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In re Words: Get With the Times (New Roman)

By Juliette Gillespie

People are speaking my language! In a piece titled "[Farewell, Courier Font](#)" (Feb. 27, 2022), the Law Journal's Editorial Board wrote:

The revised R. 2:6-10 finally recognizes that *the typewriter is a thing of the past* and that proportional fonts are not a mere subterfuge to squeeze more words into the same space. Instead of 65-space lines of 12-point type, the familiar courier font, henceforth all briefs shall

be in 14-point Times New Roman, presumably to accommodate the eyesight of the more senior members of the bench. [*Emphasis added.*]

The change was listed in the 2022 Report of the Supreme Court Civil Practice Committee. Note that R. 2:6-10 is found in Part II, which governs New Jersey appellate procedure, so check your local rules if your matter is not in the Appellate Division. But I think this topic is still worth discussing on a general level.

To clarify, a “proportional font” uses varying widths to display each of its characters, i.e., the space is proportional to the size and shape of the letter or symbol. Times New Roman is one of the most popular proportional fonts.

With non-proportional fonts, each character is granted the same amount of space, whether it’s a slim little *i* or a big fat *m*. These fonts are useful when characters need to be lined up neatly in fixed columns. Old fashioned typewriters and early computers used fixed-width fonts exclusively. Courier is a non-proportional font.

Back in the days of the typewriter, when non-proportional fonts were standard, it was established that periods should be followed by two spaces. Indeed, this extra spacing made the text easier to read.

However, now that documents are created on computers, and proportional fonts are standard, we only need one space after a period. Here is a direct quote from the Associated Press Stylebook, 55th Edition (2020-2022), page 343: “*Use a single space after a period at the end of a sentence.*” It could not be more clear.

Recently I saw the following post online: “Dear Friends older than 37: You don’t have to put two spaces after the period anymore. That was for the typewriter era. You’re free.”

Yes! I thought, and immediately shared it on Facebook.

I passed it along because I found it amusing and perfectly stated. Also, by using the “sharing” mechanism, I can tell people something without having to say it directly. Who wants to look like the crabby punctuation police?

The post was created by Barton Swaim, a writer for the Wall Street Journal. While Barton and I probably don't see eye-to-eye on a few political issues, he certainly knows about writing. This is from a credible source, I thought, even more reason to share it. I was thinking like a lawyer, checking my sources, building my case.

Imagine my surprise when my Facebook "friends" (most of whom are well over the age of 37) did not immediately embrace this idea and thank me for showing them the light.

Some friends were genuinely shocked. "Wow! Really? I had no idea." "Seriously?!? My kids are right?? This is a real thing? Ugh."

Some proclaimed that they had used two spaces for so long that they would never be able to change and wouldn't even try. "Two spaces forever!" they cried. But they don't work in law or publishing, so I guess they can live in a world of grammatical anarchy if they like.

One friend asked, "Where's the harm in it?" I responded that the *harm* is I have to fix it! In formatting articles for publication, it's my job to get rid of all those pesky extra spaces. (Yes, you found it—the true motivation behind this commentary.)

Another friend pushed back: "Really? Who decided that?" I told her: Associated Press, Chicago Manual of Style, Oxford Style Manual, and the entire typesetting industry.

I couldn't believe that they weren't accepting this fact. It's a new world, people! Just stop hitting the spacebar a second time. But, once again, I had to realize that not everyone lives in a world governed by style books and court rules.

It did give me pause to refer to "typesetting." The term makes me think of old mechanical printing presses and Johannes Gutenberg back in the 15th century. But what started way back then eventually evolved into the vector graphics software that is used today, and is now becoming 3D printing. It is all happening on a continuum.

In fact, some vocabulary we use today emerged from this history, such as "uppercase" and "lowercase." In the early days of printing—and, actually, up until relatively recently—each character was cut into a piece of hard metal called a "type." There were

many identical pieces for each letter, and they were arranged to form the words, sentences and paragraphs that filled the page. These types were stored in different compartments or “cases.” The letters used more frequently were kept closer to the compositor’s desk, in the “lower case.” The more unusual letters were stored farther away, in the “upper case.” Crazy, right? So literal.

Although we are still connected to the past, we must live in the present, and prepare to welcome the future. I recently completed a course on LinkedIn Learning—assigned to me by my employer—called “How to Be an Adaptable Employee During Change and Uncertainty.” To be sure, adaptability is a desirable quality in an employee, and in pretty much any human being these days. We all need to remain flexible and open to new ideas in this rapidly changing world.

So please, adapt to modern times: If you are using a proportional font, kindly stop putting two spaces after a period. And remember, if you are working at the appellate level, you have to!

Juliette Gillespie is Law Editor at the New Jersey Law Journal, where she is responsible for contributed content and special sections. Contact her at jgillespie@alm.com. On Twitter: @JGillespieNJLJ