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RULES
FOR
TYPE

Insert only a single space after all punctuation.

Inserting two spaces after a period was common when typing on a typewriter. Monospace typefaces were designed to occupy the same amount of space no matter the width of the character. Therefore, two spaces were needed to identify the end of a sentence and the beginning of another sentence. With the introduction of the personal computer and digital type, characters are designed proportionally which allows for the correct practice of using one space after all punctuation.

Use proper “em” dashes, “en” dashes and hyphens.

An “em” is a unit of measure equal to the point size that you are using. An “em” dash is a type of punctuation used to o set clauses in a sentence or to indicate an abrupt change in thought. An “en” dash is equal to half the length of an “em” dash. “En” dashes are used to denote duration. You may kern small spaces before and after “en” and “em” dashes if you feel it is too tight. But do not give full spaces. Hyphens are used for hyphenating words. Make sure the hyphenation is in the correct place. Do not rely on the software.

Use proper quote and apostrophe marks.

Use true quotation marks and apostrophes instead of using inch marks and feet marks. Place all punctuation marks, except colons and semi-colons, inside the quotation marks.

Use true small caps.

When setting text that contains acronyms, select a typeface with small caps as a family. Selecting small caps from the style menus is a poor choice because the computer reduces the overall size of the type by 80%. This changes the stroke weight and the feel of the font. Expert sets in the Adobe TypeLibrary have small caps options.

Add letterspacing to capitalized text and small caps if needed.

Letterspacing is the amount of space between characters in a word. Some software programs call letterspacing tracking. Use positive number values to open up the letterspacing for capitalized text and small caps to about 2 or 3.

Use old style figures when appropriate.

Old style figures, also known as non-lining figures, do not line up on the baseline as do regular or lining numerals. Old style figures can be found in various fonts. If the body text has a lot of numbers, research a font family where old style figures are included. If non-lining numerals are not available use a slightly smaller point size for the lining numbers. Think of lining numbers as uppercase numbers and non-lining numbers as lowercase numbers.

Use caps properly.

Use capital letters very rarely. With the options given by type families such as bold, larger point sizes, etc., you will seldom need to use all caps to draw attention to your text. When type is set in all caps, readers have to read each individual letter rather than recognizing groups of letters. This slows the reader and the amount of information they are retrieving. Also, not all typefaces are readable when set in all caps. This is especially true about script typefaces and the most decorative typefaces. Short headlines may be one exception to this rule.

Use bold text properly.

Use bold text sparingly. Bold text stands out from body text and is meant to show emphasis. Bold text is better used in headlines, captions, logos, drop caps, or other special type treatments. Do not bold entire paragraphs of body text. Usually italics are a more subtle way to separate text from the rest of the body without drawing too much attention.

Use copyright, register and trade-mark marks properly.

The copyright (©), register (®) and trademark (TM) characters need to be reduced to work with body text. At times, depending on the typeface, you may need to reduce the mark between 50% and 70%. The goal is to try to match the x-height. The © symbol should be approximately 70% of the surrounding text. Again, trying to set the size of the symbol to the x-height. Unlike the (TM) symbol, the ® symbol should not be superscripted. It should remain on the baseline. The (TM) symbol is usually superscripted for the chosen font. The (TM) and ® symbols are normally set higher than other marks. If you choose to superscript ®, reduce it to 60% of the size.

Use the ellipsis character when appropriate.

Use the ellipsis character and not three periods. You can access the ellipsis character on a Mac by typing option + : (colon.) Allow a small amount of space before or after, not a full space. If the ellipsis character doesn't seem to be crowding the text, leave no space at all.

Avoid underlined text.

Back in the typewriter days, underlining was the only way to draw attention to the text. Now, with digital type and their families, you have the option of using bolds, italics, or obliques.

Increase line spacing to improve readability in body text.

Line spacing or leading refers to the space between lines of text. It is important for the purpose of readability and appearance. Leading is measured from baseline to baseline. As a rule of thumb, allow leading that equals 120% of point size. For sans serif, you may need 135%. Leading should be increased proportionally as line length increases. When setting headlines, negative or solid leading may be appropriate. Solid leading means that the leading equals the point size.

Choose appropriate body text size.

You can probably set body text to a point size smaller than your original choice. Body text is usually set from 9–12 points. When you print text, it is usually larger than what it looked like on the screen. So, print out your text before finalizing your layout. Type studies will help you determine the proper size before you proceed with your layout.

Don't alter fonts.

Don't alter the widths, weight, or shapes of the characters. Type design is an art. Each character has been carefully designed taking into consideration the width, weight and the shape of each character (stress, stroke, and serif.) Graphic software allows us to destroy/alter the original design. Inexperienced designers use this option to “force” type to fit. Select typefaces with large families if you need the flexibility in widths and weights.

Choose the appropriate font.

Sans serif typefaces are often less legible than serif fonts. In the western world, we learn to recognize shapes as opposed to words. Therefore, serifs help link the shapes making type easier to read. Sans serif typefaces work well for headlines and to set text that is aligned to vertical/horizontal lines. Certain sans serif typefaces, which are not very geometrical, work well for body text. These include GillSans, Optima, and Goudy Sans.

Decrease line length and increase margins.

Line length is the measure of text on one line. Any measure between 45 and 75 characters is comfortable for single-column widths. The ideal measure for body text length is 66 characters (counting both letters, punctuation, and spaces). For multiple columns, a measure between 40 to 50 characters is ideal.

Avoid letterspacing lowercase body text.

As a rule, don't add letterspacing in body text. It hampers legibility. These formatting instances should only be applied when working with all caps, small caps, numbers and display text where looser type spacing may increase legibility.

Keep word spacing fairly close.

The amount of space between words of text meant for extended reading should be fairly close—about the width of a lowercase “l.” If the word spacing is too close, it appears as one giant word and legibility is hampered. To aid legibility, keep the spaces between words not only fairly thin but also consistent and even.

Choose the ideal column width.

For single-column pages, 4.25 inches is ideal. For two-column width, columns can be as narrow as 2 inches. Turning on the hyphenation feature can improve word spacing.

Use justification when appropriate.

Justification can be appropriate in certain places. However, justification can create certain problems such as rivers and word spacing. Some solutions may work but, they need to fit into whatever guidelines the design of the page requires. Adjusting the size of your margins, decreasing the size of your text, turning on auto-hyphenate and manually hyphenating the text are all examples of solutions. Again, if the guidelines of the design require 2 margins and none of the other solutions work, then change the text into a different alignment.

Choose the alignment that best suits the text.

Make sure that the alignment chosen for all areas of text is legible and consistent with the design and guidelines. Left-aligned text is easier to read and easier to set. Justified text is more difficult to set without the inevitable word spacing problems. Right-aligned and centered are generally not used for body text due to hampered legibility. With every alignment, the designer's determination of rag is an important factor in typography. With any alignment, you want to work with your H&Js. The H&J setting is in both Adobe InDesign and in QuarkXpress.

Follow the rules of hyphenation.

Do not rely on software to judge where hyphens should be placed. At the end of lines, leave at least two characters behind and take at least three forward. For example, “elegantly” is acceptable, but “elegantly” is not because it takes too little of the word to the next line. 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. Avoid hyphenating or breaking proper names and titles. Creating a non-breaking space before and after the name will ensure that the name will not break.

Avoid beginning three consecutive lines with the same word.

Since software programs deal with line breaks automatically based upon a number of variables, it is possible to have paragraphs with consecutive lines beginning with the same word. When this happens simply adjust the text to avoid the problem.

Always, always spell-check.

Once the design is complete, spell-check all of the text. This is done two ways, and both must be used. First, in most software programs, there is spellcheck available. Use it. Second, print the document and read through the text. The monitor and design of the document will make text look perfect when in actuality, it may not be. Even if it is text given to you by a client, spell-check it. Never assume that it is correct. Keep a dictionary nearby and use it.

Avoid widows and orphans.

A widow is either a single word alone on a line or a single sentence alone on a new page or column. Orphans are single lines of copy alone at the end of a page.

Establish a clear hierarchy.

Decide what to emphasize. Which elements will receive the most emphasis? Which one or two messages do you want to get attention? Play up these elements. Everything else is secondary to those pieces of information. Use white space to bring the elements closer together or to isolate the elements and draw attention to them.

Use kerning in headlines.

Adjust the space between two particular letters to allow for more consistent negative space.

Indents.

In continuous text, mark all paragraphs after the first with an indent of at least one “em” (3 spaces).

Items in a Series.

Items in a series do not use a comma before the word “and.” For example: apples, oranges and grapes.