

# A GUIDE TO USING COLOR

The most important aspect of color to remember is that it is about *perception*. Individuals perceive and respond to color in different ways. Color can add value to your documents and presentation in the following ways:

## Emphasis and Impact

Color can highlight primary points. By adding color to your materials, you will be adding visual emphasis and impact to your presentations and reports. Your audience can focus on what's important -- with background information appropriately remaining in the background.

## Continuity and Interest

Color graphic in long documents will add variety and renew the reader's interest. With appropriate placement and use, color can give your reader's eyes a break, dividing your document into short, easy-to-comprehend sections. In presentations, a color scheme can enhance the visual continuity of your presentation materials.

## Appearance and Professionalism

Appearance is an important aspect of any communication material. Clear organization shows that planning and preparation have gone into a presentation or report. You can place text and color graphics for emphasis enhancing the overall appearance of your documents or presentations.

## Color Relationships and the Color Wheel

- Selecting colors appropriate for your work requires some understanding of color relationships. The color wheel is a useful tool for identifying the color combinations that work well together to produce desired results, and for identifying the color combinations to avoid.
- Selecting one hue from the color wheel unifies your documents. Varying the lightness or darkness of the chosen color allows for differentiation and variety.
- Selecting two opposing or complementary hues from the color wheel distracts the eye because the colors appear to vibrate when placed next to each other. Although using complementary colors is not recommended, if you choose to do so, change the saturation or value of one of the chosen colors to achieve harmony.
- Selecting two hues that are near each other on the color wheel creates harmony, since colors that are close together on the color wheel are related.
- Selecting hues with three colors between them on the wheel creates contrast. For contrasting color schemes, use darker colors in the background and brighter colors in the foreground.
- As you are selecting colors, keep in mind that black and white count as color choices too. As you design with color, plan your use of black, white, and color accordingly.

## Tips in Choosing Color

- Having the ability to create virtually any color combination increases the temptation to use virtually any color combination--RESIST THIS TEMPTATION!
- Use color in a manner consistent with generally accepted conventions. For example, in some cultures red connoted no, danger, or stop; yellow, caution or warning; and green, go or all's clear.
- If you choose not to follow accepted conventions for color use, provide a legend as to color meaning.
- Choose colors that enhance each other.

## Tips on Using Color

As you begin to use color in your documents and presentations, keep these helpful tips in mind:

- Use color to explain not decorate. If color is used purely for decorative purposes, you risk losing its

effectiveness.

- Use color to establish patterns and set expectations. Patterns, when used consistently, set expectations. Once you have established a system, stick to it. If you depart from it, do so only for emphasis. Put the most important information in the brightest color.
- Use color to group similar items or concepts and establish correlation's. If you are trying to establish a relationship between color and meaning, minimize the number of colors you use.
- Use color to differentiate. If you must use several colors in an image (for example, you are creating a pie chart that has many segments) enlarge the size of the image to enhance its legibility. Or, to highlight a particular segment, use color only on that segment. Increase line weight and font size to ensure that your audience can discriminate between colors on a page.
- Use less color -- not more. By limiting your use of color you will maximize its impact.

### **Tips on Color Presentation**

Many factors affect the perception of presentations using overhead transparency slides. If you are preparing a presentation, keep the following points in minds.

- If you are creating color overhead transparency slides, test your slides in the room where the presentation will be made. The lighting in the room may affect the color appearance of the transparency slides, altering the effectiveness of your slides on you audience. Slides with dark backgrounds work well in dark presentation rooms. Slides light backgrounds work well in light presentation rooms.
- Choose darker color intensity settings if you are using light colors, such as yellow, in your transparency slides. Light colors tend to appear faded or washed out with projected with other bright colors.
- Use a darker background behind light colors to increase contrast and make light colors more visible on the page. Or use darker, more saturated colors rather than light colors (fold, for example, rather than yellow).
- Use high contrast colors to attract attention to major points and to make slides more readable for those in the back of the room.
- Use thick lines and solid color fills on charts and graphs, and large font sizes more readable for those in the back of the room. Use thick lines and solid color fills on charts and graphs, and large font sizes for best viewing results.
- Avoid using several colors in line oriented graphics such as line graphs. These graphics are more readable when one vibrant color is used to highlight your point.

### **Improving Color Print Quality**

Color print quality is dependent on several factors: the type of paper you choose, the amount of ink printed on the page, how the ink is printed on the page, and the relative humidity of the environment.

### **Selecting Your Media**

Most 25% cotton bond paper and plain paper work well for color printing. Experiment with paper types and with your printer's color intensity settings for best results. Refer to you printer's user guide for more information on selecting paper and transparencies appropriate for your printer and on using your printer's color intensity settings.

Always print on the correct side of the media. This will make a significant difference in print quality. Load your media with the print side down. Refer to you printer's user guide for more information on identifying the "print" side of the media and on loading media.

### **Using Your Color Print Cartridge**

One way to save color ink is to print your draft copies in grayscale using the black print cartridge. Printing in grayscale is significant faster than printing in color, and it will give you a good approximation of how your final output will look.