What is type? A Brief History

History

In the early years of man, communication was only by sounds. Verbal language has its limitations; it is spoken and then heard, therefore temporary. Stories, history, folklore, and other information could not be passed down permanently. The earliest records of stories and ideas were through cave drawings, now known as pictographs; the first drawing known to date is around 25000BC. Around 3000BC, Sumerians invented cuneiforms, a writing system that consisted of wedge-shaped forms carved into clay tablets and other hard surfaces. Cuneiform evolved from pictographs and was one of the first writing systems to read left to right. Around 1000BC, Phoenicians, a society of traders and skilled craftsmen developed 22 symbols that corresponded to the 22 key sounds of their language. Their idea was to create symbols to imitate sounds. 800BC Greeks took the Phoenician invention and took it further by adding vowels and naming the symbols. Later, the Romans, which were a highly developed society, added more letters, bringing this writing system even closer to our modern-day alphabet.

Johannes Gutenberg

Until the 15th century, all books had been hand scribed for religious purposes, with beautiful and breathtaking written and illustrated manuscripts. In 1448, there was the birth of printing. Johannes Gutenberg, a goldsmith from Mainz Germany created and invented the moveable type. Gutenberg carved the characters of the alphabet into mental punches, which were then driven into other pieces of metal called matrices. Molten metal was then poured into these matrices, making the actual type pieces, identical to their original relief. The type was then fit into the printing press inspired by a wine press, which could print multiple images in a very short amount of time. This was called letterpress printing. Gutenberg went on to print the bible, the first book printed from a moveable type.

What is a font?

The term has changed over time since computers have come into being. In traditional typography, specifically in days of metal type, a font was a collection of metal characters representing the complete character set of a particular design, all of the same weight, style and size. 10, 12 point font and any other size of the same design were all separate fonts. Today, font refers to the complete character set of a particular type design or typeface in digital form. Although it refers to only one weight and style, it is not size specific as in the days of hot metal. Digital fonts are scalable.

Font Formats

Type 1 (or PostScript) Fonts
Based on computer language called PostScript which describes type and graphics in a way that allows for precise, sharp printing in any size. Consists of two components; bitmapped or screen font and a printer or outline font. Bother are required to view and to print a font. It is the preferred format in the graphic arts and publishing industry and tends to be more reliable with fewer font conflicts when printing.

Bitmapped or Screen Fonts
It is responsible for representing the font on your screen. Your screen represents all images, both graphic and type with small dots or more accurately pixels. The typical screen has 72 dots per inch/ 72dpi. In a bitmapped font, all the characters are represented as pixels or bitmaps so they can be viewed on your screen thus the term screen font. The relatively low number of dpi on your screen compared to your printer makes smaller point sizes increasingly more difficult to display sharply and clearly, giving them more jagged edges.

Printer or Outline Fonts
This is the part of the font that is necessary to print your job. It is essentially the outline of each character stored as a mathematical description, thus the name outline font. The printer font is scalable which means it can be enlarged or reduced to any size. Your PostScript printer acts as the brain that makes this interpretation.

TrueType Fonts
Apple and Microsoft joined forces to develop TrueType. Consists of a single file that contains both screen and printer font data. Most commonly used by windows users and the non-design community, with the exception of "core" TrueType fonts, which generally come standard on computer operating systems. Differs from its predecessor mainly and most importantly, in its expanded "hinting" capability. Hints are digital instructions built into a font to improve its on-screen and printed appearance

OpenType Fonts
Kind of a superset of Type 1 and TrueType with added enhancements. New features being multiplatform support, expanded character sets and glyph substitution.

Multiplatform Support
This means that the same OpenType font will run on both Mac and a Windows machine. This also means that problems associated with the transferring of documents from Mac to PC will go away.

Expanded Character Sets
OpenType fonts allow type designers and foundries to include many more characters than the 256 we are used to with Type 1 and TrueType. This means it can include true-drawn small caps, old-style figures, extended ligature sets, swash and alternate characters, fractions, ordinals, proportional and tabular figures, dingbats and symbols, and extensive foreign language support in one font.

Typography & Formats

Types Categories

Serif

A large category with a common denominator; they all have serifs. Serifs can be described as extensions, protrusions, finishing strokes. They are said to enhance readability, aside from decorative and style. Many typefaces fall under this category; Oldstyle, Transitional, Modern, Clarendon, Slab or Square Serif, Glyphic.

Serif

Sans Serif

The French word "without" sans serifs are without serifs. They have periodic returns due to the popularity of simplicity and industrial look. For Example; 19th-century Grotesque, 20th Century Grotesque, Geometric, Humanistic

Sans Serif

Script

Derived from or imitated handwriting or calligraphy
Formal; Flowing loops and flourishes with graceful, rhythmic strokes. Most often connecting scripts and imitate cursive penmanship.
Casual and Brush Scrips; Designed to look informal, quickly drawn. Strokes can be connected or not.
Calligraphic; Imitate the writing or lettering of a calligrapher. Often look as if they were drawn with flat-tipped pens, occasionally the drips, spots, blotches, and irregularities inherent in the process.

Script

Parts of a Character

Ascender –The part of a lowercase character (b, d, f, h, k, l, t) that extends above the height of the lowercase x.
Baseline –The invisible line on which most characters sit.
Cap height –The height of capital letters from the baseline to the top of caps, most accurately measured on a character with a flat bottom (E, H, I, etc.).
Descender –The part of a character (g, j, p, q, y, and sometimes J) that descends below the baseline.
Serif –The projections extending off the main strokes of the characters of serif typefaces. Serifs come in two styles: bracketed and unbracketed.
- Brackets are the supportive curves that connect the serif to the stroke, creating a somewhat softer look.
- Unbracketed serifs are attached sharply and usually at 90-degree angles.
X-height –The height of lowercase letters is usually based on the lowercase x, not including ascenders and descenders.

Readability & Legibility

Legibility refers to the actual design of the typeface. Related to the characteristics inherent in its design, including the size of x-height, character shapes, stroke contrast, serifs, and weight.
Readability refers to how the typeface is set. Related to how you arrange the type. Factors affecting; size, leading, line length, alignment, letter spacing, word spacing. The degree of legibility relates directly to hold the reader's attention for the duration of the copy. Display designs are used for a words project, where the objective is to be instantly noticeable and convey a mood or feeling.

What makes a good typeface?

Consistent Design Characteristics

Includes heights, character width, stroke width, ascenders, descenders, serif details, as well as the individual nuances and idiosyncrasies of the design.

Legibility

Ease with words that can be read as a whole. Primary importance in textile faces for smaller sizes and longer text.

Spacing

A typeface that is well-spaced, is neither too tight nor too open and has even spacing between characters.

Kerning

A typeface that is spaced properly has character combinations that are too open or too tight, these pairs should be adjusted with the creation of kern pairs.

Colour & Texture

Relies upon a combination of other factors to achieve. The right amount of spacing between the words allows the typestyle to be easily read without words running together or separated by oversized white spaces.

Basic Techniques for Emphasis

Verbal techniques we use; tone and inflection of our voice, the volume of our voice, the speed and pauses.

Italics

The most common form of emphasis. Obliques are slanted versions of their roman companion with few or no design changes and are used in the same way as italic, with less contrast. Most effectively used for soft emphasis. Also used instead of quotations for a book or magazine. Computer-generated italics should be avoided at all costs, in fear of degrading the design and metrics of the typeface.

Boldface (Or Weight Contrast)

A way to achieve emphasis base on the weight. Best used for subheadings, captions, and stand-alone words and phrases. Recommended to be used sparingly, where strong emphasis is necessary. Avoid using computer-generated bolding.

Underscores

Poor typographic method to achieve emphasis and rarely used. More underscores cannot be adjusted for weight and positioning and can clash with descenders. If needed, create them in illustrator applications with a drawing pen or pencil. The use of an underscore on the internet has a completely different meaning, it usually implies a hyperlink.

Cap vs. Lowercase

A word or phrase in all capital letters is poor design due to cap height change. All capitals disturb the rhythm and flow of text. Should be used for important words, that are discussed or referred to in a length of text. Small caps are a good choice, if available in the font you are using, which blends better with text.

Point Size

For emphasis, it is best reserved for subheadings, and should not be used within a text paragraph.

Advanced Techniques for Emphasis

Advanced enhancements, such as these, help draw attention to a paragraph, phrase, or heading. Whether it's a poster, piece of text or a book.

Initial Caps

Is an enlarged character, usually the beginning letter of the first sentence of the first paragraph. Can add typographic interest to a dull and boring page. And can have a different weight, or style in the typeface used, or an entirely different font.

Drop Caps

When a character begins at and drops below the first line of text, it is referred to as a drop cap. Drop caps usually optically align with the cap height of the first line and should base-align with a line of type below.

Raised Caps

A raised cap is one that base-aligns with the first line of type and rises above the body copy. It is much less complicated to do tastefully than a drop cap. If the raised cap is the first letter of a word make sure you space the rest of the word close enough to the initial to read as a word.

Decorative Initials

Sometimes a very unusual, elaborate, or ornate initial is appropriate and can do a lot to enhance a design. Some fonts are designed primarily for this purpose. A typeface with elaborate swashes or calligraphic forms can also add grace and visual interest to an otherwise dull design, as long as the letterform is appropriate to the content.

Indents

A space inserted before a new paragraph. Used to create visual separation. Extreme indent is occasionally seen as the first two or three lines being indented, sometimes to a depth of half the column width.