

# COLOR AS A MEDIUM OF COMMUNICATION

One of the most important considerations in the creation of an outdoor design revolves around the effective use of color.

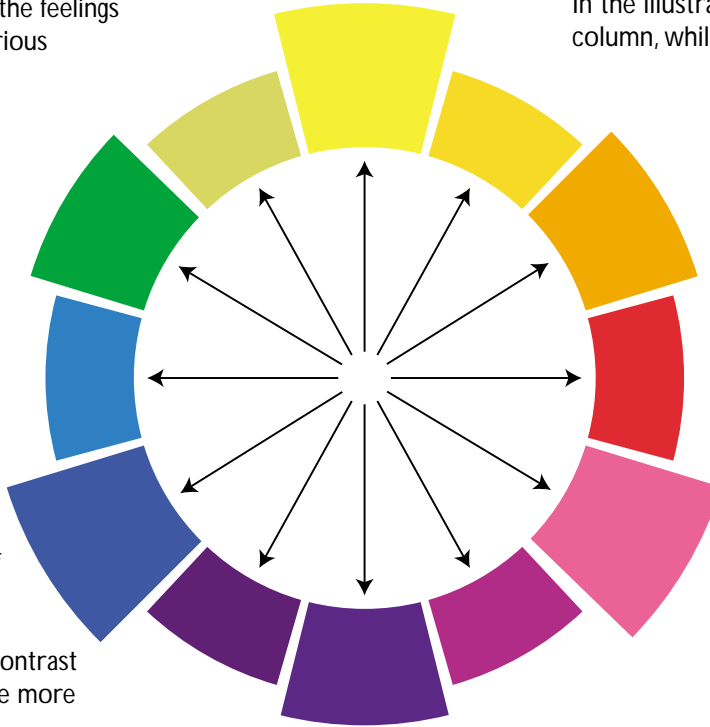
Color can convey emotions. For example, consider the feelings associated with various colors:

**red** signifies life, passion;  
**blue** gives the feeling of coolness, calm;  
**green** connotes growth, springtime;  
**yellow** says warmth, vitality.

Color also affects both the visibility and the legibility of a design.

The stronger the contrast between colors, the more vibrancy created.

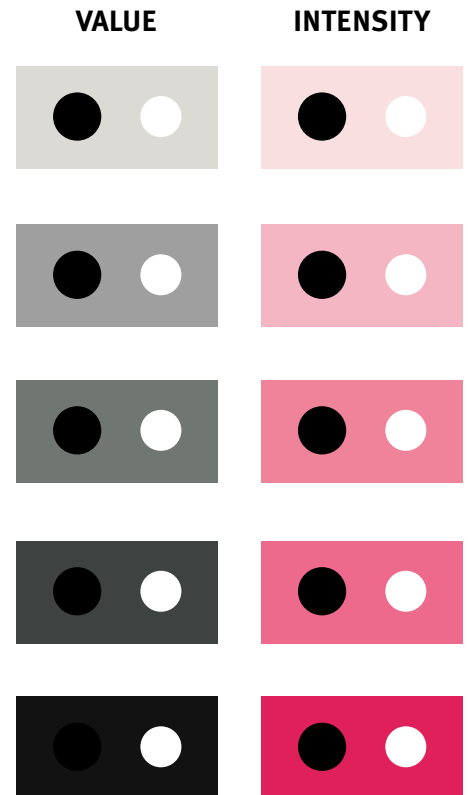
The strongest color contrasts — opposites on the color wheel — are color complements. These opposites contain no common ingredient. For example, green contains yellow and blue, but no red. Thus, green and red are complements, offering vibrancy through their contrasting relationship.



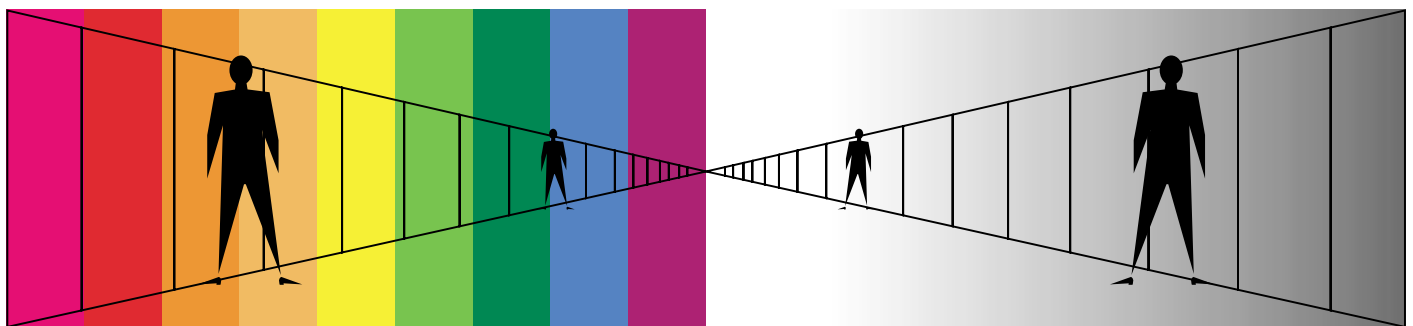
# COLOR VALUES

Colors have the following qualities: **hue**, **value** and **intensity**. *Hue* is the “color” of a color or its identity such as red, orange, green, etc. *Value* is the measure of its lightness or darkness, its position on the scale which runs from black to white. *Intensity* is the measure of a color’s strength and purity.

In the illustrations below, Value is demonstrated in the left column, while Intensity is shown in the right column.



# HUE, VALUE AND DISTANCE

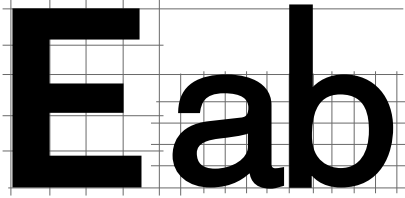


In addition to conveying emotion, color and black and white values can affect distance factors. Warm hues — reds, oranges and yellows — are perceived as closer to the viewer. In contrast, cool colors of green, blue and violet seem more distant.

Similarly, darker values in color or black and white seem to be more in the foreground, while lighter values recede. Strongly contrasting combinations of either value or hue seem closer. Legibility is affected more by value contrast than by hue.

# LEGIBILITY FACTORS

For easiest legibility at a distance, experience and research indicate that the width of a letter's vertical strokes should be about one-fifth its height. Horizontal strokes may be slightly thinner. These proportions apply equally to capital and lower-case letters, and are grouped into four areas: **Letterspacing**, **Perspective**, **Stacking** and **Line Spacing**.



**Letterspacing.** This example demonstrates the importance of a reasonable amount of air between letters. Extremely close spacing can reduce legibility, even with a clean, gothic typeface. Notice how crowding can confuse the intention of the copy by causing certain letters to attach visually to adjacent letters, thus "clear morn" could be interpreted as "dear mom."

***clear clear  
morn morn***

**Perspective.** The legibility problem created by tight letterspacing is compounded when copy lines are viewed from an angle, which can occur in outdoor. Condensed typefaces start to resemble picket fences and horizontal strokes tend to appear thicker in relationship to the vertical strokes.

***clear clear  
morn morn***

**Stacking.** This reduces readability and is not recommended for Outdoor designs. With a single horizontal line of copy, the eye moves through the message rapidly and without interruption. The stacking of additional lines reduces this facility and increases the time needed to comprehend the message. If, however, stacking is necessary for layout purposes, give careful consideration to line spacing.

**One works  
two's tough  
three's a crowd  
four...forget it**

**Line Spacing.** As in the case of letterspacing, adequate air space is necessary for maximum legibility. If a copy line is riding "piggyback" on the copy line below it, the interplay of descenders and ascenders creates confusion.

**piggy piggy  
back back**

## COMMON MISTAKES

1. Crowding too many letters into a space tends to repel the eye and thus defeats the objective of getting type as large as possible.

**OVERCROWDING**

**GIVE ME AIR**

2. Too great a contrast between thick and thin elements leads to confusion.

**CONFUSION**

3. Strokes which are too fine do not utilize fully the basic shapes and fade into the background, becoming invisible at a distance.

A N E M I A

4. Bulky typefaces become blobs at a distance, basic shapes cannot be distinguished and letters are not recognized.

**OVERWEIGHT**

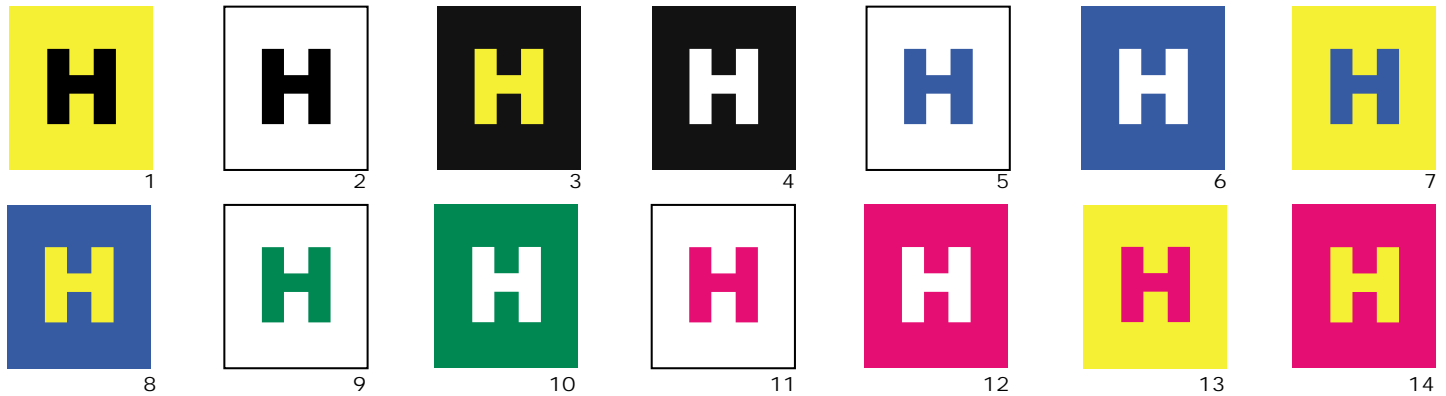
5. Script and similar styles sacrifice the basic shapes for the decorative aspect. Individual letters, therefore, cannot be identified.

*Illegibility*

# COMPARATIVE VISIBILITY OF FULL VALUE COLOR COMBINATIONS

These 14 color combinations for lettering were tested using only primary and secondary color of full hue and value. Tests for readability at a distance were conducted on different groups under the sponsorship of the Outdoor Advertising Association of America (OAAA).

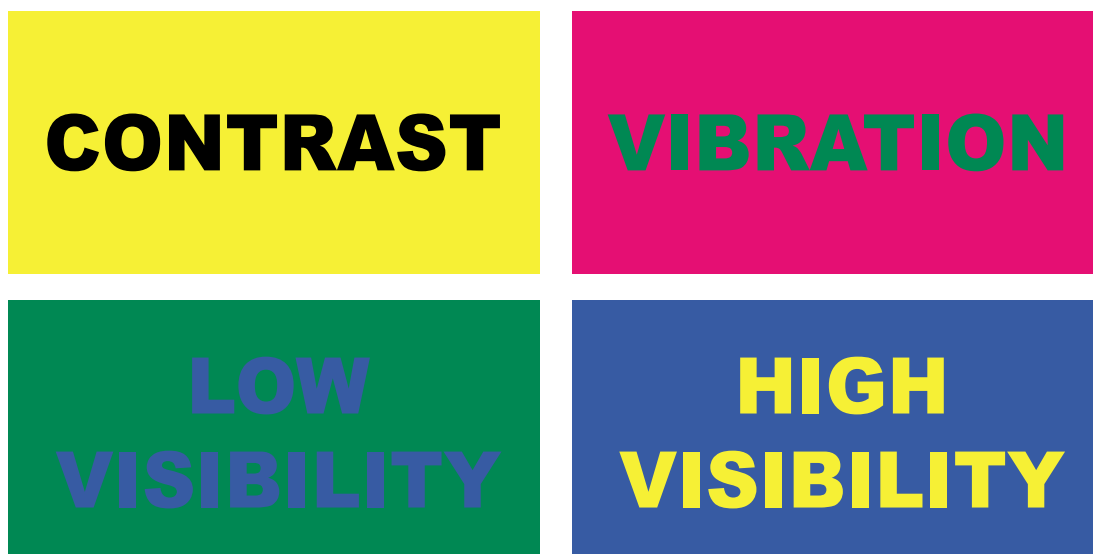
The results ranked in the sequence shown, with #1 the most legible and #14 as the least legible. Negative letters in 3, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12 and 14 appear to have a broader stroke than their positive counterparts.



## COLOR FREQUENCY AND VIBRATION

Like sound waves, light rays have varying wavelengths or frequencies: the lighter the color, the higher the frequency. These wavelengths determine perception of color. Some pigments absorb certain light frequencies and reflect others. We see the reflected frequencies as color.

Complementary colors such as red and green are not readily legible. They have similar black and white value, so their wavelengths set up a vibration. Any combination of colors of similar value, even without vibrating, will have low visibility. Although yellow and purple are complementary colors, they have strong contrast in value and therefore little vibration. They provide maximum visibility.



# DISTANCE VS. COMPREHENSION

Comprehension of an outdoor advertising design depends not only on the style of type or lettering or on the combinations of color used, but also upon how these elements work together, at a distance. Distance itself is a variable, which must be considered because the audience is in motion.

The size of type or lettering, therefore, is an important consideration in outdoor communication. To determine the proper size for specific considerations, we must first consider the demands.

A headline must be legible at any reasonable distance from close by to at least 400 feet. As illustrated below, a letter height of 20 inches is recommended. No letters should be less than 12 inches in height if we are to communicate a message effectively at a distance.

Letters 4 inches high are included simply to illustrate what happens to letters this high at a distance. This size lettering is often used in a mandatory phrase or identification.



100 FEET



200 FEET



300 FEET



400 FEET