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# ONcall

ready-to-use NEWS

## Make them green with envy: Be the best with color!

*Using color theory for communicating online and in social media*

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Using color theory for communicating online and in social media

Okay, back to basics. With messages bombarding us from every direction 24 hours a day and countless sources, have you thought about the importance of color lately?

Color theory evolved from years of scientific study on how we receive information — and how it affects our thoughts and emotions. Understanding color is an essential design skill. Communication professionals should have a basic knowledge of color theory. To begin, here's "Color 101":

**Primary colors:** red, blue and yellow. All other colors are made from these three.

**Secondary colors:** green, orange and purple, all made from primary colors (i.e., red and yellow make orange).

**Tertiary colors:** made by mixing a primary and secondary colors. "Peach" is a good example.

**Complementary colors:** Colors and shades directly across from each other on the color wheel provide a pleasing contrast. For example, yellow is opposite blue; they look good together. Colors too close together will "clash" — Like various shades of blue or red. You wouldn't wear clashing shades of red together, would you? (um, maybe don't answer that question).

### What color is your social media?

Images and color are the foundation of capturing attention. Sixty-five percent of people retain information when it's paired with an image, compared to 10 percent who just heard or read a bit of information. Facebook posts with images get 2.3 times more engagement than posts without images.

Even with that advantage, we still need to create truly memorable images — an easy task if you have a graphic designer. If you don't, rely on the fact that COLOR is the secret weapon.

### Have a color brand? Use it!

When setting up a photo or designing an image, first consider your district or school's color scheme. If you have a well-designed logo/branding guide, it's likely the colors are already complementary. These colors are a good choice for your base social media palette. Try to plan images that include these in some way.

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Complementary colors create contrast, a technique you can use to bring the eye to a focal point. Contrast in images increases conversion rates (readers “converting” to some type of action, like taking your surveys).

Colors also invoke emotion. If you’re going for feelings of warmth, compassion or love, choose colors in the warm color range: reds, pinks, oranges and yellows, although be sensitive to the varying meanings of color in various cultures.

In general, if you’re aiming for soothing and calming, choose a blue or a green. Again, carefully consider the target audience’s culture. Blue is one of the most popular colors used online — for good reason. It’s the color of trust and inspires security and a feeling of safety.

Hues appear differently on computer screens than on paper. A color you choose from printed brand material may look slightly different on a computer screen, as will colors in the photos you take. You may need to edit and adjust images to get your desired effect.

This article from the Huffington Post has great insight on how color has shaped emotions and beliefs in different cultures around the world: [www.huffpost.com/entry/what-colors-mean-in-other\\_b\\_9078674](http://www.huffpost.com/entry/what-colors-mean-in-other_b_9078674). In general, however, you can rely on the following tips for how color affects an audience that is raised in the U.S.

### What popular colors mean

**Red:** Passionate, aggressive, important. Use it cautiously.

**Orange:** Playful, energetic, vibrant. It’s like red’s safe little sister, a good way to add excitement without severity.

**Yellow:** A strange one; often linked to happiness, but it also activates the anxiety center of the brain (“caution”). It’s the color of warning signs. Lighter shades are less stressful.

**Green:** Natural, stable, prosperous, organic, the environment. It’s a popular choice for “call to action” elements. It’s also the color of money, so be careful when talking about finance issues or readers may think you’re tricking them.

**Blue:** Serene, trustworthy, inviting. The most popular online color — for good reason. It inspires security and safety. It’s also very versatile. Light blue is the color of water and sky, so it’s refreshing. Dark blue makes you feel secure and professional. Interestingly, blue can also be an appetite suppressant, so be careful when promoting fundraisers involving food.

**Purple:** luxurious, mysterious, romantic. Careful here! You’re a school — unless this is your brand color. It conveys royalty if used elegantly, and lighter shades convey springtime.

**Pink:** Feminine, young, innocent: This works with the right audience; use sparingly, and with other colors to balance it. Also be careful with gender stereotyping!

**Brown:** Earthy, sturdy, rustic. Brown adds an authentic outdoorsy feel. It works best if paired with green — for example, a tree conveys growth and stability.

**Black:** Powerful, sophisticated, edgy, the strongest of colors. Use sparingly and mainly for text, backgrounds and key design elements that don’t overwhelm other colors.

**White:** Clean, virtuous, healthy. It’s an ideal secondary color since it pairs with everything. White can guide readers’ attention by giving the eyes a place to rest. Try using ivory or cream instead for a more comforting “white space” and to avoid a cold or sterile reaction.

**Gray:** Neutral, formal, gloomy. It’s the color of formality. It is not the best choice for engaging with students and learning. Gray can also give a depressing vibe. We suggest avoiding it unless you get professional help.

**Beige:** Accentuates other colors. It's worth mentioning because it takes on the character of colors around it. It can enhance as a background color.

Find more insights about specific colors here: [www.empower-yourself-with-color-psychology.com/meaning-of-colors.html](http://www.empower-yourself-with-color-psychology.com/meaning-of-colors.html)

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*Contributed by Shannon Priem, APR, former public information director for the Oregon School Boards Association*