

Justified Type

WE'VE ALL SEEN NEWSPAPERS, books, magazine articles and ads which use justified type; that is, type that is flush on both the left and right margins. Used well, justified type can look clean and classy. When it's carelessly set, however, justified type can make your text look distorted and hard to read. Proper justification is tricky to master, but it's well worth the effort if high quality, professional-looking typography is your goal.

When type is justified, space is inserted between words and letters to expand a short line so that both margins align; conversely, in longer lines the space between words and characters is reduced to make them fit the margins. Most page layout applications have settings that

will actually compress or expand the individual characters; don't use these settings to justify text! This is the ultimate typographic taboo.

Too much additional space can create gaping holes between words, as well as rivers of white space flowing down your text. Too much compression makes type look cramped and squished, especially when compared to adjacent,

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(far left) Justification without fine-tuning can result in gaping holes, loosely spaced lines and rivers of white space, as seen in this excerpt from Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*, set in 15/18 Clarendon.

(left) Most of the problems are corrected by reducing the type to 14 point and widening the column a fraction. However, these changes resulted in three hyphenations in a row towards the bottom of the paragraph, which is still undesirable.

generously spaced lines. All this manipulation can severely degrade the color, texture and readability of your type.

With so many potential pitfalls, the wise designer will refrain from using justified type unless there's a compelling reason to do so, and only when he or she has the time and flexibility to fine-tune the text.

Here are some tips for smooth, readable justification:

- The more words that fit on a line, the fewer problems you'll have. Achieve this by making the line length a bit longer, or by reducing the point size of your type, even if only by a fraction.
- If necessary, edit the text itself to fix lines that are too open or too tight. Try to reduce the number of lines with hyphenated endings, particularly if there are more than two in a row. It's always possible to substitute short words for longer ones or trim convoluted sentences—your copywriter may welcome the chance to improve the writing, as well as the design!
- Become familiar with your software's hyphenation and justification (H&J) settings. You can usually adjust the word and character spacing parameters, as well as hyphenation preferences. ■

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The triple hyphenations disappear when the column is widened just a bit more. It looks pretty good...

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...but not as good, typographically, as the same copy set flush left. Here the word spacing and letterspacing are consistent, resulting in perfectly even color and texture. Always ask yourself: is it really necessary to justify the text?