Printing Colour Explained

4-Colour Printing (also known as Process or CMYK)

Process or 4-colour printing is used in press printing: the image is broken down into tiny dots of primary ink colours and black and printed at different angles and screens, overlapping and creating the many colours needed to print colour photography.

The 4 colours are: Cyan (blue), Magenta (pink-red), Yellow and Black. Anytime there is a photograph or multiple colours used, it is typically done using the 4-colour process.

Duotone & Tritone

When printing with Pantone colours, if the designer wants to create a blend of the 2 or 3 colours, they can create customized colour spots and blends by editing the individual screens of each Pantone. Duotone is 2 colours and Tritone is 3.

Printing in 1, 2 or 3 Colours

The option of using Pantone inks for 1, 2 or 3 colour has been a common method used in the past to be more economical (4 colour is more affordable now). Pantone colours are also used for colour accuracy as the inks are custom mixed and give you more consistent colour results. With 4-colour, you tend to end up with varied colour from print run to print run and the colour is sometimes duller in appearance.

Does White Count?

If you are having your printer use a white surface (paper, plastic, fabric) to print on, this is your background colour and is not included in the colour count. So you can have parts of your design white without it costing you as another colour.
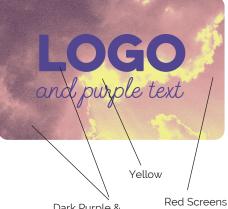
1 Pantone Colour

Monotone Photo: 1 Pantone

Duotone: 2 Pantones (or you can use 4-colour to create these as well)

Tritone: 3 Pantones

Yellow

Dark Purple & Dark Purple Screens

Red Screens

4-Colour Process to create more than 3 colours or full colour photos