Type and Layout

Colin Wheildon, with Foreword by David Ogilvy,
Strathmoor Press, Berkeley, California 1996. ISBN 0-9624891-5-
8. 248 pages. $24.95 soft cover.

As David Ogilvy says in his foreword, "this book marks a milestone." This statement may seem to be hyperbole, but to editors, designers, and others interested in typography and readability, a milestone it is. For those of us whose work depends on putting words on a page, understanding "how typography and design can get your message across—or get in the way" (the book's subtitle) is essential professional knowledge. What makes this book remarkable is that Colin Wheildon combines a lively and readable discussion of typographic principles with scientific research on reading comprehension.

Wheildon has applied empirical analysis to the time-honored truisms we have for centuries learned from elder editors and designers. His research design is admirably simple. He selected a sample of some 300 residents of 10 suburbs of Sydney, Australia, and then wrote two news articles on topics of interest to those individuals. He also composed a series of questions to test the participants' comprehension of the material as well as how much of the articles they had read. The participants read the articles and answered the questions in personal interviews with Wheildon himself. The variables studied were the different design and type characteristics of the articles presented to different groups of participants. Wheildon also collected the participants' comments on the design of the articles they read.

Instead of drily reporting his research, Wheildon presents the results of the study in an examination of each typographic maxim—the statistics are brought to life by well-considered discussion of the design issues involved, as well as visual examples drawn from advertising. The book is organized in short chapters addressing such topics as: "Serif versus Sans Serif Body Type," "Ragged Right or Left, or Justified," "Widows, Jumps, and Bastard Measure," as well as the intriguingly titled "The Perils of Ignoring Gravity," "Any Color As Long As

It's Black," and "Out, Damned Spot!" (Who would have thought a contents page could be so much fun?) The book also includes a glossary which makes it an excellent introductory text for students or new professionals.

I must admit I'm an editor—not only that, but an editor who is obsessed with type. For me, Wheildon's book was a thoroughly delightful experience, engagingly written and supported by sound, substantive research. I greeted each new chapter with a cry of joy—or perhaps a more sedate smile of satisfaction. It was indeed reassuring to find that principles I have earnestly propagated can be supported by scientific fact. Some of Wheildon's conclusions are:

- "Body type must be set in serif type if the designer intends it to be read and understood."
- "Text must be printed in black. Even copy set in deep colors was substantially more difficult for readers to understand."
- "Printing text in boldface type undermines reading comprehension."
- "Italic body type causes no more difficulty for readers than roman body type."
- "Ragged setting should be avoided if comprehensibility is to be maintained."

And perhaps most profound of all—

- "Readers are easily annoyed."

Much of today's typography is not only annoying but chaotic, designed to attract the reader's attention rather than to hold it. The important lesson of this book is that every element we put into a page has an impact on readability and comprehension. And Colin Wheildon gives us the tools to analyze that impact with precision. I am convinced that *Type and Layout* will become a classic reference for our profession, to stand alongside Strunk & White and the *Chicago Manual of Style* on everyone's bookshelf.

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The Agricultural Communicators in Education (ACE) is an international association of professionals who utilize a wide variety of media—ranging from traditional methods to current technologies—to disseminate information concerning natural resources, agriculture, and the food industry. ACE was organized in 1913. Its members meet regularly in regional meetings, workshops, and at annual meetings held each year in different locations within the United States.

ACE is dedicated to the professional development of its members. International meetings aim to help members develop communications strategies and plans and to increase their technological knowledge and skills.

Most of ACE's 700+ members are faculty and staff members at land-grant and sea-grant universities throughout the U.S. and in similar institutions in other nations. Some are employed by the federal government, others by associated agribusinesses. Others are employed at international agricultural development centers around the world.

ACE members are the communications backbone of a research and teaching network established in the United States more than a century ago. They plan, prepare, and disseminate research results and extension teaching materials. Their stock in trade is scientific information for scientists and technicians and practical, problem-solving information for people who can put it to work: farmers, families, foresters, food processors, news media, ranchers, homemakers, young people, marine businesses, main street businesses, and many others.

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