

Silm

Mastering Typography - Part 2

Character Width

fonts, called proportional fonts, have varying character widths. Others, called monospace fonts, have consistent character widths regardless of the character used.

Understanding the role of character width in fonts impacts design in two key ways:

- font contrast
- line length

In general, monospace fonts such as 'Courier New' will always stand out from fonts whose character widths vary. The eye will especially gravitate to them if they are used alongside proportional fonts. Keep this in mind when choosing contrasting fonts to use together.

The word 'Proportional' is displayed in a blue serif font. Each letter is enclosed within a red rectangular box. The boxes vary in width to match the width of each letter, demonstrating how proportional fonts allocate space based on character width.The word 'Monospace' is displayed in a blue sans-serif font. Each letter is enclosed within a red rectangular box. All boxes are of the same width, demonstrating how monospace fonts allocate equal space to every character.

Image 1. A standard typeface such as Caslon has variable character widths compared to the more uniform nature of a monospace typeface of Courier.

Monospace fonts make it possible to calculate the length of a line of text accurately, which is not possible with proportional fonts. Because of this, monospace fonts are handy if you need to know exactly how long a line of text will be.

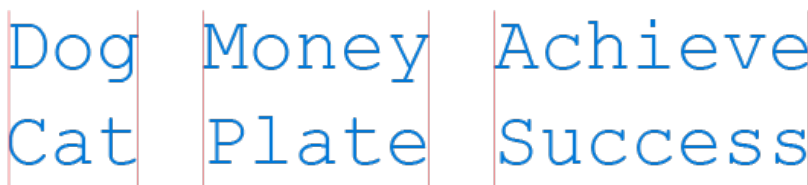
The words 'Dog', 'Money', and 'Achieve' are on the top line, and 'Cat', 'Plate', and 'Success' are on the bottom line. Each word is enclosed in a red rectangular box. The boxes are all the same width, showing that the total length of each line is identical despite the different words, a characteristic of monospace fonts.

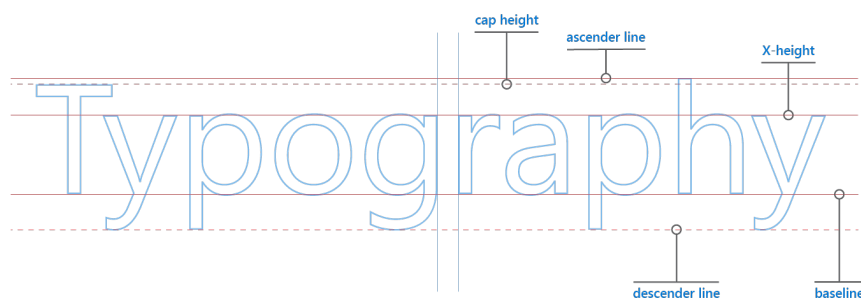
Image 2. An example of how monospace typefaces produce the same length with the same

number of characters even if the words are different.

As with kerning, character width may often be handled for you automatically when you select your font. Still, you want to be mindful of how your selection of a font may impact the character width of your text and thus impact areas like line length.

Leading

Pronounced with a short “e” sound (LED-ing), leading (or line height) is the spacing between two lines of text. You measure leading from one *baseline* of text to the next baseline beneath it. A baseline, as you may recall from writing on lined notebooks, is the line your letters sit on. Letters with tails or *descenders* sit on the baseline but extend their tails beneath it.



By increasing the leading, you increase the vertical white space between lines of text, generally improving readability in exchange for screen real estate. As a general rule, leading should be about 25 to 30 percent more than the character height for good readability. Bad leading leads to text that looks crowded and pinched.

Good

Now for manner use has company
believe parlors. Least nor party who
wrote while did. Excuse formed as is
agreed admire so on result parish.

Too much

Now for manner use has company
believe parlors. Least nor party who
wrote while did. Excuse formed as is
agreed admire so on result parish.

Too tight

Now for manner use has company
believe parlors. Least nor party who
wrote while did. Excuse formed as is
agreed admire so on result parish.