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## Typography: The Art of Text

Every day we are exposed to literally thousands of different typefaces and word stylings. Everything, from advertisements to books to food packaging, has branding, design, and more importantly typography. Typography is the style or appearance of text, as well as the art of working with text (“Beginning Graphic Design”). When it comes to typography, one could spend a lifetime exploring the field. The concept of typography is extremely expansive and ever-growing. Typography has a rich history and countless innovations that have brought text from solely handwritten into the unending catalogue it is today. Because typography surrounds us at any given moment, the influence of typography is something that simply cannot be ignored.

### **History of Typography**

The history of typography goes back to the beginnings of writing. As long as there has been some form of writing or pictographs, typography has been there to take notice. According to the Futur Academy, movable type started in 1040 AD in Japan. Though, the first historical explosion in the field of typography comes with Johannes Gutenberg, who created the printing press and repeated type in 1440 AD and is considered the creator of typography as we know it. Prior to Gutenberg, bibles and books were written by hand, which was extremely expensive and time consuming (“Times New Roman”). The invention of the printing press was the launching point for what was to come for typography.

Gutenberg's typeface created for his printing press was called Blackletter, modeled after the writing style of the scribes. This typeface, which was beautifully drawn by the monks, became dense and difficult to read when printed. Within the same century, Nicholas Jenson created the first Roman Type typeface, inspired by the text found on Italy's ancient buildings. Jenson preferred this over Blackletter, as it had straight lines and regular curves, which were clearer when printed than Gutenberg's Blackletter (Barrett-Forrest).

Once Roman Type had become the standard across Europe, the next development that came was italics. Italics, now used for emphasis, were developed in the late 1400s by Aldus Manutius to save space on the page and money (Barrett-Forrest).

From the late 1400s to the 1700s, typography development lay dormant, as very few changes occurred. Until a few different men across Europe in the early 18th century began designing new typefaces; each of them having different tastes and styles; all of which are still often used today. William Caslon created the Old Style typeface, which has thick serifs: the little tags at the ends of letter strokes. Old Style also has low contrast between stroke thicknesses. John Baskerville established what is known as the Traditional typeface, which has thinner serifs and a higher contrast between thick and thin lines, opposed to Caslon's universally thicker lines. Finally, there were Didot and Bodoni, who shaped the Modern typeface, which has extremely thin serifs and extreme contrasts between thick and thin strokes. A majority of serif typefaces fit into one of these categories (but not always). It was not until 1816, when William Caslon's great-grandson, William Caslon IV, decided to remove the serifs all together from his grandfather's typeface. In doing so, he created sans serif fonts. (Barrett-Forrest).

Following the second Industrial Revolution came another massive explosion in typography. Paul Renner pushed for more fun, crazy fonts in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 1927, he

created Futura based on geometric shapes, creating the category of Geometric Sans. Eric Gill created Gill Sans around this time too, which was similar to Geometric Sans but was softer and less mechanical; this became Humanist Sans (Barrett-Forrest). This set into motion the modern-day phenomenon that is the realm of typography.

## **Typography and Design**

Nowadays, typefaces and fonts have a world of their own in design, personality, and study. Every font has different moods, styles, or vibes, such as casual, neutral, exotic, or graphic. Some fonts come with a reputation, like Comic Sans, Curlz, Papyrus. Although there is nothing intrinsically wrong with these fonts, many people harbor negative connotations and opinions of these fonts and the usage of them. Luckily, there are similar ones that are not as criticized or overused that give off the same feeling or goal, like Macondo or Cherry Swash, without the baggage (“Beginning Graphic Design”).

Typography has everything to do with design, and design has everything to do with typography. They go hand-in-hand; and together, they have their own “language.” According to Stephen Heller, an author of over a hundred books and expert in the field of design, “Typefaces are like speaking with an accent. Designers, that’s their language” (“Times New Roman”). Thinking about the message and implementing the typeface that best fits the project or product, intended audience, and the mood that’s trying to be achieved is key when incorporating typography in design (“Beginning Graphic Design”). Heller continues, “The [type]face, the style of the [type]face, these are the accents, these are the visual nuances, but at the same time are the sound of the typeface” (“Times New Roman”). The idea of type and font being a medium of art is something that seems to be a universal metaphor in the world of typography. When Paula Scher makes a composition, she thinks of the process as creating a “visual language as opposed to

[just] a logo.” She goes on to comment that “words have meaning, and type has spirit, and the combination is spectacular” (Brown). The use of words in design and art is a form of communication, not only with the consumers, but also a communication between the graphics and text.

In the PBS series, *Off Book*, Eddie Opara describes how he manipulates design and typography. When working on a project, he likes to focus on texture and readability of the typeface’s apparent texture. Oftentimes, he will take a common font and manipulate its design and texture to create a new, dynamic typeface that will stand out and fascinate. According to Opara, attractors need to be present, as too much text and not enough form or intention lacks dynamics and does not allow the poster or project to pop out when placed among others. Even if the viewer does or does not necessarily like what’s going on or what the visual and text are doing, it is getting their attention (Brown).

### **Accessible Typography**

An aspect of typography that has become more of a prominent focus in the field is accessibility. With the advocacy and care for the rights of those with cognitive disabilities and literacy conditions, designing and applying fonts that are accessible has become a necessary development in typography. According to Gareth Williams, a journalist at Medium, when choosing a typeface, taking into consideration a “typeface that enhances legibility and readability for people with poor vision, learning disabilities, aphasia, dyslexia, or low adult literacy is a paramount importance if you want your written information to be as accessible as possible” (Williams). Accessible typefaces need to have characters that are easily distinguishable from one another, clear and readable on electronics for the reader and for assistive technology, and created in a way that prevents reading struggles, rather than exacerbate them.

According to Williams' article on what makes a typeface accessible, a key concern he addresses is that it is vital to implement sans serif fonts and fonts that have characters with distinct differences from one another. If symbols resemble each other too closely, people with cognitive disabilities and/or reading difficulties can mistake or confuse these similar characters (Williams).

The issue of using fonts that possess characters that are troublesome to distinguish can be best described by the current United States Highway signage. According to Vox, Highway Gothic was designed "to develop a clearer and more legible standard for highway signs," ("Why the US has Two"). Since 1948, it's been the traditional font seen on signage all across the United States. Starting in the late 1980s, reflective sign materials were introduced to highway signage, which produced an issue for Highway Gothic. The problem that arose is called *halation*: "when light spreads beyond its proper boundaries, creating a halo effect." Elderly drivers, especially at night, were beginning to have a harder time differentiating letters, "as lowercase letters like *e*, *a*, and *s* started blurring" into similar, o-shaped letters. After research and in an attempt to construct a more accessible typeface for drivers, a new font, Clearview, which showed a 16-percent improvement in recognition over Highway Gothic, was approved in 2004 by the Federal Highway Administration to be used on an optional basis in the United States. Roughly thirty states adopted Clearview in some way; though, now there is no longer one consistent font on the highways ("Why the US has Two").

In accessible typography today, a newer set of typefaces have recently been added to Google Fonts. Lexend typeface, which has seven variants, has recently been licensed by Google as a more accessible font that users can use ("Accessible Typography"). When developing Lexend, the creators had three improvements in mind relating to accessibility: "a sans-serif font

to reduce cognitive noise, expand scaling to improve potential for character recognition, and hyper-expansion of character spacing, which creates a greater lag time and reduces potential crowding and masking effects” (“Homepage”). Testing results posted on their site show that students taking a reading accuracy and speed test did better when reading the text in Lexend than in Times New Roman (“Homepage”). The future of accessibility and typography, hopefully, will continue improving typefaces for those with vision impairments, cognitive disabilities, reading difficulties, and everyone in between.

### **Latest Trends and Projections of Typography**

When looking at current trends and peering into the future, Monotype, the foundry of Helvetica, keeps a keen eye on the ever-changing world of typography. In March of 2021, Monotype posted an informational video of current trends with type and what they see on the horizon. One of the speakers, Phil Graham, discusses trends that are making a strong influence, what is the effect the trend is having on typography, and the projections of where the trend is heading.

One trend Garnham discusses that’s making a wave in typography is in Virtual Reality. This is a rather new projection and is in the early stages of experimentation with Augmented Reality and Virtual Reality technologies. Garnham elaborates the idea of interactive type and text within the virtual environments; virtual engagement with typography where the user can “touch,” move, and alter text. (“Type Trends”).

Garnham also has noticed the comeback of typefaces that evoke nostalgia. Smooth fonts of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, like Cooper Black and Gouty Heavy Face, are being reimaged in new, innovative ways. Alongside this resurgence has been the desire for more crafty-looking, handmade-like fonts. Making something from scratch, even in a deep seated digital age, is

working its way back into the mainstream. With both of these styles and trends, companies want to design graphics and texts that welcome the consumer by sending messages of simpler times. The rounder fonts give off a relaxed, comfortable feeling, often paired with food advertisements and comfort goods. Companies like Burger King, Dunkin' Donuts, and Fisher-Price are utilizing this trend with their branding. The homemade-feeling fonts give off a local, authentic, natural vibe, which appeals to consumers who want personality and relatability in the products and companies they are interacting with. Mindful Chef and Oatly are great examples embracing this concept. This raw, "homemade" type trend, in particular, is being used and continues to grow in popularity by a wide variety of business sectors like "food, tourism, retail, wellness," and will continue to do so "for years to come," due to the informality and reassuring impression of the style ("Type Trends").

Although these trends come and go, these shifts and expansions in typography are dominating the world around us. The oscillation of typeface developments happens so organically, everyday people do not tend to consciously take much notice. The future of typography can change drastically in an instant or stay dormant. Though with the age of technology, it seems that typography is not slowing down anytime soon.

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