Text

Newspapers measure stories in inches. A short filler item might be just 2 inches long; a major investigative piece might be 200. But since one inch of type set in a wide leg is greater than one inch of type in a narrow leg, editors avoid confusion by assuming all text will be one standard width (that's usually around 12 picas).

You can design an attractive newspaper without ever varying the width of your text. Sometimes, though, you may decide that a story needs wider or narrower legs; those non-standard column widths are called bastard measures.

Generally speaking, text becomes hard to follow if it’s set in legs narrower than 10 picas. It’s tough to read, too, if it’s set wider than 20 picas.

The ideal depth for text is between 2 and 10 inches per leg. Shorter than that, legs look shallow and flimsy; longer than that, they become thick gray stacks. (We’ll fine-tune these guidelines in the pages ahead.)

Shaping Text into Columns

Text is flexible. When you design a story, you can bend and pour the text into different vertical and horizontal configurations, as these examples show:

A lot of math is involved in page design, especially when you calculate story lengths and shapes. To succeed, you need a sense of geometry and proportion—an understanding of how changing one element in a story’s design affects every other element.
TEXT SHAPES

To repeat once more: Always shape stories into rectangles. That means all four edges of the story should align — or “grid off” — with each other, as they do in this example:

1. This story is designed into a square-shaped rectangle. The legs are all even lengths, and all outside edges of the story align with each other. It’s a clean, well-ordered story design.

Beginning designers often find themselves wrenching text into bizarre shapes as they try to make stories fit. Or they’ll choose risky, offbeat designs when simpler layouts would be more effective.

If you have that problem, try looking at your stories a different way: Focus on the shapes of your text blocks.

TEXT SHAPES: THE GOOD, THE BAD & THE UGLY

Ranked from best to worst, these are the most typical shapes for text blocks. Arrows follow the flow of the reader’s eye through the text.

1. This is the safest shape of all: a rectangle. Whether in one leg or many, it’s clean and clear: no odd wraps, leaps or bends.

2. L-shaped text results when text wraps under a photo. It’s still a neat and readable shape.

3. U-shapes break up boring stacks of text, but beware of giant leaps to the top of that right leg.

4. These shapes (called doglegs) are often inevitable when you design around ads. Try to avoid them otherwise, since art placed below text is often mistaken for an ad.

5. This backward “L” is a risky shape. Readers may think the text starts in that second leg, besides, that second leg will butt into any leg above it. Be careful.

6. Avoid forcing readers to jump blindly across art parked in the middle of one leg or sandwiched between two legs. It might sometimes work, but it’s usually risky.

7. Ugly shapes. When your text snakes around like this, it means your art is badly scattered. Back up and redesign before you confuse your poor readers.
GIVE EACH PAGE A DOMINANT IMAGE

Most beginning page designers run art too small. As a result, pages look weak. Meek. So be bold. Run your best art big. And when you use two or more photos on a page, remember that one of them should dominate. Even if there's only one photo on a page, it should run big enough to provide impact and interest — to visually anchor the page.

Here's a page where no photo dominates. As a result, it looks text-heavy and unexciting.

Here, that top photo is two columns wider — and now it dominates a dynamic page.

BALANCE & SCATTER YOUR ART

Use photos to anchor your pages, but remember to balance and separate your art, too. When photos start stacking up and colliding, you get a page that's:

◆ confusing, as unrelated art distracts us and intrudes into stories where it doesn't belong.

Or:

◆ lopsided, as photos clump together in one part of the page and text collects in another.

This layout seems to pair the lead photo and top mug, as well as the three mugs below. It's confusing and top-heavy.

Smarter photo placement avoids collision or confusion. The page is better-balanced when the art's apart.

BEWARE OF BUTTING HEADLINES

We've seen how you can bump heads (carefully) when you need to. But on most well-designed pages, head butts are unnecessary. Clumsy. And confusing to readers.

Instead, think ahead. Rather than butting headlines, use art to separate stories. In many cases, that's where raw-wrapped headlines offer a smart alternative to a crowded page.

With two sets of butting headlines, this page is clumsy and confusing. But if you use the photos to separate stories...

... it's a much cleaner layout. Notice how the raw wrap (bottom left) makes it easy to run two stories side by side.
RULES OF THUMB

On this page, we’ve collected the key design principles presented in this book. Use this list as a quick reference; the numbers running along the right margin show pages where you can find more information.

**LAYOUT & DESIGN**

- All stories should be shaped like rectangles. Pages should consist of rectangles stacked together. [44]
- Avoid placing any graphic element in the middle of a leg of type. [46, 127]
- Avoid placing art at the bottom of a leg of type. [46]
- Text that wraps below a photo should be at least one inch deep. [47]
- In vertical layouts, stack elements in this order: photo, cutline, headline, text. [46]
- Every page should have a dominant piece of art. [56]
- A well-designed page is usually at least one-third art. [74]
- Avoid dummying a photo directly on top of an ad. [89]
- Avoid boxing stories just to keep headlines from butting; it’s best to box stories only if they’re special or different. [76]

**TEXT**

- The optimum depth for legs of text is from 2 to 10 inches. [27]
- Avoid dummying legs of text more than 20 picas wide, or narrower than 10 picas. [27]
- Use italics, boldface, reverses or any other special effects in small doses. [195]
- Type smaller than 8 point is difficult to read. Use small type sparingly, and avoid printing it behind a screen. [195]

**HEADLINES**

- Every story needs a headline. [25]
- Headlines get smaller as you move down the page. Smaller stories get smaller headlines. [25]
- 5-10 words is optimum for most headlines. [51]
- Don’t butt headlines. If you must, run the left headline several counts short, then vary their sizes and the number of lines. [75]
- Writing headlines: Avoid stilted wording, jargon, omitted verbs, bad splits; write in the present tense. [23]

**PHOTOS**

- Shoot photos of real people doing real things. [100, 107]
- Directional photos should face the text they accompany. [50, 51]
- When in doubt, run one big photo instead of two small ones. [57]
- When using two or more photos, make one dominant — that is, substantially bigger than any competing photo. [57, 81]
- Try to vary the shapes and sizes of all photos (as well as stories) on a page. [80]

**CUTLINES**

- To avoid confusion, run one cutline per photo; each cutline should touch the photo it describes. [31, 119]
- When cutlines run beside photos, they should be at least 6 picas wide. [31]
- When cutlines run below photos, square them off as evenly as possible on both sides of the photo. They should not extend beyond either edge of the photo. [31]
- Avoid widows in any cutline more than one line deep. [31]

**JUMPS**

- Run at least 4 inches of a story before you jump it. [87]
- Jump at least 6 inches of a story (to make it worth the reader’s effort). [87]
- Jump stories once and once only. Whenever possible, jump to the same place. [87]