WORKING WITH CAPITAL LETTERS

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If you want to emphasize certain text parts on a flyer, poster, website etc., some people tend to simply format everything bold; or putting the text in majuscules (= capital letters).

All big = all important, no? Well, it‘s not that easy. Every font has its micro-typographic characteristics (letter width, cap height, baseline, midline, counter etc.) which you want to use for your advantage.

This whitepaper shows you some things you should take notice of when working with capital letters.

THE GAP BETWEEN EACH LETTER

A well made font should have a good tracking that supports good readability. (tracking, also known as letterspacing or character spacing = the gap between each letter)

„Adam.CG Pro“
good tracking

„BorisBlackBloxx“
good tracking, a bit tight though

„Acappella“
bad tracking
(see A-R gap)

As majuscules are big and big things need space to breathe in order to take full effect, it makes sense to space capital letters. This means that you manually extend the empty space between each letter. When working with a lot of copy, it makes sense to set an automatic letterspacing in the paragraph styles (i.e. Adobe Indesign) so you can use this paragraph style for all your majuscule copy with ease. However, the gaps between words should always be de-spaced again afterwards.

Another thing to consider: You should never letterspace too wide in order not to affect readability. But how much should you letterspace, is there a golden rule? No, not really, it always depends on the look of the font. In the end, you want to have a harmonious whole, sometimes a spacing of only five percent is enough, sometimes 80 percent are okay too. Good graphic designers and typographers recognize the ideal "dose".

If you want to have a perfect look (very important for logos for example), you should look at the spacing of each single word and always manually optimize the spacing between each letter. I tend to zoom in and out and even print fonts to achieve a perfect letterspacing (things look different when printed compared to on a screen!).

Letterspaced majuscule text looks better than without manual spacing:

Original logo "Tommy Hilfiger" with wide letterspacing

TOMMY HILFIGER

Logo "Tommy Hilfiger" without manual letterspacing (normal spacing)

A very wide letterspacing without de-spacing the gaps between words often destroys the readability. But the exception proves the rule. This effect can be used on purpose for a logo, seen in the logo of Victoria Beckham‘s fashion label "Victoria Beckham". As her name was well-known before her fashion career, people would have no problem with reading the logo. Leaving out the crossbar in the A majuscule, the M majuscule‘s reduced simplicity, that would be a W majuscule if turned upside down, and the extremely wide letterspacing make the logo a strong and confident trade mark which is dominantly taking up a lot of space, but is still subtle and reduced to the basics. This is exactly what Victoria Beckham‘s fashion embodies and this message is transported in the logo.

VICTORIA BECKHAM

Original logo "Victoria Beckham"

Fonts with a spacious letter width are very suitable for capital letter copy, in my opinion.
Attention: Fonts with a very slim letter width should not be spaced too wide because the letters can easily look "lost in the air".

SPACING FONTS

"Avenir Next Medium" (medium letter width)
normal letterspacing

SPACING FONTS

"Avenir Next Medium" (medium letter width)
spaced by +20%
(word gap de-spaced)

SPACING FONTS

"Broadsheet" (wide letter width)
normal letterspacing
font with no good letterspacing
(see P-A-C gaps).

SCHRIFT SPATIONIEREN

"Broadsheet" (wide letter width)
spaced by +60%
(word gap de-spaced)

SPACING FONTS

"Akrobat Regular" (narrow letter width)
normal letterspacing

SPACING FONTS

"Akrobat Regular" (narrow letter width)
spaced by +60%
(word gap de-spaced)
A bit difficult to read due to a too wide letterspacing and a too narrow letter width.

SPACING FONTS

"Akrobat Regular" (narrow letter width)
spaced by +25%
(word gap de-spaced)
Better readability due to a minimal letterspacing for these narrow letters.

Black letters, italic styles and hand letterings are less suitable for putting them in capital letters:

BLACK LETTERS

"Gothic Regular DB", black letters

HAND LETTERING

"Brush 77 Regular", hand lettering

If capital letters are spread over several lines, you should also consider the leading. (leading = empty space between two lines of text). The example below shows a leading that is so small that even the Ü dots (a typical German character) of the word "drüber" extend into the D majuscule of "reden". Not good for the readability, but in this case it might be a style effect consciously chosen by the editorial designer:

Quote from the magazine "Barbara" (No. 22), serif font with a high contrast in italic style in capital letters. (contrast = the lines of a letter show different thicknesses. Example for a strong contrast: **Männer***; example for no contrast:* Männer*.)*

Header in the magazine "Barbara" (No. 22), sans-serif font without contrast, without visible letterspacing. Places with ▭ *should have been letterspaced, I think.*

EMPHASIZING PARTS OF TEXT

When text is put in capital letters, you might ask yourself: How can I emphasize certain parts of text within capital letters? There are different methods to do this.

USING DIFFERENT FONT STYLES AND/OR FONT SIZES

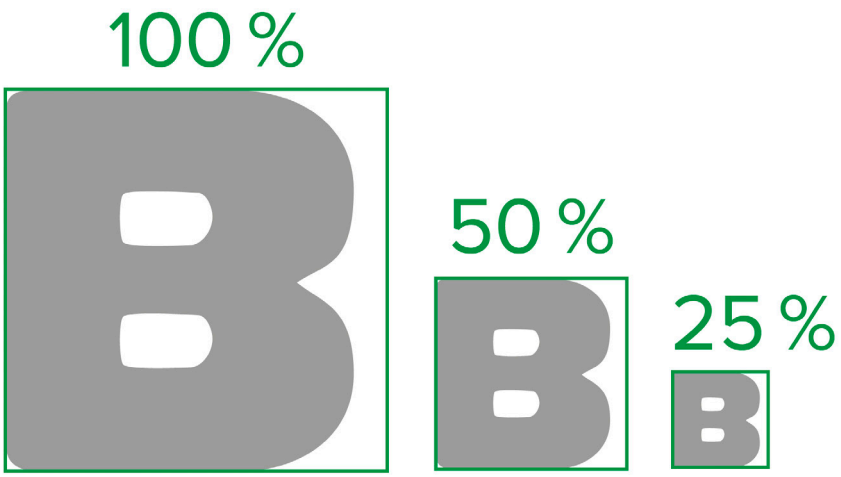
Print advertisement "Nivea Mizellen Shampoo"

In this example, the corporate font is used in a bold ("Neu", "Mizellen Shampoo") and in a light style ("Extra gründlich. Extra Mild."). In addition to that, the raspberry pink box ("Neu") with white, bold font stands out nicely, still looking subtle and in line with the corporate design.

By the way: The corporate font of the trade mark "Nivea" is very distinctive as it‘s mostly used in bold style, it looks very strong due to the lack of any contrast and some majuscules like "M" or "N" go beyond the cap height (= upper end of a capital letter) and the baseline (= imaginary line which a letter "sits" on).

Print advertisement "2. Tiroler Lange Nacht des Sports",
using different font styles (regular and bold) and font sizes

When working with different sizes within the same font, I recommend to work with symmetric values. The human eye likes symmetry which is also why people with symmetric facial features are considered to be very attractive. So don‘t simply make a word bigger than another one, but make it bigger by i.e. 50 % of a square. (Square in typography: If you place an imaginary square on top of a capital letter, whereas the height-width-relation of the letter should be covered. It‘s basically a symmetric size, a square with four equally long sides that displays the "size" of a capital letter.)



When working with squares or square parts, you make sure to introduce a certain consistency in your copy and design. This improves the overall look.

USING DIFFERENT COLOURS

You can achieve interesting effects by deleting the gaps between words and using different colours for the words. But be careful: Two colours are enough in most cases, don‘t overdo it here. Having every word in a different colour makes the copy (or the logo) easily look cheap and unprofessional.

"Haus der Begegnung" in Innsbruck, photo: Diözese Innsbruck.

MIXING DIFFERENT FONTS

Mixing different fonts is a bit delicate. If you are not familiar with how to mix fonts professionally, you might want to not even do this and use other methods of emphasizing capital letters. Otherwise, it can easily look cheap and unprofessional.

"Avenir Roman", +10% letterspacing, de-spaced word gaps;
"advent Bold3", +10% letterspacing, 125% letter width
positive example of font mixing (same letter width, manual adjustment of cap height and baseline)

"Avenir Roman", +10% letterspacing, de-spaced word gaps;
"Source Code Pro Semibold", +10% letterspacing, 100% letter width
negative example of font mixing (different letter widths, different cap heights and baselines)

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Hello, my name is Helene Clara Gamper. I'm a graphic designer that believes in a common thread – as illustrated in my logo. I help businesses build a visual identity, translate data into graphic landscapes and help publishers make their magazines look great.

I grew up in a publisher family. About ten years ago I started working in the creative field what in 2010 made me start my own business called HCG corproate designs.

Since then, I've designed for companies of many sizes from the German speaking area but also from other countries such as the USA or the United Kingdom. I created corporate design concepts for business start-ups, established editorial designs for publishers, designed and implemented rich media magazines for tablets and smart phones and visualized complex data for some great infographics.

When creating designs, I always try to get to the very essence of the character and the philosophy behind my clients' businesses and their products. This essence I include in a holistic design approach, that follows me through the entire creative process. Collaborating with my clients and exploring what makes their businesses and their products unique and stand out, I believe is an important part of my job as a designer. This is how I can develop unique visual concepts with a common thread running through them, which is something I'm really passionate about. It puts a smile on my face when I see people respond and interact with my design creations – and when my clients tell me about that.

Some of my clients say they appreciate my flexibility and transparency. I believe that being open and straight with my clients is a matter of fairness and respect and contributes to a positive and successful collaboration.

When I'm not designing you can find me doing sports, exploring nature or travelling. I get a lot of inspiration from seeing different places, doing new things or trying out new recipes with exotic spices I bought from different corners of the globe. In 2014, I fulfilled one of my biggest dreams: travelling through Peru and Ecuador and visiting the giant tortoises of the Galapagos Islands.

I live in the wonderful city of Innsbruck, Austria, the so-called "Capital of the Alps". The lovely scenery here inspires me every day.

Want to get get in touch?
I'd love to hear from you.

DESIGNS FOR DIGITAL AND PRINT