

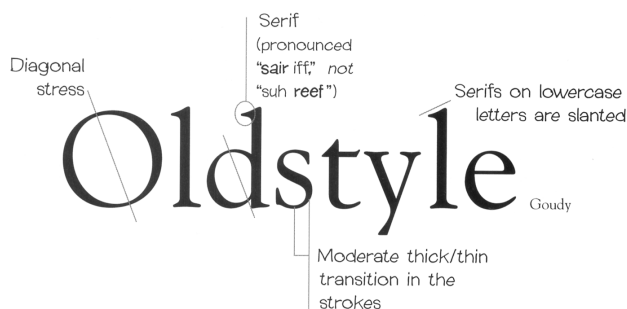
Department of Multimedia Charnwood Imaging Centre

Categories of type

There are many thousands of different typefaces available right now, and many more being created everyday. Most faces, though, can be dropped into one of the six categories mentioned below. Of course, you will find hundreds of faces that don't fit neatly into any category. We could make several hundred different categories for the varieties in type, don't worry about it. The point is just to start looking at type more closely and clearly. Focus on these six groups

page layout
typography &

oldstyle



Goudy Palatino Times
Baskerville Garamond

Typefaces created in the oldstyle are based on the hand lettering of scribes, you can imagine a wedge-tipped pen held in the hand. Oldstyles always have serifs and the serifs of lowercase letters are always at an angle (the angle of the pen). Because of that pen, all the curved strokes in the letterforms have a transition from thick to thin, technically called the "thick/thin transition." This contrast in the stroke is relatively moderate, meaning it goes from kind-of-thin to kind-of-thicker. If you draw a line through the thinnest parts of the curved strokes, the line is diagonal. This is called the *stress*, oldstyle type has a diagonal stress.

Do these faces (on the left) all look pretty much the same to you? Don't worry, they look the same to everyone who hasn't studied typography. Their "invisibility" is exactly what makes oldstyles the best type group for extensive amounts of body copy. There are rarely any distinguishing characteristics that get in the way of reading; they don't call attention to themselves. If you're setting lots of type that you want people to actually read, choose an oldstyle.

modern



Bodoni Times Bold
Fenice, Ultra Walbaum

As history marched on, the structure of type changed. Type has trends and succumbs to lifestyle and cultural changes, just like hairdos, clothes, architecture, or language. In the 1700s, smoother paper, more sophisticated printing techniques, and a general increase in mechanical devices led to type becoming more mechanical also. New typefaces no longer followed the pen in hand. Modern typefaces have serifs, but the serifs are now horizontal instead of slanted, and they are very thin. Like a steel bridge, the structure is severe, with a radical thick/thin transition, or contrast, in the strokes. There is no evidence of the slant of the pen; the stress is perfectly vertical. Moderns tend to have a cold, elegant look.

Modern typefaces have a striking appearance, especially when set very large. Because of their strong thick/thin transitions, most moderns are not good choices for extended amounts of body copy. The thin lines almost disappear, the thick lines are prominent, and the effect on the page is called "dazzling."

decorative

Addled

FAJITA

JUNIPER

EXTRAVAGANZA

Improv, Inline

SCARLETT

Decorative fonts are easy to identify, if the thought of reading an entire book in a particular font makes you want to throw up, you can probably put it in the decorative pot. Decorative fonts are fun, distinctive, easy to use, often times cheaper, and there is a font for any whim you wish to express. Of course, simply because they are so distinctive, their powerful use is limited.

script

Carpe Diem

Reporter Two Shelley Volante

Linoscript Cascade Zapf Chancery

The script category includes all those typefaces that appear to have been handlettered with a calligraphy pen or brush, or sometimes with a pencil or technical pen. This category could easily be broken down into scripts that connect, scripts that don't connect, scripts that look like hand printing, scripts that emulate traditional calligraphic styles, and so on. But for our purposes we are going to lump them all into one pot.

Scripts should be used sparingly. The fancy ones, of course, should never be set as long blocks of text and never as all caps. But they can be particularly stunning when set very large. So be bold.

slab serif

Serifs on lowercase letters are horizontal and thick (slabs)

Vertical stress

Slab serif

Clarendon

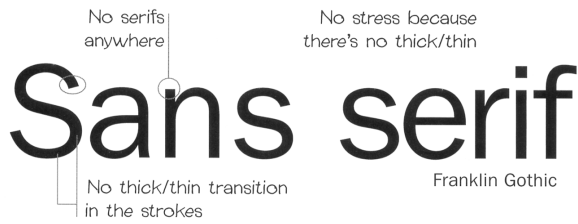
Very little or no thick/thin transition, or contrast, in the strokes

Clarendon Memphis
Memphis Extra Bold
New Century Schoolbook

Along with the industrial revolution came a new concept: *advertising*. At first, advertisers took modern typefaces and made the thicks thicker. From a distance, all you see are vertical lines, like a fence. The obvious solution to this problem was to thicken the entire letterform. Slab serifs have little or no thick/thin transition. This category of type is sometimes called Clarendon, because the typeface Clarendon (shown left) is the epitome of this style. They are also called Egyptian because they became popular during the Egyptomania phase of Western civilisation; many typefaces in this category were given Egyptian names so they would sell (Memphis, Cairo, Scarab).

Many of the slab serifs that have a slight thick/thin contrast (such as Clarendon or New Century Schoolbook) are very high on the readability scale, meaning they can easily be used in extensive text. They present an overall darker page than oldstyles, though, because their strokes are thicker and relatively monoweight. Slab serifs are often used in children's books because of their clean, straightforward look.

sans serif

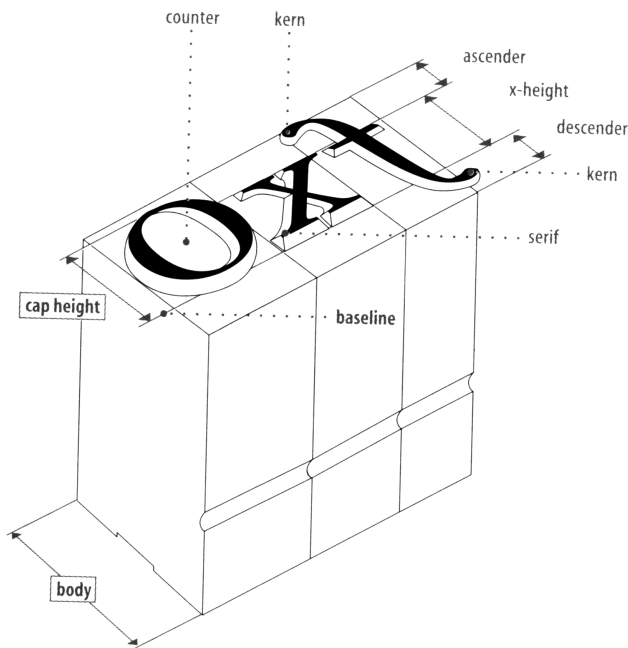


Antique Olive Formata
Gill Sans Franklin Gothic
Folio Syntax

The word "sans" means "without" (in French), so sans serif typefaces are those without serifs on the ends of the strokes. The idea of removing the serifs was a rather late development in the evolution of type, and didn't become wildly successful until the early part of the twentieth century. Sans serif typefaces are almost always "monoweight," meaning there is virtually no visible thick/thin transition in the strokes; the letterforms are the same thickness all the way around.

If the only sans serifs you have in your font library are Helvetica and Avant Garde, the best thing you could do for your pages is invest in a sans serif family that includes a strong, heavy, black face. Each of the families above has a wide variety of weights, from light to extra black. With that one investment, you will be amazed at how your options increase for creating eye-catching pages.

the letter



The problem with measuring letter forms is that there are not any real standards for type designers to follow. Typographic features like large x-heights, wide counters, and exaggerated ascenders are no less slaves to fashion than the perpetual changes in skirt lengths dictated by what's shown on Paris runways.

The size of type, indicated in points-(a point is .01384 inch; 12 points = 1 pica; 6 picas = 1 inch), is only a reminder of a historical convention, when type was cast on a body of metal. The body size of all 12-point type would have been the same, but the actual image on that body could be vastly different. Have a look at the 20-point types below, they don't have very much in common apart from the baseline.

The moral? What you see is what you get, trust your eyes not the scientific measurements.

Sizes Sizes Sizes Sizes Sizes