



PREPRESS TWO CENTS: GRAY MATTERS

The Anatomy of Gray

OR: Why doesn't my four color gray look...gray?

Here's how the dictionary defines it:

gray *n* 1: a color between white and black; having a neutral hue.

The current Pantone color library available in InDesign offers 11 different cool grays and 11 different warm grays. And that doesn't include all the other versions of gray that are available with different mixes of the 4 process colors.

That's a lot of gray to choose from.

Are you sensing a potential problem? You should be.

Want to know why? Keep reading while we dissect the possible perils and pitfalls of gray.

Because it *is* neutral, gray is popular in designs where the focus is intended for artwork, photos or other highlighted elements on the page. We augment black ink with one or more of the other three process colors to make it deeper and richer. Doesn't it make sense to use a four color gray when we want it to look richer? Sure it makes sense! The only problem is that it's usually not true.

Four color grays have a tendency to reproduce unevenly. Sometimes they end up having a faint rainbow effect, and since they're intended to be neutral, this is usually undesirable. The larger the area (backgrounds for example), the more noticeable these variations can be.

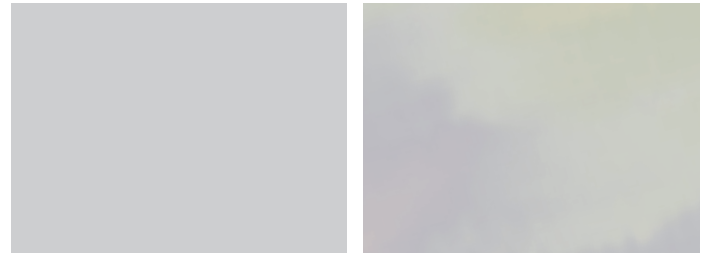
Four color grays aren't a great choice for text either. Again, the

color tends to be uneven in the final printed piece and it can be difficult to register consistently.

So what's the best way to achieve a consistent looking gray? It's easy! Just use a screened percentage of black. This may sound overly simple, but it's even, consistent and it will always *look* gray.

If you really need the look of a cool gray, a warm gray, or some other spot color gray, consider actually printing with the spot color. Spot color inks are laid down from one plate, not built up from the use of two, three or four of the process colors. Although it will most likely increase the cost of your project, it's the best way to ensure the consistent color you're looking for in a gray.

If you have questions about designing with gray or need help with a specific project, please contact us!



Believe it or not, the two gray squares above are approximately equivalent to each other. The square on the left is 22% of just black. The square on the right is the *four color equivalent* of Warm Gray 3. You can see that the four color gray is uneven, showing a gradual shift in color.