

25 Rules of Setting Type

Anyone who uses type and loves it; Anyone who uses type and hates it; Anyone who uses type and doesn't understand it; Anyone who uses type... can follow these simple rules to create great-looking documents. Here are a few of the rules typesetters follow:

1. Insert only a single space after all punctuation. (It's OK to disobey your high school typing teacher when you're preparing documents for printing.)
2. Use the proper dashes. *Hyphens* are used to hyphenate words and separate phone numbers. *Em dashes* are a form of punctuation, used to offset clauses in a sentence. *En dashes*, typically half the length of an em dash, are used to denote duration, as in 8:00–5:00, or August 12–14.
3. Use true (curly) quotation marks and apostrophes. Using tick marks directly from the keyboard sends the message "I don't care how this stuff looks."
4. Set all uppercase text slightly smaller than the surrounding text. Otherwise, your capitals will SCREAM at the reader.
5. Add letterspacing to capitalized text and small caps. Capitalized text or small caps appearing within normal text can appear too tight and crowded, and need to be loosened up a bit.
6. Use oldstyle figures when available and appropriate. Oldstyle figures are also known as *non-lining numerals*, because they don't line up on the baseline. They can be thought of as lower case numbers, and look better in text passages than the usual *lining numerals*.
7. Use a slightly smaller point size for numbers when oldstyle numerals are not available. They blend in better and don't jump at the reader.
8. Use boldface text sparingly. Bold text is like a **magnet** to our eyes, and will ruin the continuity of your text.
9. Avoid using underlined text. Even more distracting than boldface text is underlined text, which is a typographic abomination that should be avoided.
10. The © (copyright), ® (registered trademark), and ™ (trademark) characters almost always need to be reduced, sometimes by as much as 50%, depending on the font.
11. Use the true ellipsis character (...) rather than periods. The ellipsis character looks better than three consecutive periods because it has slightly more space between each dot.
12. Decrease the size of ballot boxes. As a general rule, these characters should be about two points smaller than the surrounding text... □ like this... □ not this.
13. Consider using other characters besides bullets. They're rather boring and overused. Just like ballot boxes, whatever you substitute should also be two points smaller than the text.
14. Increase line spacing to improve readability in body text. Line spacing should be significantly greater than the space between words for maximum legibility, and should increase proportionally as the line length increases.
15. Sans serif typefaces are often less legible than serif typefaces. When setting body text — i.e., text that is meant to be read continuously, serif faces are naturally better. When we read, our mind is trained to recognize the shapes of words rather than reading letter by letter. Serifs serve to form a link between letters.
16. You can probably set body text to a point size smaller than you think. Text set too large often appears trivial, or meant for children. Start with 10-point and consider reducing by half a point size, depending on the font.
17. Decrease the line length and increase margins. The more white space on the page, the better.
18. Avoid letterspacing lowercase body text. In body text, looser spacing always decreases legibility.
19. Word spacing should be fairly close, it's easier to read.
20. Choose an alignment option that suits your text. Justified text imparts a formal tone, whereas ragged text is more casual and personal.
21. Hyphenate text intelligently. When a line is hyphenated, make sure at least two characters are left behind and at least three characters are carried to the next line.
22. Make sure the stub-end of a hyphenated word is not the last word of a paragraph. In most cases, it's undesirable to end a paragraph with a single word. This is especially undesirable if the word is shorter than four characters.
23. Limit the number of consecutively hyphenated lines to three. Beyond this, it appears as if diving boards or ladders are present on the right side of your paragraph.
24. Avoid beginning three consecutive lines with the same word. Override your software for a better look.
25. Avoid hyphenating or breaking proper names and titles. The best way to prevent this from happening is to type *non-breaking spaces* between proper names.

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