## Web Typography Sucks

Richard Rutter Mark Boulton

RR: We're here to talk about web typography sucks – how it does, why it needn't, when it doesn't and how we can all do something about it. Let's talk about what we mean by typography...

### typography /tʌr'pɒgrəfi/ •n.

1 the art or process of setting and arranging types and printing from them. 2 the style and appearance of printed matter.

Oxford English Dictionary

RR: Definition from the OED. It's not really appropriate – it's all about printed matter and the days of metal type. I wrote to OED and they agreed the definition is out of date and said the word is under review. What we need is another definition.

### **typography** /tʌr'pɒɡrəfi/ •n. 1 the mechanical notation and arrangement of language.

*Type & Typography* by Phil Baines

RR: Definition from typographer & author Phil Baines in his book Type & Typography. Where mechanical include all things digital and language is the conveyance of info and ideas. So why does web typography suck?

MB: Anybody recognise these characters? These are primes.

# 6'10''

MB: They have a specific purpose...

# 6'10" 50°49'33"

MB: They are not quote marks or apostrophes.

## "It's a bloody aardvark!"

MB: So when we see punctuation like this throughout the Web, it is wrong.

## "It's a bloody aardvark!"

MB: This is the right way to do it, using the correct characters.

- hyphen	Müller-Brockmann
– en dash	3–6 April; 25–30 mm a phrase marker – thus – with spaces
— em dash	a phrase marker—thus—with no spaces — Doesn't sound much like a bee to me. — It's a bloody aardvark!
– minus	4-1=3

MB: There are cultural and stylistic differences in the usage of these characters. For example the Hart's Typesetting Rules in the UK, states Em dashes should be used as a phrase marker with no spaces. The Chicago Manual of Style states an En dash should be used with a hair, or thin space, either side.

The minus is a distinctly different character. It appears to be the same length of an en dash, but is thicker to match the equals sign.



RR: The Sun, a UK newspaper, has a reading age of eight years old.



Pals finally told him who the baby's dad was. But he did not learn the truth about the other four children – aged 12, ten, nine and six – until DNA tests proved they were Mills'.

Heartbroken Charles said yesterday: "I feel like the life has been ripped out of me.

"I brought those kids up for 12 years like any normal dad. I changed their nappies, dried their tears, took them to school – and now I've lost

and now I've

lost

RR: Even they use the correct characters. Note the en dashes, quotes and apostrophes.

school -



A LIST apart FOR PEOPLE WHO MAKE WEBSITES 124

OCTOBER 19, 2001

#### The Trouble With EM 'n EN (and Other Shady Characters)

Published in: HTML and XHTML, Typography | No discussion

The dawn of the web has frequently been compared to the invention of the printing press. But the web has also destroyed one of the greatest features of nearly every press since Gutenberg: the ability to publish pleasing type.

The printing press gave us type that was clearer and easier to read than that produced from a typewriter, because the typesetter had additional tools at his disposal—and knew how to use them. The web has cost us some of those tools.

#### Lack of tools and knowledge

There are two problems here. The first is that until <u>HTML 4</u> came along, the web was missing almost all of these tools (it's still missing many important ones).

But the larger problem is, now that they're available, almost no one publishing on the web today knows how to use them—or often even knows of their existence.

Read this, though, and you'll understand the answers to both problems far better than almost anyone else, including your English teachers.

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character encoding—it's all here, in this famous and much-bookmarked ALA article.

www.alistapart.com/articles/emen

RR How do we accomplish these characters on the Web? This fantastic ALA article explains all.

#### Search ALA



#### Topics

- + Code
- Content
- Culture
- Design
- Process
- User Science

#### Snapshot

More than you ever wanted to know about dashes, spaces, curly quotes, and other vagaries of <u>online</u> <u>typography</u>. HTML specs, grammatical rules, browser bugs and character encoding—it's all here, in this famous and much-bookmarked ALA article.

"	opening double quote	"
"	closing double quote	"
ç	opening single quote	'
>	closing single quote	'
	en dash	–
	em dash	—
	minus	−
×	multiplication	×
• • •	ellipsis	…

RR: Here's a brief summary of the characters and their HTML entities.



#### By JOHN GRUBER

ARCHIVES PROJECTS LINKED LIST MEMBERSHIP CONTACT COLOPHON



SMARTYPANTS SMART PUNCTUATION FOR WEB SITES

#### DOWNLOAD

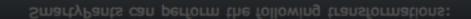
SmartyPants 1.5.1 (20 KB) — Fri 12 Mar 2004

What's new?

#### DESCRIPTION

SmartyPants is a free web publishing plug-in for Movable Type, Blosxom, and BBEdit that easily translates plain ASCII punctuation characters into "smart" typographic punctuation HTML entities.

SmartyPants can perform the following transformations:



"smart" typographic punctuation HTML entitie

#### RR: SmartyPants and Textile can help automate the procedure.

# 

MB: Ampersands.

### 5.1.3 In heads and titles use the best available ampersand

Elements of Typographic Style by Robert Bringhurst

MB



MB: Rotis sans. One of the worst ampersands available.



{HOME}

NOTEBOOK WORK

PUBLICATIONS

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ABOUT CONTACT

#### Hand-crafted pixels & text.

SimpleBits is a **tiny web design studio** founded by designer and author Dan Cederholm. We create simple, readable interfaces balanced with a standards-based methodology. Learn more

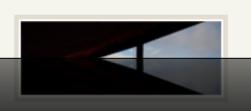


#### \* Planet Microformats

A giant master feed of anything and everything tagged with "microformats" from Brian Suda. {02.20.07}

#### Web Directions North

I've returned from several days in Vancouver, and the first-ever Web Directions North. It was a great trip, a great conference, and my second attempt at snowboarding in the last 20 years.



Directions North. It was a great trip, a great conference, and my attempt at snowboarding in the last 20 years.

#### www.simplebits.com

#### LATEST FEATURED WORK

MTV.com XHTML/CSS development



Cork'd Creative Director



TravelPost.com Logo + interface design

#### SPEAKING EVENTS

SXSW Interactive March 9-13, 2007 ~ Austin, TX

An Event Apart Boston March 26-27, 2007 ~ Boston

@media 2007 (America) May 24-25, 2007 ~ San Francisco

@media 2007 (Europe) June 7-8, 2007 ~ London

#### See me speak at 🔊

AN EVENT APART VI EVENT APART

~ See me speak at ~

June 7-8, 2007 ~ London

#### MB: Dan Cederholm's SimpleBits applies the principle beautifully.



**{HOME}** NOTEBOOK WORK PUBLICATIONS ICON SI

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**RECENT NOTEBOOK ARTICLES & QUICKBITS** 

\*Planet Microformats

A giant master feed of anything and everything ta

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MB: Ampersands in his strapline and headings are real text, not images.

```
<h1>Hand-crafted pixels
<span class="amp">&amp;</span> text.</h1>
```

```
span.amp {
   font-family: "Goudy Old Style", "Palatino",
   "Book Antiqua", serif;
   font-style: italic;
   font-size: 110%; }
```



RR: vertical rhythm. the rhythm of reading down the page – something that is lost when sticking to the browser defaults.

Daniel is roused by a rooster on the forecastledeck<sup>+</sup> that is growing certain it's not just imagining that light in the eastern sky. Unfortunately the eastern sky is off to port this morning. Yesterday it was starboard. Minerva has been sailing up and down the New England coast for the better part of a fortnight, trying to catch a wind that will decisively take her out into deep water, or "off soundings," as they say. They are probably not more than fifty miles away from Boston.

#### **Contrary Winds**

Daniel goes back and sits by one of the windows – these are undershot so that he can look straight down and see Minerva's wake being born in a foamy collision around the rudder. He opens a small hatch below a window and drops out a Fahrenheit thermometer on a string. It is the very latest in temperature measurement from Europe – Enoch presented it to him as a sort of party favour. He lets it bounce through the surf for a few minutes, then hauls it in a takes a reading.

He's been trying to perform this ritual every four hours – the objective being to see if there's any rumour that the North Atlantic is striped with currents of warm water. He can present the data to the Royal Society if God-willing he reaches London.

Text taken from *Quicksilver* by Neal Stephenson.

<sup>+</sup> The forecastledeck is the short deck that, towards the ship's bow, is built above the upperdeck.

Basic web page. an h1, an h2 some paragraphs and a sidenote.

Using the default line height and margins with some font size adjustments.

12px paragraphs

18px h1

14px h2

10px side note

not too bad, but text a little hard to read with the default line height – needs some leading

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Add some leading (increase the lineheight). But still looking a bit random due to the default margins used by browsers.

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Text taken from <i>Quicksilver</i> by Neal Stephenson.	

Now showing the vertical rhythm of 18px. As you can see the text loses its rhythm as you head down the page.

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So adjusting the margins we can this. Let's see that again...

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1 of 2

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And without the rhythm lines.

 The forecastledeck is the short deck that, towards the ship's bow, is built above the upperdeck.

Aboard Minerva off the Coast of New England	
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let's talk briefly how this was achieved. This is the science bit so pay attention. Firstly a rhythm is decided upon. In this case 18px. This works with a base text size of 12px. body { font-size: 12px; }

p { font-size: 1em; /\* 12px \*/ line-height: 1.5em; /\* 18px \*/ margin: 0 0 1.5em 0; }

line height:  $18px \div 12px = 1.5em$ 

set base text size to be 12px. everything related to that. set paragraphs to base size, but line height to the rhythm. Line height is desired height divided by the font size.

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#### Consider the heading. Sized at 18px.

<sup>+</sup> The forecastledeck is the short deck that, towards
the ship's bow, is built above the upperdeck.

h1 { font-size: 1.5em; /\* 18px \*/ line-height: 1em; /\* 18px \*/ margin: 0 0 1em 0; }

font size: $18px \div 12px = 1.5em$ line height: $18px \div 18px = 1em$ 

Font size is desired size in pixels divided by the base size (or size of parent).

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Fext taken from Quicksilver by Neal Stephenson.

Consider the side note. Smaller text at 10px, but still following the rhythm.

<sup>+</sup> The forecastledeck is the
short deck that, towards
the ship's bow, is built
above the upperdeck.

.sidenote {	font-size: 0.8333em; line-height: 1.8em;	/* 10px */ /* 18px */ }
font size: line height:	$10px \div 12px = 0.8333$ $18px \div 10px = 1.8em$	

again font size in ems is desired size in pixels divided by base size. don't be afraid of decimal places – help the browser's rendering.

Daniel is roused by a rooster on the forecastledeck <sup>+</sup> that is growing certain	<sup>†</sup> The forecastledeck is th
it's not just imagining that light in the eastern sky. Unfortunately the	short deck that, toward
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Text taken from <i>Quicksilver</i> by Neal Stephenson.	

Fext taken from *Quicksilver* by Neal Stephenson.

Consider the subheading. More complicated. Set at 14px, but syncopated with asymmetrical margins.

h2 {	font-size: 1.1667em;
	line-height: 1.286em;
	margin-top: 1.929em;
	margin-bottom: 0.643em; }

font size:	$14px \div 12px = 1.1667em$
line height:	$18px \div 14px = 1.286em$

top margin:	$27px \div 14px = 1.929em$
bot margin:	$9px \div 14px = 0.643em$

font sizes and line heights follow same maths. margins similarly: desired margin (1.5 times 18) divided by font size.

#### Aboard Minerva off the Coast of New England

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Text taken from Quicksilver by Neal Stephenson.

fext taken from *Quicksilver* by Neal Stephenson.

And the final result again.

 The forecastledeck is the short deck that, towards the ship's bow, is built above the upperdeck.



MB: When a person speaks a list, they will generally use a gesture. You should aim to mirror that gesture typographically.

#### **Component parts of DIN letterheads**

Besides the format, there are also standards for the placing of the component parts of business letterheads.

The authority for all these standards is DIN sheet 676: we show examples for the following pages. Standards exist for:

- 1. The position of the address
- 2. Position for receipt and treatment marks
- 3. Sequence and position for the main information
- 4. Sequence and position of firm's particulars
- 5. Side margin of at least 20mm

A standardized letterhead, before it is written, often gives the impression that not enough room has been left for the letter itself.

Text taken from The New Typography by Jan Tschichold

This slide shows a body of text with no leading or spacing applied.

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Adding whitespace to the text in the form of margins and leading.

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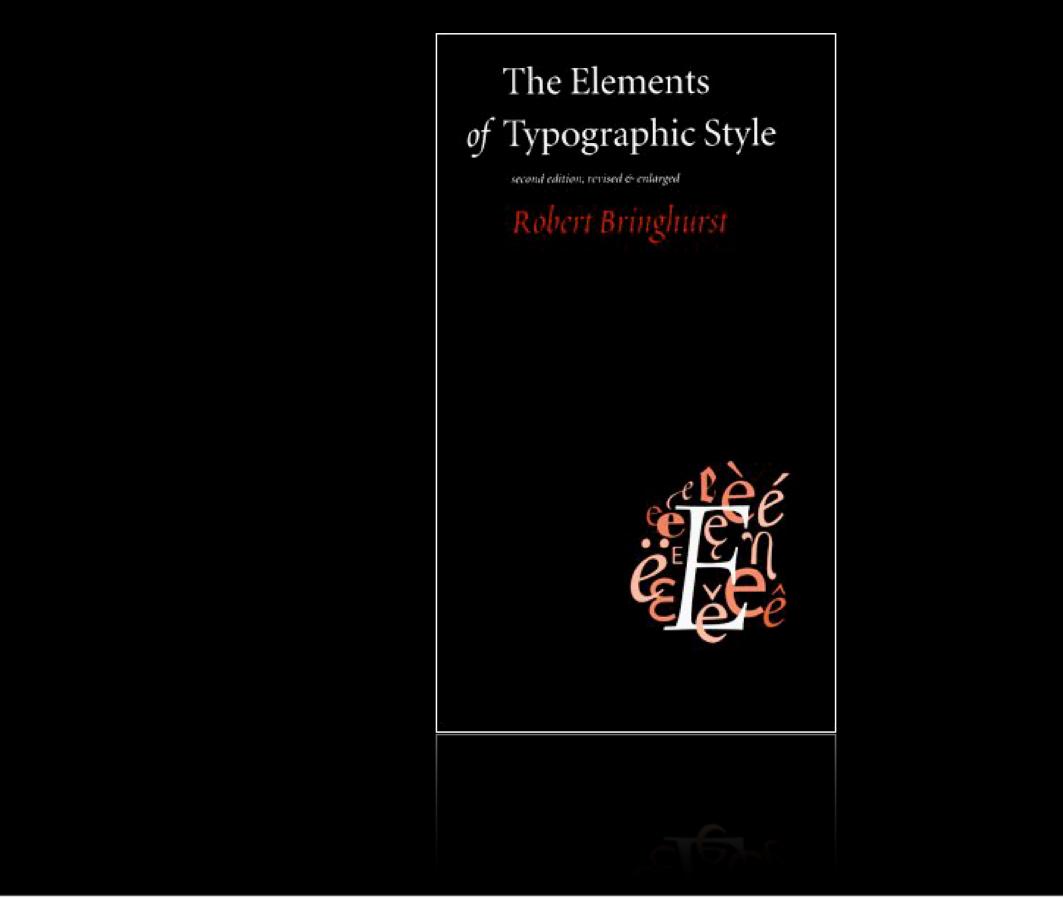
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Text taken from The New Typography by Jan Tschichold

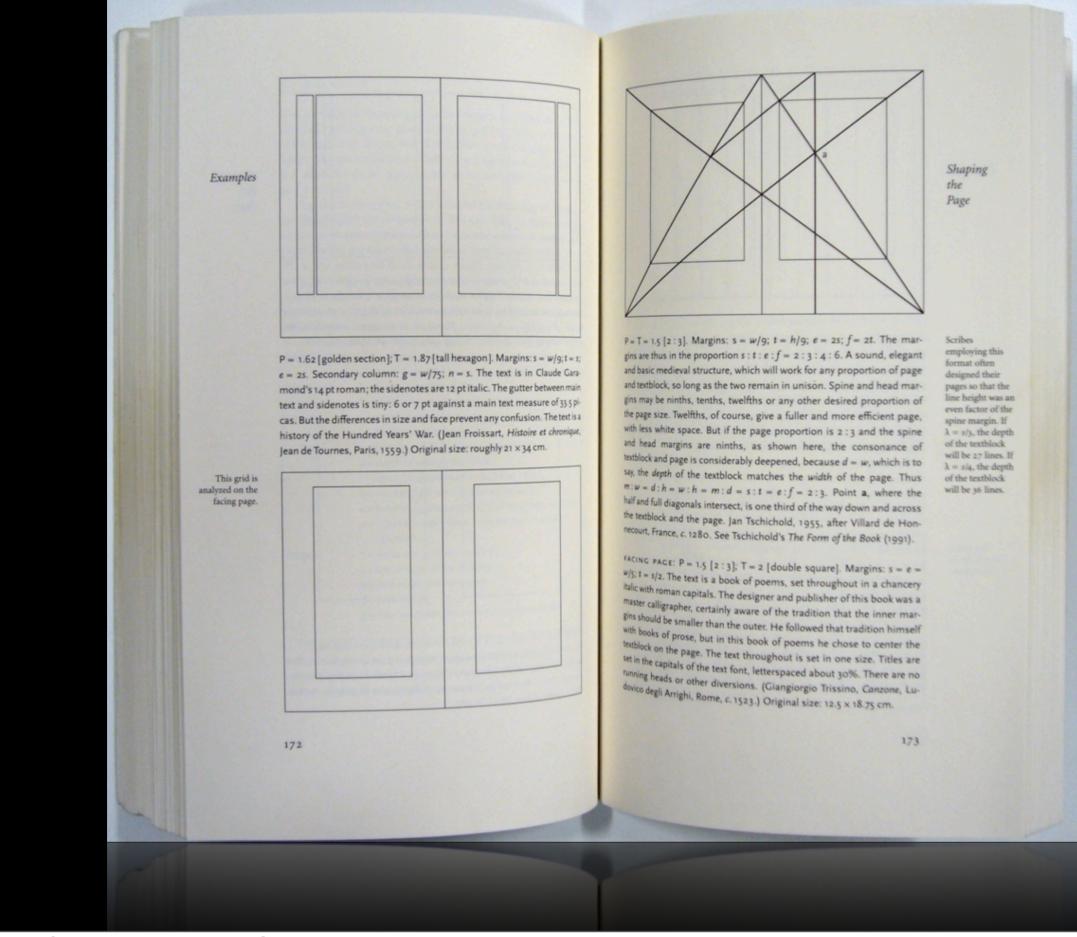
Use position (hanging in margin, or extra lead), or prominance (different typeface) to define the list. Left margin. Your eye follows the line much easier than if there were an indent.



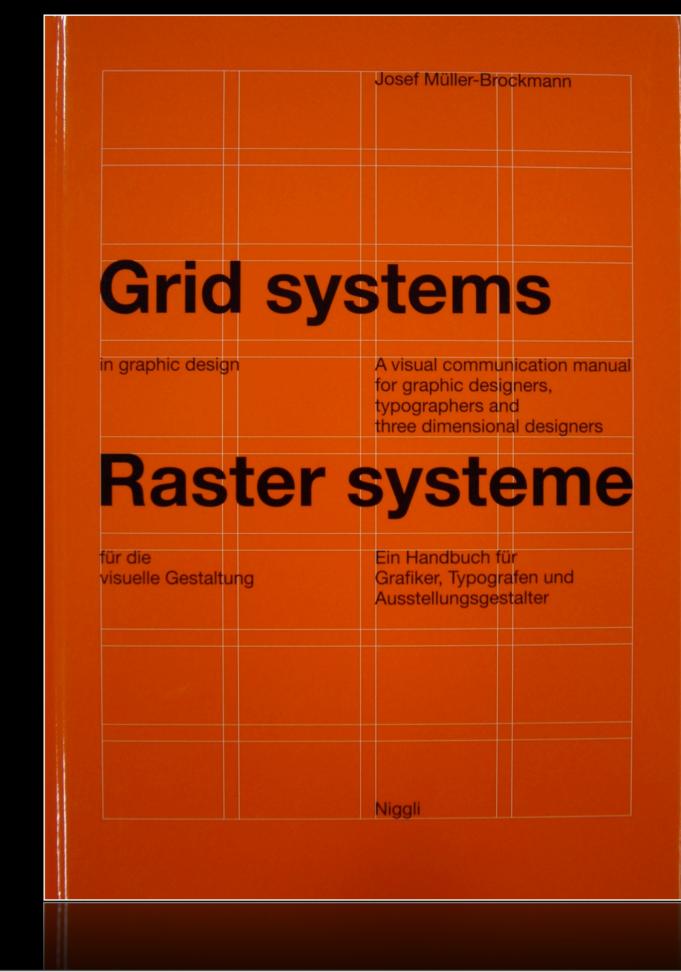
RR: Let's talk briefly about layout



RR: The Elements of Typographic Style by Robert Bringhurst is a book about typography...



RR: ...with a section on layout.



RR: Grid Systems by Josef Müller-Brockmann is a book about layout...

#### HELVETICA

abcdefghijklmnopqrs ßtuvwxyz ABCDEFGHIJKLMN **OPQRSTUVWXYZ** 1234567890

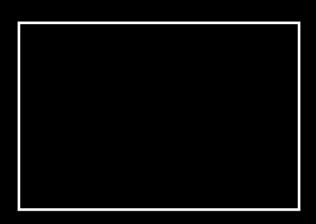
6- to 46-pt. It is now also on the market for film-settion

#### **UNIVERS**

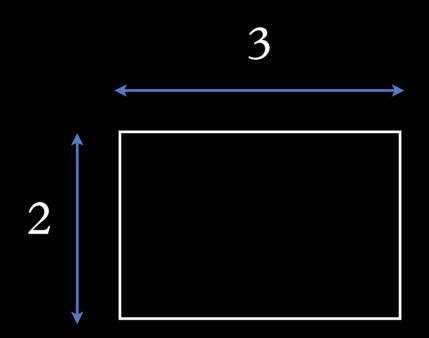
Typeface alphabets

abcdefghijklmnopqrs ßtuvwxyz ABCDEFGHIJKLMNO PORSTUVWXYZ 1234567890

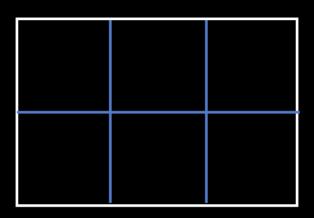
RR: ... with a section on typography. Clearly typography and layout are intrinsically linked.



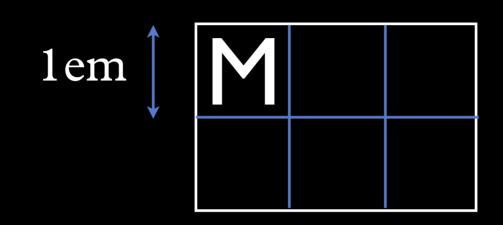
MB: So, what is the relationship between type and layout? Let's begin with the building block of a grid; the unit. This unit is based on a rational ratio of 2:3, which is loosely based on the Golden Section of 1:1.618.



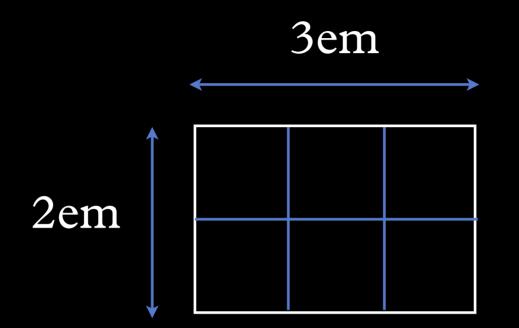




Broken down into six blocks.

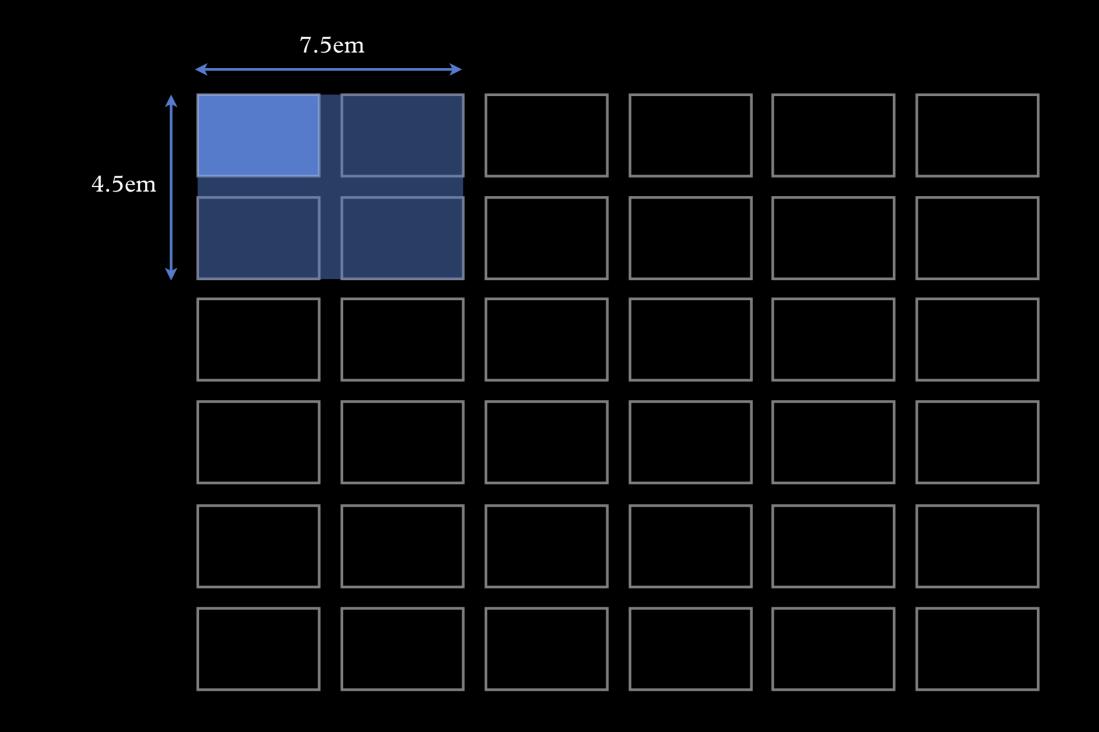


MB: Lets give it a relational measurement in terms of typography. So, one sixth of this unit is 1em in dimensions.

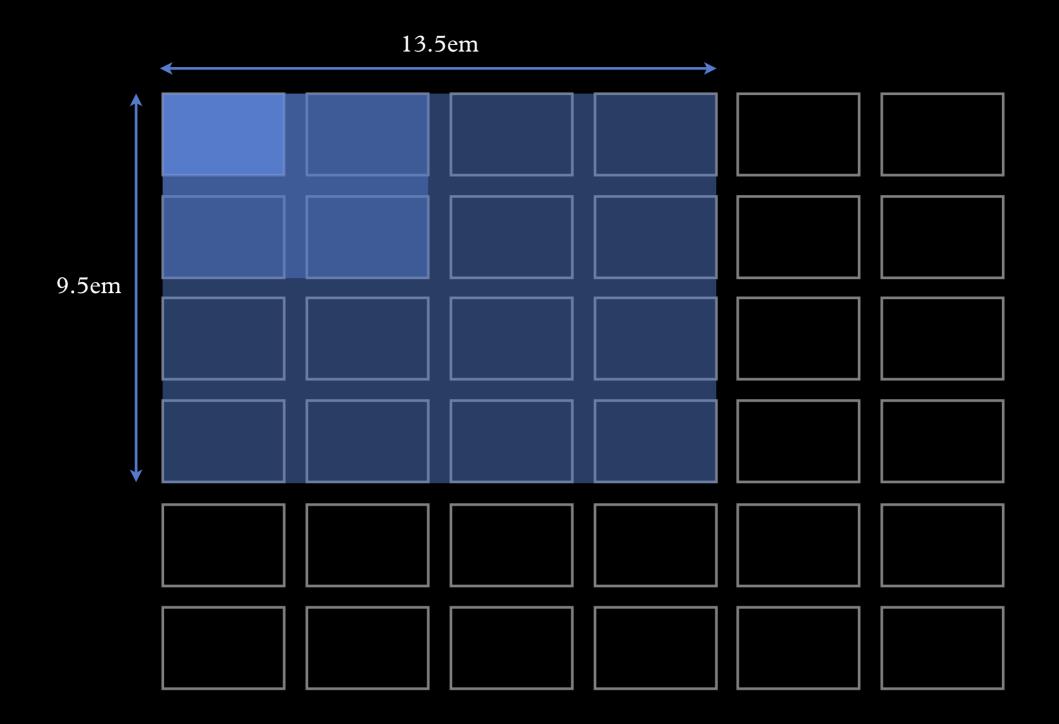




MB: We extrapolate out the units and add 0.5em gutters. The ratios are then retained through the grid.



When you combine units, you can retain the same 2:3 ratio.



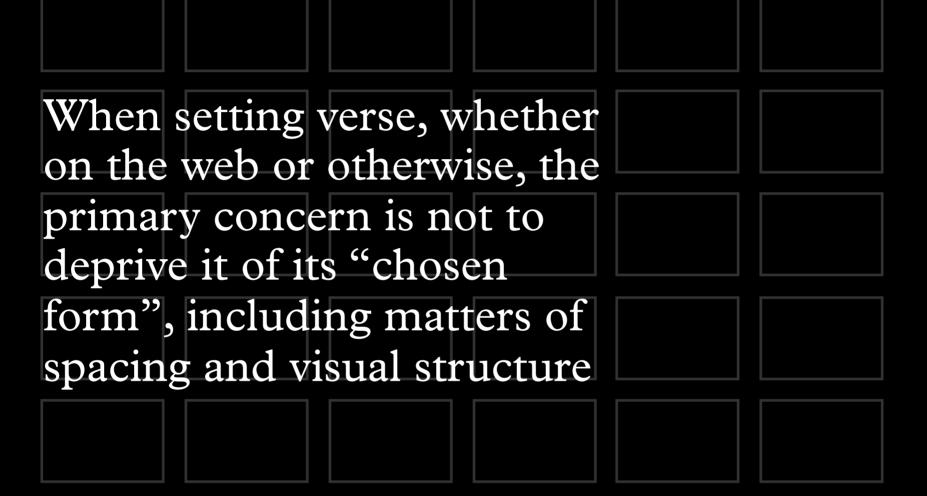
Let's make a simple grid structure.

#### Indent or center verse quotations

When setting verse, whether on the web or otherwise, the primary concern is not to deprive it of its "chosen form", including matters of spacing and visual structure

We add in some type over the grid. The type size is 1em. Therefore, there is a direct relationship between the type size and the placement of elements on the grid.

#### Indent or center verse quotations



As we take away the grid...

#### Indent or center verse quotations

When setting verse, whether on the web or otherwise, the primary concern is not to deprive it of its "chosen form", including matters of spacing and visual structure

The space that is left in between the elements of type are not decided upon arbitrarily. They are related to the unit, which is in turn related to the type size.

### body { font-family: verdana, arial, helvetica, sans-serif }

RR: The fonts that are installed on most people's machines are few, but actually well designed for display on the screen, so embrace them.

The standard font stack the comes out of Dreamweaver and just about all HTML & CSS editors is inappropriate.

#### Verdana The quick brown fox jumps over a lazy dog.

The quick brown fox jumps over a lazy dog. Arial

Verdana appears much larger than Arial, so Arial is not a suitable back-up for Verdana. Try Tahoma instead (or Candara which we'll mention shortly). If it's not suitable, don't specify it.

## Frutiger<br/>Univers0123abcdefigHJKI<br/>0123abcdefigHJKIHelvetica Neue<br/>Arial0123abcdefigHJKIm<br/>0123abcdefigHJKIm

## body { font-family: "Frutiger", "Univers", "Helvetica Neue", arial, helvetica, sans-serif; }

Why is Helvetica Neue before Arial which is before Helvetica? Because Helvetica Neue a standard install for OS X and it's hinting for digital display, particularly at smaller sizes, is much better than standard Helvetica.

#### Align corporate typefaces Align corporate typefaces

MB Aligning system fonts with branding fonts - Meta and Trebuchet

# Calibri0123abcdefigHJKlmnopQRStuCambria0123abcdefigHJKlmnopQRSCandara0123abcdefigHJKlmnopQRSConstantia0123abcdefigHJKlmnopQRSCorbel0123abcdefigHJKlmnopQRS

New Microsoft Typefaces shipping with Vista.

1																	2
H																	He
3	4											5	6	7	8	9	10
Li	Be											В	C	N	O	F	Ne
11	12											13	14	15	16	17	18
Na	Mg											Al	Si	P	S	Cl	Ar
19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36
K	Ca	Sc	Ti	V	Cr	Mn	Fe	Co	Ni	Cu	Zn	Ga	Ge	As	Se	Br	Kr
37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54
Rb	Sr	Y	Zr	Nb	Mo	Tc	Ru	Rh	Pd	Ag	Cd	Ln	Sn	Sb	Te	I	Xe
55	56	*	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86
Cs	Ba		Hf	Ta	W	Re	Os	Ir	Pt	Au	Hg	Tl	Pb	Bi	Po	At	Rn
87	88	**	104	105	106	107	108	109	110	111	112	113	114	115	116	117	118
Fr	Ra		Rf	Db	Sg	Bh	Hs	Mt	Ds	Rg	Uub	Uut	Uuq	Uup	Uuh	Uus	Uuo

RR

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Na	Mg											Al	Si	P	S	Cl	Ar
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K	Ca	Sc	Ti	V	Cr	Mn	Fe	Co	Ni	Cu	Zn	Ga	Ge	As	Se	Br	Kr
37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54
Rb	Sr	Y	Zr	Nb	Mo	Tc	Ru	Rh	Pd		Cd	Ln	Sn	Sb	Te	I	Xe
55	56	*	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86
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Fr	Ra		Rf	Db	Sg	Bh	Hs	Mt	Ds	Rg	Uub	Uut	Uuq	Uup	Uuh	Uus	Uuo



MB: so who does what? designer? developer? front-end? information architect? content?

#### It's all our fault.

#### Richard RutterClearleft.comMark BoultonMarkboultondesign.com

http://webtypography.net/sxsw2007/