nice work

a guide to pretty work

Welcome!

This is a guide for helping you figure out how to create your version of "pretty work."

Remember, this isn't just about creating stuff for your boss or protecting the bottom line - it is worth doing for you alone. Show up daily to craft something you are proud of and see how your world opens. *Trust.*

So - what does pretty work mean? It is whatever type of work you can create that is:

Nice to interact with and *easy to use for the next human that encounters it.*

If you can give your work these two things, you'll have a much better experience creating it, and you'll be pleasantly surprised by how other humans interact with it and you!

This guide has some tips for achieving both and a big list of how this can show up in work besides documents. Let's start with an example from the IRL world to set the scene.

Definitions:

✰ *Clarity of purpose = purposeful visuals*

✰ *Clarity of process = direct direction and directions*

✰ *Purposeful visuals + directness = pretty work*

Pretty Work IRL

Once upon a time, I was shared on a Google Sheets file. I know I was shared on a Google Sheets file because the notification from Google Sheets popped into my inbox. There was no email with the file share besides a topline note attached to the notification for me to "do it."

What was "it"? From the long filename ["YEAR_MONTH_NAME_ACRONYM_ACRONYM"], it seemed to be calculating goal progress. But when I clicked on the file, I realised I had more digging to do.

The sheet had different colors for certain cells (but no legend for what the colors meant), various formulas with errors because they had no numbers to pull from and — *no instructions.*

I'd never seen this file before, much less "done" it, so - I actually didn't know where to start.

I could have pinged back with a lot of questions, but... that could read as me being a bit frustrated. It would take some the to get a response, too, and the response wouldn't necessarily improve my experience with this work.

Instead, I went in with a *science experiment mindset* - wildly putting in data and changing variables - knowing I'd either break it or figure it out! I'm decent at spreadsheets, but it still took me the better part of an hour to:

1. Figure out how it worked
2. Fix the (several) broken but otherwise easy formulas I discovered in Step 1
3. And then input the right data.

So, where to begin?

I began by making it pretty.

Why? Well, the document was - hard to look at. How many of us have procrastinated starting a project because we just knew it would be unpleasant? How much easier is it to respond to emails at a desk bathed in sunshine vs. on a crowded train without even room to balance your laptop on your lap?

So whenever I start a project that I really don't know how to tackle, I always make my workspace look nice first to show myself some respect and care for my craft. That makes it easier to show respect and care to the task at hand.

In this case, I took five minutes to add *some purposeful visuals:*

1. Put a title into the sheet at the top left - in this case, it was "Department Goals Evaluation - Completed Month Date"
2. Clicked on the entire sheet and set the font family and size to rid it of the inconsistencies (nothing more unsettling than text that is one size apart)
3. Anywhere we used the "stale porridge" version of primary colors, I changed to lighter, brighter versions
4. Made the thickness of all cell borders consistent (1pt light grey, not to feel too boxed in) - also to fix inconsistent borders
5. Made sure all the text would wrap - so I could read it!
6. Deleted the 50 or so extra columns to the right (so I wouldn't scan too far to the side!)
7. Deleted the 950+ extra rows at the end of the document (so I wouldn't keep accidentally scrolling too far down!)

8. Froze the top few rows and leftmost columns so no matter where I was in the doc, I could still see what data I was editing (otherwise, I'd keep scrolling back and forth and up and down to remember what I was doing)

This made the document look nicer, cleaner, and just plain easier to use - which then made the work of investigating the formulas, figuring out what they did / the point of this exercise, and fixing them much faster than it would have been!

I then added some direction and directions.

I wanted to make sure the person receiving this after me would have a bit more intel than I did, so I:

1. Added a title above or next to each cell that had a formula calculation, so anyone else reviewing the formulas could know what they were doing!
2. Added a summary underneath the title to describe what the file was for - "This document calculates the overall achievement of department goals for [insert time period]."
   a. I also used that summary to share the file back with its owner and to confirm that the goal of the document was indeed to calculate these goals - because if not, then what I did was definitely not right.

[I would have added a legend for the colors, but it turns out they didn't mean anything.]

The owner responded simply to confirm receipt - no comments on the changes, no praise, but no complaints either - and life kept going.

Ok, so - why even do it then? Isn't that irritating?

The document owner didn't do this to be difficult or to make my life hard. They just created a file that suits the way they work and then shared it. As someone being paid for your time, you may need to occasionally use your time on less productive things (like investigating a document). And when you're paid for your time, expertise **and** experience, it's also your responsibility to spend time resolving errors and making improvements wherever you can.

The thing I was not necessarily paid to do (but makes a huge difference) is improving the document's usability.

Why? Because you should work on beautiful things you're proud of. This makes it easier for you to do the work, but it is also the easiest way to show that you respect the time, attention and care of the person who will receive it after you.

Now, flip this around. You're a client, and you're paying someone else for their time, care and attention. If you get a file like the one I did, and you have to spend some time mad-scientist-experimenting with it to get it to work for you, how do you feel about the person who sent it to you? What about their expertise and care? Are you confident that the rest of the work you pay them for is easier to use or has fewer errors? How confident are you that they understand what you need from them or how they view your time? How much would you trust them to represent **you** to the people that pay you?

An easy way to avoid this issue? Create pretty work. You can not only sidestep these issues from the start, but you position yourself as an expert and craftswoman.

purposeful visuals

checklist

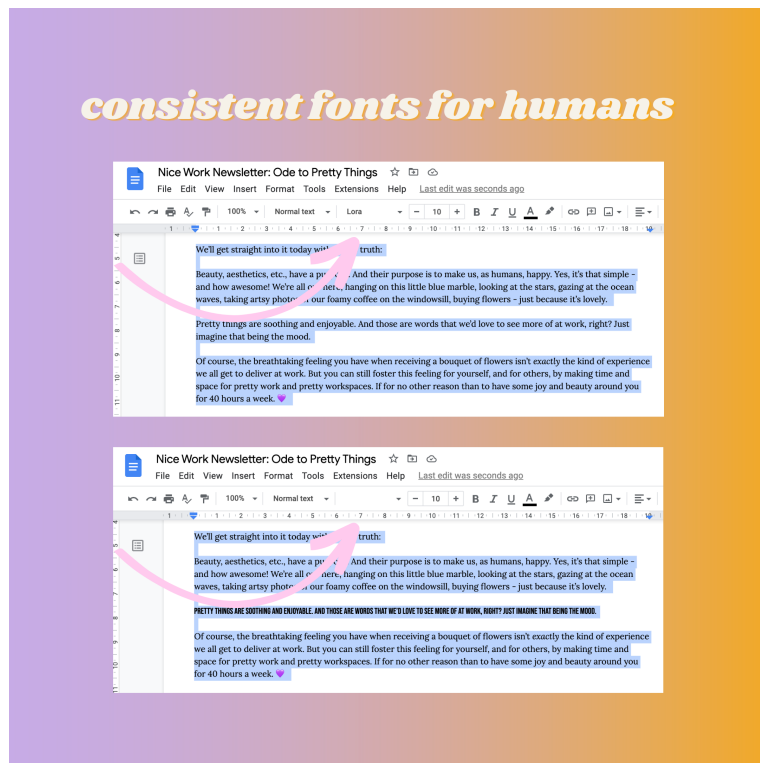*Purposeful visuals = Designing your work in a soothing and clear way, remembering:*

✦ *humans love beauty*

✦ *humans love their name/brand*

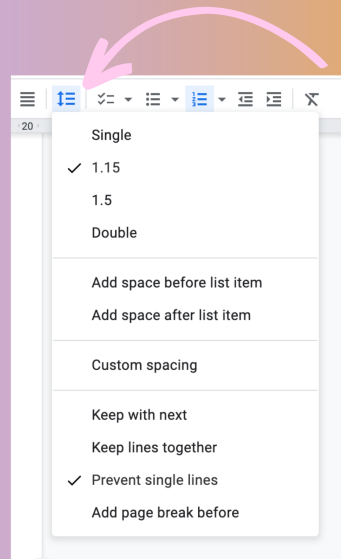✦ *humans love finished products*

Purposeful Visuals Checklist:

☐ Whenever you get a file or start one, select all the text and ensure font and sizing are consistent. You'll know it's not if it does this:

Tip: If you want to level up how polished something looks, take it out of the standard Calibri or Times New Roman Font, too.

☐ Same thing with spacing! Select all the text and go to spacing. The changes you make will then be consistent across all of the text.
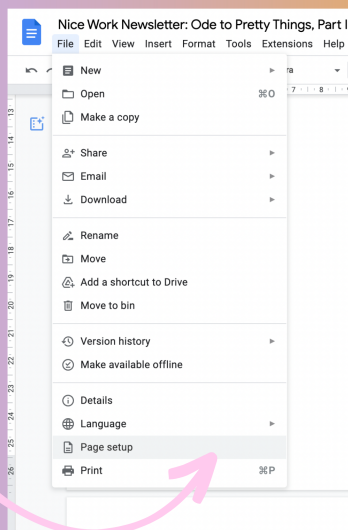
line spacing for humans

☐ Adjust your margins in documents, so shorter work fits on one page - people love things they think will be **quick to review.**
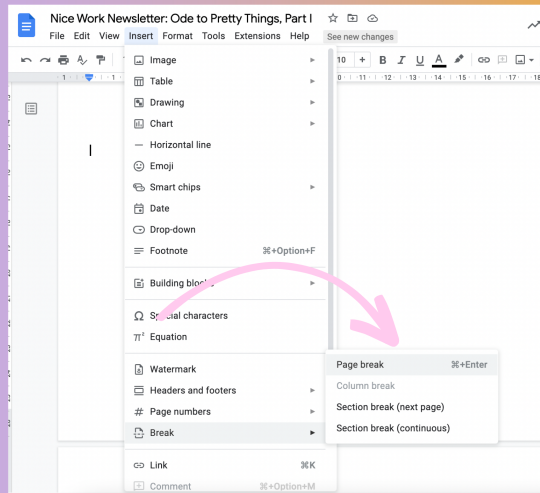
Tip: This has the opposite effect if you make your margins .1 inches and cram 2,000 words on one page. That's less nice.
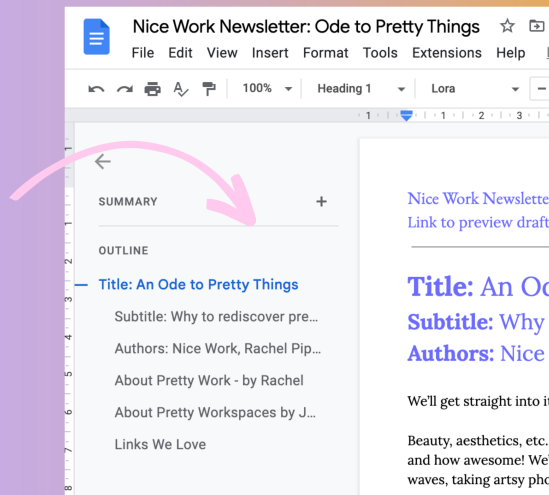
margins for humans

☐ If your work is longer than a page, use "page breaks" when you have a new section or heading (don't just press enter a few times to add space). This keeps your sections from moving in wonky ways if you add sentences or paragraphs above them.
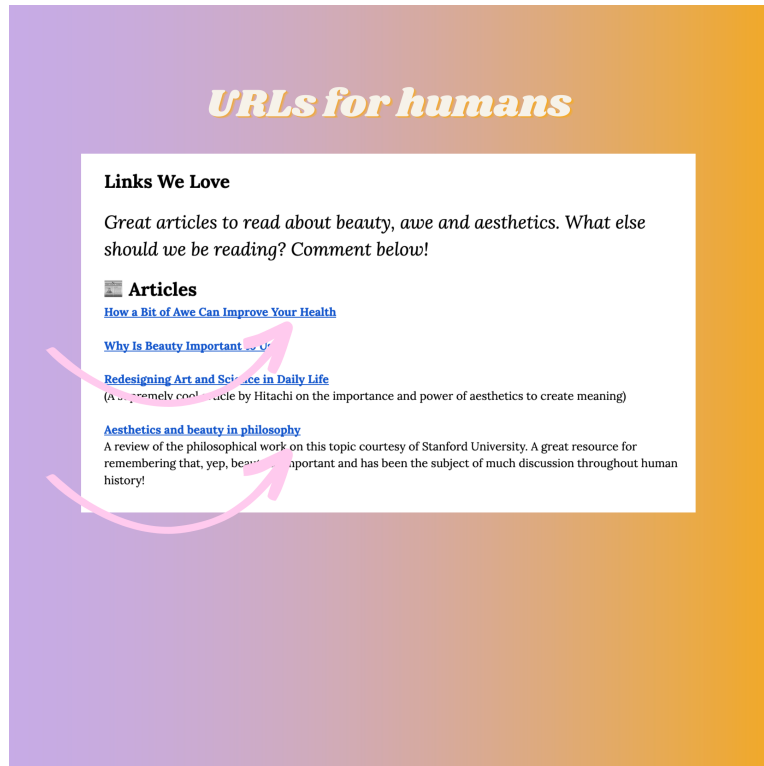
☐ Blank space! Go to line spacing and add a bit of space after sections or headings, so there's again some pleasant blank space after lines. This saves space compared to just clicking the "Enter" button. All about short documents!

☐ Speaking of headings - use them! They break up content, but also, in Word/Docs, it creates a navigation pane you can easily click through! Like this:
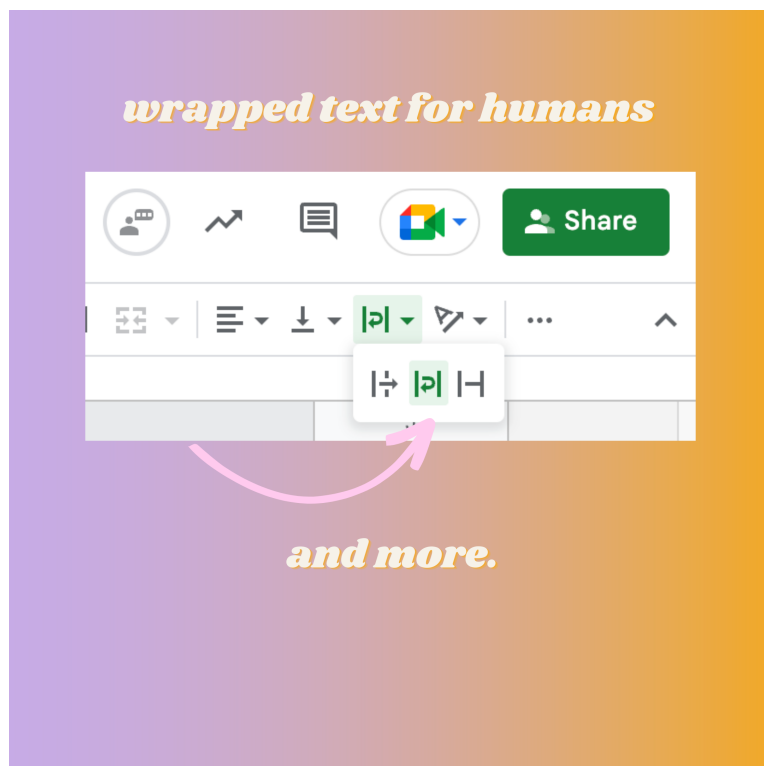
- ☐ Use color and bolding very sparingly - i.e., for a reason. Bold things that should be **emphasized**. Use colors strategically and consistently so the "rules" are obvious (i.e., all headings are purple). Make a legend if the rules aren't obvious!
- ☐ Hyperlink all links instead of leaving long alien-looking URLs! Those are for robots, humans like pretty links. Make sure it works, though - sometimes, when you add a hyperlink, you may forget a letter or number at the end!

- ☐ In Sheets or Excel, click "select" the whole sheet and wrap the text, so it fits within a cell instead of disappearing into the next column. Easy to read!

☐ Use people's names! Put it in the file name, like Final_Report_For_Jade_Leitzel_review, or in the document itself - "Prepared for Jade Leitzel on January 18, 2023."

☐ If you work in a field where your work goes in front of customers or clients, you should also create your work in their style - their templates, logo, fonts, and colors. People love their brand, and they'll love seeing it even subconsciously. Make sure it's high resolution and follows their style guide. No blurry logos in headers, and no changing their colors!

Tip: Most companies put their style guide somewhere on their website. You can also use sites like this to figure out colors from a logo!

☐ Typos - fight them! Whatever you need to do to rid your work of typos (a 3-step process of normal Spellcheck, a tool like Grammarly, and a human reading through it before sending), do that. Nothing distracts from a pretty, finished piece of work like a typo!

direction & directions

checklist

Direct direction and directions = the experience someone has with your work.

✦ **direct direction: When receiving the work is** *as easy as possible*

✦ **direct directions: When whoever** *experiences your work "gets" it with ease*

Purposeful Visuals Checklist:

What this looks like can be SO dependent on the kind of work you do, but use this filter:

Imagine the person who asked you for this has come back from an amazing vacation where they didn't have to check email at all – they're happy and relaxed and have forgotten entirely what they'd asked for your help with. Or – imagine they are STILL on vacation, and your email and document get auto-forwarded to another team member to handle while they're away. What can you do to make their experience easier?

☐ Ask your boss, clients, team, colleagues, etc., how they like to receive work and files – and remember that just because there's a "company process" doesn't mean that's how they operate! No judgment – just meet the people where they're at. Then, write it down to remember how to work with them!

☐ If it's a file, make the name of the file clear. No "final_final_final_v3" here! Name of the document, date created, whether it's final, for review, draft, etc.

☐ Give clear directions – in email and in the document itself – what is it, and how should it be used? Put it at the top, so it is easily findable.

☐ Always find a way to summarize the goal or objective of the project – especially if you are in a business where you provide work to clients or customers.

☐ Put a short summary within the document if you can; otherwise, ensure it's in your email so there's something to explain it if the chain is forwarded along!

- [ ] If it's a Google Drive or shared online file, always make a copy of it before sharing so your previous revision history, comments to yourself, etc., are hidden. Final product focus only!

- [ ] If you've written an email for someone to send along with your work, don't forget to include a subject line!

pretty work

a non-exhaustive list to spark your creativity!

✪ **A long-ish email you're sending to a colleague with plenty of line breaks to make it easier to read.**

✪ **An email you've drafted for your boss that already has the URLs hyperlinked and a subject line ready for them, too!**

✪ **A checklist going up on the work corkboard or whiteboard that fits on one page and uses color to highlight important information.**

✪ **Social media posts for your boss or team member or client to post - along with instructions on how and when to post it and hyperlinks to the images they should use.**

✪ **End-of-shift notes that use emojis, blank space, or headings to make it easier for your department heads to jump to the section relevant to them!**

✪ **A "Welcome to the waiting room" sign that is easy to read no matter where you're sitting. Bonus: including an encouraging instruction underneath it like: "Feel welcome to sit down. Someone will come to get you soon!"**

✪ **An invoice with banking information that's easy to copy and paste, along with a clear description of what the invoice is for!**

✪ **A follow-up email that attaches the previous documents and quickly summarizes the previous email chain for easy reading!**

✧⋆ *A list of items you want to order from your vendor -* *with your company logo or name at the top*, *so they remember at a glance who it is for!*

✧⋆ *Opening a yoga flow or workout class with a* *helpful intro* *of how it will go and using* *visual language* *wherever possible to help explain the movements!*