

COLOUR COMBINATIONS

Best colour combinations used in lettering of outdoor advertising displays ranked in order of legibility or letters from a distance.

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|---|--------------------|---|---------------------|
|  | 1. BLACK on YELLOW |  | 9. WHITE on BROWN |
|  | 2. BLACK on WHITE |  | 10. BROWN on YELLOW |
|  | 3. YELLOW on BLACK |  | 11. BROWN on WHITE |
|  | 4. WHITE on BLUE |  | 12. YELLOW on BROWN |
|  | 5. YELLOW on BLUE |  | 13. RED on WHITE |
|  | 6. GREEN on WHITE |  | 14. YELLOW on RED |
|  | 7. BLUE on YELLOW |  | 15. RED on YELLOW |
|  | 8. WHITE on GREEN |  | 16. WHITE on RED |

Source: Claus, K.E. and Claus, R.J. Visual Communication Through Signage, Vol. 1: Perception of the Message, Cincinnati, Ohio, Signs of the Times Publishing Co., 1974

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF COLOURS

In selecting colours for an appropriate sign, it is important to consider the psychological connotations of different colours as well as the factors affecting visibility and legibility. (An extensive discussion of the cultural and psycho-physical reactions to colour is found in *Visual Communication Through Signage*, Vol. 3, Chapter 3, Claus and Claus, 1976.) Although we will detail the attributes that have come to be associated with certain colours, we do want to point out that the suggestions given below are not hard and fast rules. The sign user should also be guided by his own sense of what is appropriate.



Red is an exciting, active colour. It is used to suggest boldness, quickness and efficiency. Its warmth is appetite inspiring. Fast-food chains use red to connote warmth, fresh food (meat) and action.



Yellow is frequently used by fast-food restaurants to create a welcoming atmosphere. It suggests light and activity, especially in its redder shades and tints.



Green is associated with living things, and therefore, freshness, youth and purity. It is the predominate colour of nature (and therefore should be used judiciously in a rural setting, so that it does not fade into the surroundings). It is powerful in suggesting naturalness and vitality, and yet it connotes peacefulness.



Blue's coolness tends to connote dignity, serenity, wisdom and quite. While its use might not be appropriate for a business which wishes to emphasize speed and efficiency, it might be used by a business which wants to suggest that it has a leisurely pace and a general atmosphere of cultivation and calm. It also tends to suggest stability and is a colour often used by banks and large corporations.



Purple has come to be associated with royalty, pomp and luxuriousness. Its visibility factor is low, making it unsuitable for freeway signs, but it is often used for personal service business such as beauty salons.



Brown is the colour of the earth and tends to connote naturalness and strength. Businesses which want to indicate their strength and mainstream value system often use brown and wood hues in their signs. Brown often connotes ranching and farming. Some fast-food franchises have used brown on their signs to suggest the ranch association of their foods. Brown is basically neutral due to its association with the earth and wood. It is not a colour to catch your eye or to suggest action.



White, in Western society, has been the colour of innocence. On a sign it can be used to suggest cleanliness and purity.



Black can be used effectively in signage to create an impression of low-keyed crispness and sedateness. Sophistication also is suggested, if large areas are used.

In assessing these colours, remember that fairly subtle shifts in tint and tone can create large differences in how a colour is perceived. While red is appropriate when used in a fairly limited area, when used over too broad an area, it can be overpowering. Simply, pale yellow can suggest daintiness, whereas a deeper yellow becomes a very sensuous and powerful colour.

In choosing the colour to be used on an outdoor sign, the sign designer or advertiser must keep in mind the characteristics of the group toward whom he is directing his advertising. Research has shown that older people tend to prefer blue because it is easier for them to see. Men prefer deep shades of a colour, while women prefer more delicate tints. In addition, there is some evidence that people in lower-income brackets prefer bright, undiluted, pure colours, while those in higher-income brackets prefer more subtle shades and tints. Children also react to certain colours positively. Bright colours attract and hold their attention. Yellows and reds are especially attractive to young children. Some fast-food establishments have selected colour combinations which appeal to young age groups; for example, McDonald's emphasizes yellow and red.

It is also important to remember that how people feel about a colour is very much influenced by the context. When people list their favorite colours, red has very high rating. But when red is associated with a kitchen, its preference rating drops considerably. Colours of the peach-pink family also receive increased preference ratings when associated with cosmetics, but drop in preference when associated with hardware.

Colours used on illuminated signs are also influenced by the time of day. Many spectacular night time displays look poorly constructed or maintained under the harsh light of day. If a 24-hour image is important, attention should be paid to how a sign looks throughout the entire day.