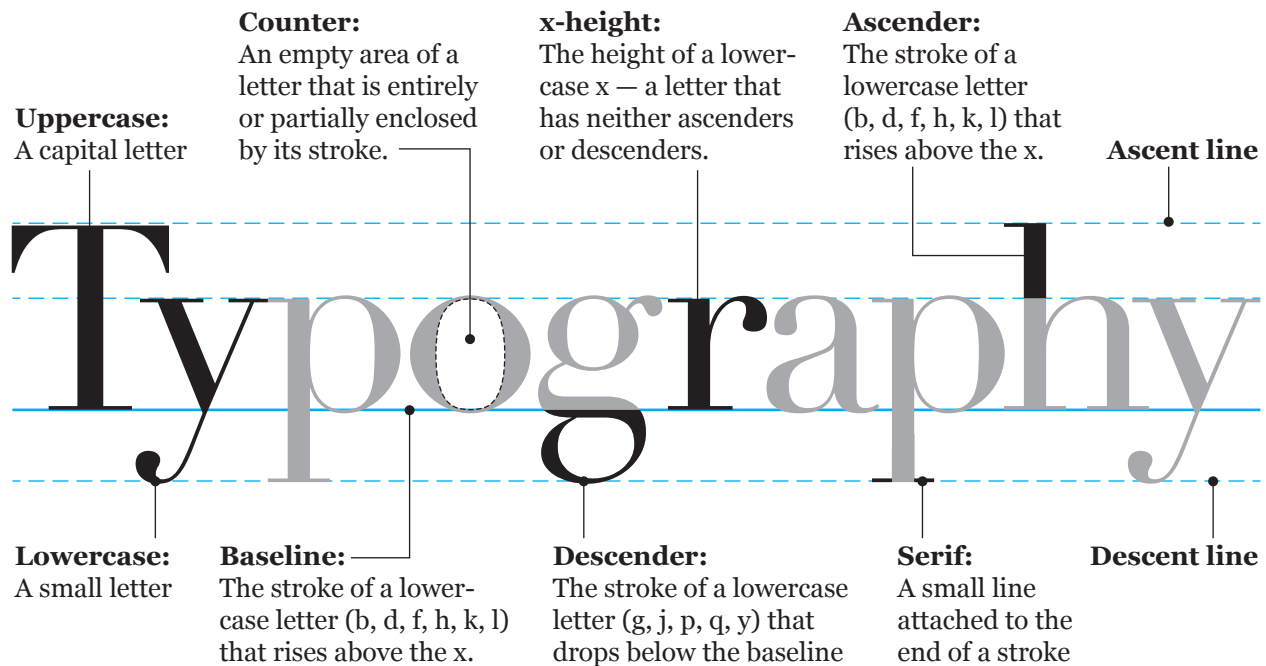# UNDERSTANDING TYPE

This handout explains a number of aspects of using typography in graphic design, including type anatomy, terminology, classification, variables and best practices for use.

BASIC ANATOMY OF TYPE

Counter: An empty area of a letter that is entirely or partially enclosed by its stroke.

x-height: The height of a lowercase x — a letter that has neither ascenders or descenders.

Ascender: The stroke of a lowercase letter (b, d, f, h, k, l) that rises above the x.

Uppercase: A capital letter

Ascent line

Lowercase: A small letter

Baseline: The stroke of a lowercase letter (b, d, f, h, k, l) that rises above the x.

Descender: The stroke of a lowercase letter (g, j, p, q, y) that drops below the baseline

Serif: A small line attached to the end of a stroke

Descent line

TYPOGRAPHIC TERMINOLOGY

Font: A particular size, weight and style of a typeface.

Example: **12-point Gill Sans Bold**

Typeface: A specific weight and style of a typeface family (at any size).

Example: **Gill Sans Bold**

Typeface family: A set of one or more fonts each composed of glyphs that share common design features.

Example: **Gill Sans**

Body text: The story text, set in columns across the page. In C226, we recommend using a serif font, 9 or 10 points for the body text.

Pictograph: A recognizable image that represents a word or idea.

Example

Ideograph: A symbol that represents an idea or concept.

Example

Phonetic symbol: A graphical symbol that stands for a sound. They are assembled in combinations to match sounds in words.

Example

Display type: Larger text within a design, such as for headlines.

TYPOGRAPHIC VARIABLES

Style: A variation of a typeface family, based on different weights (from light to bold), widths (from compressed or condensed to expanded) or angle (regular or italic).

Point size: How type is measured. One point is equal to 1/72nd of an inch (or, there are 72 points in one inch). Type is measured from the ascent line to the descent line.

Leading: The amount of vertical space between lines of type. It is measured from baseline to baseline, meaning if you want 6 points of space between lines of 12-point text, you would have 18 points of leading. Leading is often reduced in headlines so the lines of type appear more cohesive.

Alignment: How type is set on a page. There are four basic types of alignment:

LEFT — Type aligns along the left edge, with a rag (or irregular alignment) on the right. This is InDesign's default, suitable for body text.

CENTERED: Lines of type are aligned by their centers, with an equal amount of space on each side of the line. Use sparingly, and not for body text.

RIGHT: Type aligns along the right edge, with a rag on the left. Use sparingly, and not for regular body text, as it harder to read comfortably.

JUSTIFIED: Type is aligned on both sides, with variable word- and letter-space inserted to equalize the width of the lines.

Tracking: The amount of horizontal space between letters in lines of type or blocks of text. Keeping this amount at zero is usually fine for body text (small type), but you will likely want to reduce tracking for headlines (large type). You might also consider increasing this amount (open-tracking) to achieve a certain effect.

Tracking set at -50 (top) and 500 (bottom):

Tight track

L O O S E

Kerning: Adjusting the horizontal space between two individual letters to correct spatial inconsistency (often found with angled or curved letterforms). Use this only for display type, like headlines, and not for body text.

Avon Avon
Not kerned　　　　　*Kerned*

Indents: Additional horizontal space before the first line of a paragraph of text. First-line indents are used to distinguish paragraphs, which enhances the readability of body text. First-line indents should be no smaller than the point size of the text; wider columns may require larger first-line indents, but never more than four times the point size.

Changing typographic variables using InDesign's control panel:

Typeface family　Point size　　Kerning*　　　　　　　　　　　Alignment

Style　　Leading　　Tracking　　　　　　　First-line indent

TYPE CLASSIFICATIONS

Type can be broadly classified into four basic groups: serif, slab serif, sans serif and decorative. Below are some examples of each from our build on the computers in Franklin Hall.

Serif typefaces

Serif fonts are as old as Roman alphabets; their origin is widely believed to have been insertion (and exit) points from stone carving. Serif fonts are widely used in body text because they are easier to read over long passages.

RECOMMENDED SERIF FAMILIES

Athelas...4 variations*

Baskerville 6

Bodoni 72 4

Cambria..4

Adobe Caslon Pro 6

Century Schoolbook 4

Charter... 6

Cochin...4

Constantia 4

Didot 3

Adobe Garamond Pro 4

Georgia Pro / Georgia Pro Condensed 20

Hoefler Text...4

Iowan Old Style... 6

Lucida Bright 4

Marion..3

Minion Pro 10

PT Serif..4

Superclarendon **8**

Times New Roman..4

*This refers to the variations of this typeface available on the Frankllin Hall computers

Sans serif typefaces

Sans serif fonts — literally, without serifs — date from the nineteenth Century, when advancements in printmaking made it possible to produce letters that were stripped of non-essential details. The strokes of sans serif fonts end sharply, they are more uniform and their axis is straight up and down. Sans serif fonts are better used in shorter passages, as graphic text, and for display, though they are used for longer narrative text on some occasions, especially online and onscreen.

RECOMMENDED SANS SERIF FAMILIES

Slab serif typefaces

Slab serifs combine the boldness and impact of a sans serif font with the designed terminals of a serif font. They originated around the time of the sans serif, and were initially heavily used in advertising as overly bolded variations of classic serif styles. Their serifs can be squared (like Rockwell) or rounded (like American Typewriter). Some slab faces, like Clarendon, have bracketed serifs, which increase width along their length before merging with the main strokes of the letters, while others (like Blackoak) have blocky serifs with a constant width. Slab serif typefaces are best used today in small doses — as labels, for example.

RECOMMENDED SANS SERIF FAMILIES

Decorative typefaces

Typefaces that fall outside the other categories generally fall into this one – it's a catch-all for fonts that defy other classification. This category includes script fonts, illustrative fonts and those that are designed to resemble other writing styles. They can be used in graphic design, but should be used very sparingly, and only in display. It is usually best to avoid using two different decorative families in any design.

RECOMMENDED DECORATIVE FAMILIES

WARNING! USE AT YOUR OWN RISK!*

Every typeface has its admirers, and depending on the project, you can probably find a use for almost any font. But some fonts prove harder to use than others for a variety of reasons, and the fonts listed below, though widely available, are widely reviled. In J463 you aren't forbidden from using these, but be aware that each comes with a certain amount of baggage.

HANDLE WITH CARE

Apple Chancery

Comic Sans

Cooper Black

Copperplate

Hobo

Mistral

Lithos

Papyrus

Tekton

TIPS FOR CHOOSING BODY TEXT

There are a number of factors that must be weighed when selecting body copy — the "story content" of a piece of work. These include typeface (family), point size, measure, leading and alignment. But ultimately, the best choice is rooted in **readability** — the font's potential to be easily read over long passages.

GOOD

In most instances, body copy should be set in a readable, serif typeface that is neither too condensed or expanded, and which has a regular, or "book," weight. The goal of body copy is that it be comfortable to read over long passages, and bold or very light text does not support this, nor excessively wide or narrow typefaces. It must be noted, however, that "extreme" or "high-character" fonts have potential purpose as display typography, but that is often outside the requirements of a good readable typeface.

Size matters. For newspapers and magazines, which are designed to be consumed in the real world — that is, printed on paper and not shown on screens — the ideal body copy size is probably between 9 and 11 points. The amount of leading — the space between lines of horizontal text — varies by the width at which the column of type is set. The wider the column, the more leading is needed to help the reader move easily from line to line. Leading, like tracking, needs to be set neither too large or too small, but just right. In most cases, and especially with regard to body copy, alignment should be either left (ragged right), like the paragraphs above, or justified, as this paragraph is.

CAPITAL LETTERS CAN PROVIDE EMPHASIS, BUT MUST NOT BE USED IN LONG PASSAGES, AS THE LETTERFORMS CAN QUICKLY BECOME DIFFICULT TO DISCERN. *Bold weights and italics, too, should be used mostly to call special attention to a section of the text, but would present enormous readability issues if used for an entire story, or even a long sentence.*

Times New Roman, 9 on 10

A solid if unspectacular choice of body copy, well presented (except for the final paragraph).

TOO SMALL

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Times New Roman, 6 on 7

Type of this size does have a role, but should be used only for "small print" in a layout.

TOO BIG

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Times New Roman, 14 on 16

Type that is set too large for its purpose tends to look "horsey."

TOO SANS

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Gill Sans, 9 on 10

Sans serif type looks more modern, and here it is sized well, but try to imagine the difficulty of reading an entire book set in this typeface.

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