

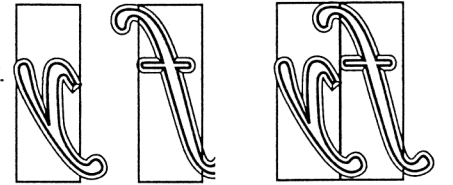
Kerning & Tracking

Kerning and tracking are two related and frequently confused typographical terms. Both refer to the adjustment of space between characters of type, also called **letterspacing**. Headlines usually benefit from kerning and text set in ALL CAPS almost always requires kerning for best appearance.

Kerning is Selective Letterspacing

Kerning is the adjustment of space between **PAIRS** of letters. Your headline type will not always look good right out of the computer. Some pairs of letters create awkward spaces that look bad and hinder legibility. Kerning adds or subtracts space between letters to create more visually appealing and readable text.

In the era of metal type, the term kern defined the part of the letter that extended beyond the metal slug, allowing letters to be moved closer together.



KERNED LETTERS

In digital type, kerning information for many commonly kerned character pairs is built-in to most quality fonts. Some software programs use these built-in kerning tables to apply automatic kerning to text. Anywhere from 50 to 1000 or more kerning pairs may be defined for any one font.



The goal of kerning is to make the type have the appearance of an even and proportional spacing between all of the letters. This will require **OPTICAL** spacing to be used, not **MECHANICAL** spacing. In mechanical spacing, there is an equal distance between each letter. On optical spacing, the distance is relative to the shapes of the letters to make the letters form a natural looking group. Some fonts are better at doing this automatically than others.



To optically space letters, you must look at the shape of the letter and use these basic rules:

- **More space** – between two vertical shapes
- **Less space** – between a vertical shape and a round shape
- **Even less space** – between two round shapes



Some specific combinations of letters will be more problematic than others. They will require more adjustment.

- Uppercase Y and lowercase letter
- Uppercase L and lowercase letter
- Uppercase T and lowercase letter
- Uppercase A and lowercase letter
- Uppercase W and lowercase letter
- Uppercase V and lowercase letter
- Any combination of the two listed above in capital letters
- Very narrow letters, such as I or l

Tracking is Overall Letterspacing

Tracking differs from kerning in that tracking is the adjustment of space for groups of letters and

Ya Ya
Le Le
To To
Au Au
We We
V. V.
LT LT
911 911

Kerning & Tracking

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.

Letterspacing can be defined as:

- **Loose** - an open lighter look with extra white space added, with fewer characters on a line
- **Normal** – no adjustment to the tracking, recommended for most uses because it is the most legible
- **Tight** – letters are close together with a heavier look allowing more characters on a line
- **Very Tight** – a heavy look where the letters almost touch, but not quite
- **Touching** – a heavy look where letters actually touch or overlap

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.

Creative Letterspacing with Kerning and Tracking

Kerning and tracking can also be applied to text to create special text effects for headlines, subheads, newsletter nameplates, and logos. Exaggerated tracking can produce an effective and eye-catching title. Extreme kerning or over-kerning creates special effects with tightly spaced or overlapping characters, perhaps for a newsletter nameplate.

Wordspacing is the space between word, not letters

Word spacing is adjustable just like letterspacing. As you apply kerning and tracking, you will also need to apply word spacing to compensate for the effect to keep the type legible. For example, with loose tracking you would need to add extra word spacing to be able to distinguish individual word. Otherwise the words will look like they run together. You can use the same classifications for wordspacing as on tracking.