



Word Spacing

by Ilene Strizver

WORD SPACING IS AN IMPORTANT ASPECT OF CREATING INVITING, EASY-TO-READ TYPOGRAPHY.

This seemingly small detail plays a key role in establishing the color, texture and readability of a typographic communication. Over-tight word spacing causes words to appear to run into each other, making it more difficult for the reader to distinguish one word from the next.

Conversely, word spacing that is too open – the more common occurrence – creates oversized blocks of white space between words, forcing the reader to read individual words rather than phrases or blocks of copy. This dramatically slows down the reading process, reducing reader comprehension and increasing the risk of distraction.

How much word spacing is the right amount? Assigning appropriate space between words is more of an optical determination than an exact science, but certain factors have a definite influence. Word spacing will be affected by the proportions of a typestyle, letter fit, and point size of the setting. A basic guideline for text is for the word spacing to approximate the character width of the lowercase 'n' or 'o'. Display settings should have narrower word spacing than text designs.

Additional points to take note of:

- A condensed type design requires less space between words than a regular or expanded typeface.

From sunrise to sunset, the little Indian boy played with his cub brothers. He did not know that he was different from them. He thought he was a little bear, too. All day long, the boy and the little bears played and had a good time. They rolled, and tumbled, and wrestled in the forest leaves. They chased one another up and down the bear tree.

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Word spacing comparison: over-tight (upper left); too loose (upper right); proper, balanced word spacing (lower).

Stories the Iroquois Tell Their Children

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Larger type requires less word spacing than smaller settings.

Word Spacing (cont.)

- A typeface with tight letter spacing needs less word space than a more openly fitting design.
- Setting type at larger sizes calls for slightly less word space than smaller type sizes.

An easy way to help determine if there is too much word spacing is to turn the copy upside down. If you can very easily distinguish one word from another, there's too much word spacing.

Although the word spacing of any given font is predetermined, it can be adjusted in most design and page layout software via the justification

settings. Changing the "desired word spacing" setting is the best method for text. For headlines, the kerning feature is the better tool – and yes, you can kern a character to a space, and vice versa!

Proper word spacing is not noticed by the reader, but is a major factor in creating text that appears even, inviting and easy to read; the copy should just flow. ■

Proper word space is proportional to the width of the typeface.

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Good word spacing is proportional to the width of the typeface, so less word spacing is called for when using a narrower style at the same type size.