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BOOK DESIGN TIPS FOR INDIE AUTHORS

DIGITAL PUBLISHING IS STILL IN ITS EARLY DAYS.
ALTHOUGH MOST AUTHORS ARE AWARE OF IT AS A POSSIBILITY,
IT IS, FOR MANY, A DAUNTING PROSPECT. THIS DOCUMENT IS
INTENDED TO CLARIFY A FEW BASIC CONCEPTS.

1

DIGITAL PUBLISHING
AN OVERVIEW

A little background

Different formats of ebook

Digital Rights Management

Distributors & distribution options

Self-publishing

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A LITTLE BACKGROUND AND A FEW TECHNICAL TERMS

DEVICES FOR READING DIGITAL PUBLICATIONS

"PUBLISHING: THE ACT OF TURNING THE AUTHOR'S INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY INTO A SALEABLE PRODUCT THAT GENERATES AN INCOME."
David Brawn "The Author"

There are two main types of device that can be used for reading ebooks: dedicated e-book readers, including Kindle, Nook and others, and tablet computers such as the iPad or any iOS device, Kindle Fire and Google Nexus.

Dedicated e-readers use electronic ink (e-ink) and only display in shades of grey. In many respects. these e-ink devices imitate paper: unlike a computer screen,they don't emit light, but rely on external ambient light. This means that their screens don't suffer with glare and reflection problems when used in bright light as happens with many digital devices. These readers are specifically designed for reading books; they may have limited web connectivity, but the reader doesn't have the distraction of incoming emails, Facebook messages and tweets.

DEDICATED (E-INK) READERS AND TABLET COMPUTERS ARE VERY DIFFERENT BEASTS

Tablets have additional functionalities and high quality, full-colour screens; they are much more versatile than e-ink readers and can even replace a laptop computer in many situations. Unsurprisingly, they also make excellent ebook readers, able to cope with a range of ebook enhancements as well as being suitable for multimedia books and applications, which are particularly popular for children's books, educational books, newspapers and magazines.

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DIFFERENT FORMATS OF EBOOK

TABLETS CAN REPLACE COMPUTERS IN MANY SITUATIONS

The technology of digital publishing has changed rapidly and a number of different book formats have arisen, some of them tied to specific devices. Some of these formats have already been superseded, while others are now recognised as standards.

Not every ebook format can be read on every kind of device, which is where it begins to get complicated. In the following table, we have listed a few of the most common formats that we work with in Tantamount, as well as some notes about each. These formats cover all the main devices a reader is likely to come across. Depending on the project, each manuscript we edit may be re-formatted and versions produced for any - or all - of these standards.

ADOBE PDF

For most of us, the PDF is the most familiar digital publishing format, but it hardly ranks among the categories of ebook. When they first came into being, the big advantage of PDFs was that they retained their format when passed from one device to another. Now, though, this becomes a problem, as the text will not reflow to fit small screens. Many devices that are used to read ebooks have a much smaller screen than a typical computer monitor, which means that reading a PDF can become an unpleasant exercise in zooming and scrolling left and right.

STANDARD EPUB

NO TWO BOOKS ARE THE SAME: DIFFERENT FORMATS ARE APPROPIATE FOR DIFFERENT BOOKS

Today, epub is probably the most common format for digital publications and can be read on all kinds of dedicated e-readers, tablets and smartphones, as well as on laptops and other computers. Unlike a traditional book, the text of an epub does not exist as a series of pages, but is instead a more fluid unit which reformats itself, flowing to fit the screen of the device it is being displayed on. A standard epub book may also have other limited functionalities that an ordinary print book cannot have, such as a linked index or glossary and links between pages or external links, but it is still very much a traditional book.

ENHANCED EPUB

Enhanced epubs take advantage of the multimedia potential of the digital world to include video, audio and interactive elements that complement the text content of the book. Because the technology is changing so quickly, not all these functionalities will work on all devices, but if the book is correctly produced, most devices will simply ignore content they cannot process and the reader can still enjoy the book, albeit in a simpler form.

FIXED LAYOUT

Some books are not suitable for the fluid text flow of the epub format - no poet is happy if the layout artist changes his poem's line breaks! - and some texts, particularly non-fiction and children's books, are written to work in blocks of information that must be preserved. Fixed-layout ebooks (available for Nook, Kindle and iOS devices) are the answer to this problem, allowing the full functionality of an enhanced ebook, with the control of layout and design demanded by this type of work.

MOBI/KINDLE

This is a specific format of ebook, comparable to the standard epub format, that was created to be read on any of the different Kindle models. Most other devices, including tablets, computers and smartphones can also read these ebooks by using special software.

APPLE IBOOK (MULTIMEDIA)

As we have seen with the epub format, the basic elements that are used to enhance an ebook are audio and video. There are, however, many more possibilities that take advantage of the full potential of the digital medium. The Apple iBook format allows a range of multimedia elements that enrich traditional text content to provide an enhanced experience for the reader. Because of its versatility and huge potential for creativity, this is an ideal format for children's and educational books.

iBooks are distributed via the Apple iBookStore and can only be read on iPads, not on other devices.

DRM

DRM PROTECTION IS OPTIONAL

Digital Rights Management (DRM) is the system that encrypts a file to stop multiple copies being made illegally. When an ebook is downloaded, it may be locked to the user's registered device or otherwise restricted. Different ebook formats have different DRM systems, and encrypting is optional.

DISTRIBUTORS & DISTRIBUTION OPTIONS

Once an ebook has been created, it must be distributed. This can be done via the publisher's, the author's, or any other website, or through the main online bookshops such as Amazon and the iBookStore. Different distributors allow different formats and most have an approval process during which they check compliance with standards and some copyright issues, etc. Some distributors require a preview or free sample of a book be made available so the reader has a better idea of what they are buying.

SELF-PUBLISHING

EVEN SIMPLE (NON-ENHANCED) TEXT CONTENT SHOULD BE IMPROVED BY EDITORIAL REVIEW AND PROFESSIONAL PRESENTATION

A lot of authors choose to self-publish their book as they see digital publication as an easy option. But, in general, authors are not editors, and nor are they graphic designers and technical experts. Many self-published manuscripts can benefit from rigorous editing and professional design to raise them from being the equivalent of simple photocopied and stapled manuscripts.

EVEN IF YOU ARE NOT A COMPUTER WHIZZ, YOU CAN STILL MAKE YOUR MANUSCRIPT AS APPEALING AND EASY TO READ AS POSSIBLE IF YOU FOLLOW A FEW SIMPLE GUIDELINES.

IN THIS SECOND GUIDE, WE TAKE A "BIG-PICTURE" LOOK AT TYPOGRAPHY, FONTS AND LAYOUT.

2

WRITE ON TRACK
TYPOGRAPHIC TIPS FOR TECHNOPHOBES

Limited fonts

Text size

White space

Text alignment

Serif / Sans serif

Transforming text

Bold & italics

Arial vs Helvetica

Being consistent

TOO MANY FONTS SPOIL THE TEXT

Don't be tempted to think that a variety of fonts will make a text more interesting and attractive: if we use sizing, bold and italics carefully, in most cases, just two fonts can do everything that's needed.

SIZE IS IMPORTANT

In order to indicate text hierarchy, we don't need to change font; instead, we can use different sizes of the same font for our headings. And, except in legal documents or reports, it's usually best to avoid paragraph numbering.

NO

2. Book the Second—the Golden Thread
2.1. Five Years Later
Tellson's Bank by Temple Bar was an old-fashioned place, even in the year one thousand seven hundred and eighty. It was very small, very dark, very ugly, very incommodious. It was an

YES

Book the Second—the Golden Thread

Five Years Later

Tellson's Bank by Temple Bar was an old-fashioned place, even in the year one thousand seven hundred and eighty. It was very small, very dark, very ugly, very incommodious. It was an old-fashioned place,

LET THE TEXT BREATHE

On the page, white space is not the same as empty space: it forms a part of the text, and makes for a better reading experience. As well as making the text more appealing and adding to legibility, white space allows us to separate elements in the text and/or draw attention to them.

NO

Las ruinas circulares

Los Nilsen eran calaveras, pero sus episodios amorosos habían sido hasta entonces de zaguán o de casa mala. No faltaron, pues, comentarios cuando Cristián llevó a vivir con él a Juliana Burgos. Es verdad que ganaba así una sirvienta, pero no es menos cierto que la colmó de horrendas baratijas y que la lucía en las fiestas. En las pobres fiestas de conventillo, donde la quebrada y el corte estaban prohibidos y donde se bailaba, todavía, con mucha luz. Juliana era de tez morena y de ojos rasgados; bastaba que alguien la mirara, para que se sonriera. En un barrio modesto, donde el trabajo y el descuido gastan a las mujeres, no era mal parecida.

Eduardo los acompañaba al principio. Después emprendió un viaje a Arrecifes por no sé qué negocio; a su vuelta llevó a la casa una muchacha, que había levantado por el camino, y a los pocos días la echó. Se hizo más hosco; se emborrachaba solo en el almacén y no se daba con nadie. Estaba enamorado de la mujer de Cristián. El barrio, que tal vez lo supo antes que él, previó con alevosa alegría la rivalidad latente de los hermanos.

Una noche, al volver tarde de la esquina, Eduardo vio el oscuro de Cristián atado al palenque En el patio, el mayor estaba esperándolo con sus mejores pilchas. La mujer iba y venía con el mate en la mano. Cristián le dijo a Eduardo:

-Yo me voy a una farra en lo de Farías. Ahí la tenés a la Juliana; si la querés, usala.

El tono era entre mandón y cordial. Eduardo se quedó un tiempo mirándolo; no sabía qué hacer. Cristián se levantó, se despidió de Eduardo, no de Juliana, que era una cosa, montó a caballo y se fue al trote, sin apuro.

YES

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Sometimes, though, once we start to understand how white space works, we can see that there are times when it needs to be down-sized. With very large font sizes (over 36 point) it's a good idea to reduce line spacing. Sometimes it can also help to close up the space between characters, but this should only be done with care (see page 6).

NO

a tale of two cities

Minion Pro, 36pt, standard line spacing

YES

a tale of two cities

Minion Pro, 36pt, reduced line spacing

LINE UP ON THE LEFT

In order to avoid unwanted and badly placed spaces, text should always be aligned on the left. To successfully justify with straight margins on both sides (flush left and right) requires professional typesetting skills.

NO

It was the Dover road that lay, on a Friday night late in November, before the first of the persons with whom this history has business. The

Full justification can lead to bad spacing

YES

It was the Dover road that lay, on a Friday night late in November, before the first of the persons with whom this history has business. The

Left justified text is correctly spaced

SERIF OR SANS SERIF

NOW, THOUGH, TABLET SCREEN RESOLUTION IS SO HIGH THAT THERE IS NO REASON THAT SERIF FONTS SHOULD NOT BE USED FOR DIGITAL PUBLICATIONS.

Serif is the name given to the little projection used in certain fonts (e.g. Times New Roman and Baskerville) at the ends of the strokes that make up each character. Some experts suggest the serif termination came about originally as it was easier for carving inscriptions, others say it was in imitation of painted lettering, while others say that the serif provided a tiny "overflow tank" that stopped ink spilling from letter moulds on early printing presses.

In the past, it has been suggested that serif fonts are easier to read as they help the eye travel between letters, but with low resolution computer screens that couldn't render the fine serif details, sans serif fonts such as Arial, Helvetica and Verdana became popular. Now, though, tablet screen resolution is so high that there is no reason that serif fonts should not be used for digital publications.

Times
Garamond
Bodoni
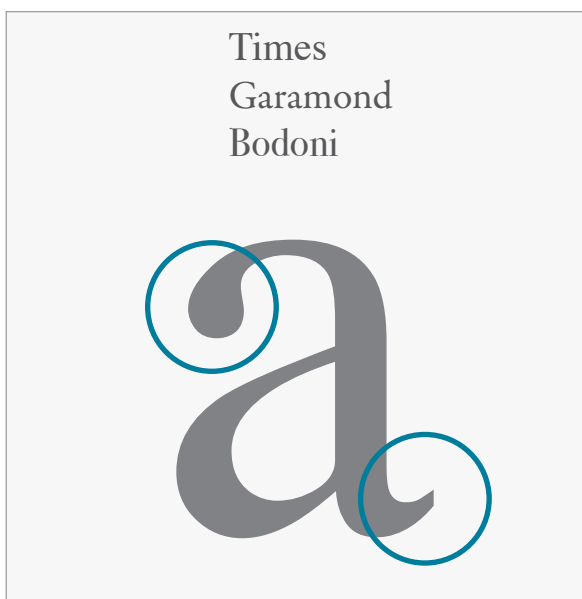
Serif. Notice the curled ends of the letter strokes

Arial
Helvetica
Verdana
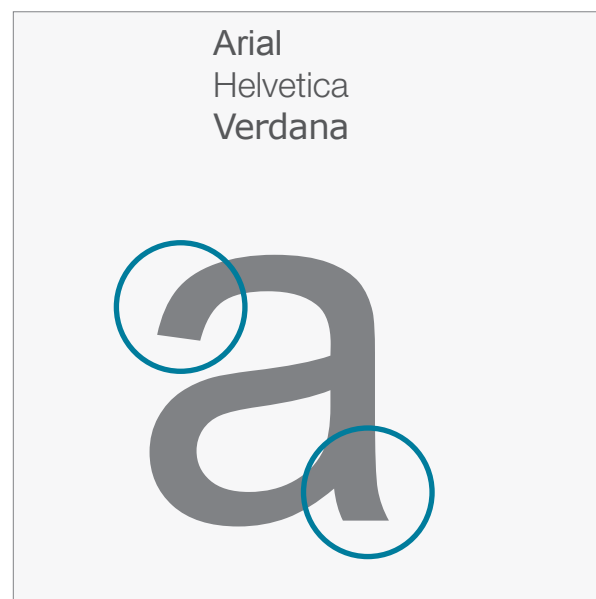
Sans serif. The letter strokes are cut straight across at the ends

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DESIGNED BY EXPERTS

Capital letters, lower case, numbers, symbols… every single character – and the spacing between characters – of any given font was designed by an expert. That means that unless we are absolutely sure of what we are about, we should not start "tweaking" things. Altering the horizontal scale or changing the kerning (the space between characters) is far more likely to make things worse rather than better. Some font families include extended or condensed versions and it is much better to use one of these than to tinker with the horizontal scale manually.

NO

a tale of
two cities

Helvetica Light, 120% horizontal scale

YES

a tale of
two cities

Helvetica Light Extended, 100% horizontal scale

NO

a tale of
two cities

Helvetica Regular, 80% horizontal scale

YES

a tale of
two cities

Helvetica Condensed, 100% horizontal scale

BE BOLD, BUT NOT TOO BOLD

It shouldn't be necessary to warn against overuse of bold and italics. These should only be used to highlight elements of the text, not simply because they "look good".

When we do use one of these effects, the correct way to do so is to use the true bold or italic font, (e.g. Times Bold) not to apply the effect to the regular font (e.g. Times Regular) by simply clicking the "bold" function – usually a button marked with a capital B – in our word processor.

abcde

Times Regular, without any style

abcde

Times Regular, with italic style applied via button or after copy/paste. It's just the text skewed

abcde

Times Italic, the real font we should use for italics

ARIAL VS HELVETICA

Apple or Microsoft, Liverpool or Everton, Coke or Pepsi, Arial or Helvetica… whose side are you on? If you don't know what the fuss is all about in the Arial-Helvetica war, check out the image below for some clues.

Arial   Helvetica

CONSISTENCY IS KING

Above all, the key to professional texts is consistency. Whichever font and type size you choose for your headings, whether you centre or left justify titles, use italics or bold to draw attention to key points etc., the most important thing you can do to make your text appear polished is be consistent.

EVEN IF YOU ARE NOT A COMPUTER WHIZZ, YOU CAN STILL USE IMAGES IN YOUR MANUSCRIPT EFFECTIVELY IF YOU FOLLOW A FEW SIMPLE GUIDELINES.

IN THIS THIRD GUIDE WE TAKE A LOOK AT SOME BASIC IMAGE ISSUES.

3

THE BIG PICTURE
IMAGE TIPS FOR TECHNOPHOBES

Image resolution

Bitmap vs vectorial

Cropping images

Cropping faces

Positioning

RESOLVING RESOLUTION

Historically, standard computer monitors had a resolution of around 72 ppi – that's 72 pixels per inch. To fill a square inch of your screen, you would need an image with 72×72 pixels, and to fill a four inch square you'd need 288×288 pixels.

Each pixel takes up space in the computer memory, so the more pixels in an image, the bigger the file size. This means that if you want to send a photo via email or use an image on a webpage, it's best to keep it small so that it doesn't take too long to load. However, if you make it too small, the computer won't have enough information to do more than show a tiny image: if you try to make it bigger, the missing data will have to be invented.

At 72 ppi, an image that is 144×144 pixels only contains enough information for a two inch square. This means that if you want to display it as anything bigger, the picture will look blurred, as the computer software will have to "guess" what colour dots to use to fill in the spaces. To display it as a four inch square, for example, three quarters of the information would have to be invented. (Incidentally, this means that most TV CSI-type "enhance" procedures are unrealistic: the detective asks the techie to zoom in on an image and the computer software supplies estimated data to fill in the blanks. It can't retrieve information which isn't there, it can only make a guess using the logic programmed into it, so any resulting details are based on guesswork, not fact.)

Once we start talking about printed images, we need to work with higher resolution – usually 300 ppi – if the pictures are to appear clean and crisp.

At screen resolution, four inches is 288 pixels, so if you try and print a four inch square picture you've downloaded from a webpage, the resulting picture will either be big and fuzzy on paper, or high quality and about the size of a passport photo.

If your image is too small for the purpose, it will appear blurred.
Left: 300 ppi image; Right: 72 ppi image enlarged to 300%

So far, we've talked about using 72 ppi for displaying images on screen; but monitors and displays are improving, and tablet screens – where your enhanced ebook is likely to be seen – tend to have much higher resolutions, typically ranging from 150 to 250 ppi, although some displays are now just as hi-res as print. So although a small picture can be scanned and used successfully alongside a story you post on your blog or webpage, it may make a very disappointing full page illustration for an ebook.

This also means that if you have images which you have optimised for web, they won't be high enough resolution for use in your enhanced ebook when it's read on a tablet.

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ALTHOUGH A SMALL PICTURE CAN BE SCANNED AND USED SUCCESSFULLY ALONGSIDE A STORY YOU POST ON YOUR BLOG OR WEBPAGE, IT MAY MAKE A VERY DISAPPOINTING FULL PAGE ILLUSTRATION FOR AN EBOOK.

It's tempting to think that you can simply "size up" the image, using the program you used to optimise it earlier. But this is still essentially asking software to interpolate missing data. In fact, you need to go back to the original image and work from that. If you scanned the image at 72 ppi, you'll need to rescan it at 300 ppi resolution. It may look huge on your computer monitor but that's the size you'll need to work with for a high-resolution tablet display.

RESOLVING RESOLUTION

The images we have talked about so far are bitmap or raster images, where each pixel is individually defined with its own values for colour and luminosity: each is independent from all the other pixels that make up the image, so when we ask the computer to make the image bigger, it has to invent values to fill in the information it lacks.

If you start with a circle, though, however large you make it, it does not lose definition, but remains a perfect circle, while a two by three rectangle will remain a two by three rectangle, whether the units are millimetres or inches. These shapes are defined by mathematical formulae and can be made bigger or smaller without losing definition.

Since it is possible to combine multiple shapes and curves to produce a single image, the complexity of vectorial images is almost unlimited. This type of image – an image composed of geometrical shapes that are defined by mathematical formulae – doesn't have a resolution: the borders will remain clear and precise no matter what size it is.
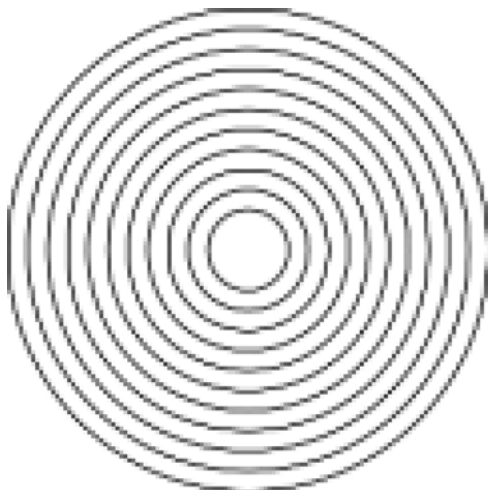
Bitmap image increased by 300%
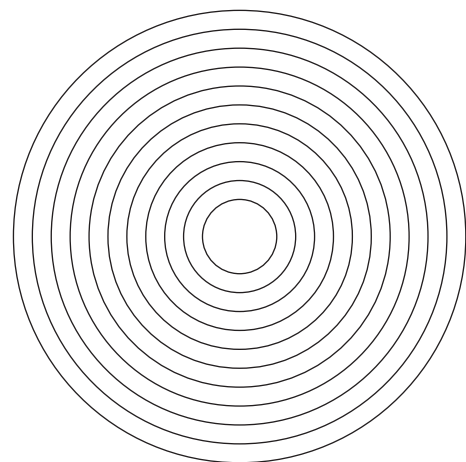
Vector image increased by 300%
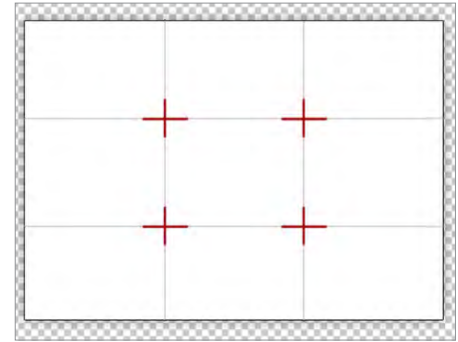
TRIMMING DOWN

Any time that graphic elements are used in a document, it's likely that some of them will need to be cropped, either in order to fit the page or simply to improve the image composition.

The "Rule of Thirds" can be used when you need to cut an image: imagine the image divided into nine sections by imposing two equally-spaced vertical lines and two equally-spaced horizontal lines as shown in the diagram; usually, the best picture composition is obtained if the focal point is positioned as marked, at or near to the intersections of the horizontal and vertical lines.
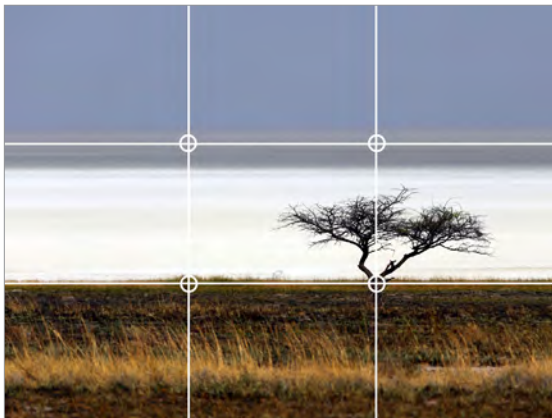
DECAPITATION

When you have a close-up of a face that you need to crop to reduce the image height, it's better to cut off the top of the subject's head rather than lop off the point of their chin. It's better to scalp your subject than to cut their throat.

There are many points at which you can cut across the forehead, but the best effect is often achieved by cropping just above the eye brows or just above the hairline, as these both provide natural closure to the face.
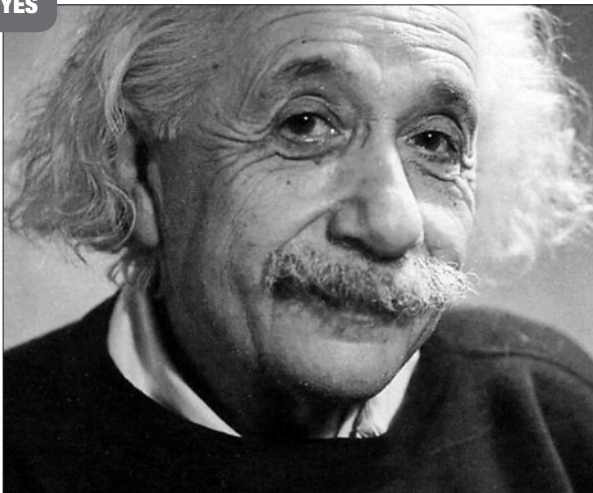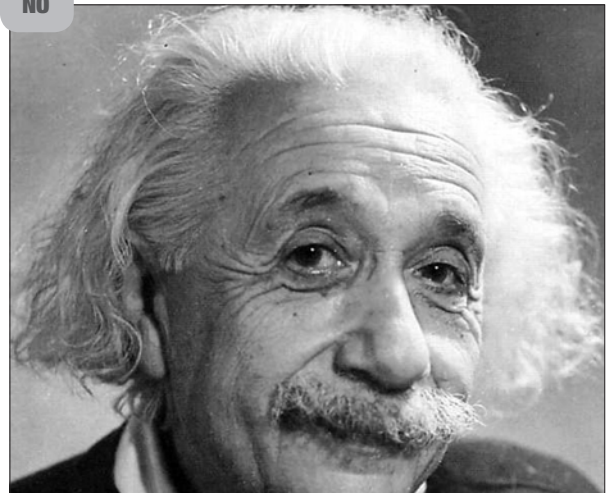
Better cropping

Unnatural cropping

POSITIONING: LOOK INSIDE

Particularly with portraits, images often face either to the right or to the left. When pictures of this type are included in a book or magazine, it is better to position them so that they are facing towards the spine of the publication, so that they are looking towards the centre of the book, not towards the exterior page edge.

In order to achieve this, it may be necessary to flip the picture horizontally. Remember that not all images can be flipped: the human body is not symmetrical, so never flip a picture of a named person.

This doesn't only apply to faces, but to action pictures, too: usually you want the subject of the picture to be running, walking etc. into the book, not trying to exit via the page edge.

YES

The dog is integrated into the double page composition

NO

The dog seems eager to leave the book behind

IN THIS FOURTH TANTAMOUNT GUIDE, WE TAKE A CLOSE-UP LOOK AT SOME SPECIAL FEATURES OF CHARACTERS AND PUNCTUATION AND ALSO TOUCH ON SOME GRAMMAR ISSUES.

4

A QUESTION OF CHARACTER
TYPOGRAPHIC TIPS FOR TECHNOPHOBES II

Capital letters

Quotation marks

Apostrophes

Diacritics

Dashes & hyphens

Ligatures

A CAPITAL IDEA

Most of us have been told that writing in ALL CAPS in messages on the internet is the equivalent of shouting. In fact, it's the same on paper and elsewhere, so to emphasise a single word or phrase, it's best to use *italics* or SMALL CAPS. (Note that the small caps option is usually found under the "font effects" menu of word-processing software.)

NO	YES
She is TOTALLY gorgeous!	She is *totally* gorgeous!

QUOTE ME!

NO	YES
"gorgeous"	"gorgeous"

Straight quotation marks are typical of old typewriters and should not be used in modern texts. Instead, we should be using the curved, typographic quotation marks that have the form "66" to open the quotation and "99" to close it. Most fonts on Windows and Mac include typographic quotation marks, but it may be necessary to adjust the software preferences to access them.

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Mac	opt+]	opt+shift+]	opt+[	opt+shift+[
Windows	Alt+0145	Alt+0146	Alt+0147	Alt+0148

Opening single quote   *Closing single quote*   *Opening double quote*   *Closing double quote*

A SENSE OF BELONGING

Many people feel very strongly about apostrophes, so it's important to get them right or you risk annoying and alienating your reader. The actual character used is the same as a single closing quotation mark, like a small 9. It is incorrect to use the opening quote and incorrect to use the acute accent – a common mistake for English writers using a foreign keyboard for the first time.

Grammatical usage is as important as typographical: in English, the apostrohe is used to indicate possession: Peter's car, the man's book, the boys' football. (Note that the football belongs to a group of boys, so the apostrophe comes after the 's'; if it belonged to one boy we'd write the boy's football.) The apostrophe is also used in contractions: do not=don't. Remember that simple plurals never need an apostrophe and there is no apostrophe in possessive its, so it's=it is.

To sum up:

- The cat (singular)
- The cats (plural)
- The cat's dinner (one cat, one dinner)

- The cats' dinner (several cats share a dinner)
- The cats' dinners (several cats and several dinners)
- The cat's dinner's cold (the one dinner of the one cat is cold)
- The cat's out hunting (the cat is out hunting)
- The cat doesn't want its dinner; it's out hunting (it is out hunting)
- The cat's caught a bird (one cat has caught a bird)
- The cats have caught a bird (several cats have caught a bird between them)

A QUESTION OF ACCENT

Diacritics, or diacritical marks, are the accents, dots and squiggles that are added above, below or alongside a letter character to form a new letter; diacritical marks often change the sound of the letter. The marks are common in some languages, but in English they usually only occur in words adopted from other languages, such as *mañana, façade, naïve, café*. Notice how the acute accent on the final e of *café* shows the reader that the letter must be pronounced so the word doesn't rhyme with *safe*, while the cedilla on the c of *façade* shows us that it is pronounced like an s, rather than the hard c of *brocade*.

On standard English-language Mac and PC keyboards, most characters can be formed by using a combination of keys, but this isn't very efficient if you are typing in a different language. Keyboards designed for languages which use a lot of diacritical marks will usually have separate keys for each complete character; a standard Spanish keyboard,for example, has specific keys for ñ and ç.

Early computers used ASCII fonts which had limited character sets; even now, not all fonts include all possible characters

although system fonts such as Times New Roman and Helvetica do. There are also international standards such as Unicode which are aimed at making it possible to use computers consistently in any language independent of system (Mac, Windows, Linux…).

DASH IT ALL!

Dashes and hyphens are one of the most obscure areas of typography, and few non-experts bother even to distinguish between the characters, let alone to use them correctly. The problems are compounded by the fact that some of the symbols can only be produced by using a combination of keys.

The most common dashes are the em dash and the en dash; there is also a numerical dash. Strictly speaking, the hyphen and the minus sign are not dashes.

Traditionally, the em dash was the same width as the letter m of whichever font was being used (so a Times em dash and a Helvetica em dash are not necessarily the same width). The most common use for the em dash in English is as an alternative to parentheses or commas used to separate a parenthetical comment. When used in this way in British English, the dash usually occurs with a space on either side. In some languages, and some contemporary English-language fiction, the em dash is also used to introduce direct speech; unlike quotations marks, there is no closing dash at the end of the spoken phrase.

The en dash was traditionally the width of the letter n, although in fact it is often simply half the width of the em dash. Like the em dash, the en dash is a separator. Above all, it is used to indicate ranges of dates and numbers, such as "1914-18" or "pp 322-25". When the numbers being used are codes rather than

counting numbers (e.g. in a telephone number) the dash used as a separator should be the numerical dash "44-123-4567", which, at least for mono-spaced fonts, occupies the same width as the number characters of the font. Note that this numerical dash is not the same as the minus sign used in mathematical formulae, which is a separate symbol.

M N _ _

*Em dash
(Minion Pro)*

*En dash
(Minion Pro)*

*Hyphen sign
(Minion Pro)*

*Minus sign
(Minion Pro)*

While dashes are used to separate, the hyphen is a connector. It can be used to form compound adjectives (state-of-the-art technology) and nouns (mother-in-law) as well as being used to indicate that a word has been split at the end of a line. (Note: the rules for word division are many, and it is usually simpler to avoid it if possible.)

Although it is common for non-professionals to use a hyphen in modern texts as a substitute for any of the dashes, there are times when the subtleties are important. The Sapir–Whorf hypothesis refers to two individuals Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf, so the names are connected by an en dash; the Thyssen-Bornemisza museum, however, is named after its founder and the two elements of his double-barrelled surname are connected by a hyphen.

Language is constantly changing and words evolve over time; combinations that occur together frequently tend to mutate, sometimes starting as two separate words, passing through a hyphenated form, and ending up as a single unbroken word. As there is no English Language Academy to regulate this process, you may find more than one option is possible (on-line / online), meaning that there is a degree of personal choice when it comes to compound words.

As with all such elements of style, the most important aspect is consistency. If you choose to use hyphens instead of an em dash to mark parenthetical phrases, for example, do take care that your software doesn't end up changing any of them unbeknownst to you. Not only should all pairs balance, but the style should be consistent throughout a document, and, indeed, throughout any series of related publications.

THE LOOPS THAT BIND

When two or more glyphs (character symbols) are joined together as one mark, the result is a ligature. One ligature we are all familiar with is the ampersand: &. It has become so familiar that few people think of its origins, but the original form was a combination of the letters e and t – the word "*et*" – which means "*and*" in Latin.

The flow waffle's fiddle
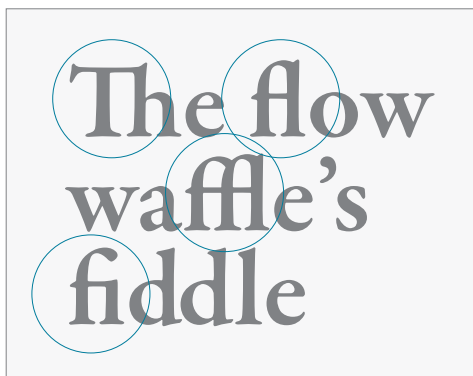
Contextual ligatures mean that a letter may actually change form depending on the adjacent letters or how close it is to the end of a line, for example. These changes are designed by experts to make the reading experience smoother, and one of the main uses of ligatures is to correct awkward combinations which would otherwise result in a conflict between the elements of two letters.

On the right the two letters as individual characters; on the left the ligature form

In a serif font, for example, elements of the f and the i occupy the same space: the overhang of the f and the dot over the I are in conflict. If they are too close, the letters will bleed into each other so they need to be kept unnaturally distant. The ligature form overcomes this problem by combining the two letters into a single unit.

Ligatures can also be used to represent sounds; the symbol æ being formed from a combination of the *a* and the *e* is used in phonetics to represent the vowel sound in the word "cat" (/kæt/). There are many ways ligatures can be formed, by connecting or removing elements and modifying forms; the effect is a smoother flow between characters, which may have the practical aim of making reading easier, or be for more decorative purposes.

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