Guide to Digital Typography and Style.

Look Around

Good typography is seldom noticed so we tend to take it for granted. So the first thing you need to do is become conscious of it. Keep a file of printed items you really like or dislike. Pull them out from time whenever you have a spare moment and look at them carefully. Consider the expected audience for each piece, how many typefaces are used; how much space surrounds the printed areas and how they are configured in relation to the paper edges and to the spaces between words, lines and paragraphs.

Fit For Purpose

The study of other printing will give you an idea of what or how to design for specific uses and for particular audiences. Let us consider here the design of a   Newsletter or Magazine. Establish in your mind the kinds of person who will read it. A mature audience will probably be happiest with a more conventional design, without many special effects. An older audience (some of whom may have sight problems) may like clear lettering of reasonably large size. Teens may find special effects very attractive, with perhaps plenty of colour. Children will like plenty of pictures.

Balance Your Space

In layout as with music, the silences are as important as the sounds. Empty space gives the eye a place to rest or breathe; it also attracts the eye to the elements that are near it. With this in mind, it is easy to see how important it is to have control of the empty spaces.

Leave yourself enough room for space between letters (kerning); in headlines; words (tracking); lines (leading); paragraphs, and around headings.

Note: Leading should be higher than the font size (Rule of thumb is 120%). Paragraphs should either have extra space between them or indents, but not both.

(US style tends to favour inter-paragraph spacing, whereas UK favours a slight indent only).

To get a good balance of white space and elements, designers aim for the golden mean ratio of 2:3 white spaces to elements.   A golden rule is try to keep sentences short and never use long paragraphs.

Mature typists of the old school were taught always to put two spaces at the end of a sentence; this is not good typesetting practice and must be avoided.

Keep It In The Family

In General any good piece of design will use no more than three families of type, regardless of its length. Usually two families will be sufficient. By family, we mean the several weights associated with a given name. The Garamond family, for instance, could include a book or text weight, bold, italic, and bold italic. It is good practice to set up Style Sheets for your publication which specifies all typographical decisions so that the same appearance is maintained through the length of the piece, and for all future editions.

The convention for normal printing is to use serif body text with non-serif headings.

For good reasons the opposite is the practice in web site design.

Justification

Avoid justifying text if you are not hyphenating, otherwise, "rivers of white" may be created within the text that will drag the eye down the page instead of from left to right in a downward motion. The best Publishing Programmes have justification tables which can be edited and added to. However, provided that the line length is not too short (in which case justification is best avoided) good results can be achieved by turning the justification off and then splitting words manually, if necessary. Proper names should never be broken, and neither should email addresses or internet links (use smaller type if necessary).

Good typography requires that there be no more than two hyphenated lines in a row, no more than three in any one paragraph, and no fewer than three letters before or after a hyphen. It's also best to avoid hyphenating words at the end of a page or column if you possibly can.

Don't Misquote

"Inch" marks are not "quotation" marks. This is one of the single most common offences, as well as the most obvious telltale sign of amateur typesetting. In some cases they are imported inadvertently into your text by 'pasting' in ASCII text.

Dashes to Quality

Hyphens are not en dashes are not em dashes. Hyphens are used only for hyphenating. En dashes are used in place of the word "to" in order to show a duration of time or sequence of numbers, such as 7:00 – 10:00, September – November, etc. Em dashes are used to set off phrases—like this—in the middle of a sentence.

<u>Don't Do This</u>

Avoid underlining in your typeset documents. If it's the name of a book, play, film or other artistic work, set it in italics. If it's a headline or subhead, make it stand out with other treatment such as a different weight of the same typeface, larger point size, or different colour.

Tips:

Never use the word "very".
Left align or decimal align the numbers in a numbered list.
Make sure to adjust your settings to eliminate widows (the last line of a paragraph printed by itself at the top of a page or column) and orphans (the first line of a paragraph appearing by itself at the bottom of a page or column).
Never use all capitals in body text and rarely in headings.
Avoid hyphens when listing. It certainly seems a waste when there are so many bullet designs to choose from.
 Try not to use more than two fonts on a page; three is about the maximum.
Use bold and italics sparingly.
You should use an italic space before an italic word.

Keep it simple.

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