NEWSPAPER TRAINING.CA

A GUIDE TO GREAT NEWSPAPER LAYOUT

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Good newspaper design, like small children, should be seen but not heard. That is, the reader should not be all that aware of the particular style elements behind the newspaper he or she loves reading so much.

The design which, by the way, is every bit as important as the news stories and photos it accommodates, at its best, quietly entices and skillfully takes the reader by the hand, leading him or her through the pages of the newspaper or its associated website.

The best newspaper design eschews flash in favour of simplicity, ensuring its sections are easy to navigate, with pages that are crisp and uncluttered in appearance.

Design has come a long way since the first newspaper appeared in Rome all the way back in 131 BC, when contents of the Acta Diurna (translation “Daily Public Records”) were carved onto stone or metal message boards and placed in localities like the Roman Forum for all to see. Those who wielded the chisels lived in a simpler time, and did not have to concern themselves with font sizes or graphic elements.

Over on this continent, many centuries later, the first ‘newspapers’ tended to resemble pamphlets or newsletters. These New England publications featured deep columns of text, few headlines, no photos. Terribly dull, gray stuff by today’s standards.

Really, it was not until the Industrial Revolution and the advent of the printing press that more traditional newspapers started appearing, using the grid style of arranging text. But, again, the visual look of the thing was of secondary concern.



How that has changed in the 20th Century. A crowded marketplace and technological advances have prompted editors to spruce up their publications with big and bold headlines, photographs and all sorts of innovative graphic elements that enhance storytelling, such as infographics, sidebars and pullout quotes.

Today most newspapers rely heavily on these visual and graphic elements, and the use of colour.

While they continue to embrace the grid system to arrange text, increasingly, they deploy modular design which helps neatly organize text and visuals in rectangular or square boxes, thereby distinguishing a given editorial ‘package’ from other things happening on the page. The rectangular modules are preferred because they promote eye movement and are less boring aesthetically, according to eye-tracking research done by the Poynter Institute.

And, of course, a veritable design revolution is taking place online with newspapers shifting their traditional design habits to experiment with navigation tools and the integration of social media elements (Share, Reader Comment) that opens possibilities for public participation.

Modern design has an expanded mandate. It must not merely inform and/or entertain but also guide readers through a publication, helping them find what they are looking for, while also letting them know which stories the editor considers most significant for them to read. Applying a focus to every page and prioritizing stories gives clues to the reader about what he should get to first, and afterward.

Shelley Ackerman, a respected Canadian freelance newspaper designer, challenges those working on design first and foremost to know their communities because “demographics means a lot.”

If it’s a retirement community, for example, a newspaper’s readability must be a priority. Or, if the publication serves a smaller community, “you want as many faces, as much community information that people can relate to.”

Design complexity, of course, will depend on practical do-ability – related to the size of a newspaper’s staff roster. Accordingly, Ackerman redesigned the Trail Times, in a way that kept things simple, and formatted.


THURSDAY
JUNE 11, 2015
$1.05
Trail Times
SINCE 1895
PROUDLY SERVING THE COMMUNITIES OF ROSSLAND, WARFIELD, TRAIL, MONTROSE, FRUITVALE & SALMO
Staircases need work before fall races
REFRESHING RIDE
Local nurse honoured by Calgary police
Saturday June 13 our local Special Olympics Team will be hosting a barbeque with hamburgers and hot dogs at Waneta Plaza
All money raised stays with our local Olympic team!
WanetaPlaza
Free kids playroom and ball pit
www.wanetaplaza.com
nofrills
Scotiabank

Josh Awtry and Colin D. Smith in overhauling the 17,500-circulation Times-News in Twin Falls, Idaho, also tried to keep things simple. See a Before and After at http://www.timharrower.com/PDFs/redesign.pdf.

Tim Harrower and Julie M. Elman, also in the U.S., have written The Newspaper Designer's Handbook, which may be worth surveying for redesign options. http://www.timharrower.com/ndh.html.

A DESIGN SHOULD ALWAYS BE LESS ABOUT MAKING THE NEWSPAPER PRETTIER AND MORE ABOUT MAKING IT MORE COMPELLING.

Ackerman recommends that content should be key in any redesign imagination exercise.

It is about killing off no-longer-useful features and finding new ways to become relevant. A design should always be less about making the newspaper prettier and more about making it more compelling, more interesting to readers, she says.

"Think about features that can be added, to connect more to the local community. Think about new local columnists … or a monthly in-depth feature consisting of one or two pages." Photo features or Q and A's that put the focus on members of the community are appealing. And, "always, as many shots of faces as you can have. People, people, people. So important."

Ackerman says too many newspapers carry out redesigns too often, sometimes upsetting their readers.

Unless there is a significant problem with the newspaper's existing logo and typeface, a redesign is more helpful when it focuses instead on the newspaper's organization, as in where do things go, what order are sections in and are they clearly differentiated?

"Are there lots of clues in each story to pull the reader in, like kickers, indexes, pull out quotes, logos, mug shots?"

In Ackerman's experience, "we work out the print model first and then sometimes, not always, we adjust the website. I really prefer it when websites are consistent with the look of the paper so that you are using the same colours, typefaces and branding."

Ackerman, who uses the design programs InDesign and Adobe Suite, is a strong advocate of "lock-to-baseline-grid,"[1] to ensure copy gets lined up consistently across the various columns. She says this is "crucial in keeping the content clean, organized and easy to follow."

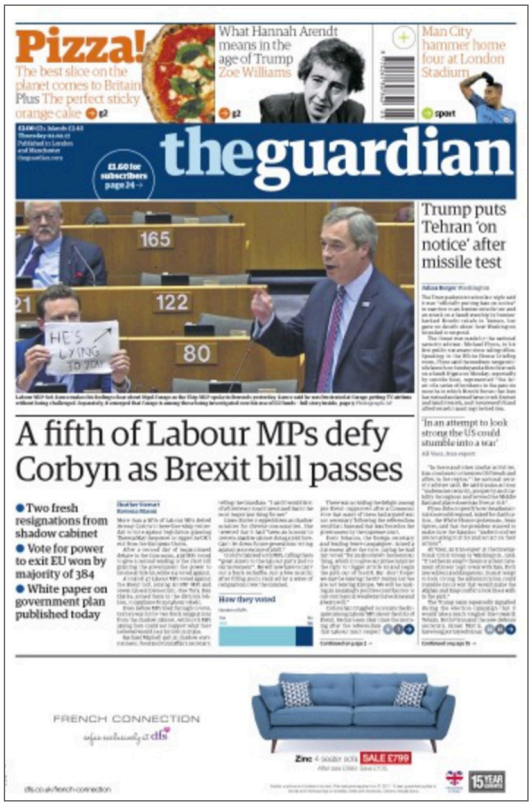
Ackerman also recommends laying out a newspaper with style sheets and master pages.[2] "If you don't know how to use them, learn, because they are absolutely necessary."

Another must – libraries.[3] "I put nothing on my master pages and everything that I can in libraries, that I can drag over to the page."

Nested styles[4] is terrifically handy. "For example, you can embed a character style into a paragraph style which really speeds up layout. So, if you are doing an events calendar and have all these listings and would like everything at the beginning of each event to be bolded, you can set up a nested style that will work."

Ackerman says many layout people aren't aware that you can change column grids[5] on individual pages. So, for example, on a particular page, you can switch off a six-column grid to a five or a nine-column pattern. "You can have a skinny little column anywhere on the page … You can just change up your design on those pages and get a little more creative."

Newspaper design is more art than science and often the best ideas are gleaned by scrutinizing techniques of those doing it well. Britain's Guardian newspaper happens to be one of Ackerman's favourites when it comes to design, and in 2014 the London-based paper was cited by the Orlando, Florida-based Society for News Design as being one of the World's Best Designed Newspapers. The Guardian was among five publications selected from a field of 200.



The judges' picks were based on the following factors: a timeless design; a strong voice; a bold approach; an apparent hierarchy; a design that serves the readers; visuals that excite; good ideas; consistency; courage.

An assortment of recommendations from an assortment of sources on newspaper design spotlights several key tips for good design.

Generally, the best design has a minimalist character, with good use of white space, so that pages have a less cluttered look. White space creates a more casual feeling and promotes the appearance of organization and cleanliness. The use of shadows, 3D effects and bevels, once popular, no longer are widely used.

Colours should be incorporated judiciously, again for the sake of cleanliness, and should be lightened as they print darker than what appears on a computer screen.

Choose easy-on-the-eye fonts and stick with a limited number of them throughout the publication. Times new Roman and Arial fonts, for example, are considered extremely readable. Serif and Sans serif fonts are preferred to script fonts. Text should generally be 11 to 12 pt.

https://signalvnoise.com/posts/140-the-10-most-popular-newspaper-typefaces

When a photo must be made smaller to fit, cropping -- allowing for a zoom-in on a key part of the photo -- is far better than shrinking or minimizing.

THE BEST DESIGN HAS A MINIMALIST CHARACTER.

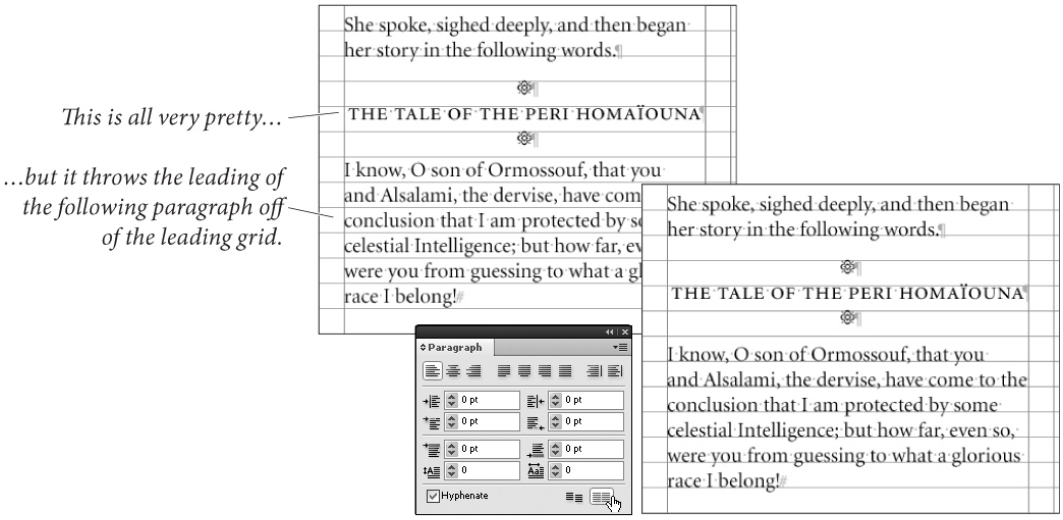
Alignment is important to keep pages looking clean and to promote visual balance and symmetry. Columns should be the same width and aligned at the top or bottom. Pictures should be aligned to each other whenever possible. Spacing should be aligned so there is the same amount of space on left of the text as on the right.

As newspapers continue to evolve, the trend line in design will likely be toward greater clarity of expression, making the product ever easier to consume, going beyond text and using more creative visual elements to tell a story; providing more opportunity for readers to become involved. Newspapers are looking ever more pristine and well organized. And inviting.

And with the move online, expect more experimentation with story presentation and interactivity, as well as greater linkages with social media. Podcasts, webinars and YouTube hits will be accessed through publications that may begin to look less and less like your father's daily newspaper.

APPENDIX - ACKERMAN'S TOP FIVE INDESIGN TRICKS:

1. Lock to baseline grid



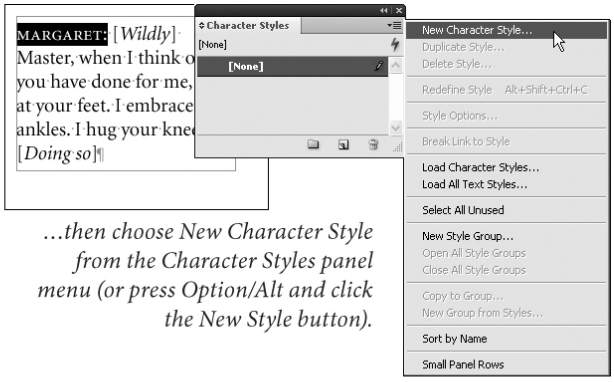
To fix this problem, select the paragraph and click the Align Baseline to Grid button.

InDesign snaps the baselines of the text in the paragraph to the baseline grid.

LOCK TO BASELINE GRID
Source: ptgmedia.pearsoncmg.com

2. Style sheets and master pages

To create a new character style, select a range of text that has the formatting you want…

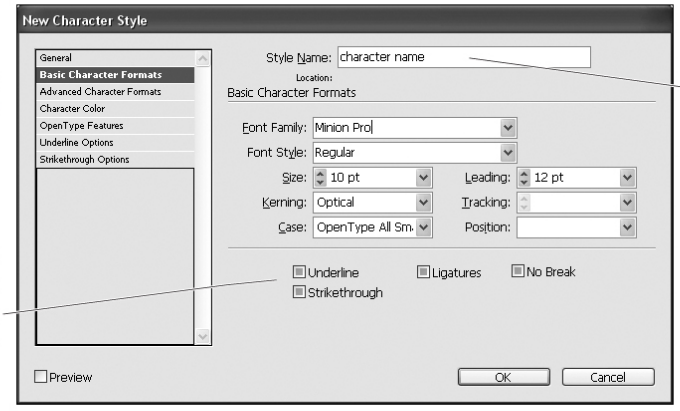


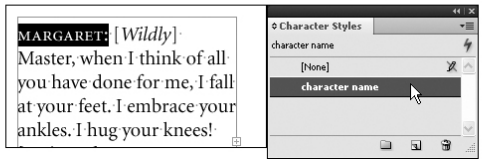
…then choose New Character Style from the Character Styles panel menu (or press Option/Alt and click the New Style button).

InDesign defines a new character style based on the formatting of the selected text.

Enter a name for the style.

Note that InDesign does not define character formatting attributes that are the same as the default formatting of the surrounding text.





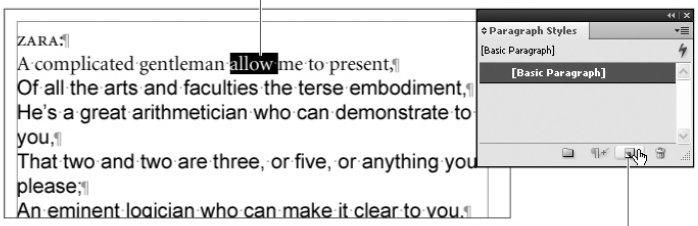
InDesign adds the new character style to the list of character styles, but it won't necessarily apply it to the selected text for you.

CHARACTER STYLES

Source: ptgmedia.pearsoncmg.com

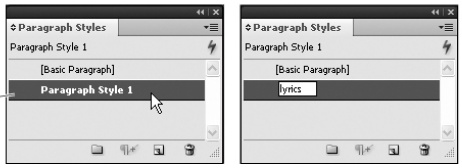
2. Style sheets and master pages cont'd...

Select a paragraph that has the formatting attributes you want.



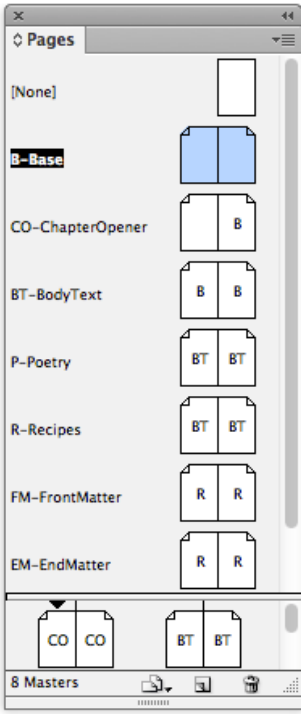
Click the New Style button (or choose New Paragraph Style from the Paragraph Styles panel menu).

InDesign creates a new style and adds it to the list of styles in the Paragraph Styles panel.



At this point, you can enter a name for the style, or edit the style definition.

PARAGRAPH STYLES
Source: ptgmedia.pearsoncmg.com

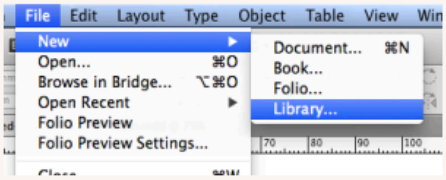


MASTER PAGES
Source: http://creativepro.com/getting-know-and-master-master-pages-indesign/#

3. Libraries

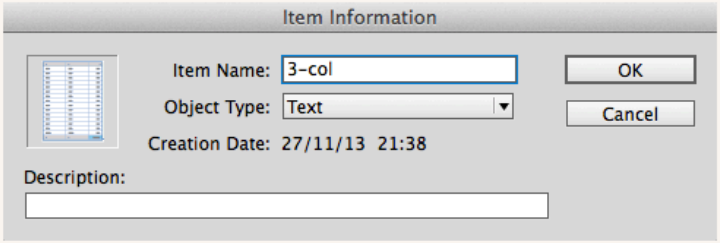
How to start with a library

Setting up a library is very easy to do. First you choose *File > New > Library...* and save your library on your hard drive. Be sure to give it a good descriptive name since that's gonna act as the panel name inside of InDesign. Once you've saved it you'll see your library item appear on screen as a new panel.



Adding items to a library is very simple

- Click and drag items to the library to add them as untitled objects.
- ALT/OPT click and drag items to the library to name them as you add these. The Item Information window that becomes available also allows you to set the object type and an object description. You can set up these criteria to later quickly search for specific items or rearrange your library items in the panel based on these criteria. Personally I'd love to be able to add object types of my own to this list for specific jobs but unfortunately these options haven't been updated since the stone age. So I know what I'll be asking for Christmas this year.



To place items from a library onto the page is just as easy:

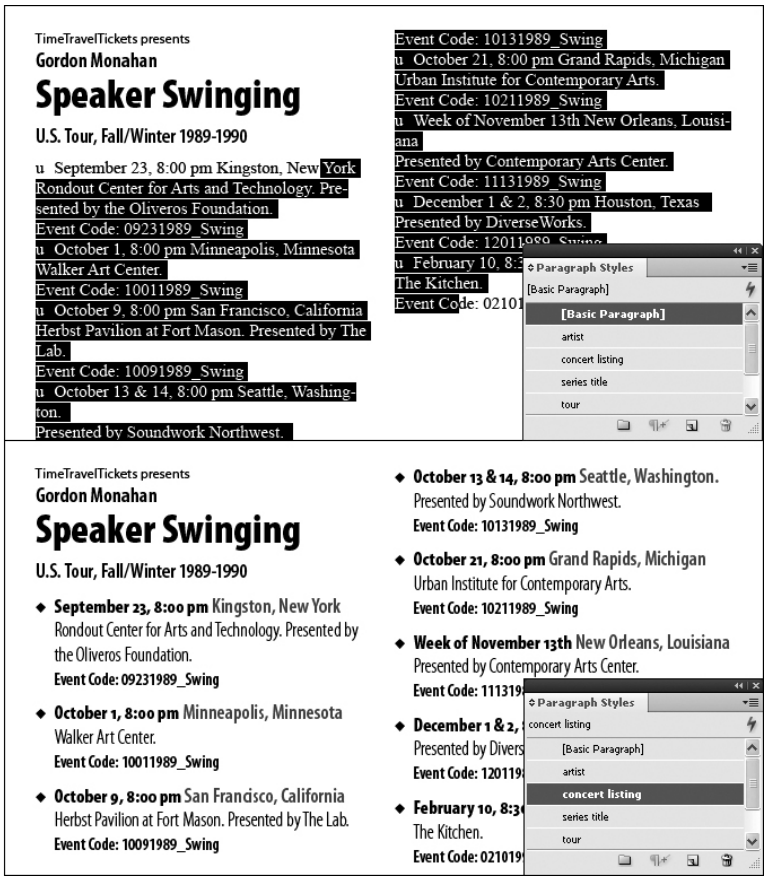
- Click and drag items from your library to your page to place them on the cursor position.
- Select the item in the library, click the library panel menu and choose Place Item(s) to place the item on the same co-ordinates from where you originally added them to the library.

LIBRARIES
Source: https://indesignsecrets.com/fun-indesign-libraries.php#

4. Nested styles

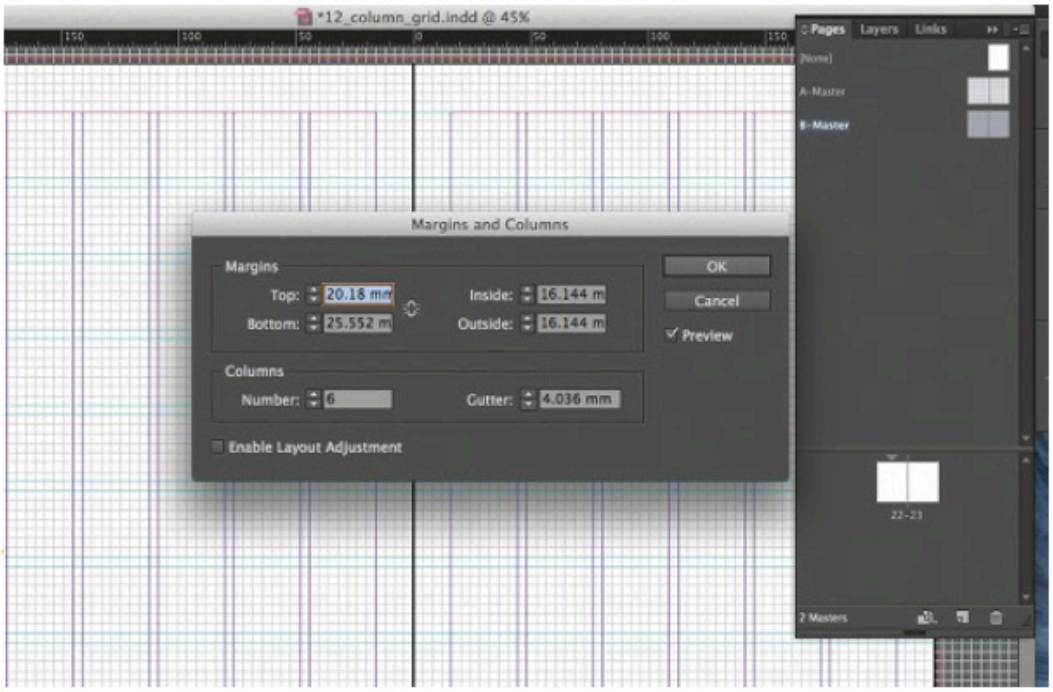
This raw text has been dumped into the document from a spreadsheet or database. Formatting a catalog full of this text would be very tedious, even if you used nested styles as local formatting.

If you add the nested style definitions to a paragraph style, however, you can apply massive amounts of formatting with a single mouse click, as we've done here.



NESTED STYLES
Source: ptgmedia.pearsoncmg.com

5. Column grids



With your document set up you can start to create multiple master pages with different numbers of columns. Select both pages, **Ctrl/Right-click** and hit .Duplicate Master Spread 'A-Master'. Then open the Margin and Columns dialog and change the number of columns.

COLUMN GRIDS

Source: http://www.creativebloq.com/computer-arts/mastering-grids-indesign-cc-71412235

RECAPPING, POINTS TO CONSIDER BEFORE REDESIGNING:

- Who is the target reader (age, gender etc.)?

- What other publications do they read, and what do they like about those?

- What are the five priority changes that would improve your newspaper's success? (If a redesign is not among them, reorient your focus.)

- What impact would a redesign have on your staff, your advertisers, your readers?

- Is there a budget for a freelancer? If so, what performance indicators would you set to determine his/her success?

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Community Newspapers Association

Written by Barbara Yaffe
Designed by Kerry Slater

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