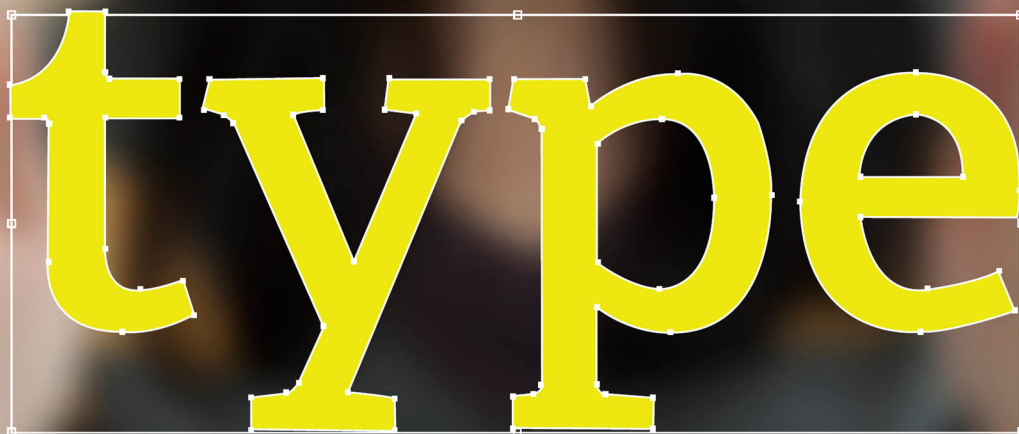


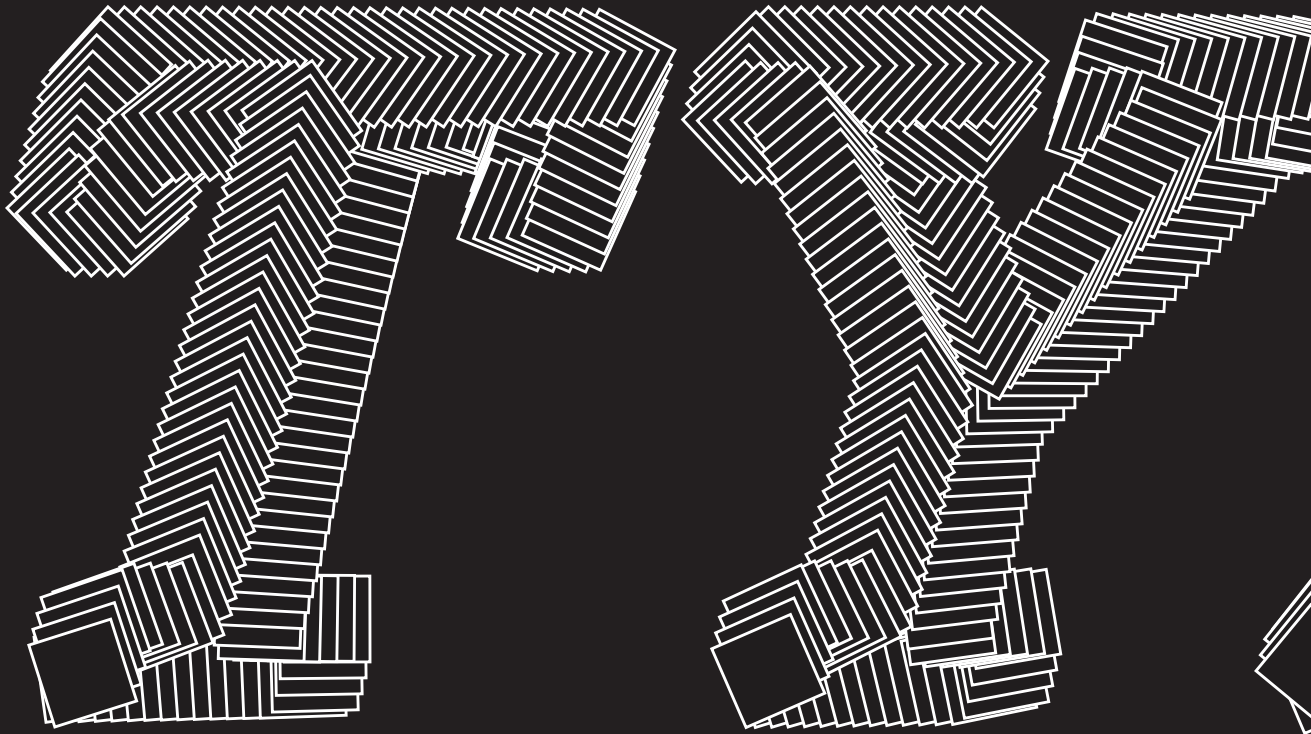
Ellen Lupton, editor



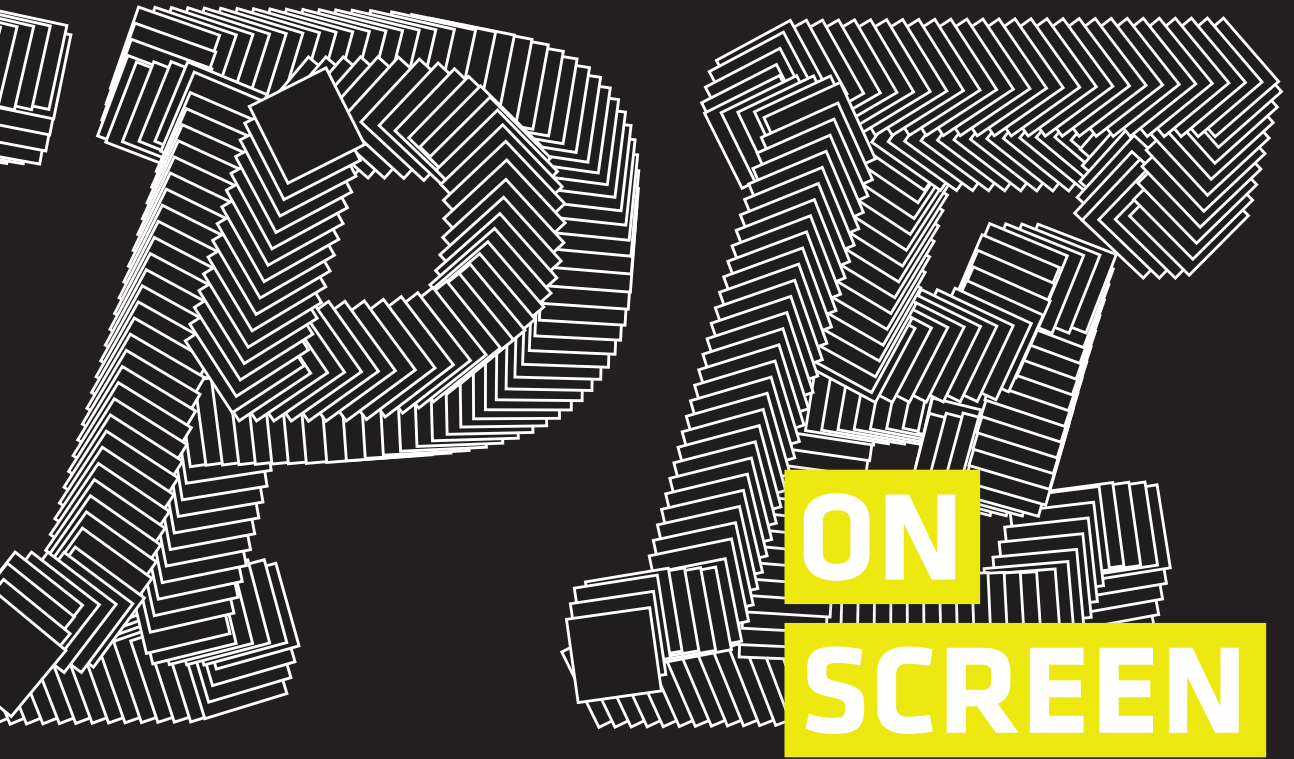
type

on screen

**A critical guide
for designers,
writers, developers,
& students**



ELLEN LUPTON, EDITOR



**A GUIDE FOR DESIGNERS,
DEVELOPERS, WRITERS,
AND STUDENTS**

PRINCETON ARCHITECTURAL PRESS
NEW YORK

MARYLAND INSTITUTE COLLEGE OF ART
BALTIMORE

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Fedra Mono, designed by Peter Bil'ak, 2002

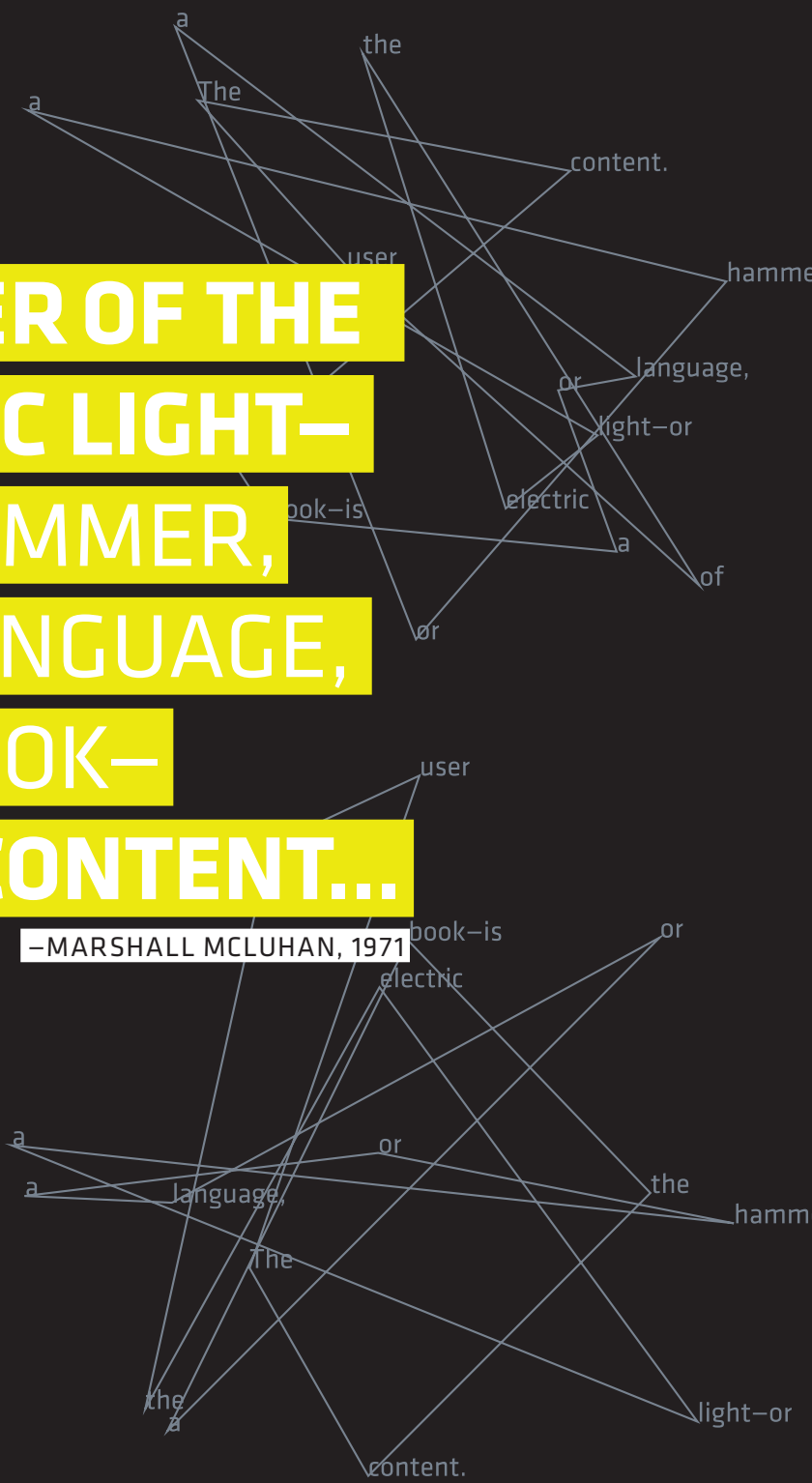
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**THE USER OF THE
ELECTRIC LIGHT—
OR A HAMMER,
OR A LANGUAGE,
OR A BOOK—
IS THE CONTENT...**

—MARSHALL MCLUHAN, 1971



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PREFACE

ELLEN LUPTON

Typography embodies written language in a concrete form. A typeface communicates through its strokes, proportions, and visual weight. Characters group together into columns and grids, bodies and heads, blocks and lists. These graphic elements carry their own physical presence. But what happens when typography sheds its fixed, static body and becomes a virtual phenomenon? What happens when readers are free to transform the parameters of visual display to serve their own needs and preferences?

This book is a guide to the flickering, ephemeral world of type on screen. Authored by a team of graduate students and faculty at MICA (Maryland Institute College of Art), *Type on Screen* explores diverse typographic issues, from choosing fonts to building brands. We plunged into the churning waters of today's tools and platforms knowing that the world we are studying won't stop changing. We expect this volume to be the first edition among many.

Type on Screen is not a software manual or a book of technical tutorials. Rather, it surveys new design principles born of screen-based communication while drawing on traditions of form and function that have evolved over hundreds of years. Typography has always responded to new technologies and new audiences. From Johannes Gutenberg in the fifteenth century to Peter Bil'ak today, the great typeface designers have forged new technologies and new business models as well as new visual forms. Typography is forever in motion—and never more so than now.

We conceived this guide with a range of readers in mind: the visual designer working across print and screen media, the student or educator exploring screen-based creativity, the developer trying to better understand visual design principles, and the editor or content producer seeking more sophisticated control over digital tools and systems.

Designers manipulate the basic parameters of typography on screen—weight, size, style, alignment, and spacing—in order to help users find the information they are seeking. In many instances the user can change those parameters, too, whether the user is the reader of a final document or an editor or writer working with a content management system.

The first four chapters of *Type on Screen* present basic concepts for shaping written content, be it a book, a news article, a blog, an infographic, or an advertisement. Such content needs to be coded in typefaces, shaped into columns and sections, accessed by an interface, linked to other texts, and packaged for distribution. The output might be a web browser, a mobile device, a tablet, or an e-reader. Designers make a series of interconnected choices—from typeface and page structure to modes of linearity, interactivity, and navigation—to create pleasing and engaging experiences for all readers.

Beyond the basics of using type on screen, this guide introduces concepts that explore screen-based design in more depth, explaining how to create icon systems, how to approach branding in a screen-dominated world, and how to enliven text with animation and code. In place of static logotypes constrained by the printing process, today's designers are creating complex branding systems alive with color and movement. Designers play with speed, color, opacity, and pacing to tell stories and convey emotion. Letterforms can move and change on screen, just as the background, camera, and surrounding elements can shift and transform. Designers are writing code to generate letters and texts endowed with the quirks and peculiarities of living things. They are using handcrafted software to create a less predictable world.

Throughout this book, general principles are demonstrated with examples of outstanding work created by some of the world's leading practitioners as well as by students and emerging artists. We are grateful to the many designers who shared their work so that others can learn from it.

Type on Screen is the sixth in a series of books published by Princeton Architectural Press and MICA. By producing these books, our graduate students and faculty expand their own knowledge of design while exchanging ideas with a community of designers and creative people working around the world. Our classrooms have become practical laboratories, and these books are the results of our research. We are proud to share them with a growing community of people who are actively engaging the medium of design, both professionally and in their daily lives.

01 FONTS ON SCREEN

CHRISTOPHER CLARK

Back in 2006, before web fonts changed the design world, hypertext luminary Oliver Reichenstein crashed into the scene with his article “Web Design Is 95% Typography.” He suggested that because the World Wide Web is composed mostly of letters, web designers had better start paying more attention to text. Good typography, he argued, is not about choosing from a multitude of fonts. The pioneering printers of the Italian Renaissance (as well as the Swiss design rationalists of the 1950s and 1960s) plied their craft with just a few type styles; so too could web designers create beautifully structured pages with a minimal range of typefaces.

The idea of solving any design problem with a single font had great appeal back then, when web designers were restricted to the skimpy handful of type styles that could be found on the operating systems of end users. The graphic landscape of the web has since radically expanded. Digital typography now teems with the diversity of a tropical rainforest—and it is littered with more trash than an urban underpass.

This chapter aims to help designers and developers make their way through today’s welter of typographic choices. By looking at the visual anatomy and cultural geography of letterforms, you will start to see why a great typeface works so well—and why a bad one doesn’t. Armed with these typographical field notes, designers will be ready to venture on through a hand-picked menagerie of screen-ready fonts.

Collected here are typefaces that have proven their beauty and usefulness across platforms. We have ranked each font for its readability, showmanship, and classiness, and have looked at how each one renders on multiple operating systems and browsers. The result of these labors is a small but powerful army of trustworthy typefaces that will enable designers to speak clearly and consistently to users of every stripe.

A-SANS The lowercase letter *g* is shown here with its vector outlines and hinted nodes optimized for screen use. Design: Young Sun Compton, 2013.

READ MORE >> Oliver Reichenstein, “Web Design Is 95% Typography,” *Information Architects*, October 2006, <http://ia.net/blog/the-web-is-all-about-typography-period/>.

WEB FONTS: A SHORT HISTORY

Typographic diversity on the web is not a new idea. The style sheet language CSS 2 (Cascading Style Sheets 2), drafted in 1998, included the **@font-face rule**, which enabled browsers to download font information and thus permitted, in principle, virtually any font to be used on any site. Internet Explorer 4 implemented the @font-face rule and has supported it ever since. However, @font-face contained no piracy protections whatsoever, allowing users to download unlicensed fonts and even link them across different sites. Such unfettered font use threatened the entire business of type design, causing @font-face to be banished from CSS for nearly a decade.

Perhaps the Internet wasn't ready for fonts in 1998. Adhering to the Web Standards Movement was still an evangelist's badge, not a job requirement, and the way operating systems rendered type varied so wildly that designers might as well have used a different typeface for each browser. But by the mid-2000s, things had started to change. The implementation of web standards had made developing sites a quicker process, allowing designers to spend less time writing different versions of the same page and more time perfecting their craft. As websites became more complex and web design grew more elegant, the wish for more fonts grew. Technologies popped up to fill the void left by CSS 2.1. Techniques such as Scalable Inman Flash Replacement (SIFR), Cufón (Scalable Vector Graphics, SVG), and Typeface.js (canvas) worked reasonably well and allowed any print font to be used on the web without the need to purchase additional licenses. Type designers began to worry less about piracy and more about a design market that was rapidly moving on without them.

HOW THE WEB LOOKED

IN 1992 The early Internet was designed to connect scientists working on different platforms around the world. Fonts were accessed by default from the user's computer. The ubiquity of Times Roman fit the web's aim "to give universal access to a large universe of documents." The World Wide Web Consortium "The Project," W3C, accessed May 29, 2012, <http://www.w3.org/History/19921103-hypertext/hypertext/WWW/TheProject.html>.

World Wide Web

The WorldWideWeb (W3) is a wide-area [hypermedia](#) information retrieval initiative aiming to connect and share the [large universe of documents](#).

Everything there is online about W3 is linked directly or indirectly to this document, including the project, [Mailing lists](#), [Policy](#), November's [W3 news](#), [Frequently Asked Questions](#).

[What's out there?](#)

Pointers to the world's online information, [subjects](#), [W3 servers](#), etc.

[Help](#)

on the browser you are using

[Software Products](#)

A list of W3 project components and their current state. (e.g. [Line Mode](#), [X11 Viola](#), [Mail robot](#), [Library](#))

[Technical](#)

Details of protocols, formats, program internals etc

In 2008 Mozilla Firefox and Apple Safari implemented the @font-face rule, making web typography accessible to most Internet users while engulfing the web community in a firestorm of buzz. Type hosting services such as Typekit, Fontdeck, and Google Fonts stepped in to fill the licensing and piracy void that still existed in CSS 3. They helped smooth out many of the wrinkles that came with cross-browser support and provided a range of typefaces for convenient one-stop shopping. Font hosting providers became the go-to resource for web fonts.

Endless font-o-graphic variety on the web would be a gleeful proposition—if only the fonts themselves were up to the task of looking good and holding their shapes across a mixed bag of rendering environments. In reality, most fonts offered by web hosting services fall short of what is demanded by today’s uneven technologies.

Initially, type designers lashed out against the web font explosion, which raised a myriad of problems. Typefaces that looked great on a Mac fell apart in Windows; variations among browsers and operating systems broke designs and ruined reading experiences. Poorly optimized fonts were swamping the web. Before 2008, the classic web fonts Georgia and Verdana had set a narrow horizon of choice, but they were flexible, consistent, and screen-ready, meticulously designed to function on screen. With the flood of fonts now available for use, designers were free to make poor choices, using display fonts for body copy, applying faux bolding and italics, and picking type on a Mac without checking it in Windows. Today, designers and foundries are working to create typefaces that can withstand the hardships of life on screen.

REINVENTING GEORGIA AND VERDANA These classic web fonts, designed by Matthew Carter for Microsoft in 1996, were engineered to display consistently across platforms, thanks to immaculate hinting by Tom Rickner. In 2011 Font Bureau, Carter & Cone, and Monotype Imaging released extended families of these web classics. Design: Matthew Carter, Steve Matteson, and David Berlow.

LANGUID SUMMER

BOLD
1,352 Filmy White Clouds D
CONDENSED ITALIC

CONDENSED LIGHT
Cumulor.

CONDENSED BOLD ITALIC
So Many Fancy

LIGHT
Ice-cream castles in the air and fea

LIGHT
DOWNF

MISSING HAND

BOLD
Demate

CONDENSED LIGHT
Did You Look Ev

BLACK ITALIC
Better round up all 462 of the

CONDENSED REGULAR
MAGIC

SEMI BOLD
MAGIC

RENDERING TYPE ON SCREEN

How a font looked on screen used to be just an issue of representation; you could rely on the printing process to make it look better. But nowadays the screen is often the final output. Many products of interaction design must perform across multiple platforms, browsers, and devices, each of which translates the vector soul of a typeface into digital rasters of diverse and sometimes monstrous shapes. The user's device could be mobile or desktop, Mac or Windows; it could be an LCD monitor, an Apple iPad, an Amazon Kindle, or a Blackberry Playbook. (Probably not that last one, but anything is possible.)

There are different font formats, including **TrueType**, favored by Windows, and **PostScript**, created for the Mac. PostScript fonts allow the operating system or browser to figure out how to best translate a character's precise vector outlines onto the cruder grid of the screen. PostScript fonts look good on any system that displays them; as rasterizers improve, the typefaces follow along. A TrueType font, on the other hand, carries around its own instructions for making the leap from outline to raster. These instructions—called **hinting**—demand many hours of specialized labor and are a stubborn obstacle to achieving universal web typography.

According to type designer Peter Bil'ak, 99 percent of fonts lack hinting, which makes them display poorly and inconsistently on the Windows systems that still dominate the Earth. Typography's lucky 1 percent includes web stalwarts such as Georgia and Verdana as well as Bil'ak's own typeface, Fedra, meticulously hinted for display on screen. Hinting tells the operating system

"How did you trace it, then?"

He took a large sheet of paper from his pocket, all covered with dates and names.

"I have spent the whole day," said he, "over Lloyd's registers and files of the old papers, following the future career of every vessel which touched at Pondicherry in January and February in '83. There were thirty-six ships of fair tonnage which were reported there during those months. Of these, one, the *Lone Star*, instantly attracted my attention, since, although it was reported as having cleared from London, the name is that which is given to one of the states of the Union."

"Texas, I think."

"I was not and am not sure which; but I knew that the ship must have an American origin."

"What then?"

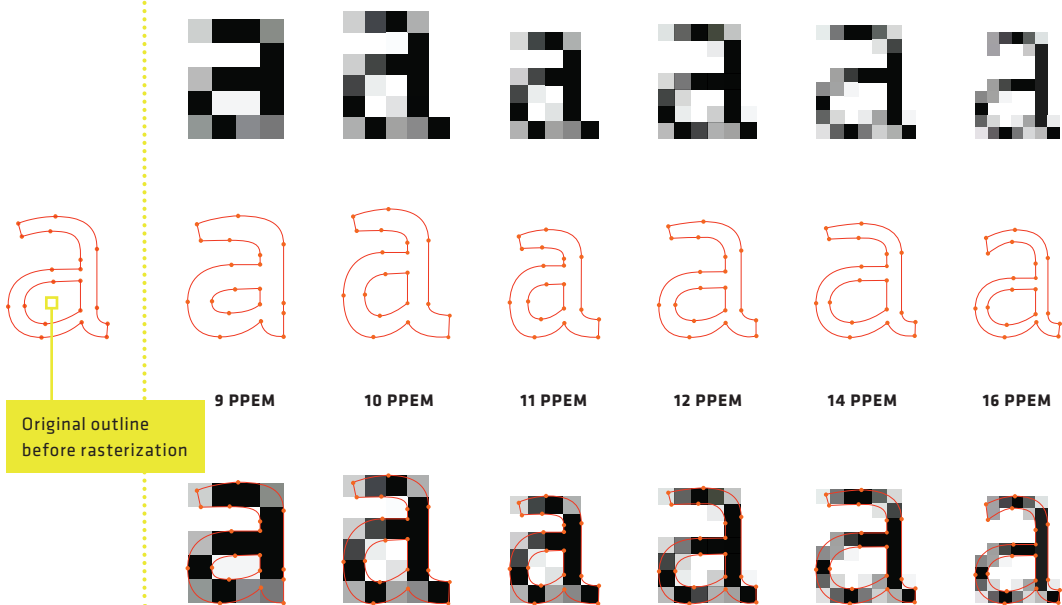
"I searched the Dundee records, and when I found that the barque *Lone Star* was there in January, '85, my suspicion became a certainty. I then inquired as to the vessels which lay at present in the port of London."

READ MORE >> Peter Bil'ak, "Font Hinting," *Typotheque*, 2010, <https://www.typotheque.com/articles/hinting>.

SHADES OF GRAY E-readers such as the Amazon Kindle provide a relatively coarse rendering of type, employing just a few shades of gray. Shown here is a screenshot from the Kindle Paper White.

or browser to adjust such features as height, stem width, white space, the slant of italics, and the relationship between uppercase and lowercase letters. Hinting creates a sharper look by increasing contrast along the edges of the letterforms, at the expense of preserving character shape and the space between letters. Depending on the kind of output, from the harsh extreme of a black-and-white bitmap to the soft, antialiased outlines of a grayscale monitor to the RGB subpixel rendering made possible by LCDs, hinting instructions vary. Hinting also transforms the shape of the letters based on the size at which they are displayed; the forms of a well-hinted font can change substantially from size to size.

Hinted versions of Fedra Sans Screen Regular in different pixels per em (ppem). The original outline is transformed by TrueType hinting instructions to fit the pixel grid of the computer screen.



FEDRA TAKES A HINT At the core of any digital font is an essential set of points and curves. How that vector essence becomes rasterized reality is a matter of interpretation. Hinting is a set of instructions that tells the rasterizer of a browser or operating system how to reposition a typeface's outlines for better display at different sizes, conforming to the pixel grid of the screen. Design: Peter Bil'ak, Typotheque.

TYPE ANATOMY AND TAXONOMY

Choosing typefaces can be a bewildering task. Understanding how the proportions of letters affect their visual impact and knowing how a type design fits into the broader history of typography can help. Many of the typefaces we use today are based on designs produced hundreds of years ago. Classical **serif** faces, introduced in the fifteenth century, imitated older media—handwriting and stone carving. In the nineteenth century, printers devised simpler, bolder **sans serif** forms to meet the needs of commercial advertising. **Slab serifs**—also first appearing in the nineteenth century—have chunky, geometric endstrokes with as much heft and presence as the main strokes of the letters. Slab faces are popular on the web because they combine aspects of both sans serif and serif letterforms, and they function well in light and heavy weights, enduring the rigors of rasterization.

CAP HEIGHT

The distance from the baseline to the top of the capital letter determines the letter's measured size.

ASCENDERS

Some elements may extend slightly above the height of the capital letters.

LIGATURES combine two characters (such as *fi*, *fl*, or *ff*) into one glyph, preventing awkward bumps and grinds.

Sticky, stuff

MINION PRO

X-HEIGHT refers to the vertical dimension of the main body of a lowercase letter (the height of the lowercase *x*). A typeface whose x-height is large in proportion to its cap height looks bigger than a typeface with a smaller x-height. Typefaces with large x-heights can be a good choice for screen.

DESCENDERS

A typeface with longer descenders and ascenders may require more line spacing (line height).

THE BASELINE is where all the letters sit. This is the most stable axis along a line of text, and it is a crucial edge for aligning text with images or with other text.

OVERHANG

The bottom strokes of curved letters (*s*, *t*, *u*) hang slightly below the baseline. Commas and semicolons also cross the baseline. Without overhang, a rounded letter would look smaller than its flat-footed friends. Overhang also helps rounded letters appear to sit stably on the baseline.

<p>SERIF</p>	<p>MINION</p> <p>Aa</p> <p>HUMANIST The roman typefaces of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries emulated classical calligraphy. The ribbonlike strokes and angled stress of Minion, designed by Robert Slimbach for Adobe (1990), exemplify the humanist style.</p>	<p>GEORGIA</p> <p>Aa</p> <p>TRANSITIONAL Typefaces with sharper serifs and a more vertical axis are known as transitional. Carter's web classic Georgia (1996) embraces these upright qualities.</p>	<p>BODONI</p> <p>Aa</p> <p>MODERN Giambattista Bodoni designed high-contrast typefaces with razor-sharp serifs. The forms of Bodoni are generally considered too high-contrast for screen reading.</p>
<p>SANS</p>	<p>GILL SANS</p> <p>Aa</p> <p>HUMANIST SANS SERIF Sans serif typefaces became common in the twentieth century. Gill Sans, designed by Eric Gill in 1928, has humanist characteristics. Note the small, tilting counter in the letter <i>a</i>, and the calligraphic variations in line weight. Gill Sans is found on many operating systems.</p>	<p>HELVETICA</p> <p>Aa</p> <p>TRANSITIONAL SANS SERIF Helvetica, designed by Max Miedinger in 1957, is available on most users' computer systems. Its uniform, upright character makes it similar to transitional serif letters. Helvetica is considered an "anonymous sans serif."</p>	<p>FUTURA</p> <p>Aa</p> <p>GEOMETRIC SANS SERIF Some sans serif types are built around geometric forms. In Futura, designed by Paul Renner in 1927, the <i>O</i>s are perfect circles, and the peaks of the <i>A</i> and <i>M</i> are sharp triangles. Futura is a widely distributed typeface.</p>
<p>SLAB</p>	<p>TISA</p> <p>Aa</p> <p>HUMANIST SLAB SERIF Also called "Egyptian," slab serifs appeared in the nineteenth century. Tisa, designed by Mitja Miklavčič in 2008, has an angled stress and serifs that have been softened with subtle curves, reflecting the humanist tradition.</p>	<p>CHAPARRAL</p> <p>Aa</p> <p>TRANSITIONAL SLAB Carol Twombly's Chaparral (designed between 1997 and 2000) has gently modulated forms and sleek slab serifs. Typefaces like Chaparral make for readable text as well as distinctive heads and subheads.</p>	<p>KULTURISTA</p> <p>Aa</p> <p>GEOMETRIC SLAB Architects are often drawn to slab serifs with a stark geometric style, such as Kulturista (above) and Rockwell (by Frank Hinman Pierpont). These faces have big, structural slab serifs and minimal modulation.</p>

HEADS AND BODIES

On screen, as on the printed page, written text falls into two main categories: **body** and **head**. **Body copy** is the principal reading matter of a text, while **heads** are shorter pieces of text that call out sections and subsections. A designer may choose to set a text entirely in a single type family, using different weights, sizes, and styles to distinguish the parts from the whole. Alternatively, designers can assemble a mix of diverse type families to create clear visual distinctions between elements of content.

A list or a block quote should look like a subset of the main text, while a caption can be more visually distinct. Headings should reflect the relative importance of the text that follows. By using type to signal levels of information, designers help readers graze through a document at their own pace, picking and choosing the content they want. Some may only read captions and headings, while others want to dig deep and pursue an argument or narrative from beginning to end.

DISPLAY FACES are designed primarily for heads. Their complex forms or extreme proportions become tiresome in large quantities. Think of display faces as garnish and spice for the meat and potatoes of basic body text.

Display

League Gothic

from the League of Moveable Type
Designed by Micah Rich with Caroline Hadilaksono

LEAGUE GOTHIC is a product of the League of Moveable Type (LMT), a group that offers typefaces for free download to the open-source community. LMT supports freeware, copyleft, and related ideas. **LEAGUE GOTHIC** is based on Morris Fuller Benton's Alternate Gothic No. 1, a compressed typeface that embraces the loud and excitable aesthetic of twentieth-century news media.

Prater Script

from FontFont
Designed by Henning Wagenbreth and Steffen Sauerteig

Prater is a beer garden in Berlin whose graphic identity was handmade by artist-illustrator Henning Wagenbreth. Wagenbreth's lettering was the launching point for this playful type family, digitally reconstructed by Steffen Sauerteig. To approximate the irregularity of hand lettering, each weight comes in two versions.

Some typefaces are designed specifically for body text. Type designers work hard to create typefaces that fly under the reader's radar, using subtle, well-crafted forms and evenly spaced characters to achieve effortless reading. A good text family includes multiple weights and styles (roman, italic, and bold, at the very least) suitable for expressing a rich hierarchy of information. A text face with appealing details can also be used for heads, its character changing as it moves up in size.

MINION PRO A single family can be used for headings and body text. The italic enlarges to become a handsome title, while the small caps provide quiet subheads.

Cinderella

ACT ONE: STATUS QUO

Many years ago a gentleman had a charming lady for his wife. When their daughter was very young, the mamma died. After a time, the little girl's papa married another lady, who had two grown daughters as disagreeable as herself.

ACT TWO: CALL TO ACTION

The King's son gave a grand ball, and all persons of quality were invited. In Cinderella's home nothing was talked of but the rich dresses the two sisters were to wear. At last the happy day arrived. The two proud sisters set off in high spirits. When

PRATER SCRIPT AND SKOLAR Here, a fancy display face offers a counterpoint to a more traditional text face.

Cinderella

ACT ONE: STATUS QUO

Many years ago, a gentleman had a charming lady for his wife. When their daughter was very young, the mamma died. After a time, the little girl's papa married another lady, with two daughters as disagreeable as herself.

ACT TWO: CALL TO ACTION

The King's son gave a grand ball, and all persons of quality were invited. In Cinderella's home nothing was talked of but the rich dresses the two sisters were to wear. At last the happy day arrived. The two proud sisters set

aA



HEADLINES

51% Sans

47% Serif

aA



BODY COPY

36.5% Sans

61.5% Serif

SANS VS. SERIF In 2013 a study of global news sites found that when it comes to headlines, sans faces have a slight edge over serifs. Body copy, however, still leans resolutely toward tradition, with 61.5 percent of sites opting for serif. While the majority of sites surveyed were using nonstandard web fonts, the most commonly occurring typefaces were Georgia, Arial, and Chaparral Pro for headlines, and Georgia, Arial, and Helvetica for body copy.

READ MORE >> Jan Constantin, "Typographic Design Patterns and Current Practices (2013 Edition)," *Smashing Magazine*, May 17, 2013, <http://www.smashingmagazine.com/2013/05/17/typographic-design-patterns-practices-case-study-2013/>.

A BRIEF SURVEY OF WEB FONTS

The purpose of this guide is to help designers and developers make smart typographic decisions on the web. From the enormous range of fonts now available for online licensing, we have chosen a small selection of prominent typefaces—produced by foundries large and small and created by designers from around the world—that have proven popular among web designers. We examined how each typeface renders on different operating systems and browsers and rated each typeface for its legibility, readability, flexibility, showmanship, classiness, and what we call amphibiousness. Also included are some taster’s notes on history, style, and sensibility. At the end of the day, these judgments are more subjective than scientific; you will need to test any typeface against your own content, intentions, and personal preferences until you hit just the note you are looking for.

THE RATING SYSTEM



LEGIBILITY

How distinct are the characters from one another? Typefaces that are highly modular or geometric may be less legible than those with more organic and individualized forms.



READABILITY

How comfortable is the typeface to read in body copy? Does it invite long-form reading and writing?



FLEXIBILITY

How well does the typeface work in different sizes and weights? Would it function well for both headlines and text? A flexible typeface can solve many kinds of problems.



SHOWMANSHIP

How memorable is the font? How unique are its details? Does it have a standout *Q* or spectacular numerals? Does it look amazing when blown up to a large size?



CLASSINESS

Would it take you to Red Lobster? Would you buy it a diamond ring?



AMPHIBIOUSNESS

Has it been optimized for screen? How well is it hinted? If a font only looks good on a Mac, it scores low on the amphibiousness scale.

BAKER'S FOURTEEN Like any top-ten list, our baker's dozen (plus one) is an arbitrary sampling from the wildly diverse typographic biosphere. Dozens of other designs could take the place of most of the typefaces listed here. When you find a typeface you like, look for more created by the same designer or foundry. The choices are endless and growing in number every day.

SERIF

Fedra Serif
Georgia
Meta Serif
Minion
Skolar

SANS

Dagny
DIN
Helvetica
Proxima Nova

SLAB

Adelle
Chaparral
Kulturista
Museo Slab
Tisa