



# A Few Lessons About the **Art** of **Typography**

## **Typography exists to honor content.**

Letters have a life and dignity of their own. The words they comprise have a point to be made, even if the that point is frivolous. To understand how to build the page and set the type, read the text before designing it. Discover the outer logic of the typography in the inner logic of the text. Choose a typeface—or a group of faces—that will properly express the character of the text. Shape the page and frame the text block so that it reveals every element, every relationship between elements, and every logical nuance of the text.

# Before The Beginning; Think Of The End

How will the text be shown? Is it a printed piece, an ebook, an interactive PDF or a web page? If printed, is it high-end offset printing or a digital job at Kinkos? The answers to these questions may help you in determining what typeface to use. A hairline serif may look great on an glossy, offset-litho page but may fall apart at small, text sizes on a rough surfaced, uncoated sheet. Those same serifs will also pose a problem on a web page if the type is text size. Even the newer screen resolutions may not hold the serif together once the type size is small.

What dimensions will the final project be? Will it be portrait, landscape or square? Will you have to adjust the page margins for any special bindery techniques? Long before you have placed the first letter on the page you should consider these factors. They will determine how to layout your pages and determine the margins and gutters that will border your text blocks.



# Choosing The Typography

As stated above, you should consider the medium for which the typeface was originally designed and how you intend to use it now. When using digital adaptations of letterpress faces, choose fonts that are faithful to the spirit as well as the letter of the old designs. Check the weight and conformation of the letterforms at every proofing stage. Choose faces that suit the paper you intend to print on, or paper that suits the faces you wish to use. In other words, choose faces that suit the process as well as the subject matter.

Make sure you choose faces that can furnish whatever special effects you require. Do you need special characters that are only available in a few typefaces? That will narrow the field for you. Use what you have chosen to the best advantage. Don't try to force the typeface to do something that it was not intended to do. (No matter how hard you try, Comic Sans will never be appropriate for a corporate annual report—unless it is an annual report for a clown college). Choose a face whose historical echoes and associations are in harmony with the text. For example, don't use Helvetica to set an article about Medieval Italy.

Choose typefaces whose individual spirit and character is in keeping with the text. Start with a single typographic family. Respect the integrity of roman, italic and small caps. Consider bold faces on their own merits. Choose titling and display faces that reinforce the structure of the text face. Pair serif and sanserif faces on the basis of their inner structure. Choose your library of typefaces slowly and well and not just because you think they are cool looking.

Use sloped Romans (italics) sparingly. Artificially sloped Romans should not be used unless there is no alternative. If your design requires small caps, choose typefaces actually designed to be with them. Change one parameter at a time until you have arrived where you need to be. Then think about the possibility that you went to far and take a few steps back.

Consider the proportions of the page, the portions of the columns on the page, and the proportions of the typeface before choosing a size to set as a text standard. Don't use any fonts you don't need.

# Design The Page

Use a column or modular grid to establish your page design. Before adding text you may want to try different configurations using black or gray rectangles standing in for the columns. Even after you establish the basic layout and you have some text in place you may find that you need to make adjustments. Improvise, recalculate, and improvise some more. Adjust the type and the spaces within the type block. Keep the page design flexible enough to provide a livable home for the text. Many people think of the text last. They worry about the placement of images and other page elements first. Reverse this trend. Think about the layout of the text first and add the other elements as needed.

It is important to remember to include the margins in the page and column design. Find a balance between the text, the margins and the negative space on the page. Remember that the open, surrounding space is as important as the page elements placed within that space.

## About Titles and Headings

Set headlines, subheads, titles and paragraph openings in a form that contributes to the overall design. Use as many levels of headings as you need: no more and no fewer. Make sure the reader can find the beginning of the text and—if it should be split into another column or page—where it resumes.

If the text is meant to invite continuous reading, set it in columns that are clearly taller than wide. The vertical shape of the column points the reader down the page and onto to the next page. Construct the type block so that it balances and contrasts with the shape of the overall page.

“Type is a beautiful group of letters, not a group of beautiful letters.”

— Matthew Carter



## Mark The Reader's Way With Folios

In any document that is more than a signature in length folios (page numbers) may be needed. While folios can be located almost anywhere the designer chooses the most typical placement is in the outer corners. This enables the reader to thumb quickly through the pages to find their place. Folios that are centered at the bottom of the page are a classic book style but not as easy to see when thumbing through a long document or book.

## The Obvious With Running Heads

In long documents and books with a variety of subject matter it may be necessary to add title information on the page in the form of a repeating or running head usually found in a header or a footer. However, in short documents this is simply repeating the obvious. When viewing an instruction manual about a new toaster the reader does not need to be reminded on every page that they are reading a manual about toasters. A folio may be all that is needed. If the manual is quite long and covers a number of different topics the running head may be more necessary.

# Paragraph Structure and Hyphenation

Choose a basic leading that suits the typeface, text and measure. Do not indent the first paragraph of a story. In continuous text, mark all paragraphs after the first with an indent of at least one em. However, if you indent your paragraphs then don't add line spacing after the paragraph. That is redundant. If you space your paragraphs don't use a return keystroke to achieve this space. That is too much space and is visually disturbing. To start, set a space that is half that of the text leading. If you are setting type at 11/14 then a space of 7pts is a good place to start. Make adjustments to taste.

At hyphenated line ends, leave at least two characters behind and take at least three forward. Avoid leaving the stub-end of a hyphenated word, or any word shorter than four letters, as the last line of a paragraph. Avoid more than three consecutive hyphenated lines. Hyphenate proper names only as a last resort unless they occur with the frequency of common nouns. Hyphenate according to the conventions of the language.

Avoid beginning—or ending—more than two consecutive lines with the same word. Never begin a page with the last line of a multi-line paragraph from the preceding page. Avoid hyphenated breaks where the text is interrupted. Abandon any and all rules of hyphenation and pagination that fail to serve the needs of the text.

“There are numerous typographical rules. The most important is: do not ever do it the way someone else does it.”

— Kurt Schwitters

## Choosing The Correct Glyphs For Spacing

Hyphens should only be used to link compound words, like one-on-one. They should not be used to set off phrases. Use spaced en dashes or, if you prefer, an em dash that has been horizontally scaled instead of double hyphens. Use close-set en dashes between numbers to indicate a range.

## All About Numbers

Don't set fractions by typing a number followed by a "/" and then another number. These are crude and ugly. Standard fractions can be found in the type font glyph set. Use those instead. If you must make a fraction manually take some time to do it right. Use the dimension sign found in the glyph set rather than a serif "x" when dimensions are given. Choose between using old-style, or text, figures and titling, or lining, figures depending upon their use in the text. Text figures feature numbers that drop below the baseline while titling figures fit within the baseline and the cap height line. Old-style figures are usually used in a paragraph of regular text while the titling figures are used in lists, charts and graphs where strict alignment is important. Most sanserifs do not have old-style figures.

# Notes On Punctuation

Use ellipses that fit the font. If you manually set an ellipses at least take to time to adjust its tracking Minimize the use of quotation marks, especially with Renaissance faces. Hang quotation marks when needed. Eliminate other unnecessary punctuation. For example, don't sprinkle the page with unnecessary quotation marks to call attention to a "word" but use italic text instead. Be careful when using quotation marks and end of the sentence punctuation. Space these elements so they visually work together rather than leaving an awkward space. And don't double space after punctuation!

## What's On The Table?

Edit tables with the same attention given to the regular text, and make sure to set them as text that is to be read. If it is important enough to be in a table it is important enough to set well. A table does not have to be over-designed and ugly. Designed properly it should work with the standard text rather than against it.

Avoid over punctuating lists. Most lists are not complete sentences and do not require periods. Set lists and columns of figures to align flush right or on the decimal. For text and other matter, choose harmonious and legible tabular alignments. Set the tabs correctly rather than hitting the tab key over and over again.

“Exactitude is not truth.”

– Henri Matisse



# Some Final Thoughts

There are many more considerations when setting type and designing a page. These are just some of them. But it is a good place to start. Remember to check your type at every stage. This will mean printing it out once in a while as seeing it on the screen is not the same as seeing it printed. (Unless the design is web-based; then don't worry about it.)

Consult the ancestors. They knew what they were doing for hundreds of years. Look after the low-tech end of typography as well as the bells and whistles of the high-end technologies. Sometimes all it takes is a nicely done paragraph to set things off right.

