

Blue

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With the start of the new year and new decade, the color company Pantone has named classic blue (Pantone 19-4052) as its 2020 color of the year. With 1867 colors to choose from, Pantone says that classic blue has “a reassuring presence instilling calm, confidence and connection.”



[Photo Credit](#)

Isn't it interesting how we associate colors with human experiences and feelings? Calm, confident, connected make blue sound good, but what about feeling blue and talking till we're blue in the face? And what do the data say about colors and mood?

1. Chromotherapy. Also known as colorology, the ancient practice of [chromotherapy](#) rests on the idea that colors are associated with health. Centuries ago, Egyptian, Chinese and other societies practiced chromotherapy to treat various human ailments. Chromotherapy treatments posit that the visible spectrum (colors) of electromagnetic radiation can cure various diseases. According to this tradition, red stimulates the body and mind and increases circulation. Yellow is purifying. Orange increases energy levels, and indigo treats dermatological conditions. Blue soothes illnesses and relieves pain. Despite its intriguing history, chromotherapy lacks scientific evidence and is commonly thought to be a practice of pseudoscience by twenty-first century standards.

2. Research on Color and Emotional Experience. While various studies suggest that color may have an influence on how we feel and act, the data are sparse. Limited research indicates that color effects on mood are subject to personal, cultural, and situational factors. A small [study](#) suggests that blue light increases subjective alertness and performance on attention-based tasks. And some limited [data](#) suggest that people prefer blue interiors when shopping. The ideas that blue light may have a calming effect and even make our streets safer have some [modest support](#) from observational data, but we need data from rigorous studies in controlled

settings to have a fuller understanding of these relationships.

3. Blue Sky Thinking. A popular phrase in today's world of entrepreneurial start-ups, blue sky thinking refers to brainstorming with no limits. Blue sky thinking invites creative ideas, regardless of reality and practical constraints, to generate new ways of thinking about old problems. Some people think the origins of blue sky thinking comes from the idea of lying in a wide open field pondering the world while gazing at the endless blue sky above. Others claim that the term originated in the twentieth century to describe fraud, and in particular, the practice of exaggerating financial projections that were no more tangible than blue sky and hot air.

4. Feeling Blue. The vast majority of English speakers (but notably not all) recognize feeling blue as a colloquial way of describing feelings of sadness. Despite the popular expression, the origins of "feeling blue" to mean feeling sad are unclear. Some claim that it derives from the custom of old deep water sailing ships to fly a blue flag and paint the hull of the ship blue if the captain or any of the officers died during the voyage. Others claim that the roots rest with Geoffrey Chaucer's poem from around 1385 *Complaint of Mars*, where he wrote about "tears of blue and a wounded heart." And still others claim the origins lie in Greek mythology where blue was related to rain and storms caused by Zeus' tears. Most interestingly, the expression is an idiom that doesn't translate in many languages. In German, for example, someone who is blau (blue) is drunk.

5. Therapy for Feeling Blue. Seasonal Affective Disorder increases in the northern hemisphere at this time of year given the decreased hours of sunlight. Other forms of depression, including major depression, are prevalent year round. The good news is that a number of effective treatments exist to help individuals when depression strikes. [Cognitive behavioral therapy](#), [Interpersonal Psychotherapy](#), [medication](#) and even [bright light therapy](#) are among the effective interventions used to prevent and treat both seasonal and non-seasonal depression. The challenge for the field now is to develop greater capacity to personalize care so that we are better able to predict which treatment is best for a particular individual.

For all the claims about colors impacting our moods, the data are sparse. But the good news is that where we need data, we have it. Effective treatments for depression are available. And they can help us go from feeling blue to the creative space of blue skies and the calm, confidence and connection of this year's classic blue.