# 15 Signs You're A Bad Graphic Designer

06
'07 Dec

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Yes, this is a controversial topic, however I hope to raise awareness of some mistakes you may be making in your graphic design pieces that are making you look like an amateur, but please keep in mind that none of these are hard and fast rules, this is only a general guide of things you should be aware of.

Please forgive me for the graphic and bad grammar / spelling in the picture above as I'm sure you can see it is a joke :) (rainbow gradients, comic sans, bevel emboss, 13 not 15, bad grammar, off centered type – yuk)

Anyway, I have compiled 15 tell tale signs that you may still be considered a (don't quote me) bad graphic designer. Some of these have been taken from Robin Williams great book "[The Non-Designers Type Book](#)" that I recommended in the [top 5 typography resources](#) of all time.
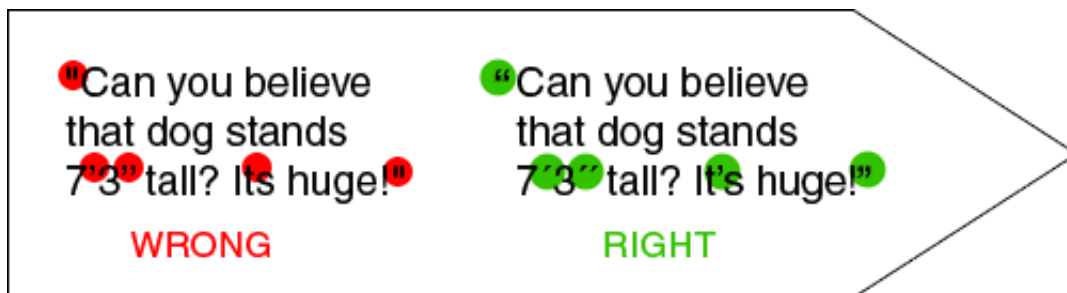
## 1. Helvetica

## Do you use Helvetica in everything?

Ok, yes I know, it is the most popular font of all time – but that is the downfall of Helvetica. Just because it is there, it doesn't mean you have to use it. Try something else next time and try break out of your habit. Just for some suggestions, maybe Trade Gothic, Formata, Futura, Antique Olive, Eurostile? And yes I know this website uses Helvetica :) Also check out the post 30 fonts to last you a lifetime.

## 2. Straight Quotes & Wrong Quotes



## Do you use straight quotes still?

Straight quotes were for typewriters, times have changed! Look at the difference between the quotes above.

1. The quotations are not hanging over the edge.
2. Straight quotes have been used instead of true quotation marks.
3. Quotation marks have been used instead of prime marks after the 7 and

3.

4.  An apostrophe has been left out in between it's.

Learn the keystrokes to 'real' quotes in every application you use. Learn the MAC & PC keyboard shortcuts here.

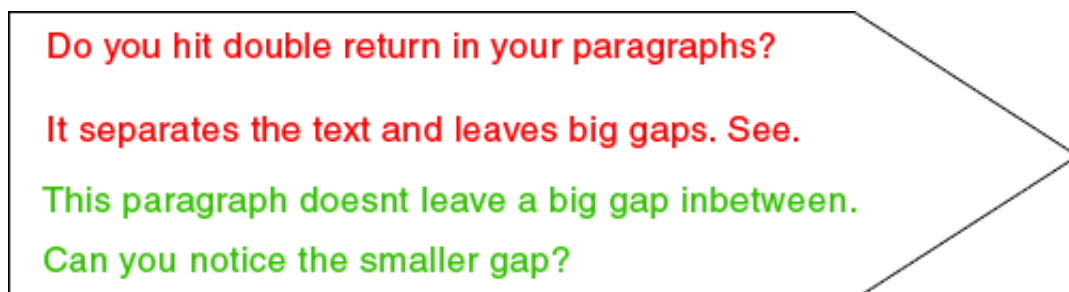Don't type curly quotes when you need inch and foot marks (prime marks).

## 3. Quotations Not Hung

**Do you NOT hang your quotation marks?**

**See in the picture in number 2,** how the quote marks are hanging off the side of the quote, compared to the other one. Hang your quotation marks. Read your software manual (check their help files) to read how to do this or you can do it manually.

## 4. Double Returns.

Do you hit double return in your paragraphs?

It separates the text and leaves big gaps. See.

This paragraph doesnt leave a big gap inbetween.
Can you notice the smaller gap?

**Do you hit the 'return' or the 'enter' key twice between paragraphs or after headlines?**

Using two spaces makes it possible to end up with a blank line at the top of a column plus it leaves way too much space between each paragraph – it looks

disconnected.

## 5. Two Spaces After Punctuation

Do you use double spaces in between your
sentences?  This is incorrect.  It makes your
sentences look incorrectly spaced.
This is the correct way. Use only one space
in between your sentences and it will look
more professional. Do you agree?

**Do you add two spaces after each sentence?**

This is a very bad practice and is not correct – Using only one space is the correct way.
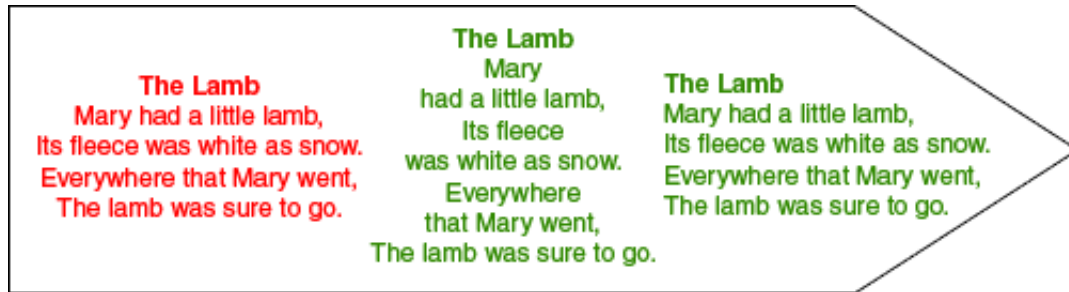
## 6. Using Boxes Behind Text

Do you use boxes behind your text? This is
practice and should only be used sparingly.

Make use of white space and
it will stand out on its own.

**Do you use plain boxes of colour behind your text?**

Just because you can, doesn't mean you have to. Try something else, use a dramatic headline, use your white space, use a different font, reverse your type, use pull quotes, etc. Can you see in the above picture how the surrounding white space makes the text stand out on its own? You can use these in the correct places however be careful not to over use it.
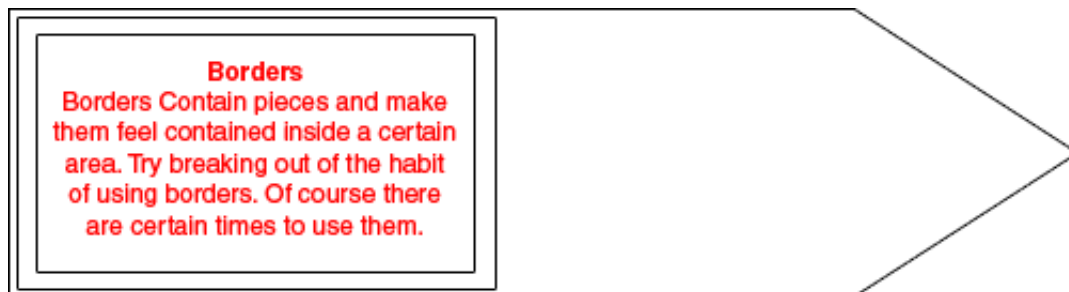
## 7. Centred Layouts

**The Lamb**
Mary had a little lamb,
Its fleece was white as snow.
Everywhere that Mary went,
The lamb was sure to go.

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## Do you use a centred layout in your graphic design pieces?

Using centred layouts is usually bad practice as it creates a deadly dull look. See how much more effective the two green verses are, they are more dynamic (one is centred & one is left aligned). Using flush left or right gives strength to your entire page and usually is a better option unless of course there are reasons to use centred text. eg. creating a formal wedding invitation.
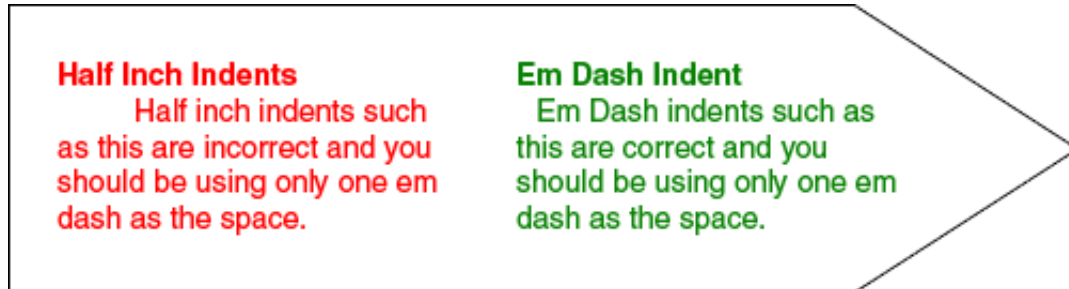
## 8. Borders

**Borders**
Borders Contain pieces and make them feel contained inside a certain area. Try breaking out of the habit of using borders. Of course there are certain times to use them.

## Do you use borders around everything?

This often indicates a beginner who feels unsafe with type that is uncontained. Use your white space. You can let it be there. Seriously.
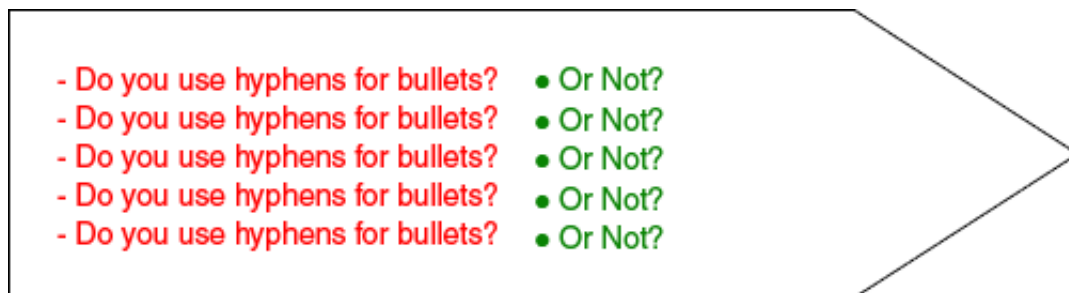
## 9. Indents



### Do you use half inch indents?

This is bad practice and is the old way (back in typewriter days). The standard is one em space which is a space as wide as the point size of the type. ([what?](#)) This is approximately two spaces, not five.
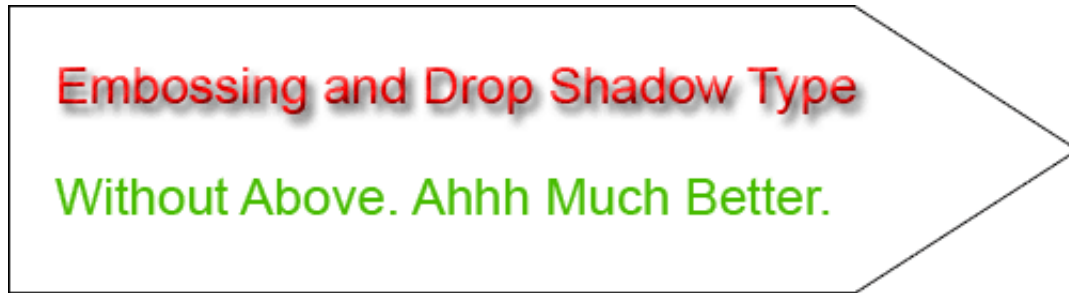
## 10. Hyphens For Bullets



### Do you use bullets for hyphens?

This is a typewriter habit and is unprofessional. Try using dots or dingbats.
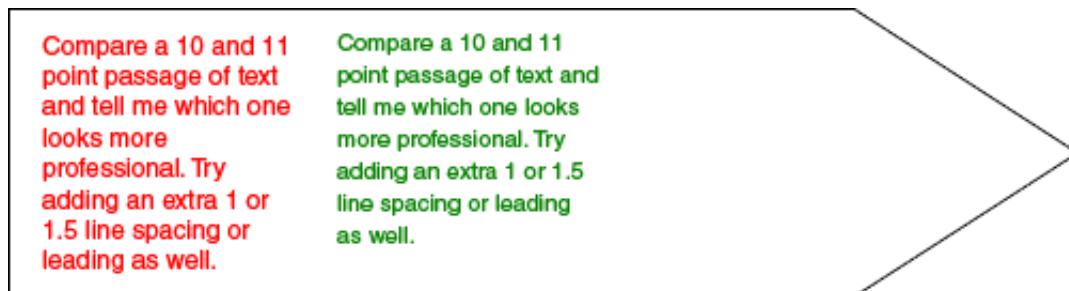
## 11. Embossing & Drop Shadowed Type

**Do you use the nifty little drop shadow or emboss tools that comes with your software?**

PLEASE STOP. This is the biggest dead give away of an amateur. This goes along with forbidden; rainbow gradients, reflections, comic sans. Just don't use them, plain simple.

## 12. 12 Point Type



**Do use the default 12 point type with auto leading?**

For most typefaces, 12 point is a tiny bit too large for body copy. Compare a 10, 11 and 12 point passage of text and tell me which one looks more professional. Try adding an extra 1 or 1.5 line spacing or leading as well. Notice the difference in the two examples above. The red is the default 12 auto leading and the green is size 11 with 2 points of leading.

## 13. Underline

## Do you underline?

Never use the underline feature, it is a law. Only for hyper links on the web is this allowed. Underlining was a way for typewriters back in the day to *Italicize* text because they couldn't set italics. Underlining and italicizing text at the same time is the most redundant thing you can do in life but rules can be broken ;)

## 14. ALL CAPS

### DO YOU USE ALL CAPS?

All caps is more difficult to read and this is because we recognise a word not by its letters, but by the shape of the whole word. When text is in all caps, every word has the same shape so we have to read every letter by itself. All caps is fine sometimes but when you are conscious of using it and why. Try using bold, using a different typeface or using reverse text.

## 15. Bad Gramma & Speling

Not spell checking your work and not using the right grammar. One of the hardest aspects designers seem to face.

### Your Score?

If you scored above 3 points, don't worry. Creating professional level type and design is mainly a matter of becoming more aware of details and practice. If you scored less than 3, then congratulations and consider it your obligation to teach others the things you know. (Hint: Link to this post ;) )

**For more information** on graphic design and typography and the things

listed above check out The Top 27 Mistakes Graphic Designers Make or refer to Robin Williams book "The Non-Designers Type Book".

What do you believe are some other signs you are a bad graphic designer?

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