

Usability News is a free web newsletter that is produced by the Software Usability Research Laboratory (SURL) at Wichita State University. The SURL team specializes in software/website user interface design, usability testing, and research in human-computer interaction.

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Does the Typeface of a Resume Impact Our Perception of the Applicant?

by [A. Dawn Shaikh](#) & [Doug Fox](#)

Summary. Resumes play an important role when applying for a job. Unfortunately, many applicants focus only on the content of the resume and not the physical appearance. The typeface chosen to display the resume not only influences the physical appearance, but also influences how an employer may view the applicant. In this study, resumes displayed in a high appropriate typeface (Corbel), resulted in the applicant being perceived as more knowledgeable, mature, experienced, professional, believable, and trustworthy than when displayed in a neutral typeface (Tempus Sans) or low appropriate typeface (Vivaldi). Moreover, the applicant was more likely to be called for an interview when their resume was displayed in a high appropriate typeface than a neutral or low appropriate typeface.

INTRODUCTION

In our last issue of [Usability News](#), we discussed the impact of typeface on user perceptions of website text. In this article, we examine typeface appropriateness for resume documents. A common mistake when creating a resume is to solely focus on the content and not the overall design and layout. It is suggested that a resume must be both eye-catching and easy to read (Fletcher, n.d.). In fact, it has been suggested that two of the biggest pitfalls in creating resumes are poor layout and physical appearance (Creating a Resume, 2008, May 12).

Typeface selection plays a major role in the perception of physical appearance of a document. It would seem prudent that typeface selection should be based on legibility. However, typeface selection for a resume goes beyond the factor of legibility for two reasons. First, the type can have visual elements that influence perception of the resume separate from the actual content (Brumberger, 2001; Kostelnick & Hassett, 2003; Mackiewicz, 2004). Second, the type can influence the ethos of the document (Kostelnick and Roberts, 1998). Ethos is defined by the author's credibility and trustworthiness. Inappropriate typeface selection can cause a negative connotation with the ethos of the author. For these two reasons, it is important to carefully consider typeface selection for resumes.

Background of Typeface Appropriateness for a Resume

Shaikh (2007) conducted a study in which the typefaces most appropriate for resumes were determined by paired comparisons using Thurstone's Law of comparative Judgment (Thurstone, 1927a, Thurstone, 1927b). The appropriateness of the typeface was evaluated by showing the same resume side-by-side displayed in a different type. The resume was displayed in a third-order approximation to English so that context effects were removed. The resume was displayed in its entirety, but had a portion of the text enlarged, or zoomed-in. Participants were to focus on the zoom-in portion of the text when making their judgments. This presentation style allowed for the typeface to be displayed at an

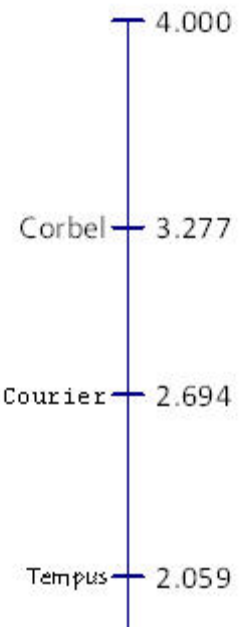
appropriate size (10 to 11 pixels), while also maintaining the layout of the resume (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. An example of the resume document used in the paired comparisons.

Walker, Smith, and Livingston (1986) suggested that certain typefaces are appropriate for different careers. Thus, the resume was displayed representing seven different careers (Butcher, Webmaster, Florist, Paralegal, Disk Jockey, Human Resource Assistant, and Statistician). Six typefaces were used to display the resumes. Based on the average proportion of times the typeface was chosen as the most appropriate, the typefaces were ordered along a continuum to represent the degree of appropriateness each represented for the different resumes. The results for the webmaster resume are shown in Figure 2. Even though it had been suggested that career influences typeface appropriateness, results suggested that the personality of the career did not influence typeface appropriateness. For all seven resumes, Corbel was judged to be the most appropriate. This typeface was neutral in personality and high in legibility. Tempus Sans was judged more neutral based on appropriateness for all seven resumes. Finally, for six out of the seven resumes, Vivaldi was the least appropriate typeface. The florist career was the only one judged to be more appropriate using Vivaldi.

Webmaster Resume



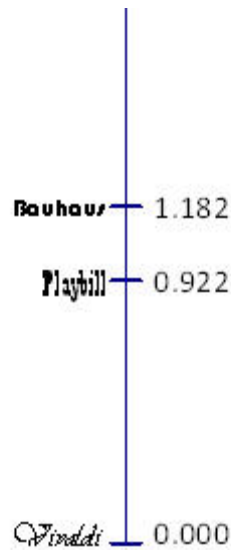


Figure 2. The average proportion of times a typeface was chosen as the most appropriate typeface when being compared to one other typeface. This figure shows results for the webmaster career.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine how typeface selection affected the ethos of the resume's author. Ethos is defined as "the disposition, character, or fundamental values peculiar to a specific person, people, culture, or movement" by <http://www.dictionary.com/>. The term is commonly used in communication to describe the believability or credibility of the creator of a message. It is hypothesized that a more appropriate typeface will have high believability and credibility, while an inappropriate typeface will have less believability and credibility.

METHOD

Materials

Based on the results of the six typefaces for perceived appropriateness, three were chosen to represent a high (Corbel), neutral (Tempus Sans), and low (Vivaldi) level of appropriateness. Since career framing did not influence appropriateness, content of the resume was based on neutrality. In a previous study (Fox, Shaikh, & Chaparro, 2007), a business resume was thoroughly tested for neutrality of content. This content was used for this study, and was presented as a resume for a salesperson. Figures 3a-3c show reduced samples of the three resumes used. The actual resume was no longer than one page. Snag It 8.0 was used to display images of the resume for the survey. An online program was constructed using PHP and MySQL to run the study.

<p>J. Doe University of Texas at Austin Austin, TX 78712 (512) 555-8963</p>	
Education	<p>Bachelor of Business Administration in Marketing University of Texas, Austin, TX College and Graduate School of Business Major: Marketing; Minor: Spanish Cumulative GPA: 3.8</p>
Professional Skills	
Professional Sales:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Telemarketed as an order-taker for Longhorn Supply, which involved learning and implementing

- sales presentation and conflict-resolution skills.
 - Solicited Austin business professionals for donations and sponsorships of UT Crew, Club Hispanic, and George Bush Hall events.
- Communications:
- Composed business news articles as an intern and authored editorial articles as a freelance columnist for the *Texas Business Weekly*.
 - Drafted professional letters for the Texas Bureau for Compliance Monitoring in an academic internship with the Migrant Farmworkers Association.

Figure 3a. Resume displayed in the most appropriate typeface (Corbel).

<p>J. Doe University of Texas at Austin Austin, TX 78712 (512) 555-8963</p>	
Education	<p>Bachelor of Business Administration in Marketing University of Texas, Austin, TX College and Graduate School of Business Major: Marketing; Minor: Spanish Cumulative GPA: 3.8</p>
Professional Skills	
Professional Sales:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Telemarketed as an order-taker for Longhorn Supply, which involved learning and implementing sales presentation and conflict-resolution skills. • Solicited Austin business professionals for donations and sponsorships of UT Crew, Club Hispanic, and George Bush Hall events.
Communications:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Composed business news articles as an intern and authored editorial articles as a freelance columnist for the <i>Texas Business Weekly</i>. • Drafted professional letters for the Texas Bureau for Compliance Monitoring in an academic internship with the Migrant Farmworkers Association.

Figure 3b. Resume displayed in the neutral appropriate typeface (Tempus Sans).

<p><i>J. Doe</i> <i>University of Texas at Austin</i> <i>Austin, TX 78712</i> <i>(512) 555-8963</i></p>	
<i>Education</i>	<p><i>Bachelor Of Business Administration in Marketing</i> <i>University of Texas, Austin, TX</i> <i>College and Graduate School of Business</i></p>

Professional Skills

Professional Sales:

- Telemarketed as an order-taker for Longhorn Supply, which involved learning and implementing sales presentation and conflict-resolution skills.
- Solicited Austin business professionals for donations and sponsorships of UT Frow, Club Hispanic, and George Bush Hall events.

Communications:

- Composed business news articles as an intern and authored editorial articles as a freelance columnist for the Texas Business Weekly.
- Drafted professional letters for the Texas Bureau for Compliance Monitoring in an academic internship with the Migrant Farmworkers Association.

Figure 3c. Resume displayed in the least appropriate typeface (Vivaldi).

Procedure

One hundred eighty-four participants completed a demographics questionnaire which included a series of question designed to assess their familiarity and experience with resumes. Only participants familiar with resumes were used in the sample. Participants viewed the web pages and answered a series of questions assessing their perceived ethos of the author. This included questions concerning the author's knowledge, maturity, experience, professionalism, believability, and trustworthiness. A 7-point likert scale (-3 to +3) was used to evaluate the ethos questions. In addition to the ethos questions, an "intent to act" question assessed the author ("If you were hiring new employees, how likely would you be to invite this applicant in for an interview?"). The final questions addressed the perceived gender of the author.

RESULTS

The ethos/intent to act questions based on the 7-point scale were investigated using a series of one-way between-subjects ANOVAs. The independent variable was typeface appropriateness as represented by three typefaces with three levels (high, neutral, and low appropriateness). The dependent variable for the ethos portion was the score on each question on a scale of -3 to +3. Post hoc tests for all ANOVAs were carried out using Tukey HSD pairwise comparisons. Chi-square (χ^2) analyses were run to determine the relationship between the typefaces and perceived gender of the author/intended audience and one additional question for the assignment.

The typeface appropriateness resulted in a significant effect on the perception of knowledge level ($F(2, 181) = 5.92, p = .003$, partial $\eta^2 = .06$), believability ($F(2, 181) = 17.36, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .16$), maturity ($F(2, 181) = 29.31, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .25$), trustworthiness ($F(2, 180) = 12.63, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .12$) of the author, and professionalism of the resume ($F(2, 181) = 52.89, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .37$). Post hoc analysis, in each case, suggested that the author of the resume using the appropriate typeface (Corbel) was significantly higher on that characteristic than the author of the resumes in neutral (Tempus Sans) or inappropriate (Vivaldi) typefaces. These results for professionalism, maturity, and trustworthiness are shown in Figures 4-6.

The question addressing intent to act ("If you were hiring new employees, how likely would you be to invite this applicant in for an interview?") was also significant ($F(2, 181) = 36.69, p < .001$, partial η^2

= .28). When compared to the neutral and inappropriate typefaces, participants were significantly more likely to invite the applicant for an interview when the resume was in an appropriate typeface (Figure 9).

A final question addressing the author's gender was evaluated using a chi square analysis. Results suggested a significant difference ($\chi^2 (2, N = 184) = 45.50, p < .001, \Phi = .50$) indicating that the author of the resume in Vivaldi was more likely to be judged as female; the author of the resume in Corbel was more likely to be judged as a male.

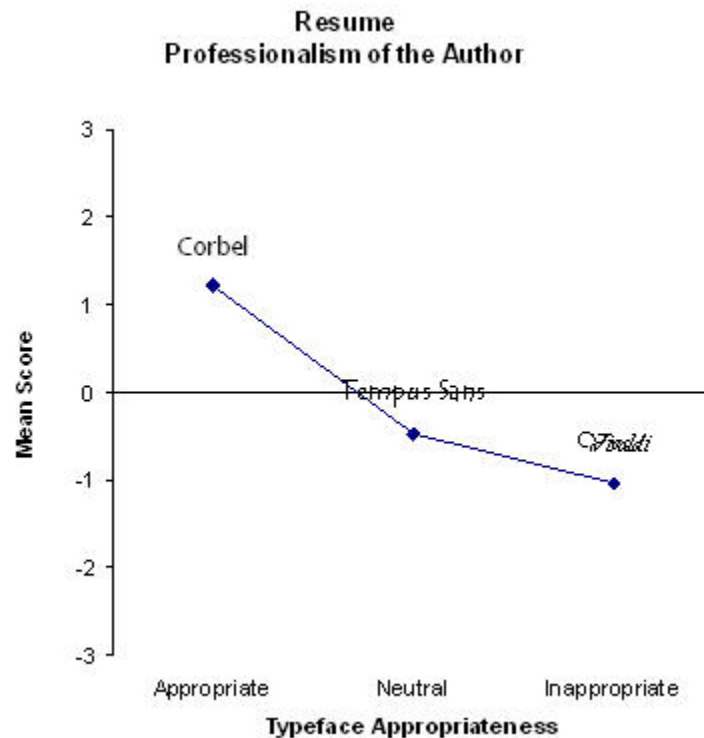
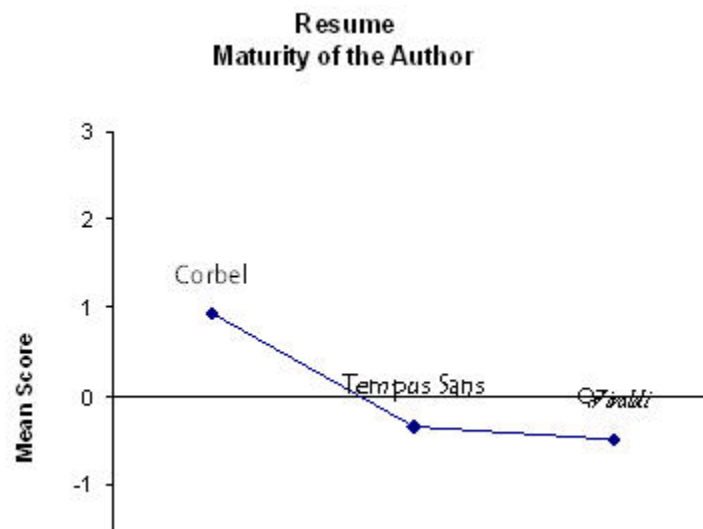


Figure 4. Perception of the professionalism for the author based on typeface appropriateness. The resume author using the appropriate typeface was perceived as significantly more professional than the authors using the neutral or inappropriate typefaces.



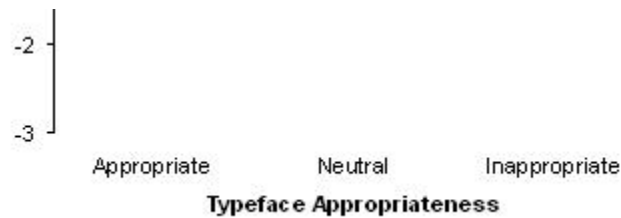


Figure 5. Perception of the maturity for the author based on typeface appropriateness. The resume author using the appropriate typeface was perceived as significantly more mature than the authors using the neutral or inappropriate typefaces.

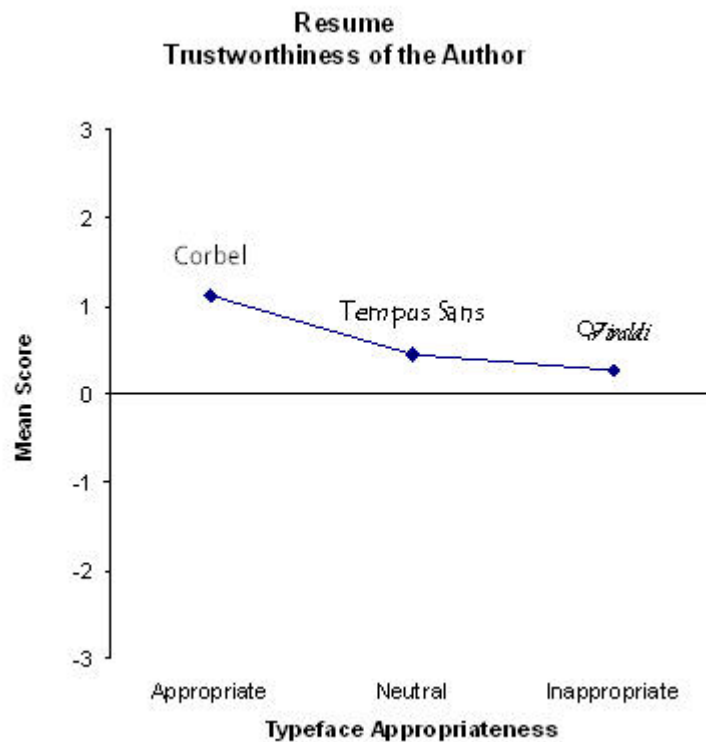
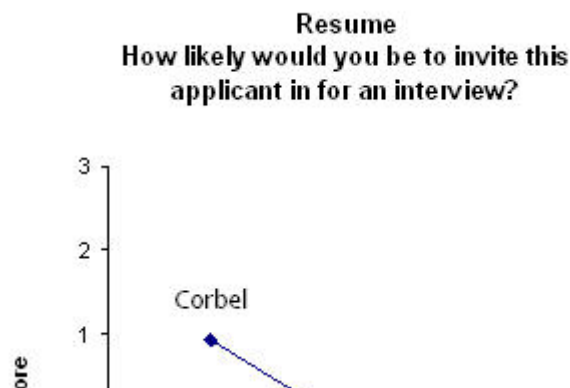


Figure 6. Perception of the trustworthiness for the author based on typeface appropriateness. The resume author using the appropriate typeface was perceived as significantly more trustworthiness than the authors using the neutral or inappropriate typefaces.



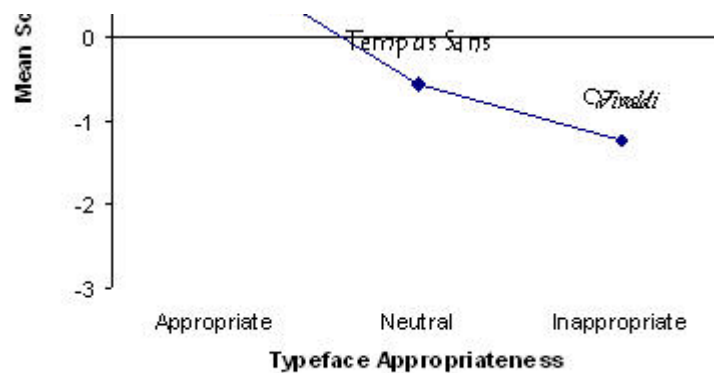


Figure 7. Results for whether the author would be asked for an interview. The resume author using the appropriate typeface was more likely to be asked for an interview than the authors using the neutral or inappropriate typefaces.

DISCUSSION

Typeface selection appears to have an effect on the ethos of the author. Authors using an appropriate typeface (Corbel) were perceived in a more positive fashion than those using a neutral (Tempus Sans) or inappropriate (Vivaldi) typeface. The author of the Corbel resumes was perceived as more knowledgeable, believable, professional, mature, and experienced. As a result, the author using Corbel was more likely to be called in for an interview as measured by the intent to act question. Thus, if a job candidate wants to be taken seriously, typeface selection is an important element of resume creation. Typeface selection cannot be solely based on legibility; it must also be based on perceived personality. Both the appropriate (Corbel) and neutral (Tempus Sans) typeface were highly legible; however, only the appropriate typeface was judged high for ethos. This suggests that there is only a small selection of typefaces such as Corbel that are appropriate for resumes, and neutral typefaces like Tempus Sans and inappropriate typefaces like Vivaldi should not be used.

*Note: This article presents only a small portion of findings from a comprehensive study investigating the perceptions of typeface personality by Dawn Shaikh. Please contact [Dr. Shaikh](#) for more information.

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