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Secrets of Terrific Type

Lesson 02-08: Kerning—Photoshop

Leading, Tracking, and Kerning are three typography terms that can often be confused. So far, we've covered Leading and Tracking and in this lesson we'll go over Kerning and how it's different from the others.

In the last lesson, we learned about how Tracking is the amount of space between characters.

TRACKING

And while we are reviewing terms, Leading is the amount of space between lines of type.

LEADING

LEADING

LEADING

Neither of these are to be confused with Kerning. Kerning is the amount of space between two specific letters. Most notably, the letters A, V, W, and Y. And this is only for certain font types. Because script fonts are created to connect, Kerning is almost a non-issue for them. But for other fonts, it can matter. Let me show you what I mean.

Here is the word Avenue typed in the same font and same size. But one has proper kerning and one doesn't. Can you tell which one is correct?

Kerning:

Avenue



Avenue

The one where the space between the A and the V is smaller is the correct choice.

Why is that?

When it comes to fonts, each designer has to give a certain space to each letter. And normally, that works out great. With most letters, regular spacing is just fine. But when you have a word, such as avenue, the slanted nature of the A and the V really show that regular spacing. The space between the A and V looks much larger than the spacing for the rest of the word. Kerning is how we fix that!

Here's how to do that in Photoshop.

Step One: Prepare the Workspace

I've created a new document that is 12 x 12 inches at 300ppi with a white background.

Press the letter D to reset the Color Chips.

In the Menu Bar, choose Window > Character and click on the Character panel Menu icon and choose Reset Character.

Step Two: Add Type

Get the Horizontal Type tool. In the Tool Options, set the Font to Venice Serif, the size to 100pts, and for this I'll use Center Alignment.

On the document, click once and type the word Avenue. Click the checkmark to commit.

Avenue

Step Three: Duplicate Type

Press Ctrl J (Mac: Cmd J) to duplicate the layer.

Get the Move tool.

On the document, while holding down the Shift key, click and drag the duplicated word down. We're only doing this so we can see the difference.

Avenue

Avenue

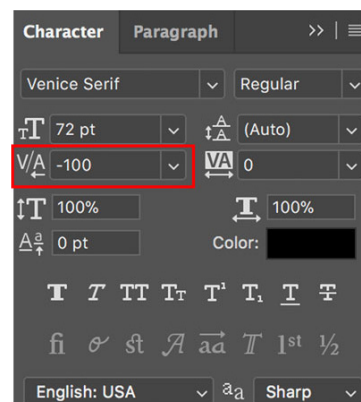
Step Four: Adjust the Kerning

In the Menu Bar, choose Window > Character.

Get the Horizontal Type tool.

Click on the duplicated line of type and place your cursor between the A and the V.

Access the Kerning option (which is just below the Font Size) and type in the number -100. Press Enter.



Avenue

Avenue

Now you can see that the second line where we manually set the Kerning looks more natural than the top line.

So, here's the deal. Is Kerning important?

My answer is yes. But the amount of times you will have to worry about it are infrequent. If you're a professional designer, Kerning will be more important to your work. If you're a hobbyist, I would consider checking titles, subtitles, or large pieces of text for places where Kerning adjustments might be needed. But going through paragraphs of type that are small may be more work than necessary for something that is just for you.

So there are only two things that are important when it comes to Kerning.

#1. Don't forget to Kern letters when it's necessary.

#2. Don't over do it. Making the space too small is just as bad as forgetting to Kern.

Kerning Shortcuts

Ok, so once again, these shortcuts are very similar to how the shortcuts for Leading and Tracking work.

But because the Kerning only has to do with the space between two characters, we have to have the type layer active and the cursor pulsing between two characters before we can adjust anything.

Shortcut #1

So first, in the Menu Bar, choose Window > Character to open the Character panel.

Now, make sure you have the Type tool active and then on the document, click to activate the type and place your cursor between two characters where you might want to adjust the Kerning.

Now, place your mouse over the symbol for Kerning. It's the V/A under the Font Size field.

Now you can click and drag right or left to adjust the Kerning.

Shortcut #2

The second shortcut involves the keyboard and is similar to the shortcuts for Leading and Tracking.

So, make sure the cursor is still pulsing between two characters.

Now press and hold the Alt key (Mac: Opt key) and then press the right or left arrow keys to adjust the Kerning.

Because Kerning is a less frequently used option, we will be forgoing homework for this lesson. But just to make sure you understand the topic of Kerning, I've created a visual quiz for you to take! So make sure you complete the quiz before you move on to the next lesson.