

Things can be further confused when additional space is inserted between the lines of type. This is known as *leading* (pronounced ‘ledding’) because it used to be produced by inserting strips of lead or brass of the appropriate thickness between the lines of type. Nowadays, of course, the computer produces the gap, but most software programs will still refer to the space produced as leading. This means that the size of the character and the space in which it lives are the product of several factors:

- the design of the font;
- the size of the font;
- the leading used with the font.

Points are used for vertical measurement in type. For horizontal measurement the pica-em is used. A pica is an old-fashioned name for 12pt type. Before the point system came into general use, type had names for sizes: Pearl (5pt); Ruby (5½pt); Nonpareil, pronounced nonprul, (6pt); Minion (7pt); Brevier (8pt). Bourgeois, pronounced ‘burjoyce’ (9pt); Long Primer (10pt); Pica (12pt). Only Pica (pronounced ‘piker’) has survived into modern usage.

An em-quad is the square of the size of type being used. In the old days of metal type, it was actually a square block of metal, measuring the square of the type used. This means that an em-quad is not a particular size; one can have an eight point em-quad or a 24pt em-quad. However, for measuring the width of columns, pictures and other horizontal measurements, we use pica-ems – a 12pt measure. This is often abbreviated to pica (in the US) or to em (in the UK). We use ems (sometimes called *muttons*) as a measure to indent type. If a paragraph is indented (starts with a space) then it is probably indented by a mutton – an em space – or a *nut* (an en or half an em).

Some books claim that an em is the width of a standard 12pt roman letter ‘m’ as this is the widest character (Giles and Hodgson 1996: 30; Quinn 2001: 81). This seems unlikely as no character ‘m’ I’ve ever measured is as wide as the type size it’s set in, nor is it an explanation that appears in any of the older books on typography, but it is a handy explanation for its name.

## What is leading?

Leading is additional space inserted between lines of type. Imagine that you are writing notes on a standard A4 lined notepad. The space offered by the pad

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*Figure 8.6 (opposite)* Leading can be considered as a reporter’s notebook. The typesize might vary, but the distance between the lines remains the same

Your writing might be an average size and fit well on a pad of lined paper. But someone else might write in a larger face and so the type would not fit the page.

Another person's writing might be quite small and would fit easily into the lines left by the writing pad, making their copy looking very different to yours. It would also allow much more writing to be fitted into the same space - more difficult to read, but much more economic.

Another person's writing might be quite large and would need to be double spaced or it would not fit.

between the lines remains constant, but you could choose to write in very large or very small letters (see Figure 8.6). If you wrote small, there would be more space between the lines of script. If you wrote large, there would be very little room. Adding space between the lines by leading, has a similar effect, adding or removing space between the lines of type. If, using my notepad analogy, you decided to double space your writing, writing only on every other line, it would give the effect of inserting lead to the value of one of the lines.

## White space and leading

White space is vitally important in the design of newspapers and magazines and is vital to the way the type looks and behaves. Just as one would judge a person partly by the house in which they live or the car they drive, one is also influenced not just by the type, but also the space in which it lives. The amount of space allowed to a type not only affects the way we interpret the message the type contains but it also influences how easy the type is to read. Tinker (1963) quotes a number of studies, one by Paterson and Tinker (1940) in particular, that shows a little leading is a good thing as far as legibility is concerned. Adding 2pts of lead to an 8pt type improves legibility by 5 per cent. Interestingly, any increase of leading beyond this does not appear to improve legibility according to Tinker (1963: 93).

However, just because thicker leading than two points does not improve legibility, that doesn't mean it doesn't have other effects. Type with a lot of leading would inevitably have a lot of white space around it. This block of type would look unhurried and uncluttered giving an impression of authority and gravitas. A traditional font such as Times Roman is often combined with plenty of white space by the broadsheets in order to give an impression of thoughtfulness and authority. A tabloid, on the other hand, usually wants to give the impression of brashness, immediacy and liveliness. Tabloids tend to use fonts with large x-heights and minimum white space (see Figure 8.7).

Look in a couple of newspapers to compare adverts. Adverts have to say a lot in very few words and so the font used is of crucial importance to reinforce the message or even add a completely different message. Copy in adverts from banks and insurance companies are often set with plenty of leading and space around the text. They want to give an impression of authority and trustworthiness. An electrical retailer of the 'stack 'em high, sell 'em cheap variety' on the other hand, wants to give an impression of haste, that special offers are being snapped up by bargain hunters. If you don't get to the store today, it might be too late. This is achieved by adverts that are cramped with information, prices and pictures. The adverts don't say it, indeed they often mention helpful staff ready to talk you through the product, but the message in the spacing is intended to

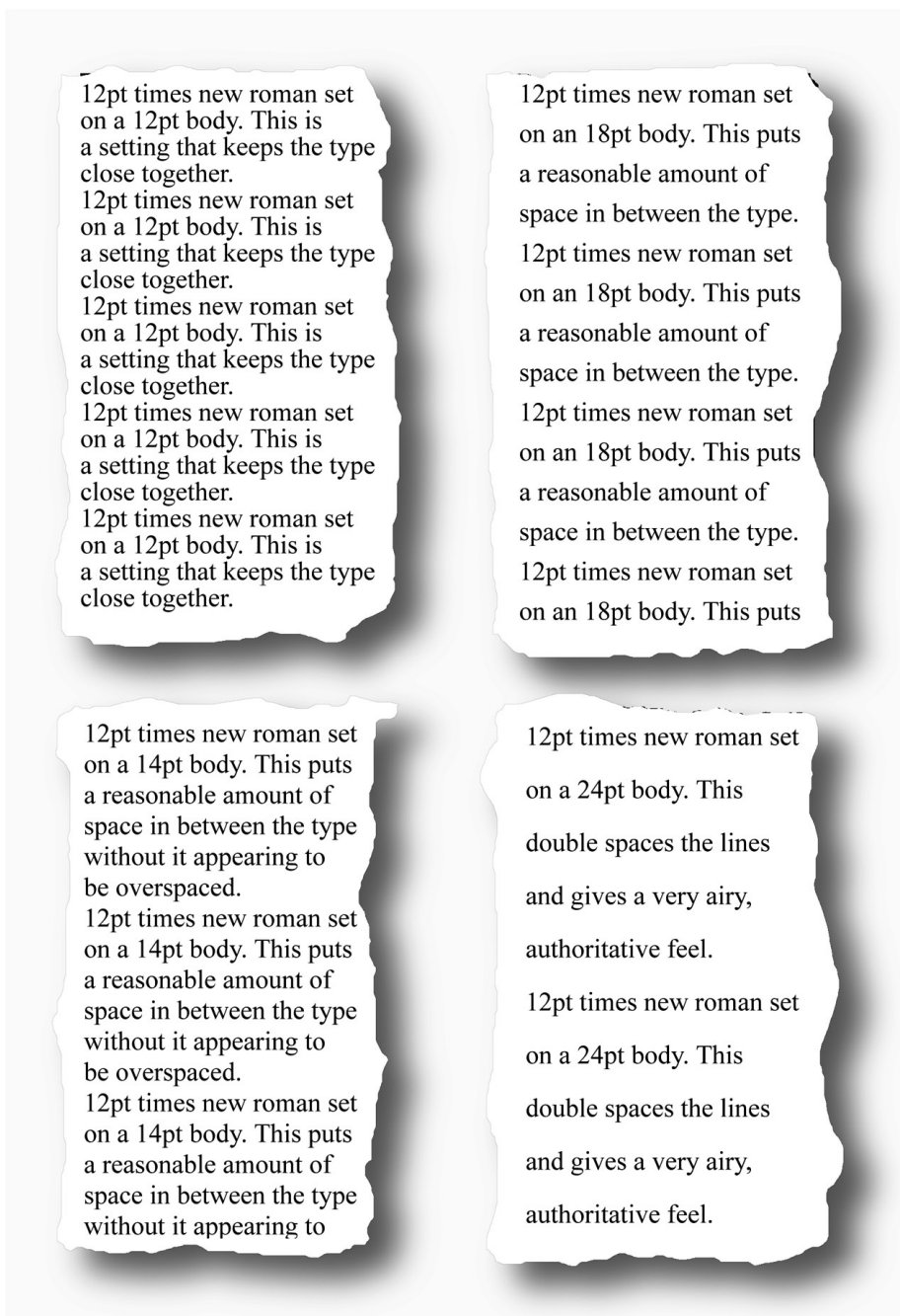


Figure 8.7 Leading (the space between lines of type) can have a dramatic effect on the message

give the reader the feeling of a busy market place brimming with bargains that need to be snapped up immediately or they will be lost to some other customer.

## USING TYPE IN DESIGN

There are five main families of type: old style, transitional, modern, Egyptian and contemporary that represent the development of type over the past 350 years (Craig 1980: 31). Modern types have been with us since the middle of the last century. However, from a design point of view, a better categorisation of type is old style, modern, slab serif, sans serif, script and decorative.

Old style is the design of type used at the start of printing and representing the style of writing prevalent at the time. Scribes used quills and therefore the type was made up of a series of thick and thin strokes. This was mimicked in the type. Old style also has serifs – the little curlicues identifiable on fonts such as Times New Roman.

Modern types maintained the thick and thin strokes and the serifs but became much squarer and blockier as the need to carve or cast the type took precedence over the need to match the style of contemporary scribes.

Sans serif fonts (as their name suggests) do not have the little curlicues at the end of the strokes. Nor do they normally have a mix of thick and thin strokes, although they can. They look even more modern and are simple and unadorned.

Scripts are designed to look like handwriting and are often used to mimic handwriting on invitations and printed matter that is designed to look more personal or elegant. Decorative fonts cover a wide range and are there to have fun with. You wouldn't normally use a decorative font to set more than a few words – they are usually very difficult to read. However, they can add emphasis to a headline or caption.

Serif fonts are normally used for the body text of a newspaper or magazine. There is some debate about why this is. Tinker (1963: 64) claims that a sans serif font is read as rapidly as a seriffed font, although readers prefer serifs. He also accepts that 'The legibility of certain letters . . . can be improved by more judicious use of serifs . . .' (ibid.: 42). Shipcott (1994: 46) claims that serifs do improve legibility, but does not cite a source for this. Either way, it seems that readers prefer serifs and find a seriffed font easier to read. Personally, I think Tinker is right and that the serifs seem to help us identify certain characters a little better, the eye seems to float along the top of the line making reading much easier. Another point about seriffed fonts is that they are much more likely to use thick and thin strokes to add emphasis to certain parts of a character. According to Tinker (ibid: 1963: 42) this mix of thick and thin strokes helps us to identify characters more easily.