

Widows & Orphans

Art & Design

The two bad line breaks, how to tell them apart, and how to fix them.

A widow is the short final line of a paragraph stranded at the top of a column. An orphan is the first line of a paragraph stranded at the foot of one.

WIDOW

stranded at the top

ORPHAN

stranded at the foot

- A single word alone on a line is called a runt.
- Both are faults of the page, not of the writing.
- Fix by editing the text, if you are allowed to.
- Otherwise track a few lines very slightly.
- Or change the column depth by one line.
- Never fix one by stretching the word spaces.

LOOK FOR IT

Tracking a paragraph by minus five units can pull a runt back up without being visible.

The mnemonic: an orphan has no past, so it is left at the foot; a widow has no future, so she is alone at the top.