

Body Type

Most of your newspaper consists of body type, yet few people give it much thought. I believe, however, that you need to spend quite a bit of time and effort in making it a pleasant, highly readable face that is large enough to read easily (especially for your older readers), yet doesn't cut into your shrinking newshole.

This handout accompanies the video on body type.

1. The best body type has a relatively large *x-height*, or the height of a lower case letter, not counting ascenders or descenders. They also tend to not have real thin strokes, as they disappear on newsprint. Nimrod is a good example of an effective body type:

aæbcdðeffiflghijklmnn
oœøþqrsßtuvwxyz

Note the large x-height and small ascenders and descenders.

2. Body type that is slightly condensed is easier to read than standard-width or wide typefaces. I recommend something around 95-96%, depending on the particular typeface.
3. Readability also depends on line width. As always, the answer to "What is the best width?" question is: It depends. The rule of thumb is about 150% of the point size, in picas, e.g., the target for 10-point type would be 15 picas, which I believe is at the wider side of the range. Another guideline is 1.5 times the width of the lower case alphabet (a through z). If you go too narrow, especially if you are using *justified* columns, you will have bad line breaks with rivers of white space (see video); if you go too wide, it slows reading by making it hard on the readers' eyes to find the next line after reading a line of type.
4. Linespacing is a decision based in part on the typeface (larger x-height faces require more linespacing because their ascenders and descenders are relatively short) and partly on line width (the wider the line, the more linespacing is needed). Much testing is needed to find the optimum combination.
5. Body type simulates a shade of gray on your page; in essence it represents a 10-20% gray tint block. After you have selected your body type, pick a headline face to contrast properly with your body type. Here's how you choose:

Choose a typeface that gives you an optimum amount of contrast with the body type, which creates sort of a background of gray on your pages. If you have a fairly light typeface, you should not create too much contrast by using Arial

Black, for instance, as a headline face. You could, however, use it with a darker body type because you would need a dark headline to balance it. Your standing headline typeface, which should be very different from your headlines, can then be selected.

BOTTOM LINE: Select and adjust for readability; pick headline for optimum contrast. Select standing heads that are very different. The “guideposts” need to stand out from the territory.

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