

Controlling line breaks in text

How lines of text “break” or “wrap” at the end of a line will either enhance or diminish the readability and effectiveness of your message. You can precisely control where lines break by using the following techniques. (InDesign, QuarkXPress, PageMaker and Word each provide most of these capabilities. Consult your user guide for specific instructions.)

- To keep two words such as “St. Paul” together so that they never break at the end of a line, insert a non-breaking space between the words instead of a regular space.
- To indicate exactly where a word should hyphenate, insert a discretionary hyphen at the hyphenation point. A discretionary hyphen will only appear

when the word is close enough to the end of a line to actually hyphenate. To prevent a word from hyphenating at the end of the line, without turning off hyphenation altogether, put a discretionary hyphen at the beginning of the word. This tells the software “if you must hyphenate this word, hyphenate it before the first character” which prevents hyphenation of that word.

- To prevent a compound word such as “mid-Atlantic” from breaking at the hyphen at the end of a line, replace the regular hyphen in the word with a non-breaking hyphen.
- Paragraph returns (what you get when you hit the *Enter* key on your keyboard) should be reserved for occasions when

you are typing text and you want to specify line endings, instead of letting the text wrap at the end of the line. Better yet, use a soft return or forced line break (*Shift-Enter* in many programs), which starts a new line, but retains the lines as a single paragraph. This is useful when typesetting lines of poetry or specifying breaks in headlines.

Keith Gilbert provides training & support services to help graphic designers and communicators convey print and Web messages effectively. Gilbert Consulting, 651 633-7148 www.gilbertconsulting.com