

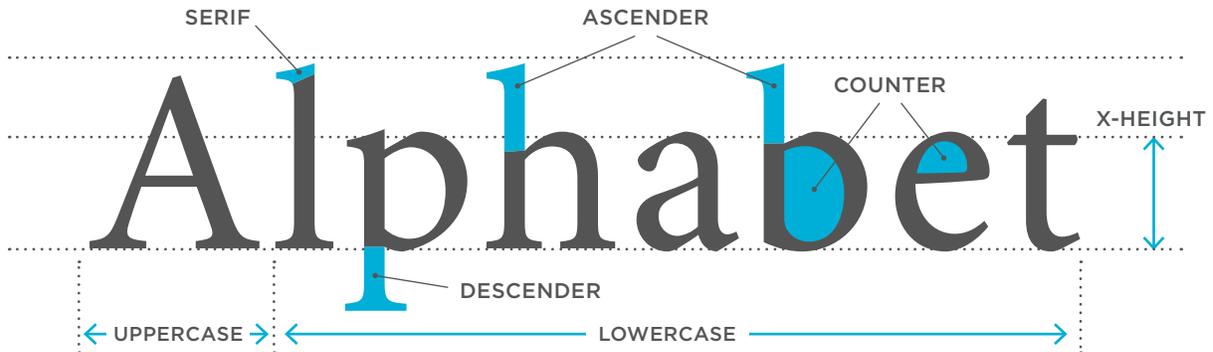
ALL THINGS TYPE

Basic Type Terms

Type terms are extensive. Every minuscule characteristic of a letter's design has a name.

Here's a fun fact: Capital letters are called uppercase, and smaller letters are referred to as lowercase by type designers as well as graphic designers. Ever wonder why those terms are used? The typesetter put the capital letters in the upper cases and the rest in the lower cases.

Students are often overwhelmed when learning type terms, so here are some basic terms that are helpful to know:



Type Spacing Terms

Kerning: the spacing between individual letters

Leading: the spacing between lines of text

Tracking: the space across a line of text



Type Sizing

Type is set in points, and those point sizes vary by font. Font point sizes are determined by the typesetting equipment from the old days of setting type. When a letter was forged for typesetting, the letter's size varied by what best fit in the metal space. Thus, sans serif fonts tend to be larger in the same point size as serif fonts. Research determining legibility can sometimes be misleading when they are comparing. For example, Helvetica and Times are 10 points, but the Helvetica font would be slightly larger and may sway the data. When reviewing type research, always check to see if the fonts have matching point sizes or x-heights.

The other difficulty in sizing type is viewing it on a screen when the final product is to be printed. Size relationships can be seen on the screen, but type often looks right on the screen but prints out much larger. **As a general rule, 72 points are roughly an inch.**

Font Families

Old Style

Thin and thick parts of a letter, stress is slanted (stress is found by drawing a line through the thinnest part of the O), so are serifs.

Transitional

As printing capabilities improved, letter design included more contrast with thicks and thins.

Modern

Very thin areas, stress is vertical, straight serifs.

Sans serif

Serifs removed, letters have no decoration.

Decorative

Fancy type, including script fonts.

Slab Serif

Sometimes called Egyptian type. Large, heavy, straight serifs.

Pair Fonts Using Contrast

The best way to pair fonts is through contrast. This contrast can be through different font sizes, the weight of fonts, font families, or color. When using two different font families, consider an easy pairing: a serif with a sans serif font. Try to avoid using two fonts from the same font family because it often looks like an attempt to match a font that didn't succeed. The more contrast in size, weight, font family, or color, the better the pairing works.



Legibility

When discussing type, legibility and readability come into play. Legibility determines if each letter can be deciphered. If the type is going to bleed off a page, there's a higher chance of legibility when cutting off the bottom parts of the letters instead of the top parts of the letters. Spacing also determines letter legibility and how well the font within a text block can be read. Consider the use. Web legibility is better with sans serif fonts, and print legibility tends to be better with serif fonts. However, it is unclear if it is the serif that aids in legibility or the extra letterspacing needed for a serif font. Additionally, never use a script font in all uppercase.

It is amazing how brains can decipher words. They depend more on word shapes than individual letters. This is why it takes longer to read words with very short ascenders and descenders or in all uppercase letters because the word shapes are similar. This is also why it's more difficult to spell words with a string of vowels; they do not change the word's shape (e.g., continuous).

FUN FACT – Read this message:

Aoccdrnig to a rscheearch at Cmabrigde Uinervtisy, it deosn't mttar in waht oredr the ltteers in a wrod are, the olny iprmoetnt tihng is taht the frist and lsat ltteer be at the rghit pclae. The rset can be a toatl mses and you can sitll raed it wouthit porbelm. Tihis is bcuseae the huamn mnid deos not raed ervey lteter by istlef, but the wrod as a wlohe.

Analyzing Type: What makes a good font?

Often, graphic design students will ask, “Is this a good font for the project?” This isn’t something that can be readily answered. When designing, the best font is a relative question. More information about the project needs to be considered, such as the intended message, what feeling is being evoked, the role of the type (headline, body copy etc.), and what other elements are on the page. Is it a piece about a serious health concern? A fun, curvy font will not work. Is it for young readers? Cute handwritten fonts may look like a fit, but handwritten fonts are not always the easiest for young readers to decipher. How long will a person have to read the message? If it is a sign they are driving or walking by, a fancy font with too many words would be hard to read. Can the reader get to the pertinent facts quickly, or do they have to wade through seas of copy to find what they need? Maybe a contrasting font would help the important information stand out.

What is the
intended
message?

What feeling is
being evoked?

What is the role
of the type?

What other
elements are
on the page?

Accessibility

When testing legibility or designing with type, consider accessibility and universal design rules, which include ways to accommodate people with vision impairments. Contrast is the best way to aid legibility in type. Consider having a 70% difference between the value of the text and the value of the background. Avoid placing light type on a light background, dark type on a darker background, or type over a photographic image. When placing type onto a photographic image, consider placing the text in a quiet area where the lightness or darkness is consistent so a contrasting type can be added without visually competing with the image itself.

Hill, W. (2010). *The complete typographer* (2nd ed). Pearson College Div.