The background of the entire image is a stylized, abstract representation of flames. It features large, flowing shapes in bright yellow and orange, set against a solid black background. The flames appear to be rising from the bottom, creating a sense of heat and intensity.

SEVEN DEADLY SINS OF TYPOGRAPHY

TYPE365.COM

Introduction

School teaches us plenty of useful facts. If it weren't for school, I wouldn't be able to multiply; I wouldn't know how underwhelming Romeo & Juliet is; and I wouldn't know about the Bay of Pigs. (You mean, we didn't ruin Cuba's pork industry...?)

School, though, teaches us bloody terrible typography skills.

Typography is the visual equivalent to voice. It's how you know when someone is sarcastic over text or mad on some comment board. It's also how some posters look great while others make you want to puke.

For example, in school, we learn to type in 12 point Times New Roman, double spaced, with one inch margins. And it's awful.

If you spend 6 minutes reading this, I promise that everything you write will look and feel better.

Here's a quick test to see if your heart is beating: which looks more serious, a or b?

a. I love you

b. I love you

If you chose b, then you have at least some sense of how typography affects the words we write. Clearly, a, set in Comic Sans, the laughing-stock of the type world, looks less serious. Clearly.

This is the first point of good typography...

1. Choose a good typeface

Your system comes with a bunch of typefaces, so which one do you choose? Well, to make things simple, do not use Times New Roman, Arial, Caliber, Cambria, or any other default. I say this not because breaking the mold is inherently good (I'm not that hip); I say it only because using the defaults suggests typographic apathy. It says that you're lazy and don't want to put in the time to find a better typeface.

In truth, Times New Roman is a good typeface. It's just been overused so much that now it says something other than *I'm a good typeface*. It says *I'm a lazy typeface*.

So, what typeface should you choose? If you're not looking to research and buy a typeface online somewhere—if you want to stick to those that came with your computer—here's a list, you might have some:

Serif

Garamond
Caslon
Bodoni
Century
Georgia

Sans-serif

Futura
Univers
Gill Sans
Helvetica
Akzidenz-Grotesk
Avenir

Having trouble finding a good one?

I've put together a guide that explains what makes a typeface *good*, and explores the nine best ones *you already have*.
[Check it out.](#)

2. Take care of your body text

The most important part of whatever you're writing is the body text, not the headers. I know it's important to have a good first impression, and people pay a lot of attention to the headers, but most of the page is body text, and that's the part that needs to look good. So before you take care of your kids or health or anything else, take care of your body text.

Okay, so how do you do that?

3. Don't let your title bully your body

Pages with text on them have a certain shade of grey at a distance; the blocks of text stop looking like lines of words and begin blending in with the white that separates them.

So what does this mean for headers? Well, they should be large enough to stand out—to contrast with the body text in some meaningful way. But they shouldn't be so large or bold that they outweigh the body text—they shouldn't push around the body text.

How to win an election

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How to win an election

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4. Keep your body text from running too wide

Lines of text should be between 45 and 90 characters wide, with 75 being a safe bet. This roughly equates to two lower case alphabets—`abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyzabcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz`.

So, how to you achieve this? Well, in Word or online, it means changing the margins to be larger than the standard; in school we all learn such bad typographic practices, one of the worst is using one-inch margins on all sides. Margins serve different purposes and, therefore, have different needs. Don't get suckered into the one-inch cult.

On email, this usually means creating a one-cell table, and typing your entire email into that table cell, then changing the width accordingly. Sometimes this can look quite good actually. And, if you're so inclined, you can make the borders of the table white so you can't see them.

Too wide

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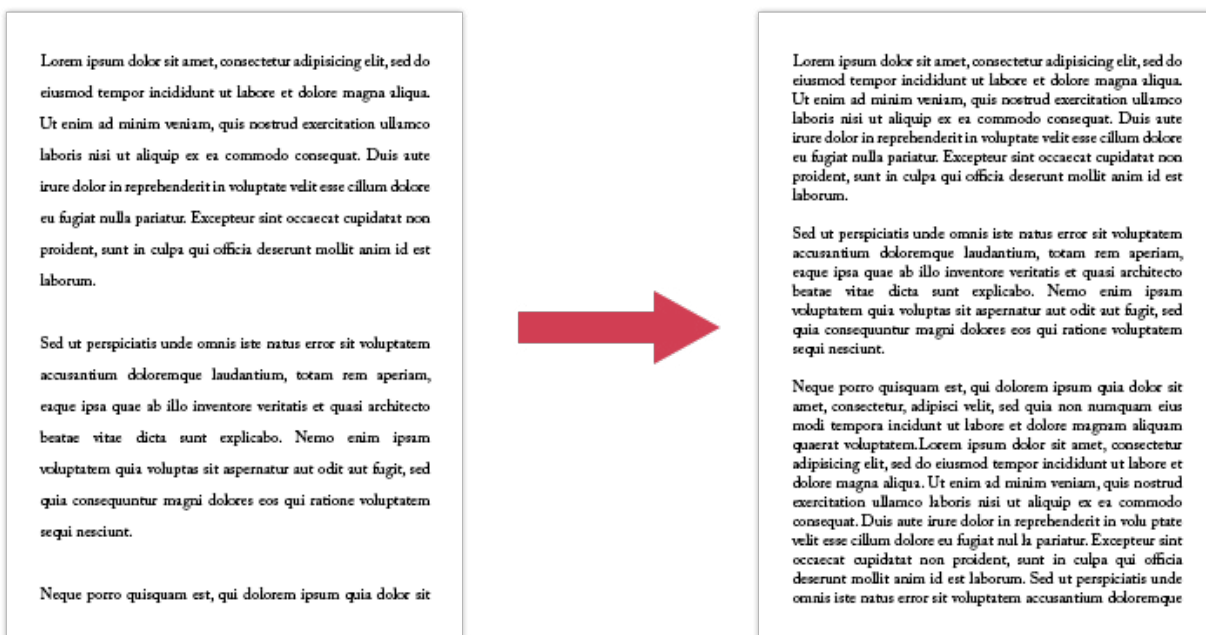
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5. Space well, not double

Another terrible school-time habit we develop is double spacing. This ends up creating a very airy page; it also makes it easier for a title to bully the body text because the body text can't stand its ground. Line height should be between 120% and 140% of type size. Double Space just means 200%, by the way. So you can see how bad it really is.

On Word, you don't have any built-in options here, but you can change it in the settings. If you can't find how, 1.15 spacing or 1.5 spacing will do, depending on the text.



6. Choose an appropriate type size

We learn that 12 point is best—or, we learn that 12 point is the only option—but in most cases, that's not true. When working in print, between 9 and 12 point is best—don't worry, it usually won't look too small. On screens, 14–23 pixels looks best.

7. Contrast only when needed

Dimensions of contrast are the ways one thing is different from another. So, for example, *this* has two dimensions of contrast from this; the first is both italicized and underlined while the second is neither.

Only one dimension is needed, usually. So make something **bold**, or underlined, or *italicized*, or ALL CAPS, or l e t t e r s p a c e d , or a different size, or a different font, but not m u l t i p l e. It's just unnecessary.

Make your titles the same typeface and a different size, or a different typeface and the same size. When emphasizing something, make it **bold** or *italicized*, but not both.

What to do next?

If you know someone whose type needs help, forward them this pdf. Seriously, if it keeps one more ugly document from being created, the entire world will thank you.

—Lucas Czarnecki, type365.com