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Typography Paper

“Typography is the art of arranging type and type design” (Vasinov). In the current web landscape, text is still the way most sites communicate to the user. Ensuring that not only is your text readable, but appealing is important in establishing yourself on the web.

The general idea behind typography is that human beings process information a certain way and our print and digital text needs to be manipulated to play into this reality. On the web text is usually sectioned into headers and paragraphs. Establishing a specific font for each allows the reader to become comfortable with your page. Pages have been created that have neglected these rules, and they are usually an unreadable mess of text that the reader’s brain has a hard time wrapping itself around. The rules are meant to make things easier for everyone. This includes designers, programmers, and readers alike. Some designers experienced with typography have been able to bend the rules as they see fit and get away with it. These are people who have working with the medium of words for a long time and know the places where the rules can be bent or broken. Individuals looking to start should begin by establishing where the lines are before trying to cross them.

To the untrained eye typography is something on its surface that feels simplistic, but in practice is difficult to master. Typography encompasses a wide range of attributes and rules that allow designers to make text readable and appealing. For example, paragraphs can be styled in many ways. Will there be indentation at the beginning of each paragraph? What about line spacing? Will paragraphs be separated with a line break or is the indentation enough to mark the place where paragraphs begin and end? How should the paragraphs be aligned? Do I want the alignment to left, right, centered, or justified? These are questions that need to be answered when designing the way paragraphs are displayed. For example in this paper the indentation of the paragraphs is 3 spaces long, there are line breaks between paragraphs, the paragraph is left aligned and the line spacing is double of its normal amount. I’ve made these decisions for several reasons. Left-align is great for large bodies of text. The slight indentation lets the reader know where the paragraph begins without being obnoxious. The line space allows for the paragraphs to subtlety stand out and improves the readability.

Apart from bodies of text, the text itself has a wide range of properties. Tracking is also known as letter spacing. If the letters are too close too together it makes the text hard to read. Kerning is often confused with tracking. Kerning refers to the spacing between certain letters in different fonts. On the web you have to individually change the kerning in every spot that needs to be altered. Some fonts appear to be strange if the kerning is off on certain letters. I have noticed that the natural kerning in some of the fonts that are commonly used in Word are off and I often find myself checking to see if accidently put an extra space between letters. Tracking and kerning matter because if the reader is distracted by the space between the letters, the message will not have as great of an impact. The size of the text is another aspect that deserves consideration. Headers should always appear larger than paragraphs, but there should be a balance between the two. If the sizes are too similar then the reader might get lost while reading the site, on the other hand if the size disparity is too large then the paragraphs will most likely be too small to read and the headers way too big.

Punctuation is something that a lot of people overlook, but can make a body of text look a lot better if properly managed. Many designers suggest using the en dash instead of the em dash. The em dash is slightly bigger and can create new lines which in turn break up the text is a less then appealing way. Although in many places it is noted that the en dash does not replace the em dash. The em dash is frequenly used when an abrupt change of thought occurs in a sentence. Of course these are not to be confused with the hyphen. Learning when to use each dash can make text much more appealing. Most people when using computers don’t remember to use true quotation marks which are curled instead of the straight ones. When your character set allows, using the ellipsis character rather than three periods looks significantly better. Changing the spacing between three periods can achieve the same aesthetic result. There is a difference between the forward slash and the solidus. The solidus is mainly used to display fractions and looks a lot better than using the forward slash for the same thing. When used properly, punctuation can make text a lot more appealing and readable.

Here is my top ten list of typography rules to follow for the web. 1. When picking fonts for headers and paragraphs pick one serif and one sans-serif. 2. There should be an appropriate amount of white space between all elements. 3. Don’t use more than three fonts 4. Make sure the line height allows for maximum readability. 5. Try not to use justified alignment ever. 6. Ensure that the leading and kerning are properly set. 7. Use the Fibonacci sequence or something similar to give your page a “natural elegance.” 8. Pick a simple font for the paragraph font; place a high value on readability. 9. The paragraph font size should be between 10 and 12 point. 10. Make sur e the font color and the background color have enough contrast so that people don’t struggle to read the page

Bibliography

Vasinov, V. (2010, March 11). *Typography is Important*. Retrieved September 26, 2012, from Techmic Studios: http://www.techmic.com/magazine/issue-1/typography-is-important