

Things They Never Taught

A Guide to

Common Studio Blunders (and How to Avoid Them)

Sure, they may have taught you about negative space in art school, but what about about type and creator codes? Let's recap some of the dry—but essential—topics your instructors may have forgotten.

FILE NAMING

File naming conventions (or lack thereof) are an issue at many studios. Ambiguous or inconsistent document names result in files being needlessly challenging to identify—and tougher still to retrieve from archives a year later.

I'm not going to propose a miraculous style of file naming that will suit everyone, but I can offer some helpful generalities. The single most important bit of information to include in your file name is the docket number, since it's a unique means of identification. Other than that, fill up the rest of the name with as much info as you can. You've got thirty-two characters to work with—use 'em. Use consistent names for clients and abbreviations to give yourself more space to describe the job. Some studios even insert codes to signify resolution, color and format info. For example, "Big Picture 400T/4C" is a 400 dpi TIFF in process color.

Most important, file naming is all about consistency, and a flawed but universal system is still infinitely preferable to no system at all.

COPIES AND VERSIONS

Duplicates of job files around your network are a recipe for disaster. The end result is usually people making changes to each of the duplicate files, so neither one ends up being right. (A lengthy but worthy tangent: file sizes can appear different depending on the size of the volume the file is on—the bigger the volume, the bigger the file will appear. Why? Because a disk can only be broken down into so many segments of data. The larger the disk, the bigger those segments are. So, for instance, a file on a CD may appear smaller than it does on your hard drive. Don't let this confuse you into thinking you're dealing with different files.)

While copies of files can be dangerous, multiple versions of the same file can save your bacon. Clients will frequently ask you to do something, get a look at it and immediately ask you to change it back to the way it was. So do a "Save as" and add a number or letter to the name of different versions of your file. But be sensible: use versions for significant changes of direction, not every little type change. Be sure to file away your ver-

sions in a separate folder when final artwork has been chosen.

One of the few places that it is safe to store a duplicate file is what I refer to as the "pre-trash."

Which brings us to...

DON'T TRASH IT—PRE-TRASH IT

The Trash was originally intended as a kind of "undo" for deleting files, but dealing with the size and volume of files we do, the Trash tends to get emptied frequently and with little consideration for what's within. In the studio environment, it's way too risky a place to leave a file for even a couple of days.

What workstations need is a location for "probable trash," stuff that is convenient to keep at hand and can safely be disposed of after a while. This handy folder usually has a name like "Holding" or "Trash Later" and is placed just north of the Trash icon. The most common role for the pre-trash is to store files that have just been copied elsewhere, either across the network to a co-worker or shipped out. When you're doing your hard drive house-cleaning, just pop open the pre-trash folder, view by date and toss the oldest stuff.

Remember that everything in the pre-trash should be expendable. If something should be a duplicate or disposable. If something gets deleted by mistake, the worst case scenario is you'll have to spend a little time retrieving it from elsewhere.

GET OFF THE DESKTOP

The Macintosh desktop is one handy spot—everything's right there, just a double-click away. But this allure leads many people to over-use it, probably slowing them down and undoubtedly confusing co-workers. Ever try hopping onto a colleague's machine to quickly output a file, only to find everything is on the desktop? Happy hunting.

The desktop is a clumsy place to file because all sorting functions are essentially lost, making locating something by name or date tedious. (I know: you *can* sort desktop files, but most desktop-filers have everything placed just where they like it; sort it all and you're wreaking havoc.) Desktop files also tend to end up in odd places, like just off-screen or behind other icons.

I think of the desktop as a place to organize things and then file them. It's an interim location for files before they're shuttled

You in Art School

by Kirby Ferguson

off to more suitable locations.

The desktop is a handy location for drag-and-drop applications like *Acrobat Distiller*, *MacLinkPlus* and *DropStuff/Expander*, but I've come to prefer using drawers, the pop-up window you can create by dragging a window to the bottom of the screen. (Some people fall in love with drawers, even going so far as to file current jobs in there, but since drawers don't stay open, this seems cumbersome.) Drawers are also a good place to drop all those infrequently used desktop printers.



Here's my drag-and-drop drawer. I can use this little guy to quickly compress and expand files, distill PDFs, translate PC files and fiddle with type and creator codes, among other things.



To avoid window clutter, hold down option as you double-click folders. To back-track to a folder that's been hidden, just command-click on the title bar. (Similarly, shift-clicking a title-bar in Quark will give you a list of currently open documents.)

extension she didn't recognize, I thought she was talking about a Macintosh extension file—y'know, like *QuickTime* or *Type Reunion*. I was baffled.

The lesson from this incident: most designers live in dangerous and potentially embarrassing ignorance of their clients' technologies. This is a risky way to deal with the people who pay you.

By "extension" she of course actually meant the three letters which precede a Windows document name, identifying what

kind of file it is. Send a file without an extension and it will appear as a mysterious generic icon. If you're sending a document to a Windows client, be sure to append the extension to the file name. Most of the extension names are now familiar to us from seeing them on the Internet—.jpg, .gif and .pdf are the ones you'll most likely be sending. Studios who often send files cross-platform may wish to add extensions to all their files. Some apps, like *Photoshop*, can do this automatically.

Beware of using illegal characters, such as slashes, question marks and colons, in your Windows-destined file names. Stick to letters and numbers and remember that anything that comes after a period will be designated the file extension.

When sending images to clients who don't have access to professional graphics software (which is most of them), make sure the images are RGB. CMYK is a professional color space that many low-end graphics programs don't support. Also, forget about sending TIFFs or EPSs, which are also typically unrecognizable by low-end programs. And send images at screen res (96 dpi for Windows), otherwise they'll appear at a 1:1 ratio and seem enormous.

THOSE MYSTERIOUS TYPE & CREATOR CODES

While Windows uses simpler but less flexible three letter extensions, the Macintosh uses type and creator codes to distinguish what a file is and what to do with it. Unfortunately, neither UNIX nor Windows NT do, so they often get lost when filtered through any sort of Internet server. For this reason, it's often recommended to "wrap" your files with some sort of compression when sending them over the Net. Then when the file is expanded, the type and creator codes remain intact.

If you receive a file that appears as a generic file, you can use handy utilities like *File Buddy* and *CMTools* to fix the type and creator codes.

BACKUPS AND ARCHIVING

The ideal backup configuration is, of course, a nightly tape backup by *Retrospect*. If you're in a small studio that doesn't have a nightly backup, you're playing with fire—the digital files in your office are the most valuable thing you possess. It only takes one corrupt job for an archiving system to pay for itself.

Having said that, this simply is not the way many studios work,

Afraid of all the window clutter you'll generate by constantly popping open folders to get to your work? This is easily avoided by holding down the option key as you double-click. If you need to backtrack to a previous folder, just command-click on the name in the title bar. (Forget Window Shade, which "rolls up" windows when you double-click the title bar or click the icon on the far right; this just means you have to deal with a mess of title bars rather than a mess of windows.)

Also, be sure to set up a "Downloads" folder for all your Internet downloads lest they all pile up on the desktop, which is the default destination.

GETTING ALONG WITH THE REST OF THE WORLD

The first time a client told me that a file which I had sent her had an

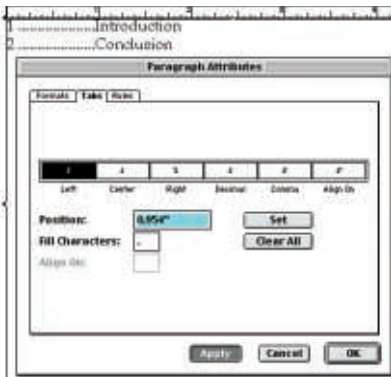
nor will they ever. Some places just can't pony up the required couple grand, others fear administration of such a setup. So savvy folks have to take things into their own hands and manually back-up their jobs. An external hard drive, a server, even a Zip disk are all reasonably safe places to copy to—but it's important to at least get the job off your own hard drive. The *QuarkXPress* file is always the most valuable thing to backup, and, in my experience, also the most prone to corruption. While you probably won't have time to do manual backups of all your jobs, be especially careful with the big ones. The longer a job is in the studio, the better the chances are it will corrupt.

After a job has been shipped, it can be archived onto a variety of formats, but CDs are probably the most tried and true. After you've got a swelling archive, you need to be able to search all those discs without popping each one into your machine. You can create a searchable index of these discs using programs like *Disktracker* or *CDFinder*. My personal favourite is *FindIt*, a (free!) utility that's part of the (free!) Iomega ZipTools. (But beware of the *FindIt* extension which will attempt to constantly index everything in sight.) Be sure to dupe archive CDs and move them off-site in case the place burns down. It bears repeating: your digital files are the most important thing in your studio—aside from the people.

THE GREAT, MISUNDERSTOOD QUARKXPRESS

QuarkXPress is the bread-and-butter of most studios, yet it's also the program most misunderstood. Perhaps the most common *XPress* composing mistake is the use of space bars to line up text in columns. Things never align properly this way, and tweaking positions later is an utter nightmare. Learn how to use tabs. (Note that Quark's group scaling does not scale the position of tabs; the results are almost never desirable. If you do this a lot, third-party XTensions can handle the task.) Also be sure to use character fills to set up things like, say, the lines of periods you might see in an index connecting titles with their page numbers.

Let's cover a few more text formatting inefficiencies. Use the "Enter" key to send type to the next column, not a series of carriage returns. Use paragraph spacing to add spaces after paragraphs, not an empty line; this is usually too much space anyway, and it can't be tweaked as easily as paragraph spacing. Remember that soft returns (Shift-Return) will send type to the next line without creating a new paragraph. And never type two spaces at the end of sentences. If you receive a document that's been formatted



Tabs, not space bars—that's how we line stuff up.

this way, run a quick search-and-replace to get rid of them.

By default, *XPress* doesn't set up an auxiliary dictionary, meaning the option to add words is greyed out. If you don't set up a custom dictionary, spell checking will go on endlessly flagging the same "mistakes." Head to "Auxiliary Dictionary" and select "New" to set up a custom dictionary.

Beware of Quark's dreaded single (or non-existent) undo, and coordinate your saves accordingly. For instance, save before doing a big search and replace. If it goes awry, just revert.

One of the most annoying things about *QuarkXPress* is its defaults. For instance, picture and text boxes are set to wrap. Most users never touch these preferences, so their files end up being composed of bizarre and elaborate wrapping. To edit application preferences in *XPress* you have to edit them while no document is open; otherwise, the changes you make will only affect that open document.

Since *QuarkXPress* rubs some users the wrong way, they stick with *Adobe Illustrator* whenever possible. This is a big mistake. For text-heavy or multi-page documents, using *Illustrator* means missing out on the productivity benefits of master pages, style sheets, multiple pages and better image linking and text handling, not to mention the overall speedier nature of *XPress*.

TINY TIPS: SMALL BUT POWER-PACKED!

Treasure your trannies. Photographic transparencies and prints are prone to getting swept up with other paperwork or blown off desks and into oblivion. Somebody in your studio has to be anal about hanging onto them. This responsibility is often not defined between account execs or Mac operators. So designate somebody. CDs sent from other suppliers are also often misfiled or abandoned. Take similar care with them.

Reclaim command-tab. The Mac OS recently took over the command-tab keyboard shortcut, using it to switch between open applications. However, this overrides the same *Illustrator* shortcut which toggles you between the pointer tool and the direct-selection tool. There's probably a more streamlined way to do this, but I disable this shortcut by heading to the Help Center and searching for "switching between open applications." There you can click on "Help me modify the keyboard shortcuts" and turn this behaviour off.



You'll want to spend a little time in your Quark prefs to save more time later.



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Learn your BCCs from your CCs. Many people use CC (carbon copy) when e-mailing to multiple recipients. This means all the recipients can see each other, which many of them won't appreciate. Use BCC (Blind Carbon Copy) to hide the list of recipients. Speaking of e-mail, my rule of thumb when sending attachments

some even throw the mouse out, thinking it's shot. If your mouse is moving oddly, open up the bottom, pop out the ball and scrape away all that grime that collects on the rollers. (You optical mouse users can happily ignore your mouse.)

Mind your Zips. Zip disks are yesterday's news when it comes to shipping files. Aside from not being terribly durable, they're expensive and are almost never returned. If you're going to ship Zip disks, then you should catalogue them and have somebody track them down afterwards. But really, you should forget shipping Zips and send CDs.

Do you really need those passwords? Many studios seem to have password protection on their network more out of vague paranoia than real security issues. But rather than allow guest access to an entire machine, set up a mailbox—a single folder on every machine that acts as a catch-all for files received. When someone heads to the Chooser, this shared folder is what will show up.

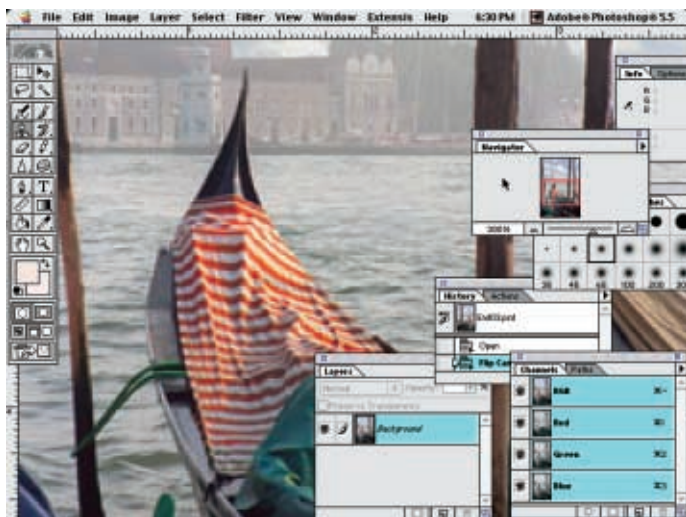
A couple of useless features that should be turned off. Head to General Controls and turn off "Menu Blinking" and "Warn if computer was shut down improperly," both of which slow you down and neither serves any real purpose anyway.

Essential Web stops. Got an insurmountable technical problem? MacFixIt (www.macfixit.com) is the place to go. If the answer's not there already, you can post your own query. VersionTracker (www.versiontracker.com) is recommended for keeping up-to-date with your software.

A handy little app. For some handy reference material, like fraction-to-decimal conversions and a preflight checklist, download *Digital Design Buddy* (www.lakegroupsoftware.com/DigitalDesignBuddy.html).

And the big one...Last but not least, save early and often! (Just don't use *QuarkXPress* Auto-save, which slows things down and tends to save at the most inopportune times.)

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Surely you don't do this do you? Straighten 'em out and get on with your day.

is to limit them to two megabytes in size (remember to check the size *after* it's been encoded as an attachment). Any more than two megs and you're risking a bounce-back.

Don't be a palette shuffler. Many graphics professionals make a hobby of fiddling with floating palettes, constantly shuffling them about the screen as they work. What a waste of time. For Adobe apps, just line them up the way you like them, close the ones you don't want, then tap the tab key to hide them all when you want. Learn your keyboard shortcuts for specific tools and you'll really be cruising. *QuarkXPress* can't be run quite so elegantly, since there isn't a keyboard shortcut to hide all palettes, nor can they be docked. Still, palettes are fewer and smaller and you can use keyboard shortcuts to hide each individually.

Bilingual typing. Don't use Key Caps or PopChart to create your French accents. Learn the keyboard shortcuts and you'll feel the wind flyin' through your hair. They're easy and they all revolve around the option key. For example, to type "é," just hold down the Option key and "e," then type "e" (or whatever letter you want to place the accent over). Using the letter "e" as an example again, here's how the rest work:

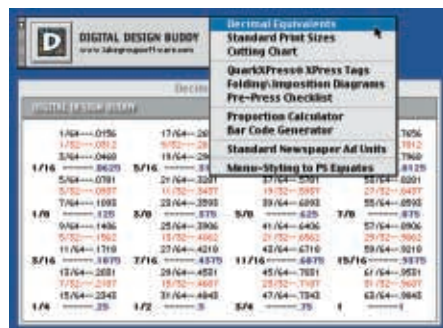
- Option-~ + e = è
- Option-i + e = ê
- Option-u + e = ë

To recap, the Option key combination creates the accent, then you type the character you want the accent to appear over. This one's the odd duck: Option-c gives you "ç".

Clean yer mouse. Amazingly, many Mac users have never opened up their mouse. When it gets jumpy or unresponsive,



If you don't want to enable guest access to your entire computer, but you also don't want to deal with other users needing passwords, enable guest sharing on a single folder for others to copy to and from.



Digital Design Buddy compiles plenty of handy reference material and even some simple functions into one application.

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