

The Letter



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Historical  
**Development**

**T**he original Semitic letter for the sound of r may have been inspired by an Egyptian hieroglyph for tp or "head" as it was known in Proto-Sinaitic script. This hieroglyph was pronounced as "ra's". It

today, with dictionary.com claiming that the Greeks took the Etruscan letter for P and added a leg and turned it into R.

The Etruscan alphabet was derived directly from the Greek alphabet and their letter for P



Figure 1. Variations of the ancient Egyptian hieroglyph. for "head".

was adopted for use as the letter for r by ancient Semites because in their language, the word for "head" was rêš (also the name of the letter). The Greek alphabet contained a letter known as "rho", which originates from the Phoenician letter "rosh" and looks like a, sometimes backwards, capital P (figure 2). "Rho" is commonly cited as the main origin of the letter R, and likely originated from that ancient Egyptian hieroglyph. Some confusion has ensued as to the process of how exactly the letter "rho" turned in to the R we know

visually resembles something closer to a backwards lowercase r. So it is unlikely that the Greeks used the Etruscan letter for P to make R. In fact, the Etruscans had a



Figure 2

letter for R which looked like our modern day P. It is said that it developed into the

R we know today with it's extending leg after the Etruscans started adding a little leg on the bottom of it

to more easily differ it from their letter for P.

Additionally, seemingly completely by coincidence, since the Romans also wanted a character in their Latin alphabet to represent the sound of R they created a character that looks very much like our modern day R and is almost completely identical pronunciation and composition to the rune "raidō" (figure 3) used by the Germanic tribes to the north of them at this time. It is unknown whether or not there was any exchange of

ideas between the Germanic tribes and the Romans in the origin of this character, though it seems unlikely that they conceptualized the exact same character completely independent of one another.

The descending diagonal stroke on the letter R develops as a graphic variant in some Western Greek and Etruscan alphabets (writing rho as a P with a much smaller leg descending to the right), but it was not adopted in most Old Italic alphabets; most Old Italic alphabets show variants of their rho between a "P" and a "D" shape, but without the descending stroke. Indeed, the oldest known forms of the Latin alphabet itself of the 7th to 6th centuries BC, in the Duenos and the Forum inscription, still write r using the "P" shape of the letter. The Lapis Satricanus inscription shows the form of the Latin alphabet around 500 BC. Here, the rounded, closing Π shape of the p and the shape of the r has become difficult to distinguish.

The descending stroke of the Latin letter R has fully developed by the 3rd century BC, as seen in the Tomb of the Scipios sarcophagus inscriptions of that era.

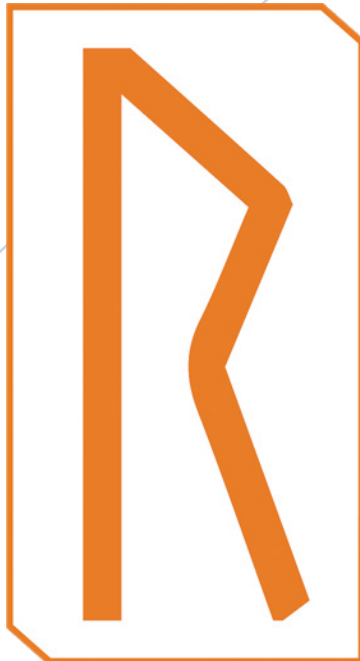


Figure 3



Figure 4. Render of a handwritten r rotunda, resembling the modern majuscule R without the stem.

From around 50 AD, the letter P would be written with its loop fully closed, assuming the shape formerly taken by R.

The minuscule (lowercase) form r developed through several variations on the capital form. Along with Latin minuscule writing in general, it developed ultimately from Roman cursive via the uncial script of Late Antiquity into the

Carolingian minuscule of the 9th century.

In handwriting, it was common not to close the bottom of the loop but continue into the leg, saving an extra pen stroke. The loop-leg stroke shortened into the simple arc used in the Carolingian minuscule and until today.

A calligraphic minuscule r, known as r rotunda (figure 4),

was used in the sequence with the letter o, bending the shape of the r to accommodate the bulge of the o (as opposed to or). Later on, the same variant of r was also used where r followed other lower case letters with a rounded loop towards the right to create a more fluid character, such as b, h and p. R rotunda was also used to write the geminate rr. Use of r rotunda was mostly tied to blackletter typefaces of the middle ages, and the glyph fell out of use along with blackletter type in English language contexts for the most part by the 18th century.

Insular script used a minuscule r which retained two downward strokes, but which did not close the loop as a majuscule R does “Insular r”; this variant survives in the Gaelic type popular in Ireland until the mid-20th century (but now mostly limited to decorative purposes).

The name of the letter in Latin was er, following the pattern of other letters representing continuants, such as F, L, M, N and S. This name is preserved in French and many other languages. In Middle English, the name of the letter changed from /er/ to /ar/, following a

pattern exhibited in many other words such as farm (compare French ferme), and star (compare German Stern).

The letter R is sometimes referred to as the littera canina (canine letter). This phrase has Latin origins: the Latin R was trilled to sound like a growling dog. A good example of a trilling R is the Spanish word for dog, perro.

In William Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet, such a reference is made by Juliet's nurse in Act 2, scene 4, when she calls the letter R “the dog's name”. The reference is also found in Ben Jonson's English Grammar.



# Styles, Form & Structure

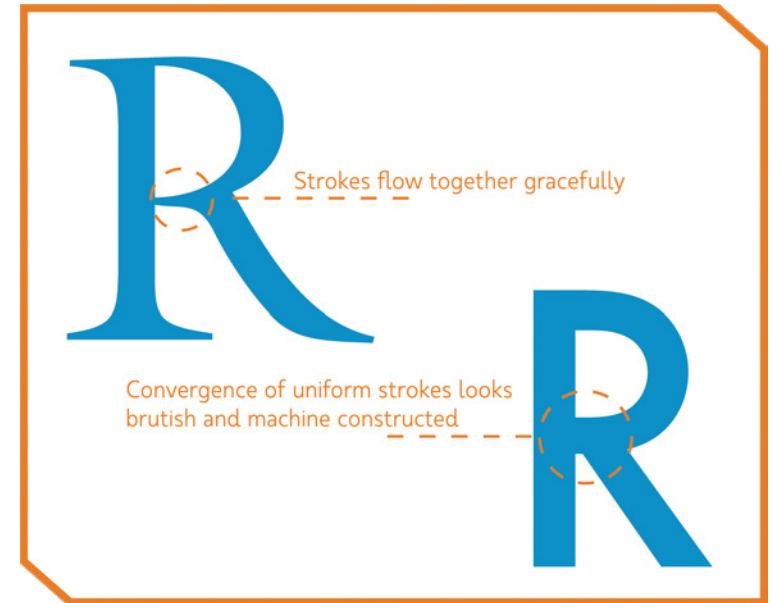


Figure 1

**T**he majuscule letter R is structured in a way that pulls from other letterforms to create its own unique letterform. It consists of a main stem running down the left, from this stem, at the top, extends a shoulder that forms a bowl within the enclosed space. Under the bowl is a leg that can extend from either the base stem or the stroke under the bowl. The point at which the leg meets the bowl is called a “joint” or a “junction”.

The structure of the majuscule R appears as if the top half of a majuscule P

and the bottom half of the majuscule K were stacked on top of each other thus creating this unique form. This is what this letterform has evolved to look like over time though it has no origins in the letters K and P. As explored in the previous section, this character has complex origins. When it finally reached the stage of the Roman letter R we know today it had a more elegant style, the different components of the R flowed with one another (Figure 1).

The modernist movement and the emergence of sans serif type in to popular material

changed the majuscule R to appear as more of a brutish figure, turning it from a series of elegant strokes to a half ellipse, a vertical line and a diagonal line (Figure 1). This form of the letter R can also be seen as exact, precise and mathematical, but it is certainly more of an imposing form.

The majuscule R in script typefaces (Figure 2), conventionally, will simplify the complex form of the R into two strokes: one stroke for the stem, and another stroke that starts to the left of the stem and works its way around the bowl, eventually turning into the leg.

Another interesting formation of the majuscule R comes from the Futura D Black typeface (Figure 3) in which the stem is simplified to be a rectangle and as such the bowl is a half ellipse and the leg is a triangle. This typeface takes this letterform and simplifies it down to its bare essentials, the rectangle, half ellipse and triangle. The miniscule r in this typeface is as well simplified down to its bare essentials with the stem being represented by a vertical rectangle and the arm and



Figure 2



Figure 3

ball terminal existing simply as a circle next to the stem of the letterform.

The miniscule, or lowercase r is a simple letterform that consists of a stem and a shoulder extending from the top right end of the stem. Sometimes the shoulder on the r is referred to as an arm. Generally, on the miniscule r in a serif typeface (Figure 4), the shoulder of the r leads into a "ball terminal," which is akin to

a regular terminal only more bulbous. In serif faces it is an odd shape of a letterform. With its bulbous ball terminal and its head serif so close together, it is certainly an odd composition for a letterform.

In slab serif faces we get a letterform in the miniscule r that is a little less confusing as the ball terminal is usually squared off into a downwards serif at the end of the arm.

Sans serif typefaces are the next step to simplifying the miniscule r and within a conventional sans serif typeface, the miniscule r appears as a rectangle for the stem and a basic, uniform stroke as the arm (Figure 4). The miniscule r in this form makes the most visual sense as

it is plain to see the elements that it needs to be comprised of. The miniscule r being a stem and an arm as it used to look like a smaller majuscule R but had the leg and the rest of the bowl cut out of it to increase convenience when hand writing this character.

An interesting case is the case of the minuscule r in script typefaces (Figure 5). This r, at first, does not appear to be an r for those unfamiliar. The script minuscule r takes the stem and swirls it around in a circle to turn it into the arm. Unlike the arm of the sans serif minuscule r, the script r has an extended arm that takes a turn downwards and back up. This form comes from the natural flow of handwriting a

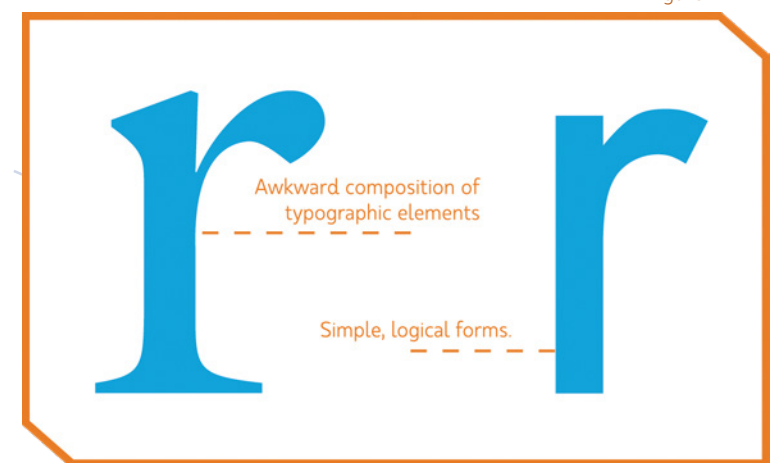


Figure 4

minuscule r. When handwriting a minuscule r as it appears in a sans serif typeface, it causes many problems as the writer must raise their writing utensil and spend time locating the

start of the next letter to continue their writing. With the minuscule r having an extended arm, they can flow this letterform into the following form with ease.



Figure 5



# Corporate **Identity**





View of the Ryerson Image Arts Center at their downtown campus.

Use of the letterform of R spans emblems and logos for many companies. It is a letterform that holds a great amount of possibilities for unique stylization and disposition that are immediately recognizable.

Ryerson University (commonly referred to as Ryerson) is a university that uses the R for its emblem, logo and sports team logos. It is a public research university in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Its urban campus surrounds the Yonge-Dundas Square, located at one of the busiest intersections in and around downtown Toronto.

The majority of its buildings are in the blocks northeast of the Yonge-Dundas Square

in Toronto's Garden District. Ryerson's business school, Ted Rogers School of Management, is on the southwest end of the Yonge-Dundas Square, located on Bay Street, slightly north of Toronto's Financial District and is attached to the Toronto Eaton Centre. The university has expanded substantially in recent years with new buildings such as the Mattamy Athletic Centre, in the historical Maple Leaf Gardens arena, former home of the Toronto Maple Leafs. The university's administration services are also housed in 1 Dundas and 495 Yonge Street. The university is composed of 39,000+ undergraduate students, 2,600 graduate students, and 12,000 continuing education students. Ryerson is ranked 4th in



Figure 1

Ontario and 10th in Canada by student enrollment.

Such a large institution should be built on a recognizable corporate identity. Ryerson's old logo (Figure 1) featured a serif typeface in white spelling out Ryerson University in front of their brand colours of a muted blue and stripe of gold, the typeface was atrocious, the lettering had an awkward demeanor and the placement of elements within the logo looked awkward and uninspired. Ryerson did not have much when it came to identity.

In August of 2015, Ryerson spent \$200,000 on a new brand, including a font and colour update.

The rebranding consisted of an extensive consultation process including eight focus groups, six round table discussions between undergraduates, graduate students and alumni, over 8,000 surveys, 40

one-on-one interviews as well as a competitive review of other universities.

The result was an updated logo (Figure 2) — the new marque keeps alive the traditional Ryerson blue-and-gold palette while employing a new "bold, sophisticated and innovative" font — and a new vision, which envisages the university as a fostering "inventive and purposeful thinkers and creators."

The creative execution is penned as a strategy to provide a "much more unified approach to communications that will distinguish Ryerson from other institutions."

To the chagrin of the administration, however, some students expressed discontentment with the usage

of school funds. "It looks like they took the old logo, then broke it," Josh Gonsalves, a student in RTA, said. "Could the \$200,000 not have been spent in a more beneficial way? Does a logo take priority over other important issues?" Kristina Kramer, a social work student, said. "Uneducated decisions, such as spending an obscene amount of money to paint the campus roads yellow

and blue, should not be made this easily by an educational institution," she continued.

McGinn addressed the possibility of such critiques saying, "The brand is more than a font or a logo, it's about our tone, manner, messaging, imagery, photos, graphic elements, typography and colour palette." McGinn also noted that the logo was "based on research and input



Figure 2

with students and potential students" and that the diversity of the student body was not only "well represented but also heard." After 20 years of "growth," it was finally time for the university to refresh its look, creating a "brand framework to reflect all of the great changes at Ryerson," she added.



Figure 3

This new logo features updated, more engaging colors with improved placement and layering, but, most relevantly, it features an updated typeface that replaces the old, horrendous logo type. The typeface used is Replica, which features a modern sans serif look with some letters, including the majuscule R, cropped at the sides. This R is not immediately recognizable as Ryerson's R. With simply a minor crop on the right leg of the R letterform, their brand now has an emblem that stands out.

Ryerson's sports team, the Ryerson Rams (Figure 3) also features a stylized R emblem.

This emblem (Figure 4) is bold, italic, slick and sharp. The R has a leg that points in to the spine of the R and immediately makes a sharp turn to outline the bowl before it meets the stem. On the top left corner of the letterform, on the stem, there is a sharp triangle that extends from the stem. This simple triangle and the sharpness of the end of the leg work together to create motion and athleticism in this R emblem. The sharpness of it also works alongside the concept of their mascot being a ram with sharp horns.

Ryerson has utilized the letter R in their emblems and logos over the years to a varying degree of effectiveness, but the one thing that has been consistent is that they are always recognizably Ryerson.



# Modern Day Language

## What R u doin'?

**P**eople today have varied the methods in which the letter r is used and pronounced likely more than ever before. With the rise of the internet age also rises the use of slang words that evolve at an ever accelerating rate. Along with the constant bastardization of slang words, the boundless content on the internet provides consumers with a display of accents from all over the world, instead of these accents being limited to geographical region as they were before the age of mass electronic media.

One of the most prevalent trends in English language inflection over the past couple decades has been the omission of the letter r in the

pronunciation of most words. Omitting the pronunciation of r is what is formally called a non-rhotic accent. Specifically in non-rhotic accents, the letter r is not pronounced except for when it comes before a vowel. In this sense, someone speaking in a non-rhotic accent would not pronounce the r's in "worker", but would pronounce the r's in rice or credit.

The reason that non-rhotic language has become such a trend in popular culture is due to the rise of hip-hop and R&B in the world of music. Up until the late 2010's, rock and pop dominated the charts as the most popular genres as it had for decades prior. In 2017, hip-hop and R&B surpassed rock as the most popular music

genres in the United States. Though in years prior to 2017, hip hop and R&B were still on the rise to popularity.

Hip-hop and R&B being genres dominated by black people of colour, the way they speak, the way they rap, and the way they sing has permeated popular culture along with thier music. Most rappers today, be them white, black, or any other race, likely do not pronounce most r's in a non-rhotic fashion,

due to the influence of the African-American accent that these genres of music were built off of. Examples being "gangsta" instead of "gangster" or "whateva" instead of "whatever". With these genres being so popular, they affect how the population talks day-to-day and aswell how slang is formed.

There is internet slang that was developed years ago that utilizes the letter r.



Offset, a member of the rap trio Migos, known for their inventive slang.

One example being the phrase "ROFL", which is shorthand for Rolling On the Floor Laughing. This is a dated piece of internet slang as it displays an absurd exaggeration of a reaction to comedy and requires one more letter to spell and one more syllable to pronounce than something as simple as "LOL".

Perhaps the most consistent and widespread uses of the letter r in internet slang is the

bastardization of the spelling of the word "are" into simply one letter "r". This is used in all sorts of casual, colloquial internet communications, be it texting a friend or sending a tweet, it is too convenient to just stop using over time. Aswell it helps that it is a piece of internet language that is based off of function and not comedy, as internet comedy is changing constantly with

the day old jokes being deemed unworthy.

The most common instance of the letter r being relevant in today's slang is actually when there is a lack of the letter altogether.

As stated before, with hip-hop and R&B giving rise to non-rhotic colloquialisms, today's slang words evolve to exclude the letter as well. This is apparent in the debasing of common words such as "player" to "playa" or shorty to shawty, a well known remover of rhotic r's is the rapper 2pac, known for songs like "Ambitionz az a Ridah."

Completely new slang words arising from internet culture everyday as well rarely contain the rhotic letter r such as yeet, lit, or drip.

With the way modern colloquialisms are moving, the rhotic r could be in trouble in the coming centuries of the english language. Not only because it is considered popular and cool to remove it, but also because it is convenient. Removing the rhotic r allows for easier pronunciation with less strain to pronounce the r sound.



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