

# Graphic Design: Psychology of Color

## Lesson 13: Colors and Moods

### How do colors affect our moods?



Color, without our realizing it, can have a profound effect on how we feel both mentally and physically. Dr. Morton Walker, in his book *The Power of Color*, suggested that the ancient Egyptians as well as the Native American Indians used color and colored light to heal. Below are some emotional associations that humans tend to have with certain colors. These are important to keep in mind in order to create the mood you are seeking.

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**Blue** represents peace, tranquility, calm, stability, harmony, unity, trust, truth, confidence, conservatism, security, cleanliness, order, loyalty, sky, water, cold, technology, and depression.

Blue can "slow the pulse rate, lower body temperature, and reduce appetite." Blue is considered a business color because it reflects reliability.

In China, blue is associated with immortality.

In Colombia, blue is associated with soap.

For Hindus blue is the color of Krishna.

For the Jews, blue symbolizes holiness.

In the Middle East blue is a protective color.

Note: Blue is often considered to be the safest global color.



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**Black** is the absence of light and therefore, of color.

It represents power, sexuality, sophistication, formality, elegance, wealth, mystery, fear, evil, anonymity, unhappiness, depth, style, evil, sadness, remorse, anger, underground, good technical color, mourning and death.

In speech we say "Don't let a black cat cross your path", "Black Market" or "Black Monday".



**Green**, one of most-often cited favorite colors. It represents nature, environment, health, good luck, renewal, youth, vigor, spring, generosity, fertility, jealousy, inexperience, envy, misfortune.

"Its cool quality soothes, calms, and has great healing powers." It is often worn in operating rooms by surgeons.

In China, green hats mean a man's wife is cheating on him; it is not a good color for packaging.

In France studies have indicated green is not a good color choice for packaging either.

In India green is the color of Islam.

In Ireland green has religious significance (Catholic).

In some tropical countries green is associated with danger.

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**Orange** is a combination of yellow and red. Orange is considered a warm color like red, but to a lesser extent; orange expresses energy. It has luminous qualities and has been used for attention-getting purposes, such as on caution signs.

Orange brings up memories of fall leaves, pumpkins and Halloween. It symbolizes balance, warmth, enthusiasm, vibrance, flamboyancy, and is demanding of attention.

In Ireland orange has religious significance (Protestant).

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**Purple** represents royalty, spirituality, nobility, ceremony, mystery, transformation, wisdom, enlightenment, cruelty, arrogance, mourning. Purple is considered an exotic color.

Purple dye was made from the mucous gland of a snail. It required thousands of snails to yield 1 gram of dye causing it to be a color only nobles could afford. Today purple is a trendy color targeting creative types.



Digital image taken of Dr. Scott Lowe and his sports car. Fall 2001

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**Red** is the color that we pay the most attention to. It is the warmest and most energetic color in the spectrum.

We associate red with love, valentines, danger, desire, speed, strength, violence, anger, emergency exit signs, stop signs and blood.

Red can evoke a fight-or-flight response, raise blood pressure and make the heart beat faster.

Red would not be the color of choice for psychiatric wards, prisons or a hospital.

In China red symbolizes celebration and luck, used in many cultural ceremonies that range from funerals to weddings.

In India red is the color of purity (used in wedding outfits).



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**White** is what we see when all colors come together in perfect balance.

It represents reverence, purity, simplicity, cleanliness, peace, humility, precision, innocence, youth, birth, winter, snow, good, sterility, and marriage.

We use white in figures of speech like "pure as the driven snow" or "a white lie." We associate white with the good guy in old western movies.

In Japan, white carnations signify death.

In eastern cultures white symbolizes coldness and sterility.



Digital image of sunflower  
Summer 2001

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**Yellow** represents joy, happiness, optimism, idealism, imagination, hope, sunshine, summer, gold, philosophy, dishonesty, cowardice, betrayal, jealousy, covetousness, deceit, illness, hazard, spirituality and inspiration.

The yellow rose is a symbol of friendship, less passionate or threatening than red ones.

In Asia yellow is sacred, and imperial.

## Lesson 14: Colors that Move

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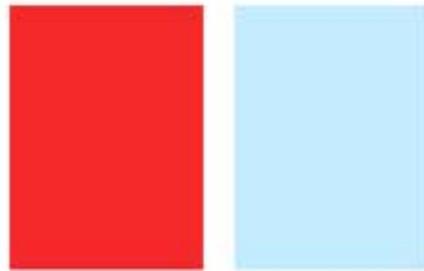
### **How do colors "move" in an image?**

Another important aspect of color is understanding how colors move in space.

Bright, high-intensity, warm colors advance in space. They appear as though they are going to jump out at you. They get your attention.

Low intensity, cool colors, on the other hand, recede; they make a space appear larger than it is.

By combining these colors you can create the appearance of dimension or depth to a one-dimensional picture:



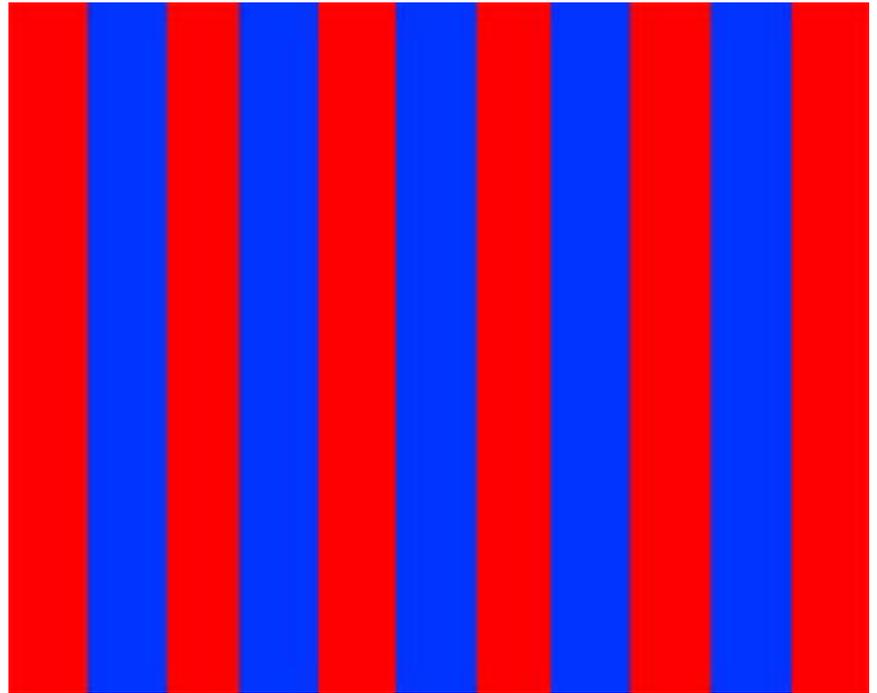
# Lesson 15: What to Avoid

## What are some color combinations that should be avoided?

### Primary Colors.

Many people feel that primary colors go together. And indeed, there are many times when these combinations have been used successfully, especially with children's toys. But when viewed on the computer, it can be another story.

Here's an example. Stare at the red and blue stripes below for 5 to 10 seconds. (Uncomfortable, isn't it?) Then focus your eyes on the white part of the page and see what happens!



Did you see orange and green stripes?

Here's an example of a web site that uses high-intensity primary colors. Ouch!



[See the original web site](#)

The reason that primary color combinations tend to not work is because both are high intensity colors, and so side-by-side they appear to vibrate. The eye cannot make the adjustment where the two colors meet, making this combination very hard on the eyes. This color combination can be used very successfully if you use shades or tints of one of the colors, for instance bright red and navy blue.

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**Dark on Dark.**

Dark colors, especially dark colored text, on a dark background are very difficult to see. Consider contrast:

