Basic Typesetting Guide

The Basic Rules:

1. Never stack words
2. Never stack hyphens
3. No rivers or loose lines
4. Use a minimum of 3 lines in a paragraph at the end and beginning of columns
5. Sans serif copy point size between 7–10, Serif copy point size between 8–11
6. Never have 2-letter hyphens at the end of a line
7. No widows or orphans on a line ending a paragraph
8. Always have a good undulating rag for copy settings
9. Always make sure your punctuation marks are the correct format
10. Use a minimum of +4 for leading
11. Never less than 5 words per line, Never more than 15 words per line
12. A word following a period at the end of a line must be at least 3 characters or more

This is a detailed document on good type setting concepts. There are other issues not covered here, but in general these are the main rules you want to address in your copy settings. These copy rules are to be followed every time you set copy. If you are not using these rules, your copy settings are not correct. Every time you set copy be sure to check against this list.

Descriptions for The Rules:

1. Never stack words:
A word stack is when 2 or more lines have the same word directly above or below. Stacking can occur most commonly at the end of lines. However, stacking can also occur inside the column. The repetition of the same word on 2 lines causes visual flaws that draw the eye and distract from the copy setting and legibility.

2. Never stack hyphens:
A stacked hyphen is when 2 or more lines have hyphens at the end of the lines. These cause visual flaws also called "pig bristles" which must be eliminated.

3. No rivers or loose lines:
Rivers, or rivers of white, are visually unattractive gaps appearing to run down a paragraph of text, due to an accidental alignment of spaces. They can occur regardless of the spacing settings, but are most noticeable with wide inter-word spaces caused by full text justification or monospace fonts. Some other common causes for rivers are poor hyphenation and short line lengths. Loose lines are poorly spaced individual lines in a setting that have large gaps between words and cause that line to stand out (like white acne). Tight lines have too little space between words. Both cause uneven text color, and disrupt the overall harmony of the copy.

4. Lines at the end and beginning of columns:
Always use a minimum of 3 lines to end or begin a column of text. Having less than 3 lines will cause a poor visual look to the columns and feel incomplete to the eye.

5. Point size for copy:
Body text should be around 7-10 pt, depending on x-height of typeface; sans serifs tend to have bigger x-height than serifs. Copy that is too large appears "horsey" and unsophisticated. Copy that is too small is illegible.

6. No 2-letter hyphens:
Lines in your copy settings should be hyphenated if needed. Always have at least 3 or more letters before or after the hyphen. Hyphenated words with 2 letters before or after, are hard to read and create odd shapes and distract from the overall harmony of the copy setting.

7. No widows or orphans:
A widow or orphan is a very short line—usually one word—at the end of a paragraph or column. Regardless of the length of the word, avoid having a single word ending a paragraph. (See next page on *More info on Orphans and Widows*.)

8. Rags:
The ideal rag is a subtle zig zag or undulating pattern, having lines weave in and out, alternating between short and long lines. You want to avoid lines with a sloping alignment—consecutive lines that progressively grow or shrink in length, creating diagonal shapes. A fairly balanced gap is a 5 or 6 character difference between the longest and shortest lines in the column. Of course, there are exceptions—condensed type will allow for more letters while extended type might tolerate fewer. Then you also have to take into consideration the letters within the word itself—words with a fuller body of letters like m and o might appear visually longer while words with trimmer letters like i and t will allow for a higher number of letters. The way you can quickly determine length difference is to pull a vertical guide to the end of the shortest sentence in your text block, and pull another vertical guide to the end of the longest sentence. If the difference is vast between the guides, you know you have a poor rag.

9. Punctuation formatting:
Use smart (curly) quotes for quote marks or apostrophes—not prime marks (straight inches or feet marks). Use [option+colon] for ellipsis, instead of typing 3 periods. Use En-dashes [option+ hyphen] for duration—use them where you can substitute the word "to" or "through." Em-dashes [option+shift+hyphen] are for a credit line or for a break in thought in a sentence. These three marks are not interchangeable. Using them correctly is a mark of professionalism.

10. Leading:
Use enough leading to achieve a clear vertical separation between lines—avoid having the ascenders and descenders touching each other. A minimum amount of leading for body copy is +4 of the type size.

11. Line length:
If your lines are too short or too long the information becomes hard to read. Line lengths of over 15 words are hard to follow and your eyes get lost finding the next line. Line lengths that are under 5 words are annoying to read for any real amount of time, as your eyes must shift constantly.

12. Words at end of lines after periods:
Having words of less than 3 letters following a period at the end of a line is similar to the problem of 2-letter hyphens. Words shorter than 3 letters after a period at the end of a line usually appears to be hanging and disjointed.

Things to Remember When Setting Type:

Align everything, both horizontally and vertically. Arbitrary placement leads to clutter. Use the guide lines for alignment and avoid aligning by eye. Do not mix point size within a word, especially names. Only exception is when used as paragraph indicator, i.e. Drop Caps, Initial Caps, Intro Line, etc.

Always use paragraph indicators to separate paragraphs. Nobody likes reading a block of text without pause. It is rare that you would ever use more than 1 or 2 paragraph indicators. Usually, only 1 paragraph indicator is needed. Don't indent the first paragraph. Don't put a full return between paragraphs. Use either a 1- or 2-em indent or 50% extra leading as paragraph indicator. Don't use both.

All caps require a lot more tracking, at least +100 to +200; lowercase roman needs minimal tracking, around +5 to +15; lowercase italic needs medium tracking, around +10 to +30; body text in general should be around +10 to +40 tracking, any more will elongate reading time from word to word.

When mixing style or typefaces, match them at x-height, not by point size, as italics tend to run slightly smaller.

Create hierarchy with change in size, weight, color or style. Pick one effect for each level, avoid doing more than 2 effects for a level, i.e. pair roman with italic, but not with italic bold.

No script typefaces: Blocks of script copy are not inviting to the eye. Chunks of text set in script create a busy visual texture that is subtly off-putting to readers. Any script will be harder to read than a serif or sans serif typeface. The reader's eye is not as used to script character shapes as it is to those in more traditional typeface designs. This slows down the reading process, and can reduce comprehension and information retention.

Always hang quotes outside the column/copy block. This keeps the shape of the copy uniform.

White space, or negative space, is your friend. Do not cover up your white space.

More Info on Widows and Orphans:

There's a few different definitions and uses of the words Orphan and Widow. Some use them interchangeably, depending on how old-school you are. Regardless of whether you're using Orphan or Widow, or Orphan Line or Widow Line—they are all bad! You should avoid any single words (or partial words) on a line no matter where they are.

A widow is a very short line—usually one word, or a hyphenated word—at the end of a paragraph or column. A widow is considered poor typography because it leaves too much white space between paragraphs or at the bottom of a page. This interrupts a reader's eye and diminishes readability. Fix them by reworking the rag.

Like a widow, an orphan is a single word, part of a word or very short line, except it appears at the beginning of a column or a page. This results in poor horizontal alignment at the top of the column or page. The term "orphan" is not as commonly used as "widow," but the concept is the same, and so is the solution: fix it!

Setting Your Hyphenation:

Make hyphens your friend—without them, you'll end up with rivers and gouges, which are a bigger offense! Soft returns work only in small doses—imagine flowing text for a book that is 200 pages… now imagine you have 2 days to do it.

Learn to set your hyphenation setting in the pull down menu under Paragraphs—do not hyphen less than 6 letters, 3 letters minimum before and after hyphen, and limit to 1 hyphen. Do not hyphen across column, do not hyphenate last word, and don't hyphenate Cap words (it could be a name and no one likes to see their name cut in half).

Besides soft returns, it's better to play with the tracking to push words around; you'll get a better even gray. Do not adjust above +10 or -10 of your original tracking setting—it is nice to set text with +15, then you have some room to go up or down to make adjustments. Never go above +50 tracking for body copy—that makes them too loose and abrupt, it is also hard to read the words. Of course, there are exceptions given to fonts that have very tight tracking or extended tracking.

Typesetting Rules with Examples

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Poor Typesetting Examples: (poorly set type, callout number for problems)

Language, in any of its many [1] forms, is a self-contained many types of systems of interactive signs that communicates ideas. Just as elocution and diction en- [6] hance and clarify the meaning of our spoken words, typographic signs can be manipulated by a designer to achieve more lucid and expressive typographic com- munication.

Signs operate in two dimensions: syntactic and semantic. When the mind is concerned with the form of a sign, it is involved with ty- [2] pographic syntax. When it associ- ates a particular meaning with a sign, it is operating in the seman- tic dimension.

All objects in the environment can potentially function as signs, representing any number of con- cepts. A smog-filled city signify- ing pollution, a beached whale [3] representing extinction, and con- fetti implying a celebration—each functions as a sign relating a spe- cific concept.

Language, in any of its many [10] forms, is a self-contained many types of systems of interactive signs that communicates ideas. [11] Just as elocution and diction en- hance and clarify the meaning of our spoken words, typographic signs can be manipulated by a designer to achieve more lucid and expressive typographic communi- cation.

Signs operate in two dimensions: syntactic and semantic. When the [5] mind is concerned with the form of a sign, it is involved with typo- graphic syntax. When it associates a particular meaning with a sign, it is operating in the semantic dimen- sion. [7]

All objects in environments are potentially a function of signs. It [12] representing any number of con- cepts. A smog-filled city signifying pollution, a beached whale repre- senting extinction, and some [8] confetti implying a celebration— each functions as a sign relating a specific concept.

Good Typesetting Examples:

Language, in any of its many forms, can be a self-contained many types of systems of interactive signs that communicates ideas. Just as elocution and diction enhance and clarify the meaning of our spoken words, typographic signs can be manipulated by a designer to achieve more lucid and expressive typographic communication.

Signs operate in two dimensions: syntactic and semantic. When the mind is concerned with the form of a sign, it is involved with typographic syntax. When it associates a particular meaning with a sign, it is operating in the other equally large semantic dimension.

All objects in the environment can potentially function as signs, representing any number of concepts. A smog-filled city signifying pollution, a beached whale representing extinction, and confetti also implying a celebration—each functions as a sign relating a specific concept.

Example A: Justified / Space between / Serif

Language, in any of its many forms, is a self-contained many types of systems of interactive signs that communicates ideas. Just as elocution and diction enhance and clarify the meaning of some of our spoken words, typographic signs can be manipulated by a designer to achieve better and more lucid and evoke expressive typographic communication.

Signs operate in two dimensions: syntactic and semantic. When the mind is concerned with the form of a sign, it is involved with typographic syntax. When it associates has a particular meaning with a sign, it is operating in one of the semantic dimension.

All objects in environments are potentially a function of signs. It representing any number of concepts. A smog-filled city signifying pollution, a beached whale that is representing extinction, and some confetti implying a celebration—each functions as a sign relating to a very specific concept.

Example B: Flush left / Space between / Sans Serif

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 All objects in the environment can potentially function as signs, representing any number of concepts. A smog-filled city signifying pollution, a beached whale representing extinction, and confetti also implying a celebration—each functions as a sign relating a specific concept.

Example C: Justified / Indent / Serif

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Example D: Flush left / Indent / Sans Serif