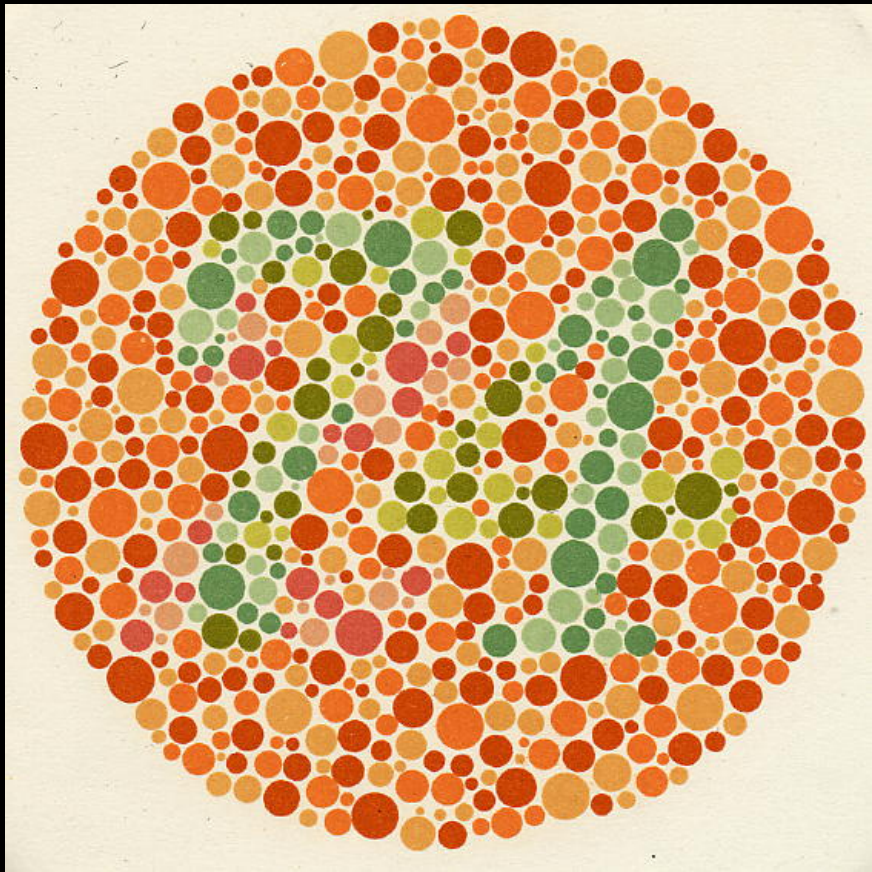
Protanope

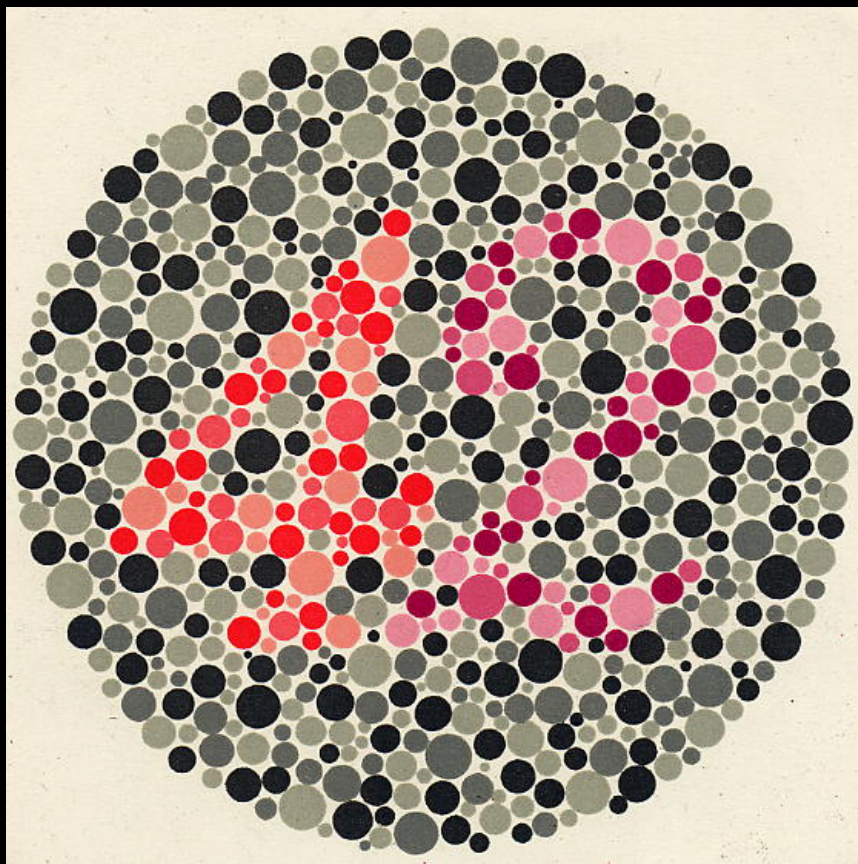




# Ishihara plates







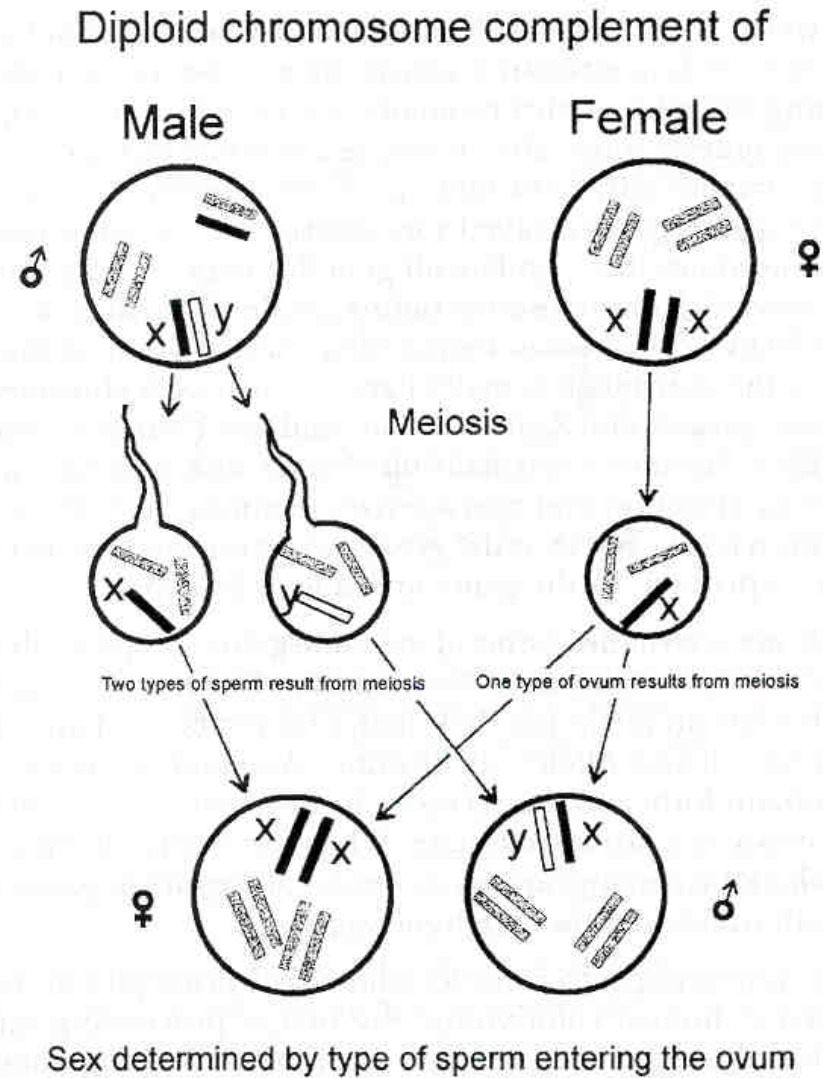
Main types of colour vision defects with approximate proportions of appearance in the population.

---

		percent in UK	
Condition		Male	Female
Protanopia	no L cone	1.0	0.02
Protanomaly	milder form	1.0	0.03
Deuteranopia	no M cone	1.5	0.01
Deuteranomaly	milder form	5.0	0.4
Tritanopia	no SWS cone	0.008	0.008

---

# XY inheritance



**Figure 10.17** Prior to fertilization, meiotic division of germ cells results in two types of sperm, but only one type of ovum. Depending on which sperm is effective, the fertilized ovum will have two X cells and be female, or one X and one Y cell and be male. This diagram show why the X cell of the male offspring can come only from the mother. (From Watson, 1976, p. 14.)

The emergence of two longer wavelength (M- and L-cones) is thought to have occurred relatively recently in primate evolution.

Why might it have been important?

# No red-green discrimination



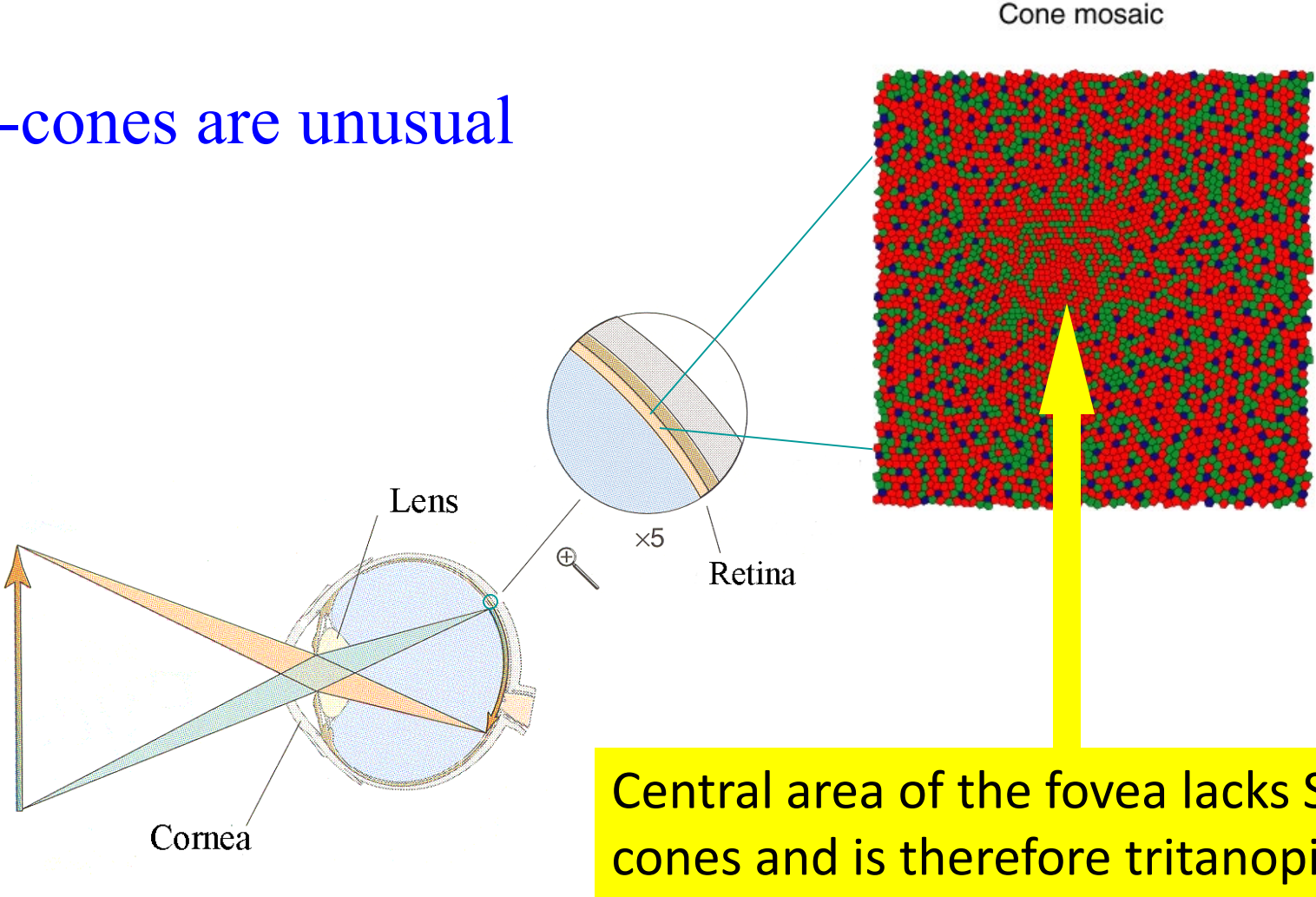
## Red-green discrimination



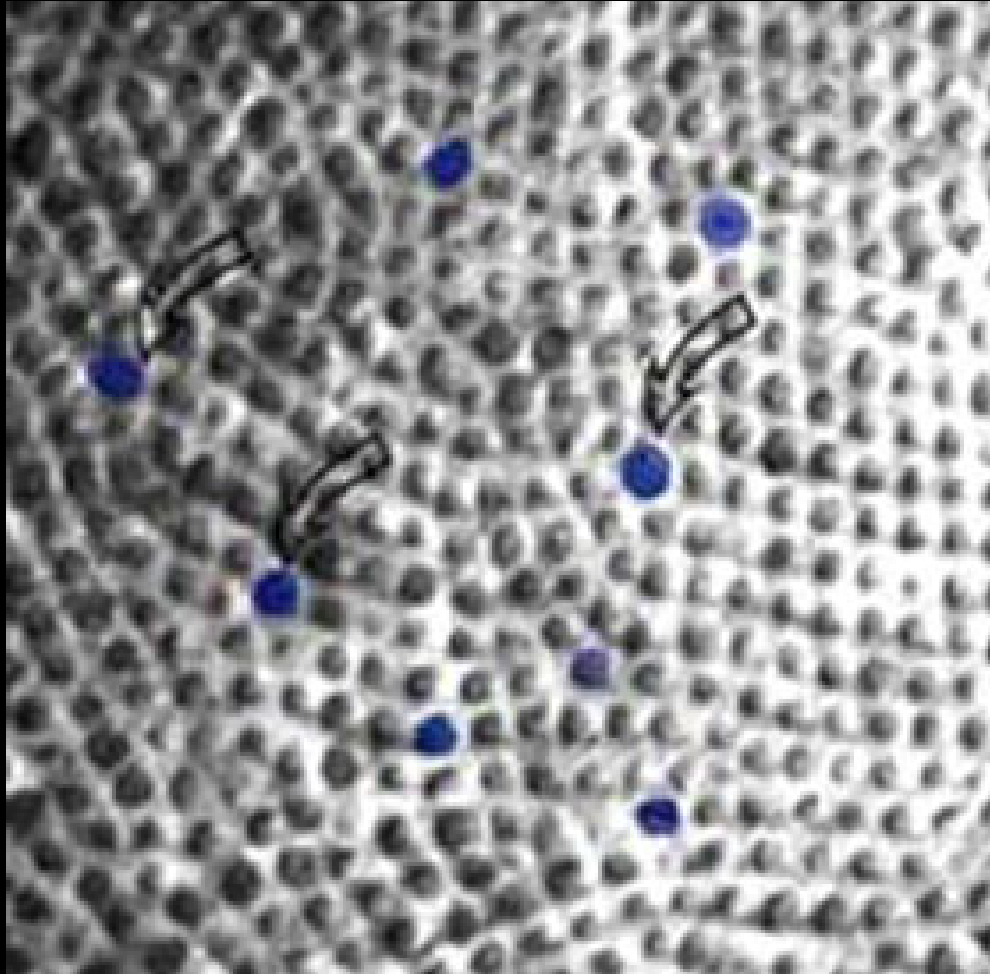


S-CONE MEDIATED VISION  
IS UNUSUAL

# S-cones are unusual



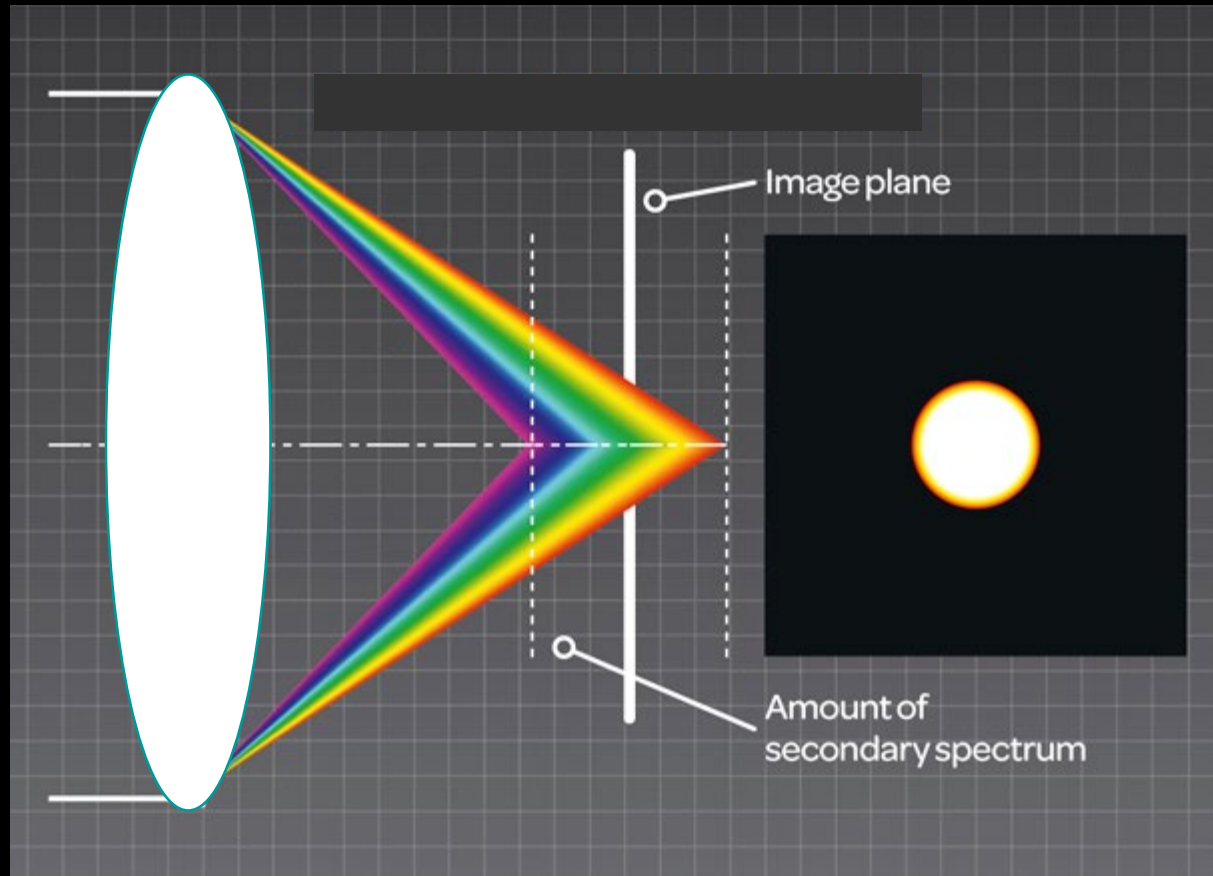
In other retinal regions, the S-cone mosaic remains sparse.



S-cones form  
between 5 and  
10% of the cone  
population.

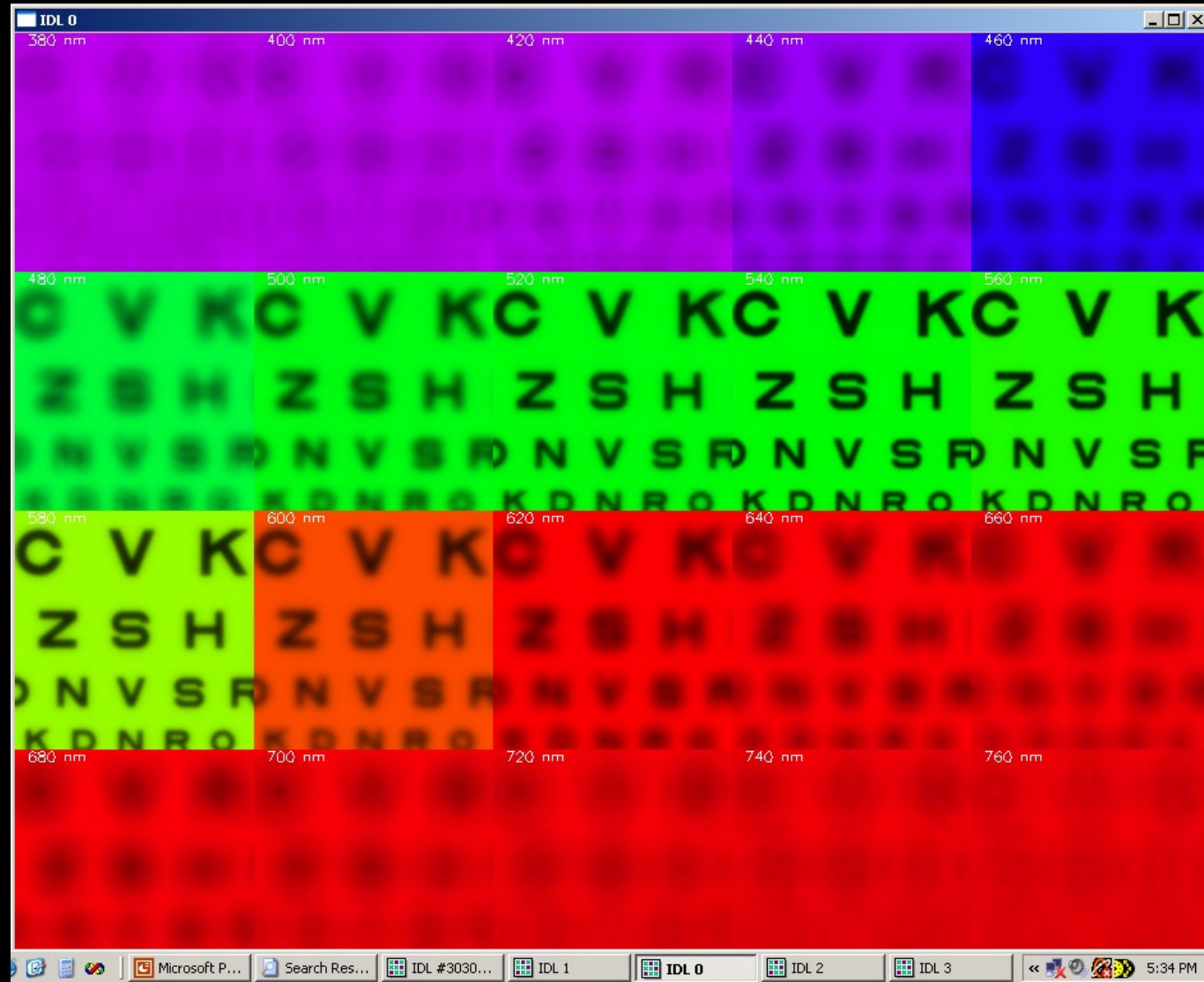
Why is S-cone vision sparse?

# Chromatic aberration

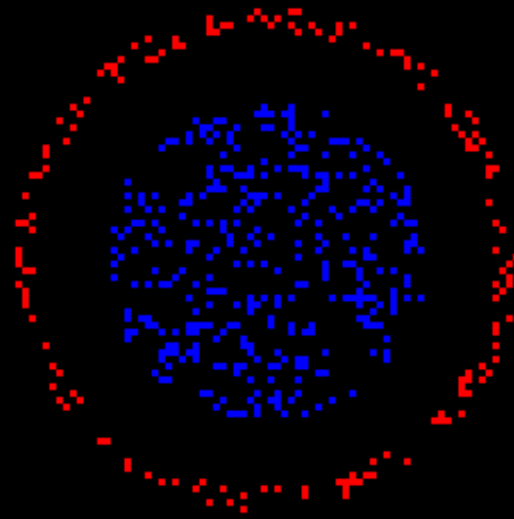


Base picture: Digital camera world

# Effect of chromatic blur on eye chart

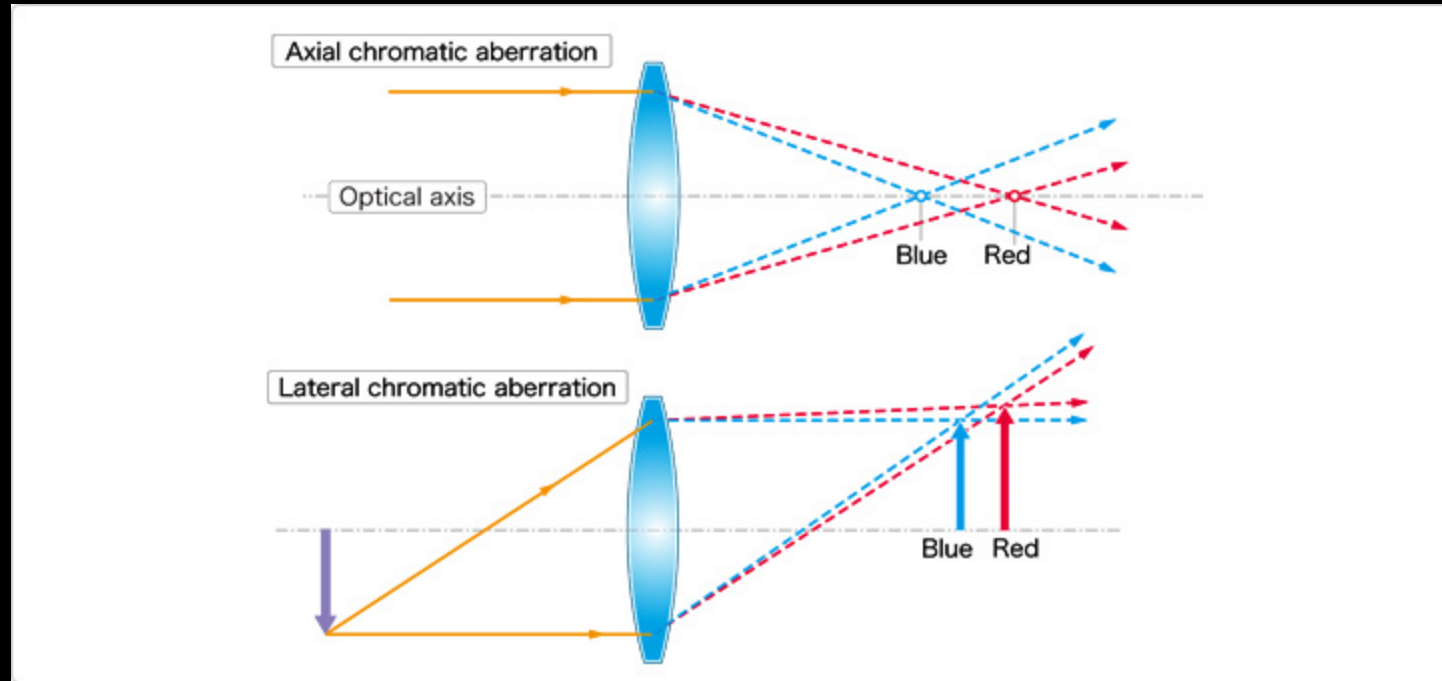


# Chromostereopsis



Different colours are perceived  
at different depths...

## Linked to lateral chromatic aberrations...





# Chromostereoscopic windows

