

# The Colors of Literacy: How Color Coordinates Text

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Everywhere we go we are constantly engaging with texts via literacy activities. For me, my most common literacy activity is to write in my planner and on my whiteboard. These two mediums work together to serve a common purpose of helping me manage my many tasks and reminders. However, what makes this literacy activity unique to me is how I synchronize them with a specific color code.

## Introduction

Every day we are faced with obligations, meetings, classes, work, reminders, lists, notes, dates, and many more things that we have to keep track of. Thinking about every task as one conglomerate mass can definitely become overwhelming (especially without a way to organize everything). Plus, without a fairly simple means to remember and prioritize our commitments, items will be forgotten or not completed. I definitely learned the importance of lists when I was in high school, particularly in junior year. I learned that I couldn't coast by relying solely on my memory to remember and make time for my many obligations; thus, a better alternative turned out to be keeping track of all of my tasks by writing them down in a planner. Detailed planning, for me, first started when I bought my own planner the summer before junior year. It was about a medium-sized planner that was decorated with succulents and had a variety of colors, as well as a gold "2018" printed on the cover. In the years before, I would write a note or put some reminders in my phone here and there, but I wouldn't make a habit of it and often left out some important tasks. Therefore, this purchase of a legitimate and

organized planner was a huge step forward for me. After purchasing this planner, I started recording events, due dates for homework, club meetings and times, health appointments, miscellaneous reminders, and many more. In this analysis, I will discuss the literacy within scheduling and planning. However, it is not just the inscriptions that are significant to the literacy activity but rather my use of colors to coordinate the different tasks in my life and to synchronize my two main means of scheduling: a planner and a whiteboard.

## The Role of Color

When it comes to organizing my life events, color is the most crucial aspect to me. In my mind's eye, I tend to picture or imagine objects, moods, songs, or obligations as colors. As a result, this makes it easier for me to categorize everything into colors. The text in my planner is split up into nine color-coded activities, as seen in Figure 1. These colors include red, orange, green, light blue, darker blue, purple, pink, brown, and black. Most of the colors

are decided based upon my personal judgement or attitude towards the activity. Others are just simply associated together for no particular reason. To illustrate this more concretely, allow me to explain what each color means to me by discussing the color-coding method that I write down in my planner (see Figure 1.)

First, red is commonly used to portray flashy warnings, so I use it to distinguish something I absolutely need to remember or draw particular attention to. Examples include payment deadlines, application deadlines, the first day of classes, etc. Orange is the next best color that draws my attention because it is bright like red, but it is not quite as “urgent” as red, which is what makes it ideal for reminders that are important. Green is the color associated with nature, so I think of health and most things natural. Hence, the color green is used for appointments.

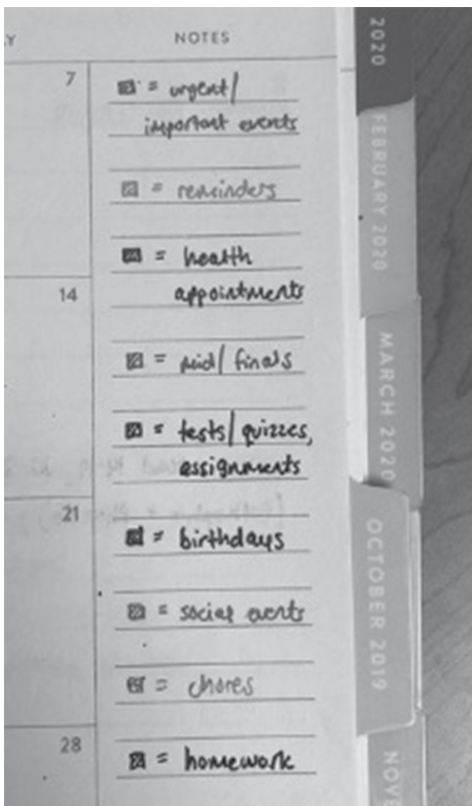


Figure 1: Color-coded activities in the notes tab of a personal planner.

The light blue is a recent addition to my color coding. Despite the fact that I see this color as calm and relaxing, its purpose is to distinguish itself from the darker blue. Personally, brighter colors stand out to me more than neutral or basic colors, and since exams are important, it is crucial that they stand out from other inscriptions. The darker blue is the color of an ordinary blue pen. To me, this shade of blue is associated with businesses—situations that are professional with moderate significance. In other words, this shade is what I use for quizzes and due dates; they are not at the same degree as an emergency, yet also not as [mundane] as a daily homework assignment. As for purple, there really isn't a legitimate reason as to why it's associated with birthdays, aside from the fact that it's the color I mentally imagine when I think of birthdays. Pink correlates to social events because pink is my favorite color. It is a color associated with happy and positive vibes; therefore, I utilize it to represent events or plans that are significant to my social life. Examples include plans made with friends, birthday parties, or club events that I wish to take part in. Next, I use brown pens to write down chores. Lastly, I use black to write down homework assignments because it is a neutral color. To me, writing assignments in this color sends a mental note to my brain that it is just another thing to check off the to-do list and has no particular priority or secret message behind it – it is just blunt and concise.

## Two Mediums of Planning

In the past, I've experimented with a few planning mediums, including planners and bullet journals. However, this year, I decided to try something different. Instead of having just one medium to organize myself with, I decided to try having two: a planner and a whiteboard calendar. Contrary to how hectic and confusing this sounds, having two different mediums is more practical than you may think. Planners are great to have on hand because they are portable and practical to write in. In spite of that, they are also prone to being left inside backpacks and forgotten about. Nevertheless, this is where the whiteboard becomes useful. The large, obnoxious nature of the whiteboard makes it impossible to ignore. This eliminates the problem of not checking my planner. Likewise, it removes the problem of forgetting my planner because it is stationary in my dorm room. Plus, my favorite part is how the palimpsest nature of the whiteboard allows me to continuously erase old tasks and write new ones without it looking too messy.

### Genre

In the ISU Writing Program, **genre** means a kind of production that it is possible to identify by understanding the conventions or features that make that production recognizable. Here, Eldredge uses the genre of planners and bullet journals as a way to organize her activities, events, assignments, and more.

Furthermore, the nature of the mediums, as well as the texts within each one, are different too. First of all, the planner is already made. As seen in Figure 2, there are designated spaces for dates, reminders, goals and bullet point to-do lists. Plus, there is a calendar view for each month, a weekly view (viewable in Figure 4), and tabs to locate each month more efficiently by month and year (Figure 2). This premade planner comes in handy when I need to organize miscellaneous thoughts or reminders, and it allows me to easily add text to my planner. Because there is so much space available, I can write more detailed notes to myself. For instance, instead of writing “roommate agreement” as I would on the calendar, I would write “roommate agreement @9pm in the common room” in my planner. Here, we can see how the same idea behind a text is written differently, solely based on the medium being used. Additionally, the extra space in my planner enables me to write the mundane tasks that I wouldn’t have been able to fit on the whiteboard. As a result, I typically write more entries in my planner as opposed to the whiteboard. By the same token, the premade nature of the planner takes away a certain personal aspect of organizing, since I did not make it myself.

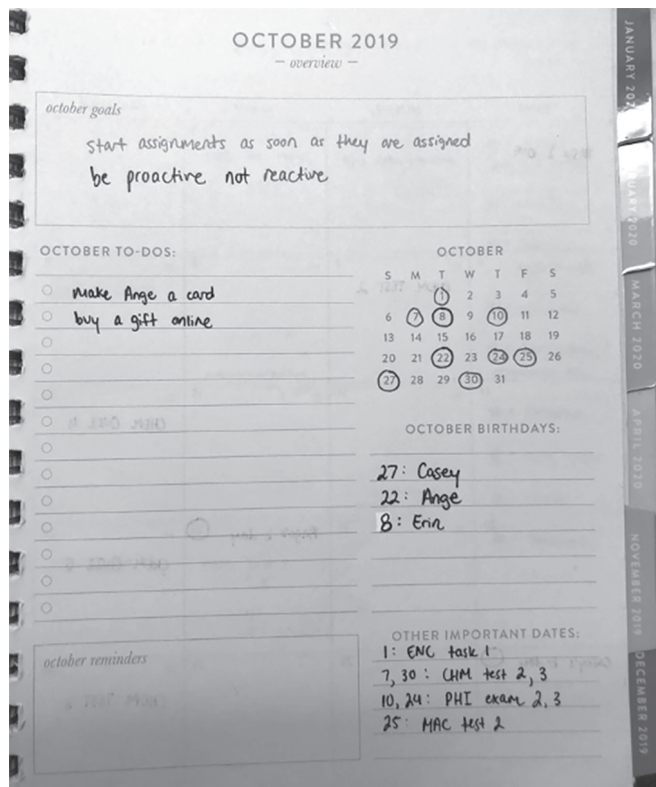


Figure 2: Different spaces for different tasks.

The calendar (Figure 3), on the other hand, is completely handmade by me. I have to physically draw out the calendar every month and make space for other texts I want to include. As implied earlier, because of the lack of space on the whiteboard calendar, texts are brief and succinct; they are usually of important value, too. In other words, because of the limited space, only important reminders or tasks with priority are written down on the calendar. Because of this, I decided to have two additional sections to write down the daily to-dos: “Schoolwork” and “Misc. Reminders,” as seen in Figure 3. These sections are used to remind myself of what needs to get done by the end of the day, and tasks are erased as soon as they have been completed.

## United by Color

It is clear how these two mediums are different, but what makes them the same? The answer to that is simply the colors used by both of them. What I mean by this is that both mediums are synchronized through the same color-coding tactic that was previously discussed. Simply put, reminders in my planner are also reminders on my whiteboard, and quizzes/tests in my planner are also quizzes/tests on my whiteboard.

Take for example Figure 3. This whiteboard has all of my tasks written down and color coded according to the color key from Figure 1. Now examine Figure 4. All of these notes and tasks are color-coded according to the key, just like the whiteboard. In both mediums, dark blue represents



Figure 3: Whiteboard calendar.

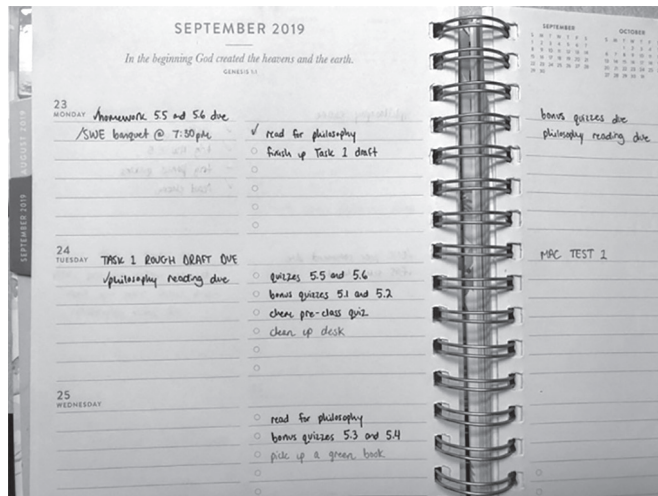


Figure 4: Planner

small-scale due dates or quizzes, light blue is for exams, pink is for social events, black is for homework, and orange is for reminders. What this shows is how two different mediums of text can work together to organize my life through the strategic use of color.

## Conclusion

First and foremost, it is important to acknowledge that my literacy activity of scheduling and planning is a literacy activity to begin with. Elizabeth Angeli makes a point in “Three Types of Memory in Emergency Medical Services Communication” about the writing done by EMTs, in which, “Notes then became external representations of individual memory” (3). Similarly, the notes and phrases I would write down in my planner or whiteboard were also outward forms of my memory. For instance, as soon as an assignment was given, I would immediately write it down so I wouldn’t forget it. The same goes for the tests that my professors put in their syllabus. Since I don’t

actively read all of my syllabi on a weekly basis, I just jot down the important dates so that I won’t forget them later. Essentially, what the EMS responders and I are doing are writing down brief notes to serve as long-term memory. Granted, our activities have different contexts, but the point is, a literacy activity doesn’t have to be an entire essay. Notes can be just as efficient to use, if not more.

### Literacy Activity

Any activity in which one engages with a text, typically via reading or writing. This can be anything from writing formal letters or books to simple inscriptions in a planner or sticky note.

All in all, it's clear to see that color has a strong influence over how I conduct my literacy activity of scheduling and planning. Komysa Hassan states in her article, "More Than a Marker for the Passage of Time," that "understanding literacy as both a created and creative force is important to deciphering the power and diversity of writing activity" (4). I find this personally relatable due to my use of creativity in color coding. Through color, I can portray a whole message using sparse phrases or relay a secret message that only I will understand. Either way, taking advantage of color makes this common literacy activity more unique and personal to me. Hassan is also implying the importance of the duality of created literacy and creative literacy. This duality is particularly important to my literacy activity because the *created* aspect of it comes into play when I write texts in either planning medium, while the *creative* aspect comes into play when I use color to code and categorize different texts, as well as unite my two planning mediums. Nevertheless, these two components of literacy are not separate entities but rather work in conjunction with each other to add diversity and meaning to my literacy activity of scheduling and planning.

## Works Cited

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