



# Basic Guidelines for Page Layout

**These very basic rules of thumb apply to everything from simple letters to newsletters and books. They really are quite simple to follow, even for novices, but they will give your work a professional look.**

1. Don't use more than two different typefaces in a given document or publication. For variety, use different sizes (10, 12, 14 point, etc.), weights (light, regular, bold or heavy), and styles (normal or roman, italic, bold, small caps, drop caps). Experts often recommend using a serif face (e.g., Times Roman or Garamond) for body copy, a sans-serif face (e.g., Helvetica or Arial) for headlines, subheads and captions.
2. Don't use underlines except in very special cases. Underlining was one of the few means we had to emphasize words or phrases with typewriters. Now we can use italics, boldface or small caps for emphasis, and we should.
3. Do be very careful of overprinting type on a colored background, or reversing type out of a colored tint block. Light blue type overprinted on a dark blue or black background won't cut it; too hard to read. Type reversed out of a background should be in a very light color or, preferably, white. Strong, bold, sans-serif faces work best.
4. Don't try to cram too much material onto a page. White (or negative) space is a valuable design tool; use it well. That means allowing adequate margins and gutters (the space between columns) as well as leading (space between lines). It's very important to keep spacing consistent! Uneven spacing between heads and body copy, or between paragraphs, can be distracting to a reader.
5. Do use lead-ins, subheads and lift (sometimes called "pull quotes") paragraphs liberally to break up large blocks of type. Subheads and short summaries or lead-ins can provide a transition between headlines and body copy. Subheads also break up body text into sections, and identify the subject of those sections. Lift paragraphs consist of text pulled from the body copy and placed in a screened box or between rules, usually in a font heavier or otherwise distinct from the body type, to break up a "gray" page.
6. Do eliminate widows and orphans. Widows are very short lines, one or two words, at the bottom of a paragraph. Orphans are short lines at the top of a column. Usually minor editing, adding or cutting a few words will eliminate the line or pad it out to almost full column width.
7. Do use clipart and other graphics to brighten up your pages, but don't go crazy with such art. The old "too much of a good thing" adage definitely applies here. You also want to be consistent with your art. Cartoonish clipart may clash with straightforward line drawings or illustrations when used on the same page or in the same section. It's usually pretty obvious even to non-designers when art styles don't blend well.
8. Do not use photos unless they are of good quality and you're sure they will reproduce well in the print medium you use. They don't work well in newsletters or fliers that are run off on copiers, for example.
9. Do reduce hyphens to a minimum, even if this means overriding the automatic hyphenation performed by your publishing or word processing program. Just as in the case of widows, orphans and rivers (see below), a bit of judicious editing will solve the problem.
10. Do watch for "rivers" in your body text. There are areas of white space that run vertically through body copy on your pages. (These are far more common today than in the old "hot type" days when experienced linotype operators produced most body text.) They are very obvious, unprofessional and distracting to readers, so avoid rivers like the plague.