

## Basic Tips for a Professional-looking Document

Personal computers give us the tools to create documents with a wide variety of design capabilities, limited only by the software we choose, our proficiency with it, and our design sense and expertise. These guidelines can help get you on the right track.

### 1. Limit use of fonts.

A document with too many fonts (or typefaces) can look like a jumbled mess. Just because your computer comes with many fonts doesn't mean you should use them all—or even three or four—in one document. A standard guideline is to limit a document to two fonts, typically a *serif* font for the body copy and a *sans serif* font for the title and headings.

**Serif**—A short line or flourish that completes the strokes of a letter, like the horizontal lines on the top and bottom of a vertical stroke, e.g., F, L, M, P.

**Sans serif**—Literally, without a serif. This font has no horizontal lines on the vertical strokes, e.g., F, L, M, P.

### 2. White space is your friend.

A page that's visually crowded is difficult to read—and chances are it won't be read at all. Take a look at a magazine or brochure you like. Study the size of the margins, the display copy, the “air” around the graphics, even around headings. This is called *white space* and it gives your eye a rest on an otherwise busy page.

### 3. Use headings to aid the reader.

Another way to avoid visually crowding a page is to use headings to break up long, running text. Not only do they help the reader skim to get an idea of the overall content, they introduce periodic white space.

### 4. Use ragged right paragraphs.

Traditionally, published books used right justification. This means that the text on the right margin is aligned. This is easy to do with most word processors, but that doesn't mean you need to use it in your documents. Magazines and brochures increasingly use “ragged right,” where the text at the right margin is not aligned. Many find this easier when reading, and it gives a document a friendlier, less formal feel.

### 5. Use columns to enhance readability.

General belief is that a three-inch column of text is easier to read than if your eye must travel across the page for six inches. Depending on your document, consider using multiple columns. They don't necessarily need to be the same width. And the extra benefit is more white space!

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