

# A Newsletter Primer

An introduction to the art of making a newsletter

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Newsletters come in so many shapes and sizes that it's hard to decide the best way to lay one out. This document is intended to give you the basics while you make these early decisions.

## Newsletter Parts

**Body.** This is the main text of the articles—the main text of your newsletter. Because serif fonts are easier to read in print, Times New Roman, Garamond, or Palatino are typical body fonts. (For on-screen applications such as web pages, sans-serif is a better choice for the body.)

**Bleed.** When printing on the page goes all the way to the edge, it is called a bleed.

**Caption.** The descriptive text beneath a table or figure.

**Display.** Text in your masthead and in heads is called display text. Use sans-serif heads if your body font is serif. Examples of sans-serif fonts are Arial and Helvetica.

Too many drop-caps on a page are distracting and may look unprofessional.

**Folio.** A fancy word print shops use that means *page number*.

**Grid.** A grid is the basic design of the publication. See “On the Grid” for more information.

**Gutter.** The white space between pages in the spread. Also refers to the space between columns.

**Heads.** Used to break a newsletter into articles, or to break an article into sections. Also called headings, headlines, and subheads.

**Justified.** Justified text is aligned to the left and right, so both margins are straight. When using justified alignment, be sure to watch for odd spacing and add hyphenation where necessary.

**Masthead.** In a newspaper or a newsletter, this is the title of your publication. Consider the design and type of a masthead carefully, as it has significant influence on the overall image of the newsletter.

**Ragged-right.** This is aligning text to the left, allowing the right margin to be “ragged.”

**Rule.** A line added to the page, such as between columns, above a figure, or around a box.

**Serif.** Serif fonts are those that have little flourishes, and sans-serif fonts are those without. This text is Times New Roman—a serif font. The heads used in this document are Arial—a sans-serif font. (See “Fonts & Type Matters” for more information.)

**Sidebar.** A small area, often shaded or with a rule around it to set it apart, with additional information to complement an article.



Figure 1. A typical newsletter.

The Marketing Voice newsletter from the Oregon chapter of the AMA (<http://www.ama-pdx.org/>)

**Call-out.** This is when you copy a quote from within the body, increase it and set it off in an eye-catching way. This term also refers to labeling parts of an illustration. (Also called a *pull-quote*.)

**Drop-cap.** A drop-cap is the enlarged first character of a word at the beginning of an article that is extended over several lines. Capitalize the rest of the word, and maybe even the next two or three words.

**Spread.** The inside facing pages in a newsletter, book, or magazine.

**Tagline.** Subtext that may optionally go with the masthead, usually to describe affiliation or the purpose of the publication.

**White space.** Leave room between items on your page to create blank areas—or white space—in your document. This improves readability and makes your overall document look less crowded, more appealing and professional.

## Newsletter Size

The standard office newsletter is printed with “letter size” pages—that’s 8½ x 11 inches. It’s best to have your print shop copy the pages onto “tabloid” size paper (that’s 11 x 17 inches), then fold it to the desired size.

Using the tabloid-sized paper means that the number of pages in your newsletter will always be equally divisible by 4.

Another option is to have your newsletter copied onto 11 x 25½ inch paper, then folded into thirds. This will allow you to have a news-

letter with a number of pages divisible by 3. But not as many print shops are equipped to copy to paper of that size, so even though you’d use less paper, this might be a more expensive option.

## About Paper

When printing the originals to use for copying, use the brightest white, most opaque, and smoothest paper you can find. This will produce the crispest, cleanest original.

For the finished newsletter, good quality paper can make a big difference without adding much to the overall cost. Look for a paper that is opaque and is a little thicker than standard copy paper.

If you will have photos of people in the document, use white or cream-colored paper, not blues or greens.

## Fonts & Type Matters

**Rule #1.** Be consistent! When you decide what typeface to use for a head, use that typeface for all heads in this and future issues of the newsletter. Document all your decisions about type, layout, placement, and

editing in your style guide to ensure consistency.

**Rule #2.** Limit yourself to no more than three typefaces in your entire newsletter. The mark of an amateur is using lots of different typefaces. You’ll find many good newsletters that use only two or even just one.

The typefaces (fonts) you choose are very important. You should match the typeface to the message, such as a traditional face for a professional document or a fancy calligraphic face for a wedding announcement.

When selecting a font for the body of your newsletter, pay attention to its weight: does it look crowded, dark, or heavy? Or does it look open and light?

**Serifs:** These fonts are excellent for body text in printed pieces:

- Times New Roman
- Garamond
- Century Schoolbook

**Sans-serifs:** These fonts are good for heads, for call-outs in figures, and for tables:

- Arial
- Eras
- Franklin Gothic

**Designed for screen:** These fonts were designed specifically to look good on a computer screen:

- Verdana
- Georgia
- Tahoma

## Editing

Laying out a newsletter is more than placing pictures and text in a pleasing manner. The most overlooked function when creating a newsletter is the careful editing that is required in order to achieve a quality publication. Editing includes verifying that all the information is accurate, is spelled correctly, is grammatically correct, and conforms to your house style guide.

*Ahoy! Come Dine on a Pirate Ship*

Blackadder ITC, 24 pt.

Kid’s Clothes at Kid’s Prices

Tempus Sans ITC, 20 pt.

Try Our Aromatherapy & Massage Package

Bergell LET, 20 pt.

Give the Gift of Diamonds

Copperplate Gothic, 22 pt.

*Pina Colada Specials!*

Jokerman, 22 pt.

Figure 2. Match the typeface to the message.

Buy a recognized style manual and use it as your editing bible—especially if you are editing work contributed by other authors. My style manual is the *Chicago Manual of Style, 14<sup>th</sup> Edition*.

Following are a few of the common mistakes to look for when editing.

**Spelling.** I know this seems obvious, but you'd be surprised how many people neglect to use their spell-checker. But beyond the obvious, look for the variants which many spellcheckers will miss. These include words spelled to British standards (such as *colour*) and homonyms (*there/their*).

**Underlines.** Never underline except optionally in email and website addresses or for type effect in heads. Underlining for emphasis went out with the typewriter!

**Italics.** Use italics for publication titles, foreign words, the first occurrence of a special term, and sparingly for emphasis. Special note: The title of a magazine is italicized; the title of an article in that magazine is set in quotation marks.

**Improper emphasis.** Italicize sparingly for emphasis. Never use all-caps, quotes, or underline for emphasis.

**Dashes.** There are three types of dashes each with a different length: the hyphen, en-dash, and em-dash.

- Use the hyphen to form compound words and to interrupt a word on a line and continue it on the following line. (“The butter-eating contest will be fun.”)
- To show a continuation of numbers (such as 23–28), use an en-dash. (“The contest will be held March 5–7.”)
- Use the em-dash to set off interrupting clauses in a sentence—such as the dash used here. (“I want to go—even though I hate butter.”)

For each kind of dash, do not put a space before or after it

**Ellipses.** The ellipsis is a series of three dots to show the trailing off of a thought or that a word is missing. This series always has exactly three dots with no spaces. If it ends a sentence, add the period.

**Quotes and apostrophes.** Use the typographic quotes and apostrophes (“”, ‘ ’) not the straight marks shown on the keyboard key (“ ”, ‘ ’). The only time you should use the straight marks is in some mathematical formulas, or when specifying degrees, minutes, and seconds.

## Photos & Graphics

Keep in mind how your publication will be output. If you know that it's going to be printed on a nice color printer and color-copied by a reputable print shop, then go for color photos. But if it's going to be copied on the office copier, make sure that you choose photos and graphics that will look good in black and white without looking “muddy.”

**Photographs.** Blurry or under-contrast photos and childish clipart are worse than no images at all.

Edit your photos using photo-editing software to improve contrast, crop, and size them before inserting them into your newsletter.

It is important when preparing photos for a newsletter to consider the size of the file. In general, the higher the quality of the photo, the larger the file size will be. At its simplest, the quality of a photo can be measured in resolution. So a 1200-dpi (dots per inch) photo would be a much larger file than a 300-dpi photo.

However when you print a 1200-dpi image on a 600-dpi printer, it looks no better than a 600-dpi image. Often, due to the print technology, paper, and the image size, a 300-dpi image will look fine.

For a large image destined for a glossy, high-resolution magazine cover you want a 2400-dpi image;

but for an office newsletter, storing an image at 300-dpi—and sometimes even 150-dpi—is fine.

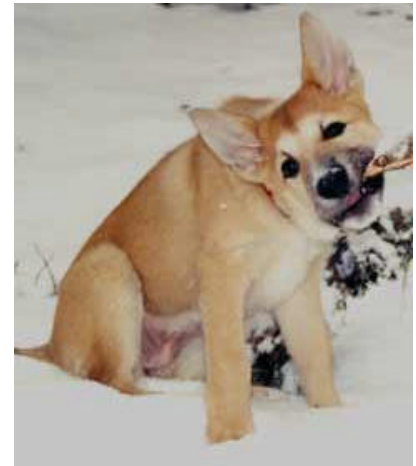


Figure 3. Photo editing.

An action as simple as increasing the brightness and contrast can make a huge difference in the quality of a photo.

**Importing graphics.** Especially when you're in a hurry, you may be tempted to edit a photo in your photo-editing software, then just copy it and paste it into your newsletter. Resist the temptation! The file will have no compression and will significantly increase the size of your newsletter file.

Instead, save the file then import it into your newsletter. Choosing a file type to save it to depends on what your DTP (desktop publishing) program can import and also the

quality of the output you will use. For an office newsletter—assuming your DTP program can accept it—use the JPG format (pronounced “jay-peg”). This format gives you a lot of control over compression—the more you compress, the smaller the file will be.

Experiment in your photo-editing program to see what level of compression is just enough to reduce the file size without reducing the quality of your photo.

**Photo editing.** Beyond cropping, resizing, and adjusting the brightness and contrast, add visual appeal to your photos by stripping the subject out of the background and adding a drop-shadow. (See figure 1 on page 1 for an example.)

**Clipart.** If you use clipart, keep a consistent style throughout the document. Cartoon-clipart is very unprofessional and should be avoided.

Clipart is easy to come by. You can buy books of it to scan yourself at almost any bookstore or online at <http://www.doverpublications.com> (where you can also buy George W. Bush paper dolls).

Your graphics or desktop publishing software may have come with clipart, or you can buy prepared clipart on discs that are usually sorted into categories. You can also find free clipart on the Internet, such as at <http://dgl.microsoft.com>.

Finally, there are many fonts that are made up of miniature graphics. A popular example of this type of graphic font is “Wingdings.” These fonts are a great source of decorative items that you can use in your newsletter.

## Style Guide

A style guide is a document that lists the conventions adopted by your company to ensure consistency between documents. Some companies have a corporate communications person who may already have compiled a company style guide. If not, check with your marketing department or the marketing communications person.

Remember that a style guide prepared by corporate or marketing usually only governs documents that are intended for an audience *outside* the company. For an in-house document, such as a department newsletter, it is not as important that you conform to established corporate style. If a style guide exists, discuss your design with the corporate or marketing communications person.

It is important that you create a style guide for your newsletter. Make sure you keep the guide current and apply it to every issue of your newsletter to ensure that your publication is professional and consistent.

The style guide will also protect your newsletter in the event that

you’re suddenly unavailable to work on it. Ask yourself: Is there enough information in my style guide that somebody else could put together my newsletter?

The style guide documents the following information:

**Type.** Typeface, style, size, and spacing for each element such as the body, all levels of heads, masthead, captions, etc.

**Grid.** The overall layout of the document and the rules for using it. See “On the Grid” for more information.

**Words.** Lists of names of departments, positions, companies, and other words you will encounter that might not be found in a standard dictionary. Include how to spell, capitalize, and abbreviate the words. Also list rules about word selection such as *ensure/assure/insure*, use of the ampersand, *i.e.*, *e.g.*, etc.

**Flexible grammar.** To ensure consistency, list your standards for flexible grammar rules, such as that of the “series comma.” [My suggestion: in a series of three or more words, always insert a comma before the conjunction.]

**Printing and finishing.** Describe how the newsletter is printed, including specifying stock and finishing instructions.

**Other.** Add every decision you make to the document to ensure that the next time you have to think about it, you’ll make the same decision again.

## DTP 101

Desktop publishing (DTP) can be complicated. Whether you use Word, Publisher, PageMaker, or Quark—the most important thing you can do is to go beyond merely learning your DTP program, and to master it. Read books about the program, and more importantly, experiment!

Here are a few of the very basic rules when learning about desktop publishing:

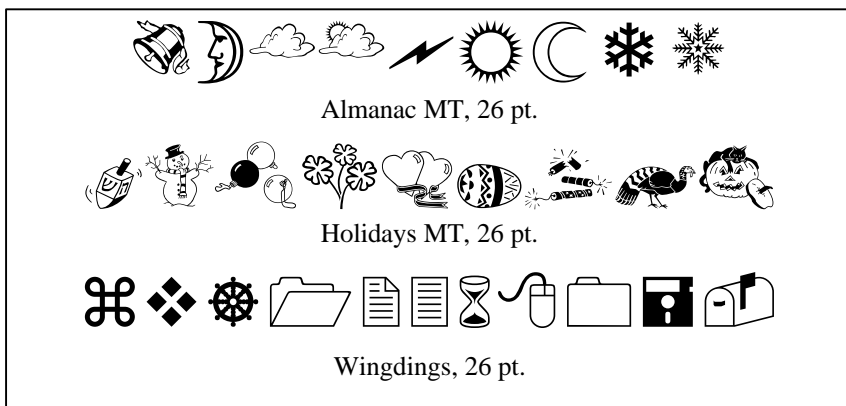


Figure 4. Symbol fonts..

**Saving.** Save your work often. Not only is this wise in case of an unexpected loss of power, you may find that you need to “undo” a series of mishaps by abandoning the file (closing it without saving) and going back to your last-saved version. In general: every time you complete a complicated task—save the file.

**Hard return.** Only press the return key (hard-return) at the end of a paragraph, not at the end of each line. If you want to add extra spacing between paragraphs, use the DTP program’s paragraph-spacing feature. Don’t add extra hard-returns between paragraphs.

**Indents.** Don’t use a set of spaces to indent text—use the tab key.

**Space.** There is only one space between sentences—never two. The old-days of typewriters needed the extra space, but computers don’t. Also, do not place spaces before or after a dash or within an ellipsis.

**Hyphenation.** Most DTP programs have a feature called “soft hyphens” that allows you to specify where to hyphenate a word *if needed*. By using soft-hyphens rather than just using the hyphen key on the keyboard, the hyphen will only appear if needed, and will disappear if text-reflow makes it unnecessary.

**Wrapping.** The way your text flows around graphics is called wrapping. If your DTP program will allow it, a visually interesting effect is to wrap text closely around the contours of a photo subject that has been stripped out of its background.

**Styles.** One feature of DTP that often eludes the beginner is “styles.” Of all the new features you are learning, this is one of the most important for you to understand and to use. Styles are like formatting-templates for part of your newsletter. By defining all the text formatting in styles, you give yourself the ability to very quickly and easily make changes to the entire document.

## On the Grid

Virtually all good publishing design—books, newspapers, magazines, brochures, newsletters, etc.—is done using a grid system.

A grid describes how many columns are on a page, how to position text on the page, and how to add photos, figures, and call-outs within the columns. When you take the time to design a grid that is thorough and flexible, you guarantee a consistent newsletter design. The grid includes an actual grid sketch and information on how to use it, such as what

items are allowed to span columns.

The larger and more formal the project is, the more complex the design of the grid needs to be.

For an office newsletter, the grid can be fairly simple. It needs to specify the number of columns, how low on the first page the masthead will go, and the position of the page number.

For example, the grid for this document consists of little more than three columns, with a 2-inch drop on the first page for the masthead. For a grid this simple—and since this is not going to be a recurring document—I did not document the grid.

If you would like to allow for figures, photos, or call-outs to span across partial columns, then consider laying out extra columns on your grid (see figure 5 below).

Designers have found that the ideal column length allows for about thirty characters in a line of body text—but this is not a hard-and-fast rule.

## Print Shops

When your newsletter is laid out and you’re ready to print it out, what you do next will depend largely on the arrangements you’ve made with the print shop. Either you’ll print out crisp originals which they will



Figure 5. Grids.

The left image shows a 5-column grid. The center image shows text placed using the grid. The right image shows variations of column placement using a 12-column grid.

impose and copy onto tabloid sheets and fold, or they'll accept a disk from you and they'll print it for you.

Printing refers to using a press to imprint an image on a page. This is the highest-quality output for your newsletter, but is usually only cost-effective for larger quantities (unless your print shop offers direct digital printing).

Copying refers to using a machine to photocopy an image from page onto another. The high-end machines used in better print shops are excellent and can produce quality output.

Regardless of the print method, when you work with a print shop, be sure that all of your agreements are in writing.

Here are some basic printing terms that you'll need to know.

**Stock.** This refers to the paper. You'll probably deal with tabloid-size sheets. You'll need to specify the manufacturer, the color, and the weight. Ask the print shop to go over swatch books with you to select your stock.

**Ink.** If you were having newsletters printed rather than copied, then you'd specify Black, CMYK (process color), or specify exact colors to use by referring to a PMS code (Pantone Matching System). Since you'll probably be dealing with copy processes rather than traditional printing, you'll just specify whether its B&W or color copying.

**Impressions.** This is the number of actual copies they'll make. Different print shops will specify this differently. In most cases, if four letter-size pages were copied onto both sides of a tabloid-size sheet, this would count as eight impressions. Other print shops might count this as two impressions (one for each side of the tabloid).

**Imposition.** To impose pages is to lay them out in the order needed for the finished booklet.

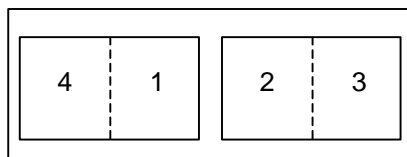


Figure 6. Imposition.

The front of the sheet has pages 4 and 1, and the back of the sheet has pages 2 and 3. When folded, the page order will be correct.

**Quantity.** Note that they're interested in how many finished newsletters they'll be making, but also in how many impressions they'll be copying. Be sure that it's clear what you're specifying.

**Finishing.** Finishing refers to the work done to complete the job. This includes stapling, folding, gluing, drilling (3-hole punching), adding stickers, and shrink-wrapping. If your newsletter has reference information in it, consider having it drilled to encourage your readers to keep the newsletters in a binder.

**Proofs.** If you want the print shop to assemble one newsletter for you to check before they print all of them, then ask for a proof. Some print shops will not do this for small orders. If you were going to have the newsletter printed by traditional methods, then they would provide you with a proof for you to approve before printing.

**Accepting delivery.** Remember that you need to maintain an ongoing relationship with your print shop. Inspect the work you receive from them and be sure to voice any concerns you may have with quality.

## The Next Level

Once you master the basics, what should you do to equip yourself for producing a quality newsletter?

**Master DTP.** Read books about your particular DTP program. Create your own mini-projects to experiment with to push the envelope of your knowledge. Challenge yourself to be master the program.

**Learn photo editing.** Editing photos on the computer can be a challenge, but once you delve into it, it's not as difficult as it looks. You don't have to be a master at editing photos, but you should become reasonably comfortable with your graphics package and some of the common tasks in preparing photos for your newsletter.

**Get familiar with fonts.** You should know where to go to look for new fonts, and how to install them on your computer.

So what are some steps you can take right away to bring your newsletter to the next level? Here are some ideas:

**Color.** Adding even one color to a black and white newsletter can add visual interest for a minimal cost.

**Articles.** Look for contributing authors to add new viewpoints and voices to the newsletter.

**Useful content.** If you are faced with blank space to fill, rather than inserting a comic or other "fluff" filler, add something that your readers will find useful instead.

**Back ups.** Always have at least one back-up article ready for last-minute emergencies.

**Stock photos.** If you have the budget for it, consider adding a stock photo to the cover of each issue.

### Introductory DTP web sites

- <http://desktoppublishing.com/>
- <http://www.microsoft.com/office/Publisher/>
- <http://desktoppub.about.com/cs/publisher/index.htm>
- <http://www.newsletter-tips.com/>

### Suggested reading

- *How to Get Great Type Out of Your Computer*, James Felici
- *Using Type Right*, Philip Brady
- *Chicago Manual of Style, Ed. 14*, University of Chicago Press