

Text Essentials

Every day, we **WRITE** for a living. The word processor is the world's most-used software, but almost all of us are self-taught. A few years ago, we just typed, and someone else laid out our documents. Now we are typists and designers in one, but don't realize it. Knowing how to use text properly will make your life easier and your editor happier. Here's a crash course.

Type **ONE SPACE** after a period. Double spaces are for typewriters, with their extra-wide letters. With proportional computer fonts, double spaces look tacky. Every professional book, journal, and magazine on your shelf uses one space, and so should you.

The quote marks on your keyboard are not **REAL QUOTE MARKS**—they're called straight quotes, or typewriter quotes. Typographer's or "curly" quotes are what the real world uses. An apostrophe is a single closing curly quote. Your word processor probably converts keyboard quotes to real quotes on the fly—check the Autocorrect > Autoformat settings. Sometimes it screws up, though.

Don't **UNDERLINE** anything (particularly not in these web-link days). Use bold and italic for emphasis. Maybe even a nice bold contrasting font. ALL CAPS and underlining are both typewriter relics.

The wee line on your keyboard is a hyphen. To make a **DASH**, don't type two hyphens (typewriter again). Insert Symbol will show you the shortcut for an en dash and an em dash. Basically, en dashes are used in a range (from x to y, replacing the 'to'), while longer em dashes show a break in a sentence—like this (Americans often use an en dash with a space on each side for the same purpose – like this.)

There are a multitude of **SPECIAL CHARACTERS** available in all fonts: curly quotes of course, a degrees symbol (°), an ellipsis (...), a bullet (•), some math symbols (×, ±, ÷), Spanish punctuation (¡, ¿), and accented characters (é, à, î, ñ, ö, š). Insert > Symbol will show them, as well as the keyboard shortcuts (which vary between Mac and PC). Don't try and fake these yourself; for example, by making an 'o' small and superscripted for a degrees sign. Your editor will not be happy.

Fonts can be divided into two main types: **SERIF** and **SANS-SERIF** (plus a bunch of goofy fonts like Comic Sans that have no place in most documents). Serifs are the little 'feet' on letters; they've been trimmed on sans-serif fonts. Serif fonts are *easier to read* in bulk: use them for your body text. Some sans-serif fonts can be nice and bold; they make good *headings*. Some examples are listed to the right. Avoid Times: it's a personal bugbear of mine. You probably have no good fonts on your computer, unless you bought them yourself.

If you find yourself typing tab-tab-tab-tab, something's wrong. You're probably using the default **TAB STOPS**, which are only a half-inch apart. Set your own: click the button, click in the ruler. Choose left tabs except in special cases (like setting columns of numbers with a decimal tab stop). The ideal is a single tab between each item in a table—this will make your editor much happier, as they won't have to delete hundreds of superfluous tabs. And *never* use the space bar to make things line up; this only works on typewriters.

INDENTS are also controlled from the ruler. You don't need to indent the first line of your *very first* paragraph; we can see where it starts. All other

typewriter font. Two spaces
proportional font. Two spaces
proportional font. One space

"Typewriter quotes."
These are "crass," and these are "nice".

| | | | |
|-------------|--------|----------------|--------|
| ‘ | “ | ’ | ” |
| Single | Double | Single | Double |
| open quotes | | closing quotes | |

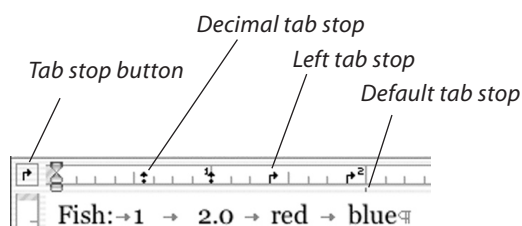
Bold small caps. Small caps, half-sized capital letters, come standard with good fonts, but are faked by most of the fonts on your computer.

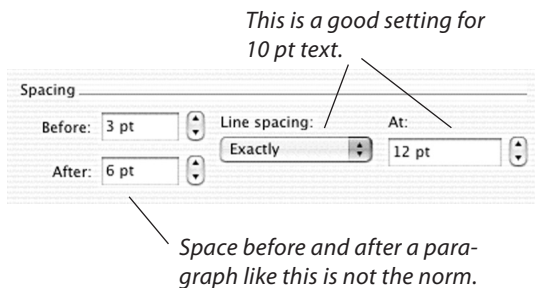
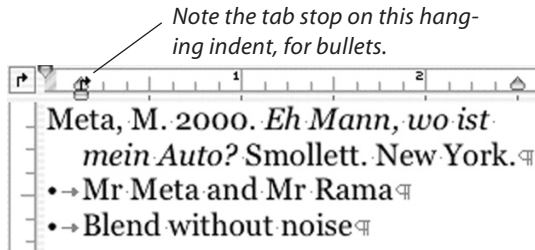
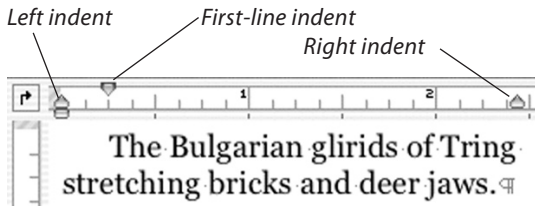
| | |
|---------|---------------------|
| Hyphen | Thin-edged |
| En dash | Tues–Fri, 8:00–5:00 |
| Em dash | This—or that |

Why do all the serif fonts look so similar? Because centuries of printing has created a consensus on what's easiest to read. Bear this in mind.

Garamond, Georgia, Hoefler Text *Serif*

Arial Black, Trebuchet, Verdana bold *Sans-serif*





paragraphs can have a small indent: a few letters, about a quarter inch. Don't do this with the tab key; use the first-line indent marker in the ruler (like tabs, these ruler settings only affect the paragraph you're in, or those you've selected). Leave the left and right indent markers, unless you want to bring the whole paragraph in from the left and right margins as a block quote. You should either indent paragraphs, or put space between them (see below) but not both.

HANGING INDENTS, used for bibliographies or bulleted lists, combine indent and tab settings. Select all the paragraphs you want to format. Set the first-line indent at the margin, and bring the left indent in a little. If you set a left tab stop at the same place as the left indent, you can type a bullet or number and tab to jump over to the same indent as the rest of the paragraph. Of course, most word processors have automatic bullets and numbering these days, but it's nice to know how it all works in case something goes wrong.

Very long lines of text are hard to read. Use indents or margins to adjust the **LINE LENGTH**, so that lines are no more than 2–3 alphabets long (that's about 4–5 inches for most text typefaces).

LINE SPACING is one of the best ways to improve readability, often better than making the text bigger. Check Format > Paragraph. The default is "single spaced": try setting an *exact* line spacing about 120% of your font size (so you could set 10 pt Georgia on 12 pt line spacing, alias "Georgia 10/12"). Increase line spacing by a point or two for if readability is compromised, for example with some sans-serif fonts.

Get control of your **PARAGRAPH SPACING**. Don't press Enter twice between paragraphs; that inserts a whole line of space (like a typewriter), which is usually too much. Try manually setting a lesser amount, like 6 pts, or 3 pts between references in your bibliography. Note that space after one paragraph adds onto any space before the next one.

Choose **FONT**s carefully. If you use more than one, make sure they contrast properly; in practice, that means one serif and one sans serif on the page, at least until you know more typography. Avoid cute novelty fonts. They usually send the wrong message, and if they came with your computer everyone's seen them a million times. Don't default to 12 pt—it's usually too large. Most books are set in 10, 10.5, or 11. Yes, you can manually type in a point size and line spacing.

Rather than format each paragraph individually, learn to use **STYLES**. These are preset formats, with names like *Normal* or *Heading 1*. Some apply to a whole paragraph, others to individual letters. You can modify the premade ones, create your own, import them from other documents using the Organizer, or even open the Normal template and fix them there to affect all subsequent documents you create. Once you've applied a style to every paragraph, you can make global changes, like "all sub-headings 1 pt bigger" in a flash. For details, come to another workshop.

Now you know some basic formatting, you'll find yourself having to correct other people's text, particularly e-mailed or taken off web pages. The **REPLACE** feature of your word processor lets you automate much of this: for example, changing double to single spaces. See my web site for a tip sheet.

SO that's some basic typography. I hope it's raised your awareness, and that you'll start noticing these principles in use all around you. Of course, there are no design police to arrest you if you don't abide by them, but if you still want to break the rules you're now at least making an informed choice. ☛

Further Reading

Williams, Robin. *The Mac [PC] is Not a Typewriter*. (Peachpit Press, 1995). Short twin books, covering much of this workshop but more elegantly. Another of hers is *The Non-designer's Design Book* (Peachpit Press again)—she also has non-designer books on *Fonts and the Web*. All are highly recommended

Bringhurst, Robert. *The Elements of Typographic Style* (Hartley & Marks, 2002, 2nd ed.). Browse to blow your mind with the insane intricacies of typography.

Spiekermann, E. & Ginger, E.M. *Stop stealing sheep (and find out how type works)*. (Adobe Press, 2002, 2nd ed.) Gets you thinking hard about font choice.

Please feel free to email me comments, suggestions, questions, and complaints.