



# hamburgefonds.

or, an inquiry into the basics of legible typography.

- 1** *Choose a good font face.*  
Fonts that are overly complex, too heavy, too light, or have too much contrast between heavy and light lines will not be as legible as those that are less complex.  
**The less complex the font face, the more readable.**
- 2** *Size matters.*  
Larger type sizes take up much space, and therefore take longer to read. Smaller type sizes are too difficult to read. A medium text size is usually optimal.  
**Choose a font size around 10pt.**
- 3** *Leading is key.*  
Having too much or too little leading between lines can slow down reading speed.  
**The sweet spot lies between 2 and 4 points of leading.**
- 4** *Style counts.*  
Boldface is more readable than type set in italics (which slows the reader down), but Roman is preferable to both.  
**Set text without boldface or italics, where possible.**
- 5** *Save the serifs.*  
Although there is no overwhelmingly conclusive answer, studies suggest that readers prefer serif typefaces, although sans-serif faces are useful for conferring certain voices.  
**Where voice is no object, use serif typefaces.**
- 6** *No justification for justification.*  
There is no conclusive evidence suggesting that readers prefer justified text over unjustified, although unjustified is given a slight edge as far as readability and reader choice.  
**Don't justify your text without a good reason.**
- 7** *Don't visit the capital.*  
**Uppercase is substantially harder to read than lowercase.**
- 8** *Run the numbers.*  
Using Arabic numerals, as opposed to Roman numerals or written-out English words, is the most readable way to convey numbers. Further, old-style numerals (in which certain numerals hang below the baseline) are more readable than those that rest on the baseline.  
**For maximum readability, use old-style, Arabic numerals to represent numbers.**
- 9** *Dream in color.*  
**Black on white is unequivocally the most readable color combination.**

**why hamburgefonds?** "hamburgefonds" is an invented word used by type designers to preview typeface designs because it contains every major shape and stroke needed to create an entire alphabet.

andrew. 

**The Serifs**

Serif letterforms are characterized by the ornaments found at the tips of each stroke. Serif typefaces originally evolved from the hand-drawn calligraphy used in bookmaking before the invention of movable type. Because serif fonts were used exclusively for the first five hundred years after the introduction of the printing press, printing meant to look classic or traditional - including most books and newspapers - centers around serif typefaces. There are several different classifications of serif faces - chronologically beginning with the Old style faces (Garamond, Bembo, and Palatino, to name a few), which feature more natural, calligraphically-inspired letterforms than the contrasty, geometric forms of the Modern faces (such as Bodoni).

# letterforms, typefaces & the secret lives of fonts

## hamburgefonts

Old style serif (*Goudy Old Style*)

## hamburgefonts

Transitional serif (*Baskerville*)

## hamburgefonts

Modern serif (*Didot*)

## hamburgefonts

Slab serif (*Rockwell*)



**Anatomy of a Typeface**

Type design is much more nuanced than it may first appear - the relationship between the height of the uppercase and lowercase characters, the varying thickness of the strokes of the characters, how much "air" there is in each letterform. So studied are the minutiae of typeface design that an entire vocabulary exists to describe various features. The *x-height* of a typeface refers to the height of the lowercase letter "x," which also often corresponds to the heights of other lowercase letters. Similarly, the *cap height* refers to the height of a standard capital letter. Additional standard heights are defined for *ascenders* and *descenders* - letterforms with verticals that rise above the cap height or dip below the baseline, respectively. Ascenders and descenders are shown to help improve the recognizability of words that contain them, and are therefore important to consider when designing a typeface. Finally, *counters* are either partially- or fully-enclosed white spaces within letterforms.

**Three (or More) of a Kind**

Many faces have a variety of styles, based on the same letterforms - often different weights (boldnesses) of the same letterforms, or italic characters (sometimes called obliques).

hamburgefonts  
Helvetica Neue Ultra Light

hamburgefonts  
Helvetica Neue Bold

hamburgefonts  
Helvetica Neue Light Italic

hamburgefonts  
Helvetica Neue Bold Italic

hamburgefonts  
Helvetica Neue Regular

hamburgefonts  
Helvetica Neue Condensed Bold

**The Sans-Serifs**

Sans-serif letterforms are characterized by their lack of adornment at the end of each stroke, in comparison with serif forms. Sans-serif typefaces have only existed for just over one hundred years, but are among the most ubiquitous typefaces today. Helvetica, especially, a typeface developed in Switzerland in the 1950s - is used in countless corporate logos and adorns the entire New York Subway System. Although sans-serif faces enjoy some usage as body text, they are more often used as display faces - for headlines, advertising, signage, and other short, more dramatic blocks of text. Classifications range from Geometric faces to more calligraphically-inspired Humanist faces.

## hamburgefonts

Neo-grotesque sans-serif (*Helvetica Neue*)

## hamburgefonts

Humanist sans-serif (*Gill Sans*)

## hamburgefonts

Geometric sans-serif (*Futura*)

**Specialty Faces**

In addition to more traditional serif and sans-serif typefaces, there are a wide variety of faces designed for more specific uses. Script typefaces, for example, are used to simulate elaborate, stylized handwriting, whereas more subdued Handwriting typefaces are meant to emulate common, every day handwriting. It is not advisable to use either style for large blocks of text since script and handwriting faces are designed for their dramatic style rather than readability. A more obscure style of typeface is the Dingbat typeface. Usually these faces don't include any of the standard Latin alphabet characters at all, providing ornaments, icons, special symbols, or other auxilliary characters instead.

hamburgefonts  
Script typeface (*Zapfino*)

Dingbat typeface (*Zapf Dingbats*)

**Ligatures, Fleurons & Special Characters**

Well-designed, professional typefaces will have many characters beyond the standard alphanumeric set. In particular, special characters called *ligatures* are used when adjacent characters would conspicuously interfere with each other. For example, the crown on the lowercase "f" would conflict with the dot on the lowercase "i," and thus, when they're used beside each other, the typeface designer has provided a special unified character to solve this potential issue. *Fleurons* are simply ornamental characters that bear a floral resemblance - they can be used in longer blocks of text as dividers, or just as ornaments in a book or magazine. Additionally, many characters which don't appear on the standard keyboard are available in some typefaces - for example, fractions, foreign characters with diacritical marks, or special symbols (like the per mille sign, shown here)



**Numerals**

Both series' of Arabic numerals shown above are set in Garamond, however the top series is set using *old style numerals*. These glyphs are only as high as the lowercase x-height, while the standard style numerals extend to the uppercase x-height. Old style numerals are further stylized by their ascenders and descenders - while numerals like 0,1, and 2 adhere to the standard lowercase x-height, numerals like 5 descend well below the baseline, while numerals like 8 are almost as tall as their standard-style counterparts.

