



Designing your document

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Language and design work together to make your document easy to read, and easy to use. Good design acts as a map for your reader. It signposts important material and makes information easier to find.

Good design will:

- encourage people to read your document
- improve understanding
- save time

Good design is not complicated. You should think about design for all your documents - including letters. Make your document more reader friendly by following these guidelines:

Before you start

Think about the design of your document while you are writing it - not afterwards. This will help organise and impose a structure on the document. Use headings to arrange information into logical and easily digestible parts.

Typeface

- use a typeface that fits your purpose and is easy to read
- use one or two typefaces only and avoid ornate styles
- use a serif typeface for the main text of your document. Serif typefaces have small extensions (serif) at the top and bottom of each letter.
- use a sans serif typeface for emphasis and in headings.

Typesize

- make the main text between 10 and 12 points, depending on the style of typeface. Type that is very small is difficult to read, particularly for people with poor eyesight, older people, or younger people.

Length of lines

- make sure that the length of each line is between 50 and 70 characters wide - that's up to 8.5cm across. Short lines break continuity and very long lines cause the eye to wander.

Spacing between lines (leading)

- don't push words up close together or spread them too far apart as they become too hard to read.

Upper and lower case (capitals and small letters)

- use lower case. When we read, we recognise words by their overall shape, rather than by individual letters. Lower case text is easier to read because words form distinct shapes that are easy to recognise. Avoid using only upper case text as it makes identifying words difficult.

Justification (alignment)

- set text and headings against the left margin (flush left). This maintains equal space between words and letters, is easier to read, and means important headings run sequentially down the left-hand side of the page. Text set against both the left and right margins (justified), can produce uneven spaces between words, which break continuity and makes text hard to follow. Do not set text against the right margin (flush right).





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Colour

- use black type on a light background as it is easier to read
- use colour to emphasise parts of your document or add appeal, but make sure it does not overwhelm the text.

White space (space without printing)

- use white space to make your document look less crowded
- use white space to show the beginning or end of a section, and to emphasise important information.

Highlighting information

- use bold and italic to highlight - but use them sparingly
- avoid underlining and avoid using capitals.

Other keys to find information

- use headings to identify each section of your document - and show the relative importance of headings by size and style
- use a table of contents, as an index for longer documents
- use running headers/footers that show names of sections and page numbers
- use a running system that is clear and easy to follow.

Be consistent!

Decide on the style of your document - and stick to those decisions. Documents that are inconsistent in their use of design appear confusing and uninviting.

