THE ELEMENTS OF TYPOGRAPHIC STYLE: VERSION 4.0: 20TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION BY ROBERT BRINGHURST
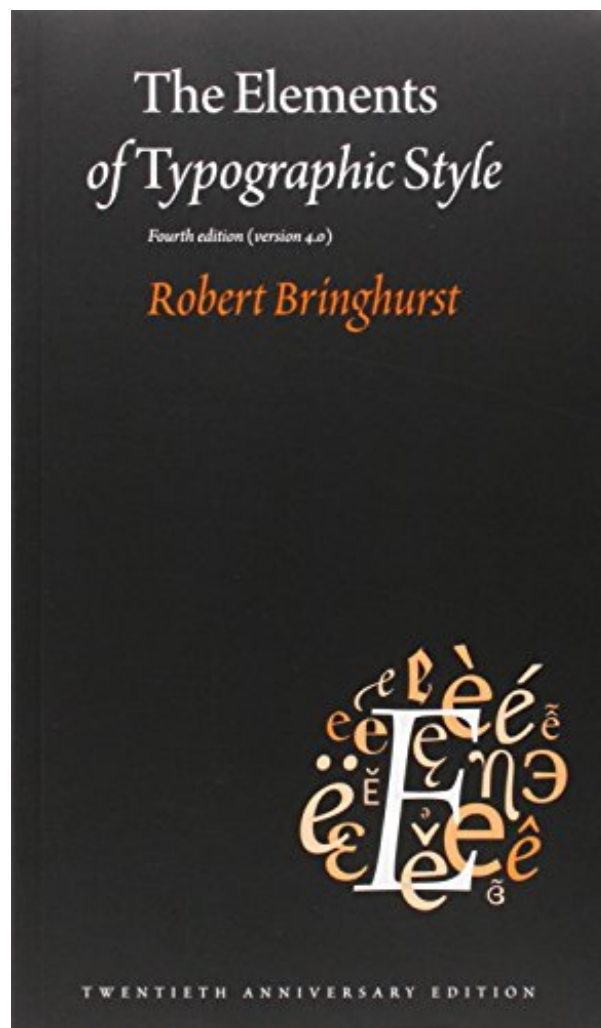
The Elements
of Typographic Style

Fourth edition (version 4.0)

Robert Bringhurst

TWENTIETH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

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Review
"A classic in the field." — Library Journal

About the Author
Robert Bringhurst is a poet, typographer, linguist, critic, designer, translator, teacher, and cultural historian. He has published more than thirty books, eighteen of them books of poetry. His book, The Black Canoe, a study of Bill Reid's sculpture, is a classic of Native American art history and his book The Elements of Typographic Style is considered the "bible" for typographers the world over. In Canada, Bringhurst is best known for his groundbreaking study of Native Canadian oral literature, A Story As Sharp as a Knife: The Classical Haida Mythtellers and Their World (1999), a work that startled many readers and sparked intense academic and public debate. Two volumes of translation from classical Haida complete the trilogy: Nine Visits to the Mythworld and Being In Being. In 2004, the trilogy earned Bringhurst the Edward Sapir Prize, awarded by the Society for Linguistic Anthropology. Among his more recent books of poetry is Ursa Major (2003), a multilingual work in which characters tell simultaneous stories in English, Latin, Greek, and Cree.

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Renowned typographer and poet Robert Bringhurst brings clarity to the art of typography with this masterful style guide. Combining the practical, theoretical, and historical, this edition is completely updated, with a thorough revision and updating of the longest chapter, "Prowling the Specimen Books," and many other small but important updates based on things that are continually changing in the field.

- Sales Rank: #45005 in Books
- Published on: 2013-01-15
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: .82" h x 5.37" w x 9.25" l, 1.18 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 382 pages

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Most helpful customer reviews

103 of 108 people found the following review helpful.
I can't remain in my profession without this book.
By Brian M. Taylor
As a designer, I am always looking to hone my skills. I thought I was adept at setting type until I found this gem. Bringhurst's study of type covers the obvious to the arcane. Beautifully designed, it illustrates type and

their families, page geometry, philosophies of design, and typesetting rules. Master Craftsman, Hermann Zapf (you know -- his faces are in your computer) said himself that "he wishes to see this book become the Typographers Bible". This book is a must for the writer, publisher, designer, and editor because it covers a multitude of topics and rules vital and common to each sector. This is the "Manual of Style" for typesetting. It requires us to think more carefully about the setting of words and its impact on writing: "Typography is to literature what musical performance is to composition -- full of endless opportunity for insight OR obtuseness." I recommend this for anyone even remotely interested in the artform of letters. I highly recommend it for writers considering designing their own books.

200 of 216 people found the following review helpful.
Not perfect, but probably the best
By Erik Fleischer
The Elements of Typographic Style (version 3.1) is certainly a very well written book that contains not only a great deal of useful information but also interesting insights of a more subjective nature. However, it is not as perfect as practically every other review posted here suggests, and I would like to point out a few aspects in which it could be improved.

Little more than half of the 382-page book is filled with what I would call the actual "core" of the work. The other half is dedicated to analyses of the author's favourite typefaces (about 80 pages) and several appendices. There is nothing inherently bad about this distribution, but unfortunately some of the core parts were only given a cursory mention, when in my opinion they deserved more in-depth discussions.

So, for example:

(a) In chapter 8, Shaping the Page, the author lists countless page and textblock proportions and provides a large number of geometric figures representing page formats, but does little more than give each proportion a name ("Full Cross Octagon page", "Turned Hexagon" etc). He then gives a few examples, but not nearly enough, and leaves the reader wanting for more details on which proportions or formats would, in the author's analysis, be more appropriate for this or that type of text. And most of the numbers and diagrams merely take up space in the book, since just knowing about their existence does not help much.

(b) Two diagrams on page 6 (just before the table of contents) are supposed to show the reader how the author came up with the proportions for the book's pages and textblocks. Unfortunately, the hexagons, circles and intersecting lines are not accompanied by any kind of explanation (and reading chapter 8 is not enough to decipher them), so instead of serving as a useful practical example they do little more than decorate the front matter.

(c) In chapter 10, Grooming the Font, Bringhurst advises readers to mend defective glyphs and make glyphs that are missing from a font, but does not suggest ways in which these tasks might be accomplished. One can more or less guess how he went about making the corrections to Photina shown as an example, but it would be useful to be given a little more detailed information. Someone who needs to be told to fix a font certainly needs to be told how to fix it.

(d) On pages 204 and 205, the author shows "part of a text file designed to test for missing or dislocated glyphs". Why not give the reader the full file, as an appendix perhaps? Why not save the reader the trouble of trying to reproduce the full test text (after googling in vain for it), which probably will not be nearly as good as the one Bringhurst, a master typographer, has produced over the years?

(e) The author's suggestions for further reading are not annotated in any way, and many, if not most, of the

books mentioned are out of print. The reader will seldom find information about the contents of the out-of-print books (which are often not made clear by the title) on Amazon.com, so comments by the author would have been extremely useful.

Another slightly disappointing feature of a book that has a section on page design is the fact that, at least in my humble opinion, the textblock is a little too close to the spine for comfortable reading - but maybe there wasn't much the author could have done to anticipate the way the binding would work.

In the end, anyone serious about typography will want to get this book anyway: not only because it is probably the best in its class, but also because Bringhurst is a master from whom a lot can be learned. Having said that, until the issues mentioned above are addressed (perhaps in a future edition?), I would not consider this book worthy of "bible status".

I wrote the above review several years ago and originally gave the book four stars. In a recent comment on my review, fellow reader Steve McFarland wrote: "I only wanted to say, half-seriously: the Bible has a lot more flaws than this, but it's still the Bible - I say Bringhurst wrote the definitive text, warts and all!" And he's right: expecting absolute perfection is unrealistic and unreasonable. Five stars it is.

52 of 54 people found the following review helpful.
Should be required reading
By A. Cinque Hicks
This book should be required reading for every graphic designer, book designer, typographer and certainly anyone directly or indirectly responsible for unleashing the current wave of awful typography on an unsuspecting public. Bringhurst covers everything from the basics of type styles to advanced kerning principles to the finer points of page proportions, all in a succint yet engaging way.
Bringhurst does an excellent job of laying out a series of rules and guidelines, while making it clear that these are a starting point, a foundation for good type design, not a set of limitations. He is a poet as well as a typographer, and his eloquence pays tribute to the field as no one else has.
The book features a good deal on the evolution of typography and includes great side-by-side comparisons of typefaces to illustrate specific points. He also deals extensively with punctuation marks, diacritics and the duty/joy of designing type with languages other than English in mind. I find myself returning again and again to the section on the subtleties of page proportions. He also achieves the nearly impossible balance of singing the praises of the old masters while not being afraid of the best of what's new and experimental.

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