

5

tips for better typography

The details count. Custom kerning that headline or utilizing hanging punctuation for cleaner text blocks can speak volumes about your knowledge of design.

1

Know when to use hyphens vs. dashes

The difference between hyphens and dashes can seem subtle, but it's a telltale sign of your attention to detail and understanding of proper typography.

HYPHEN

Joins one or more words together.

The Creative Department is one-of-a-kind.

EN DASH

Specifies a range of values.

TCD's team's creativity operates beyond a typical 8-5 workday.

Shortcut:



EM DASH

Notes a break in thought.

I love visiting the West Bottoms—especially to stop in for coffee with The Creative Department.

Shortcut:



2

Clean up your fonts

Find a happy medium between number of fonts, weights and sizes utilized. One typeface may not have enough variation on its own, but four or five together can create chaos. Depending on the type and size of a document, a safe range falls between two and three fonts.

This also means developing a consistent style for headlines, subheads, and body copy, keeping your design clean and readable.

Fonts can consist of many weights and styles, so develop a system of hierarchy. Same-sized elements of equal importance might be better off in the same font weight rather than several different weights or styles.

3

Use *true* small caps

A real designer knows the difference between “true” and “fake” small caps. If you don't know about the fakes, they can be tricky to catch. Here's the difference:

equal width **TRUE**

unequal width **FAKE**

True small caps are created separately within a font. The typeface creator designed the small caps alternates to match the weight of a capital letter.

Fake small caps are computer-generated, scaled down versions of the font's capitals. The letters appear too thin next to their capital counterparts.

InDesign's character panel allows you to view OpenType font alternates, including small caps capabilities. Simply hover over “OpenType” under the dropdown menu, revealing the list of alternates. Any items in [brackets] indicate missing features. If “Small Caps” isn't in brackets, you're in luck! You've found the real deal.

4

Learn to kern

Customizing the space between letters increases type readability and consistency. Any designer will tell you how much more pleasant it is to read text that's kerned correctly. There's more to kerning than just readable body copy, but that's a good place to start. For quick kerning in your body copy, select “Optical” over “Metrics” in the Kerning section of your toolbar.

Custom-spacing large type, such as titles and headlines, is especially important because it's the more dominant type on a page or layout. If it's poorly kerned, it will stand out—negatively. In some instances, a widely kerned headline creates emphasis or movement, making it a dynamic graphic.

KERNING

[kur-ning]
• adjusting space between characters

Bad kerning makes designers sad

The Creative Department loves to kern

Practice your skills with this kerning game >

5

Use the right font for the right purpose

When purchasing fonts, pay attention to their intended use—print or web. Some fonts that read well on paper, such as a thin serif, may not be legible on screen, and vice versa.

Maintain the integrity of type by keeping it in proportion. Never stretch type to fit your means. Some typographers create condensed and/or extended versions of their typefaces, so if you need a thinner or wider font, see if a condensed or extended version exists, rather than distorting a typeface. Respect the creator's intent.

Lastly, understand the tone of your project to select the right font. A bouncy script font may be beautiful for a greeting card, but it won't have the same effect on a business letter, where a sturdy serif might be better suited. Know your audience, and be aware of the fonts that likely resonate with them.

Good typography is crucial in good design. Master the basics, and continue to expand your knowledge of typography. And at all costs, just say no to Comic Sans.

To see how TCD handles typography, take a look at our work.