



About kerning and tracking

Kerning is the process of adding or subtracting space between specific pairs of characters. *Tracking* is the process of loosening or tightening a block of text.

You can automatically kern type using metrics kerning or optical kerning. *Metrics kerning* uses kern pairs, which are included with most fonts. Kern pairs contain information about the spacing of specific pairs of letters. Some of these are: LA, P., To, Tr, Ta, Tu, Te, Ty, Wa, WA, We, Wo, Ya, and Yo. InDesign uses metrics kerning by default so that specific pairs are automatically kerned when you import or type text.

Some fonts include robust kern-pair specifications. However, when a font includes only minimal built-in kerning or none at all, or if you use two different typefaces or sizes in one or more words on a line, you may want to use the *optical kerning* option. Optical kerning adjusts the spacing between adjacent characters based on their shapes.



Before applying the optical kerning option to the “W” and “a” pair (top), and after (bottom)

You can also use *manual kerning*, which is ideal for adjusting the space between two letters. Tracking and manual kerning are cumulative, so you can first adjust individual pairs of letters, and then tighten or loosen a block of text without affecting the relative kerning of the letter pairs.



Kerning and tracking **A.** Original **B.** Kerning applied between “W” and “a” **C.** Tracking applied

When you click to place the insertion point between two letters, InDesign displays kerning values in the Control palette and Character palette. Metrics and optical kerning values (or defined kern pairs) appear in parentheses. Similarly, if you select a word or a range of text, InDesign displays the tracking values in the Control palette and Character palette. (See [Adjusting kerning and tracking](#).)



Adjusting kerning and tracking

You can apply kerning, tracking, or both to selected text. Tracking and kerning are both measured in 1/1000 em, a unit of measure that is relative to the current type size. In a 6-point font, 1 em equals 6 points; in a 10-point font, 1 em equals 10 points. Kerning and tracking are strictly proportional to the current type size.

You can also directly adjust the kerning between words only, by using keyboard shortcuts. Word kerning isn't the same as the Word Spacing option in the Justification dialog box; word kerning changes the kerning value only between a specific word's first character and the word space preceding that character. The amount of the word kerning adjustment is the same as the Kerning value in the Units & Increments Preferences dialog box. When you press the shortcut and hold down the Shift key, the kerning amount is the Kerning preferences value multiplied by 5.

To use a font's built-in kerning information for selected text:

In the Character palette or Control palette, select Metrics in the Kerning  menu. Metrics is the default.

To automatically adjust the spacing between selected characters based on their shapes:

In the Character palette or Control palette, select Optical in the Kerning menu.

To adjust kerning manually:

1. Using the Type tool, click to place an insertion point between two characters.

Note: If a range of text is selected, you can't manually kern the text (you can choose only Metrics, Optical, or 0). Instead, use tracking.

2. Do any of the following:

o In the Character palette or Control palette, type or select a numeric value in the Kerning menu.

o Press Alt+Left/Right Arrow (Windows) or Option+Left/Right Arrow (Mac OS) to decrease or increase the kerning between two characters. When you kern using these shortcuts, the increment used is 1/50 of the em space for the current type size. Holding down Ctrl or Command when you use these keystrokes multiplies the kerning increment value by 5 with each keystroke.

To change the default kerning increment value:

1. Choose Edit > Preferences > Units & Increments (Windows) or InDesign > Preferences > Units & Increments (Mac OS).

2. Type a new value for the Kerning option and click OK.

To turn off kerning for selected text:

In the Control palette or Character palette, type **0** or choose 0 in the Kerning menu.


You can also press Alt+Ctrl+Q (Windows) or Option+Command+Q (Mac OS) to reset kerning and tracking. When you do so, kerning is set to Metrics, regardless of which kerning option was previously applied.

To highlight text containing custom kerning and tracking:

1. Choose Edit > Preferences > Composition (Windows) or InDesign > Preferences > Composition (Mac OS).

2. Select Custom Tracking/Kerning, and then click OK. When this option is turned on, green highlighting appears over text with custom tracking or kerning.

To adjust kerning between words only:

With the Type tool , select a range of text, and do one of the following:

o To add space between selected words, press Alt+Ctrl+\ (Windows) or Option+Command+\ (Mac OS).

o To remove space between selected words, press Alt+Ctrl+Backspace (Windows) or Option+Command+Delete (Mac OS).

o To multiply the kerning adjustment by 5, hold down Shift as you press the keyboard shortcut.

To adjust tracking:

1. Select a range of characters.

2. In the Character palette or Control palette, type or select a numeric value for Tracking .