Spacing

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HHHHH

HHHHH

When spacing a font, I always start with a line of H's

HHHHH

HHHHHH

This is probably too tight – look at the overlapping serifs.

HHHHH

HHHHH

This is too loose – words won't hold together.

Assuming this spacing is correct, we compare the spaces between letters...
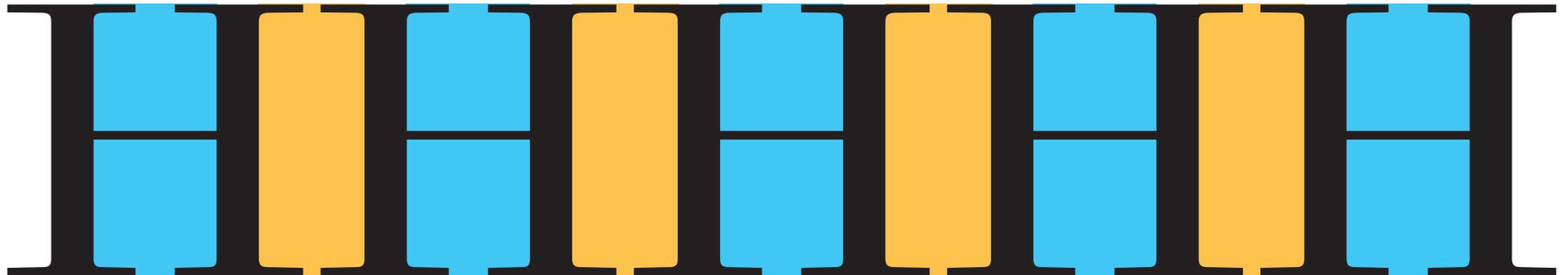
...to the spaces inside...

...to make sure they seem balanced.
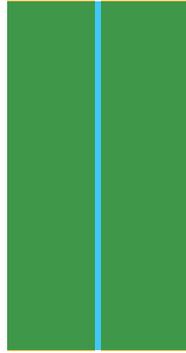
SANS:
Space between flat characters is just under half of the counterform width
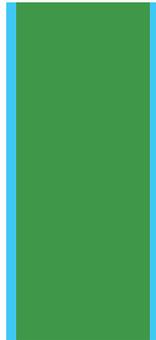
SERIF:
Space between flat characters is slightly less than the counter-form width

When we overlap the inner and outer spaces, this is what we see.

HHOHOHOO

HHOHOHOO

The next step is to add the O, and see how it looks between H's and on its own.
If the sidebearings are set to the same value as the H, the color seems uneven.

HHHOHOHOO

HHHOHOHOO

Although these spaces are numerically equal, they are visually uneven.

HHOHOO

HHOHOO

This looks better...

HHOHOHOO

HHOHOHOO

...but the spaces between round characters are much narrower, when measuring from the outermost points.
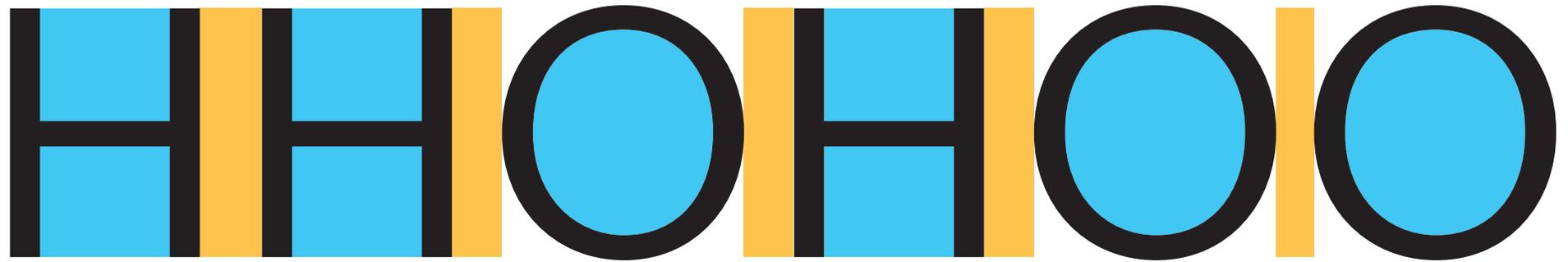
When we compare inner and outer spaces...
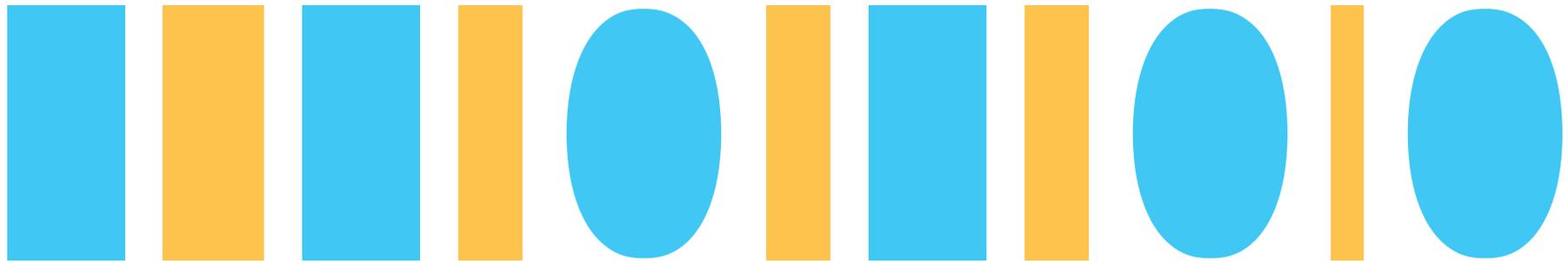
...it doesn't look even. Why?

HHOHOHOO

HHOHOHOO

We need to take the entire space around the O's into account.

Comparing inner and outer spaces...
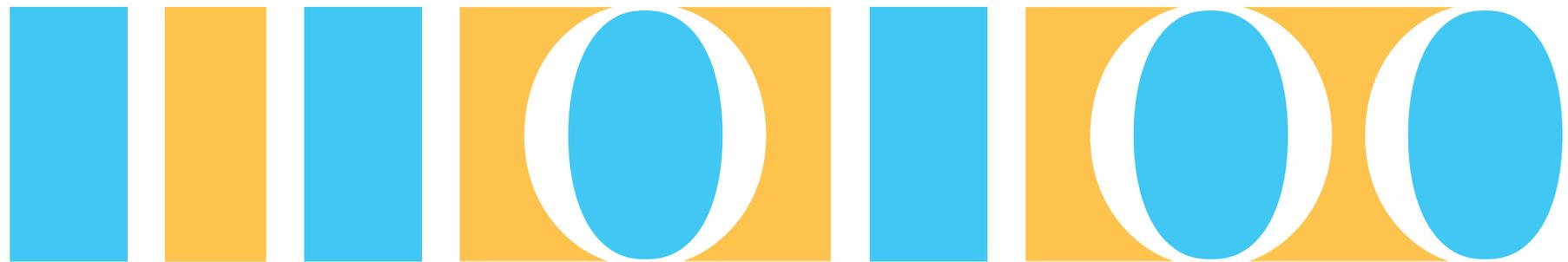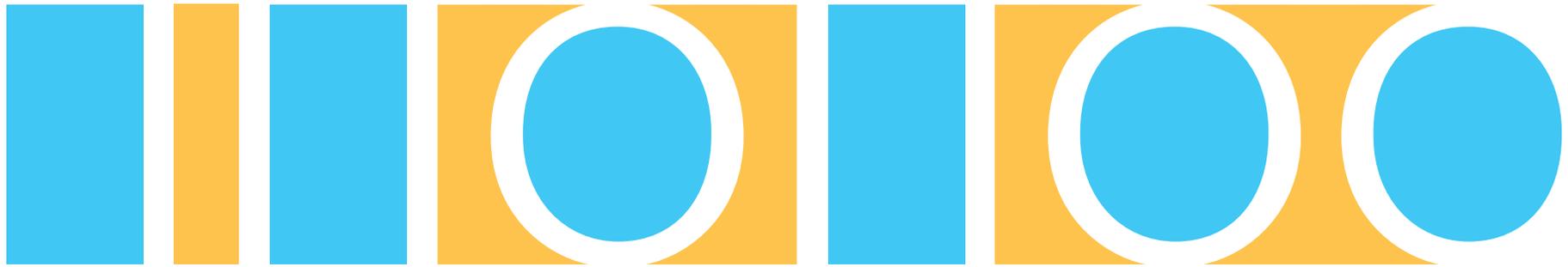
...we see that the relative sizes of these spaces aren't so different after all.

HHDHODOO

HHDHODOO

To test that the straight and round characters are spaced properly, apply the H spacing value to the left side of D, and the O spacing value to the right. If it looks uneven, adjust the control characters and the D until it looks right.

HHAHOAOO

HHAHOAOO

Then start trying different kinds of shapes, always in the same control string.

HHEHOEOO

HHEHOEOO

The open side of E makes it tricky to space.

Some rules for spacing

1. Symmetrical characters are spaced symmetrically.

HOA

Numerically, the left and right sidebearings should be
the same on symmetrical characters.

2. Similar shapes are spaced the same.

O C D

G Q

Because these are the same kinds of shapes, the spacing values should be the same. You've made the decision once – why rethink it again and again?

H B D E
F I K L
M N P R

The same thing applies to straight-sided characters.

3. Always space between control characters. Always!

HHAHAHOHOHOAOO

HHBHBHOHOHOBOO

HHCHCHOHOHOCOO

HHDHDHOHOHODOO

Memorize the control string.

nnanonoaoo

nnbnonoboo

nncnonocoo

nndnonodoo

In the lowercase, the control characters are n and o.

0020101211

0030101311

0040101411

0050101511

For numbers, the controls are 0 and 1.

4. The main goal is balanced spacing and an even texture.*

*but it will never be perfect without kerning individual pairs.

HHLHOLOO

HHYHOYOO

HHJHOJOO

If you get L Y and J to look right between H's, they are too loose between O's

AVAILABLE ATTACKS

Although the spacing is correct here, some of the combinations don't work.

AVAILABLE ATTACKS

AV VA AT TA AC are too loose; TT is probably too tight.

AVAILABLE ATTACKS

Kerning for indivual pairs fixes these issues

HAHVHAHH AHTHAHCH

But if you had adjusted the sidebearings to make these exceptions look good, it would cause other problems. For this project, it will be best to adjust the kerning in your specimens by hand in InDesign at the end.

5. Don't be afraid to adjust serif lengths to even out spacing.

HAHYH

It's a little bit hard to see exactly how long the serifs are, but it's clear that the A and V serifs are shorter, to narrow the sidebearings without changing the space between serifs.

6. There are no easy mathematical rules for good spacing.

Which means...

If it looks right,
it is right.

7. Space as you draw.

And remember:
HHDHOHODOO