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Page Layout Measurements

Points and Picas

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Stop inching your way into desktop publishing. Plunge into picas for page layout measurements. For many, the measurement system of choice for typesetting and publication design is picas and points. If your work involves complex, multi-page designs such as books, magazines, newspapers, or newsletters, working in picas and points can be a real timesaver. And if you plan to work in the newspaper or magazine publishing industry, you'll likely be required to stop thinking in inches or millimeters for page layout. So why not start now. In fact, you're already half-way there since if you use type you already work with points.

Newsletter layouts frequently involve small pieces that are difficult to measure in fractions of inches. Picas and points provide easily for those tiny amounts. Have you heard of the magic of thirds in design? Quick, divide a 8.5 inch by 11 inch piece of paper into thirds horizontally. Now, find 3.66 inches on the ruler. It's not easy. But 11 inches is 66 picas so each third is 22 picas. Much simpler, but that's just the beginning.

- Points are the smallest unit of measurement. Type and leading are measured in points with 72 points to the inch.
- Use picas for measuring column width and depth, margins, and other larger distances.
- Picas and points have a direct relationship to each other. There are 12 points in a pica.
- If you're a metric maven you may have a bit more trouble with the conversion to picas, but for those of us raised on inches it's simpler. There are 6 picas to an inch. A standard US letter size page is 8.5 by 11 inches or 51 by 66 picas. (6 picas are

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approximately 25 mm)

- The letter p is used to designate picas as in 22p or 6p. With 12 points to the pica, half a pica would be 6 points written as 0p6. 17 points would be 1p5 (1 pica = 12 pts, plus the leftover 5 pts).

Your software can take away some of the math for you. For instance, with picas as your default measurements in PageMaker, if you type 0p28 (28 points) into the control palette when setting indents or other paragraph settings it will convert it to 2p4 automatically.

If you're converting existing designs to pica measurements, you may find it necessary to know the size of fractions of points (for example $\frac{3}{32}$ of an inch converts to 6.75 points or 0p6.75). [This chart](#) [offsite link] includes fractions from $\frac{1}{32}$ to 1 inch expressed in picas, points, and decimals too.

If you want to create dummy layouts for a design, remember that depth is measured in picas. So if you want to know how much vertical space a 48 point headline occupies divide 48 by 12 (12 pts to the pica) to get 4 picas of vertical space. [This article](#) [offsite link] from an online journalism related course describes this in more detail.

I may not have convinced you to change your ways but I hope you at least come away from this with a basic understanding of how picas and points are used in desktop publishing. If you really want to take a stab at using picas in your page layout, I invite to first try out the series of calculations on page 2.

Next > [Learning to Use Picas and Points](#)

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