

graphic design

Typography to a purpose

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This paper shows some real-life examples of typography, some good, some not so good. We shall have a look at what is on the page and speculate about what the publisher or designer is trying to accomplish.

Fiction

Most fiction publications consist simply of text. Good typography means typography that does not get in the way. Our two examples are a collection of short stories: 'Damon Runyon Favorites' (figure 1) and a novel 'Sybil' by Benjamin Disraeli (figure 2).

The Runyon book looks a bit sloppy because of loose word spacing, and the very narrow margins make the page look cramped. The use of page headers doesn't help, although the right page headers do contain useful information, *viz.* the titles of the stories. What the picture doesn't tell is that the printing is quite good, that the paper has a pleasant supple feel and that the cover has a nice atmospheric illustration.

The Sybil book is much more tightly designed. Margins

are adequate but certainly not extravagant. There are no page headers at all, but the page looks fine without them. Page numbers are centered. From a strictly practical point of view, page numbers at the outer edge ought to be better, but I doubt whether the page would then look as good. Compared to the Runyon book, the type size is smaller, and so a more open look is combined with more text on the page – but some people are going to need their glasses. . .

Neither book starts a new page for a new chapter or story, and neither book uses bold type or a second typeface. For fiction books such as these, such low-key design is fine.

Reference publications

Other than in novels, you really want page headers in a dictionary (figure 3). This is one of several features to let you find information quickly. Others are outdated boldened names of entries. In more recent dictionaries you might see a contrasting typeface here.

Compare the typographic parameters with those of the two works of fiction: there, too, space was saved, but type had to remain comfortable to read even for long stretches. Here, you won't be reading more than few lines at a time and therefore smaller and narrower type is still acceptable.

A more frivolous representative from this category is 'The

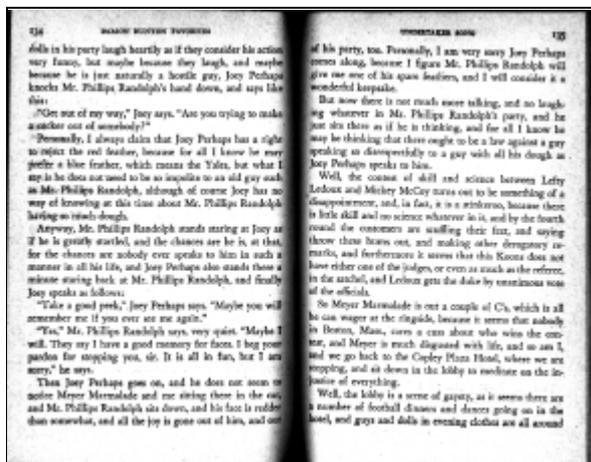


Figure 1. *Damon Runyon Favorites*, Pocket Book Editions, 1942. Short stories.

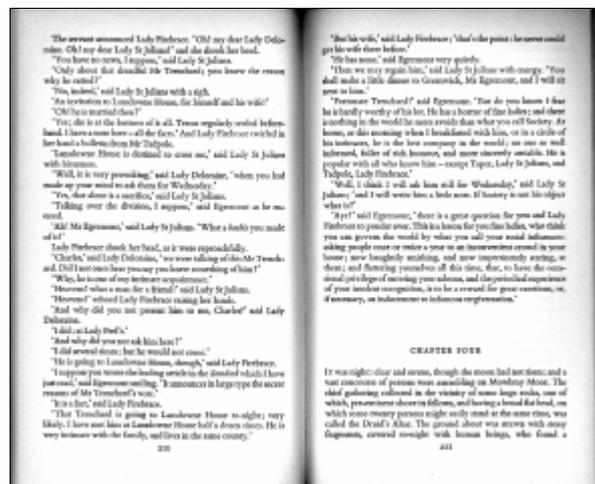


Figure 2. *Sybil*, Benjamin Disraeli, Penguin, 1954



Figure 3. Advanced learners dictionary of current English, Oxford University Press, 1963

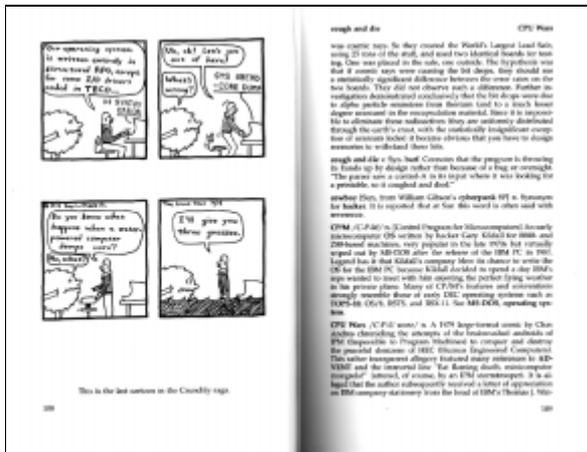


Figure 4. The new hacker's dictionary, Eric Raymond, MIT Press, 1991

new hacker's dictionary' (figure 4). This is much closer to conventional book typography, and of course its real purpose is entertainment, not reference. The cartoon, by Guy L. Steele, demonstrates that there is a place for amateurism. This book is typeset with Tex[info].

Catalogues and advertising

Price lists (see figure 5) also often squeeze a lot of type in a small space. Here, too, headings should help you to get to the right spot quickly. More conspicuous though is the decoration in this example: a circuit board as general background, shaded type for headers, and shapes with graduated fills. This is certainly not done for the sake of legibility; presumably it has something to do with the image the advertiser is trying to project.

Another example, figure 6, shows more variation. This is not a magazine ad but a page from a standalone publication. Running text is set from two typeface families: one serifed and one sans-serif. The serifed text seems intended



Figure 5. Cirkit ad, from an English computer magazine, 1998

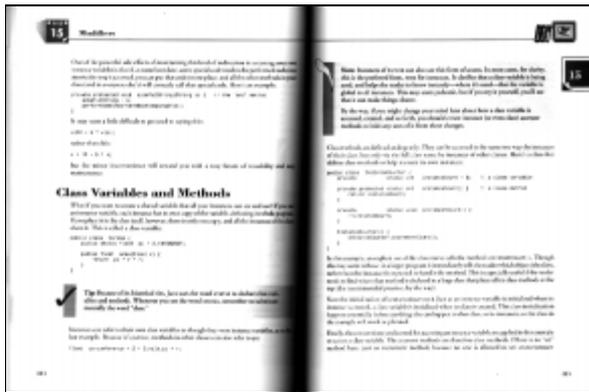


Figure 9. *Teach yourself Java in 21 days*, Laura Lemay and Charles Perkins, SAMS, 1996

The other one, figure 8, one of my own, is for a small publisher Ellessy. The author's name rather than the title is the most prominent item. The typeface is Officina Serif, which is readable enough here, but which you wouldn't want to use for a novel. Space considerations forced me to place some text alongside the cover on the righthand page. Such narrow columns of type aren't pretty and aren't easy to read.

Computer books

The shelves of bookstores are crammed with fat and ugly computer books. A quick inspection will tell you that in most cases the bloat comes from both the writing and the designing. I failed to come up with a really awful example from our own collection, since we had recently given all our unwanted books to a 'kringloop' second-hand goods

store. So the worst offender I could come up with is 'Teach yourself Java in 21 days' (figure 9) The selected spread shows the abundant use of graphic symbols and ornaments and of shaded boxes. This makes it only mildly awful, it can get much worse; check for yourself at your local bookseller. The monospaced font for code is actually rather nice.

The manual of SuSE Linux (figure 10) is produced with $\text{\LaTeX} 2_{\epsilon}$, as stated on the colophon page. It also suffers from over-decoration: lots of shadowed textboxes and danger signs, boldened text and sculpted keys. This spread doesn't show it, but the makers have not been overly careful about typographic niceties such as staying within the margins or not having a headline at the bottom of the page. The English can be pretty bad, sometimes to the point of incomprehensibility. In short, the kind of production that gives \TeX a bad name.

They are no longer upstarts and I think they should shed their amateurish look and hire a real designer. Nevertheless, the ugliness is rather endearing. Also, it is a very useful book for someone trying to set up a Linux system.

For a large part of its catalogue, O'Reilly sticks to its well-known formula of an animal woodcut on the cover, and the inside typeset in ITC Garamond in an unadorned style, with little variation from volume to volume; figure 11 is from 'Running Linux'. Standard for the O'Reilly books are unindented paragraphs separated by vertical whitespaces, the headings in bold-italic and the indented code fragments in Courier. In this case there is an enlarged left margin for symbols such as bombs (danger) or book symbols to mark crossreferences.

O'Reilly's Unix books are almost invariably typeset from SGML via groff, a batch tool. The colophon doesn't tell how much manual intervention was required. Their

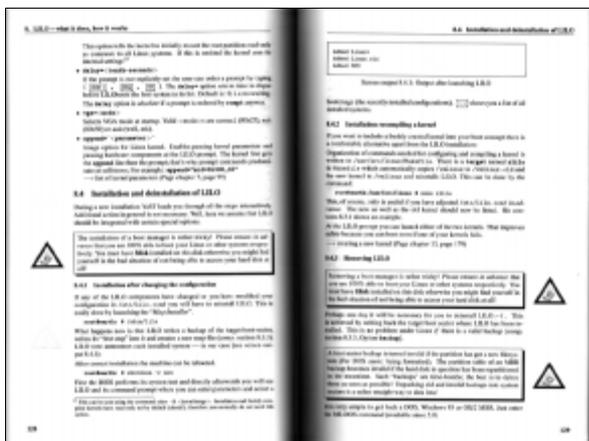


Figure 10. *SuSE Linux 5.1 manual*, 1997



Figure 11. *Running Linux*, Matt Welsh and Lars Kaufman, O'Reilly, 1994

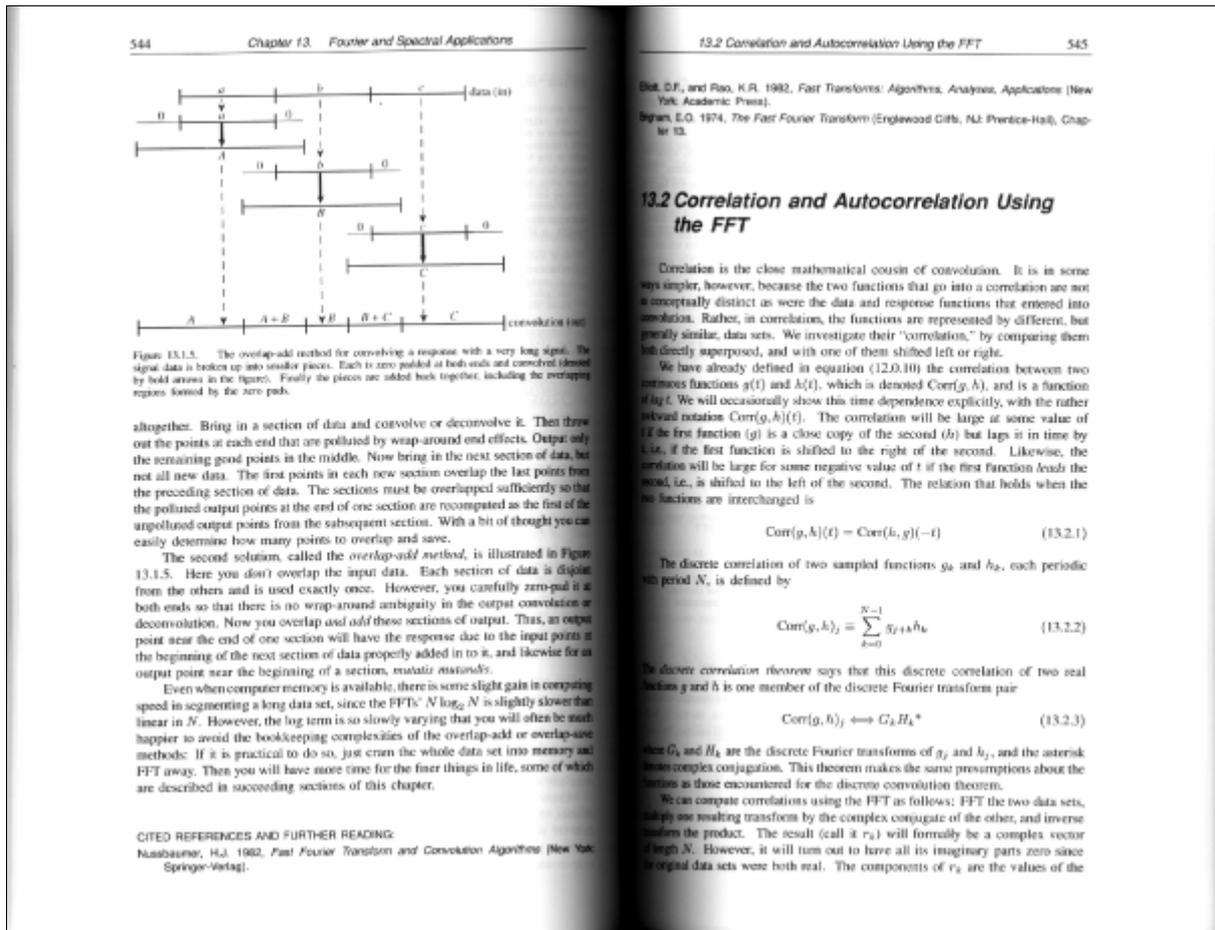


Figure 12. *Numerical Recipes in C*, Press, Teukolsky, Vetterling and Flannery, Cambridge University Press, 1992

Windows books are usually produced with FrameMaker and have a very similar look.

Math books

Of course I ought to include a couple of math books too, since MAPS is about T_EX, and math typesetting is the first and foremost reason why T_EX has been created.

'Numerical Recipes (figure 12) is indeed typeset with T_EX. Running text is set in Times, headlines and references in Helvetica, math in Computer Modern.

As often with textbooks, the lines are a bit long for comfort. I would have liked smaller pages, but then there would have been even more of them, making the book even more unmanageable.

Equations are centered, and paragraphs are always indented, also after a section head or an equation. Jarring is the combination of section numbering and a title which doesn't fit on one line.

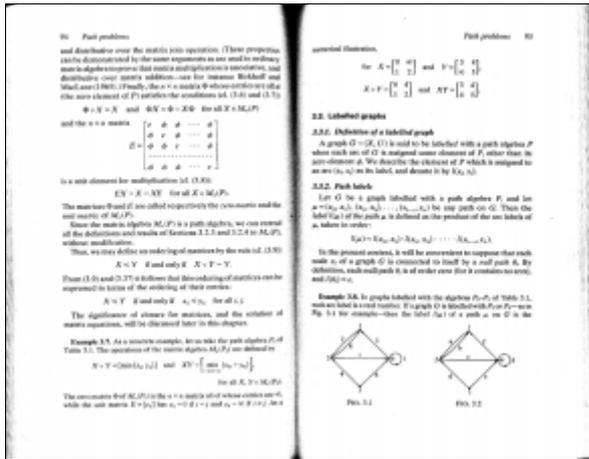


Figure 13. *Graphs and Networks*, Bernard Carré, Oxford University Press, 1979

Our second math example, *Graphs and Networks* (figure 13), must have been typeset without \TeX . It also centers equations and indents all paragraphs. Here, the page size

is comfortable. On the minus side, all the math and the numbered section heads and the illustrations make for a very busy layout.

I don't know what it would take to make such publications look good. Detailed and numbered sectioning often is a necessity; left-aligned equations would still look busy although maybe a little bit less so.

A picture book

We end with a cute little book on a grim subject: 'History of the war' (figure 14). It has the dimensions of an ordinary paperback, except for its landscape orientation. This alone already makes for a striking effect. It is printed in two colors, orange and black. Each spread is about a separate topic. It is designed on a three-column grid. In the displayed spread, only one of the two times three columns is filled with running text.

Justification is not very good, but it hardly matters because of the strength of the general layout and the impact of the illustrations.

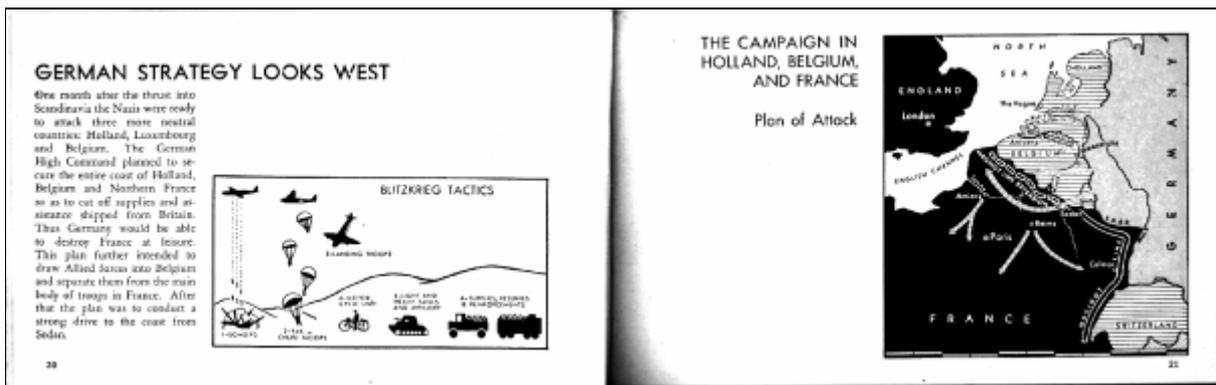


Figure 14. *A history of the war*, Rudolf Modley, Penguin, 1943