Controlling text alignment

Print fiction has historically been displayed with justified text, that is, all the lines of text are adjusted with extra spaces so that they end evenly on both sides. Unfortunately, to do this in a way that looks half decent, you need a robust hyphenation dictionary. Otherwise, particularly long words can cause unsightly rivers of white space that flow through your pages.

Some ereaders let the user control the alignment of an ebook's text. The iBooks app displays justified text by default. Users can go to Settings, click iBooks and choose OFF next to Full Justification to use the settings specified by the book designer. Unfortunately, that setting is a bit hidden. Even worse, iBooks has a bug that keeps it from following the text-align property in the CSS.

Luckily, there is a workaround. It turns out that iBooks 1.1 will pay attention to the CSS text-align property if and only if there is a second element, within the main p element, that contains the text.

1. Contain the body text within every single p element in another element. If you're not specifying the font, use span. If you do want to specify the font, use samp, as described in "iBooks and fonts". You can use the GREP expression, <p>(.*)</p> to find all of your p elements (add the class to that expression if necessary), and then replace it with <p><samp>\1</samp></p> or <p><span>\1</span></p>, depending on whether you're applying font family info or not.

   ```
   <p><span>Here is the text.</span></p>
   ```

2. Specify the alignment for the p elements in the CSS.

   ```
   p {text-align: left}
   ```

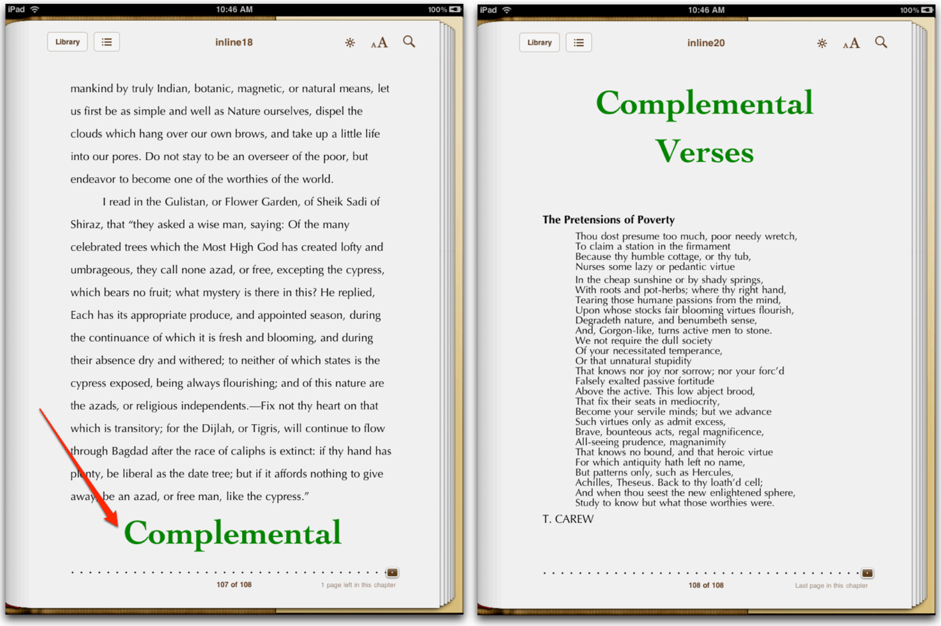
If you do use samp, be sure to set the font in the CSS as well. If you use span, no extra CSS is required for the span selector.

When Apple fixes this bug in iBooks, the workaround will no longer be necessary, but leaving it in shouldn't create problems in future, less-buggy ereaders.

Keeping elements together

The iBooks app doesn't currently support the standard CSS page element controls, like page-break-before, page-break-after, and page-break-inside. Neither does it support the standard CSS orphans and widows properties that can keep individual lines from appearing at the top and bottom of pages. Some other readers, including Barnes & Noble's Nook, do support the orphans and widows properties and even have default values set. How then can you best control the flow of text to keep headers from showing up alone at the bottom of pages, captions from being separated from their illustrations, and the last line of a paragraph from starting a new page?

Until iBooks supports the real page-break controls, you can exert a fair amount of force with one special value of the display property: inline-block. This value forces iBooks to view the affected content much as if it were one discrete item, like an image. So, if you apply display: inline-block to a div, all of the contents of that div are treated as a unit, and are kept together on a page—as much as possible—often starting a new page in the process. It is a roundabout way of creating a page break, but it's definitely better than nothing.



mankind by truly Indian, botanic, magnetic, or natural means, let us first be as simple and well as Nature ourselves, dispel the clouds which hang over our own brows, and take up a little life into our pores. Do not stay to be an overseer of the poor, but endeavor to become one of the worthies of the world.

I read in the Gulistan, or Flower Garden, of Sheik Sadi of Shiraz, that "they asked a wise man, saying: Of the many celebrated trees which the Most High God has created lofty and umbrageous, they call none azad, or free, excepting the cypress, which bears no fruit; what mystery is there in this? He replied, Each has its appropriate produce, and appointed season, during the continuance of which it is fresh and blooming, and during their absence dry and withered; to neither of which states is the cypress exposed, being always flourishing; and of this nature are the azads, or religious independents.—Fix not thy heart on that which is transitory; for the Dijlah, or Tigris, will continue to flow through Bagdad after the race of caliphs is extinct: if thy hand has plenty, be liberal as the date tree; but if it affords nothing to give away, be an azad, or free man, like the cypress."

Complemental

Complemental Verses

The Pretensions of Poverty

Thou dost presume too much, poor needy wretch,
To claim a station in the firmament
Because thy humble cottage, or thy tub,
Nurses some lazy or pedantic virtue

In the cheap sunshine or by shady springs,
With roots and pot-herbs; where thy right hand,
Tearing those humane passions from the mind,
Upon whose stocks fair blooming virtues flourish,
Degradeth nature, and benumbeth sense,
And, Gorgon-like, turns active men to stone.
We not require the dull society
Of your necessitated temperance,
Or that unnatural stupidity
That knows nor joy nor sorrow; nor your forc'd
Falsely exalted passive fortitude
Above the active. This low abject brood,
That fix their seats in mediocrity,
Become your servile minds; but we advance
Such virtues only as admit excess,
Brave, bounteous acts, regal magnificence,
All-seeing prudence, magnanimity
That knows no bound, and that heroic virtue
For which antiquity hath left no name,
But patterns only, such as Hercules,
Achilles, Theseus. Back to thy loath'd cell;
And when thou seest the new enlightened sphere,
Study to know but what those worthies were.

T. CAREW

On the left, without inline-block, the header starts at the bottom of the page.
Ew! On the right, thanks to inline-block, the header begins a new page.