1.9 LEADING AND READABILITY

As a general rule, newspaper designers have determined that the optimum column width for type is about one and one-half times the point size, in picas. That is, if your body copy is set in 10-point type, the optimum column width for that type is 15 picas (10 x 1.5). The minimum width is equal to the point size in picas (10 picas) and the maximum width is twice the point size in picas (20 picas). Any wider than that and readability suffers.

DIRECTIONS: Based on what you've learned about leading, fill in the blanks.

If your body copy type was set at 9 pt., what would be the optimum column width in picas? _____

For that same body copy, what would be the maximum column width in picas? _____

And the minimum? _____

When type is set in a column with more narrow than the minimum recommended width, it is usually set flush left to avoid "rivers" of white space that can be distracting to the reader. When type is set in a column width wider than the maximum recommended width, it is usually set with additional leading so the reader's eyes don't drift down.

DIRECTIONS: Based on what you've learned about leading, check the box that corresponds to the best answer.

Some 9-point, justified, serif text was set in column that was 12 picas wide. What should the designer do to ensure readability?

- ❏ Nothing. It'll be plenty readable.
- ❏ Set the type flush left.
- ❏ Add leading.
- ❏ Make sure it's in a sans serif font for contrast.

Some 9-point, justified, serif text was set in a very wide column, about 20 picas wide. What should the designer do to ensure readability?

- ❏ Nothing. It'll be plenty readable.
- ❏ Set the type flush left.
- ❏ Add leading.
- ❏ Make sure it's in a sans serif font for contrast.

Some 9-point, justified, serif text was set in a very narrow column, only 6 picas wide. What should the designer do to ensure readability?

- ❏ Nothing. It'll be plenty readable.
- ❏ Set the type flush left.
- ❏ Add leading.
- ❏ Make sure it's in a sans serif font for contrast.

Some 18-point, introductory text was set in a sans serif font. It was set above the columns of text in one column that was 4 inches wide. What should the designer do to ensure readability?

- ❏ Nothing. It'll be plenty readable.
- ❏ Set the type flush left.
- ❏ Add leading.
- ❏ Make sure it's in a sans serif font for contrast.

BONUS: You're working on creating a one-page newsletter with a page that is 51 picas wide with 3 pica margins on the outside and inside, giving you a printable area of 45 picas. How many columns, each separated by 1-pica gutters, can you divide this page into without making the columns too narrow or too wide? (Hint: There's more than one correct answer. The best answer will be a range.)