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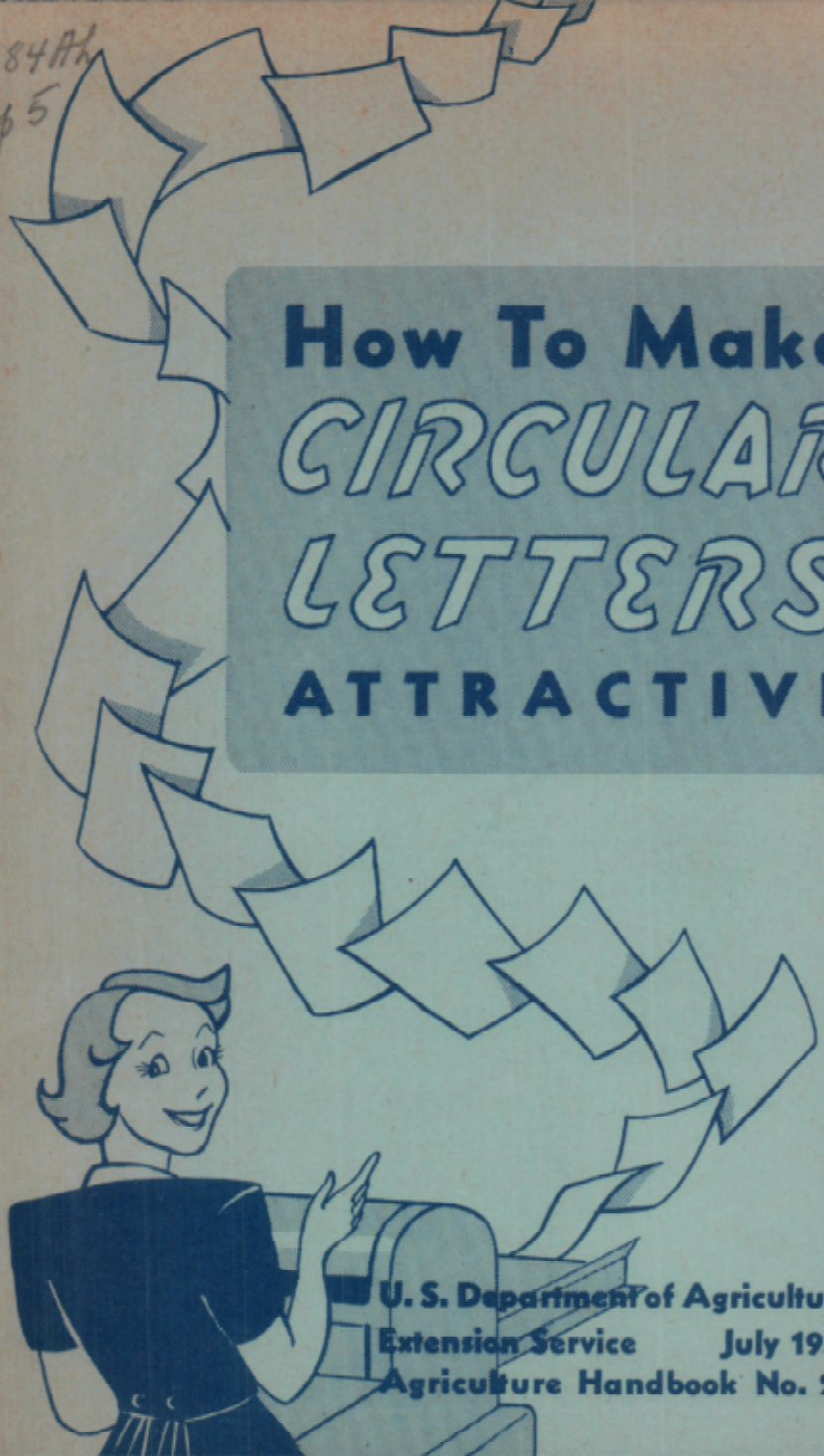
How To Make CIRCULAR LETTERS ATTRACTIVE



U. S. Department of Agriculture
Extension Service July 1951
Agriculture Handbook No. 26

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

EXTENSION SERVICE

WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

July 1951

Dear Extension Coworker:

Most extension workers know that the successful circular letter is one of our effective and economical tools for driving home ideas and values.

They know, too, that the "read" letter is the one that appeals to the reader's interest, is timely, is neat and sprightly enough to wig-wag and hold the eye, and is written clearly and readably.

We all know these things, to be sure. And yet we frequently see circular letters that are drab and poorly written. They hardly justify the effort of the postman to deliver them.

Some of the handicaps can be readily overcome with a little more attention to details. This handbook includes some hints about how to do this. It will help you to brighten your circular letters, make them look neater, and point up your messages in a briefer way through the use of illustrations. It suggests some of the aids that will encourage your circular letter to warm its way into the mind of the reader.

Sincerely,

Lester A. Schlup

Lester A. Schlup, Chief
Division of Extension Information

How To Make Circular Letters Attractive

By MARGARET M. MASCHI, Specialist in Visual Presentation

The chief factors that help to make a circular letter look attractive are—

Wide margins.
Clear-cut typing and duplicating.
Orderly arrangement.
An interesting heading in larger lettering.
Illustrations.
Color.

All circular letters should have the first three elements—wide margins, clear-cut typing and duplicating, and an orderly arrangement—if you want to make a favorable impression on the reader. The other three—an interesting heading, illustrations, and color—should be added if your letter needs to have special appeal.

WIDE MARGINS

People are reluctant to read form letters if they look as though they will take too much time. Mail boxes are stuffed with so much showy and lengthy advertising material that a circular letter can best compete by being brief and simple. So it is better to cut down on the text rather than crowd the page. Use margins 1 to 1¼ inches wide at the sides, and 2 inches or more at the bottom if the text is full. Wider margins are desirable where the text is short. Especially in these days of threatened paper shortages, however, it is inadvisable to go to extremes in leaving paper blank.

CLEAR-CUT TYPING AND DUPLICATING

Good stencils require only a little extra care, and the end result is well worth the trouble. If your circular letters are smudged, or the typing is blurred and uneven, ask yourself these questions:

- Am I using the right touch?
- Is my typewriter properly adjusted? Is the platen in good condition? And do all the keys hit evenly?
- Are my type keys clean? Should I brush them clean after every 5 or 10 lines?
- Should I use an extra cushion sheet? Should I use a sheet of cellophane on the face of the stencil?
- Do I have the proper tools for making an illustration—light table, styli, writing plate, screen plates?
- Do I have lettering guides in large sizes and up-to-date styles?
- Is the duplicating machine properly adjusted? Are paper and ink in good condition?
- Should I change the ink pad?
- Do I know how to make sure that my stencil will print squarely on the paper?

You will find helpful information on all these points and many more in any of the manuals on preparing good stencils. They are put out by duplicating-machine manufacturers and by paper companies.

ORDERLY ARRANGEMENT

An orderly arrangement of the various elements you have to work with can be achieved by a little thought before you begin typing the stencil.

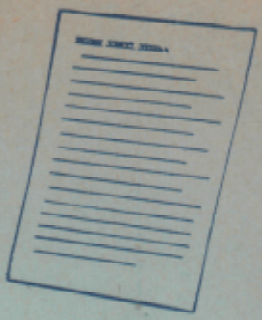
If you have text alone, arrange it in a shape that corresponds to the proportions of the paper. If the text is solid, break it up with paragraphs or subheads.

If you are arranging several elements such as text, a hand-lettered heading, and an illustration, it is better to have a rough draft of the typed material, and to sketch roughly in pencil on a tissue sheet, just where you are going to place each part. Four examples of orderly arrangement of text and illustrations are shown on page 12. You will find that additional ideas for pleasing arrangements come to you with a little experience.

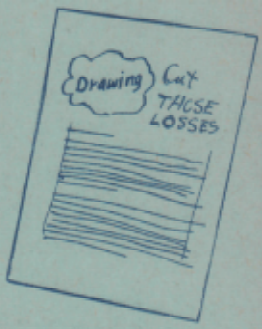
Above all, do not crowd the letter up into the letterhead so that it is difficult to tell where the letterhead stops and the letter begins.

Keep a file of circular letters that have the snappy look you are trying to achieve. They will give you ideas for future use.

Remember that every improvement you make on the stencil will be multiplied by as many letters as are run from it. Therefore, the extra time you may spend in preparation will be justified many times over.



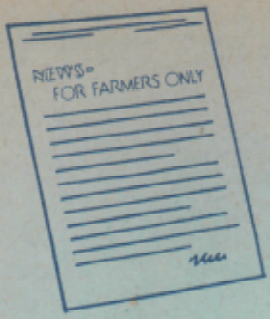
Rough draft.



Tissue lay-out.

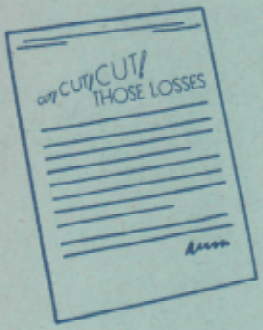
Finished copy.

AN INTERESTING HEADING



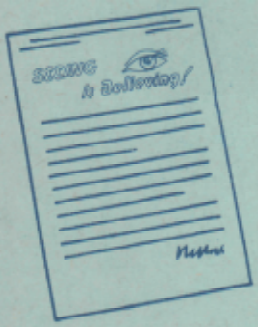
Almost every advertisement that you look at these days has a "catch line." This is a sentence or a phrase, usually at the top and played up in display lettering, to catch the reader's eye. By arousing the reader's interest, it leads him on to read the text.

Circular letters that make use of this principle are usually more effective. Catchy headings that will intrigue the reader are hard to think up, but there is an easy way. Advertising men have made an art of catchy headings, and magazines and newspaper advertisements are full of inviting captions. You can start a file of these just like your file of circular letters, and by changing a word here and there, adapt them to your subject matter.



In lettering these headings, use a lettering guide that is big and bold. Letters about one-half inch tall are most effective.

Frequently advertisements will have words or even whole sentences that are hand-lettered in a dramatic or distinctive way, and lend themselves to tracing.



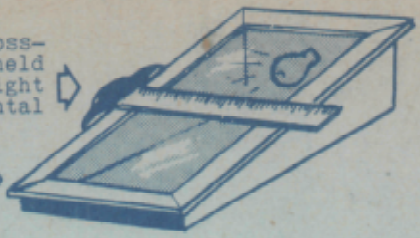
If you are going to do your lettering freehand, always make a pencil version of it on tissue, then trace it onto the stencil.

Let's try lettering a heading on a practice stencil, but first—have you all the tools shown on the opposite page?

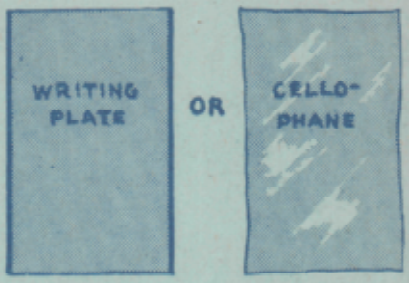
TOOLS

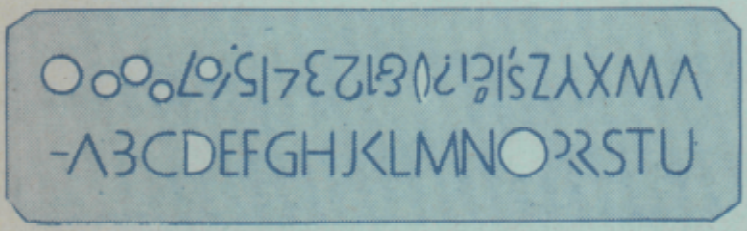
T-SQUARE.—Ruler that has a cross-piece, so that it can be held against the side of the light table as a guide for horizontal lines.

LIGHT TABLE.—A box with top of frosted glass, with light bulb inside. Inexpensive to make or buy.

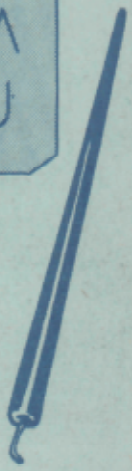


WRITING PLATE.—Semitransparent sheet placed directly under the stencil. Prevents tearing stencil with stylus. Or you can use cellophane for the same purpose, but place it on the face of the stencil.



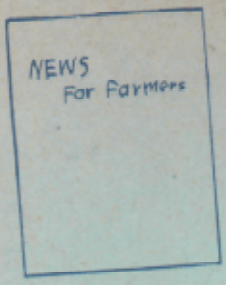


LETTERING GUIDES.—Alphabet stencils in various sizes made of plastic. Some letters are given in two parts, and guide must be moved to complete the letter.



LETTERING STYLUS.—The point is made of bent wire for inserting in grooves of lettering guides.

Step-by-Step We Use a Lettering Guide

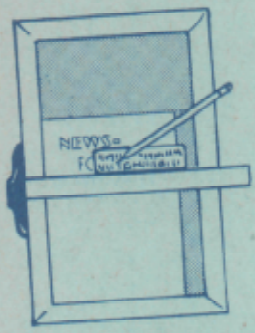


Step 1.—Rough-in the lettering.

On a tissue, letter lightly in pencil the heading you are going to do. This will give you some idea of the size of lettering guide to use.

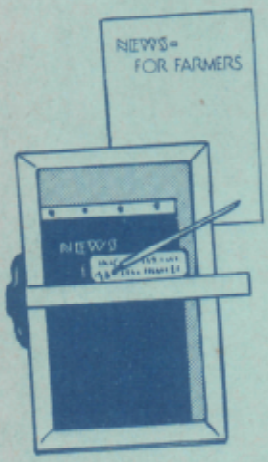
You have your choice of several styles in setting up the lettering—

All capitals.
Capitals and small capitals.
Capitals and small letters.
Or you may emphasize the most important word by doing it in a different style of lettering.



Step 2.—Make a pencil outline.

Attach your tissue to the light table with tape. Place the T-square and lettering guide as shown at the left, and outline the letters with a sharp pencil using it as you would a stylus. Now you know exactly how much space the lettering takes up, so that you can center it on the stencil. You may want to spread the words or put them more closely together to make them fit. The light table does not have to be lit for this.



Step 3.—Trace on the stencil.

Place a sheet of cellophane on top of the stencil, or a writing plate directly under it, and arrange the stencil on the light table, alining it with the T-square. Now trace the lettering onto the stencil with your lettering guide and stylus, using the tissue as a model.

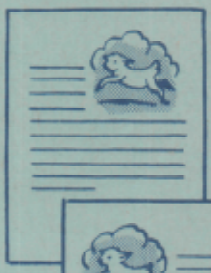
ILLUSTRATIONS

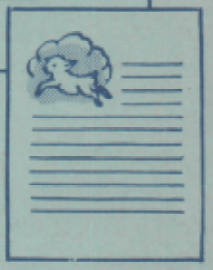
One of the purposes of using a circular-letter illustration is to arouse the reader's interest. The illustration can also help to clarify the text. It helps the reader to retain information by giving him a mental picture that sticks in his mind and makes it easier for him to recall the words that went with the picture.

Only the simplest type of outline drawing or diagram is suitable for a circular-letter illustration. Even if you are proficient at drawing, the limitations of the stencil and styli will prevent your being "artistic." Try tracing the two lambs, shown in the margin, on a stencil, and you will see that the one drawn with straight lines is easier to do than the "curly" lamb, even though both look simple.

Beware of using elaborate cartoons that attempt to be funny. They may be misunderstood by a great many people. Choose, rather, drawings that are lively and show action.

This—





Not this.

Most pictures face either right or left. Rarely do you see a front view. Always have your illustration facing toward the text. If the drawing you want to use is facing the wrong way, trace it on tissue and use the reverse side. In reversing any picture, be careful that people do not become left-handed or that objects do not appear unnatural.

Extension workers are not expected to be artists, nor do they need to be in

these days when magazines and newspaper advertisements are full of small sketches that can be easily traced. It is important and timesaving to have a file of such drawings. Sometimes a slight change will make them suit your purpose. The Federal Extension Service puts out pages of drawings called SPOTS FOR EXTENSION LETTERS AND PUBLICATIONS. These are issued from time to time and distributed through the State extension offices. Commercial companies also put out books of outline drawings for tracing on stencils.

Be sparing with your illustrations. One good sizable drawing on a page is more effective than several tiny ones. If you must use as many as three, leave a wide margin at the left and run them down the side of the text.

Leave plenty of white space around the illustration. If it is crowded, so that it drips over into the text, better leave it out entirely. When the sketch you want to trace is too large, you may be able to eliminate unnecessary parts of it.

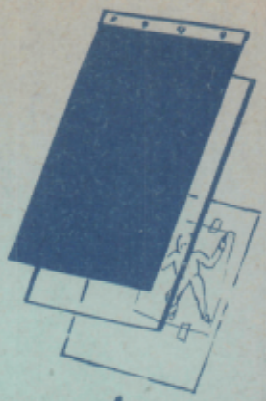
If the drawing you are going to use is too detailed, or has printing on the back, you will find it easier to trace it first on tissue, and then trace it from the tissue to the stencil.

Don't wait until you have to illustrate a circular letter—try your hand on a practice stencil first. Trace the same drawing each time, but use different styli and different pressures. You will find that using cellophane over the stencil, or a writing plate under it, will make it almost impossible to tear the stencil and you will be able to make firmer lines. Be sure to mark the method and tool you used for each drawing right on the stencil, then run off the stencil and see which method suits you best.

Step-by-Step We Make an Illustration

Step 1.—Place the illustration.

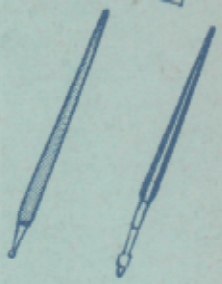
If you want to be sure of placing the drawing correctly on the stencil, outline lightly on a letter-size tissue the position of the drawing. Slip this tissue under the stencil in proper position and mark on the stencil where the drawing should come. Then place the drawing under the stencil where you have marked it.



Step 2.—Trace the illustration.

Insert a writing plate between the drawing and the stencil, and place them on the light table. Or you may use a sheet of cellophane on top of the stencil. Now trace the drawing. You may use either a stylus with a thin loop of wire at the point, or a ball-point stylus.

Use a firm touch, and get bold, clear lines. A fuzzy illustration is unpleasant to look at and may be confusing.

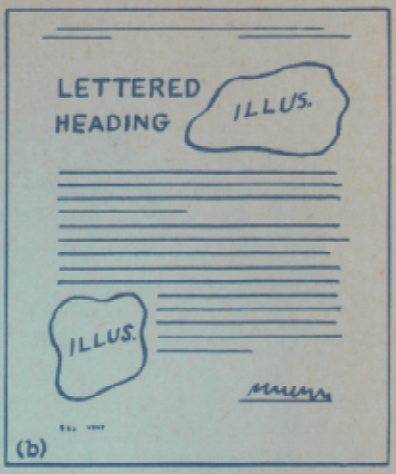


Step 3.—Shade the illustration.

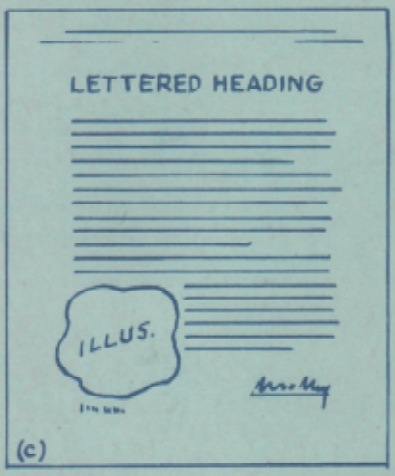
To shade parts of the drawing, use a shading screen. Never try to do this by hand. The shading screen is a small plastic or metal square with raised dots in various patterns. It is placed under the stencil where you want the shading to go. Rub over the area with a loop stylus or burnisher.

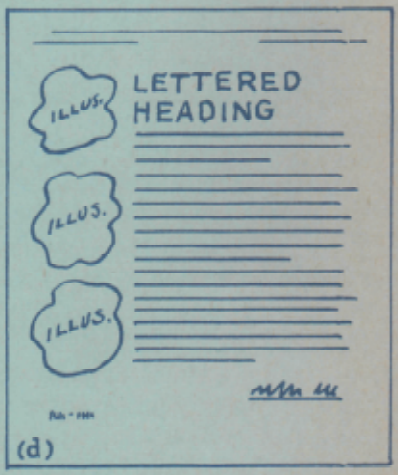
Corrections can be made with correction fluid on the stenciled drawing just as in the typing, so don't be afraid of making a mistake.

Suggested Lay-Outs for Illustrated Circular Letters



The simplest and easiest lay-out you can use is one with the drawing at the top of the page, and the lettered heading alongside it (a). If the drawing is facing to the right, place it at the left of the page, and vice versa. If you have two drawings, they can balance each other on the page (b).





If you have to place your drawing so that it cuts into the text, try to place it at the left, so that the text frames it evenly (c). When you have three drawings, arrange them in an orderly pattern in the left margin, rather than scatter them through the text (d).

COLOR

Color adds appeal to almost any written material. The simplest way to add color to your circular letter is to run it on colored paper. Care must be used to select a paper that is pale enough, so that the typing will not lose any legibility.

When using colored paper that has no letterhead, type your letterhead on the stencil.

If you send out a series of letters, you can often save time by having an illustrated heading printed or multilithed on colored paper. The printing can be done in a contrasting ink, and each letter in the series on a different color at virtually the same cost. You will want the printing done on the proper kind of paper, such as paper with soft finish, suitable for use in duplicating machines.

DUPLICATED LEAFLETS

Attractive leaflets as well as attractive circular letters can be prepared for duplicating when printed material is not available. These can be useful as hand-outs to office visitors or after meetings.

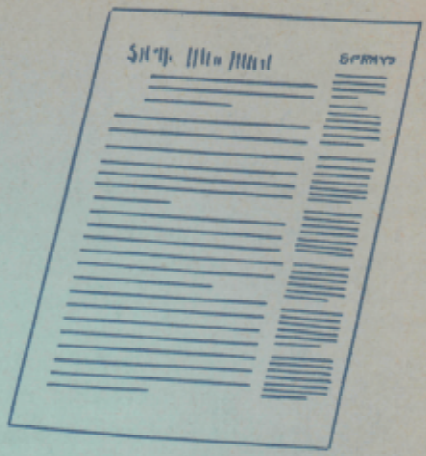
By using the paper vertically or horizontally and folding it into halves or thirds, you can use a variety of arrangements such as are found in printed leaflets.

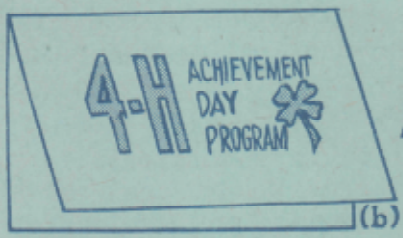
Since you will be using both sides of the paper, be sure to use a stock heavy enough to prevent the typing from showing through.

You will notice that the text in printed folders is blocked-up at the right. This gives a crisp, clear-cut look to the text that can be achieved on the typewriter by "justifying" each line. This takes time and trouble, however, and may be worth while only on material of special importance. An illustration loses its effectiveness if it is bordered by straggly lines of text. So to give it a neat, squared-off look, the text around it should be justified.

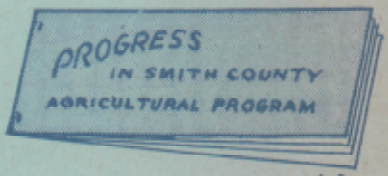
Suggested Lay-Outs for Duplicated Leaflets

(a)

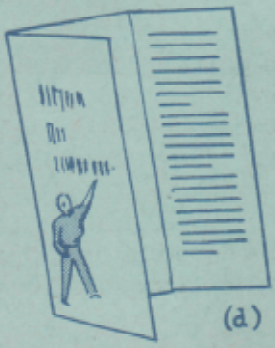




(b)



(c)



(d)

(a) Paper is folded vertically. Inside spread has two columns, one wide and double spaced, the other narrow and single - spaced. (b) Paper is folded in half horizontally. (c) Paper is folded in thirds horizontally, cut, and stapled at the side to resemble an album-type publication. (d) Paper is folded horizontally in thirds. This is the most popular fold for printed leaflets, but is difficult to do with a stencil, as the stencil has to be inserted sidewise in the typewriter. This can be done more easily if the typewriter carriage is 15 inches or wider.

HOW TO JUSTIFY TYPING TO GET AN EVEN RIGHT-HAND MARGIN

Make a rough draft of your typed material and set the typewriter stops for the width of the line required. Do not type beyond this width, but fill out the extra spaces with asterisks:

> We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are**
> created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator***
> with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life,
> Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

Go back over the copy and indicate by checks where you can skip spaces. Spread your "skips" so that they do not occur directly under one another and make rivers of white space:

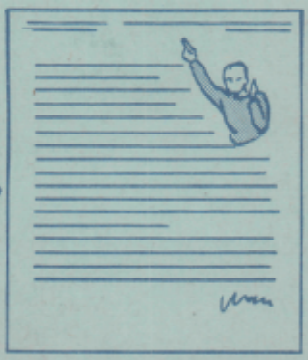
> We hold^these truths^to be self-evident, that all men are**
> created equal, that^they are^endowed by^their Creator***
> with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life,
> Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

Now type the stencil, skipping the spaces:

> We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are
> created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator
> with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life,
> Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

This—

Not this.



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