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 /ˈtaɪpəɡrəfi/ 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 I wrote to OED and they agreed the definition is out of date and said the word is under review.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** /tɪˈpɒɡrəfi/ • 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.
MB: They have a specific purpose...
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.
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.
PRODI QUILTS AS PM

The mother of all betrayals

WIFE HAD 4 KIDS BY LOVER

Save £499 with our 5 year Fixed Rate Mortgage

5.89% 6.50% 6.4%

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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...
How do we accomplish these characters on the Web? This fantastic ALA article explains all.
RR: Here’s a brief summary of the characters and their HTML entities.

```
“ opening double quote   &#8220;
” closing double quote   &#8221;
‘ opening single quote   &#8216;
’ closing single quote   &#8217;
– en dash               &#8211;
— em dash               &#8212;
− minus                 &#8722;
× multiplication        &times;
… ellipsis             &#8230;
```
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:

RR: SmartyPants and Textile can help automate the procedure.
5.1.3 In heads and titles use the best available ampersand

*Elements of Typographic Style* by Robert Bringhurst
MB: Rotis sans. One of the worst ampersands available.
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 ➞

Recent Notebook Articles & QuickBits

⭐ 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.

I’ll first say congrats to Maxine, John, Dave and Derek for putting on what was an outstanding publication.

MB: Dan Cederholm’s SimpleBits applies the principle beautifully.
Hand-crafted pixels & text.
SimpleBits is a tiny web design studio founded by author Dan Cederholm. We create simple, readable websites balanced with a standards-based methodology.

RECENT NOTEBOOK ARTICLES & QUICKBITS

* Planet Microformats
A giant master feed of anything and everything tagged with microformats.
<h1>Hand-crafted pixels
<amp;text;</amp;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.
Aboard Minerva off the Coast of New England

Daniel is roused by a rooster on the forecastledeck† 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 and 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.

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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.
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.

body { font-size: 12px; }

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

line height: 18px ÷ 12px = 1.5em
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Text taken from Quicksilver by Neal Stephenson.
h1 { font-size: 1.5em; /* 18px */
line-height: 1em; /* 18px */
margin: 0 0 1em 0; }

Font size: \( \frac{18\text{px}}{12\text{px}} = 1.5\text{em} \)

Line height: \( \frac{18\text{px}}{18\text{px}} = 1\text{em} \)

Font size is desired size in pixels divided by the base size (or size of parent).
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Consider the side note. Smaller text at 10px, but still following the rhythm.
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.
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Text taken from Quicksilver by Neal Stephenson.
font size: \[ 14\text{px} \div 12\text{px} = 1.1667\text{em} \]
line height: \[ 18\text{px} \div 14\text{px} = 1.286\text{em} \]

top margin: \[ 27\text{px} \div 14\text{px} = 1.929\text{em} \]
bot margin: \[ 9\text{px} \div 14\text{px} = 0.643\text{em} \]

font sizes and line heights follow same maths. margins similarly: desired margin (1.5 times 18) divided by font size.
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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.
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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.
Grid systems
in graphic design
A visual communication manual
for graphic designers,
typographers and
three dimensional designers

Raster systeme
für die
visuelle Gestaltung
Ein Handbuch für
Grafiker, Typografen und
Ausstellungsgestalter

RR: Grid Systems by Josef Müller-Brockmann is a book about layout...
... 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.
MB: Ratio of 2:3
Broken down into six blocks.
MB: Let's 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

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.

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.
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.

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.

Arial
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

MB Aligning system fonts with branding fonts – Meta and Trebuchet
New Microsoft Typefaces shipping with Vista.
|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 1 | H |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 2 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 3 | Li | 4 | Be |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 4 | Na | 12 | Mg |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 5 | K | 20 | Ca | 21 | Sc | 22 | Ti | 23 | V | 24 | Cr | 25 | Mn | 26 | Fe | 27 | Co | 28 | Ni | 29 | Cu | 30 | Zn | 31 | Ga | 32 | Ge | 33 | As | 34 | Se | 35 | Br | 36 | Kr |   |   |
| 6 | Rb | 38 | Sr | 39 | Y | 40 | Zr | 41 | Nb | 42 | Mo | 43 | Tc | 44 | Ru | 45 | Rh | 46 | Pd | 47 | Ag | 48 | Cd | 49 | La | 50 | Sm | 51 | Eu | 52 | Gd | 53 | Tb | 54 | Dy |   |   |
| 7 | Cs | 56 | Ba |   |   | * | 72 | Hf | 73 | Ta | 74 | W | 75 | Re | 76 | Os | 77 | Ir | 78 | Pt | 79 | Au | 80 | Hg | 81 | Tl | 82 | Pb | 83 | Bi | 84 | Po | 85 | At | 86 | Rn |   |   |
| 8 | Fr | 88 | Ra |   |   | **| 104 | Rf | 105 | Db | 106 | Sg | 107 | Bh | 108 | Hs | 109 | Mt | 110 | Ds | 111 | Rg | 112 | Uub | 113 | Uut | 114 | Uuq | 115 | Uup | 116 | Uuh | 117 | Uus | 118 | Uuo |   |   |
It’s all our fault.