

Leading Kerning and Tracking

Definition: Leading is the space between lines of type. It is generally measured from baseline to baseline and expressed in points. The name leading is derived from the days of hot metal type when strips of lead were placed between lines of type to provide line spacing.

Some programs offer multiple ways to specify leading which can lead to some confusion.

Although it refers to the space between lines of text, leading measurements are generally specified as the amount of space from baseline to baseline. Leading is normally measured in points, just like type.

How much leading?

One rule of thumb suggests adding about 20% or around 2 points to the point size of your text as a starting point for adjusting line spacing. Less is generally too crowded.

Definition: Kerning and tracking are two related and frequently confused typographical terms. Both refer to the adjustment of space between characters of type. Some pairs of letters create awkward spaces. Kerning adds or subtracts space between letters to create more visually appealing and readable text.

Selective Spacing

Kerning is the adjustment of space between pairs of letters.

Overall Spacing

Tracking differs from kerning in that tracking is the adjustment of space for groups of letters and entire blocks of text. Use tracking to change the overall appearance and readability of the text, making it more open and airy or more dense.

You can apply tracking to all text or selected portions. You can use selective tracking to squeeze more characters onto a line to save space or prevent a few words from carrying over to another page or column of text.

Tracking often changes line endings and shortens lines of text. Tracking can be further adjusted on individual lines or words to improve hyphenation and line endings.

Tracking should not replace careful copyfitting. Use tracking adjustments carefully and avoid extreme changes in the tracking (loose or normal tracking following by a line or two of very tight tracking) within the same paragraph or adjacent paragraphs.