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Quick Tips to Looking Good in Print



Based on the book
Take Command of Your Writing
by Jill Meryl Levy

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Looking Good in Print

If It Doesn't Look Good, It Isn't Worth Reading!

While it may be an exaggeration to say that if something doesn't look good, it isn't worth reading, it's true that the nicer a document looks, the better the chance that someone will read it. If your message is important enough to put in writing, it's worth making the document look good.

People do not often go out of their way to read something unless they *have* to read it or *want* to read it. If your document looks professional, attractive, and user-friendly, people are more inclined to want to read it. Remember, too, that you are often competing with many other demands for your readers' time and attention. You can't afford to turn readers off with documents that look ugly, uninviting, or difficult to read.



When you make an effort to make your documents look nice, it communicates to readers that you care about them and their needs, that you take pride in your work, and that what you have put in writing is important to you.

Choosing Between Serif and Sans Serif Type

Type is grouped into two basic styles: *serif* and *sans serif*. *Serifs* are lines or curves projecting from the end of a letter (as illustrated below). Serif typefaces have those lines or curves; sans serif faces do not. Serifs help guide the reader's eye from one letter to the next. So serif type is considered better for prolonged reading, such as body text in a training manual.

Sans serif faces, on the other hand, are generally thought to be easier to read at very large sizes or very small sizes. They work well for headlines where the type is larger than the rest of the text. They also work well for forms where the type is small and the space is limited.

Serif ★ **Sans Serif**

Using multiple typefaces (e.g., serif for body text and sans serif for headlines) is acceptable if done wisely. However, using too many typefaces can give the appearance of a ransom note pasted together. Careless intermingling of regular, bold, and italic type can have the same effect. The type becomes a distraction, taking attention away from the message. The page looks messy and amateurish, not clean and professional.

Aligning Text

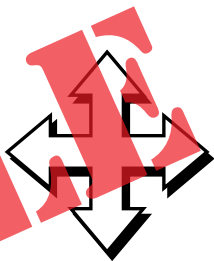
There are four basic options for aligning text.

Justified text (flush on both margins) generally gives documents a neater, more professional appearance. However, because the normal space between letters and words is altered to justify the text, justification sometimes results in uneven spacing.

Flush left (ragged right) text is relatively easy to read and allows even word spacing. It can also reduce the excessive hyphenation sometimes found in justified text.

Flush right (ragged left) is difficult to read because the reader has more trouble finding the beginning of each line. It can be used for special effects, captions, or short sidebar comments. Excessive use of flush right is not recommended, however.

Centered text works well for most headlines and for formal invitations or announcements. It does not work well for body text because it's difficult to read for the same reason that flush right text is.



Using FULL CAPS

Use **FULL CAPS** sparingly ... if you must use them at all.



When we read, we recognize **not** only the words themselves but **also** the shapes of the words. Words set in **upper and lower case** have distinctive and recognizable shapes. The monotonous rectangular shapes of words set in **full caps** lack these visual clues, making documents written in full caps harder to read.

Avoid thinking that readers will perceive the message as being more important if the words are set in **full caps**. Readers are more likely to subconsciously dismiss the text as too difficult to read and therefore not worth the effort.

More effective ways to emphasize important text include using bold or italic type, increasing the font size, repeating important words in headlines or pull quotes, and using graphics to draw attention to the message. What works best will vary from one application to another.

Adding Emphasize with Type

Emphasis can be added by varying the type as long as the document is easy to read and pleasant to look at.

Boldface type is generally the most effective way to make something pop out on the page. Yet too much bold type can undermine the intended effect and make the page look dark and intimidating. In addition, if print quality is poor, the type has a tendency to plug up, making the words difficult to read.

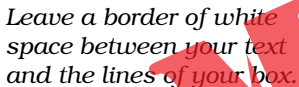
Italic type provides a subtle contrast to the main text. It is used primarily when subtlety, as opposed to strength, is desired. Since italic type is more difficult to read than plain text, it should be used sparingly.

Underlining is the least desirable because it is hard to read. Readers have difficulty separating the words from the lines beneath them. Some letters are especially difficult for readers to identify because they run into the underlining: g, j, p, q, y.

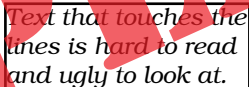


Using Boxes and Backgrounds

Enclosing type in a box is another way to draw attention to important information. Use a line width that will complement your type rather than compete with it. And very important—leave a border of white space between the text and the lines of your box. Text that touches the lines is hard to read and ugly to look at.



Leave a border of white space between your text and the lines of your box.

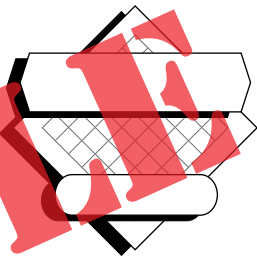


Text that touches the lines is hard to read and ugly to look at.

When using text against a gray, colored, or patterned background, maintain enough contrast to ensure the type is easy to read. Consider using larger or darker type so that it stands out against the background. If the background is dark, you may need to reverse the text instead. However, studies have shown the black text on a white background is as much as 40% easier to read than white text on a black background.

Using Headlines and Subheads

Headlines and subheads are organizational tools to help readers identify what information is being presented in the text that follows. Subheads help break the information into manageable segments and allow readers to quickly locate specific information. They also add visual interest to the page by breaking up large expanses of text. This makes reading less of a chore, which increases the effectiveness of your message.



Headlines and subheads should be set off from the main text by using larger type, bolder type, or both. They may be set in a different typeface for greater contrast. They may be aligned differently from the body text. For example, a headline or subhead might be centered while the rest of the text is justified.

People may subconsciously skip over headlines and subheads when they read, so it's important to ensure that the text that follows clearly communicates the message without requiring readers to stop and backtrack.

Using Illustrations and Photographs

Illustrations and photographs can emphasize important information and help readers understand difficult concepts. They can also enhance the appearance of a document, making it easier and more enjoyable to read.

Have a purpose for every image. Avoid meaningless “designer droppings” that are distracting to the reader. Avoid overshadowing the message with graphic elements that steal the reader’s attention away from the text.

Use high quality images that complement the text and that complement one another. Bad or inappropriate artwork or photos detract from the message and reflect poorly on the writer.



Crop, reduce, or enlarge photographs as needed to make them clearer or more dynamic. Consider editing out distracting information to help your audience focus on key elements. Use captions to explain or supplement images as needed.

Don't infringe on copyrights when using images created by other people. Get permission.

Take Command of Your Writing

Take Command of Your Writing by Jill Meryl Levy is the first comprehensive guide to more effective writing geared specifically for emergency services personnel.

- ◆ Each chapter provides a thorough coverage of the rules, answering many questions that other grammar books leave unanswered.
- ◆ The most important rules are highlighted in easy-to-read sidebars for quick reference.
- ◆ Thousands of examples make it easy to understand how to apply the rules.
- ◆ Professionally drawn illustrations provide an attractive, user-friendly format.
- ◆ A thorough index makes information easy to find.

This 670-page reference book contains 17 informative chapters that can help you become a more effective writer.

- ◆ Commas
- ◆ Other Marks of Punctuation
- ◆ Parts of Speech
- ◆ Subject-Verb Agreement
- ◆ More on Verbs
- ◆ Adjectives and Adverbs
- ◆ Pronouns and Antecedents
- ◆ Spelling
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A single copy of *Take Command of Your Writing* is \$49.95 plus \$5 for shipping and handling (plus sales tax in California). Volume discounts are available. To order, call (800) 477-7151 or (408) 866-2081 (after 8:30 California time please).