

What is Kerning?

According to a research at Cambridge University, it doesn't matter in what order the letters in a word are, the only important thing is that the first and last letter be at the right place. The rest can be a total mess and you can still read it without problem. This is because the human mind does not read every letter by itself, but the word as a whole.

When we read, we interpret shapes of words rather than individual letters. The main objective in kerning type is to try and achieve a visual evenness through the characters.

Kerning is the art of repositioning the letters in a word so that they are more pleasing to the eye. Type that is not properly kerned looks very unprofessional. Once you grow accustomed to properly kerned text you will be amazed at the bad typesetting that you see everywhere.

*Can you see the awkward spacing in the first example?
Pay close attention to kerning capital letters.*

TYPEFACES GIVE VOICE TO WORDS

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The average untrained person can tell the difference intuitively and subconsciously, even if they can't tell you why one set of letters looks better to them.

Font Selection is the key to beautiful design (but that's an entirely separate topic). If you have a mish-mash of fonts that are a visual nightmare, kerning will not save bad type decisions. Type creates mood and understanding. A professional designer takes great care selecting and setting type. Well-set type creates a smooth visual flow which helps the reader concentrate on the meaning of the words. Kerning puts the necessary, final polish on this key design element.

Learn to Kern

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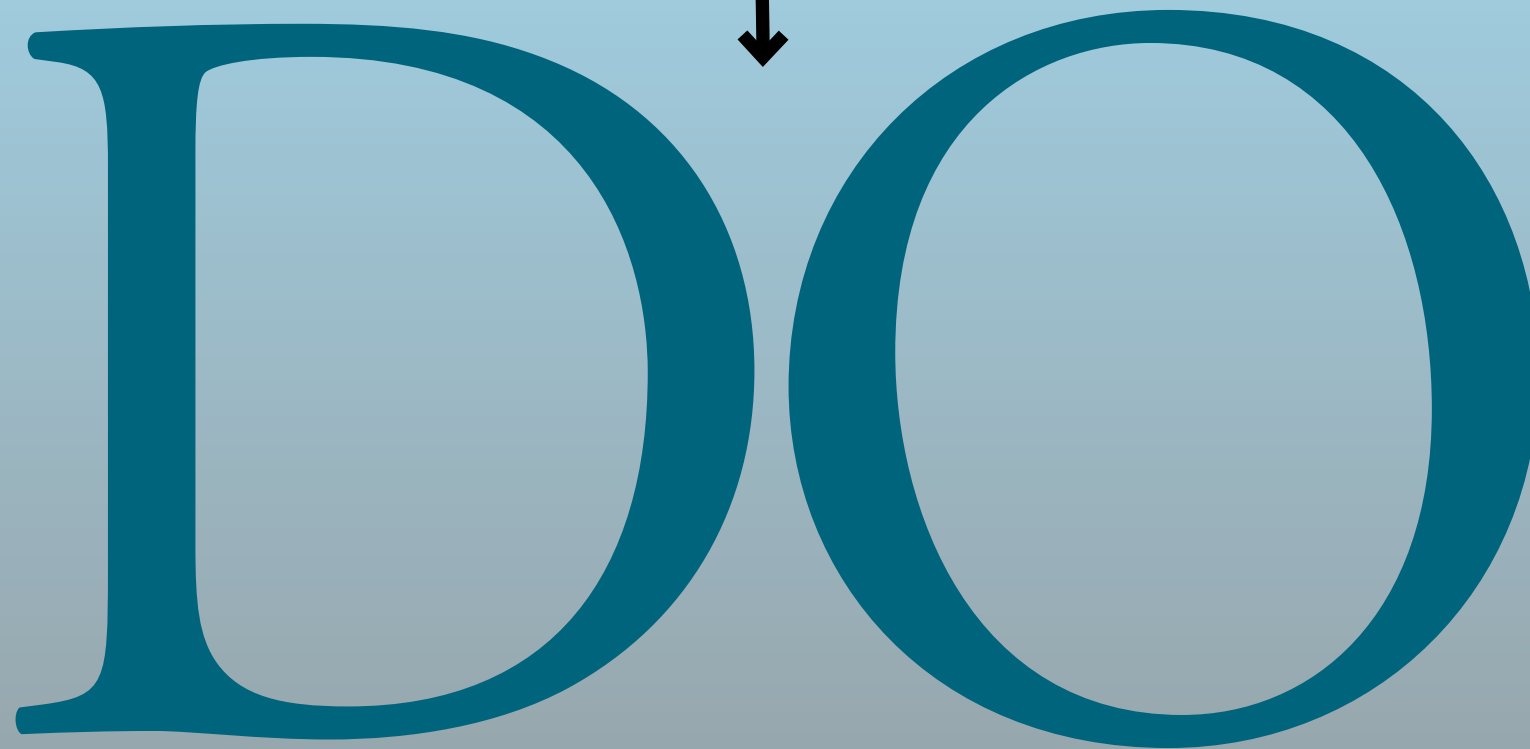
Legibility is primarily the concern of the typeface designer, to ensure that each individual character or glyph is unambiguous and distinguishable from all other characters in the font. Legibility is also in part the concern of the typographer to select a typeface with appropriate clarity of design for the intended use at the intended size. An example of a well-known design, Brush Script, contains a number of illegible letters since many of the characters can be easily misread especially if seen out of textual context.

Readability is primarily the concern of the typographer or information designer. It is the intended result of the complete process of presentation of textual material in order to communicate meaning as unambiguously as possible. A reader should be assisted in navigating around the information with ease, by optimal inter-letter, inter-word and particularly inter-line spacing, coupled with appropriate line length and position on the page, careful editorial “chunking” and choice of the text architecture of titles, folios, and reference links.

from Wikipedia

Round Letters

Round letters should be placed quite close together because the counters in each round letter create a sense of great space.



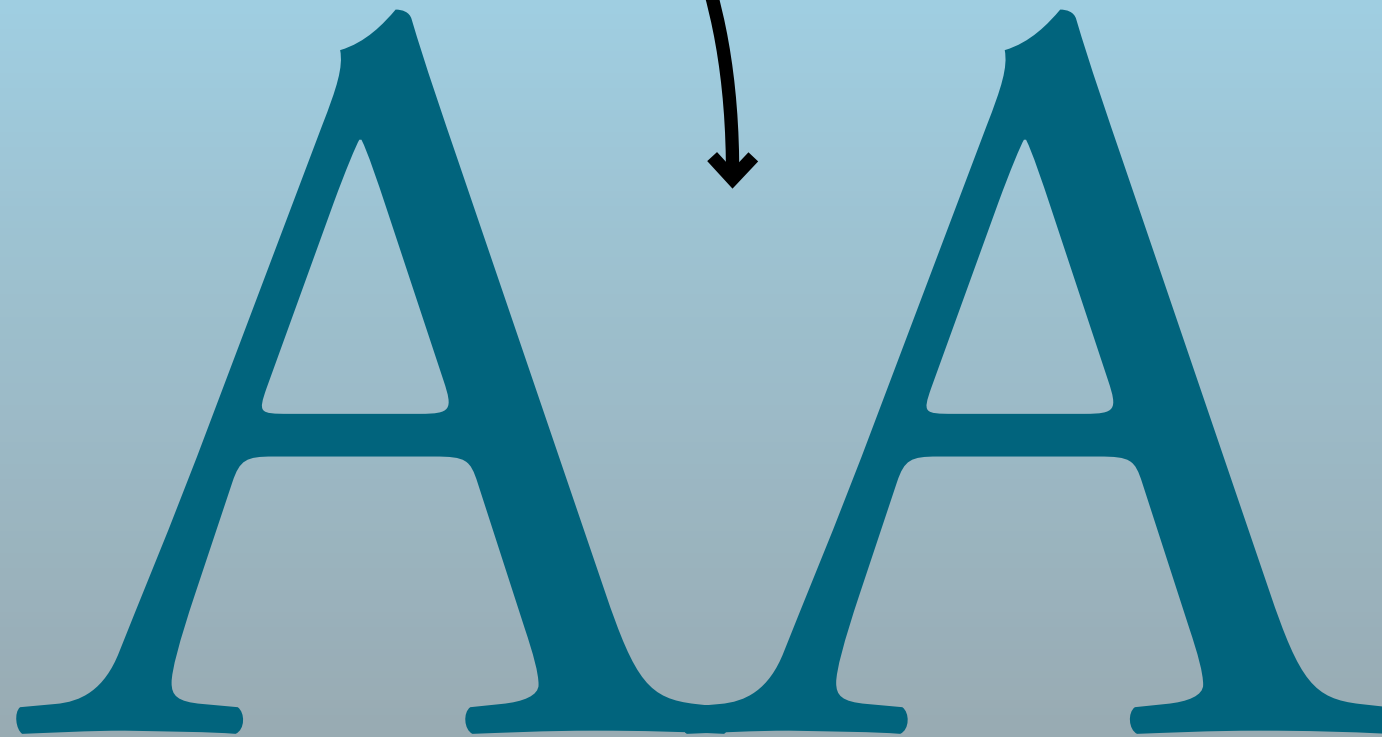
Straight Letters

Straight-shaped letters need some “breathing room,” especially around the letter i.



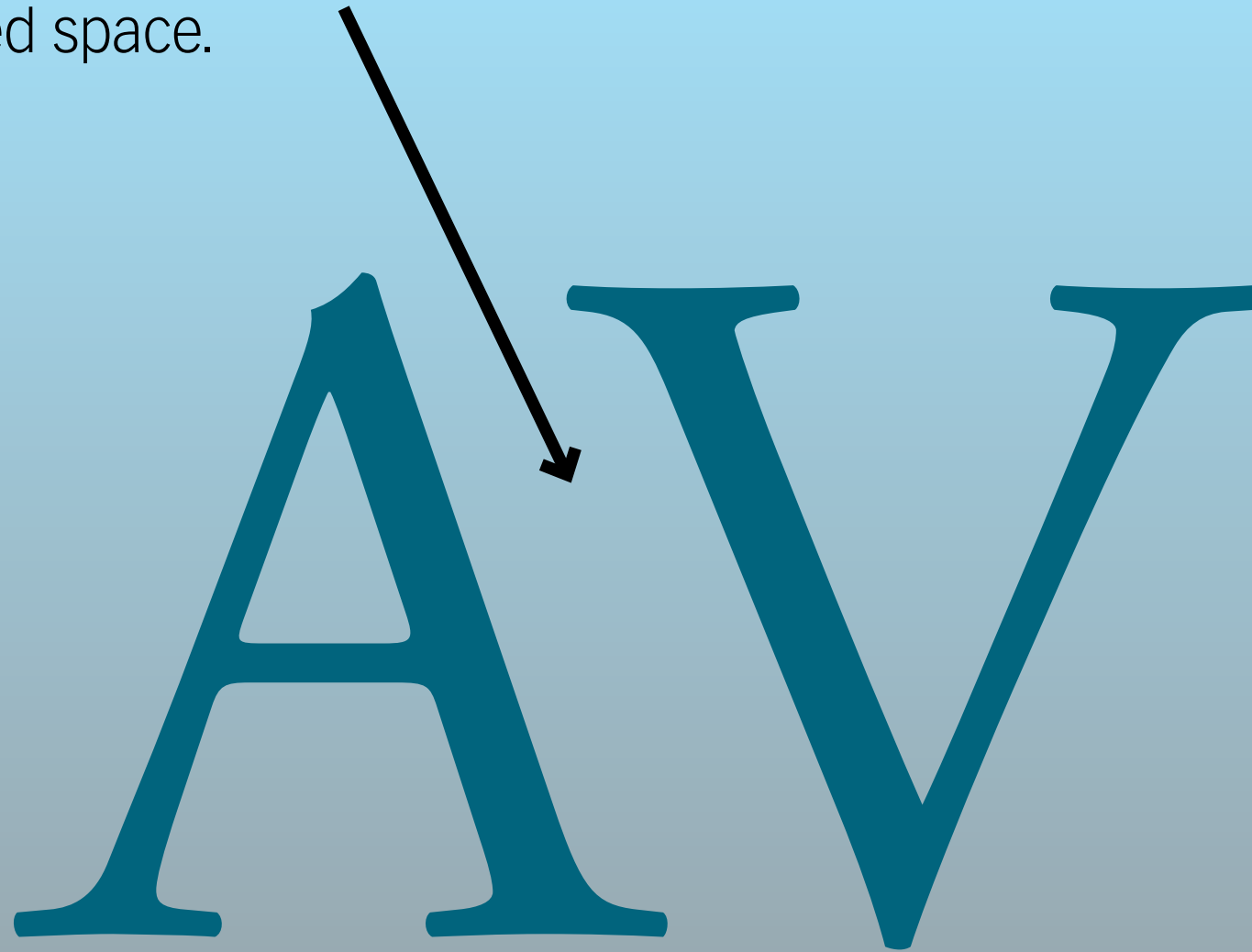
Opposing Diagonals

Opposing diagonal letters or any letters with large areas of white space should be moved together to avoid excessively large areas of white space.



Mirrored Diagonals

Space mirrored diagonal letters the same as straight-shaped letters. They need the added space.



Ligatures

Two or more letters combined are called ligatures.
Some common ligatures are ff, fl, fi, tt, ae.

shuffle



shuffle

Set in Adobe Garamond Pro. The PRO designation means that the font automatically selects ligatures when it sees certain combinations of letters. Times New Roman (at left) does not.

Tips

tweak, analyze, and tweak again until you have it right!

Don't be lazy! Make the adjustments to the letter spacing, or kerning.
Kerning is the difference between amateur and professional design.

The larger the type size, the more obvious the letter spacing errors.
Bad letter spacing can be quite distracting.

- Some font faces are intended for larger display type. Don't use them for body copy.
- Some typefaces fall apart and look terrible at sizes lower than 10 or 12 points. Use fonts that scale well below about 10 points.
- Cheap (and free) fonts are almost worthless. The individual letter forms are inferior and the letter spacing is horrible requiring a lot of time kerning.
- The smaller the point size, the more space is needed between letters to keep the characters legible. Conversely, as a typeface is set larger, a snugger fit between letters creates word-shapes that are easier to read. The goal of good letter fitting is to create an even "color," between all of the characters.
- Avoid monospaced typefaces for body copy. They draw too much attention to the individual letters distracting the reader from the message.
- Avoid setting type in lines of more than sixty-five characters. Longer lines cause the reader to "double," or read the same line twice.
- Avoid setting type in lines of less than thirty-five characters. Shorter lines cause sentences to be broken and hard to understand.
- Avoid setting type in all capital letters. Capital letters slow reading speed and take 30 percent more space than lowercase letters.
- For a predominantly older readership of 65 and over or for audiences with known visual handicaps, set body text in sizes from 14 to 18 points. Use 11 to 12 point type for readers in the 40-65 age range. For beginning readers of any age, a larger type size around 14 points is good.
- Keep headlines between 14 and 30 points in most cases, keeping in mind that the closer in size to the body text, the harder it is to distinguish headlines from other text.
- Because the space between characters expands as the type size increases, designers often fine-tune letterspacing when working with large letters.

Tips taken from <http://www.about.com> and <http://www.coolhomepages.com/cda/kerning/>

Learn to Kern in Adobe InDesign

Two tricks for checking on letter spacing:

1. SQUINT at the type. You should see an even “color” to the type.
2. Turn the type, or the printout of the type upside down. “Rivers” of white space should become obvious.

Adjust Kerning Manually

- Using the Type tool, click to place an insertion point between two characters. Note: if a range of text is selected, you can’t manually kern the text (you can choose only Metrics, Optical, or 0). Instead use tracking. Do any of the following:
- In the character panel or the Control panel, type or select a numeric value in the Kerning menu.
- Press Alt+Left/Right Arrow (Windows) or Option+Left/Right Arrow (Mac OS) to decrease or increase the kerning between two characters. The amount of the word kerning adjustment is the same as the Kerning value in the Units & Increments Preferences dialog box. When you press the shortcut and hold down the Ctrl or Command key, the kerning amount is the Kerning preferences value multiplied by 5.

Change the Default Kerning Increment Value

- In the Units & Increments section of the Preferences dialog box, type a new value for the Kerning option and click OK.
- Turn off kerning for selected text.
- Select text. In the Character panel or Control panel, type or choose 0 in the Kerning menu.
- You can also press Alt+Ctrl+Q (Windows) or Option+Command+Q (Mac OS) to reset kerning and tracking. When you do so, kerning is set to Metrics regardless of which kerning option was previously applied.

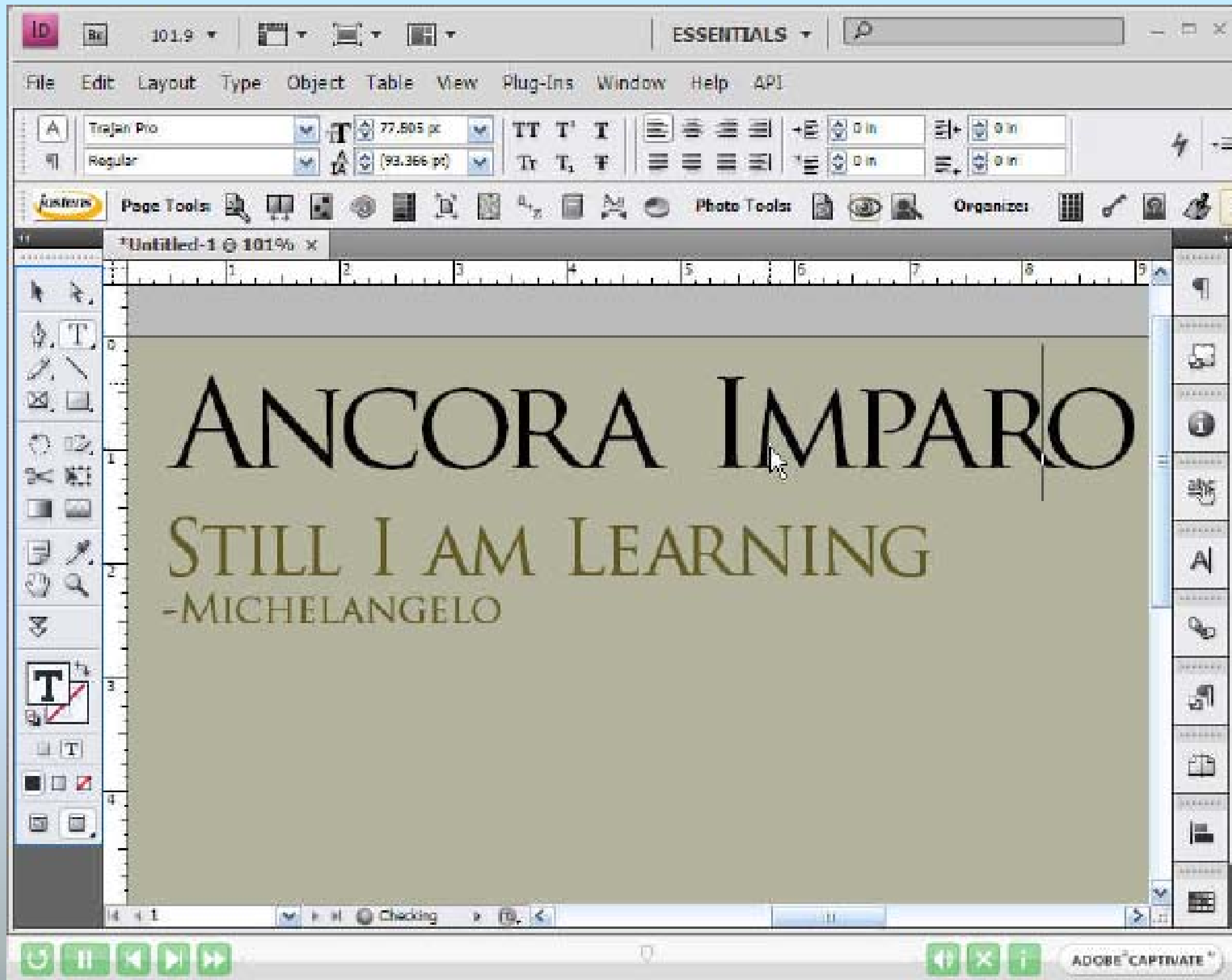
Adjust Tracking

Select a range of characters.

- In the Character panel or Control panel, type or select a numeric value for Tracking. Highlight text containing custom kerning and tracking. In some instances, you’ll want to be aware of text that has custom tracking and kerning applied. If you select the Custom Tracking/Kerning preferences option, green highlighting appears over text with custom tracking or kerning. Choose Edit>Preferences>Composition (Windows) or InDesign>Preferences>Composition (Mac OS).
- Select Custom Tracking/Kerning, and then click OK.

Adjust Kerning Between Words

- With the Type tool, select a range of text and do one of the following:
- To add space between selected words, press Alt+Ctrl+\ (Windows) or Option+Command+Delete (Mac OS).
- To multiply the kerning adjustment by 5, hold down Shift as you press the keyboard shortcut.



Kerning Exercise

- Open InDesign CS5
- Go to Preferences (Ctrl-K) go to: Units and Increments, change to inches, kerning & tracking 2 /1000 em
- Make new document (Ctrl-N): letter size, portrait
- Put your name at the top of the page.
- Set the following type:
 - HANDGLOVES all caps, 72 pt Minion, regular
 - **Handgloves** Caps and lower, 72 pt. Times New Roman, Bold
 - typed lower case, 120 pt. Arial, Bold
 - startSTART 120 pt. Minion, Bold
- Now, Kern the space between individual letters to create better visual balance.
- Place the following files into your document:
KerningHandgloves.psd
KerningHandgloves2.psd
KerningSTART.psd
KernedTyped.psd
- Go to Object>Effects>Transparency and change the Opacity setting to 50%.
Move the imported type on top of your words to check your work.
- Save your file as a .pdf file and copy to the Inbox (DropBox) for evaluation.
- How did you do?Next➤

typed
startSTART
Handgloves
startSTART