

How Typewriters Changed Correspondence: an Analysis of Prescription and Practice

Sue Walker

*Department of Typography and Graphic Communication
University of Reading, England*

Typewriters began to be widely available in the 1880s and 1890s, and one of their first uses was for the typing of commercial correspondence. Because typewriters are relatively inflexible compared with handwriting, typing inevitably influenced the visual organization of correspondence. These changes in visual organization are evident in the reduced use of indentation and superscripts, increased width of margins, and line spacing being dependent on the length of the letter. This paper will discuss the development of such changes, drawing examples both from the prescriptions for, and the practice of, commercial correspondence.

Commercial handwriting

At the beginning of the twentieth century there were four main styles of handwriting for business and commercial work: business handwriting, civil service writing, text hand, and legal style. In basic letter formation these styles were similar, but each assumed individual characteristics by variation in slope, lateral compression, boldness, and letter spacing. These individual distinctions were determined by the requirements of the writing: the civil service hand, for example, had to be read easily, and correct letter formation and wide spaces between the letters were held to be essential (Pitman, 1904).

These commercial hands shared one major disadvantage: they were not fast enough to be able to cope with an ever-increasing work-load in the business and commercial field. The average speed of writing was twenty-five to thirty words a minute (Cleaver, 1895, p. 17). As early as 1876 it was being claimed that with a typewriter it was possible to write between sixty and ninety words a minute (Anon., 1876, p.254), but this is likely to have been one of many exaggerations. Adler gives the following more realistic figures: "For the most part of the 1870s, they [typewriters] were poor performers, packing up at maximum speeds in the vicinity of 30 to 40 words per minute. The type bars clashed and jammed, apart from other problems, and although the company claimed 30 to 60 w.p.m., the lower figure was the more realistic and even optimistic one" (Adler, 1973, p.42).

Typing gradually began to supersede handwriting, particularly in the commercial field, though the transition was by no means abrupt: “The typewriter has now largely superseded long-hand as a means of correspondence, but, notwithstanding its introduction, a considerable proportion of clerical work is still done, and must necessarily be done, by the pen” (Grebby, 1913, p.59). By 1905, however, it appears that typewriters were widely used as the following quotations from *Pitman’s journal* suggest:

In the old days when the typewriter first came . . . it was a question whether the typewriter as such would be of use to him in his business, and he was fairly entitled to his opinion about that. Now that question is to be settled by common consent and the only question the would-be purchaser has to decide is which of the many typewriters he will buy. (Anon., 1905a, p.604)

Handwriting has fallen into disuse because the typewriter is quicker than the pen and typewriting is more legible than handwriting. There are probably as many good penmen now as there ever were, but we do not often see a specimen of your art simply because typewriting has taken the place of handwriting to a very large degree. (Anon., 1905b, p.663)

Mechanical constraints

Typewriters present users with limited means of visual organization: on a standard keyboard there are only eighty-eight characters available, spatial variation is limited to fixed vertical and horizontal increments, and changes in weight and size cannot be made. Compared with handwriting, which offers users the potential for infinite variety in size, shape, spacing, and colour, typing is very inflexible.

Typewriters also force users into making decisions about visual organization that, in handwriting, are intuitive to a large extent. Line endings are a good example of this: in handwriting, letters at the end of a line are often compressed or written in a smaller size to prevent making a decision about where to break a word; in typing, because character increments are fixed, decisions about word breaks are inevitable. Typewriter users at the end of the nineteenth century had to change attitudes and adapt to new sets of possibilities and constraints.

In Pitman’s *A manual of the typewriter* (1893) a specimen of “bad” typing is illustrated (Figure 1) and the faults are identified as: irregularity of impression, irregularity of spacing, unevenness at the beginning of paragraphs, lines of typing not parallel with the top edge of the paper, uneven spacing between the lines, misuse of certain characters (i.e., representation of figures 1 and 0), bad alignment, and finger marks and smudges. The inclusion of such a list in one of the earliest typing manuals suggests such faults were commonplace at the time; a comment from the same manual supports this view: “The earliest specimens of work were unsightly in the extreme. They were full of errors, over-writings, and pen corrections. These blemishes still characterise typewritten MS., but not to the same extent as was the case some few years ago” (Pitman, 1893, p.8).

Articles written at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century provide evidence of debate about the quality of typing: to some it was the equivalent of “writing in print” (Anon., 1887), but to others reading typed material was like having been fed on sawdust! Despite such comments, typing was considered by most as equivalent to typesetting, and typing therefore attained status in terms of formality over handwriting. Typewriter manufacturers also emphasized this point in their publicity material with such statements as “The Williams typewriter writes like a press” (Anon., 1901).

User reaction

The earliest published user-reaction to typewriters I have seen is from a correspondent to *The phonetic journal* who had owned a typewriter for a week. He or she considered it to have the following advantages: “It feeds itself, spaces the lines, and only needs the writer to touch the letters before him and touch the hand-lever for an instant when beginning a new line. Any finger of either hand can be used. The machine also inks itself, by means of a ribbon that is said to need no re-inking for a year” (Anon., 1876, p.254).

The cost and non-alphabetic arrangement of the keys are mentioned as disadvantages, and it is said that typewriters do not hide careless spelling or initiate creative writing. The conclusion is very similar to comments written in relation to word processors and micro-computers in more recent times: “If, however, the machine is what it promises to be and what, so far as I have gone, I have found it to be, it is destined to work a great revolution in the course of a few years” (Anon., 1876, p.254).

Early typed letters

User manuals to accompany typewriters began to appear as early as 1888 with Harrison’s *A manual of the typewriter*. Models for setting out commercial correspondence were contained in early typing manuals and remain a constituent in the 1980s. Early models for typed correspondence imitated handwritten commercial correspondence, models for which were frequently seen in books teaching commercial handwriting. As can be seen in the example in Figure 2, the dominant stylistic feature in both exemplar and copy is indentation—of the lines in the address, of the beginning of paragraphs, and of the lines in the complimentary close.

Figures 3 and 4 illustrate the similarity of visual organization in one of the last handwritten and one of the first typed letters of a company that appears to have acquired a typewriter towards the end of April 1887. The letters are very similar in their visual organization: width of left-hand margin, position of inside address, paragraph indents, indents on the second line of the address and position of salutation are almost identical. The most obvious difference

3Green St.
Kensington, Aug. 9, 1891

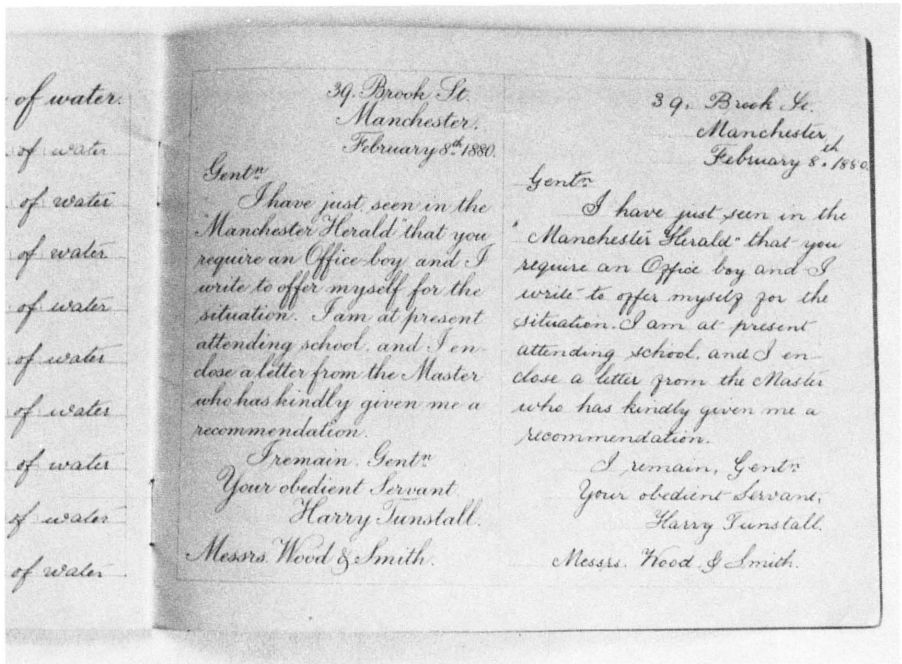
gent.
I beg to apply for the post of shorthand writer & typist advertised
by you in the Daily Messenger. I have only had a week's practice on the
typewriter, but I feel sure that I could soon pick it up as
I have made considerable progress in a very short time. It is only a matter
of practice, and I should be ready to do my best to please.
Hoping
Hoping
to receive a favourable reply, I am, gent. Yours faithfully

WILLIAM
6

MESSRS. BROWN & CO., PICCADILLY.

Figure 1. Example of bad typing. (Pitman, 1893, plate I).

Figure 2. Model letter and copy. From Greenwell's Scientific Series, No. 10 commercial forms, London, c.1880 (From the collection of V.H. Crellin).



HEAD, MORISON & BLAIR.

SHIPPING & FORWARDING AGENTS & INSURANCE BROKERS.

LONDON. † LIVERPOOL. † MANCHESTER. † DUNDEE. † BIRMINGHAM.
5, GRACECHURCH STREET. † 1, RUMFORD PLACE. † 57, PRINCESS STREET. † 84, COMMERCIAL STREET. † 86, NEW STREET.

REFER TO **GT.** TELEPHONE **Nº 4200.** *London* 9th May. 87. *1887*

TELEGRAM ADDRESS
HEADSHIP, LONDON.
" " LIVERPOOL
" " MANCHESTER
" " DUNDEE
" " BIRMINGHAM

Messrs Nalder & Nalder Ltd.

Wantage.

Gentlemen.

"Odessa" (s). We have your favor of 7th inst, & note that the Machine will leave on Thursday next for this steamer & arrange shipment accordingly. We await usual particulars in due course,

And are Dear sirs

Yours truly,

Head Morison Blair

HEAD, MORISON & BLAIR.

SHIPPING & FORWARDING AGENTS & INSURANCE BROKERS.

LONDON. † LIVERPOOL. † MANCHESTER. † DUNDEE. † BIRMINGHAM.
5, GRACECHURCH STREET. † 1, RUMFORD PLACE. † 57, PRINCESS STREET. † 84, COMMERCIAL STREET. † 86, NEW STREET.

REFER TO **GT.** TELEPHONE **Nº 4200.** *London* 29th June 1887

TELEGRAM ADDRESS
HEADSHIP, LONDON.
" " LIVERPOOL
" " MANCHESTER
" " DUNDEE
" " BIRMINGHAM.

Messrs Nalder & Nalder Ltd
Montagu, Berks.

Gentlemen

Dear Sirs We have your favor of 28th inst. We are glad to say that we have now arranged for the air Quoa to take the Thrashing Machine at the freight of £19 in bill, payable abroad, including landing at Bristol, you paying dock charges in London. Please despatch the Machine tomorrow consigned direct to the steamer in bill with dock for our order, to be delivered by land under usual conditions to us as per form enclosed & charge.

Yours truly,

MB

Figure 3. Letter from the Nalder & Nalder collection. 1887; 257 x 206mm; off-white wove paper pre-printed with very pale blue lines 8.5mm apart; written in black ink; black printed letterhead. (Figures 3, 4, 5, and 6 are reproduced with permission of the Institute of Agricultural History and the Museum of English Rural Life, University of Reading)

between the two letters is that the line length on the typed letter is shorter but this is probably because the typed letter is shorter in length (in later typed letters from the same company, the lines are longer). Other differences in the two letters are due to differences between handwriting and typing as methods of composition. In the handwritten letters, for example, abbreviations such as 3rd and L^{td} use superior letters above a dash. In the typed letter where such conventions are difficult to do and time-consuming, the same abbreviations are shown as “3rd” and “Ltd.” In the handwritten letter the reference “Braila” is underlined, and the reference “Odessa” in the typed letter is enclosed in double quotation marks. This is because in typing underlining necessitates going back over letters already typed.

In the Head, Morison & Blair examples the typewriter is being regarded as a substitute for handwriting, but this is not always the case. Slightly later examples from the firm T.C. & C. Graham (Figures 5 & 6) show characteristics of visual organization that indicate the typewriter is being seen as an alternative to the pen: the paragraphs are ranged left and line spacing is determined by the length of the letter (single if long, double if short).

Two longitudinal studies

In the rest of this paper such changes in visual organization will be studied in more detail by considering prescriptions for setting out correspondence in typing manuals from 1890 to the present day, and by considering the extent to which such prescriptions have been followed in practice as evidenced from two files of letters. In order to do the latter, two studies were made of the ways in which graphic conventions and the use of space have changed in typed business correspondence from the 1890s to the present day (Walker, 1983). The first, major, study is referred to as the “Macmillan” study and the second as the “Nalder” study. The majority of the letters in the Macmillan study are from the Macmillan archive, Reading University Library (RUL MS 1089) which consists of the correspondence of the publishers Macmillan & Co. Ltd from 1875 to 1940. Letters from 1940 to 1977 were obtained from the continuing archives of Macmillan at Basingstoke, and the correspondence of Routledge & Kegan Paul in Reading University Library (RUL MS 1489). Most of the letters in these collections were from authors to their publisher and their content was therefore of a literary rather than a commercial kind. A second study was made of the correspondence of an agricultural machinery firm, Nalder & Nalder. The letters from this collection are in the Institute of Agricultural History and Museum of English Rural Life, University of Reading, dated from 1878 to 1932. They were more commercial than the Macmillan letters, being originated by engineering and agricultural firms and insurance companies.

Figure 4. Letter from Nalder & Nalder collection. 1887; 257 x 206mm; off-white wove paper pre-printed with very pale blue lines 8.5mm apart; purple typing; black printed letterhead.

239

TELEGRAMS
GRAHAM
SKINNER STREET
NEWPORT.

Telephones (National 34)
(Post Office 50)



ALL QUOTATIONS & SALES
SUBJECT TO THE USUAL STRIKE & ACCIDENT CLAUSES.

NEWPORT, MON.

October 27/08

SOLE AGENTS FOR
WANTYDLE BLACK VEIN COLLIERY

Messrs. Haldar & Haldar.

W A N T A G E.

Dear Sirs,

We thank you for your favor of the 26th inst. The Coal we have offered you for12/8. per ton, delivered at Wantyde Road or Challow, is semi bituminous, but from our Forest Pit and not our Mantylgo. We have, however, quoted you for this particular sort fully believing that you will find the Coal suit your purposes almost as well as our Mantylgo Thro' & Thro' to which it is very similar. We often supply it in place of that, where the rate makes it advantageous to do so, and in this case there is a saving of...2/- per ton. We would also point out that there is a very good percentage of Large in this Coal. Full, should you desire to have our Mantylgo, this would be....14/8. per ton, Net, 3/8. We should be pleased to receive a line from you by return, as to which sort you would care to have forwarded. We should, however, like you to try that we quoted you for on the 25th inst., which would be more economical probably, seeing the difference in the prices. If you use Smithy Coal, we should be pleased to supply you with our very best @.....12/- per ton, Net, delivered Challow. You will find this very clean coal, and we are sending it largely for Works purposes in the Oxford and Reading districts, etc.

Yours truly,
J. C. & C. Graham

245

TELEGRAMS
GRAHAM
SKINNER STREET
NEWPORT.

Telephones (National 34)
(Post Office 50)



ALL QUOTATIONS & SALES
SUBJECT TO THE USUAL STRIKE & ACCIDENT CLAUSES.

NEWPORT, MON.

October 27/08.

SOLE AGENTS FOR
WANTYDLE BLACK VEIN COLLIERY

Messrs Haldar & Haldar.

C H A L L O W.

Dear Sirs,

We thank you for your post card of the 26th inst., and are pleased to note that you will try a truck of Thro' Coal as quoted for by us. We feel sure that you will be pleased with the quality, and we hope to do regular business with you.

We are, Dear Sirs,

Yours truly,

J. C. & C. Graham

Figure 5. Letter from the Nalder & Nalder collection. 1898; 250 x 202mm; off-white wove paper; blue typing; blue-black printed letterhead.

Sender's address

Even the authors of the earliest typing manuals assume that letters will be written on paper with a printed letterhead and therefore give little information as to the position and form of the sender's address. Collyns in *The typist's manual* (1895) says, for example: "Business letters are generally typed upon letter paper with a printed heading, setting forth the nature of the business, style of firm, address, &c." (p.32). She adds, however: "In cases where the heading is not printed, type the address first and then the date. As a general rule commence the first line of the address at 30 on a No.2 machine, and 35 on a No.5, and indent each line of address 5 spaces from the preceding line" (Collyns, 1895, p. 32). ("No.2" and "No.5" refer to the model numbers of Remington typewriters; the numbers "30" and "35" refer to positions on the margin scale.)

Most of the letters studied from the Macmillan and Nalder collections were typed on paper with printed letterheads. When letters did have an address typed by the sender, it was usual for each line to be indented and positioned in the top right-hand corner. The most common alternative to this form, and one especially evident in typed letters from before 1900, was that of a shortened form of address comprising the name of a house and a town, written in a single line and positioned in the top right-hand corner. In letters written in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s there was some evidence of addresses typed with each line ranged left.

Style of inside address and letter as a whole

The term "inside address" or "direction" refers to the address of the person to whom the letter is sent, and this tends to appear on commercial rather than general or informal correspondence. As such it is used for identification and classification. The producer of the letter has to make decisions about: whether its inclusion is necessary, its position on the page, and its form and punctuation. The form and position on the page of the inside address in typed correspondence are dependent upon the style of the letter as a whole. There are four basic styles: fully indented, indented, semi-blocked, and blocked. These are illustrated in Figure 7.

Typing manuals published before 1915 generally concur that each line of the inside address should be indented by five or ten character spaces and that lines should be double spaced. Smith Clough (1915), however, lists five alternative forms including one where each line of the address is ranged left. During the 1920s the ranged left style began to be used for the inside address, and this coincided with a gradual shift in typing style from the fully indented to the indented form, which became standard practice until the late 1960s when it began to be superseded by the semi-blocked and blocked style of layout.

Figure 6. Letter from the Nalder & Nalder collection. 1898; 250 x 202mm; off-white wove paper, blue typing; blue-black printed letterhead.

Reaction from typing authorities towards a blocked inside address was mixed. Menzies writes: "The American method of display, which has become popular with many English firms, is to start each line of the address and superscription at the same point. The older method is to indent each line five degrees" (Menzies, 1924, p. 964). Smith Clough (1947), however, is in favor of an indented inside address: "The first (the 'block' method) is the quicker way, but with a tabulator, the second method [indented] takes very little more time and gives a neater appearance" (Smith Clough, 1947, p.56). The blocked style was American in origin and although it was not until the late 1960s that blocked styles were recognized by typing examination bodies, such as the Royal Society of Arts, examples of blocked letters occur in Owen (1920) and Drury & Pearce (1936).

One of the main promoters of the blocked style of layout in the 1960s was HMSO which instigated an Organization & Methods (O & M) investigation into Government stationery. The chief interest of O & M in a new typing style was to increase productivity: "If the adoption of a simplified form of layout could achieve this without significant loss of legibility or style (whatever this may objectively be), the efficiency of nearly 30,000 Government typists and secretaries could be painlessly increased, so enabling the conduct of public business to be expedited" (Fowler, 1969, p.124).

Fowler goes on to say that O & M officers studied previous simplification recommendations made by such bodies as the American National Office Management Association and the Institute of Office Management. Their chief recommendation was that to avoid time-consuming activities such as centring and space bar tapping, as many lines as possible should begin at the left-margin. O & M's original proposals were consequently for a blocked style of layout and these were submitted to Government Departments. Reactions were generally favourable, but some amendments were suggested. The most serious criticism was over the positioning of the date, subject heading, and subscription at the left-hand margin. After consideration it was decided to: "maintain the left-hand position of the subject heading (to obviate centring), to change the position of the date from left to right (for the sake of clarity and to facilitate filing), and to give Departments the choice of a left- or right-hand subscription" (Fowler, 1969, p.125).

O & M then went on to consider the effect of the new style of layout on productivity. Eighty-two letters were typed twice by four typists and the length of time taken was recorded. the first typing used the old layout, and the second the new (the typists were allowed four weeks to get used to it). The results reported in Fowler (1969) were as follows:

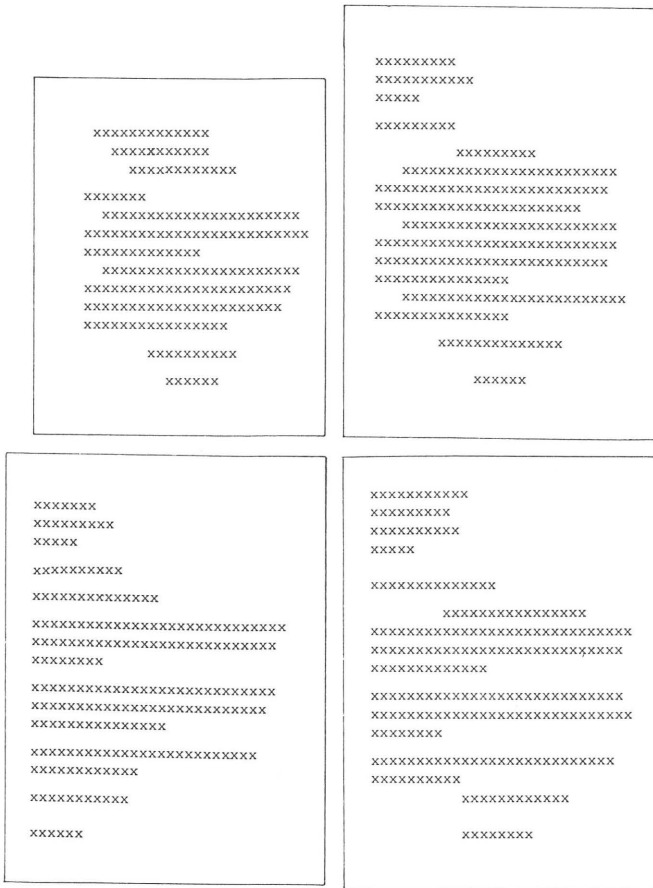


Figure 7. The four recognized styles of organizing typed correspondence.
Clockwise from top left:

Fully indented.

Layout derives from nineteenth-century commercial correspondence. All lines of the inside address and paragraphs are indented. Complimentary close and designation are centred.

Indented.

All lines of the inside address are ranged left. Paragraphs are indented. Heading is centred. Complimentary close and designation are centred.

Semi-blocked.

There are a number of variations of this style (see Mackay, 1977, pp.135-6). Lines of the inside address are ranged left. Paragraphs are ranged left. Heading and complimentary close may be centred, or aligned with the date if this is typed on the right-hand side of the paper.

Fully blocked.

All lines begin at the left-hand edge.

Typist	A	B	C	D	Total
Number of letters typed	31	29	16	6	82
Average time taken for each (minutes):					
Old style	4.0	4.9	4.5	4.0	4.4
New style	3.6	3.9	3.7	3.0	3.7
Average difference as percentage of saving over old style time	10.5	21.4	18.0	25.2	17.3
Percentage saving after "theoretical" addition for collation and decollation time	8.5	17.9	15.4	21.3	14.9

In each case a saving was made and Fowler concludes: "that the adoption of our specific new style layout for typed Government correspondence would save between about 10 per cent and 15 per cent of the average typist's time. Since even the lower of these two figures was obviously sufficiently high to justify the general adoption of the simplified format, a recommendation to this effect was recently made to all Government Departments" (Fowler, 1969, p.128).

Position of inside address

As well as the style, the position of the inside address has also changed during the last hundred years. In examples of commercial correspondence from the nineteenth century the inside address is positioned at the foot of the letter on the left-hand side, but today it is usually placed above the body of the letter on the left. The newly published typing manuals began to promote the top position during the latter part of the nineteenth century: "The forms of correspondence differ in different houses. Sometimes the name of the addressee is placed at the beginning of the letter, and sometimes at the end. It is, however, becoming increasingly frequent for the name and address of the intended recipient to be written before the body of the letter, as subsequent reference to the copying book is thereby facilitated" (Pitman, 1893, p.49).

By the 1940s most typing manuals accepted the top position in commercial correspondence, though Lockey (1948) still feels it necessary to state its advantages: first, so that it is never omitted owing to lack of room; and secondly so that in circular letters where individual addresses are entered separately, time is saved by inserting the address at the top of the page. The bottom position of the inside address did not disappear completely: in official correspondence (civil service letters), the correct position for the inside address was at the foot of the letter until the redesign of British government stationery in the late 1960s. The correct position in the new stationery is between the two

parallel lines at the top of the main body of letter and below the address of the originator. This position corresponds with recommendations in BS1808 (1970) so that if a window envelope is used the address panel serves the dual purpose of internal and external address: “The addressee panel is so positioned that when the letterhead or form is correctly folded and inserted, it registers with the window of the envelope. A specified area surrounding the addressee panel shall be kept clear so that no printed or typed matter other than the name and address of the addressee appears through the window of the envelope” (BS1808, 1970, p.7).

Apart from official letters, the only other reference to the inside address being placed at the foot of the letter in typing manuals published since 1950 is in W. & E. Walmsley’s *Pitman commercial typewriting* (London, 1970, p.48): “In personal letters the name and address of the addressee are usually placed at the foot of the first page.” The inside address is positioned at the foot of the letter. It therefore can indicate either formality (in the case of official typed letters until very recently) or informality (in the case of an informal typed letter).

Position of complimentary close

In typed correspondence, as can be seen from the diagrams in Figure 7, the positioning of the complimentary close and signature is dependent on the style of the letter as a whole. If, for example, a fully blocked layout is being used then the prescribed correct position is ranged left with the inside address and the body of the letter. In the case of one of the semi-blocked arrangements the beginning of each line of the complimentary close falls at the centre of the paper on which the letter is written, and with the traditional, indented layout the complimentary close is centred on the writing line.

Some typing manuals consider the disposition of vertical space around the complimentary close. Lockey (1948) and Heelis (1965) suggest, for example, that two lines of vertical space should be left below the main body of the letter above the complimentary close, and that a space of two double line spaces or two treble line spaces should be left for the signature.

Prescription leads practice

Prescriptions in typing manuals demonstrate clearly that changes in the overall layout of correspondence derive to a large extent from technical constraints imposed by typewriters. It has been shown how, during the 1920s, the fully indented style was superseded by the indented form, which remained the one prescribed until the 1960s when the semi-blocked and blocked styles began to be recommended too. Letters from the Macmillan and Nalder collections indicate that practice follows prescription: the letters revealed a shift from the fully indented to the indented style in the 1920s, and there appeared to be a

corresponding, though less marked, shift towards the blocked styles in the 1970s.

Body of the letter

The visual organization of the body of the letter is dealt with very thoroughly in the typing manuals that have been studied: "This [the body of the letter] contains the message or information to be conveyed and should occupy the centre of the page. Orderly arrangement greatly facilitates the reading, and a letter that is well arranged should fall naturally into paragraphs. Short paragraphs are preferred, as they have a more distinct appearance than long solid paragraphs, but excessive paragraphing should be avoided. Each phase of the subject should have a separate paragraph" (Drury & Pearce, 1936, p.237). These views are representative of those in typing manuals from the 1880s until the present day.

Line spacing

One change in prescription in typing manuals over the last hundred years has been a shift of preference from double line spacing to single line spacing for the typing of the body of the letter. Morton in *Practical typewriting and examination guide* writes: "The line spacing must be regulated by the length of the text and the size of the paper. *Double* line spacing should be used whenever possible, it being most effective" (Morton, 1907, p.57). Crooks & Dawson (1942) recommend single line spacing if a letter is long and double line spacing if it is short, but according to Crooks (1929):

The modern practice is to type *all* letters in single spacing. The single spacing is adopted nowadays because it gives a much more compact and neater letter. If the single spaced letter is correctly typed, it is easier to read. In other words, it is more correct to say that the modern practice is "single spacing and *short* lines, instead of double spacing and *long* lines". The typewriter mechanism gives plenty of space between the single lines, so far as the eyesight is concerned, and with the short line the eye and the mind are able to get a quicker grasp of the letter as a whole than is the case with the average double spaced letter.(p.32)

Following recommendations in typing manuals, single line spacing gradually and steadily began to replace double line spacing in the 1920s, and 1930s, and 1940s.

Paragraphs

The most common ways of denoting the start of paragraphs in typing are by indenting the first line, by hanging the first line to the left of subsequent lines, and by starting every line at the same point. Before about 1965 the recommended form was indentation, but over the years the prescribed width of the indent has changed. Ten character spaces are prescribed in two early manuals (Morton, 1891; Collins, 1895); in later editions of Collins, however, the wider

indent is no longer mentioned which suggests it is no longer acceptable. One reason given for reducing the amount of paragraph indentation was to make typing similar to typesetting: "The modern view and practice is to reduce and not to increase the amount of space in the first line of a paragraph, and to bring the typewritten page more closely in accord with the method of printing, which does not allow the appearance of the page to be spoiled by wide gaps in the letterspaces" (Crooks & Dawson, 1942, p.202).

Although the blocked form of address began to be mentioned in typing manuals from the 1920s onwards, it was not until much later that the blocked style began to be suggested as an alternative to indentation for paragraphs in commercial letters. Drury & Pearce (1936, p.237), however, say that blocked paragraphs are often used in sales letters. Once the blocked style of paragraphing is adopted, some means other than indentation has to be found to indicate the start of a new paragraph. The most obvious way, and the one that is recommended in the manuals, is to increase the vertical space between paragraphs. By the time manuals began positively to recommend the use of blocked paragraphs (i.e., mid-1960s), single line spacing rather than double was seen as the norm for typed business correspondence unless the letter was very short, when 1½ line spacing was preferred.

According to prescriptions in typing manuals, therefore, the treatment of paragraphs and line spacing in the body of the letter should relate to the style of the letter as a whole. Blocked paragraphs and single line spacing are, for example, characteristics of semi-blocked and blocked layouts. As most of the letters in the Macmillan collection were typed in the indented or fully indented styles, one would expect the most common method of denoting paragraphs to be indentation: this expectation was confirmed. There was, however, considerable variety in the number of spaces left at the start of paragraphs.

Margins

In typing manuals the specification for the width of the left-hand margin is given either in terms of letter spaces or position on the margin scale, or is merely implied in specimen letters. The general rule seems to be either five letter spaces or five on the margin scale; in Pitman (1893), however, the width of the margin is given as ¾ inch. Sometimes the general principles behind the use of a margin are discussed:

Correspondence with wide left-hand margins and narrow right-hand margins is a survival of the days when the left-hand margin was utilized for filing purposes. Present-day practice is to have centred letters with equal margins, in much the same way as the printed page of a book. Wide margins are desirable; narrow margins do not look well unless the page is full. If the use of wide margins means that a letter extends slightly beyond a page, a slight readjustment of the margins should be made to enable the letter to be typed on one page. (Drury & Pearce, 1936, p.232)

This extract is interesting for two reasons: first the change in the disposition of marginal white space from unequal left and right margins to equal margins around the text. Secondly, the reference to “the printed page of a book.” It seems to be a characteristic feature of typing manuals dating from the 1920s and 1930s that the reader is referred to more formal kinds of typography as seen in newspapers and books.

Drury & Pearce’s recommendation was reflected in the Macmillan letters: many of the early ones were typed with tiny right-hand margins, but from the 1910s onwards there was growing evidence of wider right-hand ones.

Resumé

It would seem from studying letters in the Macmillan and Nalder collections that it was in the 1920s that the visual organization of correspondence was significantly affected by the use of the typewriter. The publication of *The dictionary of typewriting* in 1919 and *Pitman’s commercial typewriting* in 1922, two of the most thorough and comprehensive guides, may well have contributed to the consolidation of typing practice around this time. Visual organization was no longer solely determined by conventions in handwritten letters. In the 1920s the overall style of layout changed from fully indented to indented which meant that the lines of the inside address were ranged left. Line spacing began to change from double to single for letters of medium or long length, and this resulted in a change in the convention for denoting the openings of paragraphs from indentation to indentation plus space. A change towards blocked and semi-blocked styles occurred in the 1970s - a change advocated on grounds of speed and efficiency by the stationery office.

Typists make a significant contribution to the history of letter-writing because the *visual* organization of the letter plays the dominant role. Typists are not usually originators of the letters they type but producers, and are less concerned with the meaning of the language in the letter (though they may correct grammatical and punctuation errors), but more concerned with ordering and arrangement. Typewriters encouraged specialist operators because of the manual dexterity and accuracy needed by the technology.

Word processors are easy to operate and have simple correction procedures. Originators can work directly with the technology and know they can end up with a professional-looking job. The typist’s expertise has, to a large extent, been replaced by the program or operating system. It is, for example, easy for an inexperienced word processor operator to produce copy that has centred headings and a right-justified margin — just two features of visual organization that are relatively difficult and time-consuming to produce on ordinary typewriters. It will be of interest to see to what extent word processors affect visual organization in the next few years, and whether these are comparable to the changes caused by the introduction and widespread use of the typewriter.

References

- Adler, M.H. (1973). *The writing machine*. London: George Allen & Unwin.
- Anon., (1876). The typewriter, *The phonetic journal*, 27 May 1876, pp.253-4.
- Anon., (1887). Typewriting — introduction, *The phonetic journal*, 24 December 1887, pp.623-4.
- Anon., (1901). Catalogue for *The Williams typewriter no. 4*. London, 1901.
- Anon., (1905a). *Pitman's journal*, 5 August 1905, p.604.
- Anon., (1905b). *Pitman's journal*, 26 August 1905, p.663.
- BS 1808 (1970). *Specification for sizes and recommended layouts of commercial forms. Part 1: letterheads and forms other than those produced on rotary presses*. London: British Standards Institution.
- Cleaver, F.C. (1895). *Papers on penmanship*. London: Isaac Pitman & Sons.
- Collins, E. (1895). *The typist's manual: an elementary text-book for commercial students*. Manchester: John Heywood Ltd.
- Crooks, M. (1929). *The typists' companion*. London: Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons Ltd.
- Crooks, M. & Dawson, F. (1942). *The dictionary of typewriting* (4th ed). London: Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons Ltd.
- Drury, P., & Pearce, H.L. (1936). *The typist's deskbook*. London: Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons Ltd.
- Fowler, G.H.E. (1969). Typing topics — towards a simpler letter layout, *O & M Bulletin*, vol. 24, no. 3, pp.124-9.
- Grebb, J.K. (1913). *A first course in commercial correspondence and office routine*. London: Macdonald & Evans.
- Heelis, F. (1965). *Pitman's business typewriting* (7th ed). London: Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons Ltd.
- Lockey, F.J. (1948). *The theory and practice of typewriting* (2nd ed). London: Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons Ltd.
- Mackay, E. (1977). *The typewriting dictionary*. London: Pitman Publishing Ltd.
- Menzies, G.C. (1924). The main divisions of a letter: neat copies from rough drafts, *Pitman's journal*, 12 July 1924, p.964.
- Morton, A.E. (1891). *Typewriting and typewriters and how to choose a machine*. London: Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons.
- Morton, A.E. (1907). *Practical typewriting and examination guide*. London: Smith Premier Typewriter Co., and Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons Ltd.
- Owen, M. B. (1920). *The typists' vade mecum. . . with special chapters on setting out*. London: Stanley Paul and Co.
- Pitman (1893). *A manual of the typewriter*. London: Isaac Pitman & Sons.
- Pitman (1904). *Pitman's commercial handwriting and correspondence*. London: Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons Ltd.
- Smith Clough, E.R. (1915). *A new course in typewriting*. London: Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons.
- Smith Clough, E.R. (1947). *Rational typewriting (short course)* (15th ed). London: Gregg Publishing Co.
- Walker, S.F. (1983). Descriptive techniques for studying verbal graphic language. Ph.D. thesis, Department of Typography & Graphic Communication, University of Reading, England.
- Walmsley, W. and Walmsley, E. (1970). *Pitman commercial typewriting*. 7th edition. London: Sir Isaac Pitman and Sons Ltd.