

A Basic Font Primer



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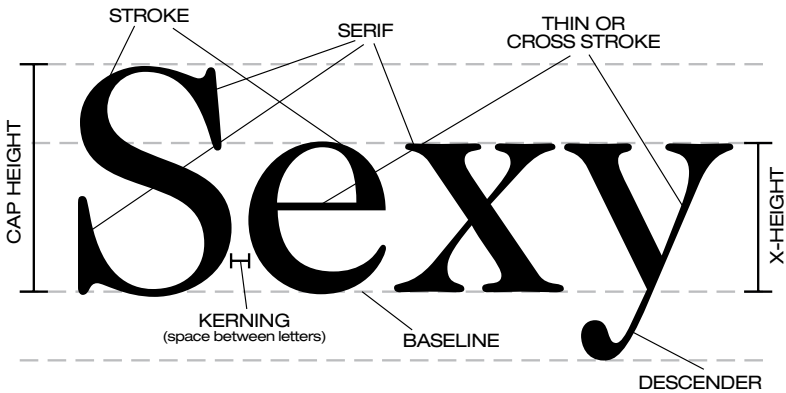
Introduction

Personal computers have brought incredibly sophisticated and powerful typography tools to the professional and novice user alike. This guide is intended to give non-graphics professionals a basic understanding of typography (fonts) and their usage.

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Basic Type Terminology



Height of the lowercase "x" determines the height of all other lowercase letters. Typically, lower case letters are 4/6 height of capital letters.

What is the difference between a font and a typeface?

A **font** is the complete assortment of type of one face and one size, including upper and lowercase letters, punctuation, numerals and other special characters. A **typeface** is a particular style of type design including the full range of characters in all sizes.

Typeface: **Helvetica Neue**
Fonts (10pt): **Helvetica Neue Roman**
Helvetica Neue Roman Italic
Helvetica Neue Medium
Helvetica Neue Medium Italic
Helvetica Neue Bold
Helvetica Neue Bold Italic
Helvetica Neue Heavy
Helvetica Neue Heavy Italic
Helvetica Neue Black
Helvetica Neue Black Italic

What's in a name?

Fonts are traditionally named by or for the individual designer of the typeface (e.g., *Caslon*, *Garamond* & *Goudy* reflect the names of designers William Caslon, 1692–1766; Claude Garamond, 1480–1561 and Frederic Goudy, 1865–1947 respectively). In modern times, type foundries have appended their names to typefaces they have digitized (e.g., *Adobe Caslon*, *Adobe Garamond*, etc.).

Fonts may be named to reflect their intended purpose or usage (e.g., *Wedding Text* or *Stencil*). In addition, font names may reflect cultural or historical heritage. *Helvetica* is derived from *Confederation Helvetica*, the Latin name for Switzerland. A

Swiss designer, Max Miedinger, designed *Helvetica* in 1957 to compete with the typeface *Akzidnez Grotesk*, the first modern sans-serif typeface originally released in 1896 by the Swiss type foundry H. Berthold AG.

One additional quirk: although a font name *can* be copyrighted or trademarked, the actual design of the letterforms *cannot*. Hence, the proliferation of differently named fonts that look identical—and which are, in fact, identical—is due to this loophole in the law.

General Type Categories

Serif

Traditional faces derived from Roman letterforms with varying stroke widths. Used primarily for body text because of its readability. Conveys notions of tradition, stability and dependability.

Sans-Serif

Modern letterforms with (typically) uniform stroke widths. Designed for legibility in larger, non-text sizes.

Display

General term for type set larger than surrounding text as in headings. Many display faces are designed to convey distinct moods, cultures or historical referents.

Formal & Informal Script

Faces derived from cursive handwriting of an elegant, refined or calligraphic nature.

Informal Modern

Faces derived from informal handwriting encompassing cursive and non-cursive letterforms.

Blackletter

Faces derived from medieval German letterforms. Often referred to as Old English or Gothic.

Samples

SERIF FONTS

Adobe Caslon Regular
9pt/10pt leading

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed diam nonummy nibh euismod tincidunt ut laoreet dolore magna aliquam erat volutpat.

Berkeley Book
9pt/10pt leading

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed diam nonummy nibh euismod tincidunt ut laoreet dolore magna aliquam erat volutpat.

Utopia Regular
9pt/10pt leading

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed diam nonummy nibh euismod tincidunt ut laoreet dolore magna aliquam erat volutpat.

Usage

Books, magazines and newspapers usually deploy a serif face for the majority of their body text because numerous studies have shown serif faces cause the least eye fatigue over extended periods of reading time. Serif fonts are versatile and can be used across all media.

Character

Serif fonts are traditional and suggest a certain sense of formality and dependability. They can reflect qualities of competence and/or trustworthiness.

SANS-SERIF FONTS

Avant Garde Book
9pt/10pt leading

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed diam nonummy nibh euismod tincidunt ut laoreet dolore magna aliquam erat volutpat.

Frutiger Roman
9pt/10pt leading

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed diam nonummy nibh euismod tincidunt ut laoreet dolore magna aliquam erat volutpat.

Zurich Roman
9pt/10pt leading

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed diam nonummy nibh euismod tincidunt ut laoreet dolore magna aliquam erat volutpat.

Usage

Sans-serif faces, like serif faces, are used extensively throughout all print and web media. Designed for legibility, sans-serif faces are ideal where text must be set small due to space limitations and/or conversely, set very large to communicate critical information (think: road signage) under varying and often imperfect lighting conditions.

Character

Sans-serif fonts are clean, direct, simple and suggest modernity. They can reflect a high-tech sensibility and at times a certain formal elegance or sophistication. In other contexts, sans-serif fonts can suggest a down-and-dirty, lowest common denominator (think: “everyday low pricing”) kind of quality.

Samples

DISPLAY FONTS

Ad Lib 14pt

The Thursday Business Meeting Group

Chevalier 12pt

THE THURSDAY BUSINESS MEETING GROUP

Thunderbird 10pt

THE THURSDAY BUSINESS
MEETING GROUP

Usage

Display fonts are used in logos, headers of fliers, advertisements, posters, packaging and POP displays to create specific moods, feelings and associations suggested by the design of the font itself. *They are not intended to use as body text.*

Character

Display fonts are typically exuberant, boisterous and in-your-face. Display fonts do not strive to be subtle in the mental images they seek to conjure; they beat you about the head and say “pay attention to me!”

FORMAL SCRIPT FONTS

Amazone 18pt

The Thursday Business Meeting Group

Liberty 24pt

The Thursday Business Meeting Group

Snell Roundhand 20pt

The Thursday Business Meeting Group

Usage

Formal script fonts are used almost exclusively in materials (invitations, logotypes, advertisements, etc.) related to weddings and formal events. They do not function well at small point sizes (less than 14pt) and should be used sparingly.

Character

Formal script fonts convey elegance, tradition, sophistication and upscale formality.

Samples

INFORMAL SCRIPT FONTS

Brush Script 18pt

The Thursday Business Meeting Group

Martina 18pt

The Thursday Business Meeting Group

Ruach 18pt

The Thursday Business Meeting Group

Usage

Informal script fonts are used (like many display fonts) in fliers, logos, ads, packaging, etc. They are not suited for use as body text and lose legibility the smaller they are reproduced.

Character

Informal script fonts can be playful, frivolous, happy and spontaneous. While some may suggest artistry, most convey a sense of liberty; casualness and/or relaxation.

INFORMAL MODERN FONTS

Democracy Free Form 16pt

The Thursday Business Meeting Group

Mother Goose 24pt

The Thursday Business Meeting Group

Tom Fool 18pt

The Thursday Business Meeting Group

Usage

Informal modern fonts are a relatively recent (since 1990) development brought about by the widespread availability and affordability of computers, scanners and font-digitizing software. In essence another flavor of display font, informal moderns are used in fliers, advertisements, posters, etc. targeting a youth demographic.

Character

Informal modern fonts are personal, whimsical, quirky and suggest extreme informality. Some may suggest anger or alienation.

Samples

BLACKLETTER FONTS

American Text 24pt

The Thursday Business Meeting Group

Old English 20pt

The Thursday Business Meeting Group

Cloister Black 20pt

The Thursday Business Meeting Group

Usage

Blackletter fonts have been traditionally used in diplomas, stock certificates or other documents of an historical nature. In recent years, they've become popular as logos for horror films and heavy metal (Goth) bands.

Character

Blackletter fonts, via their antecedents in German Gothic lettering (think: Gutenberg Bible), evoke religion, tradition, integrity and formality. They are also evocative of medieval Germany's preoccupation with morbidity and the occult.

Fonts and Computers

When the process of porting existing typesetting technology to computers began in earnest in the 60's & 70's, the terminology and nomenclature of the old linotype technology was retained. This has created great confusion and misunderstanding among computer users whose backgrounds are not in the graphic arts. Here are a few frequently asked questions about what the terminology means.

Why is type measured in "points" instead of inches?

In essence, because it's easier. By defining an inch as equivalent to 72 points, smaller type sizes could be defined easily without resorting to cumbersome fractions.

What is "leading"?

Prior to the age of modern computer technology, type was set using a machine (invented by Ottmar Mergenthaler in 1884) that used hot lead to set one line of type at a time. When greater spacing was desired between lines of type, a lead ingot was added to each line of

type. Hence, "leading" refers to the space between lines of text.

Why does 10pt Utopia look bigger than 10pt Caslon?

The designation "10pts" refers to a measurement within which a character set must fit. Typefaces vary in how much space is built-in above and below the characters as well as in their width, x-height and stroke weight. A further complication is the use of different systems of measurement (both historically and geographically) which contributes to the lack of consistency in type sizes we see today.

Font Usage Guidelines

The following are some general rules in using fonts to their best advantage for your communication and marketing materials.

Fonts can convey feelings, attitudes and/or create associations that can either enhance, detract from or contravene your message.

For example, which of the following is likely to enhance the efforts of a financial services company to attract clients with high incomes?

THE FARNSWORTH GROUP

The Farnsworth Group

Limit the number of fonts in documents, advertisements or web pages.

The general rule of thumb is use no more than two typefaces in a piece. Typically, a combination of a serif face for body text with a sans-serif heading (or vice versa) is all you need.

Use ALL CAPS sparingly.

All caps can be used in headers (1 to 3 lines of text) and to EMPHASIZE a word or phrase. Do NOT set lengthy blocks of body text in all caps because it becomes very difficult to read.

Do NOT set script or “fancy” fonts in all caps.

Compare

CONGRATULATIONS

to

Congratulations

**Use bold or italic faces for *emphasis*.
Avoid underlining.**

Underlining text for emphasis is a convention from typewriter days. With a variety of bold weights and italic faces available, it is not necessary to use underlines to create emphasis. (One exception is the convention of indicating links on a web page with underlines.)

Font Usage Guidelines

Computer-set fonts use proportional letter spacing (i.e., a lowercase “i” uses less space than a lowercase “m”) unlike typewriters in which letters are monospaced (i.e., the spaces surrounding all letters are equal). Consequently, there is no need to follow the typewriter convention of adding two spaces following a period unless you are using a monospace typeface:

“American Typewriter” is a monospace “typewriter” font which retains the spacing characteristics of a typewriter. Two spaces following the period is acceptable when using this font.

Avoid reversing type with thin strokes and/or using such type on tinted backgrounds.

Example Number One

Example Number Two

When justifying body text, avoid having 3 or more lines end in hyphens.

me to live in Maine but I’m not from Maine,” says Susan Kenney, who was born in New Jersey. “It’s quiet and comparatively unstressful here. Imagine, living life without parking meters!

Separate sequential headings and body text with more space above the heading than below the heading.

This:

DOG FIGHTS

In September, every Friday night at Eric’s house (in Wooster) will feature . . .

CHICKEN FIGHTS

In September, every Saturday night at Eric’s house (in Wooster) will feature . . .

As opposed to this:

DOG FIGHTS

In September, every Friday night at Eric’s house (in Wooster) will feature . . .

CHICKEN FIGHTS

In September, every Saturday night at Eric’s house (in Wooster) will feature . . .

Font Usage Guidelines

Know the differences between a hyphen, en-dash and em-dash.

Hyphens separate compound words (African-American) and indicate breaks in polysyllabic words across lines of text.

An *en-dash*, typically the same width as the lower case “n” in any given typeface, is used to separate dates and is a substitute for the word “to”:

January 24, 2007 – February 23, 2008

An *em-dash*, typically the same width as the lower case “m” in any given typeface, is used to offset parenthetical clauses inserted into a sentence and/or to substitute for a semi-colon:

An *em-dash* — typically the same width as the lower case “m” in any given typeface — is used to offset parenthetical clauses inserted into a sentence. It can also substitute for a semi-colon when adding exclamatory text at the end of a sentence — *like this!*

Include punctuation marks when italicizing or bolding text in a sentence.

For *example*, the comma after “example” is italicized, and note the **bold** period at the end of this **sentence**.

Decrease leading when using fonts at large sizes (30+ points) in headlines.

We Sell All
Major Brands! 36pt/
30pt
leading

versus

We Sell All
Major Brands! 36pt/
43.2pt
leading
(Default)



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