A Type Book on Univers

in Univers

This book will give you a brief introduction to typography along with an in-depth study of the typeface Univers created by Adrian Frutiger.

The Designer

Adrian Frutiger is one of the most important type designers to emerge since World War II. He is the designer of many notable faces—the best known being the sans serifs Univers and Frutiger—and was one of the first designers to create type for film.

Although Frutiger has said that all his types have Univers as their skeleton he felt, when he came to design a face for the Charles de Gaulle Airport at Roissy, that Univers seemed dated, with a 1960's feel. His airport face, originally known as Roissy but renamed Frutiger for its issue to the trade by Mergenthaler Linotype in 1976, is a humanistic sans serif that has been compared to Gill and Johnston types.

Frutiger has created a broad range of typefaces including OCR-B a type for optical character recognition. His 1982 Breughel is an original face almost wholly comprised of curves and fitting into no existing type category.
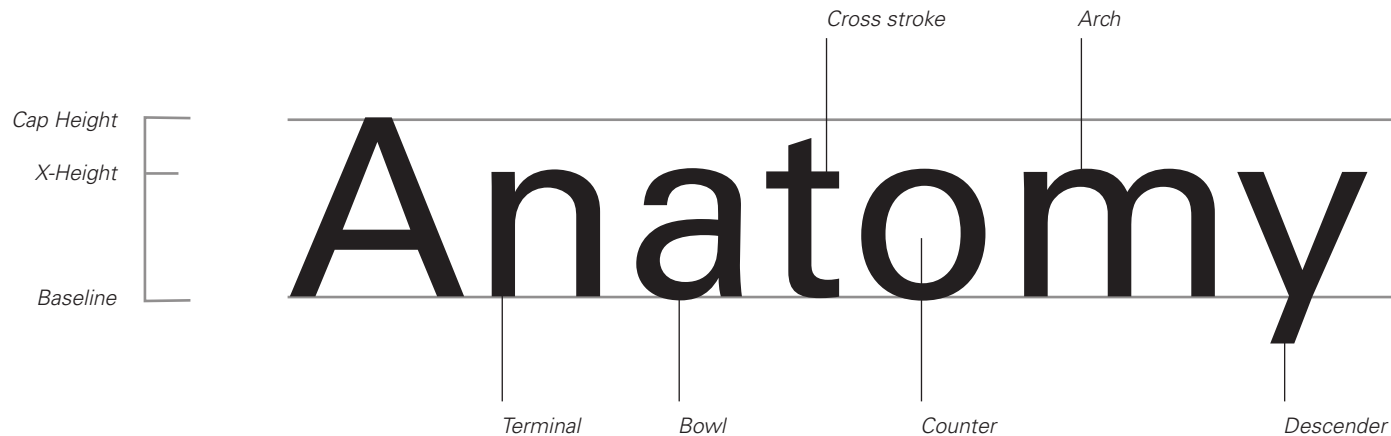
He has embraced new technology and used it to advantage in faces such as Centennial, a modern whose fine serifs are made possible by recent improvements in definition.[1]

Aa Bb Cc Dd Ee Ff Gg Hh Ii
Jj Kk Ll Mm Nn Oo Pp Qq
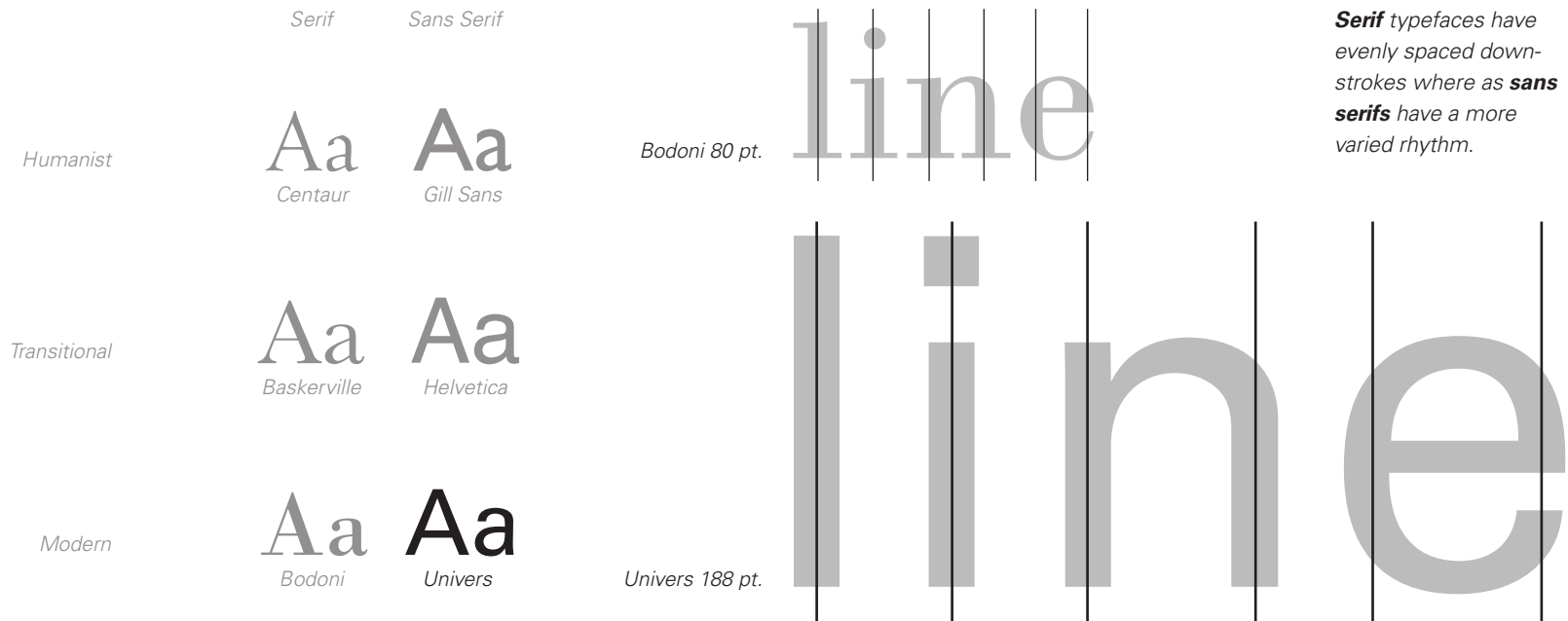Rr Ss Tt Uu Vv Ww Xx Yy Zz

Univers 33 pt.

A Brief Introduction to Type

Cross stroke   Arch

Cap Height

X-Height

Baseline

Anatomy

Terminal   Bowl   Counter   Descender

Let's start with some basic letterform anatomy:

The **cap height** is the height of uppercase letters, the **x-height** is the general height of lowercase letters, usually measured by the height of a lowercase x, and the **baseline** is where most of the characters sit. In the world of typography, there exist two general categories of type: serif and sans serif. Serifs are the small lines attached to the ends of a stroke in a letter or symbol. The topic of this book is the Adrian Frutiger's **Univers**.

Humanist

Aa Aa
Centaur *Gill Sans*

Transitional

Aa Aa
Baskerville *Helvetica*

Modern

Aa Aa
Bodoni *Univers*

Bodoni 80 pt.

line

line

Univers 188 pt.

Serif *typefaces have evenly spaced down-strokes where as **sans serifs** have a more varied rhythm.*

Type Classification

A basic system for classifying typefaces was devised in the nineteenth century, when printers sought to identify a heritage for their craft. **Humanist** letterforms are closely connected to calligraphy and the movement of the hand. **Transitional** and **modern** typefaces are more abstract and less organic. These three main groups correspond roughly to the Renaissance, Baroque, and Enlightenment periods in art and literature. Designers in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have continued to create new serif and sans serif typefaces based on historic characteristics. **Univers** is one of these sans serif typefaces.[6]

Gentle tapering
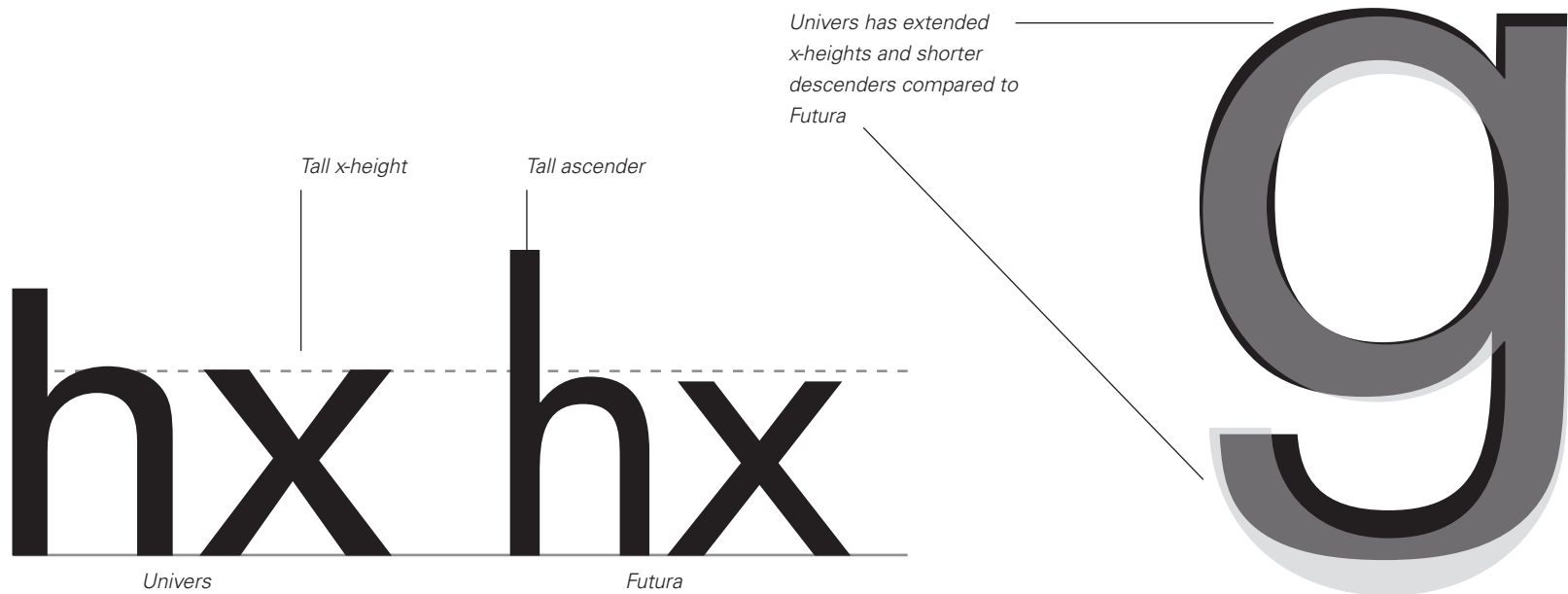
Not a perfect circle
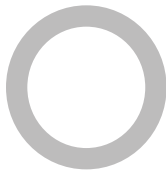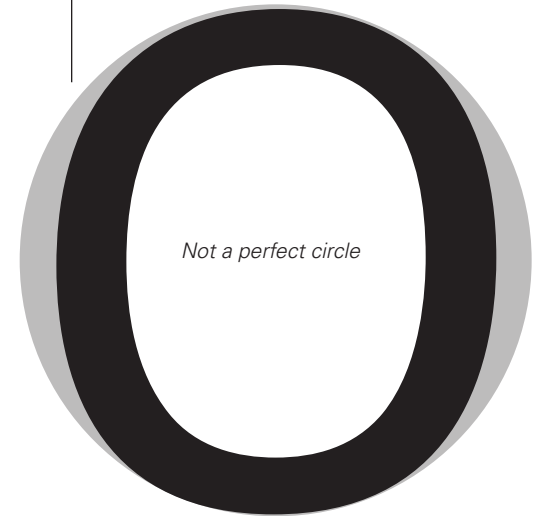
Perfect circle *Upper case* *Lower case*

Characteristics of the Typeface

To achieve the goal of an expansive, integrated type family, designers must be sensitive to the nuances of each letterform while simultaneously considering the overall system. In the case of Univers, this sophisticated approach to type-family design is supported by a well-considered set of typographical characters. Inspired by his study of the limitations of existing sans serifs, Frutiger began with the assumption that *"a purely geometric character is unacceptable in the long run, for the vertical ones; an O represented by a perfect circle strikes us as shapeless and has a disturbing effect on the word as a whole."* [2]

Univers has extended x-heights and shorter descenders compared to Futura

Tall x-height

Tall ascender

hx hx

Univers

Futura

Legibility

Frutiger himself is skeptical about theories of legibility and says legibility is solely a matter of habit. Despite this, Univers is famous for its legibility. Ascenders and descenders were shortened in comparison with existing typographic norms, and x-heights were increased. Larger x-heights also provided greater legibility,

addressing the concern that sans-serif type was more difficult to read than serif type. Univers has a multitude of weights that all focus on legibility, making it a very versatile typeface. Despite the difference in line weights specific to each font, the precise forms of each letter give the typeface an impression of homogeneity.[4]

Univers Weights and Widths

Each number corre-
sponds with a different
combination of **weight**
and **width**. The first
number represents the
weight of the lines and
the second number
represents the width
of the letters.

same point size

39   Univers
49   Univers
59   Univers
47 Univers
57 Univers
67 Univers
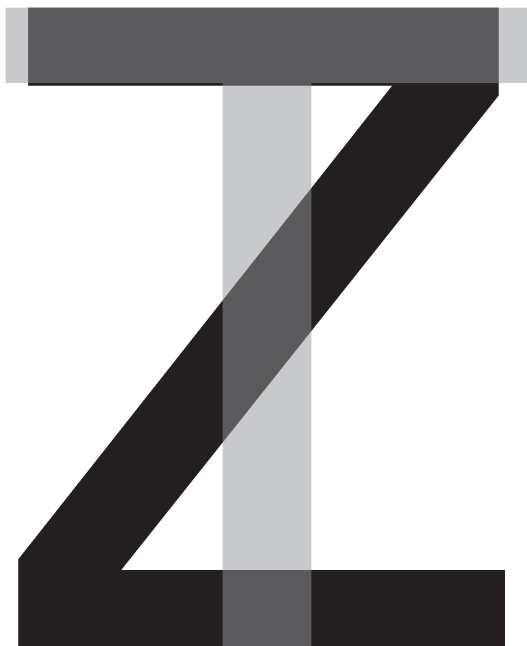45 Univers
55 Univers
65 Univers

*The lower the number
the lighter the weight*

*The higher the
number the more
condensed the type*

39 Thin Ultra Condensed *52 pt.*

**93 Extra Black
Extended** *21 pt.*

6

Z t

The T is slightly longer

The Z becomes thicker

In Univers, lower case letters with curved ends are cut horizontally. The T is angled to demonstrate Frutiger's respect for writing with a pen.

a e s k *Univers*

a e s k *Gill Sans*

Optics

By overlapping a Z and a T of the same point size, variation in stroke thickness becomes apparent. Frutiger's decision to use different stroke thicknesses for the horizontal, diagonals, and verticals was a response to his assessment of visual discrepancies in other typefaces. It is also no coincidence that Frutiger's interest in creating a functional and efficient type family followed well-documented scientific research done in the 1930s and '40s on the mechanics of eye movement during reading.[3]
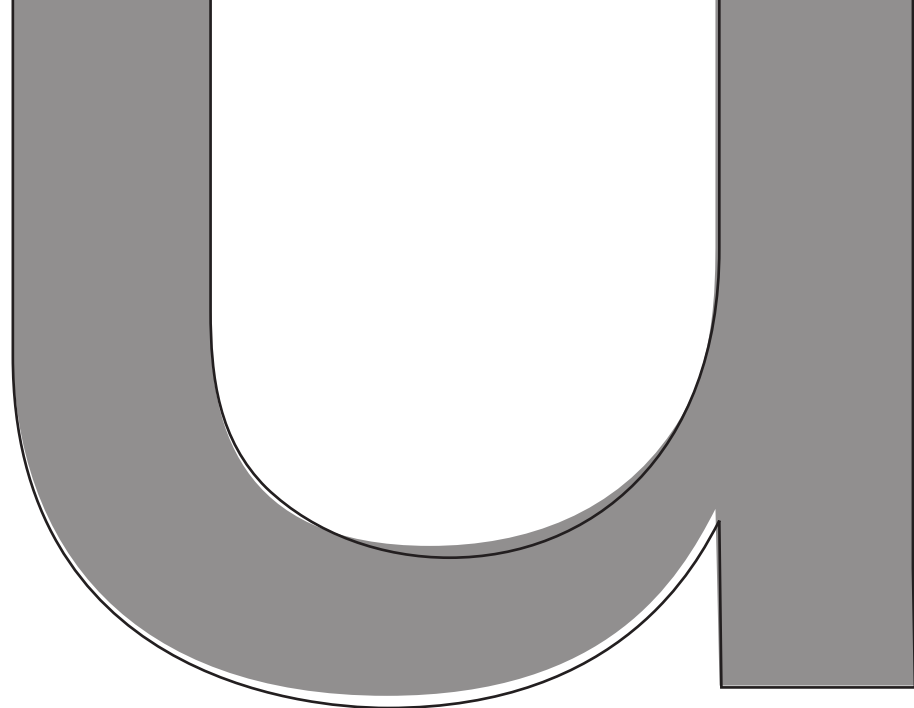
*The upside-down
N is slightly larger
than the U*
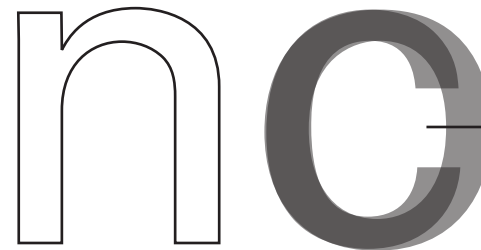
The c is smaller than the o because in open letters the white space achieves greater penetration into the form, thereby appearing larger. The n is slightly larger than the u because white entering a letterform from the top appears more active than white entering from the bottom.

While Frutiger's goal was to make letters that fit together so flawlessly that the assemblage formed a new satisfying gestalt, he also deemed it important that individual letterforms remain distinct from one another.[4]

R R R r r r

Helvetica   Univers   Optima

*The differences at **terminals**, the degree of **curvature** and the varying **heights** differentiate Univers from Helvetica and Optima.*

y y y Y Y Y

Comparisons

Univers font was created almost simultaneously with other successful alphabets: **Helvetica** (1957) and **Optima** (1958). Whereas Helvetica has a general clarity and a modern, timeless and neutral effect without any conspicuous attributes (lending to its great success), Univers expresses a factual and cool elegance, a rational competence. In comparison, Optima has a more organic form due to the subtle swelling at each of the terminals of a letter, [5]

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Gill Sans

Futura

Univers

Aa Qq Jj

Aa Qq Jj

Aa Qq Jj

Wide counter   *Flat tail*   *Square dot*

*The **A** of Univers has a wide counter compared to other typefaces.*

*The **Q** tail is attached to the exterior shape so as not to disturb the counter. The shape of the stroke can vary greatly between typefaces.*

*The upper case **J** curves around and is cut at the horizontal. Additionally, the dot is a square shape instead of a round one.*

Gill Sans and Futura share similar characteristics with Univers. Eric Gill created Gill Sans in 1926 and Paul Renner released Futura in 1927. All of these typefaces are geometric sans serif typefaces, but the unique treatment of particular letters sets them apart. "Built up from a geometric basis, the lines must play freely," Frutiger wrote, "so that the individuals find their own expression and join together in a cohesive structure in word, line, and page."[4]

Symbols and Numbers

? ? ? ? ? ?

?!"'':;.,/[(])#&=+*~<\>|}{^%$@`

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0

0 O o
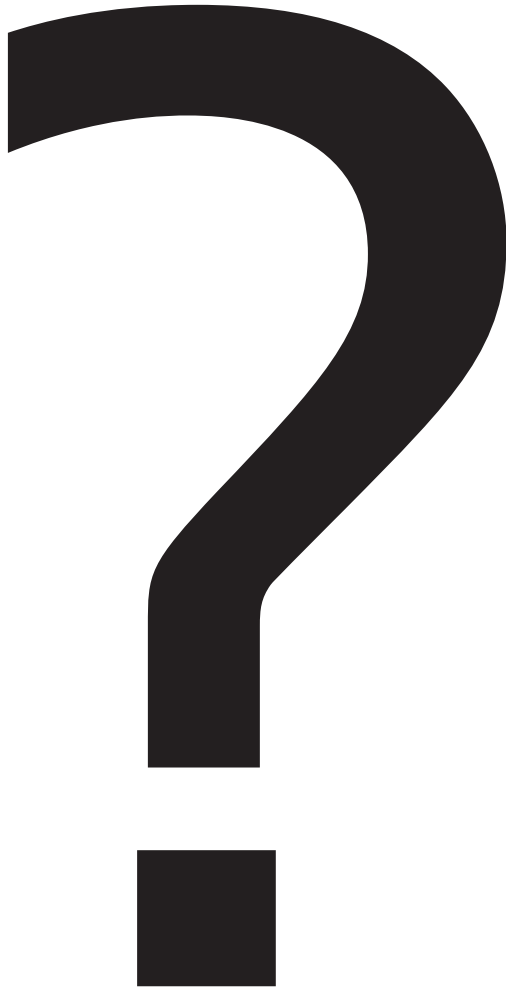
Zero   *Uppercase O*   *Lower case O*

One of the few incon-sistencies of Univers occurs in a discrepancy between the weights of the **question mark**. In two weights the curve is cut horizontally, while in the others it is vertical.

The numerals are narrow in comparison to the letters. This is most noticeable with the zero, which is impossible to confuse with an O.

Univers   *Gill Sans*

4   4

4   4

Helvetica   *Futura*

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2   Alexander S. Lawson, Anatomy of a Typeface (Boston: D.R. Godine, 1990), 304.

3   Jennifer Gibson. Revival of the Fittest: Digital Versions ofClassic Typefaces (New York: RC Publications), 171.

4   Ibid, 173.

5   Linotype Library GmbH, Available at http://www.linotype.com/7-267-7-13347/univers.html/Accessed November 1, 2005

6   "Type: Classification." Type: Classification. N.p., n.d. Web. 16 Apr. 2014. <http://papress.com/thinkingwithtype/letter/classification.htm>.