

The design and production of this book was completed by Ngan Huynh in 2022.

Text from the book:
Digital Color and Type,
Rob Carter. Rotovision, 2002

Library of Congress: 200579540
ISBN-13-978-02364-01

19 Rules of Typography

“Some things never change, and in the typographic realm, principles upon which sound practice relies have remained essentially the same for centuries.”

– Rob Carter

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01

For optimum legibility, choose classical, time-tested typefaces.

These typefaces should be drawn and crafted with consistency among characters, and exhibit highly legible proportions.

Examples include: Baskerville, Bembo, Bodoni, Caslon, Centaur, Franklin Gothic, Frutiger, Futura, Garamond, Gill Sans, Goudy Old Style, Helvetica, News Gothic, Palatino, Perpetua, Sabon, Times New Roman, and Univers.

02

Be mindful not to use too many different typefaces at any one time.

The main reason for using more than one typeface is to create emphasis or to separate one part of the text from another.

When too many different typefaces are used, the reader is unable to determine what is and what is not important.

O 19 Rules of Typography explains how to work effectively on screen and in print by mastering the fundamental principles of traditional typography: type and color.

X 19 Rules of Typography explains how to work effectively on screen and in print by mastering the fundamental principles of traditional typography: type and color.

O 19 Rules of Typography explains how to work effectively on screen and in print by mastering the fundamental principles of traditional typography: type and color.

X 19 Rules of Typography explains **how to work effectively** on screen and in print by mastering the fundamental principles of traditional typography: type and color.

03

Avoid combining typefaces that are too similar in appearance.

If the reason for combining typefaces is to create emphasis, it is important to avoid the ambiguity caused by combining types that are too similar in appearance.

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04

Text set in all capital letters severely retards reading.

Use upper and lower case letter for optimum readability. Ascender and descenders provide the necessary visual cues to make text more readable.

Text set entirely in upper-case letters form monotonous, rectangular shapes. Upper-case letters can successfully be used in display type (headlines; type above 16 points).

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X 19 RULES OF TYPOGRAPHY EXPLAINS HOW TO WORK EFFECTIVELY ON SCREEN AND IN PRINT BY MASTERING THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF TRADITIONAL TYPOGRAPHY: TYPE AND COLOR.

RULE NUMBER

05

Use text sizes that, according to legibility studies, prove most readable.

These sizes generally range from 8 to 12 points for text that is read from an average distance of 12 inches to 14 inches.

Always remember that sizes (based on the x-height of letters) appear different from one typeface to another.

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RULE NUMBER

06

Avoid using too many different type sizes and weights at the same time.

Some experts recommend using no more than two sizes, one for display titles and one for text type.

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RULE NUMBER

07

Use text types of book weight.

Avoid typefaces appearing too heavy or too light. Text typefaces that are too light cannot easily be distinguished from their backgrounds.

In typefaces that are too heavy, counter forms diminish in size, making them less legible.

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RULE NUMBER

08

Use typefaces of medium width.

Avoid typefaces that appear extremely wide or narrow in width.

Rather than distorting text by stretching or squeezing the text width, use type families that include condensed and extended faces that fall within accepted proportional norms.

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09

Use consistent letter and word spacing for an even, uninterrupted texture.

Letters should flow gracefully and naturally into words, and words into lines.

This means that word spacing should increase proportionally as letter spacing increases.

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10

Use appropriate line lengths.

Lines that are too short or too long disrupt the reading process. As the eye travels along longer lines, negotiating the next line becomes difficult.

Reading overly short lines creates choppy eye movements that tire and annoy the reader. When working with text type, a maximum of about 70 characters (10 to 12 words) per line is thought to be most acceptable.

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RULE NUMBER

11

Use line spacing that easily carries the eye from one line to the next.

Lines of type with too little space between them slow the reading process; the eye is forced to take in several lines at one.

By adding one to four points of space between lines of type (depending on the specific typeface), readability can be improved.

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RULE NUMBER

12

For optimum readability, use a flush left, ragged right type alignment.

Although in special situations, other type alignments (flush right, ragged left; centered, and justified) are acceptable, the tradeoff is always a loss, however slight, in readability.

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13

Strive for consistent, rhythmic rags.

The purpose of effective rags is not only to achieve aesthetic beauty, but to enable readers to move gently and effortlessly down a text column.

Effective rags consist of lines establishing an informal but consistent pattern of line endings.

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14

Always try to clearly indicate paragraphs from each other.

Don't ruin the integrity and visual consistency of the text. The two most common ways of indicating paragraphs are by indenting and inserting additional space between paragraphs.

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15

Try to avoid widows and orphans whenever possible.

A widow is a word or very short line at either the beginning or end of a paragraph. An orphan is a single syllable at the end of a paragraph.

16

Emphasize elements within the text with discretion and without disturbing the flow of reading.

You can use italics, underlined type, color type, different typeface, small capitals, capitals, bold type within light type, light type within bold type, larger type, and outline type to emphasize elements but never overdo it. Use minimum means for maximum results.

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RULE NUMBER

17

Always maintain the integrity of type.

Avoid arbitrarily stretching letters. Well designed typefaces exhibit visual qualities that make them readable. Arbitrarily distorting them compromises their integrity.

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RULE NUMBER

18

Always align letters and words on the baseline.

Letters are designed to coexist side-by-side on an invisible baseline. “English is not Chinese!”

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19



When working with type and color, ensure that sufficient contrast exists between type and its background.

Too little contrast in hue, value or saturation, or a combination of these factors, can result in type that is difficult, if not impossible, to read. Be careful when using photos or texture behind text.

Remember, rules must first be understood before they can be broken.

Once you have a good foundation of these rules, you can freely journey into unconventional terrain.

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ABOUT THE BOOK

19 Rules of Typography explains how to work effectively on screen and in print by mastering the fundamental principles of traditional typography: type and color.

The book opens with a thorough examination of the basics of type and traditional typographic rules. It then explores how those rules can be broken to achieve new and innovative design.

A wide variety of fully illustrated academic case studies reveal the rationale behind the work profiled. This is a useful reference book that provides graphic designers with a fresh set of possibilities for screen work.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rob Carter teaches typography and visual communication at Virginia Commonwealth University.

His design work has been exhibited at the American Institute of Graphic Arts, New York Directors' Club, the Society of Typographic Arts and elsewhere.

He is the author of *American Typography Today*, and co-author of *Typographic Specimens: The Great Typefaces*, and the classic *Typographic Design: Form and Communication*.

