

# BLUE: Color Communication

## How Do Colors Affect Us?

Colors are powerful! As designers, we can communicate better through knowledge of color meanings.

Blue is often heralded as the popular favorite of colors, perhaps because, as claimed at [Desktoppublishing.com](http://Desktoppublishing.com): “Almost everyone likes some shade of the color blue.” Blue and red are the colors frequently selected for logos. Many believe that blue is universally the best color, having the most positive and fewest negative cultural associations.<sup>2</sup> Only in the area of food—is blue generally found to be lacking in appeal. Let’s explore the color blue: in the [Physical](#), [Emotional](#), [Psychological](#), [Cultural](#), [Phrases and clichés](#), [Design communication](#), and [Other names for blue](#).

Although colors can convey different meanings in different eras, cultures, and for different individuals, in general, the following prevails for the color blue.



Blues, in the concrete

### Blue—in the Concrete, Physical

Color meanings arise from associations with the color in the physical realm. There are two major substances of universal experience from the blue area of the color sphere.

**The Sky**—offers imagery of vast heavenly realms. Cool, fresh, light, airy, and ethereal; depending on the shade, it can range from a positive image of sunny blue skies, to darker stormy scenarios.

**Water**—brings to mind peaceful and relaxing visions of blue seas, lakes, and streams, yet can go to the might and power of an energetic ocean, or the cold grandeur of glaciers and snowfields.

### Blue—in Communication

**Emotional impacts:** the color blue is cool and serene; causing viewers to feel more relaxed, calm, and secure. Blue hues can set a somewhat sedate or serious mood. Large doses of darker blues can imply somber feelings or sadness, as expressed in “the blues.”

**Psychological associations:** blue can convey conservatism, dependability, faithfulness, intelligence, and trust. Blue suggests freshness, cleanliness, or purity.

Often a quiet or passive color, blue in some contexts can lean towards coldness or melancholy.



“Power” Suit & Tie

### Cultural meanings:

Many believe that blue is the best color for positive cultural associations across the various cultures.<sup>2</sup> In several cultures, blue has been believed to ward off bad spirits, and/or worn as charms to protect against evil.

In iconography, blue is the color associated with the Virgin Mary. Blue is used as a patriotic national color in many nations, often along with red or yellow. Blue uniforms for the military, police officers, and even in corporate “power suits” can convey confidence and dependability. Some eastern cultures do not distinguish between blue and green.

**Phrases and clichés** are fun to ponder and to relate back to basic blue substances and their associations: “true blue” (loyal, faithful, trustworthy), “feeling blue” (sad or depressed), “the blues” (music originally from African Americans, expresses troubles and hardship), “blue ribbon” (top prize), “boys in blue” (policemen or military), “between the devil and the deep blue sea (to select between two unappealing choices), “out of the blue” (unexpected, as dropped from the sky), wild blue yonder” (vast far away place), “blue Monday” (first workday after the weekend), “blue laws” (severe or overly-strict laws), “once in a blue moon” (rarely happens).

### Design communication

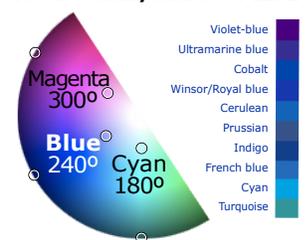
Blue is a well-liked color with a wide range—from light, dark, vibrant, or subdued, and from purplish to greenish—on the color sphere. Imagery hints at vast depths of seas and heavens. Used heavily, blue can feel cold or somber. Blues work well with most colors.

Add silver or gray for a sophisticated understated look. Brown tones and greens create a nature-oriented feel. If your blues seem too cool or conservative, add a touch of fiery red, or orange (blue’s complement the color sphere), to liven things up.

To sum it up: cool and calm, a bit sedate and serious, sometimes sad, exuding dependability and trust. That’s it, the color **BLUE!**

—Boni

### A few of many names for BLUE



Note: colors appear differently on each monitor.

Color sphere—blue side