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Secrets of Terrific Type

Lesson 02-05: Tracking—Photoshop

Our next stop in the big world of type is all about Tracking!

In the last lesson, we learned that Leading was the amount of space between lines of type.

This is not to be confused with Tracking which is the amount of space between each character.

Tracking can be small,

Tracking can be small.

Or it can be large.

Tracking can be large.

And while the idea of Tracking is pretty simple, you can use Tracking in many different ways to achieve superior design results. For example, let's say you have a set of words you want to create into a piece of word art.

**Start Each
Day With
a Grateful
Heart**

Some of the words are longer than the others. But the word art shape we need to create is a rectangle. How can this be done? Tracking, when used correctly, can be the ticket to creating this piece of word art to have the shape we want it to have.

Let's take a look at how to do this in PS.

Step One: Prepare the Workspace

Create a new document that is 12 inches x 12 inches at 300ppi with a white background.

Press the letter D to reset the Color Chips to the default of black over white.

In the Menu Bar, choose Window > Character. Click on the Character Panel Menu icon and choose Reset Character. The reason we are doing this is because any time we change a setting in the character panel, that setting can remain sticky. So, it's always best practice to reset the Character panel before starting a new project.

Step Two: Add Type

Get the Horizontal Type tool. In the Tool Options, I'm setting the font to Mark My Words with a size of 60 pts. I'm also going to use Center Alignment.

On the document, click once and start typing the phrase. My first line of type will say "start each". Once you're done typing, click the checkmark to commit.

start each

TIP: Here's a tip you can use whenever you're creating type. When you need to start a new line of text that's close to another line of text, Press and hold the Shift key as you click to create a new line of type. Doing this will tell the program you want to create a new line of type instead of it trying to activate the type that is close by.

On the document, while holding down the Shift key, click once to start the third line of type. This line is going to be my third line in the phrase as I want to alternate my fonts. So using the same settings, I'm going to type "a grateful" and now that I'm doing, I'll click the checkmark to commit.

start each

a grateful

Now, I need to create my 2nd and 4th lines of type. So, in the Tool Options, I want to change my font to Lane-Narrow and leave everything else the same. But before I can do that, I need to go to the Layers panel and click on the Create a New Layer icon. I need to do this before I change the font settings, otherwise it would have changed the layer I just typed to the new font since it was still activated.

I'm also going to press the Caps Lock key because I want these lines to be all caps.

Now, on the document, while holding down the Shift key, click once to start the second line of type. I'm going to type "day with" and now I'll click the checkmark to commit.

start each
DAY WITH
a grateful

And, again, on the document, while holding down the Shift key, I'll click once to start the fourth line of type. I'm typing the word "heart" and then I'll click the checkmark to commit.

Step Three: Align Layers

- Get the Move tool.
- In the Layers panel, click once on the top type layer and then while holding down the Shift key, click once on the bottom type layer so that all four layers are activated.
- In the Tool Options, click on the Align Horizontal Centers icon. This will make sure that all four lines are centered correctly.

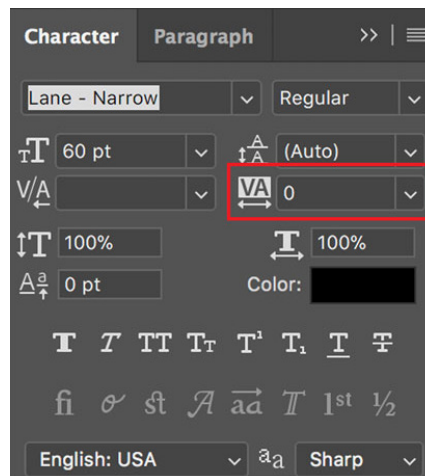
Next, I need to move and nudge things a bit in order for my lines of type to line up how I want them to. So I'll use the Arrow keys to nudge the lines up and down until I'm happy.

Ok, now that everything is centered, you can see the last line is much shorter than the others.

start each
DAY WITH
a grateful
HEART

Step Four: Adjust Tracking

So to fix this, in the Menu Bar, choose Window > Character. This will open the Character panel. The Tracking setting is found just under the Leading setting.



TIP: One thing to note here, is that when you change one of these settings, the settings tend to be sticky. Just remember, anytime you start a new project, to come back into the Character panel and reset your settings before you start typing. This will help ensure you don't spend time trying to figure out why your type is acting funny.

I'm going to click on the Tracking drop down box and I'll change it to 100.

start each
DAY WITH
a grateful
HEART

That didn't do enough so let's try 200. Ok, we're getting closer but it's still not enough.

start each
DAY WITH
a grateful
HEART

Now I'm going to click in the Tracking box and change the number to 300 by typing it in. Press Enter when you've put in the number you want to try. Ok, that looks much better!


start each
DAY WITH
a grateful
HEART

Now that you've seen how to adjust the Tracking in PS, let's discuss a few do's and don'ts.

#1. Due to the nature of script fonts and how each letter connects to the next, changing the Tracking of many script fonts will not achieve a desirable result.

Almost all script fonts are made to have letters connect. As you can see, when I increased the tracking between the letters, it really made this font look tacky.

 *Don't change
the tracking
of script fonts.*

 *Don't change
the tracking
of script fonts.*

One caveat is that sometimes, a script font doesn't always track like it's supposed to. In those cases where the letters don't connect like they should, then you need to adjust the Tracking in order for them to connect properly.

#2. Any fonts that don't connect, like serif, sans serif, or some handwritten fonts, you can adjust the tracking when needed. The biggest don't with tracking is to make the tracking too small. If your letters don't have enough space between them, it makes things very difficult to read.

Don't make the tracking too small.

#3. Don't make the tracking extremely large.

If the letters are so spaced out that you can't tell it forms a word, then you've gone too far. There might be extreme design cases where something like this works but it's very infrequent.

L A R G E

So, the idea is moderation. When it comes to Tracking, you will more often try to increase it. And the amount you increase it can be quite large depending on the font and the design. Just make sure to not go too small or too extremely large and you'll be ok!

Tracking Shortcuts

These shortcuts are very similar to the shortcuts for Leading. This first one works the same way.

Shortcut #1:

So open the Character panel by going to the Menu Bar and choosing Window > Character.

In the Character panel, hold your mouse over the symbol for Tracking which is the VA symbol directly below the Leading symbol.

Then, you'll see this double sided arrow and you can click and drag the mouse left or right to quickly adjust the Tracking.

Shortcut #2:

The other shortcut involves the Alt key (Mac: Opt key).

So in the Layers panel, double click on the thumbnail of the type layer so that the type is all selected.

Now press and hold the Alt key (Mac: Opt key) while also holding down the right or left arrow keys to adjust the Tracking.

In the next lesson, we're going to spend a little more time working with tracking. We're going to create a modern style logo so get ready for our next project!