

WHAT DID YOU SAY AND WHAT DO YOU MEAN

by [Steve Brown](#)

In a recent speech, a Fed official reportedly took disclaiming to a level even Greenspan would have been proud to hear (Greenspan once quipped "If I seem unduly clear to you, you must have misunderstood what I said"). This official reportedly said something along the lines of 'the views expressed herein are not necessarily those of my colleagues or anyone else in the Federal Reserve System and the paper provided contains no information about my own thinking about current policy.' While this disclaimer leaves the reader wondering what is meant, the list that follows are things we can be crystal clear about when it comes to people who generate reports using heavy doses of innumerable colors, bolds, italics and other features. Here are some rookie mistakes.

Rookie mistake #1 - you like to see lots of colors on your screen when you produce a report. You may not have counted, but there are 40 default colors that can be used in Excel before you throw in the shading combinations. Using both options, you have almost a limitless color palette. The more colors you use to make a point, the more likely the point may be missed, due to the noise on the page. A good rule of thumb for any report is to utilize a maximum of 4 colors to keep things simple and clean.

Rookie mistake #2 - you use the wrong colors together, making it more difficult for the reader to follow the report. Some color combinations just don't work well together, such as red & green (clash with each other and are very hard to read plus color blind readers will have no idea what you are trying to say); orange & blue (these colors together mess with the brain, often causing a disturbing effect on readers as the colors seem to vibrate against one another) or red & blue (these colors just do not have enough contrast to be seen well when used together). Watch the combinations to make sure your eyes don't bug out.

Rookie mistake #3 - you don't check to see how the report looks when printed in black and white. People sometimes create beautiful documents when viewed in color, but forget most printers sitting around banks print in black and white. Make sure any document you create prints well in both color and black and white to get your point across. Nothing is more frustrating to a reader than to be given a report that prints black on black on black, when it was intended to print green on dark blue on gray. You cannot assume the person you are sending it to will only view it on a screen, so double check to see if you can read it when printed or viewed as black and white.

Rookie mistake #4 - you use a font that works just fine because your eyes are sharp, but you send it to someone who needs a bigger font to read it (like us). You cannot assume the receiving party knows how to increase the viewing percentage on their monitor, so make sure to use at least a 10 font (the only exception to this rule is the Banc Investment Daily, where a 9 font is allowed given we write it and due to the amount of information we cram in on a single page). Along the same lines, avoid using fancy typography such as italics, bolds, underlines, quotes, marks, parenthesis, ornamental fonts, all capital letters, etc. as these just serve to distract, 'distract,' distract, (distract).

Rookie mistake #5 - you use colors all over the report, but do not give the reader a key or legend telling them what each color means. It may look really cool to you, but the reader cannot tell what you are trying to say.

At the end of the day, no matter what you are trying to say or how you are trying to say it, our advice is to think of the recipient whenever possible to avoid making them guess what you mean.

BANK NEWS

Repeal in Process

The Senate has voted to repeal legislation that would have taken effect Jan 1 2012 and required all businesses to report all payments for goods or services totaling \$600 or more to the IRS on Form 1099.

Not Quite Yet

Fed Atlanta President Lockhart in a speech yesterday said he doesn't expect the FOMC to raise interest rates by the end of 2011, given low inflation and the fragile nature of the US economic recovery.

Disappearing

BMO Financial Group will reportedly change the name of Marshall & Ilsley (which has been around since 1847) to BMO Harris Bank once the acquisition is completed.

Best & Worst ROA

The top 5 states with the highest ROA in order for 2010 were UT (1.65%), AK (1.31%), OK (1.15%), NE (1.08%) and ND (1.08). Meanwhile, the bottom 5 states, all with negative ROAs in order were MI (-0.96), ID (-0.77), PR (-0.71), FL (-0.71) and GA (-0.60).

Economic Optimism

A new survey from KPMG shows an improvement in corporate executive optimism, as 68% expect business activity to rise over the next 12 months (up from 57% in Oct); 41% plan to hire more in the months ahead (up from 28%) and 65% expect revenues to rise over the next year.

Gambling Habit

A former bank manager of a Citizens Business Bank branch in CA has pleaded guilty to embezzling \$200k to support her gambling habit (she was originally charged with taking \$679k from 5 customer's accounts).

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