

Typographic Terms

When older typesetting methods gave way to electronic publishing, certain traditional terms got carried along. Today we use a mix of old and new terminology to describe typography.

Alignment The positioning of text within margins. Text flush with the margins on both sides is referred to as *justified*. Text is often aligned with only one margin, either the left or right and is then described as right- or left-justified, ragged left or -right, or flush-left or -right.

Ascender The stem of lowercase letters (such as k, b, and d) that ascends above the x-height of the other lowercase letters in a typeface.

Backslant A typeface with a backwards slant, the opposite of italic.

Baseline The imaginary line on which the majority of the characters in a typeface rest.

Body copy The main text of a document, as distinct from titles and headings.

Boldface A typeface rendered in darker, thicker strokes so that it will stand out.

Bullet A dot or other special character used to indicate items in a list.

Cap height The height from the baseline to the top of the uppercase letters in a font. This may or may not be the same as the height of ascenders.

Centered text Text placed at an equal distance from the left and right margins. Headlines are often centered.

Character In typography, a single element such as a letter, numeral, or mark of punctuation. The emerging term to describe these typographic elements is *glyph*, which is more descriptive when discussing non-Roman alphabet characters.

Character encoding An encoding is a table that maps character codes to the glyphs of a font. There are 32,768 possible typographic codes in the latest font technology, OpenType, designed to accommodate nearly any alphabet system known.

Condensed font A narrower version of a font that is used to get more characters into a given space.

Copyfitting A typographic process of adjusting the size and spacing of type to make it fit within a defined area or on a definite number of printed pages. Can be done by calculation, or by successive adjustments at the computer until a fit is reached.

Descender The part of a lowercase letter (such as y, p, and q) that descends below the baseline. In many typefaces, the uppercase J and Q also descend below the baseline.

Dingbats Non-alphanumeric glyphs. Dingbat fonts consisting entirely of these characters are a source of graphic symbols—such as arrows, bullets, and dividers—and other graphic ornaments.

Display type Type larger than that of the body text, used for headlines and display.

Drop cap A document style in which the first capital letter of a paragraph is set in a larger point size and aligned with the top of the first line. Used to indicate the start of a new section of text, such as a chapter.

Ellipsis A punctuation character consisting of three dots, or periods, in a row. It indicates that a word or phrase has been omitted.

Em, em space, em quad A common unit of measurement in typography. The em is the width of the point size. For example, in 12-point type, one em has a width of 12 points.

Em dash A dash the length of an em used to indicate a break in a sentence.

En, en space, en quad A common unit of measurement in typography. The en is typically half the width of the point size. It is half the width of an em space.

En dash A dash the length of an en is used to indicate a range of values. Some typographers prefer it to the longer em-dash to indicate a break in a sentence.

Flush-left ragged-right Text that is aligned on the left margin is said to be flush-left. If the text is unaligned on the right, so that it has a ragged edge, it is said to be flush-left ragged right. The term ragged-right is sometimes used alone to mean the same thing.

Flush-right ragged-left Text that is aligned on the right margin is said to be flush right and, if unaligned on the left, is said to be set

flush-right ragged-left. The term ragged-left is sometimes used alone to mean the same thing.

Font One style, weight, and width of a typeface. An example is Times Bold Extended. Times is a typeface family, Roman is a style, Bold is a weight, Extended is a width. The terms font and typeface tend to be used interchangeably.

In hand-set type, the term *font* described a *single point size* of a particular typeface design. Because digital-typesetting technology enables scalable fonts, the size defining a font is no longer applicable.

Font contrast Font contrast refers to the range of thickness of the strokes used to draw a font's characters. Helvetica has low contrast, for example, because the letters are drawn with strokes of uniform thickness. Bodoni, on the other hand, has high contrast.

Font family Also called a *typeface family*. A collection of similar fonts designed to be used together. The Garamond family, for example, includes roman and italic styles, several weights (regular, semibold, and bold), and several widths (extended and compressed).

Galley proof A proof that is close enough to final copy to permit proofreading. The traditional galley was a small unit of machine-set type, which was checked before being merged into a frame with other galleys. The galley proof—also called a *reader's proof*—was used to check for errors in typesetting.

Letterspacing Letterspacing adjustments are applied to a block of text as a whole, and are sometimes referred to as *tracking*. This is distinct from kerning, which adjusts space between pairs of letters. Letterspacing is used to improve legibility and to fit more or less text into the given space.

Ligature Two or more letters drawn as a unit. In some typefaces, certain pairs of letters overlap in unsightly ways if printed side by side. Substituting a ligature improves the appearance in these cases. Examples include the *fi*, and *fl* pairs.

Oblique A slanting version of a face. Oblique is similar to italic but without the script quality of a true italic.

OpenType OpenType solves the problems of previous font technologies. OpenType fonts are cross-platform and can contain character sets of tens of thousands of glyphs, allowing for typography in almost any language. Special characters, such as small caps and old-style numerals are included in OpenType fonts rather than being found in a separate font. In addition to scalable OpenType fonts, Adobe offers *Opticals*, series of OpenType fonts that are designed for setting in a narrow range of point sizes.



MyriadPro-Cond.otf

Paragraph rules Graphic lines that separate blocks of text and isolate graphics on a page.

Pi characters Special typographic characters, such as mathematical symbols, not included in ordinary fonts.

Pica A unit of measure that is approximately one-sixth of an inch. A pica is equal to 12 points. The traditional British and American pica is 0.166 inch. In PostScript devices, a pica is exactly 1/6 inch.

Point A unit of measure in typography. The original ANSI point was 72.27 to the inch, but the PostScript era ushered-in a new point that is exactly 72 to the inch.

Point size The common way to describe the size of a font. A font's point size is the distance in points from the top of the highest ascender to the bottom of the lowest descender plus a tiny gap for legibility.

Quad A typesetting term for a specified space size. For example, an em quad is the width of the point size, and an en quad is half that width.

Raised cap A design style in which the first capital letter of a paragraph is set in a large point size and aligned with the baseline of the first line of text. Compare to a drop cap.

Reverse type, reverse text Type that is printed white on black, or light-colored against a dark background.

Roman The upright style of a typeface, as contrasted with its italic version.

Sans-serif font A typeface without serifs, the tiny ornaments that are found on the tips of letter parts. Helvetica is an example of a sans-serif font.

Serif In typeface design, a small, decorative stroke appearing at the ends of the main strokes that define a letter.

Typographic Terms (continued)

Strike-through Text that has a line drawn through every letter, essentially showing cancellation. The technique is used when editing a document, and in legal printing, where the original text is shown, with strike-through, and the replacement text is printed nearby.

Style One of the variations, such as italic and bold, that comprise a typeface family.

Symbol font A font consisting primarily of mathematical symbols rather than ordinary letters and numbers. See *pi characters*.

Tabular figures Numerals that all have the same width. This makes it easier to set tables of data. Also called *lining numerals*.

Tracking The average space between characters in a block of text. Sometimes also referred to as letterspacing.

TrueType A scalable type technology.

Type 1 A standard format for digital type. Originally developed by Adobe, Type 1 was, until recently, the most commonly available digital type format. Type 1 has been replaced by OpenType fonts, which offer many more characters, multiple-language support, and stretchable elements for setting music and text in languages with such elements.

Typeface A design for the letters, numbers, and symbols comprising a font, often part of a family of coordinated designs. Individual typefaces are usually identified by a family name and some additional terms indicating style, weight, and width.

Typeface family See font family.

Typeface styles Within a typeface family, variants such as Roman and Italic.

Typeface weights Variants within a single typeface family, including thin, light, bold, extra-bold, and black.

Typeface widths Width variants within a single typeface family, including extended, condensed, and normal width.

Typographic “color” The consistency of a block of text. This depends on the thickness of the strokes that make up the characters, as well as the point size and leading used for setting the text block. When seasoned typographers refer to “color,” they are talking about textual consistency, the lack of rivers of white space in composed text, and evenness.

Widow A single word or part of a word ending a paragraph of type.

Word-spacing Adjusting the average distance between words to improve legibility or to fit a block of text into a given amount of space.

X-height Traditionally, x-height is the height of the lowercase letter *x*. As a general rule, it is the height of the body of lowercase letters in a font, excluding the ascenders and descenders. Some lowercase letters may extend a little bit above or below the x-height as part of their design, even without ascenders and descenders. The x-height can vary considerably among typefaces with the same point size, which is based on the width of certain uppercase letters.