

## TECHNICAL WRITING GONE AWRY

Below is an excerpt from Chapter 7, page 440 of *The QuarkExpress 4 Book* by David Blatner, Peachpit Press 1998, a subsection of his discussion of style sheets. Batten down your hatches, there's a tempest in this teapot.

"Tip: Based-On Differences. When one style is based on another, Xpress only keeps track of the differences between the base style and the new style. Let's say you have a style called 'Head1' and it's 18-point Futura with the bold style applied, and a style called 'Head2' that's based on 'Head1,' except that it's 12 point Futura and is not bold. The differences between the two are the point size and the bold attribute.

If you change the font of 'Head1' to Franklin Gothic, then the font of 'Head2' changes, too. But if you change the point size of 'Head1' to 24 point, then 'Head2' does not change, because the point-size 'link' is broken. However there's one important exception: if you change the parent style to have attributes that are the same as the child style, the difference is broken. If you change 'Head 1' to 'not bold,' for example, then there's no difference in style between the two and the link is broken. Then, if you go back and change 'Head1' to bold again, 'Head2' follows suit and becomes bold. This is much the same as what happens when local formatting within a paragraph matches the formatting of the style (see 'Local Formatting vs. Formatting with Styles,' earlier in the chapter).

To summarize: As long as you don't change any formatting in the parent style to match the child style, you'll be fine. But as soon as you change an attribute in the parent style to match the child style's, that link is broken, the child style isn't different in that way anymore, and you're going to wish that you'd paid more attention to this paragraph."

Wheewweee. David Blatner is a wonderful writer, and his tome *The Quark Book*, is surely among the best, if not the king of the hill, among third-party QuarkExpress teach-throughs. But, as he was gracious enough to admit, he completely fumbled this one paragraph. Not only is this explanation painfully contorted, opaque, and mistaken, it's a perfect example of what happens when a benevolent expert gets into a malevolent muscle-bound frame of mind, and loses sight of his know-nothing audience, not to mention the real world simplicity of the subject. Yes, actually, all that up there is really simple, but has been rendered unfathomable, and ends up gibberish. I for one do not blame an obviously overwrought author, knowing his excellence. The editor of this paragraph, however, should be taken out and shot.

Lest that sound extreme, lend your ear to this anecdote from my own experience. The teacher in my advanced Quark class (rightly) swears by *The Quark Book*, but is himself of timid intellect. In his class he teaches that based-on styles are fraught with such peril as to be avoided at all cost. While I cannot read his mind, I strongly suspect his fear comes from the misunderstanding promulgated in this single paragraph by the bible he so reveres. Even if this is not the cause of my teacher's trepidation, surely such pseudo-convincing garble slipped in amidst good writing by a celebrated expert will stymie all but the most sternly discerning.

That's where I come in. Pardon my immodesty, I have yet to encounter a writer with whom I did not feel at least on even terms. (I once spent a month back in my college days learning to speak in iambic pentameter - just to prove that the great Shakes was in a groove that, once you're in, is harder to break out of than keep up, and even before that I'd refer to him as Willie - Billy being reserved for Blake. I must bite my tongue now not to digress into the realm of filmmakers . . . .)

Anyway, back on track, we want to explain "based-on" styles in QuarkExpress. First of all, there are these things called "styles," which are a set of formatting attributes for text. As an example, say I want this paragraph to be such and such font, at such and such size, maybe bold or underlined, or not, maybe baseline-spaced this way or that, hyphenated and justified this way or that, tabbed this way or that - you get the idea. You make a styleset, so you can zap a paragraph with it, ascribing all the formatting attributes at once. Now you make a new paragraph style, or maybe you just have an idea for a new style, either way, the new style has at least one different attribute. Well, if there's more in common with a given style than not, it may well behoove you to make the new style "based on" the style with which it has so much in common. That saves you a lot of reiterating, and is especially handy if there is going to be a contextual correlation between the "parent" style and the "child" or "based-on" style. An example would be your common header and subhead style. They are true "family," since one will always stand "relative" to the other, and stylistically they should maintain some family resemblance.

So you now know, in case you didn't before, what a "style" is and what a "based-on" style is, and why you might want to have them. Now you need to know their relationship in QuarkExpress, the subject of the published "tip" quoted above. The relationship of a parent style to its child or based-on style is the bond of what attributes they have in common. Quark links together each attribute they have in common, so that if you change one such attribute in the parent, that attribute changes in the child as well. To take this a little further, say the parent has the attribute of being bold, while the child is in italics. That's an attribute they do NOT have in common, and therefore Quark does not link them. However, if you were to change the parent to italics from bold, the parent and child would then have italics in common and any further change of that attribute in the parent style, say, back to bold again, or over to normal text, would then carry over into the child, so the child too would become bold, or normal text. A link is established by what the based-on style has in common with the parent style.

Just as a link is established in the discussion above, a parent-child link would be broken if you changed the shared attribute in the child or based-on style. For instance, if they were both bold, and you changed the parent to normal, the child would become normal, but were both bold to start with and the child were changed to normal, the parent would not change (rank, you might say, has its privileges). At that juncture, however, since the parent and child no longer share this attribute, the attribute-link would be broken, and now a change to that attribute in the parent would not carry over to the child.

Simple right? Makes sense too. So what then is so inexorably confusing about the published tip quoted above. Well, the passage begins by talking about "broken links," telling us that the point size in "Head2" does not change, because the point-size link is "broken." However, since they never had point size in common, there never was a link to

break. It continues, ". . . if you change the parent style to have attributes that are the same as the child style, the difference is broken." Now we have a "broken difference," okay, I'm game, a "broken difference" can be poetic license for describing something had in common. The sentence which follows next, though, clinches the discombobulation, reading "If you change 'Head1' to 'not bold,' for example, then there's no difference in style between the two and the link is broken." Since parent and style are "linked" by what they have in common, what "link is broken?" Isn't rather a link established? Of course it is!

What is so confounding is precisely the original premise of "relationships based on differences" to signify "links." That is woefully counter-intuitive, and Mr. Blatner was gracious enough to admit in an email that "the stuff you quote from the book leads me to believe that I had too much caffeine when I wrote it." While relationships may conceivably be "based on differences," links the world over are based on something had in common, and when that something differs, the link breaks. This simple explanation fully describes what the author agreed is what he meant.

Here's how I'd rewrite the passage:

Tip: Based-On Linkage: When one style is based on another, Xpress keeps track of what the base style and the new based-on style have in common. Let's say you have a style called "Head1" and it's 18-point Futura with the bold attribute applied, and a style called "Head2" that's based on "Head1," and is the same in all respects except that it's 12-point Futura and is not bold.

If you change the font of "Head1" from Futura to Franklin Gothic, then the font of "Head2" changes as well. But if you change the point size of "Head1" to from 18 point to 24 point, the 12 point attribute in "Head2" does not change, because the point size attribute was never shared, and therefore never linked, to begin with.

There is a useful corollary to this linkage relationship. If you change an attribute in the parent style to match an attribute in the child or based-on style, a link is now established. Were you to change that attribute again in the parent style, that attribute change would now carry over into the child style. This parent/child linkage is much the same as what happens when hard or local formatting within a paragraph matches the formatting of a style applied to that paragraph. The matching local attributes are subsumed in the style, and will likewise change if altered in the style (see 'Local Formatting vs. Formatting with Styles, earlier in this chapter).

Okay?

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