

Skin Tone Reference

Expose, balance and isolate skin across every complexion — the method, exposure targets and the mistakes that give it away.

Skin is a **memory color** — the brain carries a fixed reference for it, so any error reads as wrong instantly, even to viewers who couldn't name a scope. Getting it right across *different* complexions, without forcing everyone to one hue, is the skill.

Exposure targets — there is no single number

COMPLEXION	SPECULAR HIGHLIGHTS	DARKER AREAS
Fair skin	~70–80 IRE	—
Medium skin	peaks nearer 70 IRE	floor around 30 IRE
Darker skin	bright parts below 40 IRE	~15–20 IRE
Deepest tones	tops out mid-30s IRE	bottoms near 10 IRE

Rule: deeper skin sits lower, lighter skin sits higher — expose a sensible range for *that* subject. Anchor on the forehead (avoid blush or a five-o'clock shadow).

Balance on the skin-tone line

Turn on the vectorscope's **skin-tone indicator**. Nudge temperature and tint until skin lands on or just beside the line — good white balance *is* good skin tone, in one move.

REMEMBER

Real skin is a *range* along the diagonal line — a little red at one end, yellow at the other. Don't flatten every pixel onto one point.

Isolate on its own node

Place skin work on its own node **right after primaries** — before secondaries or the look can muddy the signal. Build a clean qualifier: narrow hue width, sat low/high, then post-filter, denoise, clean-white, clean-black.

8-BIT FOOTAGE

Skip the qualifier (it exposes compression artifacts) — reach for the HSL curves instead.

Consistent commercial skin

Color Slice's dedicated skin section keys skin with no qualifier needed on 8-bit; density/saturation sliders add richness without a plasticky look.

COLOR COMPRESSOR

Set target hue ~18–25°, squeeze every skin pixel toward it at *partial strength* so skin stays alive — erases yellow blotches for flawless, uniform skin.

Common mistakes

- Exposing every subject to the same number instead of a sensible range for *that* person.
- Flattening skin onto a single vectorscope point instead of leaving it a range.
- Grading skin in the same node as the rest of the frame.
- Forcing every complexion to one hue instead of natural, healthy skin per subject.