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Secrets of Terrific Type

Lesson 02-08: Kerning—Photoshop Elements

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 PSE.

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.

Step Two: Add Type

Get the Horizontal Type tool. As always, first click on the Tool Options Menu icon and choose Reset Tool.

Now, in the Tool Options, set the Font to Aleo Regular, 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.

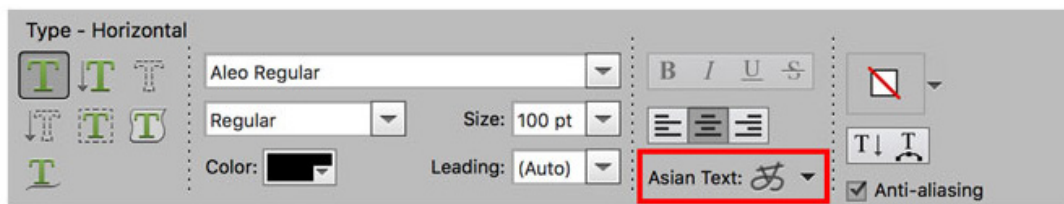
Avenue
Avenue

Step Four: Adjust the Kerning

Get the Horizontal Type tool.

Click on the duplicated line of type and click and drag to select the letters A and V.

In the Tool Options, click to open the Asian Text Options and click to open the percentage drop down box. Choose 100% and click the checkmark to commit.



Avenue Avenue

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

But as before, with PSE, the Asian Text options don't always work with every font. And, as we discussed before, sometimes changing it to 100% will produce better results with some fonts than it does with others. I will also tell you that at 100%, even though we've made it better, the kerning here could be even smaller between the A and the V in order for it to look the best. But, this is our only option in PSE so it is much better than no option!

Step Five: Alternate Option to fix Kerning

One more thing before we wrap up our lesson on Kerning. There is one more work around to fix Kerning if the Asian Text Option doesn't do enough or doesn't work at all. It's not as slick as PS but it's still a good option to use when needed.

So, the way to do this is to make the capital A have it's own layer. Then we can use the Move tool and arrow keys to nudge it into place. Let me show you quickly how to do that.

So, let's delete this duplicated layer and go back to the original text layer.

Avenue

Then, let's click once on the line of type and delete the capital A.

Click the checkmark to commit.

venue

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

In the Layers panel, double click on the duplicated type preview icon to select the duplicated letters.

Once all of the letters are selected, type a capital A and click the checkmark to commit.

veAue

Get the Move tool.

On the document, while holding down the Shift key, click and drag the capital A into place. Use the Arrow keys to nudge it. There, that looks pretty good.

Avenue

The reason we duplicated the line of type and then used the Shift key to move it was to make sure we kept the capital A properly aligned with the rest of the word.

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 between the letters is just as bad as forgetting to Kern.

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.