What’s black and white and red all over?

A newspaper (ha ha!). Seriously, though, try reading aloud the following list of colour names as quickly as possible. You should find this very easy.

**Purple**
**Brown**
**Red**
**Blue**
**Green**
**Orange**

For the next set, ignore the meanings of the word, and just say out loud their colour. Again, this should be easy.

**Book**
**Book**
**Book**
**Book**
**Book**
**Book**

Now try this set. Again, ignore the meanings of the words, and just say out loud their colour:

**Green**
**Purple**
**Blue**
**Red**
**Orange**
**Blue**

Phew, that was harder, wasn’t it? Turn the page to find out why.
What’s Black and White and Red All Over?: Answer

The Stroop Test (invented by the wonderfully named John Ridley Stroop of Nashville, Tennessee) demonstrates that, except for beginners, reading is an extremely automatic process. If you see a word, you cannot help but read it and process its meaning. This is exactly what makes the last part of the test so difficult. When you see the word written in red, it is very difficult to say “red”, because you automatically read and process the word “green”. Infuriatingly, no matter how hard you try, you just can’t stop yourself from doing so!

Although it might seem a bit trivial, this test actually has lots of applications in psychology. For example, worse than normal performance on the test can be an indicator of attention fatigue (that feeling when you just can’t concentrate on anything any longer) and possibly (though this is very controversial) of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). This is because the test is a measure of impulsivity. To succeed, you need to suppress your impulsive “instinct” simply to read the word; something that ADHD sufferers are notoriously bad at doing.

Sources: