

The anatomy of a simple handout

handout for L&S TA training by Will Benton (willb@acm.org)

THIS HANDOUT IS AN ANNOTATED VERSION OF MY HANDOUT TEMPLATE. YOU DON'T HAVE TO USE EVERY IDEA HERE, OF COURSE, BUT SOME OF THESE SHOULD BE USEFUL!

GIVE YOUR HANDOUT A TITLE THAT IS DESCRIPTIVE, BUT NOT TOO LONG - YOU'LL WANT TO REFER TO IT IN LECTURE, AND HANDOUTS WITH LONG TITLES WILL MAKE THIS TEDIOUS....

PUT YOUR NAME AND SOME WAY TO CONTACT YOU IN A PROMINENT PLACE...

I PREFER TO USE SANS-SERIF FONTS FOR HEADINGS...

Sans

THIS ISN'T MERELY A SHOUT-OUT - INSTEAD, IT GIVES PEOPLE SOME WAY TO PROVIDE FEEDBACK AND CORRECTIONS! *

...AND SERIF FONTS FOR LARGE BLOCKS OF TEXT

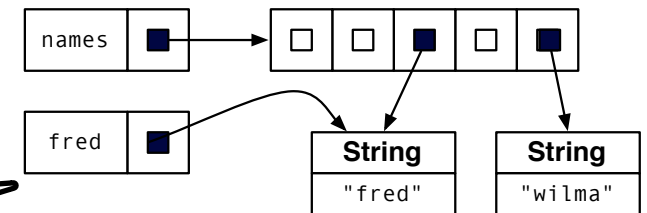
DON'T GO FONT-CRAZY, THOUGH! ONE OR TWO GOOD FONTS IS ENOUGH.

Serif

EVEN SIMPLE FIGURES CAN REALLY AID YOUR PROSE!

Why is this handout in landscape (wide) rather than portrait (tall) orientation?

I prefer the landscape orientation for a couple of reasons. Most importantly, I find it easier to lay out the sorts of handouts I typically design on a wide page. Landscape lends itself well to a three-column layout, in which most columns have between fifty and sixty characters of eleven-point type. This is a good line length; the lines are not so long as to be tiring to the eye (your eyes don't like to move back and forth unless they're watching tennis), but not so short as to require many distracting hyphenations.



The three-column layout also affords other possibilities, like including small figures in columns (the one above, which unfortunately has nothing to do with this text, is from a CS 302 handout). Alternatively, you can use only one column for text (e.g. definitions or answers to common questions) and use the other two columns for a large figure. Especially large figures, like graphs, flowcharts, or timelines, may benefit from an entire landscape page.

By the way, do you think that the question-and-answer style is a useful way to structure didactic prose in a handout?

It's worked pretty well for me so far.

IT'S PROBABLY A GOOD IDEA TO INCLUDE A COPYRIGHT NOTICE, ESPECIALLY IF YOU PLAN TO DISTRIBUTE HANDOUTS VIA THE WEB

A STANDARD FOOTER WITH THE FILE NAME AND MODIFICATION DATE CAN MAKE IT EASY TO FIND THE RIGHT FILE LATER, WHEN YOU WANT TO PRINT MORE.

* I'VE ACTUALLY RECEIVED SUGGESTIONS AND CORRECTIONS OVER EMAIL, SENT BY FRIENDLY PEOPLE WHO FOUND MY HANDOUTS ON THE WEB!