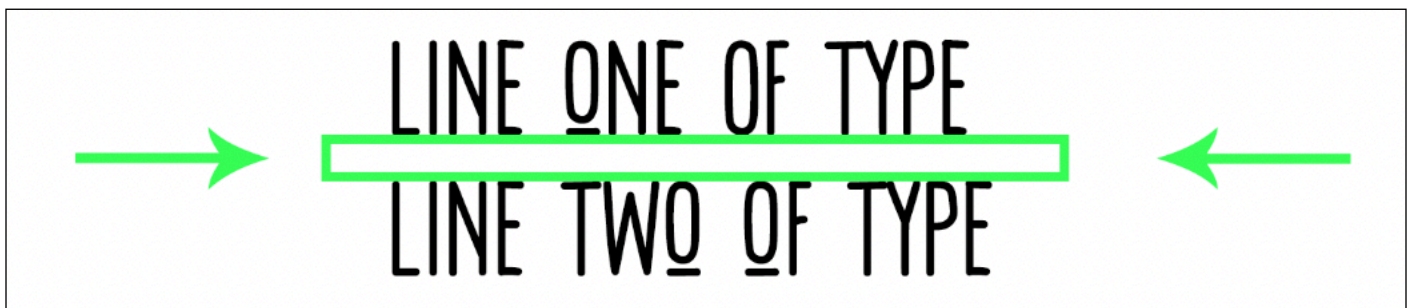Essential Solutions for Page Design Problems

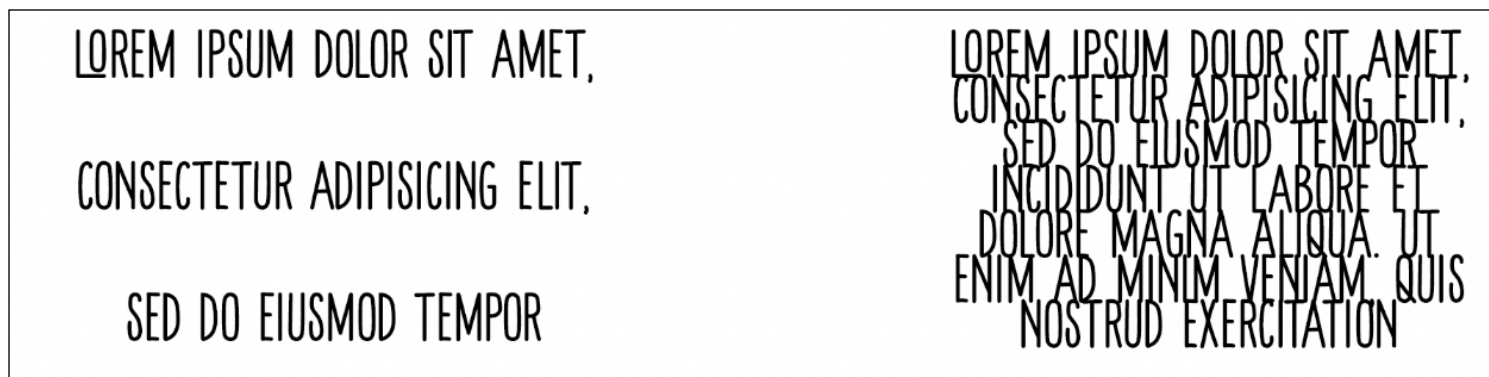# Design Problem: Incorrect Leading

by Jenifer Juris

Learn what incorrect Leading is and how easy it is to fix.

In this Essential Solutions for Page Design Problems lesson, we're going to take a look at the Design Problem of Incorrect Leading. But before we look at the Design Problem, let's make sure we all know what Leading is.

Leading is defined as the spacing between adjacent lines of type, or the space between the lines in a paragraph of text. Leading is a simple thing but it's still important we get it right.

Incorrect Leading occurs when the spacing between lines of type is too large or too small.
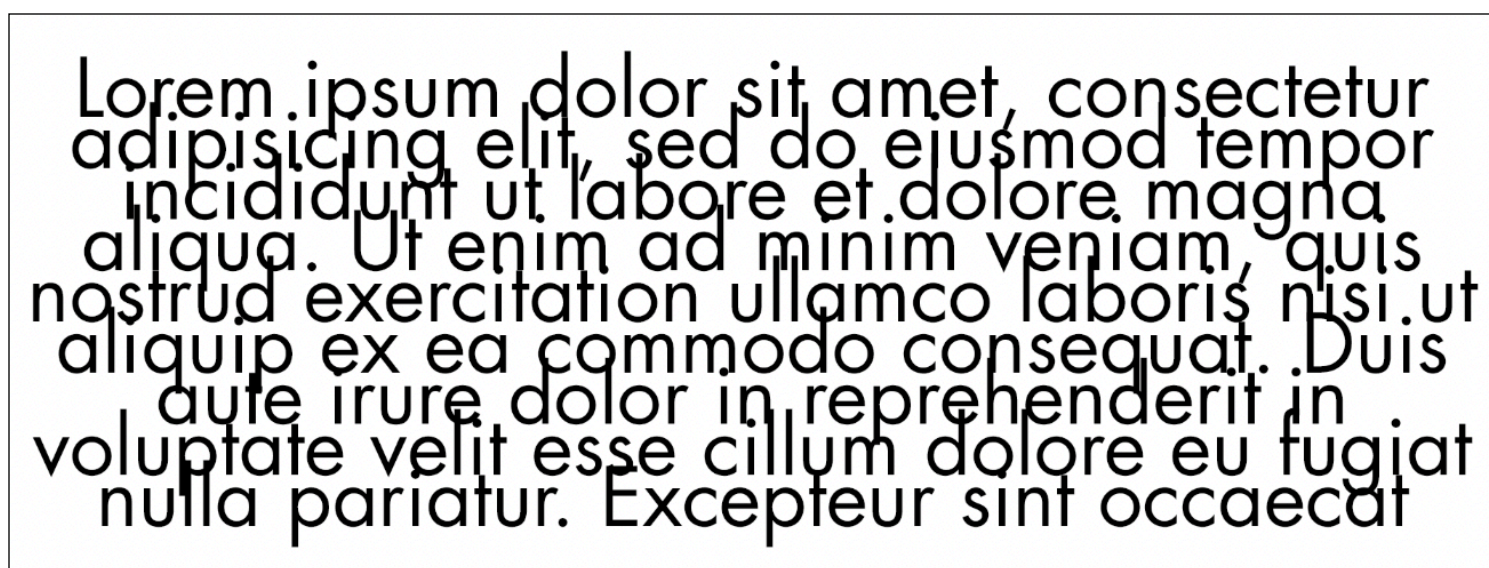
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This can happen for two main reasons:

1. The font's automatic Leading is off or calibrated incorrectly.
2. We have our software's Leading set to the wrong value.

Incorrect Leading is a design problem for a few reasons:

1. If the Leading is too small, the letters from one line to the next will be too close together or in some instances, they may even overlap.

This is a problem because it makes the type very hard to read. Anything on a layout that doesn't make sense makes us like a scrapbook page less. Our brains want something to be easy to look at and easy to comprehend.

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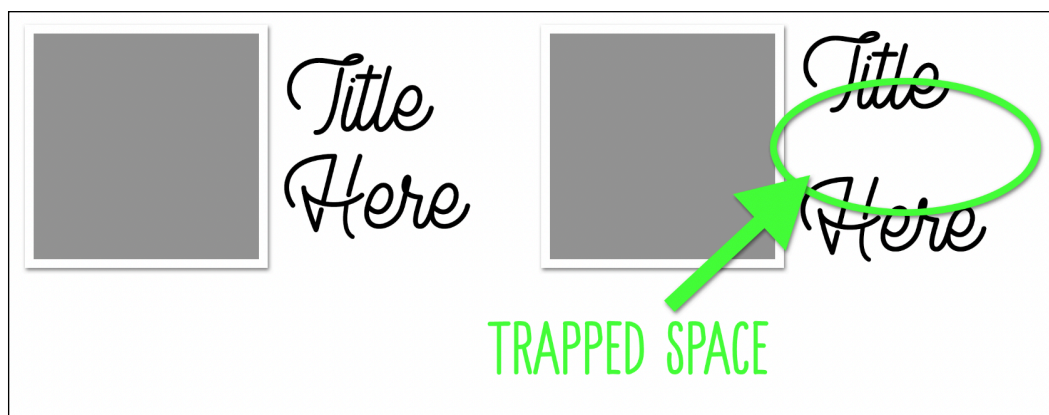2. If the Leading is too large, it creates a mental disconnect between the lines of type.

Again, our brains want something to flow smoothly, especially when we're reading. If the space between the lines is too large, it makes us wonder why.

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3. When the Leading is too large, it creates what we call trapped space on our layouts.

Trapped Space is defined as an illogical break between two things that should go together. Think of it like a hole in the middle of your page. Our eye expects something in that space, and when it's empty, our brain gets confused. This creates a less appealing page.

Here's a visual example of good Leading on a title, versus incorrect Leading that's causing trapped space. The trapped space creates a break between the two lines of type and causes a visual disconnect. This is creating a hole in the design of our page.

Title Here

Title Here

TRAPPED SPACE

Now that you know what Leading is, what incorrect Leading looks like, and why it's a design problem, let's take a look at a handful of visual examples to see if we can spot which paragraphs or titles have correct or incorrect Leading.

In this first example, do you think the Leading is too small, too large, or just right?

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If you said too large, you would be correct. Here's what it should look like.

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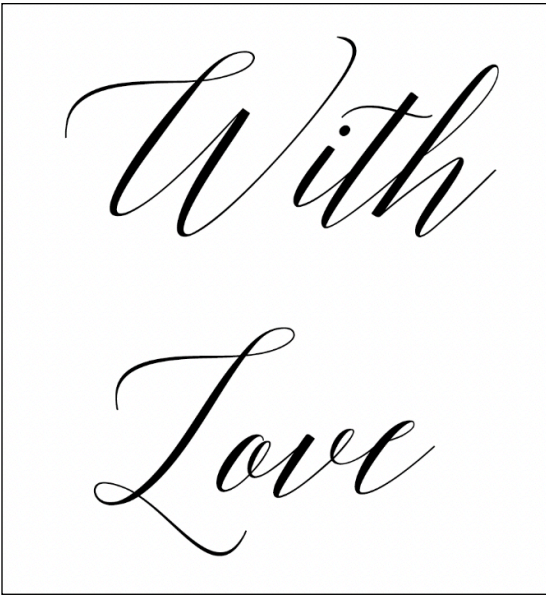
In this second example, do you think the Leading is too small, too large, or just right?

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If you said, too small, you would be correct. There's hardly any space between the lines, and they need a bit more breathing room. Here's how it should look once the Leading has been corrected.

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In this third example, I've created a title while using the Auto setting for Leading. Do you think the Leading is too large, too small, or just right?
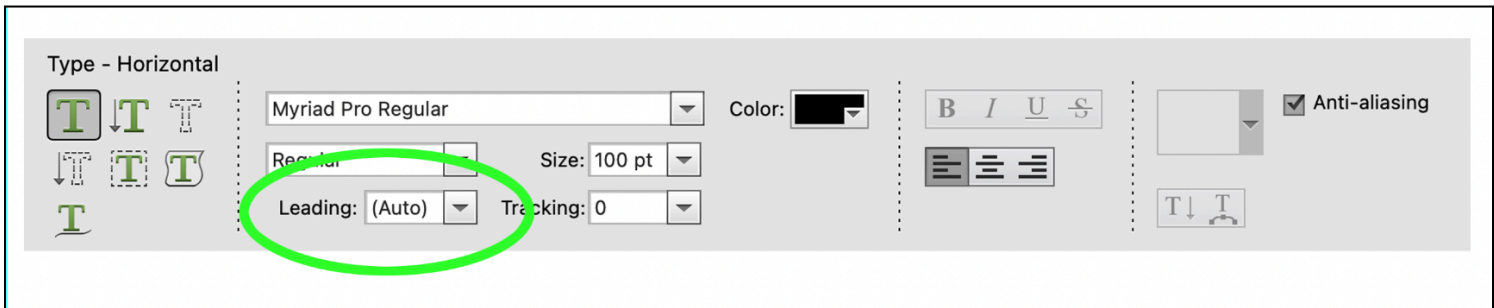

If you said too large, you are correct! Many times, when working with a font at larger sizes, decreasing the Leading is necessary. The Auto setting is usually too large and spaces the title words too far apart. Here's what the title looks like now that I've decreased the Leading. The title looks more cohesive and like one unit instead of two.
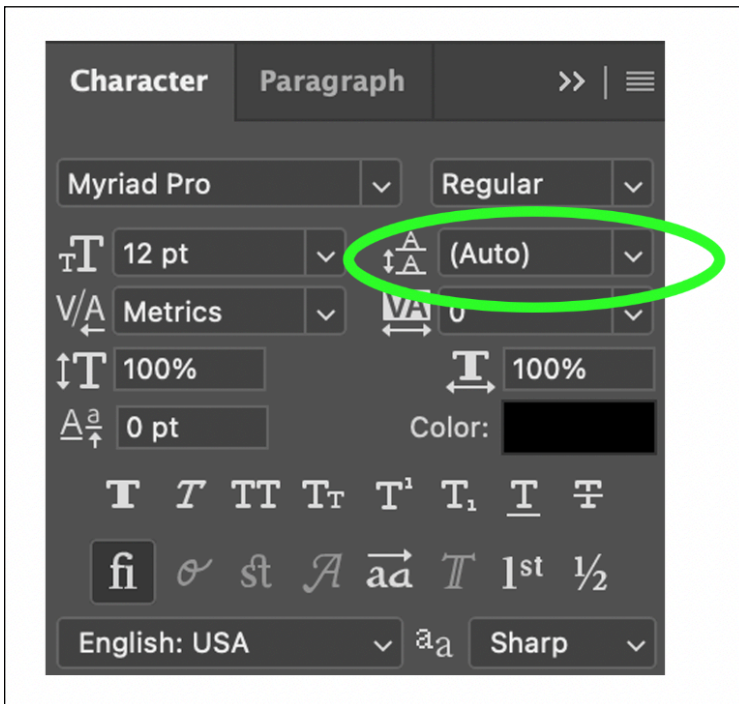

I hope these visual examples have helped you better understand what good Leading looks like. It's a simple thing that is easy to overlook.

Fixing the Leading of our type is one of the easiest things to do:

In Photoshop Elements, all you have to do is get the Type tool, and in the Tool Options, change the number of the Leading to be smaller or larger depending on what your type needs.

In Adobe Photoshop, you do the same thing, only you access the Leading from the Character Panel.
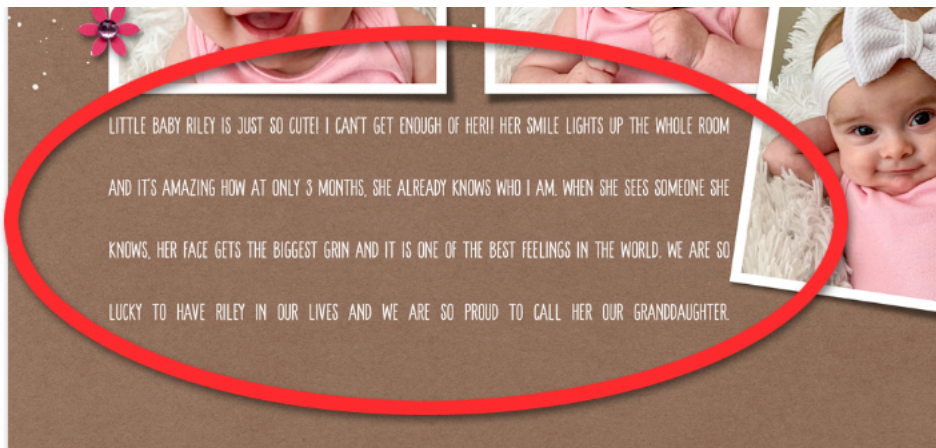
Here's the page I made where the Leading is incorrect. Can you spot the errors with the Leading?

For the Title, the spacing between the two lines is too small. The letters are starting to overlap and the whole title feels crowded.

The journaling, on the other hand, has the opposite problem. There is way too much space between the lines and it makes the journaling feel disjointed and unconnected.

Here's my page now that I have corrected the Leading for both my title and the journaling. What a difference it makes! The title has just enough breathing room between the lines, and my journaling does too. The journaling feels more cohesive and takes up much less space, all because we fixed one small thing; the Leading.

LITTLE BABY RILEY IS JUST SO CUTE! I CAN'T GET ENOUGH OF HER!! HER SMILE LIGHTS UP THE WHOLE ROOM AND IT'S AMAZING HOW AT ONLY 3 MONTHS, SHE ALREADY KNOWS WHO I AM. WHEN SHE SEES SOMEONE SHE KNOWS, HER FACE GETS THE BIGGEST GRIN AND IT IS ONE OF THE BEST FEELINGS IN THE WORLD. WE ARE SO LUCKY TO HAVE RILEY IN OUR LIVES AND WE ARE SO PROUD TO CALL HER OUR GRANDDAUGHTER.

Here's the before and after, side-by-side. It's easy to see what an impact correct Leading can having on a layout.

So to review, incorrect Leading is a design problem because:

1. If the Leading is too small, the letters from one line to the next will be too close together or in some instances, they may even overlap.
2. If the Leading is too large, it creates a mental disconnect between the lines of type.
3. when the Leading is too large, it creates what we call trapped space on our layouts.

The solution for fixing incorrect Leading is:

Adjusting the Leading field in the Type tool Tool Options (PSE) or the Character Panel (PS).

Page Credits:
Page: Jenifer Juris
Photos: Desi Groeneweg
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