presentationzen
DESIGN

A simple visual approach to presenting in today's world

SECOND EDITION
2
第二版

Garr Reynolds

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New
Riders
VOICES THAT MATTER™

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it is best to avoid it entirely
Above all, do no harm

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When using color as labels, apply it consistently and deliberately. Remember that text and symbols in the same or similar colors will appear related, so be sure they actually are. Define what each color represents and create a color palette for your design. Important information should be indicated by location, size, and contrast, not by applying bright colors.

Wrong	Right
Urgent Context Normal Normal Context	Urgent Context Normal Normal Context
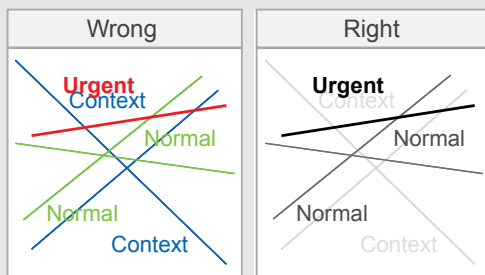
Color division deficiency

Between 8–10 percent of men and approximately 1 percent of women have some form of color vision deficiency (CVD) or colorblindness. Most have difficulty distinguishing red from green, and distinguishing those colors from orange-yellow. Dichromats see only two colors, most commonly blue and orange (plus gray). People

with mild cases of CVD see strong colors but not pastels, and they have difficulty distinguishing colors that vary only by the addition of red or green, such as blue and purple, brown and gray, or the many shades of blue-green. People with CVD, however, have no trouble interpreting luminance—yet another reason to "get it right in black and white." Programs such as Vischeck (www.vischeck.com) simulate the common forms of CVD. For example, the following figure illustrates how a deuteranope would see the colored text to the left. Unless you know that all your viewers have normal color vision, be sure your message is intelligible to all.

If you can't use color wisely,
it is best to avoid it entirely
Above all, do no harm
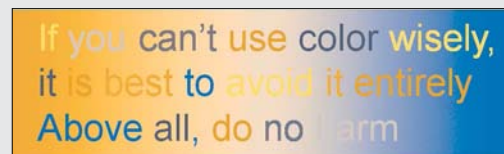
In conclusion

Color is beautiful and digital media makes it easy to include it in all forms of presentations and designs. Skillful use of color, however, can only be achieved by combining principles with practice. Remember, most ideas can be well presented in black and white. Add color carefully and for a purpose, and your results will be both beautiful and functional.

Achieving an Emotional Connection

Color can be used to emphasize, get attention, point the way, and so on, but color is also emotional. We do not want to make too much of this, as it's impossible to list all the associations regarding color. These associations and feelings can be very culture specific and interpretations can vary somewhat depending on your particular audience. Still, here are a few generally accepted associations, both negative and positive. Proper usage depends on you researching your audience to find out if there are any colors to avoid, emphasize, and so on.

Red: Assertive, powerful, bold, urgent, intense, emotionally hot, love, and passion—but also stop, danger, evil, murder, and so on. Depending on your message, an association with red such as "blood red" can be positive in a Red Cross blood drive presentation, or it might be negative in the case of war or death.

Pink: Romantic, soft, tranquil, passive, femininity, health, love, romance, joy, and cotton candy.

Orange: Warmth, compassion, excitement, enthusiasm, spiritual, energized, playful, fun, autumn, and Halloween. Orange is often used for sports teams, such as the OSU Beavers, the Syracuse Orangemen, the University of Tennessee Volunteers, and the Denver Broncos, because of its energy.

Green: Natural, balance, harmony, the environment, earthy, healthy, persistent, calm, good luck, rebirth, go (as in traffic light), and spring—but also the color of envy.

Blue: Dignified, professional, successful, loyal, calm, peaceful, tranquil, positive, and authoritative (in dark blue)—but also melancholy (as in feeling blue).

Yellow: Optimistic, cheerful, happy, energetic, fun, sunshine, inspiring, summer, and gold—but also cautious (used a lot on warning signs because yellow gets attention).

Purple: Meditative, royalty, luxury, wisdom, spiritual, exotic, creativity, artistic, inspiration, and spirituality.

Brown: Natural, earthy, solid, reliable, strong, comfortable, rustic—but also bland, conservative, and ordinary.

Black: Classy, formal, artistic, simplicity, authority, and power—but also negatives such as death, fright, loss, troubles, and mourning.

White: Pure, innocent, clean, new, simple, spacious, cool, and winter (snow)—but also bland, ordinary, and sterile (good if you're a medical professional). In some cultures it is associated with death.

Gray: Neutral, respect, humility, stable, wise, and simple—but also uncommitted, cloudy, dull, depression, or a general negative feeling of a "lack of color."

"Nature is a master colorist."
— James & Sandra Crowley
Wabi Sabi Style

Image in slide from iStockphoto.com.

Feel warm and stay cool

It's useful to understand that colors can be broadly categorized in terms of their relative warmth and coolness. Colors closer to red, orange, yellow, and brown are warm, and colors closer to blue, green, and violet are cool. Warm colors tend to pop out a bit and come toward you. Cool colors tend to fade into the background. For this reason, cool colors are often used for backgrounds and warm colors are often used for foreground elements.

Artists use warm and cool colors to create depth and volume in paintings, and we can do the same by observing the relationship between warm and cool colors in a slide design. You can use warm colors for backgrounds as long as you adjust the value and saturation appropriately. As a general principle, however, remember that warmer colors come to the foreground, so it's usually a good idea to use those colors for emphasis.

Beyond this, people develop certain feelings about warm and cool colors. Many of our color impressions may be learned (for example, reading the previous information about the emotions tied to colors may influence the way you think about them). Nonetheless, people's feelings about and associations with color are genuine. For example, some people associate blues and greens with cool aspects found in nature such as grass, trees, and the clear blue sky. Warm colors of orange and yellow are associated with the heat of the sun. Red may be associated with hot things in nature such as lava, fire, and "red hot" chili peppers (the hottest ones are actually not red, but they'll turn your face quite red indeed). You can work those emotional aspects of color into your slide designs if they make sense and support your message.

In this slide, I took two scenes from nature—one blue and cool and one orange and warm—and layered them differently. You can see how cool colors fade to the background and warm colors pop, despite their placement on the slide.

Lights on or off?

If the projector is bright—or if you are using a large flat-panel display—there is little need to darken the room. Whenever possible, do not turn the lights off. Communication is enhanced when audiences can clearly see both the visuals and your face. (And it certainly makes for better teaching if students can see the teacher.)

Slide background color: light or dark?

For large keynote presentations at conferences, darker venues (Pecha Kucha Nights or Ignite events, for example), and larger venues, use a darker slide background because white light on the background can be blinding in an otherwise dark room. Most situations, however, such as those in college lecture halls or in school classrooms, have enough ambient light to justify a white or light background.

The advantage of using a white background is that you can use stock images without having to take time to remove the white backgrounds. (PowerPoint and Keynote come with tools for removing a selected color from an image, such as a white background, but their tools do not do as smooth a job as more professional editing software.) Regardless of the type of background you choose, what matters most is maintaining clear contrast between the background and the foreground elements. It's important to pay attention, then, to the levels of contrast among the foreground elements and the background.

Images in slides on this page and opposite page from iStockphoto.com.

On a large screen, the chart in the slide on the left does work, though the contrast is more subtle for the gray bars. The background pattern in the slide on the right makes it harder to see the gray bars.

The slide on the left has a background with a midtone of gray, which makes the gray bars almost impossible to see. The background in the slide on the right contrasts well with the darker gray bars.

As I'm sure is obvious to you, the brightness of the backgrounds in these slides is neither attractive nor easy to view for extended periods when placed behind this particular chart.

The color of the text in the slide on the left matches the color of the hills in the distance. The text is legible, but pops out much better in white, as seen on the right.

A shadow is added to the text on the left to make it pop out more and add depth. Greater contrast is created by placing the text in a box with a darker background on the right.