



## Kerning & tracking

Kerning is the adjustment of the space between individual characters. Good typographers adjust kerning by eye for visually balanced spacing.

There are many different approaches to kerning and the space between characters depends, to a degree, on the style or type of design you are working on.

Whether your spacing is very tight, very wide or somewhere in the middle, making sure they are visually balanced is the key.

Good kerning takes a lot of practice, but once you can spot bad letter spacing, you can't help but notice it. Take a look at the examples below.

*As you can see from the example on the right, the spaces range from being too big (or 'loose') to too small (or 'tight'). We need to visually balance these spaces by hand kerning each combination of neighbouring characters.*

Twirl

Space too big

Too small

About right

Too small

*Here is the same word, but after some much needed kerning. The tightened gap between the T & w is the most noticeable difference. The spaces are now visually consistent with each other and appear much more balanced.*

Twirl

*There are different schools of thought as to how to treat kerning of an uppercase T. Some believe that the following character should tuck right up underneath it, others think a slight overlap will do. It really depends on your personal preference and the overall balance of the word.*

Typeface = Akzidenz Grotesk Medium

### Things to note

Different characters come in all kinds of different shapes and sizes; whether they have straight edges, curved, are at an angle or with an overhang. Therefore a 'one-size-fits-all' approach when spacing letters will rarely look balanced.

For example, as curved characters overhang the x-height and baseline slightly, they will also need to 'overhang' your inter-character spacing also. Therefore a c & o together will need slightly tighter kerning to appear visually similar to an i & k.

collate

*Here is an example of a well-spaced word. Inter-character spaces appear balanced and visually equal throughout...*

collate

*...but when we actually measure the spaces, we can see big differences between the relationships between curved characters, straight characters and combinations of both. Visually equal does not always mean numerically equal.*



## Kerning & tracking

Tracking is the adjustment of the *overall* spacing between characters and is useful for larger amounts of text (often referred to as *body text* or *body copy*).

Tracking differs from kerning only in so much as it is a uniform adjustment of character spacing, rather than an adjustment of individual characters.

In theory, a well designed typeface shouldn't need to be 'tracked' as it should already be well-spaced when designed\* – but this isn't always the case in the real world. Tracking has a direct impact on legibility (or *the readability*) of text. Set tracking too high and you copy will look 'loose' and unrefined, set it too tightly and characters will merge into one another and be hard to read.

### Too much: +100 tracking

*2001: A Space Odyssey* is a 1968 science fiction film produced and directed by *Stanley Kubrick*. The screenplay was co-written by Kubrick and *Arthur C. Clarke*, and was partially inspired by Clarke's short story *The Sentinel*. Clarke concurrently wrote the novel of the same name which was published soon after the film was released. The story deals with a series of encounters between humans and mysterious black monoliths that are apparently

### Too little: -60 tracking

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### Just right: 0 tracking

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\* You'll often hear ex-Typographic Circle Chairman Bruno Maag passionately making this point.