

3.1 DETERMINE COLUMN WIDTH

Remember from chapter 1 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.

NOTE

When writing the specifications for type, designers first write the point size followed by the leading. So, 10/11-point type indicates type that is 10 points tall on a line that is 11 points tall, giving 1 point of space between each line of type.

EXERCISE: Your broadsheet page is 12.25" x 21", with 2-pica margins required on each side to avoid elements running off the page. When redesigning your newspaper, you've elected to use Minion, a serif font with an average x-height, so 10/11-point body copy will be satisfactory. Prepare a step-by-step diagram to calculate the column widths and then to select which ones will result in readable column widths.

SAMPLE: Your tabloid page is 17" x 22", with one-half inch margins required on each side to avoid elements running off the page. When redesigning your newspaper, you've elected to use Nimrod, a serif font with a large x-height, so 9/10-point body copy will be plenty large enough. Keeping the columns at optimum width, how many columns can you have on the page?

1. Calculate the print area: A 17" x 22" page is 102 picas by 132 picas since there are six picas per inch. Subtract the three picas you need on each side, and the area available for printing is 96 picas by 126 picas.
2. Knowing that the optimum column width for 9-point type is (9 x 1.5) 13.5 picas, divide the possible print area by the optimum column width: $96 / 13.5 = 7.11$ or approximately seven columns.
3. Then, to calculate the exact column width of each of the seven columns, first subtract the spacing to be used between each column. With one pica between each column, that's six picas, making the area that could be covered with text 90 picas. So, $90 / 7 = 12.86$ picas, the exact width of each column.

Now, aren't you glad the software performs these calculations for you?

EXERCISE: Based on these calculations, put a check by the ones that would result in readable column widths.

- 1 column = 96 picas each
- 2 columns = 47.5 picas each (including a 1-pica gutter)
- 3 columns = 31.3 picas each (including 2-picas for gutter)
- 4 columns = 23.3 picas each (including 3 picas for gutter)
- 5 columns = 18.4 picas each (including 4 picas for gutter)
- 6 columns = 15.2 picas each (including 5 picas for gutter)
- 7 columns = 12.9 picas each (including 6 picas for gutter)
- 8 columns = 11.2 picas each (including 7 picas for gutter)
- 9 columns = 9.8 picas each (including 8 picas for gutter)
- 10 columns = 8.6 picas each (including 9 picas for gutter)