

# The Philatelic Communicator

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## Some Formatting Suggestions

by Barth Healey

In a perverse sort of way, the explosion of easy-to-learn layout programs has caused deterioration in the quality of some philatelic journals because the (mostly) volunteers who proved so adept at handling the necessary research and word editing were fooled into thinking they were design mavens, too. *It ain't necessarily so.*

There are undeniable benefits in preparing formatted, camera-ready copy for a print shop to run off a society journal, not the least being a great cost savings. But just because even baby iMacs come today with a wealth of typography tricks does not mean that we all know how to use them to greatest benefit. Let me suggest a few basics that, I hope, will increase readability and thus readership, which in turn makes any journal a more desirable outlet for writers.

### TYPE

There is a tradeoff between the readability of a type font and its "bulkiness." That is, a slimmer type face without serifs (those little stubby bits at the top and bottom of an L, for example) can be read at a smaller size than serif type. That's why telephone books are in sans serif type.

But the wider the columns, the more that serifs are needed to guide the eye from one letter to another. Thus, the wider the column, the larger the type needed. Italic type, in my experience, is harder to read than bold, and much harder to read than standard roman, so italics should not be used in small type measures (something the editors of the *Scott* catalogs seem not to appreciate).

As a rule of thumb, ordinary body type should not be less than nine points high, and 10 or even 12 is better.

Leading (pronounced ledding) refers to the space between lines of type. Long ago, in the last century, each line of type was set in lead, and the lines were stacked up in long shallow trays called galleys to make a column. If the lines of type did not fill the allotted space, slivers of lead were inserted between the lines, a process called leading. Today, of course, this process is electronic. The type in *The New York Times*, for example, is 8.7 points high but is set on a "slug" that is 9.6 points high. Thus, each line has nine-tenths of a point of "lead" built into it. Believe it or not, fine-tuning to tenths of a point makes a real difference, both in appearance and in wordage. (The face, by the way, is Imperial, digitized by Autologic from the original by Intertype, which was designed by Edwin W. Shaar in the late 1950s. *The Times* currently uses a Postscript version.)

There is often the temptation to cheat on type size or the leading (the size of the slug that the type is set on) in order to save space. You can change the type size easily in most formatting programs. It's a bit more difficult, but you can also change the leading, going from what is typically a 12-point type face on a 13-point slug to a slug that is only 12½ points high.

Don't do it. The cramped look that results will only drive away readers. Negotiate trims in the article with the author instead. She needs readers more than she needs all those adjectives! So trim out the adjectives instead.

### PAGE LAYOUT

Countless studies of how people read show that the eye finds it difficult to follow a line of ordinary type that is more than about three inches long. Thus on a basic 8½ by 11-inch page, given an inch or two of margin on either side, the basic layout should be two columns at least unless you are prepared to surrender a good deal of space in the form of leading, as book designers do.

The eye also likes white space on a page, and the easiest way to maximize the white space without sacrificing editorial matter is to use a ragged-right command. This means that the lines of type will not line up on the right-hand margin. (To pre-empt letter writers, I recognize that this just moves the white space from within each line of type and bunches it on the right margin, but the eye does not really "see" the internal white space.)

If you use this ragged-right format, remove the vertical rule between the columns, since it just eats a bit of the white space you have just created.

Another gimmick to increase white space (albeit at the cost of some editorial space) is to keep paragraphs very short. *Linn's* does this, but I sometimes find that it impedes comprehension: I think the author has completed a thought when I get to the end of a paragraph, only to find that he has something to add or subtract from said thought.

A counterexample is *The New Yorker*, with paragraphs that run entire columns. With its pretty wide margins and lack of vertical rules (lines) down the page, this does not "darken" the look of the page much, but I find it also slows comprehension because the writer shifts gears in mid-paragraph, where I am not ready for the change.

Another rule of thumb: Paragraphs should not be any

►► continued on page 3

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## The Quill

Joe Foley

Our lead article in this issue provides some very useful advice on formatting by Barth Healey. It's a great advantage to have a professional like Barth available to share his knowledge with us.

Taking this article to heart, we decided to do a little experimenting in this issue. The lead article is two-column, ragged-right format. The "Editors' In-Box" series is also two columns but with a justified right format.

The "President's Message" is three columns, justified right and Alan Warren's article on copyright is three columns, ragged-right. Why all the mix and match? This gives us all an opportunity to compare these variations and decide how we want *The Philatelic Communicator* to look in the future.

There will probably always be a need for a few pages to be in two columns, but the rest is up to you. Please send us a post card or e-mail and state your preference: two or three columns, justified or ragged-right. While you're at it, we use 10 point *Times New Roman* for most of the text. Let us know if there is something else you prefer.

Another change based on this same article is the use of boldface for URLs and e-mail addresses, without any punctuation. This should avoid any confusion, particularly if this "code" has to be split between two lines.

### THE NET

Like it or not, the 'Net is here to stay. We doubt it will completely replace other media any more than radio replaced newspapers. However, it will (and has) impacted other forms of communication. Our hobby has a wide offering of Websites as noted by Ken Sanford in his "Computer Corner." In fact it's very difficult to keep up with all of them (assuming anyone would want to). We have found that certain types of rapid reading, quickly turning pages that contain little of interest, is much slower on the 'Net.

Additionally, archival questions of electronic media are open to question. At a seminar at the Library of Congress it was noted that there exists today a vast quantity of information stored on media no longer in use and thus with no way to "read" it.

Buying and selling stamps and covers on the 'Net is certainly convenient and we have acquired some great material that way. However, listings such as eBay don't seem to be able to organize material in the same orderly manner as a hard copy auction catalog. Finding specific items of interest can be a slower operation. Yet some very prominent dealers and auction houses are very active in both electronic and conventional media. Again, impact certainly, but not complete replacement. □