

Type Families
Historic and characteristic
classifications of typefaces
researched by students

Black Letter

Black letter, also known as German Black Letter and Fraktur, was developed in Germany in the late 1400s. The Germans continued to print using this font into the 1900s.

Venetian Old Style

Dating from late 1400s in Venice, this readable family is characterized by minimal variation in thick and thin stroke weight, a small x-height, bracketed and cupped serifs, and ascenders that are higher than capitals.

Garalde Old Style

The faces have rounded serifs and moderate contrast between thick and thin strokes, and the letters are open, rounded, and very readable. The thick strokes of curved letters are inclined to the left.

Transitional

Transitional typefaces have greater contrast between thick and thin strokes than old styles, wider, more gracefully bracketed serifs with flat bases, a larger x-height, and curved strokes have a more vertical axis.

Modern

The modern typeface was a result of the work of Gianbattista Bodoni in the 18th century. It is characterized by high contrast between thick and thin strokes, vertical axis, and flat serifs usually at a 90 degree angle.

Slab Serif

Slab serif or Egyptian typefaces are characterized by blocklike serifs that are thick, flat, and extend out horizontally or vertically. They are usually best for designs in which the quality of print isn't the most refined.

Grotesque

Early sans serif type designs such as Franklin Gothic are called grotesque, a name coined by the English, who considered the first of these typefaces awkward and unappealing because they lacked traditional serifs.

Geometric

Geometric sans-serif fonts appear uniform and boxy. This family originated in the early 20th century and is used in signage, headings, and anywhere a clear, short statement is needed.

Neo-Grotesque

Neo-Grotesque, a refined version of the early Grotesque family, evolved with the International Typographic Style during the 1950s. The typestyle is recognized by its even widths, low contrast and large x-height.

Humanist

As sans serifs, the humanist typefaces mimic the form and structure of calligraphy and have more modulated strokes, attempting to make the neo-grotesque sans serifs more appealing.

Formal Script

As the name of this family implies, formal scripts are characterized by their flowing and ornate styles, typically with connecting strokes. Many, like Bickham, are based on the work of 18th century writing masters.

Casual Script

Casual script typefaces often mimic handwriting techniques with various instruments. Mistral typeface is a loose running script based directly on the handwriting of its designer, Roger Excoffon.

Hand Lettered

This family includes all of the fonts that are made to look like specific styles of printing. Many fonts represent invitation writing, drafting text, comic text, text in children's books, or just plain hand printing.

Decorative

Decorative typefaces use an artistic style to add personality, or to create a theme. Decorative fonts should be used purposefully and selectively for only for a word or a limited amount of copy.

Display

Display typefaces, as their family name implies, are intended to be used in larger sizes. Some may be designed with only capital letters. These fonts evolved to meet the needs of advertisers.

Capitals

Capitals are display typefaces with only uppercase characters. They may incorporate elements from many different typestyles and are used predominantly for listing or heading applications.

Monospaced

Monospaced type fonts are fonts in which all of the characters occupy the same amount of horizontal space. They are often used in software programs that use tables, charts, or graphs.

Typefaces
Examples that
chronicle about 500
years of evolution



Wilhelm Klingspor

Centaur

Goudy Old Style

Baskerville

Bodoni

Clarendon

Franklin Gothic

Futura

Helvetica

Optima

Bickham Script

Mistral

Tekton

Peignot

Cooper

Trajan

Courier

Students hand-drawn letterforms
Ascender, median, base, and
descender lines visualize x-height
differences among typefaces

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