

Five Rules of Type & Color

Next to words, color is one of your most powerful communications tools. Combine them well and your graphics can be compelling, eloquent and commanding.

Color Aids Understanding

It can improve the communication quality of just about any document. Color can tie related elements together so their relationship is recognized at first glance.

Color Emphasizes

Color can lead the reader’s eye to the key point, the benefits, the bottom line.

Color Shows Ranking

Color can indicate ranking of information by exploiting its various degrees of noticeability. A red headline will stand out, while one in blue will recede

Five Rules for the Best Use of Color

1. Plan to use color from the start

Color must be more than an embellishment. It should work for its living by giving added value. Whether it’s for running heads or simple list-bullets, the color plan and palette should be part of the initial design process. Color should not be an afterthought, or a decoration. Don’t waste the power of color.

2. Use less color rather than more

It’s easy to over-use color, because it is so much fun, and it’s such an engaging media for displaying creativity. Be discriminating, however, in the application of color in your projects. A simple drop initial to mark the beginning of copy or a pull-quote to break up lengthy text can benefit from the judicious use of color. A page that is awash in color, however, is just graphic noise. It is color’s rarity that makes it noticeable and powerful.

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e are interpreters — not merely translators between sender and receiver. What we say and how we say it makes a difference. If we want to speak to people, we need to know their language. In order to design for understanding, we need to understand design.

Erik Spiekermann

Small applications of color work best

3. Use color consistently

Few documents stand alone; most are part of a brand. Being seen as “belonging” is useful both to the individual document and to the organization that publishes it. Color is a quality that people tend to remember. A color scheme can become an identifier, if it is coordinated with consistent typography and uniform layout.

David Copperfield

Children's Classics

Treasure Island

Children's Classics

Tom Sawyer

Children's Classics

4. Make large areas pale, small areas bright

A solid page covered in brilliant, saturated hue is probably painful enough to push viewers away. Yet the identical hue may be ideal for a small, sparkling spot or typographic highlight. The rule of thumb is: the bigger the area, the paler the color should be.

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5. Use color-friendly fonts

Regardless of its brightness, color is paler than black and contrasts less with a light background. As a result, type printed in color will not have the power of simple black. You can compensate for this paleness by increasing the amount of color used. Increase the impact of type up by bumping it up by one weight (book to regular, regular to semi-bold, semi-bold to bold etc.) – or set it a size larger. Another trick is to make lines of copy shorter and increase line space slightly. If it is worthy of color, it is worthy of being legible.

Bump It Up

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Type is a beautiful group of letters, not a group of beautiful letters.

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Weight and size improve color's visibility

Smart use of color makes your message and brand clear and memorable.

Illustrations set in [Helvetica® Now](#), [Queensby](#), [Chonky](#) and [Corporate Slab](#)