10 “points” about fonts – What you need to know to tell the story in style

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**1. Like all design elements, fonts should be used with purpose.** And – let’s face it – the purpose of a yearbook is to tell the stories of the year. So the fonts chosen to “speak” shouldn’t draw attention to themselves but rather to the content on the page.

**2. Fonts have personalities and attitudes, which should be considered before choosing them.** Most fonts in yearbooks are used for body copy, captions, headlines, subheads, pull quotes and sidebars. Fonts can be formal and elegant; funky and fun; serious and somber; or silly and light. Thousands of fonts can be downloaded for free or for a fee. The best way to get a complete font family with multiple variations and weights is to buy the entire family at once. Many free fonts don’t include the variations of bolds and italics that the “legitimate” fonts offer. Shop around, and print samples.

**3. Whatever you do, don’t settle for the default 12-point Times New Roman for body copy unless you are formatting an essay for English class.** Body copy should be clean, simple and easy on the eyes. Serif fonts (fonts with feet) give a traditional look, while sans serif fonts appear contemporary. Keep in mind that the roundness or openness of a font with respect to the length of its ascenders and descenders will affect readability. Try a 9-point size with a leading (space between lines) of 14 to give some air to body copy, and adjust up and down from there. Alignment also can set the tone of the text. Justified text (straight edges on both sides) looks clean, structured and more formal than unjustified text. Unjustified right margins are perfect for a casual, relaxed look. Use centered or unjustified left margins sparingly in body copy, as it is difficult to follow with the eyes. For the same reason, never set body copy across an entire page.

**4. Captions may be set in a font from the same family that is used for the body copy, but choose something different about it to make it stand out.** Set it a size or two smaller than the body copy, and use automatic leading to keep the captions tight. Try setting captions in bold or italic (or bold and italic) to help them pop and draw attention to the photographs. As captions are often set narrow, an unjustified right margin is a smart choice to avoid the awkward spaces that result from forced justification.

**5. There are no rules as to size, selection or placement of headlines, but a smart designer will consider the story content, personality of the book and overall visual style when choosing a headline font.** Some staffs use different display fonts, which are more decorative than a body copy font, for each section. Others use the same font family for headlines throughout the book. Whatever you choose, use headline fonts to draw readers into the story – not to show off what you feel is a cool font. Display fonts can add a dash of personality to a spread, but they will lose their appeal and uniqueness if they are overused. Headlines can be as small as 36 points (or less, depending upon desired effect), or they can take up the entire page. The point is to do what best illustrates the contents of the spread. For staffs using a consistent font on each spread within a section, a display font (or selection from the predetermined font family) should be used in a relatively small, consistent size and weight. Specialty fonts might work on feature spreads. Just be careful not to overdo them, or readers will be overwhelmed.

**6. Subheads are smaller headings, which often clarify the main headline.** While they are set smaller than the headline, they should be a few points larger than the body copy. If a distinctive font is used for the headline, it is best to use a simple font for the subhead. Think in terms of contrast. If using a serif font for body copy, try a sans serif for the subhead. Or if a normal font is used for body, perhaps a bold or italic will provide the contrast needed for the subhead to stand out.

**7. Pulled quotes or featured quotes can be the same size or considerably larger than the body copy.** Again, keep contrast in mind so that quotes stand apart from the body copy. If the body is fully justified, try a centered alignment for a quote, or a left or right alignment.

**8. Sidebars should appear as a separate unit, so don’t choose the same body copy and size used for the main story.** Consider using a different font from the body copy (remember, contrast!) or at least a different size and leading. The headline might be a smaller version of the main headline, or it might match the subhead. It could be a contrasting variation of the font family used on the spread. Any combination can work as long as you don’t introduce a whole new look. It should be a repeat or variation of something that is already on the spread.

**9. Dropped caps can either be the same as the block of text they are dropped into, or they can be the same as the headline or another font used on the spread.** The size of the font will depend upon the size and leading of the story that they drop into.

**10. Some designers like to use fonts as graphic elements to decorate a page.** This may even mean using fonts to create artsy text that is not intended to be read. If this is the case, be sure that readers know that, so that they don’t try to make sense out of something that they are not supposed to “get.” Letters might bleed off of the page or appear to be piled on the page through negative leading techniques. Skilled designers can add interest to a spread without adding information. The look can be edgy and contemporary.