

Document Layout

~ Some basic hints...

In the world of document design, there are both appropriate and inappropriate ways to use type and arrange layouts.

Appropriate design will bring out the intended message of your document, making it comprehensible to the greatest number of people. Inappropriate design will compromise your message, and may confuse or even frustrate your reader.

If the layout of your document makes it difficult or frustrating to read, it may cause your document to be passed over, never to be read. A well-designed document generally communicates the message 'I care about my work.'

A poorly-designed document may communicate just the opposite message. A little care and attention to small details can make a big difference.

These comments are for finished documents.

Please use DOUBLE SPACING in documents for proof reading

One Space between sentences

Use only one space after periods, colons, exclamation points, question marks, quotation marks—any punctuation that separates two sentences.

What! I was taught to type using two spaces after periods and this is correct when you are using a typewriter. However, the personal computer is **not** a typewriter.

On a typewriter the characters are all **monospaced**; that is they each take up the same amount of space—the letter **i** takes up as much space as the letter **m**. Because of this you need to type two spaces after a period to separate one sentence from the next. BUT...

On a Macintosh or PC most of the fonts are proportional—the letter **i** takes up about one-fifth of the space of the letter **m**. This means that the extra space is no longer necessary. Look at the examples below:

Notice that in this paragraph how the letters all line up in columns, one under the other, just like a typewriter. This is because each character is *monospaced*. This monospacing means that (on a typewriter) it is necessary to use two spaces after a period to separate the sentences.

RIGHT

This paragraph uses a font with *proportional* spacing. Each character takes up a proportional amount of the available space. Typing a single space between sentences is enough to separate them. Two spaces creates a disturbing gap, as can be seen in the paragraph below.

WRONG

This paragraph uses a font with *proportional* spacing, with two (2) spaces typed after punctuation. Each character takes up a proportional amount of the available space. Typing a double space after punctuation creates a disturbing gap, as you can easily see here.

Emphasising Type

Don't underline words. Use all caps sparingly. Underlining and ALL CAPS are for typewriters.

With a typewriter, there is only one way to emphasise a word or words and that is to underline or set it in ALL CAPS. However, with a Mac or a PC we have other options. If you want to emphasise, you can use **bold type**, larger type or even a **different font**.

You can also use *italics* instead of underlining or even **bold italics** to emphasise text. Underlining an italic word is redundant. **Don't do it.**

If you use ALL CAPS to emphasise words, it makes them more difficult to read. This is because people tend to recognize words not only by their letter groups but also by their shapes or 'coastline'. Look at these words:

Apple Computer

APPLE COMPUTER

When words are set in all caps, their shapes are all the same and the reader is forced to read letter by letter, rather than recognizing groups of words. The larger the block of text that is set in all caps the more tiring it becomes. All caps can be OK if used sparingly e.g. for headings or small blocks of text (OK?)—but be aware of the options above. This document uses a **sans serif bold** font for its headings to set them off from the main body text which is an **oldstyle serif**.

(See: **A Brief History of Fonts**).

Quotation Marks and Apostrophes

Use true quotation marks and apostrophes—not inch or foot marks.

Most word-processing applications have an optional preference to use true quotation marks (“ and ”) or (‘ and ’). These are sometimes called smart quotes or curly quotes. It is much better to use these than the standard typewriter quotes, which are in fact inch (") and foot (') marks. Some applications set the true quotation marks as the default standard but it is better to leave the option unchecked and use the keystrokes shown below:

Mac OS

Opening double quote: “ Option [

Closing double quote: ” Option Shift [

Opening single quote: ‘ Option]

Closing single quote: ’ Option Shift]

(or apostrophe)

Windows®

Opening double quote: “ Alt-0147

Closing double quote: ” Alt-0148

Opening single quote: ‘ Alt-0145

Closing single quote: ’ Alt-0146

(or apostrophe)

If you set the true quotes option as a default you can make mistakes like the example below:

Wrong: **In the ‘80s**

Right: **In the ’80s**

The first example is wrong because it uses an opening single quote (the computer default). The second example is right because it uses an apostrophe to replace the missing numbers (19).

Dashes and Hyphens

Never use two hyphens instead of a dash. Use hyphens, en dashes and em dashes appropriately

Hyphens are strictly for hyphenating words or line breaks. Double hyphens are used on a typewriter to indicate a dash, like this --. This is because typewriters don't have a real dash. With the Mac or PC it is not necessary to use the double hyphen because we have real dashes.

The en dash –

The en dash is so-called because it is about the width of a capital N in the font and size you are using. It is used between words **indicating a duration**, such as hourly time, months, years or distance:

January–March

7:30–9:45 A.M.

3–5 years

Tokyo–Osaka bullet train

The em dash —

The em dash is twice as long as the en dash—it is about the width of a capital M in the font and size you are using. The em dash can be used like a colon or parentheses or to indicate an abrupt change of thought. It can also be used where a period is too strong and a comma is too weak.

i.e. use the em dash instead of a double hyphen.

Note how I have used an em dash in the first sentence of the paragraph above, and at other places in the document. Do not put spaces on either side of the em (or en) dash. So—where do we find these characters?

Mac OS

– en dash	Option Hyphen
— em dash	Option Shift Hyphen

Windows®

– en dash	Alt-0150
— em dash	Alt-0151

Indents & Paragraph Spacing

Don't use tab spaces as indents; don't indent first paragraphs; don't use indents AND extra paragraph spacing.

Indents are visual clues to tell the reader that a new paragraph is starting. On a typewriter the standard indent is five spaces, which suits the monospaced characters. A common mistake with the personal computer is to set a five space tab indent. This is far too big for the proportional-spaced characters. Use your word-processing application to set the first-line indent automatically. 2–3 spaces is enough for most proportional-spaced characters.

This paragraph has a 5-space indent set with a tab at the beginning of the first line. As you can see, this creates a disturbing gap at the beginning of the text. This large space distracts the reader's eye and makes the text less readable.

This paragraph has a 2-space first-line indent set with the word-processing application. As you can see, this has a much better balance with the proportional spacing of the characters and makes the text easier on the reader's eye.

As stated above, the purpose of an indent is to warn the reader that a new paragraph is about to begin. If it is the first paragraph, the reader does not need that clue—it is redundant.

The second and subsequent paragraphs need the indent, because they are new paragraphs. If you do not use indents, then a little extra space between the paragraphs can be used to indicate the beginning of a new paragraph. Use the word-processing application to set this spacing. Don't hit a double Return—this will make the space too big.

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A Brief History of Fonts

There are seven basic categories of font; oldstyle, modern, slab serif, sans serif, script, fringe and decorative. These are described below:

Oldstyle

The characteristics of oldstyle typefaces developed out of the traditional handlettering form, following the way the scribes held their pens and drew letters. Oldstyles have a warm, graceful appearance and are generally the best choice for setting readable, lengthy bodies of text. Oldstyle fonts always have serifs and they are the most 'invisible' which means that they don't have design characteristics that interrupt the flow of communication; usually the character forms are 'easy on the eye'.

Palatino is an oldstyle font (the body text of this article)

Modern

Typefaces in the modern style were developed at a time when the world was changing. America ushered in democracy, France ushered out monarchy and the Industrial Revolution was under way. Political and social theorists were establishing a more rational, mechanical view of the universe and its inhabitants. Modern type faces have a strong thick/thin contrast that makes them hard to read in lengthy bodies of text. They are good in small doses because of their 'dazzling' effect.

Onyx is a modern font

Slab serif

One of the results of the Industrial Revolution was that a new field of business—advertising—came along. Type designers looked for new ideas to make their typefaces distinctive. One of these was to thicken the serifs (making them slabs) which gave the type a more regimented, mechanical appearance than oldstyles. Sometimes slab serifs are called 'Egyptian' because Napoleon was on his campaign into that country at the time they were developed. All things Egyptian became very fashionable—and the name became a selling point.

Century Schoolbook is a slab serif font

Sans serif

Sans serif fonts, as their name implies, have no serifs at all. They first became popular after the First World War, another period of great social and political change. The Bauhaus school of design was established in 1919 and their motto of 'form follows function' had a great influence. Typefaces were stripped down to their bare essentials, to their simplest, most functional forms, reflecting the mood of the times. Like modern fonts, they are hard to read in large bodies of text, but used sparingly e.g. for headings as in this article, they can have a striking effect.

Arial is a sans serif font

Scripts

Script and decorative typefaces have appeared in almost every period of type history. They imitate handlettering in many varieties; often calligraphic, as in the example below.

Zapf Chancery is a script font

Fringe

Fringe fonts are typically distorted, often deliberately ugly and usually difficult to read. However, if used for the right application they can have a striking effect.

Sand is a fringe font

Decorative

Decorative fonts are deliberately noticeable and are not meant for anything else except to be decorative. Obviously, decorative fonts are best used sparingly—if at all.

DAVY'S IRIBBONS

is a decorative font