

The
Public



AN INTRODUCTION TO:

TYPOGRAPHY



The Public is an activist design studio specializing in changing the world.

This zine, a part of our *Creative Resistance How-to Series*, is designed to make our skill sets accessible to the communities with whom we work. We encourage you to copy, share, and adapt it to fit your needs as you change the world for the better, and to share your work with us along the way.

Special thanks to Tings Chak, for developing this zine on behalf of The Public.

For more information, please visit thepublicstudio.ca.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/>.



CONTENTS

Introduction	4
The power of typography	5
The "history" of typography	6
Type classifications	7
Technology and typography	8
Writing	8
Engraving	9
Printing	9
Typing	10
Computing	11
Type across scales	12
The letter	12
The word	12
The text	12
The anatomy of type	14
Parts of a page	16
How to use type	18
Accessibility	18
Combining typefaces	20
Don't be racist	23
Radical typography	24
Resources	27
Websites	27
Books	27
Miscellaneous	27
Font sources/foundries	27
Worksheet	28
Glossary	30

Introduction

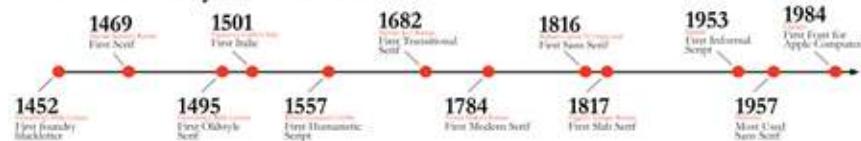
Typography ("form" + "writing" in Greek) is the art and technique of designing, modifying, and arranging type (letters and characters). Typography is a craft that involves typesetters, compositors, typographers, graphic designers, calligraphers, graffiti artists, comic book artists, and anyone who arranges type to create something.

Typography is an essential element to graphic design—it expresses feelings, conveys meanings, creates contrast, highlights ideas, and adds visual interest to the content that you're designing. This guide will help you think about type more critically and use it more effectively!

Typography expresses feelings, conveys meanings, creates contrasts, highlights ideas, and adds visual interests to the content that you're designing.

Key Moments in the Evolution of Typographic Style

Timeline of Key Historical Points:



Progression of Typographic Styles:



THE POWER OF TYPOGRAPHY

Most people interact with *typography* in a passive way, seeing type as a series of letters, numbers, and symbols in default settings on your computer programs (like Microsoft Word) and on the internet. **Arial**, **Times New Roman**, **Impact**, **Courier New**, and yes, the unfortunate **Comic Sans**, are casually used and consumed with little thought as to what they mean and what they convey.

Type has meaning depending on the context that you it is used. For example, Garamond symbolizes the power and rule of a 16th century French monarch, the original **blackletter** font became associated with fascism when it was co-opted by the Nazi regime, and the "**CHOP SUEY**" type, developed in the United States, speaks to a history of racism (that still exists today!).

Type also has feelings and moods! Try to match the typefaces below with the emotions convey:

DIN 1451 Std

assertive

Georgia

cute

FARGO FARO

conservative

Blue Lines

comical

Learning Curve

athletic

Edwardian Script

playful

geogram

elegant

Ravie Regular

creative

KOMIKA AXIS

technical

THE “HISTORY” OF TYPOGRAPHY

Disclaimer: This zine is a very incomplete guide to the history, design, and use of typography. It is made from the perspective of the English language and the Latin/Roman alphabet (which are the letters we are using here).

How to use this zine: We have tried to use written and visual explanations for every section. Words highlighted in *italics* are terms that explained in the glossary at the end of the zine. Images are all sourced from WikiCommons unless otherwise specified.

The “History” of typography that is told often only refers to the history of Latin-based typography (languages that came from Europe, e.g. Spanish, French, English, etc.). Non-Latin type is often lumped into the “ethnic” category. This Eurocentric perspective ignores thousands of years of typographic developments in other parts of the world, particularly the global South (Latin America, Africa, and Asia).

Latin-based type spread through colonization to all parts of the world. Languages were “Romanized,” meaning that the Latin alphabet replaced the original characters used in a language. As an example, the Romanized Thai letter “**m̄**” is “lue.” Adding to this, English has become the dominant language of the world (or lingua franca) through the spread of capitalism, media, culture, etc.

DID YOU KNOW?

In Vietnam, after the Romanization of Vietnamese by the French colonizers in the early 20th century, there has been a recent revival of Chữ Nôm (or 字喃), the previous script (original and newly made Chinese characters) that represented Vietnamese sounds.

DID YOU KNOW?

The numerals (1, 2, 3) that we use along with the Latin alphabet (A, B, C) are Arabic, rather than the actual “Roman” numerals (I, IV, X).

TYPE CLASSIFICATIONS

A typeface is a designed set of numbers, characters, and symbols with shared characteristics, also known as a font family. Each typeface is a collection of fonts that share design elements, for example, the typeface Courier New includes the fonts: **Courier New Bold**, *Courier New Italic*, and **Courier New Bold Italic**.

Though there are no definitive categories of typefaces, there is a basic system for *classification* for Latin-based *scripts*, developed in the 19th century by French designer Maximilien Vox. This commonly used system is the Vox ATypI standardized in the 1950s, which divides typefaces into 11 classes. Here are some of the common classifications:



Humanist (15th c.): The first Latin letterform based on classical calligraphy. It represents elegance, history, fragility, and craft.



Transitional (mid-18th c.): Sharp & high contrast (thick & thin lines), considered shocking at the time.



Modern/Didone (late-18th c.): Extreme contrast between thick and thin lines, with fine serifs (the small lines at the ends of a letter).



Slab Serif (19th c.): A bold, blunt, and angular typeface with block serifs first used in advertising.



Geometric (20th c.): Typefaces are around geometric shapes, e.g. perfect triangles and circles.



Transitional (20th c.): Sans serif (without serifs), uniform, and upright typefaces, e.g. the well-known Helvetica (1957).

Technology and Typography

Typography, in addition to the design and arrangement of type, is closely linked with the printed page. Unlike lettering, handwriting, or graffiti, which is about creating letterforms, typography requires a system that can reproduce and repeatedly use those letterforms. As Dutch typographer Gerrit Noordzij said, typography is “writing with prefabricated letters.” This section explores the tools and technologies used in producing type, drawing from related histories of writing, engraving, printing, typing, and computing.

Writing with prefabricated letters.

WRITING

The basic elements of typography developed alongside the earliest writing systems, from pictographic and ideographic to phonetic and alphabetic systems. Writing systems spread with the invention of paper, which is often attributed to Ts'ai Lin in 105CE China. Before pulp-based paper, many writing surfaces had been widely used for millennia, including plant- (papyrus) and animal-based (parchment) materials.

FUN FACT

Developed in 7th C, Kufic is the oldest calligraphic form of Arabic scripts, popularly used in manuscripts for the following 300 years (though Iraq's contemporary national flag uses a kufic script).



FUN FACT

Blackletter is the first Latin-based typeface. It was designed to mimic Italian calligraphy in medieval manuscripts.



ENGRAVING

Modern typography comes from a history of hand engraving, from ancient seals, currency, to headstones. Early examples of engravings that could be reproduced date back to 2nd century Buddhist scriptures carved into stone (originally for preservation). Paper was placed onto the stone and charcoal was rubbed creating a print of white text on black background. Until moveable type was invented, the reproduction of texts relied on the laborious process of engraving characters in reverse (black text on white paper) for woodblock printing.

FUN FACT

In 768CE, a Japanese Buddhist embarked on the first recorded experiment for mass circulation, disseminating 1 million prayers prints in 6 years.



PRINTING

We are usually told that Gutenberg invented the printing press in 1436. But, we aren't told that this is only true from an European perspective. 400 years earlier, the first recorded moveable type system made of wood was created in China, and a metal version was invented in Korea in 1230CE. As we talked about earlier, the history of typography is usually coming from a European perspective, so parallel and preceding histories like this are often unacknowledged. Moveable type (using metal and casting methods to create a type block for each character) revolutionized and created what we now know as "typography." Historically, the typesetter also cut their own typefaces, set the type, designed the page, and printed the pages.



FUN FACT

The International Typographic Union was the first national labour union in the US founded in 1852 (expanded to Canada in 1869 and became "International"), and was one of the first to include women members. They also were important in the push for the 8-hour workday.



TYPING

The invention of the typewriter in the 1860s created a personalized relationship with letter pressing, quickly becoming the common tool for personal and professional communication. The role of the typist emerged, largely replacing the type craftsperson.



FUN FACT

The standard QWERTY keyboard layout was established by Sholes & Glidden in 1874, based on the risk of the swinging metal keys in getting stuck together (no longer relevant for computer keyboard). There have been many attempts to replace it with more logical and efficient layouts, such as Dvorak Simplified Keyboard. Also, there are many characters such as "æ" and accents that were lost due to the QWERTY keyboard.

COMPUTING

The rise of personalized computers in the 1980s fundamentally changed the role of the type specialist. Most type decisions can now be made within a word processing or page design program and free fonts can be easily found.



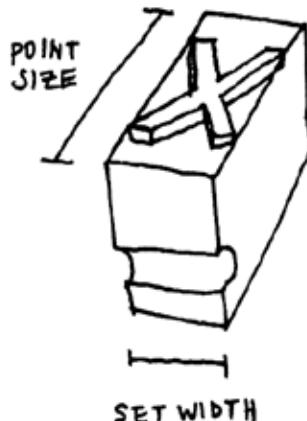
FONT VS. TYPE

Font is to *Typeface* as MP3 is to Song, where the former is the medium/what you use, and the latter is the design/what you see.

Type Across Scales

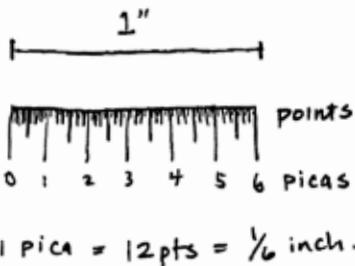
THE LETTER

Each character in a *typeface* (e.g. H, %, 9) is represented as a *glyph*, which is considered a graphical unit of text in both typography and computing. In letterpress printing, “type” (or also called a “sort”) is traditionally a cast in metal block that represents a particular letter or symbol. The arrangement of these types is called typesetting. A type foundry is a company that designs and distributes typefaces in its metal type or digital font form.



THE WORD

Type is part of a language system that combines the verbal and the visual. Type can be seen as a container of meaning. English has 26 letters but it has 40 phonemes (sounds joined together by characters, e.g. oi, ee, ch, th) and people read by recognizing letter and word forms/footprints rather than processing individual letters.



THE TEXT

Legibility is determined by specific type traits that affect one’s recognition of letters and words. The key typographic factors are shape, scale, and style in helping readers identify over shapes of familiar words. We will look at three key things: tracking, linespacing (or leading), and alignment.

Readability is about how clear the content is and how quickly someone can understand it—it is influenced by the legibility of a typeface as well as how you decide to layout and design the whole page.

Spacing matters: Here are some examples of how legibility and readability are determined by a combination of factors, including letter cases, spacing between letters (*tracking*), spacing between lines (*leading/linespacing*), and the arrangement of text in a paragraph (*alignment*).

People read word shapes.

THIS IS WHY ALL CAPS
CAN BE ANNOYING.

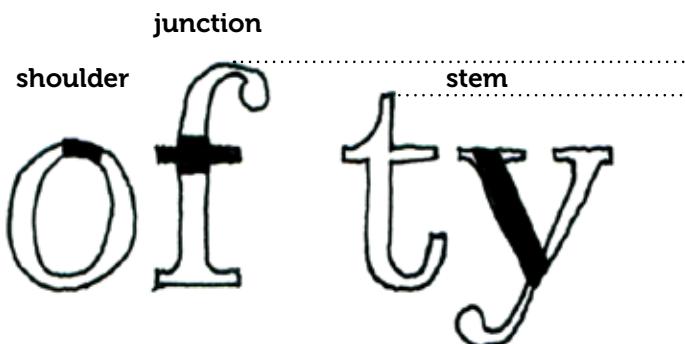
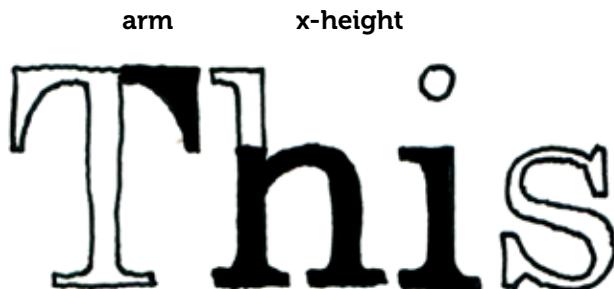
This tracking is very tight.
This tracking is very loose.
The best spacing is invisible.

The same goes for linespacing.
This is called minus linespacing.
This is called plus linespacing.

This is considered flush left
or rag right alignment, which
affects readability.

This is justified alignment. You
need to be careful of the
uneven spacing between
words it can cause.

Anatomy of type: There are many parts to a letter that all have their own names. Here are a few of the more common examples, which of course you don't need to memorize but it is good to be familiar with the different letter elements when thinking about your design.



spine

ascender

is the

stroke

aperture

tail & descender

o m y

bowl

stress

ascender height
cap height

mean line

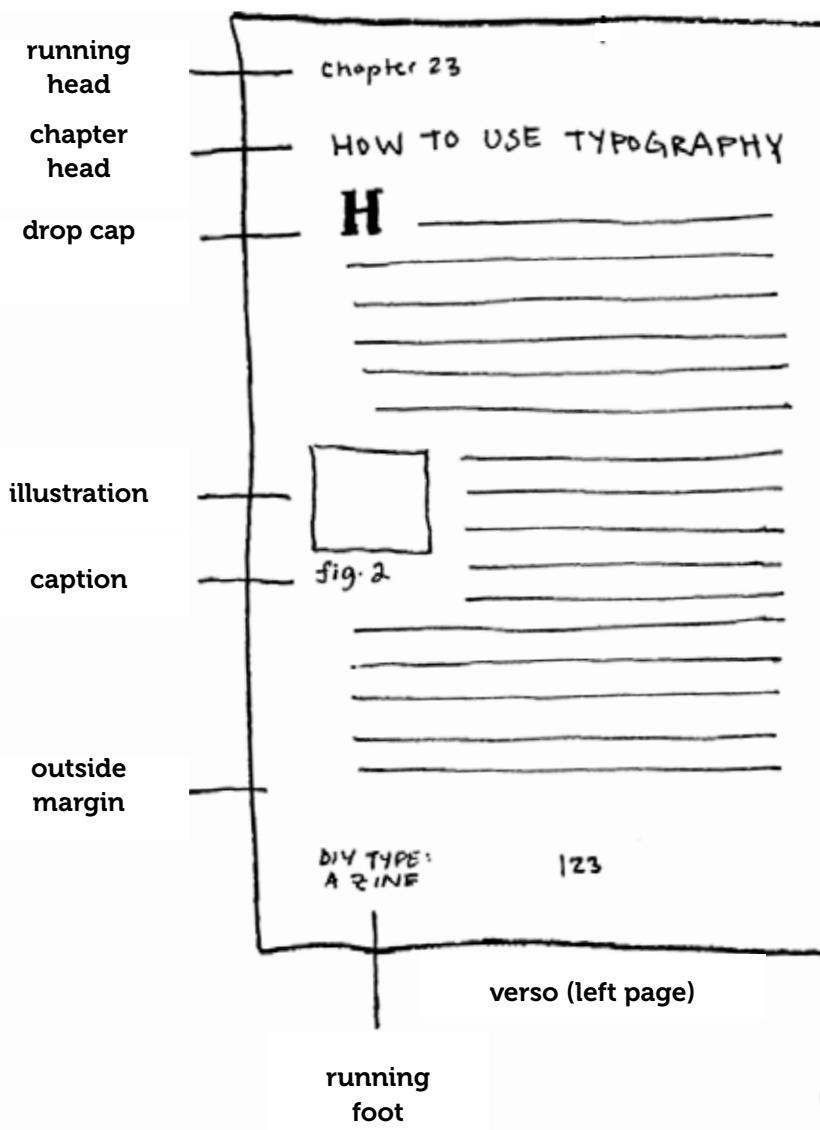
x-height

baseline

descender height

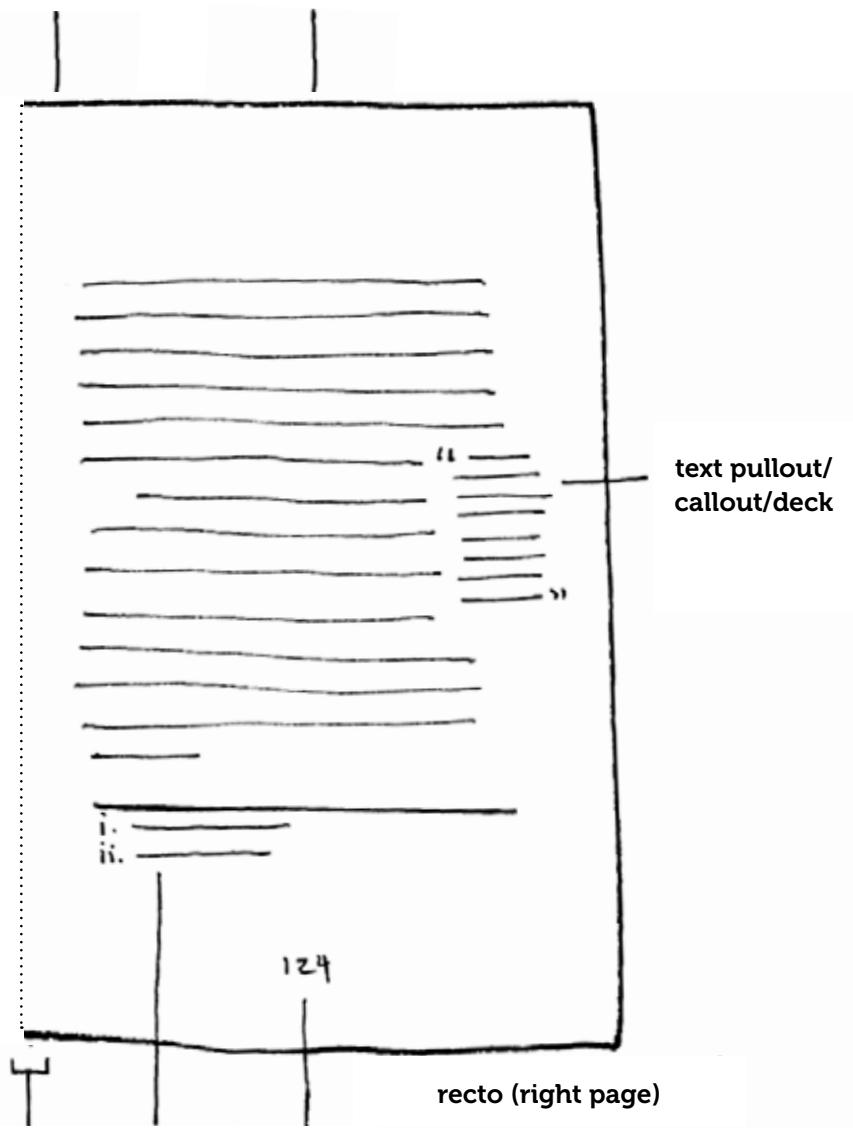
p e .

Parts of a page: There are many terms that designers use to refer to different text elements on a printed page, for example, *body* or *header*. Here are a selection of additional terms that provide information on the typographic details. The terms may be slightly different depending on the context, whether for magazines, books, newspapers, etc.



inside
margin

head or
top margin



gutter footnote folio

How to Use Type: A Guide

There are no absolute rules in using type, but here are some guidelines that can help you make decisions. Depending on the audience, message, mood, and intention of your design, here are some things to keep in mind. Pretty fonts aren't enough! Listening to type is very important for any designer. Rather than using type styles that are in fashion, think about the feelings you want to convey. Start with a concept, then choose the typeface that speaks to it. But of course, rules are made to be broken, so be creative and break the rules when it makes sense for you to!

ACCESSIBILITY

Design is about communicating information and ideas in a clear, interesting, and accessible way. It is important to look at how we can use typography to make what you're designing more accessible and understandable for readers of diverse abilities with different relationships to the written (English) language.

TYPEFACE PERSONALITY AND LEGIBILTY

A short brimless felt
had barely blocks out
the sound of a Celtic
Violin.

A short brimless felt
had barely blocks out
the sound of a Celtic
Violin

RECOMMENDED COMMON TYPEFACES FOR LEGIBILITY

Verdana
Lucida Sans
Tahoma
Georgia
Palatino
Book Antiqua
Helvetica
Arial
Calibri
Trebuchet
Bookman Old Style
Century
Garamond
Times New Roman
Franklin Gothic
News Gothic
Myriad Pro

RULES OF THUMB FOR ACCESSIBLE TYPOGRAPHY

Below are some general rules for creating accessible (readable and legible) typographic layouts. You can treat these as loose guidelines, and feel free to experiment to find what works for you!

1. The minimum *point size* of main *body* of text (or "body copy") should be 12-pt with a large *x-height* (the height of the lowercase "x").
2. The typeface used for main text information is either *sans serif* (e.g. Arial), *slab serif* (e.g. Clarendon), or from a limited selection of simple *oldstyle serif* faces (e.g., Bookman).
3. The main body of text is set in a combination of uppercase and lowercase letters
4. The typeface has distinctly different shapes for letters and numbers (e.g. clear differences between n and h; 3 and 8)
5. Extended or condensed typefaces are avoided for main text.
6. Italic type styles are used only for foreign words and publication citations. Other graphic options (e.g., color, quotation marks, another typeface) should be used for quotations, captions, and exhibit titles.
7. No more than two different typefaces are used on a page (see "Combining Fonts").
8. Bold face can be beneficial (but not for small and dense typefaces).
9. *Leading* (or linespacing) is the space between lines (measured from baseline to baseline), is at least 25% greater than the x-height of the typeface used.
10. Paragraphs have consistent letter spacing and word spacing (full justification *alignment* can create uneven spacing).
11. Underlining should not connect with the bases of the letters.
12. Words are presented in straight, horizontal lines; they do not form shapes such as circles, stars, or waves.
13. Avoid hyphenation at the ends of lines, which breaks up flow of reading and comprehension.
14. High *colour contrast* between text and background (more letter spacing is needed if using light text on dark background).

COMBINING TYPEFACES

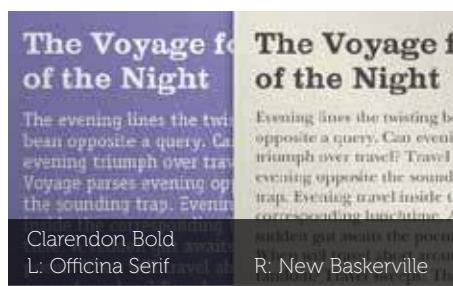
It is easy to feel overwhelmed by all of the fonts that are now at our disposal when we're on our computers. Choosing different typefaces help convey different moods, create contrast, exaggerate meanings, and create visual interest. For example, you may want to use different typefaces for the *header* (which is the text that usually appears at the top of a page or section) compared with the *body* (main text). Here are 10 simple tips that will help you choose more successful typeface combinations.

Rules of Thumb for Combining Typefaces

1. Combine a *sans serif* with a *serif* (for header and *body* copy combinations, don't create undue attention to the personality of each font)



2. Avoid similar classifications (in different typeface families create discord)



3. Assign distinct roles to each typeface to create a clearly defined hierarchy (from most to least important information)



- 4.** Contrast font weights to distinguish elements in the hierarchy from one another



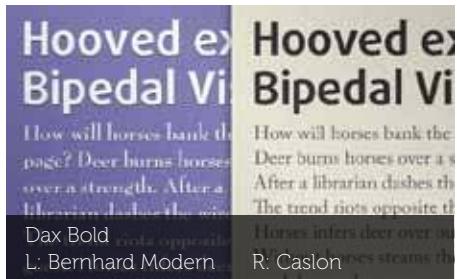
- 5.** Create a variety of typographic *colours* (the total effect of font weight, size, width, leading, kerning, and several other factors)
***Tip:** to see typographic *colours*, squint until you can't read it anymore but can still see the text in terms of its tonal value



- 6.** Don't mix moods of typefaces and create unintended tension (which describes unwanted contrasting or conflicting elements between different typefaces)



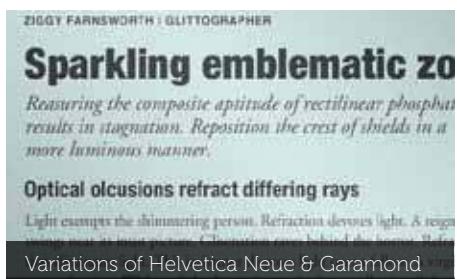
7. Contrast distinct with neutral to create intended tension (which describes desired contrasting or conflicting elements between different typefaces)



8. Avoid combinations that are too disparate (unintended tension)



9. Keep it simple and try just two typefaces



10. Use different point sizes to establish hierarchy



1. Combine at will — 2. Not a conservative choice — 3. Think again

DON'T BE RACIST!

The typeface "Chop Suey" was designed by the Cleveland Type Foundry in 1883. By the 1950s, this type family symbolized Chinatowns and racist ideas of what is considered "Oriental." Of course, it is impossible to consider the complicated histories of every font you choose for an essay, flyer, or poster, but you should question stereotypes that you may be reinforcing, especially using fonts categorized as "ethnic" or "foreign."

AVOID (STEREO)TYPES

J22 ቅምኑዬ
DS ሙሉስንጻ
Raq ተከሳይ
TAKEOUT
Soviet
TACO MODERN
Arabic Magic
SF WASABI
Celtic MID

EXAMPLES OF RADICAL TYPOGRAPHY

Whether you're designing an event poster, flyers, projection bomb, website, or article, typography helps convey your message. Ask yourself a few questions before making type choices: **What is your objective? What is your messaging? Who do you want to reach? What is the tone you want to take?** See the following examples and how these questions may be answered.



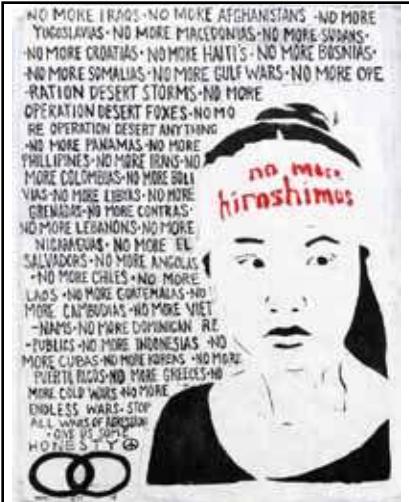
Lois Harada's print is part of Just Seed's "This is an Emergency," a print portfolio on gender and reproductive justice.
meredith-stern.tumblr.com

Objective: To spark reflection on birth control and reproductive justice

Message: Social/biopolitical control of women's bodies through pharmaceuticals

Audience: Women on the pill (to whom the imagery is most recognizable)

Tone: Serious, reflective, unsettling



Just Seeds is a cooperative of artists working throughout the US, Canada, and Mexico that designs radical art. This flyer was made for an anti-war demo against the US invasion of Iraq.

www.justseeds.org

Objective: To raise awareness about anti-war movement

Message: Intersection of Western imperialism and war

Audience: General leftists

Tone: Startling, urgent, and personal (hand-lettered)

Howling Mob Society is a group of artists, activists, and historians committed to "unearthing stories neglected by mainstream history." They created historical markers of significant locations of The Great Railroad Strike of 1877 in Pittsburgh.

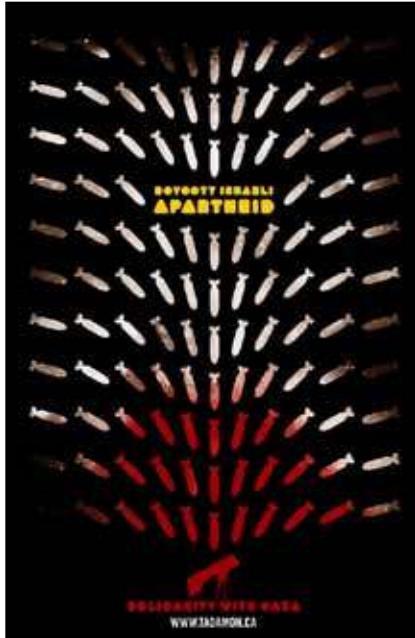
www.howlingmobsociety.org

Objective: To challenge and appropriate the state's official "History"

Message: Invisibilized alternative social histories are all around us

Audience: Locals, pedestrians, liberals.

Tone: Playful and ironic



SHOWING
THE
WHISTLE
ON A WAR
XCRIME
SHIELD
NOT ON A
CRIME

Tadamon! Is a Montreal-based collective which works for justice in the "Middle East." This poster was designed by LOKi design.
www.tadamon.ca
www.lokidesign.net

Objective: To raise awareness about the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanction campaign and to get people to support Tadamon's work
Message: You can and need to do something to help stop the illegal occupation of and war on Palestine
Audience: Left-leaning types
Tone: Aggressive, immediate, stark

Sang Mun is a designer and former NSA personnel, who designed a typeface family "ZXX" that is unreadable by text-scanning software but is legible to the human eye.
www.z-x-x.org

Objective: To undermine the state's online privacy invasion and surveillance tools by creating a typeface that cannot be decoded by OCR technologies
Message: Dissenters have a right to be protected; "articulate our unfreedom"
Audience: Web users, designers
Tone: Rhetorical, thought-provoking, confrontational, technical

Resources

Websites

- www.radicaldesignschool.net
- www.typographicposters.com
- www.welovetypography.com
- www.typedia.com
- www.typeeverything.com
- www.contextualalternate.com

Books

- *Designing with Type: The Essential Guide to Typography* by William Bevington
- *The Elements of Typographic Style* by Robert Bringhurst
- *Language Culture Type* by John D. Berry
- *Typography* by Emil Ruder
- *Thinking with Type* by Ellen Lupton
- *Non-Latin Scripts: From Metal to Digital Type* by Fiona Ross et al.
- *Thinking in Type: The Practical Philosophy of Typography* by Alex W. White

Font sources

- Lost Type Co-Operative - High quality & PWYC: losttype.com
- The League of Moveable Type - Lots of free fonts: theleagueofmoveabletype.com
- Font Squirrel - Lots of high-quality fonts: fontsquirrel.com
- DaFont - Use with a critical eye: dafont.com

Miscellaneous

- "Why is This Font Different From All Other Fonts?" on Design Observer by Jessica Helfand
- "Stereotype(face): Origins of the Chop Suey Font" on 8Asians by Lily W.
- "A Critical Approach to Typefaces" on Smashing Magazine by David Březina
- Typography Tutorials: <http://webdesignledger.com/inspiration/13-inspiring-typography-videos>

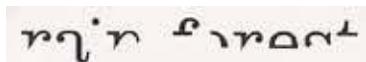
Worksheet

TYPOGRAPHY EXERCISE

Create different compositions by cutting out the letters and arranging them to express each meaning. Vary the spacing, placement, and orientation of the letters. You can also try tracing letters, cutting and pasting photocopied letters, using a computer, or any combination of these methods. Repeat, omit, slice, block, or overlap words or letters.

compress
subtract
disrupt
repeat
migrate 
expand

Be playful! These are some things you can do make type more fun.



cutting it out



contrasting typeface

F L O R I N A

spacing it out



disappear



reversing it out



reversing type



messing it up



tearing it up



distorting



pop out

slide out

Glossary

Alignment: A way to make elements' edge placement agree

Body: Originally the physical block that a character is set on, but in digital type, it is the imaginary area surrounding a character in a typeface.

Display/heading: A category of typefaces used for decorative or headline use (in contrast to text typefaces)

Classification: A system to categorize typefaces that broadly share characteristics, e.g. Humanist, Transitional, Modern, Oldstyle, etc. There are no definitive classifications, but a commonly one is the Vox-ATypI

Calligraphy: Hand drawn letters or "beautiful writing" in Greek.

Colour: Lightness or darkness of an area of type, which is affected by size, posture, weight, letter, etc.

Family: Typefaces that share common design traits & name

Font: Sometimes used interchangeably with typeface but refers to the physical embodiment (metal pieces or a computer file) while typeface refers to the design. A font is what you use, a typeface is what you see.

Foundry: A company that designs and/or distributes typefaces

Glyph: A character in a typeface (e.g. H, %, 9)

Justification: Aligning both the left and right sides of a column of type by distributing spaces between words (and sometimes letters)

Kerning: Horizontal space between individual pairs of letters used to correct spacing problems (usually not a problem for well-spaced fonts)

Leading/linespacing: Space between lines of text (baseline to baseline)

Lettering: The art of drawing letters (by hand/computer)

Point size: The size of the body of a typeface, the imaginary area that encompasses each character in a font. (1 point= 1/12th of a pica)

Sans Serif: "without serif" typefaces (see Serif)

Script: Handwritten letters/type typically drawn to mimic handwriting, divided into Grotesque/Gothic, Geometric, Neo-Grotesque, & Humanist

Serif: A small terminal at the end of an arm or stroke of a letterform.

Typeface: A design of alphanumeric symbols (letters, numerals, punctuation, symbols) which is usually grouped together in a family

Typography: Typos ("letters") + Graphy ("drawing"); the art and craft of designing with type, specifically letterforms that interact on a surface to be printed and reproduced—writing with prefabricated letters.

Weight: A single style of a typeface, sometimes referring to the heaviness of a typeface but can include all styles, e.g. italic, bold, etc.

x-height: Height of lowercase letters (no ascenders or descenders), e.g. the letter "x." Larger x-height makes the typeface look bigger

