



typesetting tips

serif fonts do not. Generally, serif fonts are more readable and best for body text. Sans serif is more legible, and most suitable for headlines and signage and websites.

LEARN TO BE A TYPESETTER. The computer is not a typewriter. You need not be stuck with a mono-spaced font. The world of proportionally-spaced fonts opened wide with the coming of desktop publishing. You can now typeset. Not just type. Typesetting is a cleaner, more elegant way to display the written word. You command leading, kerning, point size, ligatures, cap heights, drop caps, italics, em dashes and more.

Use only **ONE SPACE** after any kind of punctuation that separates two sentences. That two-space rule is for typewriters.

USE THE REAL THING—“the curly/smart kind”—for quotation marks and apostrophes. Use inch " marks and foot ' marks for only that. Most word processing software, especially page layout software, have a preference to automatically set the proper style of quotes and apostrophes, leaving the foot and inch marks accessible by certain key combinations, as other speciality typesetting marks.

USE HYPHENS, EM DASHES AND EN DASHES APPROPRIATELY. Use an em dash—not two hyphens—for those instances where a comma is too weak and a period too strong. The en dash is used where you would use the word “to.” January–August. Go to your software guide and find the key combo for en and em dashes, then use them. And while you’re at it, consult your software manual for other special characters—accent marks and such—you can use. Also pay attention to the subscript and superscript options your application offers.

LEARN TO KERN TYPE—to set visually-even letterspacing. This is most critical in large, headline-sized type. The computer spaces letters mechanically. Your job is to space them visually, to make them look even and consistent.

EXTRA WATER unkernd **EXTRA WATER** kernerd
Many software applications now come with expert kerning sets, which automatically correct some of the worst combinations.

CLEAN UP THE WIDOWS AND ORPHANS. Widows are lonely characters (7 or less) on the last line of a paragraph—a short word or (worse) a piece of a word. An orphan is the last line of a paragraph (however long) that sits along at the top of a column. Do what you must to correct such sloppiness—edit, add, reflow line breaks, adjust column widths, etc.

CLEAN UP YOUR LINE BREAKS, BADLY HYPHENATED WORDS AND STACKS OF HYPHENATIONS. Again, do what you must to make the column of type look and read better.

KEEP THE LEADING (LINE SPACING) CONSISTENT WITHIN A PARAGRAPH. For large, multiple-line headlines, tighten leading between lines set in all caps. There are no ascenders and descenders using the space, so visually tidy up. Same is true for upper/lower case headlines using letters with none (or few) ascenders and descenders.

LEARN THE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE BASIC TYPE STYLES—and the type families within each. Serif type has the little bars and bevels and such at the end of the characters’ strokes. Sans

BE CONSISTENT! Keep the fonts, leading, indents, margins, alignments, point sizes, heads and subheads, etc. the same.

WHEN ITALICIZING A WORD, select the space before the word as well, but not the space after. This avoids the appearance of too much space before the word and too little after it.

When using **script or fancy typefaces** (fonts), **AVOID ALL CAPS.** Script caps are designed to add flourish and style to the script. They look best when used in combination with their lowercase characters or some other font. **Example:** *THIS IS TOO MUCH WORK TO DO. See What I Mean?*
THIS TYPEFACE IS EVEN MORE.

DON’T OVERUSE ALL CAPS. Too much for too long is difficult and tiring to read. The eye is trained to see shapes when reading, and familiar words are identified by shape—without each letter being read and assembled into a word. All caps forces the eye to read each letter of each word.

DON’T HYPHENATE HEADLINES. Break the headline between words in the most visually pleasing and balanced manner available.

DON’T INDENT *AND* ADD SPACE BETWEEN PARAGRAPHS. Just do one or the other.

DON’T JUSTIFY YOUR TYPE unless the column is wide enough to prevent awkward rivers in the word spacing. The secret to clean justification (the lines are flush both left and right down the column) is a wide column—like the width of the page—and a small point size that allows plenty of words per line. Otherwise, just set your type ragged right.

AVOID UNDERLINING. Italicize instead. Underlining is for typewriters. The emphasis work of the underline is unnecessary with the superior options available to a typesetter—including bold type, or even a different font. And for those times you may want the underline feel, use a rule.

DON’T COMBINE MORE THAN TWO TYPEFACES ON A PAGE. And of those two, better if one is serif, the other sans serif. To use lots of typefaces just because you got them is amateur. If you do go for the sans serif–serif combination, go for a bold contrast too. If you have training in design and typography, do what you want.

DON’T OVERDO IT! Too many exclamation points, too many words emphasized in italics and bold, too many caps lose their punch. They clutter up the page, compete with the layout and collectively whimper instead of shout.

DON’T USE THE SPACE BAR TO LINE UP COLUMNS of letters and numbers. Set up and use tabs.