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## Using Points and Picas

By [LaurenMarie](#) NOVEMBER 16, 2007 - 9:00 AM

By the way, it's pronounced *pieka*, as in pie, not pika. Please, no pika.

A quick recap from the [last post](#):

- 1 inch = 6 picas
- 1 pica = 12 points
- 1 inch = 72 points

### Why Use Points and Picas?

The thing that I like about using the pica system for page layout is that a US standard 8.5 x 11 inch (known as "letter") document divides in half and into thirds exactly with picas. Do you know what one third of 8.5 is off the top of your head? Well it's not even an exact number: 2.8333 to infinity.

However, if you were using picas, you'd know that since 8.5 (inches) x 6 (picas per inch) = 51 picas, then one third is exactly 17 picas.

It works beautifully on the length too. 11 (inches) x 6 (picas per inch) = 66. Then 66/3 = 22! Isn't that much easier than 11/3 = 3.667?

And since tabloid (11 x 17), another common US paper size, is just two 8.5 x 11 documents put together, it works with that too!



**Not Pika!**  
 (and definitely not Pikachu)



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The baseline is what is important here. This is set at 112/130.

## Implementing the System

Picas and points make aligning text to a standard baseline throughout a document easier, too. In other words, two columns of text next to each other will sit on the same lines, as well as text from page to page.

Here's an example of how to set up the common baseline, forgive me if it's a little confusing:

I like to design with 10 point type in general, with 12 points of [leading](#) (pronounce it as in the metal, lead, with -ing). In order to align all of my type exactly to the same baseline, so that the text in separate columns and pages sit on the same line, I need to set my **baseline** in InDesign at 1 pica (*Edit>Preferences>Grids, modify the Increment Every field*). Why? Look back at the leading. *Leading* is the distance between baselines. 12 points is the leading I'm using, and 12 points = 1 pica, therefore my baseline needs to be 1 pica.

With this baseline set, I will use a 12 point subhead and 1 pica (AKA 12 points) of space after the end of each section, before the subhead. Using these measurements, I can be assured that all my text will line up. It takes a bit of planning, but it's worth it!

baseline →	<b>Subhead Set at 12 Points</b>
	This is body copy set with a baseline of 1p6 (18 points). The font size is 10 points and when it is aligned to the baseline, that makes the leading equal to 18 points.
	<b>Subhead Set at 12 Points</b>
	This is the same body and baseline settings. The space between each of these section is equal to the height of the baseline, 1p6. Basically we just skipped an extra line. Aligning items to a grid makes it look much more balanced, don't you think?

Other sets of measurements I've figured out:

Using 8.5 point type you can have 12 point subheads, 1p6 of space between sections, 18 point leading, which means baselines set at 1p6. This offers a large amount of space in between the lines and it's easy to read even though the point size is small.

With a 12 point font for your body copy, you can use a 14 point subhead with 18 points of space inbetween sections and 18 points of leading overall. These measurements make your baseline equal 1p6, or 18 points.

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Have you noticed the connection between the leading, grid and space between sections? They are all equal! This is because the leading and the baseline are the same thing. The space between? All we are doing is skipping a full line, without putting the extra hard return in. Get it?

### Keep This Handy

For an 8.5 x 11 inch sheet of paper, use the following point/pica measurements:

-  8.5 x 11 inches = 51 x 66 picas
-  In half: a guide at 25.5 picas for the width and at 33 picas for the length
-  In thirds: guides at 17 and 34 picas for the width, guides at 22 and 44 picas for the length




Oh, and for your bleeds, 1/4 inch = 1p6.

Need other standard sizes converted into picas? Use this [chart from Burbank Printing](#).

I would love to hear if any of you use the pica system (or will now switch!). Whether or not you currently use it, what do you think of the pica system? Is it worth the energy to memorize another way to measure?

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[inspirationbit](#)

POSTED NOVEMBER 16, 2007 AT 2:00 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

ok, I'm printing this out and reading on my way to home. Thanks!



[LaurenMarie](#)













POSTED NOVEMBER 16, 2007 AT 3:05 PM | [PERMALINK](#)

Awesome! I hope it's helpful, Vivien, at least for when you are designing with standard American sized papers!

[Steve Tiano](#)

POSTED NOVEMBER 17, 2007 AT 11:06 AM | [PERMALINK](#)

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