

DESKTOP PUBLISHING 101

Desktop publishing was once the exclusive domain of corporations and extravagant hobbyists. Expensive software such as Quark Express and PageMaker controlled the exact placement on a page of various elements, including text, photos, graphics, headings, captions and recurring layout features.

Over time, lower-cost software appeared which made it feasible to create reasonably handsome pages on home computers (in the Macintosh or Windows operating systems). This in turn forced Microsoft to upgrade the features in its flagship software – *Microsoft Word*.

Today, any PC equipped with Word (or its competitor WordPerfect, for that matter) can produce quality publications, leading some writers and graphic designers to create their own cottage industries, bypassing traditional printing processes, lowering production costs, and exerting 100% control over how each page appears in their publication.

If you are acclimated to the basics of word processing, it may be time for you to branch out, learning how to augment your poignant prose with stellar graphics, crisp photos, and elegant typography.

A word of caution: too often those newly immersed in this graphic art can be over-exuberant, creating documents with cacophonous graphics, overzealous typefaces, and indigestible paragraphs. Before your next desktop publishing oeuvre resembles a ransom note, let us consider a few sensible rules of layout.

Readability

When producing a newsletter or advertising copy, remember this rule: each column of text should not exceed two lower case alphabets wide.

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyzabcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog (which is not to say that all dogs are lazy, or all foxes are either quick or brown, for in bio-diversity there is diversity itself.)

OK, you've noticed that the preceding paragraphs were wider than that rule. But you started reading this document because you wanted to learn something. Too many people will turn away when their eyes are overtaxed by wide columns, OR, they will jump quickly down the page, missing key points, to get to the end of the page, and on to their next cup of coffee.

Learned scholars have determined that for maximum readability, the body of a document should be displayed in a SERIF typeface, that is a typeface such as Times New Roman which has all those little chisel-points at the edges of the letters.

Upper and lower case letters let you identify a word quickly. When you wish to emphasize two or three words, you could underline the words, though nowadays it is preferable to **boldface the words**, especially in our Internet society, where an underline is used to represent a hyperlink to another web page.

UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES SHOULD YOU SET AN ENTIRE PARAGRAPH IN CAPITAL LETTERS BECAUSE IT SLOWS DOWN THE BRAIN'S ABILITY TO MAKE SENSE OF WHAT IS WRITTEN, IS CALLED "SHOUTING" IN AN E-MAIL SETTING, AND DRAWS TOO MUCH ATTENTION AWAY FROM THE REST OF THE PAGE. See what I mean?

Psychology of Type

Printing is a conservative art – a good printer strives to improve legibility of a document, while augmenting its psychological impact on the reader. There are three major categories of type:

SERIF – including typefaces such as Times New Roman, Garamond, Bookman and Century Schoolbook. Serif typefaces have a formal appearance (one which appeals to the literati and Halliburton shareholders).

SANS SERIF – including typefaces like Arial, Franklin Gothic, **Eras**, Futura and Verdana. These typefaces are simplified, eliminating the little chisel-points for a more modern look, though this means it takes the eye a little bit longer to identify each word. Of course we are starting to get used to this typeface. Sans serif typefaces have an informal appearance (which appeals to the proletariat and granola people).

DISPLAY TYPE – includes a wide variety of typefaces such as **DESDEMONA**, **ALGERIAN**, University, VAG Round, Bazooka, *Centaur Festive Italic*, Cloister Black, **Dom Casual**, **Broadway**, Park Avenue, etc.

Display type can be elegant, formal, informal, whimsical, stylish, modern, antique and illegible. Yes, illegible. Try reading a whole paragraph set in OldE English. WORSE YET, TRY READING THE SAME PARAGRAPH SET IN OLDE ENGLISH CAPITALS! In contrast, an informal typeface like Dom Casual can appear friendly and relaxed, **while a fat, round typeface like Cooper Black can appear generous (and likely to slice larger portions of chocolate cake for you)**.

You will note that display type can also be either serif or sans serif in style – but you would definitely not want to read an entire book printed in one of these decorative type faces.

THIS JUST IN - There is one other typeface which is my particular passion, **Optima** (or Optimum). It is an in-between typeface, which does not really have serifs on each letter, but gives the subconscious impression of there being serifs, by a slight widening at the end of each stroke. Advertisers love this typeface, because it sells to Republicans and Democrats alike.

About Italics – Italics can come in handy to have something stand out – like highlighting names of committee members when they are referenced in a report. “*Or italicizing a quote within a paragraph, so that you can tell instantly it is a quote.*”

RANSOM NOTES

If you got a little disoriented in the previous paragraphs, it is because I violated my own rule on legibility. Stick with ONE serif typeface for your paragraphs, and one sans serif or display typeface or your headings, and people won’t be tempted to put \$10,000 in small bills in the hollowed out tree after reading your document. For the majority of this treatise on desktop publishing, I am using a sans serif Arial typeface for HEADINGS, and Times New Roman for body. Everybody has these two type fonts on their PC – so these work very well for Internet websites.

ABOUT TYPE SIZES

Once upon a time, all we thought about were PICA and ELITE type sizes on typewriters. Typewriters were either 10 or 12 pitch, that is 10 or 12 letters per inch. With the advent of the IBM Selectric typewriter (and its interchangeable ball heads), we started redefining type sizes by their **height**. As luck would have it, 12 point became the type size closest to what were used to seeing on a typewriter. In the point system, 72 points equals one inch in height.

Yes, the previous paragraph was in 12 point type, but for your convenience, here is an example of 14 point type, and here is an example of 18 point type. Then there is 24 point type, or 36 point type. You get the picture. Type also looks psychologically bigger if it is **bold** face.

GET THE LEAD OUT

Another element of control in printing is the spacing between each line. You probably accept whatever Microsoft gives you, but be aware that you can increase or decrease the space between each line of type, and also increase or decrease the spacing between paragraphs through the **Paragraph...Indents and Spacing** menu. This document makes use of this feature by decreasing the space between paragraphs to fit more paragraphs on a page, without detracting from legibility.

Cooper Black design came to us from Madison Avenue, which discovered that readers went quickly to sleep when confronted with a page full of type that looked something like this:

ALIENS INVADE WHITE HOUSE

Washington, DC April 1, 2004

The Surgeon General announced today that DNA testing has confirmed that the entire US Cabinet is populated by Pod People Gen. Hugh N Cry counseled the media to avoid panic, since this has actually led to an increased intellectual capacity of the Cabinet. One drawback has been discovered, however. The lack of tear ducts in Pod People makes it difficult for them to feign emotion or empathy as they discuss cuts in the welfare budget, increases in military spending, or additional tax cuts to wealthy campaign contributors, who may very well be pod people themselves.

White space has nothing to do with outer space. Rather it has to do with incorporation non-verbal elements into a document – including blank space itself. Unless you are on a tight budget, needing to cram everything into a four page newsletter, consider using white space to hold onto the short attention span of your reader who has been eating a lot of fast food while watching MTV and surfing the Web.

Yes, I AM trying to cram everything into four pages, but I will show some examples of use of white space when we incorporate photos and graphics.

FIFTH COLUMN

Actually, you will want to limit yourself to two or three columns per page. Normal default in Microsoft Word is for each column to be the same width, but you can make life more interesting if you set each column to a different width – for example, you could combine use of white space with use of multiple columns by having a narrow left-side column to hold major headings, and a wider right-side column to contain the paragraphs or body.

FIFTH COLUMN

*You
can do
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TEASER QUOTES

You've seen this technique time and again in publications that are convinced nobody will read the whole article unless it is "sexed up" like the CIA's intelligence assessment concerning weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. Sometimes the quote is accidentally moved from a preceding page in the article, driving the reader insane (even more infuriating than those miserable blown-in magazine subscription postcards which fall on the floor while you attempt to read the magazine). What does this have to do with water being found on Mars, you may well ask? And well you may ask. So ask.

WATER FOUND ON MARS!

This is an example of a TEASER quote, designed to draw you into reading the paragraphs from whence it came.

Of course we know that the Rover found traces of H₂O on the red planet – as evidenced by the hematite ore discovered on the first week of exploration. It doesn't matter, though, because the Pod People have also taken over NASA, and are just trying to distract us from global warming on Earth. It is a well-known scientific fact that Pod People prefer more temperate climates than predominated during the New Hampshire Primary. They were not responsible for the crop circles in Iowa, which were caused by indecision among voters who couldn't decide if Lieberman was the most boring candidate.

JUSTIFY YOUR WORDS

The rest of this document was printed with right-justified paragraphs, but this paragraph is set in the more informal, friendly, ragged-right. Some people think it is more inviting.

COLOR AND CONTRAST

Notice how so far everything has been in tried and true black & white? Chances are if you are reading this article in the office, on company time, you will only be able to print out a copy on the company LaserJet in B&W. But print this article at home on your color InkJet, and you can transform it into a Technicolor extravaganza. Wouldn't the teaser quote above be more alluring in **TEAL**? And how about using dark blue ink for the headings, and dark red ink for the paragraphs (or the opposite, as shown below).

BE WARNED

Notice how the word **TEAL** above was a little hard to read? When choosing color for your printing, remember, it must be dark enough to be read. Also, some colors reproduce poorly on the company Xerox, or show up as a light grey on the company LaserJet. Besides, you shouldn't be using those devices for personal items. AND we are trying to save a few trees, by going to a paperless environment.

You be the judge. Just visit a few websites and you will see examples of legible and illegible text. You will see examples of excellent and atrocious graphics. You will see websites with lots of style, but no substance, and websites with stimulating literature presented in a most un-stimulating environment.

WE AIN'T DONE YET

I'm just about finishing up the fourth page of this handy-dandy handout, but you probably want to see examples of good use of white space, appropriate use of graphics and a few crisp photos – all designed to help you with next year's Christmas Letter. That will take time, so I will put that in a separate file.

While you are waiting for that next literary effort to see the light of day, take out one of your favorite magazines and thumb through, noting how the quality of the advertising enhances the overall appearance of the magazine. Then take out your morning paper, and check out the ads.

Some of them may resemble **RaNsom notes**. Others may look like oversized classified ads (like those carpet warehouse ads which squeeze 10 pounds of content into a 5 pound sack). And then there are the quality ads, which hold your attention. See? You're learning!