

# PRINCIPLES OF Typography

## *Learn how to identify and combine categories of type*

The art of typography is a fascinating study and deserves careful consideration. This guide will give you a good start. Each typeface has defining characteristics, and most can be categorized into a group with similar features.

The combination of typefaces can be tricky business. No more than two typefaces should be used in a design, and when two are used, they must come from different categories that contrast with each other. When using just one typeface, contrast can be achieved by using different weights, such as bold and light.

A basic rule of thumb is to never use two serified typefaces together or two sans-serifed fonts together. For example, Garamond, from the Oldstyle category, would be a good choice for body copy, but the titles in the same layout should not be in Times New Roman, because it is also Oldstyle and the fonts would not contrast. Further, a Modern would also conflict because it also has serifs and too many similarities. A better choice for titles would be Futura bold, which is a heavy Sans Serif font that contrasts nicely.

Beginners often err by using fancy, frilly, or grungy fonts, when a simpler choice would make a more appealing and legible design. Legibility and readability should always be paramount. If you use a decorative or script typeface, use it sparingly. Choose typefaces that are simple and classic for a professional, timeless look.

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The following pages introduce you to the six *Categories of Type*, *Anatomy of Letterform*, and *21 Rules of Typography*. Review these pages carefully and often, then start incorporating these techniques into your work. Have fun with your typography!

# CTYPE Categories

*Typefaces can be grouped into six different categories*

Grouping typefaces into categories makes it easier to find contrasting pairs to use in a layout. Even though there are endless sub-categories, these six categories work nicely to learn the basics.

## Oldstyle

Oldstyle typefaces are readable and great for body copy. The serifs are usually slanted and the thick-to-thin transition is moderate. Examples: Garamond, Times New Roman.

## Modern

Modern typefaces are best for titles, not copy, because the thin lines disappear when set small. The serifs are thin and horizontal, and the thick-to-thin transition is radical. Examples: Elephant, Poster Bodoni.

## Slab Serif

Slab serif typefaces are versatile and readable for copy. They are heavier and therefore put more “color” on the page than Oldstyles. The thick, slab-like serifs are horizontal and usually the same weight as the rest of the letter. Examples: Rockwell, AmerType.

## Sans Serif

Sans Serif typefaces are simple, legible and work in many applications. Sans means “without” so there are no serifs. There is little or no transition. Examples: Futura, Helvetica.

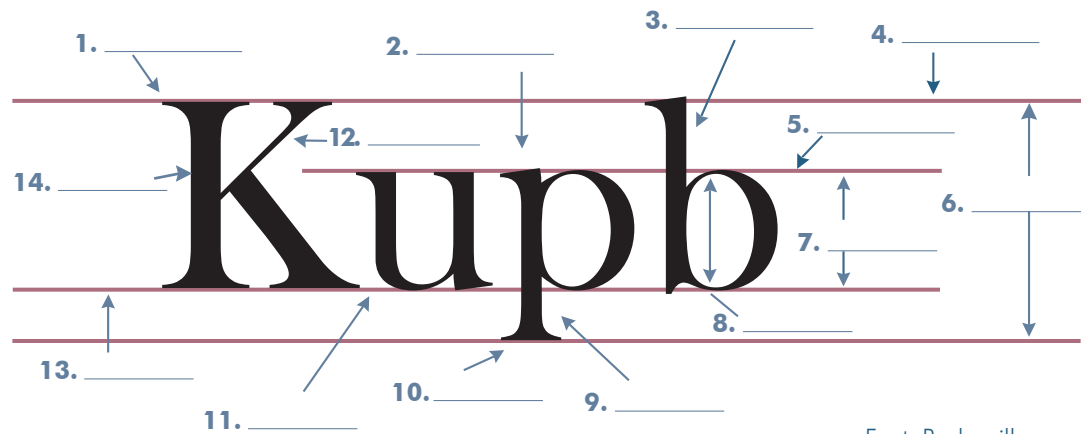
## Decorative

Do not overuse decorative fonts. Like scripts, they should not be used for body copy. They are usually trendy, theme-related and quickly outdated. Examples: Jokerman, Curlz.

## Script

Use script typefaces sparingly, for they are hard to read. They are best when set large for titles and not for body copy. Scripts are flowing and resemble handwriting. Examples: Vladimir, Edwardian Script.

# ANATOMY OF Letterform



Font: Baskerville  
 Category: Oldstyle  
 Sub-category: Transition

## Definitions

- 1. Uppercase** Capital letter which extends from baseline to capline
- 2. Lowercase** Small letter with x-height that may include ascenders / descenders
- 3. Ascender** The portion of a lowercase letter that extends above the meanline
- 4. Capline** The line to which uppercase letters and ascenders reach
- 5. Meanline** The line to which lowercase letters reach, without ascenders
- 6. Point size** Size measurement determined by height from capline to descender
- 7. X-height** The height of a lowercase letter from baseline to meanline
- 8. Stress** The axis of a letterform that intercepts the two narrowest points
- 9. Descender** The portion of a letterform that extends below the baseline
- 10. Serif** Tiny lines on the edges of strokes and stems
- 11. Kerning** The space between individual letters
- 12. Stroke** The diagonal portion of a letterform
- 13. Baseline** The bottom line on which the letterform rests
- 14. Stem** The vertical portion of a letterform

# 21 RULES OF Typography

*Study these rules and refer to them often*

## 1. Five Categories

Typefaces can be grouped into three general categories:  
**Serif, Sans Serif, and Decorative/Script**

Typefaces can be grouped into six specific categories:  
**Oldstyle, Modern, Slab Serif, Sans Serif, Decorative, and Script**

## 2. Terminology: Fonts vs. Typefaces vs. Categories

- A.** A *typeface* is a family of fonts such as Gill Sans.
- B.** A *font* is one member of a typeface family, such as Gill Sans Bold.
- C.** A *category* is a large group of similar typefaces, such as Sans Serif.

## 3. Contrasting Combinations

As a general rule, avoid using more than two typefaces in a design. Choose typefaces from two different general categories (serif, sans serif, or decorative/script) so they have contrast.

When using only one typeface (for example, only Gill Sans), use fonts with contrasting weights (light, regular, bold) for titles and body copy.

When using two typefaces, choose one that will work for body copy and one that will work for titles and subtitles. The title font should generally be heavier (or “bolder”) in weight so it stands out.

Oldstyle, Modern, and Slab Serif categories all have serifs. As a beginner, avoid using any two different serified typefaces together, even if they are from different categories. If you ever bend this rule, be sure your choices are either so similar that no one will notice (match the letter “a”, or very different in weight, so they have contrast.

## 4. Legible Body Copy

Never use all caps for body copy because it is harder to decipher the letterforms quickly. Avoid using modern, decorative, and script typefaces for body copy because legibility is very low.

## 21 RULES OF **Typography** continued...

### **5. Large Contrasting Titles**

Titles can be large, eye-catching focal points that set the theme of the design. Avoid using trendy decorative and script typefaces that are not legible or send the wrong message. If you must use less legible typefaces, set them large to improve legibility. Choose fonts that clearly communicate your message to the audience.

### **6. Proximity Communicates**

Keep titles and subtitles closer to the text they introduce, and further from previous or subsequent text.

### **7. Organization Simplifies**

Use subtitles to organize and engage the audience. Subtitles break up body copy into manageable chunks for readers.

### **8. Paragraph length**

Stick with one idea per paragraph. Generally, limit online copy writing to about five lines per paragraph and print copy to about ten lines per paragraph. But this can vary based on column width, design, point size, and design style.

### **9. Measure = not spreading type too wide**

Measure is the width of a line of body copy. Avoid spreading type across the whole width of the page. When possible keep lines narrower than 75 characters. Also, avoid columns that are too narrow to accommodate the largest words without awkward gaps.

### **10. Body Copy Size**

Avoid using large body copy. Generally, you should keep the body copy size around 10 point. However, that can go up or down, depending on the typeface. Copy on business cards and other small layouts should be even smaller, around 8 point. In some typefaces, the numbers appear larger, so you should make them a point or two smaller than the letters. When using a bullet (the shortcut is "F8" in Adobe programs) you may also want to highlight it, and make it a smaller point size. Be consistent with title size, subtitle size, and body copy size throughout the same design piece.

## 21 RULES OF **Typography** continued...

### 11. Paragraph alignment

Since we read from left to right, left alignment is easier to read than right alignment. Justified paragraph alignment can create awkward gaps or “rivers” in lines of type, especially in narrower columns. It helps to use the justified alignment option in InDesign that leaves the bottom line left-aligned, or just switch to left alignment.

### 12. Consistent paragraph style

When using an indented paragraph style, do not also add line space between paragraphs. When using line space between paragraphs, do not indent. In other words, chose one style and be consistent.

### 13. Consistent leading

Leading is space between lines. Crowded leading reduces legibility. Use consistent leading with the same types of paragraphs. For example, pull-out quotes or accent boxes of type can have different leading.

### 14. Tracking / Kerning aids alignment

**A.** *Tracking* refers to the general spacing between letters and words.

**B.** *Kerning* refers to the spacing between two adjacent characters.

You can use tracking and kerning to align lines of type with other design elements. Remember to never stretching or scale type out of its properly balanced proportions. Adjust kerning and/or tracking in a line with a long word to avoid a large gap or very ragged edges.

### 15. All-Cap Tag Line Effect

Adding larger amounts of tracking for a line of small all-caps can be used for a tag line or less important part of a logo or title. For example, the word “company” in Fall River Company could be placed underneath “Fall River” in all caps and much smaller with added tracking to align with the main title. However, it is usually not a good practice to add tracking with lowercase lines of type.

### 16. No Vertical Stacking

Do not stack one letter on top of another vertically in a title, because letters have different widths and they will look awkward. If you want a vertical title or line, turn it sideways instead. Our minds are capable of reading short chunks of type easily when they are turned sideways.

## 21 RULES OF **Typography** continued...

### 17. Light Drop Shadows

Use drop shadows sparingly so they don't "muddy up" the type. When it comes to shadows, my rule is: "Keep it light; Keep it tight; Keep it right." Keep shadows lighter in value than the letterform, close to the letterform, and on the same side as other shadows in the design piece. In other words, keep the direction of the light the same.

### 18. Fix "lower last lines"

When your last line in a paragraph drops lower (more leading than the rest of the paragraph), place your cursor at the end of the last line and hit "Return." The last line should move up and into position. If it does not, try highlighting the whole paragraph and choose a leading amount in the Character palette in InDesign.

### 19. Fonts to avoid at all costs

Avoid overused fonts. Handmade, scrapbooking, kid print, and some decorative and script typefaces fall into this category. For example, steer clear of Papyrus, Comic Sans, Scriptina, or Zapfino.

### 20. No Widows, Orphans, or Rags

- A.** A *widow* is one word that appears alone on its own line at the end of a paragraph.
- B.** An *orphan* is one line at the end of a paragraph that falls at the top of a new page or new column.
- C.** A *rag* is the uneven vertical margin of a paragraph that leaves distracting and irregular white space. A good rag only varies slightly in and out from line to line. Never leave a poor rag, widow or orphan in your copy. If you adjust your point size, column width, or rewrite things a bit, you can easily correct these common issues.

### 21. Misc. Bad Habits To Avoid

- A.** Avoid adding two spaces between sentences.
- B.** Avoid using hyphens, unless absolutely necessary. You can turn off the hyphenate option in the "Paragraph" palette in InDesign.
- C.** Align the bottom of columns whenever possible. If you can't align them, exaggerate the misalignment; it is better that they are too different than too similar.