



Essential Solutions for Page Design Problems

Design Problem: Highly Saturated Backgrounds

by Jenifer Juris

Tempted to use a highly saturated background paper? Learn why this is a design problem and what you can do instead to make your photos shine.

Welcome to the first lesson in the Essential Solutions for Page Design Problems Series. In this series, we are going to focus on one design problem at a time. We will explain why something is a design problem and then we will offer a solution to fix it. In this first lesson, we're going to look at highly saturated backgrounds.

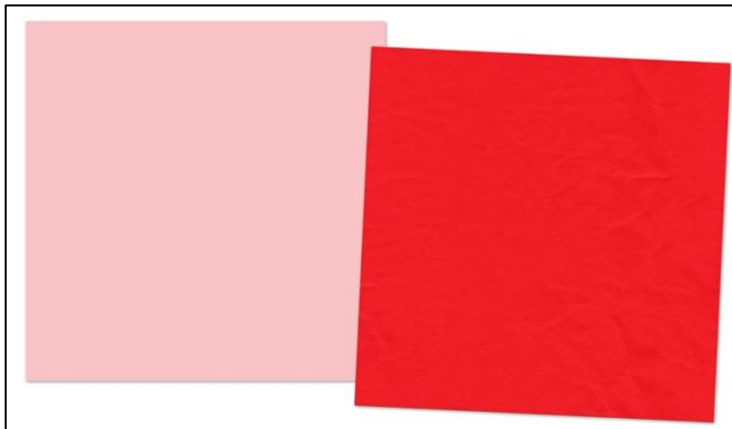
When it comes to picking a paper or color for the backgrounds of our scrapbook pages, it can be hard to choose the right one, especially when designers include so many fun and vibrant papers in the kits we use when we scrapbook.



But one of the design problems we often see is the use of a highly saturated background. Before I explain why this is a design problem, let me explain what I mean when I say highly saturated.

Saturation, when it's used in terms of color, means the intensity or the pureness of a color. The more saturated a colored paper is, the stronger the color's intensity.

For example, here is a red paper that is lightly saturated sitting next to a red paper that is highly saturated. The highly saturated paper has a strong and powerful presence, while the lightly saturated paper is more calm and less forceful.



But what happens when you have photos that go with a theme that consists of highly saturated colors? Themes like Fourth of July, Christmas, and just about every major holiday are known for very saturated and vibrant colors.

In my case, I've got these 5 photos of two of my nephews playing together. Red is a prominent color both in the toys and on MJ's pajamas. Using this shade of red could be tempting, so let's look at the page I made doing just that.



Here's what my scrapbook page looks like with a highly saturated red background. This page isn't the worst scrapbook page I've ever seen. I have well-lit photos, realistic drop shadows, and coordinating colored elements to pull this page together.



However, when I look at this page, a series of things happen. The first thing I see is Alan's face in the largest photo.



But the second thing my eyes go to is the bright red paper. This brings into play the design term of focal point.



What our eyes are drawn to when we first look at something is what we call the focal point.

Whenever you first look at anything, the focal point is whatever your eyes see first. In our hobby, we want our photos to be the focal point of the page. In the case of this page, only the biggest photo is noticed before my eyes can no longer ignore the screaming red paper. Think of highly saturated papers this way: it's like writing an email in all caps, which translates as if you were yelling. Your highly saturated papers are yelling to the viewer's eyes to "Look at me - I'm a bright red paper - ignore those adorable photos; they are nothing next to me".

So even though 1 of my 5 photos gets some attention, it's quickly diverted to the bright red paper and the rest of the photos don't stand a chance. When I create a scrapbook page, I want as many of my design choices as possible to point to all the photos *first*, and the papers and elements second.

This is the number one reason that using a highly saturated background is a design problem. The highly saturated paper becomes the focal point instead of the photos.

HIGHLY SATURATED BACKGROUNDS:

ARE A DESIGN PROBLEM BECAUSE
THEY BECOME THE FOCAL POINT
INSTEAD OF THE PHOTOS

There are other minor reasons not to use a highly saturated background. In this case, the journaling I wrote up is hard to read and it's being lost in the sea of red. When you use a highly saturated background, you end up being able to use fewer elements because the page already feels full.



If using a highly saturated background paper is a design problem because it steals the focus from the photos, then how do we properly document memories that are associated with saturated colors such as Christmas, or, in this case, my nephews?

The answer is to use small pops of the highly saturated colors as design choices but leave the background paper neutral.

And there's another design term - the word neutral. What exactly do I mean when I say that? Well, neutral colors are defined as muted shades with little to no saturation. Colors

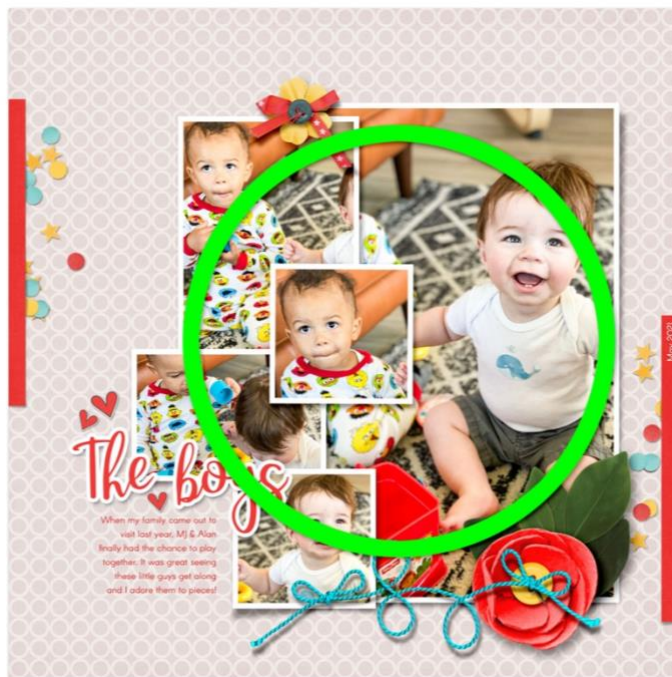
like white, beige or tan, and gray first come to mind, but lightly saturated shades of any color can work as a neutral background.

In this image of my page, I've made the background paper a neutral one. I've also included small pops of red throughout the layout to complement the colors in the photos without stealing the focus.



Now when I look at the page, my eyes first circle the photos before they go anywhere else. This is the desired outcome. All my photos are now the focal point. As much as possible, we always want our photos to be the first thing our eyes are drawn to and everything else to be secondary.

Also notice that because the background isn't so strong and overpowering, I can now use a few more elements and colors on my layout, and instead of having to use all black for the type layers, I can now use a softer color and still have it be readable.



But I know some of you are still wondering if it can make that big of a difference, so let's look at the two pages side by side.



When these two pages are side by side, I find that my eyes keep trying to ignore the page with the red background. But it's so visually distracting due to the yelling the highly saturated paper is doing. The page with the neutral background is my anchor of calm in the midst of the angry red sea.

So, let's recap this design problem.

Using a highly saturated background is a design problem because it makes the paper the focal point instead of letting the photos be the focal point.



DESIGN PROBLEM:
HIGHLY SATURATED BACKGROUNDS
BECOME THE FOCAL POINT

A good solution for using highly saturated colors is to use small splashes of them on the page in conjunction with a neutral background.



SOLUTION:

USE A NEUTRAL BACKGROUND
WITH SMALL SPLASHES OF COLOR

So, the next time you're tempted to use a highly saturated background, remember to turn off the Caps Lock key and use a neutral background instead.

Page Credits:

Page: Jenifer Juris

Photos: Jodi Finley

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