

Some Typographic Rules to Remember

adapted from *The Mac Is Not a Typewriter* by Robin Williams

One space between sentences.

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

“Curly” quotes and apostrophes.

Use real quotation marks and apostrophes—never those grotesque generic marks that actually symbolize inch or foot marks: use “and” — not "and". Typewriter quotation marks are the single most visible sign of unprofessional type.

Dashes.

Never use two hyphens instead of a dash. Use hyphens, en dashes, and em dashes appropriately. Hyphen: - En dash: – Em dash —

Underlining.

Don’t underline. Underlining is for typewriters; italic is for professional text.

Capitals.

Very rarely (almost never) use all capital letters. Text set in all caps is much harder to read.

Kerning.

Adjust the space between letters according to your sensitive visual perception—optical kerning.

Tabs & Indents.

Use those tabs and first-line indents regularly. NEVER use the space bar to align text.

Paragraphs.

Either indent the first line of paragraphs or add extra space between them—not both.

Widows & Orphans.

Never leave widows and orphans bereft on the page.

Widow: when a paragraph ends and leaves fewer than seven characters (not words) on the last line.

Orphan: when the last line of a paragraph won’t fit at the bottom of a column and must end itself at the top of the next column.

Hyphenations & line breaks.

Avoid more than two hyphenations in a row.

Avoid too many hyphenations in any paragraph.

Avoid stupid hyphenations.

Never hyphenate a heading.

Break lines sensibly.

Leading, or linespacing.

Keep the linespacing consistent.

Justified text.

Justify text only if the line is long enough to prevent awkward and inconsistent word spacing.

Serif & sans serif.

Serif type is more readable and is best for text; sans serif type is more legible and is best used for headlines.

Combining typefaces.

Unless you have a background in design and typography, never combine more than two typefaces on the same page. Never combine two serif fonts on the same page, and never combine two sans serif fonts on the same page.

Typographic Checklist

- Use only one space between sentences.
- Use real quotation marks.
- Check the punctuation used with quote marks.
- Use real apostrophes.
- Make sure the apostrophes are where they belong.
- Use en and em dashes where appropriate.
- Use the special characters whenever necessary, including super- and subscript.
- Spend the time to make nice fractions.
- If a correctly-spelled word needs an accent mark, use it.
- Don't underline.
- Never use all caps in body text; rarely use it in headlines.
- Kern all headlines where necessary.
- Never use the space bar to align text.
- Use a one-em first-line indent on all indented paragraphs.
- Use a decimal or right-aligned tab for the numbers in numbered paragraphs.
- Leave no widows or orphans.
- Never have more than two hyphenations in a row.
- Avoid too many hyphenations in any paragraph.
- On every line of the text in the document, watch all line breaks carefully. Be sensible.
- Keep the leading (linespacing) consistent.
- Tighten up the leading in lines with all caps or with few ascenders and descenders.
- Adjust the spacing between paragraphs; rarely use a full line of space between paragraphs in body text.
- Either indent the first line of paragraphs or add extra space between them—not both.
- Never justify the text on a short line.
- Hang the punctuation off the aligned edge.
- Use serif type for body text unless you are going to compensate for the lower readability of sans serif.
- Never combine two serif fonts on one page.
- Never combine two sans serif fonts on one page.
- Never combine more than two typefaces on one page (unless you've studied typography). So the gist is: if you're going to use more than one face, use one serif and one sans serif.
- Don't be a wimp.
- Use italic and bold sparingly.
- Use proper punctuation with parentheses.
- Align the first baselines of juxtaposed columns.
- Encourage white space.
- Don't crowd text inside a box—let it breathe.
- Be consistent.
- Use some sort of bullet when listing items, not a hyphen.
- Avoid abbreviations.
- Use small caps for A.M. and P.M.; space once after the number, and use periods.
- Reduce the size of the punctuation marks in headlines.
- Set the space *before* an italic word also in italic.