

Typesetting 101: Basic principles of book design typesetting

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Book Typesetting: How a book is typeset

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How exactly is a book typeset?

Preparing the text

Most manuscripts are input into a word-processing program where, for ease of proofreading, the text is double-spaced and paragraphs are indented with tabs. Using the "Find and Change" feature, your text is prepared for typesetting by:

- changing two consecutive spaces to one space—an old typing convention was to insert two spaces after a period or colon, but it's not necessary with modern typefaces
- removing tabs—paragraphs will be indented using the "paragraph style" specified in your book design, rather than using tabs
- checking em-dashes, en-dashes, ellipses and other typographic elements to make sure the space before and after is consistent, and conforms with your editor's style sheet.

Flowing text into your interior page design

First, your text is flowed into your interior page design. The pages are numbered consecutively from Chapter 1 to the end of the text, and this is our first look at how many pages the book has, and how much room there is to play with. Depending on the number of pages specified in the budget and printing quotes, the text will be manipulated to fit the page count.

Typesetting pages individually

Modern page-layout software will typeset text to an extent, but it has some limitations. Each page in your book must be examined separately for the following:

- awkward spacing
- lines that are too loose or too tight (too big or too small spaces between the words)
- how hyphenated words are divided, and how many lines end in hyphens
- paragraph endings—there shouldn't be just one small word or half a word on the last line of a paragraph
- page endings—pages shouldn't end with a hyphenated word or an awkward page turn
- pages should all be the same length—if not, text is manipulated to make it fit.

Kerning titles

Each title or chapter heading is checked for awkward character combinations. Because every letter is shaped differently, some fit together better than others. Adjusting the space between two letters is called "kerning." For example, the beginning of the word "illustrator" can look squished in some typefaces and need more space than normal. Some other combinations which often need kerning are VA, FI and To.

Typesetting—invisible book design

As you can see, your book designer spends a lot of time making sure your readers don't notice anything about your typesetting. That's the beauty of good typesetting—no one notices it!