

readability

When you know some of the elemental rules of typography, two things happen: selecting the best typefaces to use becomes easier and quicker; and your documents communicate more effectively.

To do this, start with the most fundamental aspect of typography: readability. While it might seem a little obvious that type should be easy to read, readability also refers to the level of reader comfort. That is, if someone can read the columns of a newsletter you produce without strain, then your document has good readability. Here are some tips for you to consider.

ITALICS

Since people are not accustomed to reading italics, it slows down the reading process, especially when the copy is long. However, italic type can be very effective when used sparingly to provide emphasis.

WORDSPACING

Too much wordspacing breaks the line into separate elements, inhibiting reading. It also creates gaps or "rivers" within columns that destroy even "color" essential to good readability.

When wordspacing is greater than line spacing, reading is difficult because the eye tends to move from top to bottom instead of from left to right.

LINE LENGTH

Contrary to what many think, the eye does not read individual words, one at a time, but scans the line pausing momentarily to read groups of three or four words. Too long a line tends to tire the eye and makes it difficult to locate the beginning of the line that follows. On the other hand, lines that are too short disrupt sentence structure. Also it requires the eye to change lines too often.

Set sans serif typefaces in slightly shorter line lengths than serif typefaces for maximum readability. Use a shorter line length for typefaces that have a strong contrast in thick and thin strokes. These faces can be difficult to read in extended settings because a "picket fence" look is created that tires the eye.

The ideal line length is dependent upon the design of the typeface, the type size, the linespacing, and the amount of copy set. Generally, a line should have 55 to 60 characters or 9 to 10 words for optimum readability.

Type Size	Minimum Length	Optimum Length	Maximum Length
6	8	10	12
7	8	11	14
8	9	13	16
9	10	14	18
10	13	16	20
11	13	18	22
12	14	21	24
14	18	24	28

Contrary to what many think, the eye does not read individual words, one at a time, but scans the line pausing momentarily to read groups of three or four words. Too long a line tends to tire the eye and makes it difficult to locate the beginning of the line that follows. On the other hand, lines that are too short disrupt sentence structure. Also it requires the eye to change lines too often.

CAPS VS LOWERCASE

Words set in uppercase and lowercase have a more distinctive outline which enables the reader to recognize the words faster. Words set in all caps have an even horizontal outline with letters of similar shape and size. Type set this way severely impairs reading—more so than any other legibility factor. Also it uses a significantly greater amount of space—as much as 35%—than text set in lowercase of the same size.

LETTERSPACING

Proper letterspacing depends on many factors such as the typeface you use, the amount of copy, linespacing, type size and weight, nature of the design, audience and viewing situation, as well as your own taste. When letterspacing is at its best, text has "even typographic color" which enhances readability and makes communication more appealing. (For

more information on typographic color, please refer to the catalog's center spread.) The tighter the letterspacing, the darker the lines of type become. You can set Adobe condensed type tighter than regular or extended type. Display sizes can be set tighter than text type which usually requires more space for maximum readability.

WORDS SET IN UPPERCASE AND LOWERCASE HAVE A MORE DISTINCTIVE OUTLINE WHICH ENABLES THE READER TO RECOGNIZE THE WORDS FASTER. WORDS SET IN ALL CAPS HAVE AN EVEN HORIZONTAL OUTLINE WITH LETTERS OF SIMILAR SHAPE AND SIZE. TYPE SET THIS WAY SEVERELY IMPAIRS READING—MORE SO THAN ANY OTHER LEGIBILITY FACTOR. ALSO IT USES A SIGNIFICANTLY GREATER AMOUNT OF SPACE—AS MUCH AS 35%—THAN TEXT SET IN LOWERCASE OF THE SAME SIZE.

LINESPACING

Too little linespacing creates dark, uninviting "color" that may cause the eye to skip a line when scanning to find the next one. Too much linespacing causes the eye to jump from line to line and is disruptive to reading. Adobe typefaces with large

x-heights (the height of lowercase letters, most easily measured on the lowercase x), those with strong contrasts in thick and thin strokes, sans serif and bold faces, and reverse type, all require more linespacing. The function of your document

should dictate the proper linespacing. Text for prolonged reading, like that found in a manual, should be openly spaced since reader comfort must be extended over long stretches. On the other hand, text in reference materials, a directory, for example, can be more closely spaced because readers are just searching for a single piece of information.

"Minus linespacing" is the reduction of space between lines of type so that the baseline-to-baseline measurement is less than the point size of the type, for example, 10 point type on 9½ point body.

USUALLY, THIS CAN ONLY BE DONE WITH SMALL X-HEIGHT FACES, OR WHEN THE TEXT IS SET IN ALL CAPS.

THINK SMALL

If copy must fit into a small space, choose a typeface that is small in point size but large in x-height. Medium weight faces hold out better when used small. Slightly condensed type allows for more characters per line.

If copy must fit into a small space, choose a typeface that is small in point size but large in x-height. Medium weight faces hold out better when used small. Slightly condensed type allows for more characters per line.

If copy must fit into a small space, choose a typeface that is small in point size but large in x-height. Medium weight faces hold out better when used small. Slightly condensed type allows for more characters

DISPLAY TYPE LETTERSPACING

How tight is tight?

TOUCHING

How tight is tight?

VERY TIGHT

How tight is tight?

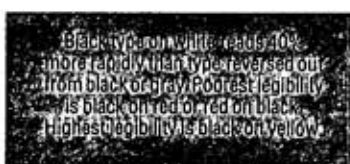
TIGHT

How tight is tight?

NORMAL

BACKGROUND

Black type on white reads 40% more rapidly than type reversed out from black or gray. Poorest legibility is black on red or red on black. Highest legibility is black on yellow.



Black type on white reads 40% more rapidly than type reversed out from black or gray. Poorest legibility is black on red or red on black. Highest legibility is black on yellow.