

# RWDL

WRITING AND DESIGN LAB  
*Rutgers University-Camden*

## Guide to Document Design

Designing a document is not just about making a page look pretty: an effective design is crafted in both form and content to help an audience understand your purpose in writing. However, creating a visually striking and credible design is not always easy. When making design choices, the HATS acronym can be useful. HATS stands for headings, access, typography and spacing.

**H**eadings

**A**ccess

**T**ypography

**S**pacing

# HATS

## Headings

Headings mark off different sections of your document and can be extremely useful as an organizational tool both for yourself as a writer and for your readers. Thoughtful headings can give structure to a document and even help in revision: if one section has very little body text under its heading, it's a sign to rethink that section. Do you need to do more research or would that section work better as a subsection under another heading?

The structure of your headings should flow out of the content of your work. This document is a simple example of that: each heading corresponds to a different part of the acronym introduced on the first page. If, for example, you were writing a paper that described an ongoing process, your headings might refer to the stages of the process. When writing about literature, headings might divide your analytical work from sections giving background.

*What's the difference between headings and headers?*

Headings are distinct from “headers,” the place where you're often asked to put your last name and the page number when writing an essay. Generally speaking, headers are a form of access which help your reader navigate a document with the help of page numbers or other markers.

Headers are usually mandated by your professor, genre or the publication you're writing for, while headings are often left to the discretion of the writer.

Title 36 pt.

Heading 1 24 pt.

Heading 2 18pt.

Accent Text 16pt.

Body text 14 pt.

The heading levels for this document are shown on the left.

For body text, choose a boring font at a size from 11 to 16. Your goal is to make it readable. Generally, readability requires finding a medium weight font that has little stroke variation.

You can be more creative with headings, but make sure you're staying within the expectations of your audience and genre. Choose heading fonts that contrast with your body text: pick a heavier weight, for example.

## Access

Access refers to the visual cues that help a reader navigate and understand your writing. Adding access can be as simple as adding bullet points or numbered lists, or it can be as complex as adding flow charts and large illustrations. Consider your audience when choosing access: a good visual can go a long way toward helping an amateur understand a difficult concept.

For example, if you need to explain a term your audience might not know, consider using a sidebar, so you don't break the flow of your text. Using sidebars also gives expert readers the opportunity to skip information they already know.

To the right is an example of a flowchart made using free software called Gliffy.

## Additional Resources

### GIMP

If you don't want to buy PhotoShop, check out GIMP. It's a free program for manipulating graphics that can fulfill many of PhotoShop's functions.

### Canva.com

A website that allows you to make large infographics easily. Infographics can be useful for summarizing the findings of reports and presenting all kinds of data visually.

### unsplash.com

A huge repository of high resolution photos that can be freely used in any project, no permission required.



## Typography

Choosing fonts for a document can be much harder than it seems, which is why you often see the advice to default to Times New Roman and not think about it any more. Times is a fine font, but it's not always appropriate for the character of every document. With just a little bit of knowledge about typography, you can easily choose fonts that match the content of your work.

To understand some of the key terms, compare the two fonts below, **Abril Fatface** and Quicksand Light.



**Stroke variation** is the level of difference between the width at various parts of a letter. Fonts with high stroke variation such as Abril Fatface tend to look good at large sizes but are hard to read when small.

## Additional Resources

### Google Fonts

Most of the fonts used or mentioned in this guide are available as a free download on Google Fonts.

### TypeWolf

Many great examples of how to pair fonts as well as links to many free font downloads not available on Google Fonts.

**Serifs** are the little slashes you see coming off Abril Fatface. Serifs tend to give a more serious feel to text and make it easier to read when printed out. Sans-serif fonts like Quicksand lack serifs at the end of their letters.

**Weight** refers to the overall thickness of a font. Many typefaces come in extra bold or even ultra-bold varieties, and many sans-serif fonts come in thin or light varieties that can lend a lean, contemporary effect to a document. Most fonts that come on your computer are a medium weight, so consider downloading some varieties from a place like Google Fonts.

# HATS

## Spacing

Be sure to leave space between the end of one section and the next section's heading and give plenty of marginal space around illustrations or other points of access. If you're using columns, leave adequate space between each column of text so that the eye doesn't "jump" to the other column.

The rule about spacing also works the opposite way: put things that are similar close together. The body text that relates to a heading should be close beneath it. Captions should be directly beneath the illustration or photo they describe.

Above all, strive for consistency in your spacing.

*How much space should I use between lines?*

The standard you might have been taught for school papers is double-spaced, but different documents require different levels of spacing. In the absence of specific guidelines, shoot for readability. Somewhere between 1.15 and 1.5 is a good place to start.

### Good Spacing



*Captions directly below images.*



*Images 1/2 inch from each other, giving plenty of white space.*

### Poor Spacing



*Captions placed haphazardly.*



*Images have no set relationship with any other page element*