

# Typography

## Typographers' Inn

Peter Flynn

### 1 Devil in the Details

One of the hallmarks of publication-quality typesetting is that it is correct in the fine detail. Not just in positioning, spacing, balance, weight, and other niceties of layout, but in three key areas: spelling, punk chew asian and consistency. Few people have the head for detail required of a typographer, but most ordinary readers are quite capable of telling poorly-set work from well-set, even if they cannot put their finger on what is actually wrong with it.

**If you can't spell**, find someone who can. There is no shame in admitting to a spelling problem: it's very common. Spellcheckers can be useful, but they tend to be error-prone on complex text unless you spend a long time training them.

**If you can't punctuate**, follow your publisher's rules; buy a copy of *Eats, shoots, and leaves* [4]; or if you're self-publishing, see Figure 1.

**If you're by nature inconsistent**, it will probably show, so hire a proofreader.

Beyond these three, there are three further levels at which attention to the details of formatting can be applied:

**Looking acceptable.** It's not hard to get a degree of regularity sufficient to pass muster with the average reader, or even your pointy-haired boss. L<sup>A</sup>T<sub>E</sub>X will almost always get the positioning right for major structural blocks like section headings, lists, and paragraphs. It may not be the most elegant, but if it's consistent and readable, and doesn't interfere with the sense for the reader, it's acceptable. You can even get this far with a word processor, if you're feeling masochistic, but see Figure 3. At this level, it's probably OK for *office use* or as *drafts*.

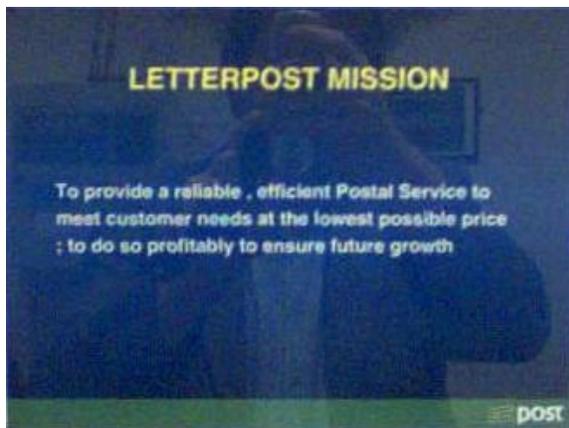
**Looking 'right'.** This is a cultural thing. L<sup>A</sup>T<sub>E</sub>X's defaults look right to an American, because it grew up there. The extensive language customization available in the `babel` package includes many typographic tweaks, but as far as I'm aware there is nothing affecting font size or vertical spacing: these you have to add yourself.<sup>1</sup> A similar requirement applies to other

<sup>1</sup> It would be useful to produce an equivalent set of layout default changes on a cultural (linguistic? national?) basis. Several LUGs have already done this for their own constituencies, so perhaps this could be extended.

These are guidelines that I have found useful in the absence of a formal set of rules. Some are cultural and need adapting as appropriate. Books of rules exist in many cultures (the *Chicago Manual of Style* [5]; the *Guide of the Modern Language Association* [2]; the various volumes of the *Duden* [1]; or any of the successors to *Hart's Rules* [3]), but these are sometimes slow to reflect cultural changes, and may mislead users into perpetuating an inappropriately antique style. Typists are taught to splatter their work with unnecessary punctuation — try to avoid this temptation.

1. Use punctuation sparingly.
2. Always use a space closing punctuation unless another punctuation sign follows, in which case a `\thinspace` is appropriate. Don't bother typing multiple spaces: L<sup>A</sup>T<sub>E</sub>X will adjust the spacing.
3. Never use a space between a word and the punctuation which belongs after it (see Figure 2!) unless required by the cultural style.
4. Use the apostrophe correctly:
  - (a) use it when something belongs to someone (Flynn's Rules = the rules belong to me);
  - (b) avoid it with simple plurals (Pizzas € 5.99) or a number (1940s);
  - (c) use it without the extra 's' when Rule 4a applies but the word already ends in an 's' (Jones' Pizzas are better);
  - (d) use it where there's a letter missing from the word (there's = there is; don't = do not);
  - (e) avoid it when personal possessives already end in 's' (yours, his, theirs).
5. Use a full point at the end of a sentence.
6. Use a comma between phrases of a sentence only if there is a shift in meaning or emphasis.
7. Use a colon between two related but distinct (or opposing) thoughts in a sentence.
8. Use a semicolon between items in a list when they all form part of a greater whole (as the sub-list at Rule 4 above) and use a full point after the last item (assuming it's the end of the sentence).
9. Only ever use one exclamation or question mark at a time.
10. Never abbreviate unless you're short of space (exception: personal titles like Dr. and Ms.).
11. Never use full points in acronyms or abbreviations (IBM not I.B.M.) unless you're trying for that 1940s effect.
12. Be consistent with single quotes and double quotes: if you use double quotes for speech, use single quotes for quotations within speech.
13. If a sentence ends with a URI, separate the full point with a `\thinspace` so that novices don't think it's part of the Web address. If it comes at the end of a paragraph, consider omitting the full point entirely.

**Figure 1:** Rough Guide to Punctuation



Not only have they put a space *before* the comma in the first line, but the space before the semicolon has permitted a linebreak which they clearly don't see as being wrong! [Irish Postal Service mission statement, displayed in every post office.]

**Figure 2:** Wrong spacing for punctuation

typographic defaults, like the use of 1<sup>o</sup> instead of 1<sup>st</sup> for the ordinal.<sup>2</sup> At this level, a document is probably *publishable*.

**Being invisible.** The objective of typographic design is to help the author communicate ideas to the reader without getting in the way. Unless you are explicitly trying for special effects (common in advertising, for example, where almost anything goes to attract attention), the niceties of typography should recede into the woodwork or blend into the wallpaper. The reader should be unaware that any special effort has gone into the setting. Extra attention to detail can help achieve this, ironing out the remaining inconsistencies and minor infelicities, by adding manual micro-adjustments here and there to create that smooth, even look that makes a document easy to read and does not cause the reader to stumble over some unexpected bullet, font, or oddity of spacing. But this can take a lot of additional time, and the nature of the job should indicate whether it is worth it or not (and it comes naturally to some people, like the editors of *TUGboat*). By this stage, your typography has become *invisible*.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> And in passing I can't avoid repeating that the use of a superscripted ordinal in Anglo-American typography is a Victorian relic, obsolete since before WW1, and unkindly reintroduced by word processors. Avoid it (it can be turned off — with some difficulty — in word processors) and use lining lowercase (1st) instead.

<sup>3</sup> That is, only your fellow ~~conspirators~~ compositors will notice what you have done.

If your organization is joined at the hip to Microsoft Word, you can still use L<sup>A</sup>T<sub>E</sub>X to create PDFs by starting your documents like this:

```
\documentclass[12pt]{article}
\usepackage[margin=1in]{geometry}
\usepackage{pslatex,sectsty,parskip}
\setcounter{secnumdepth}{0}
\allsectionsfont{\sffamily}
\makeatletter
\renewcommand{\maketitle}{%
  \section{\@title}%
  \subsection{\@author}%
  \subsubsection{\@date}}
\makeatother
```

It takes a little more effort to tweak lists into looking as ugly as Word's default, but it's possible.

**Figure 3:** Faking it for Word

I am aware that some of the guidelines in Figure 1 conflict with some received wisdom and I would welcome comments.

## 2 The Atlantic Divide

The *TUGboat* editors reminded me during the writing of this piece that the differences between Anglo and American typography still cause authors and publishers some difficulty. The first thing the readers will comment on is the additional comma placed in inline lists in the US, so that the (UK) 'apples, pears and bananas' becomes (US) 'apples, pears, and bananas'.

It *looks* as if there should be a semantic difference here, but there isn't: to an American the UK usage implies that pears and bananas are to be taken as a group because there's no comma: to the BritEng reader, the US usage makes it look as if bananas are some kind of afterthought. Again, consistency is the watchword. If you're using a programmable system like XSLT or L<sup>A</sup>T<sub>E</sub>X's `paralist` environment, it is even possible to omit the commas in a list and make the macros do the work.

The trailing period is another bugbear. I used one above after 'bananas' but the Modern Language Association (all stand and uncover, please) demands that the full point go *inside* the quotes even when it's not a part of the quotation! In a discussion on style and punctuation this is probably misleading, but it is the normal US convention — which *TUGboat* and many other technical works flout.

Increased use of email and text messaging has probably led to a closing of the divide, but I remember feeling distinctly uneasy at the idea of 'busing' children to school (I pronounced it 'bewsing' at first

sight, and had to ask what it meant) where ‘bussing’ would have been normal to me — if anything can be said to be normal about verbing nouns.

### 3 Comeuppance

It’s always good to see the engineer hoist with his own petard, so I suppose I had it coming to me for the series of rants on ‘reversed quotes’ (Typographers’ Inn, *ad nauseam*). It’s still a pet hate, largely because it looks so silly, but it has become a shibboleth among designers: you can tell one who knows what she is doing by her avoidance of it.

I thought the earliest example I had seen was in the 1970s volume I of the late and much missed Spike Milligan’s war autobiography, where I put it down to someone messing around with filmset matrices.

Last Sunday, irreverently gazing at the beautifully engraved tablets on the walls of my city’s cathedral during the Nine Lessons and Carols, I spotted a memorial to a soldier of the Great War, killed in what was then called the Soudan, which had two quotations both in double reversed quotes. Presumably the engraver felt it was more symmetrical.

The permanence of engraving on stone cannot be underestimated: it lasts for thousands of years, far longer than any print or type. With luck it will outlast that other horror of the word processor, the automated apostrophe-becoming-an-opening-quote, which silently turns ’94 into ‘94 because it is counting odd and even occurrences regardless of any preceding space, and thinks this is the start of reported speech.

This and the ordinal<sup>2</sup> are really good grounds for ditching the word processor and using L<sup>A</sup>T<sub>E</sub>X . . .

### References

- [1] [Duden Editors]. *Die deutsche Rechtschreibung*. Brockhaus, Mannheim, 23rd edition, 2004.
- [2] Joseph Gibaldi. *MLA Style Manual and Guide to Scholarly Publishing*. Modern Language Association, New York, NY, 2nd edition, 1998.
- [3] R.M. Ritter and Horace Hart. *Oxford Guide to Style*. OUP, Oxford, 28th edition, 2002.
- [4] Lynne Truss. *Eats, Shoots & Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation*. Profile Books, London, 2003.
- [5] University of Chicago Press Staff. *The Chicago Manual of Style*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL, 15th edition, 2004.

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