

alphabet

SOUP



Like people, fonts have personality. You can convey subtle moods and shades of emotion by choosing a font that suits the occasion. Read on to find out why there are so many fonts and why composing your resumé entirely in Fancy Filigree Extended can result in a Futura that's Black!

During the days when word processing meant tapping away on a noisy typewriter, the only formatting you could do was to underline text that you wished to emphasise. If you were enterprising enough to upgrade your machine to include a two-colour ribbon, you could perhaps set off text in a different colour, most often red. That was it. No bold, no italics, no condensing or expanding. No way to get rid of ragged right margins. Till the personal computer came along and revolutionised the way we looked at the printed word.

Jostling for space

Typewriter fonts (letters) are usually 'fixed pitch'—implying that each character, whether it is an 'i' or an 'm', takes up the same amount of space. A fixed-pitch font such as Courier works well with the simple, mechanical design of a typewriter but is hardly ever used in printing large amounts of text in books and magazines.

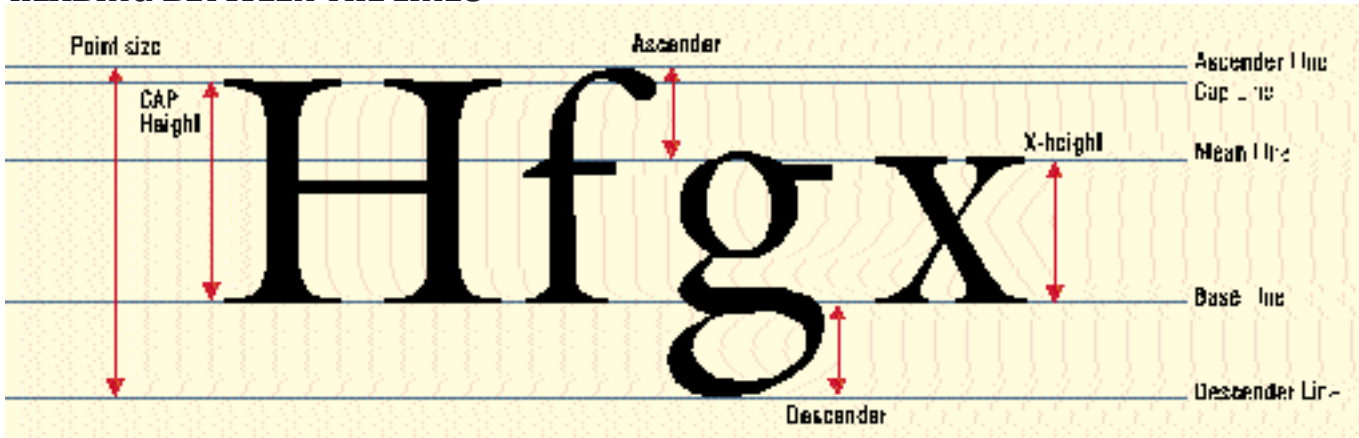
Commercially printed text and modern digital type used in computers are generally designed to be proportionally spaced. With proportional spacing, each letter is given just the amount of space it needs to look right and be most legible. Using a

proportional font, you can fit much more text on a page than with a fixed-pitch font, and improve readability too.

A question of type

Fonts can be broadly classified into bitmapped fonts and outline (or scalable) fonts. Bitmapped fonts, which are hardly used today, represent each character as a rectangular grid of pixels. A bitmap represents a particular instance of the character at a certain size and resolution, and so it is very difficult to change the size, shape or resolution of a bitmapped character without getting jagged edges and a general deterioration

READING BETWEEN THE LINES



in quality. Outline fonts, on the other hand, represent each character mathematically as a series of lines and curves and can thus be drawn (scaled) to any reasonable size.

Outline fonts are widely available in two types—PostScript and TrueType. PostScript fonts were developed in 1985 by Adobe and were meant for use with PostScript-compatible printers. In 1989, Adobe released Adobe Type Manager (ATM) which allowed PostScript fonts to be viewed clearly on a monitor and printed to non-PostScript printers. ATM, available free from Adobe, is also bundled with their free Acrobat Reader software. PostScript is used primarily by graphic designers who need to output to high-end PostScript imagesetters.

The other format, TrueType, was developed jointly by Apple and Microsoft in 1990 to circumvent licensing fees for PostScript. TrueType uses one font file to display type on a screen or printer, instead of PostScript's two. However, this single file is often larger than PostScript's two files per font. If you are not sure which format to go for, choose TrueType. It is easier to work with and requires no extra software.

And so we now have two widely used outline font specifications, one (TrueType) built into the operating system used by over 95 percent of computers worldwide, and the other (PostScript) used for imagesetting and in other high-end devices. Both are supported by most high-end output devices.

Recently, software giants Adobe and Microsoft announced the creation of a standard for type design, called OpenType. This will allow Web designers to embed all fonts using TrueType and PostScript. The compression technology of OpenType makes it especially relevant to the Internet, since it enables the embedding of type in documents and speeds up downloads. OpenType claims to support most advanced features of existing TrueType and PostScript formats.

Pirates ahoy!

The proliferation of fonts has resulted in widespread piracy. It is estimated that eighty percent of all fonts in use are illegally reproduced. Pirated versions of typefaces appear on the Net within a few

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software

Smart at Home

months of their release. Strangely, the courts do not allow type designers to copyright their work, justifying that letter shapes are in the public domain. However, they do allow type designers to copyright the names of their fonts and the software programs that create them.

To circumvent the law, many enterprising companies modify a designer's typeface slightly and give it a new, similar-sounding name. Thus we have a virtual plethora of fonts which may all essentially be the same. Helvetica is very similar to Swiss and Switzerland, and is only marginally different from that Microsoft favourite, Arial. Only a trained eye can tell the difference. (See box 'What's in a name!')

Until OpenType becomes widespread, there is danger that fonts on the Web will not be secure. It is all too easy to download fonts from the Web, especially from files formatted in Adobe's own Acrobat program. The more radical type designers are even programming new fonts in Java—which apparently makes things difficult for freeloaders.

Can one look for fonts on the Net then? Sure you can, but please make sure that the fonts you download are genuine free-ware or shareware. There are many sites from where you could unwittingly download pirated fonts, so it pays to be cautious. Any site that has a 'z' in its URL is suspect ('fontz' for instance). The OpenType format is expected to counter the trend towards piracy.

A 'typical' family

A typeface generally contains three variations on the regular 'normal' face: italic, bold and bold italic. However, many font families—Futura and Eras, for example—have been designed to include over a dozen variations in weight from light to ultra black; in addition to the standard variation in width from condensed to extended. Some families also include multiple character sets such as small capitals, ornate (fancy) capitals, old style figures and many more.

The variety enables you to achieve just the look you want and allows for a good deal of flexibility. For example, it is often necessary to make a given mass of type fit into a predetermined amount of space on the page. When space is a constraint, the

FONT OF KNOWLEDGE

How does a font differ from a typeface? Fonts and typefaces are not quite the same.



A font is of a particular point size and attribute (such as Roman or italic). Thus, Verdana Bold Italic at 12 points is a font, but Verdana is a typeface. The two terms are often used interchangeably, but typography purists often consider 10 pt Helvetica and 12 pt Helvetica to be separate fonts.

Why do I find certain non-TrueType fonts in my folder? I didn't install them!



Some fonts in the drop-down menu of your word processor may have a little printer icon next to them rather than TrueType's double-T logo, and you will also find some non-TrueType fonts in your fonts folder. These fonts are printer and system fonts, and come with your PC/printer. Do not delete these even if you think you will never need to use them!



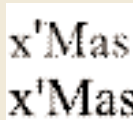
Why is type size measured in points? The point system originated in the eighteenth century in Europe, and was the

result of an attempt to standardise what was then a highly idiosyncratic and makeshift affair. The typographer Simon-Pierre Fournier proposed the point system in 1737, which won worldwide acceptance. There are 72 points in an inch, and 12 points make one pica.



What is the difference between serif and sans-serif? Serifs, cross-lines at the

end of a stroke, could be relics from the days when letters had to be brushed on to stone before cutting them. Serif (or Roman) types are preferred for large blocks of running text because the serifs facilitate readability. Serifs come in many styles, from the tapered serifs of Times Roman and Baskerville to the soft rounded serifs of Cooper Black to the slab serifs of Geometric and Clarendon. Fonts that lack these strokes are referred to as sans-serif (literally, without serif) fonts. Typical examples are Helvetica and Gothic.



What does the term x-height refer to? Traditionally, x-height is the height of the

lowercase letter x in a font. It affects the feel of a typeface, how many characters fit on a line and, depending on how the type is set, how easily your text can be read. At very small point sizes, a font with a larger x-height is easier to read, everything else being equal. Current trends in typographic design strongly favour larger x-heights.



(See illustration Reading between the lines).

Why is the distance between lines of type called leading?

During the days of metal type, printers inserted extra strips of lead (the metal) between long lines of text to make them easier to read. This procedure gave rise to the term leading (which rhymes with heading and not heading). Most word processing and page layout applications



let you adjust the leading in your documents. Leading, like fonts, is measured in points.

Why do we call capitals and small letters upper case and lower case respectively?

This is another convention that has come down from the ages of metal typesetting. To enable the compositor to assemble let-

ability to condense or expand a typeface can be really useful!

Mr Fontastic

So you managed to download a whole new set of snazzy fonts from the Internet and can't wait to try them out? Installing new fonts is not very difficult. In Windows 95, go to the Control Panel and open the Fonts folder. Under the File menu, select Install new fonts. Browse to the directory where you have the new .TTF files and click O.K. There! Your new fonts are installed. Just remember to keep the number of fonts within a reasonable limit, for they can quickly become unmanageable.

If there is anybody out there who still works in Windows 3.1, installation can be done by opening the Fonts icon in the Program Manager, clicking the Add button, selecting the .TTF files and clicking O.K. In a Macintosh, of course, all you have to do is drag the fonts on to your System Folder (after you have quit all applications). The fonts will automatically be placed in your Fonts folder located inside the System Folder.

Mera Bharat Mahan

Why install fonts for Indian languages? After all, very few people in India can type in any language other than English. You may not be much of a typist in, say, Devanagari or Kannada, but hopefully you *do* know how to read your native language.

MEN OF LETTERS

There are men from the past who live on in the System files of computers today. These are men who have had typefaces named after them not merely as an honour but because they were instrumental in creating them. Spare a thought for them when you select a block of text and set it to, say, Goudy Old Style or Caslon Openface.

Claude Garamond established a type foundry in Paris in 1545. The Garamond family of typefaces is easily recognised by its shallow x-height, probably designed to accommodate the many accent marks used in French. With a subtle elegance redolent of French Oldstyle, it is popular to this day.

John Baskerville was an English printer who strove for six years to create the ideal typeface. Though the thin strokes of the font he designed seemed impracticable in view of the printing technology current at the time, it did not prevent Baskerville from becoming one of the most popular fonts of all time.

William Caslon, an 18th-century British engraver, established a type foundry in London that produced a type distinctly English and well-suited to large

amounts of text. Designwise, Caslon seems to abound in strange flaws, but each isolated imperfection only contributes to a solid, balanced look when text is set in this type.

Giambattista Bodoni, one of the most prolific of all type designers, was the personal printer for the Duke of Parma in Italy the early 1800s. Called typography's arch-romantic, he spent most of his life refining a single typestyle that bears his name. With its thick stems and hair-line serifs, Bodoni looks most majestic in large sizes and is a staple font for newspaper headlines.

Frederic Goudy, in 1915, designed the typeface named after him. It is still a favourite with those who aspire for a classical elegance. The open counters and disproportionately large capital letters make Goudy take up more space than one would expect it to.

Oswald Cooper, a commercial letterer, introduced Cooper Black in 1920. The fat font, with its soft, rounded serifs, was absolutely unsuitable for any amount of running text but perfect for displays. Predictably, the font became an instant hit with advertisers.

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WHAT'S IN A NAME!

Many fonts are named differently due to copyright reasons but are essentially the same. If you have such duplicates installed on your computer, you might consider deleting those you really do not need. This prevents cluttering up your machine with unwanted fonts and helps you select the right font faster.

Arnold Böcklin	...	Arabia
Avant Garde	...	Avalon
Balloon	...	Bassoon
Bauhaus	...	Bahamas
Benguiat	...	Bangkok
Brush Script	...	Banff
Busorama	...	Bosanova
Caslon	...	Casablanca
Cooper Black	...	Cupertino
Dom Casual	...	DawnCastle
Eras	...	Erie
Frutiger	...	Humanist 777
Futura	...	Fujiyama
Garamond	...	Gatineau
Gill Sans	...	Humanist 521
Goudy Old Style	...	GoldenOldStyle
Helvetica	...	Swiss, Switzerland
Juniper	...	Jupiter
Machine	...	Motor
Mistral	...	Mystical
New Baskerville	...	Nebraska
Optima	...	Zapf Humanist 601
Palatino	...	PalmSprings
Peignot	...	Penguin
Revue	...	Renfrew
Souvenir	...	Southern
Tekton	...	Technical
Tiffany	...	Timpani
Times Roman	...	Tms Rmn, Dutch 801
Univers	...	Zurich
University Roman	...	Unicorn
Zapf Dingbats	...	Dixieland

And if you want to access online sites of vernacular newspapers and magazines, it is essential that you have the appropriate fonts installed on your machine. If you don't, any text on screen that is not a graphic image will appear as gibberish (see screenshots).

Installing regional language fonts is simple. Very often, the site itself will offer the font for download. Sites such as <http://indiafocus.indiainfo.com/media> and www.apna.com/media have a whole lot of links to Indian (and India-related)



language newspapers and magazines; so it is easy to go to the site of the publication of your choice. After you have downloaded the font of your choice, you can install it as described earlier. If the file is an executable (with a .exe extension) all you have to do is run the file; the font will be automatically installed in your system.

Create your own!

Wouldn't it be great if you can design your own fonts and add that extra touch of individuality to your work? It is possible, and you don't even need to be a typographer.

Fontographer, available in both Windows and Macintosh versions, is the easiest way to create and edit royalty-free fonts for use in print, multimedia, and Internet projects. The software lets you control all aspects of typeface design, manipulate letterforms with advanced drawing tools and exchange fonts across platforms.

Fontographer is simple to use, with all the tools to make type manipulation easy for both beginners and professionals. It is easy to add fractions, special symbols, foreign characters, and even logos to all your favourite fonts. You can view your work in the Metrics Window to see how your characters will look when printed.

The Windows version enables the editing of PostScript and TrueType fonts. It also lets you drag and drop or import EPS and bitmap files, import and export kerning pairs, and export EPS files for use in drawing programs.

How the Web page of Dainik Jagran looks without the required font installed. Some Hindi words are readable because they are graphic images, not fonts. Note the difference after installing the Hindi font downloaded from the site (below)



A font for every mood...

Fonts have personality. They can be formal, outspoken, boastful, showy, or... shy. If you are planning to celebrate your seventeenth birthday in a grand way, you wouldn't want to compose your invitation in boring old Times Roman. Rather, you would go for a cool font that gives a funky, with-it effect. Similarly, no one in his right font-of-mind will bring out a corporate newsletter in a flowery typeface.

It is a common tendency, especially among budding young publishers, to load a simple one-page leaflet with a dozen fonts, just because they happen to be easily available. Remember to use no more than two or three fonts in a publication—any more will make it look most unprofessional. Resumés look best in a dignified, non-showy font such as Baskerville or Garamond. Decorative fonts such as Brush Script and University Roman are best used for displays and headlines. Never set an entire document in such a typeface, for readability is of more immediate concern than visual embellishment.

So, go ahead and use the right font to say exactly what you mean!

HARIKRISHNAN MENON