

CSS Typography

Design for web content

Web Design is 95% Typography

Arial Rounded MT Bold

Oliver Reichenstein, 2006

[Web Design is 95% Typography](#)

[One More Time: Typography Is The Foundation Of Web Design](#)

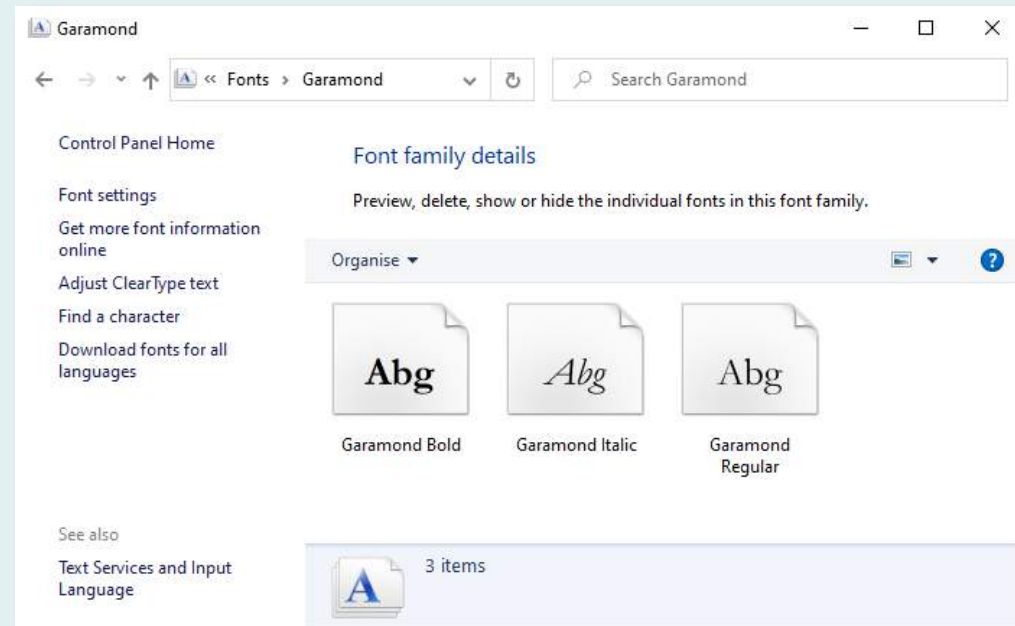
Typeface/font?

A typeface is a named design for a set of characters (glyphs) that make up a character set. For example, *Garamond* is a typeface.

Typefaces are often composed of a number of fonts that define variations in the design and these are often referred to as a font family. For example, *Garamond Regular*, *Garamond Bold* and *Garamond Italic* are all fonts and are part of the wider Garamond font family.

Typically, each font is contained in a separate file.

This may change in the future with variable fonts.



[A typeface is not a font](#)

Typography is the visual component of the written word.

Good typography *reinforces the meaning of the text.*

Typography is *for the benefit of the reader, not the writer.*

Minion Pro Medium

Typography

Clarity

Arial

Personality

Trebuchet MS

Typography has many purposes but clarity (readability) and personality are two of the most important. Notice that the two fonts used above are subtly different and this makes a big difference to the way they appear to the reader.

Typography and typefaces

Typography is not just about choosing the correct typeface for a particular design, it's about how that typeface is used:

- Size and colour
- Line height
- Line length (measure)
- Letter and word spacing
- Use of upper/lower case
- General composition, use of whitespace, hierarchy and vertical rhythm etc.

CSS gives us control of all these variables

Design for web content

CSS TYPOGRAPHIC PROPERTIES

Key typographic properties

font-family: Georgia, "Times New Roman", Times, **serif**;

font-size: 1.0em;

line-height: 1.5; /* a ratio of font size */

text-align: left; /* or right, center, justify */

font-weight: regular; /* or bold, a number e.g. 400 */

font-style: normal; /* or italic, oblique */

Don't forget that the *font-family* rule requires a list of fall-backs (font stack) and a keyword to act as a default backstop.

Note: *line-height* does not need a unit. See [this article](#) for an explanation why.

Other typographic properties

`text-decoration: none; /* or underline, line-through */`

`text-transform: none; /* or uppercase, lowercase; */`

`text-indent: 1.2em;`

`letter-spacing: 0.1em; /* use with caution */`

`word-spacing: 0.5em; /* use with caution */`

`font-variant: normal; /* or font specific e.g. small-caps */`

text-decoration is commonly used to remove the underline from link text. *text-transform* is very useful and means you never need to type all uppercase for headings etc.

CSS Typography

Nostalgia

October 31, 2011

“Good design aims to promote those features and values that are timeless. Truly great design embodies them in a way that cannot be forgotten.”

A lot of people get nostalgic when faced with the often intrusive evolution of technology. Partly it's down to our willingness and ability to change; our adaptiveness. New things can be overwhelming, too complex to justify upgrading from the current norm. I often find myself saying “What does this solve? I don't have a problem [...]

[Continue reading “Nostalgia”](#)

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It's been 1½ year since I left my position as Creative Director for a stellar agency in Utah and started freelancing full time. Over the course of that time I've been lucky enough to have some awesome clients around the world. While I do miss my old co-workers and crew, it's been an unbelievable ride. [...]

Here's an example of a web page displayed without styles (left) and with CSS added (right). Notice how visual hierarchy is changed in the styled version with the quote being given greater prominence. Notice also how whitespace is used to create logical groupings of content.

[Typography in CSS](#)

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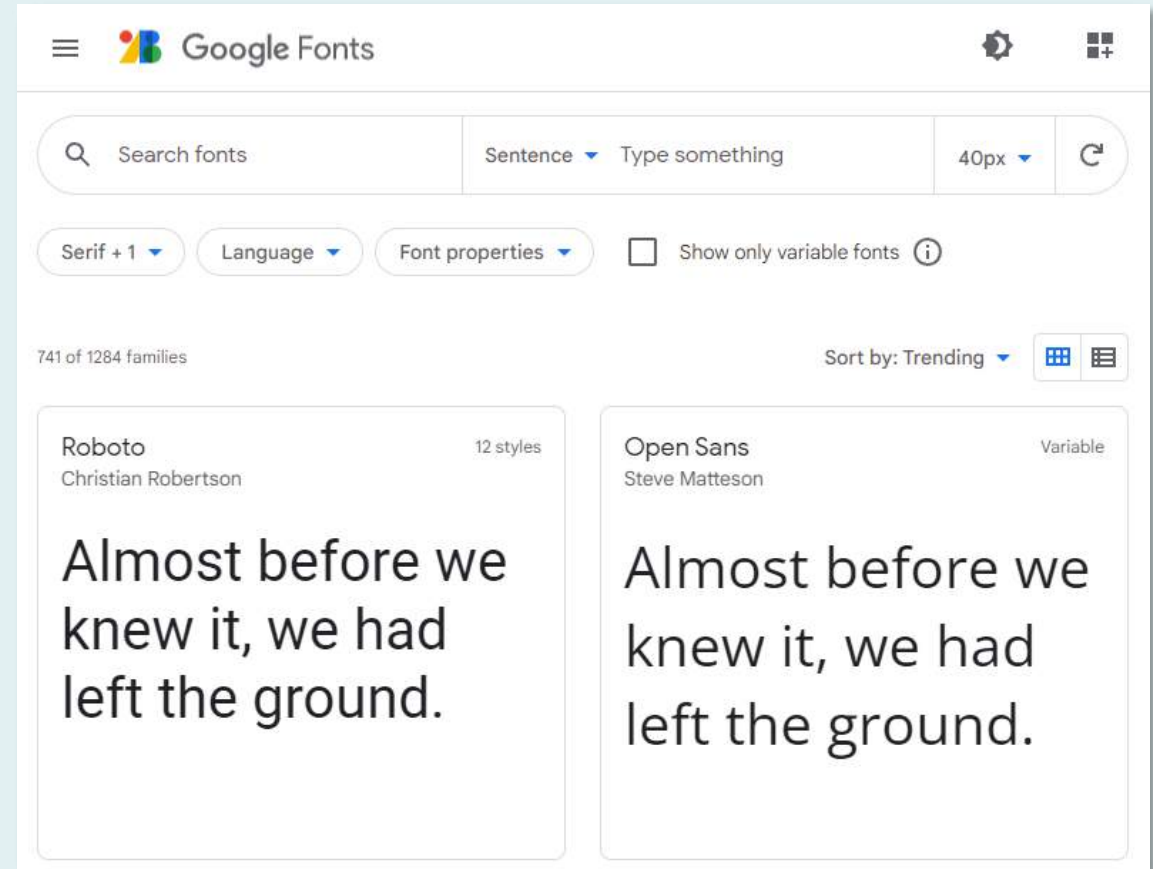
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Web Typography has changed...

- In the past, web designers were restricted to using only those fonts that were installed on the client computer.
- This limited set of fonts were described as “web safe” or “system” fonts.
- Modern browsers now support the CSS3 “@font-face” feature, which enables designers to use just about any font.
- Fonts can be served from the web server or (more usually) from a font service such as Google Fonts.

Open Source fonts are free

- Fonts with an open source license may be used for free.
- Some services, such as *Google Fonts*, (established in 2010) provide an easy way to use open source fonts.
- Font embedding is now well established on the web and older browsers are becoming rare.



Web font services

- There are several services that provide and/or serve fonts.
- Some are free and others have varying payment models.
- The most popular are shown below:



[Adobe Fonts](#) (formerly Typekit):
Pay for and serve



[Google Fonts](#):
Free and serve



Free and self-serve using a
provider like [Font Squirrel](#)

Variable Fonts

Rocher Color

Bevel: 0 ————— 100
Shadow: 0 ————— 100

A variable color font version of the stony Rocher typeface. This version provides independently variable color effects in a single font file (see the [article](#) about making the font for details). The download options include a tool for generating versions with customized color palettes. (If the sample is black and/or doesn't change with the sliders, your browser doesn't fully support variable color fonts yet.)

Design: Henrique Beier
Publisher: Harbor Type
Characters: Latin
Licensing: Free for personal and commercial use
Info/fonts: harbortype.com

ABCDEFGHIJK
LMNOPQRSTU
VWXYZ abcdef
ghijklmnopqrs
tuvwxyz 0123
456789

Variable fonts are the next big typographic innovation on the web. They have a number of benefits over traditional “fixed” fonts. They may be varied along one or more defined “axes” e.g. width or weight and can be used to define a number of typographic variants from within the same font file, thus saving bandwidth and server resources. See the links on the left to learn about them now and keep ahead of the pack! Also, take a look at the [Recursive font project](#) to get an idea of what to expect in the near future.

[Richard Rutter: Getting started with variable fonts](#)
[MDN: Variable fonts guide](#)
[Google: Introduction to variable fonts on the web](#)
[Can I Use \(browser support\)](#)
[Variable Fonts \(examples\)](#)

Design for web content

HOW ARE TYPEFACES CLASSIFIED?

Typeface classification

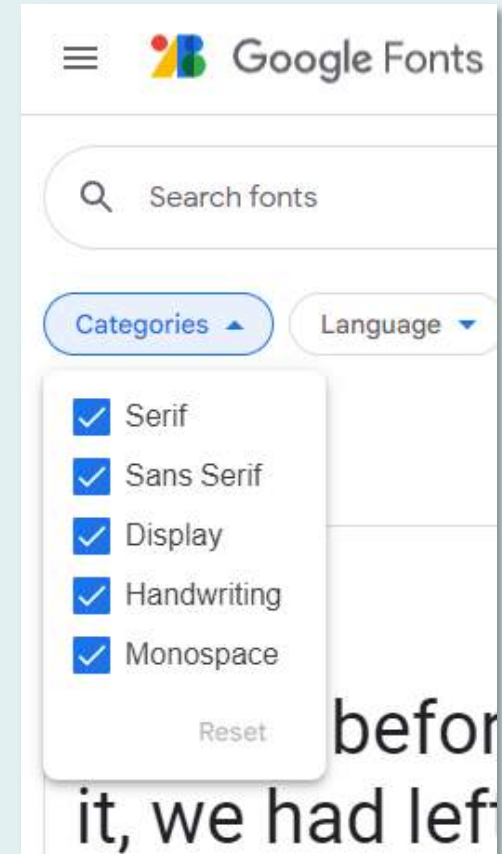
There are several different ways to classify typefaces but broadly, there are two we should be aware of:

1. Typefaces are either *serif* or *sans-serif*, which describes the design of the letterforms. Other styles also exist (e.g. script) but are less commonly used.
2. Typefaces are designed for a specific use and typically this is either body text (long-form text), heading text (short-form text) or display text (very short-form or logo).

It's important to choose the correct typeface for a particular purpose.

Typeface classification

The Google Fonts service uses 5 broad categories. The *Serif* and *Sans Serif* fonts could be used for either headings or body text but you will need to use your own judgement to decide which is best. *Display* should be used only for headings or page banners. *Handwriting* is rarely a good idea if readability is important and *Monospace** is useful for tabular data, particularly for numerals.



*Each character occupies the same space irrespective of character width.

What is a Serif?

A Serif Font 

Cambria

Traditionally, the purpose of the serif was to guide the eye when reading small printed body text such as newsprint.

A Sans-Serif Font

Calibri

On the web, serif fonts don't render well on low resolution screens and so the sans-serif fonts are more commonly used for body text – a reversal of the traditional printed use*.

*The advent of high resolution or “retina” displays is changing this.

Print/Online Comparison

Sans-serif heading

4 FRIDAY OCTOBER 28 2011

NEWS

High-profile jobs triple Wilkinson Eyre profits

Elizabeth Hopkirk & Andrea Klettner

Wilkinson Eyre has seen profits triple for the financial year ended 31 March 2011, following a series of high-profile commissions. Its pre-tax profits rose from £293,516 in 2010 to £923,820. In the same year the London-based firm's turnover increased by 5% from £10.8 million to £11.4 million and staff numbers rose from 105 to 126.

In its annual accounts, filed at Companies House this week, Wilkinson Eyre said the successful figures were a result of a number of high-profile jobs.

In July 2010 it was appointed to design a cross-Thames cable car in east London, while in May the firm received planning approval for the £78 million redevelopment of Oxford University's New Bodleian Library and for the Siemens Urban Sustainability Centre, due to open in early 2012.

Overseas work has included plans for a new building at Swinburne University of Technology in Melbourne, Australia, and its first project win in Germany — a 130m-long bridge in Hafencity, Hamburg.

Meanwhile, this week Wilkinson Eyre's £100 million masterplan for the Science Museum was thrown into doubt after the museum's director, Ian Blatchford, scrapped part of the project's first phase.

He is thought to be keen to put his own stamp on the museum's redevelopment, which was conceived by his predecessor, Chris Rapley, and designed by Wilkinson Eyre in 2009.

It included the Beacon, a glass structure bulging from the museum's facade; SkySpace, a gold roof-top cosmology gallery; a café with dramatic views; and a new entrance.

The first phase, put out to tender this year, is the revamped Treasury Galleries, though part of that scheme has just been sent back to the drawing board.

Earlier this month Blatchford poached Karen Livingstone, his former colleague at the V&A, to be director of masterplan and estate.

She is to deliver a 10-year gallery and infrastructure plan for the museum, as well as a radical review of property holdings.

This will include overseeing the Museum of the Future project — which is now going through a detailed planning and budgeting process — and hiring practices to work on specific elements of it.



In doubt: Wilkinson Eyre's Museum of the Future.

Serif body text

bdonline.co.uk Tuesday 01 November 2011

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High-profile job wins help triple Wilkinson Eyre profits

26 October 2011 | By Elizabeth Hopkirk, Andrea Klettner

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But future of Science Museum masterplan in doubt

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RELATED ARTICLES

[Science Museum poaches V&A's head of projects](#)
21 October 2011

[Design Museum's original home put up for sale](#)
20 October 2011

Serif heading

Sans-serif body text

Screen Fonts



Georgia

x-height



counter

Verdana

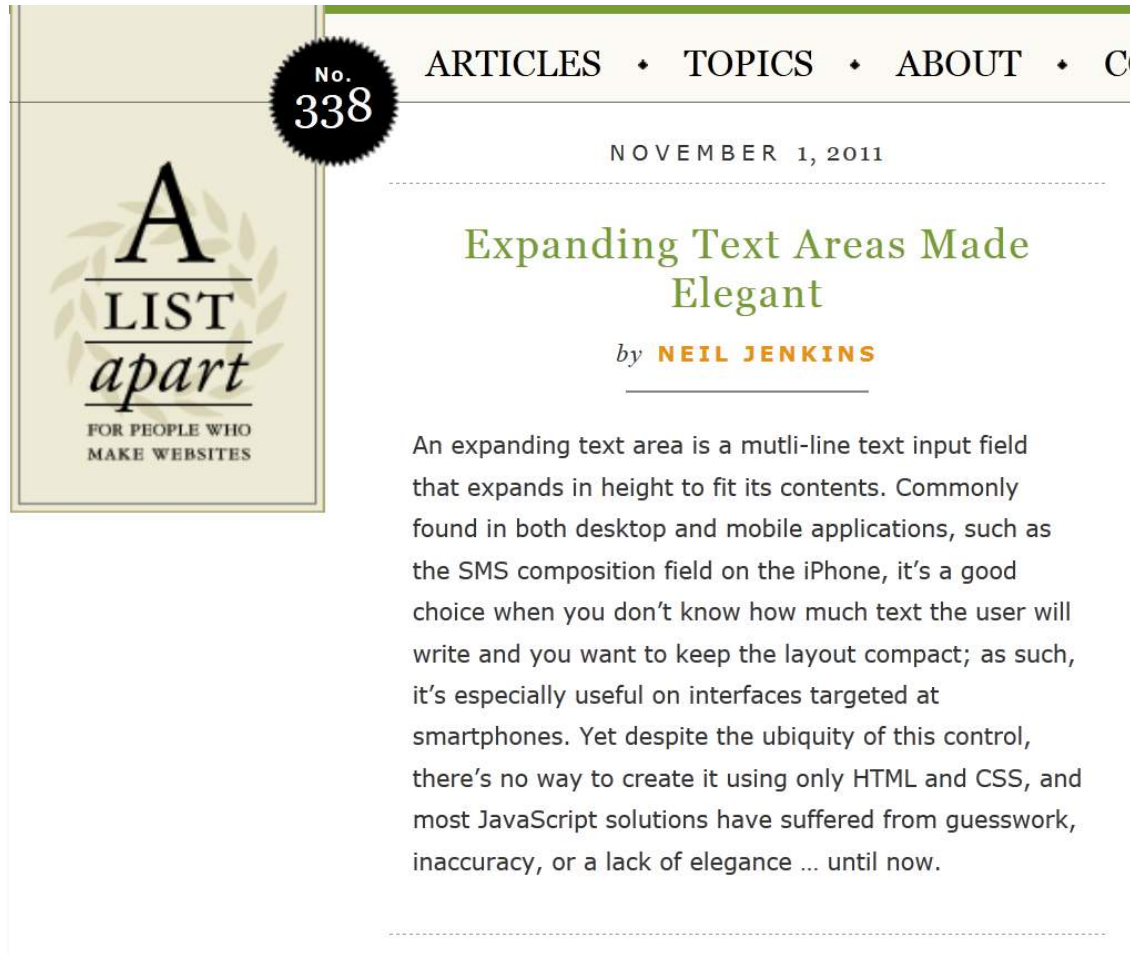
x-height

Fonts designed specifically for the screen tend to have larger x-heights. This results in more open “counters”, making them more easily rendered and therefore more readable. Georgia and Verdana are good examples of this and are commonly used in combination on websites.

Design for web content

CHOOSING TYPEFACES

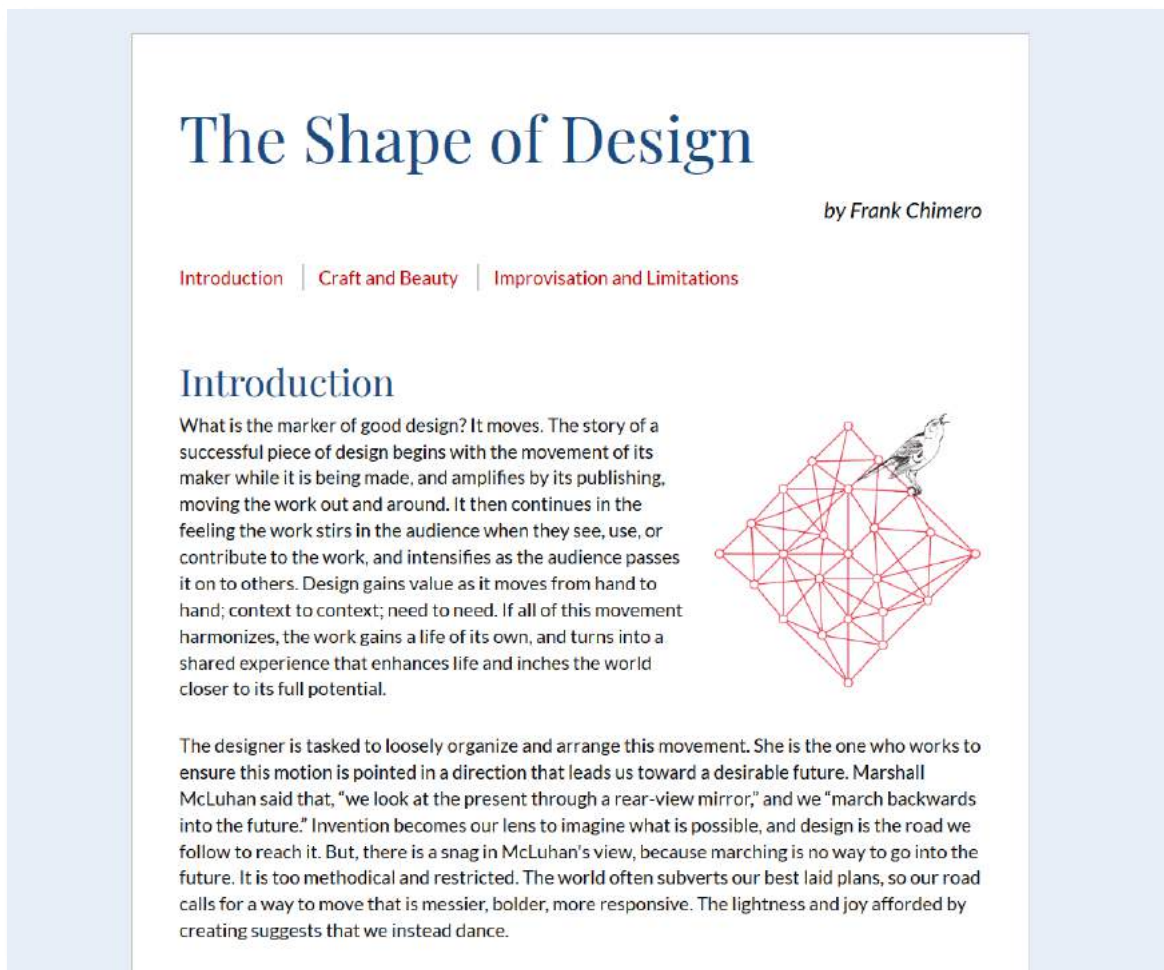
System typeface combinations



Verdana *body text* with **Georgia** *headings*.

Before the advent of font-serving services like Google Fonts, the combination of Georgia and Verdana was very common. Both are system fonts, designed specifically for screen.

Modern typeface combinations



Lato *body text* with **Playfair Display** *headings*.

These are popular Google Fonts and work well in combination because they provide good contrast. Lato is rightly popular because it is warm but authoritative with a large x-height, making it ideal for reading on screens. Playfair has slender serifs, quite unusual for a screen font but renders well on modern high-resolution screens.

Which typeface is right?

Selecting a typeface is tricky and has become more so now that choice has increased but you can start by selecting typefaces that are designed for a particular job (e.g. body text) and then select the one that has the right personality for a particular website. As with many design decisions, this choice is subjective and you'll need to train your eye...

On Web Typography

by Jason Santa Maria

How type works

There are no rules in typography.

This is the hardest fact for people to grapple with when they try to familiarize themselves with the rules, because there aren't any. We have principles, best practices, and methods that work *most* of the time, but nothing that works *all* of the time. We can do our best to ensure that something is durable: good-sized type for reading, plenty of whitespace, pleasing typefaces, and visual appeal, but we can't account for all environments and devices, which are often in flux. Learning typography is about figuring out what choices work best for each situation.

Whether we're the designers or the readers, we're all part of the audience for those choices. From the moment we wake up to the time we go to bed, we're bombarded by type: newspapers and magazines, signs on subways and freeways, emails and websites, the myriad interfaces and labels adorning everything we touch. We're exposed to more type each day than at any other point in history. Type is pervasive — and thus so is typography — yet *bad* typography remains. Why?

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Georgia

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Fira Sans

Not ornamental

In the main, your choice of typeface should allow the content to be read more easily. Often, this means selecting a typeface that is in keeping with the written style. An informal typeface may work better for informal writing.

Typefaces are not ornamental, they are designed to do a specific job.



How many typefaces should I use?

2

You'd have to make a pretty good case for using more than 2.

One for headings, one for body

Typically, one typeface is used for headings and another used for body text. This creates *contrast* between the two and makes the document easier to read. However, contrast can also be created within a single typeface using font size, weight and colour.

The variety of fonts within the Roboto* family means it could be used for both headings and body text providing there is enough visual contrast between the two.

*Roboto comes in 6 different weights as well as italic, condensed and slab-serif variants.

<https://fonts.google.com/specimen/Roboto>

Thin 100

The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog.

Thin 100 italic

The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog.

Light 300

The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog.

Light 300 italic

The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog.

Regular 400

The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog.

Regular 400 italic

The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog.

Medium 500

The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog.

Medium 500 italic

The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog.

Bold 700

The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog.

Bold 700 italic

The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog.

Black 900

The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog.

Black 900 italic

The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog.

Working with CSS inheritance

If your design uses just two fonts, one for body text (paragraphs, lists etc.) and one for headings, you can use CSS inheritance (the *font-family* property is inherited) to style all text in your site using just two declarations:

```
body {  
  font-family: Calibri, Arial, Helvetica, sans-serif;  
}  
h1, h2, h3, h4, h5, h6 {  
  font-family: Georgia, "Times New Roman", Times, serif;  
}
```

This works because setting *font-family* on the body means that every element within the body will inherit that value (including headings). We then add a rule **below** the body rule, which overrides the inherited value for all the headings. Now, every element will be displayed using Calibri except the headings, which will be displayed using Georgia.

Design for web content

WHAT ARE THE KEY CONSIDERATIONS?

Justification: take care

The CSS type properties provide great control over the way we set type on our webpages but great care should be taken. For example, the `text-align` property has a number of possible values, including *left*, *right*, *center** and *justify* but these should be used with care. By default, text is aligned to the left, which works well in most cases. Changing this default may cause undesirable results...

*Note American English spelling

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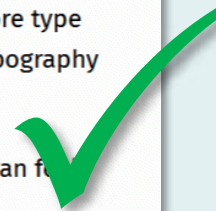
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Put plainly, good typography is hard. And the sheer number of options we have can feel overwhelming.

For one, more typefaces exist than any one person could use in a lifetime. Typeface families themselves are enormously intricate, some containing thousands of glyphs, and

```
p {  
  text-align: left;  
}
```



The default — does not need to be specified. Gives flush left and ragged right.

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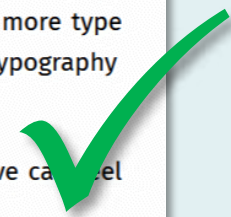
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```
p {  
    text-align: justify;  
}
```



Gives flush left and right. OK providing columns are wide enough so that words can be evenly spaced.

Justified text in narrow columns is a bad idea

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Distracting over-large spacing

Distracting "rivers"

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```
p {  
    text-align: center;  
}
```

Never for body text, headings maybe. No flush left so the eye finds it difficult to follow.

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```
h1, h1 + p {  
    text-align: center;  
}
```



Centred text can work well for headings and bylines.

On Web Typography

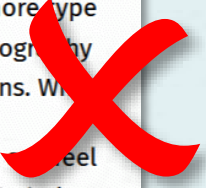
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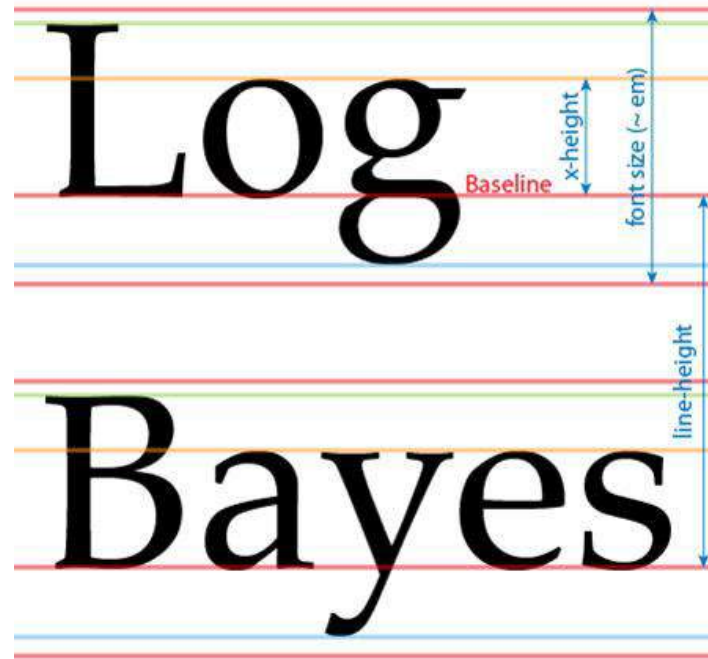
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```
p {  
    text-align: right;  
}
```

Wrong for Western script.

Line height



Line height is another characteristic that should be used with care for many fonts in most contexts, the default value works just fine but it's worth experimenting to see if you can optimise readability.

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Put plainly, good typography is hard. And the sheer number of options we have can feel overwhelming.

For one, more typefaces exist than any one person could use in a lifetime. Typeface families themselves are enormously intricate, some containing thousands of glyphs, and each of them containing many small details. Filtering through the options is a Sisyphean task. You also have to consider the elements of composition. Things like size, spacing, color, and tone all affect the reading experience.

The bulk of typography, if done well, isn't supposed to be noticed. Unlike a painting, song, or other creative output, type is a means, not an end. It's often said that good typography is invisible. Readers may only snap to the realization of the presence of type when they struggle with understanding what it's trying to convey. Namely: when typography fails.

```
body {  
  line-height: 1.1;  
}
```

Too narrow: It's difficult to jump from the end of one line to the start of another, making it difficult to read.

On Web Typography

by Jason Santa Maria

How type works

There are no rules in typography.

This is the hardest fact for people to grapple with when they try to familiarize themselves with the rules, because there aren't any. We have principles, best practices, and methods that work most of the time, but nothing that works all of the time. We can do our best to ensure that something is durable: good-sized type for reading, plenty of whitespace, pleasing typefaces, and visual appeal, but we can't account for all environments and devices, which are often in flux. Learning typography is about figuring out what choices work best for each situation.

Whether we're the designers or the readers, we're all part of the audience for those choices. From the moment we wake up to the time we go to bed, we're bombarded by type: newspapers and magazines, signs on subways and freeways, emails and websites, the myriad interfaces and labels adorning everything we touch. We're exposed to more type each day than at any other point in history. Type is pervasive—and thus so is typography—yet bad typography remains. Why?

```
body {  
  line-height: 1.9;  
}
```

Too wide: At some point the space between lines becomes more visually dominant than the text.

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```
body {  
  line-height: 1.55;  
}
```

Just right: The default value (1.5) is tweaked for this typeface. The correct line height ratio will be different for each typeface depending on its context.

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Measure


Whether we're the designers or the readers, we're all part of the audience for those choices. From the moment we wake up to the time we go to bed, we're bombarded by type: newspapers and magazines, signs on subways and freeways, emails and websites, the myriad interfaces and labels adorning everything we touch. We're exposed to more type each day than at any other point in history. Type is pervasive—and thus so is typography—yet bad typography remains. Why?

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```
main {  
    max-width: 600px;  
}
```

Measure: In typography, “measure” refers to the line length. We can control this in CSS using the *max-width* property on the containing element, often `<main>`.



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Vertical rhythm

```
p + p {  
    margin-top: 2.2em;  
}
```

Vertical rhythm: In typography, “vertical rhythm” refers to the relationship of blocks of content with the whitespace that surrounds them. We should ensure that elements that are conceptually associated are also visually associated e.g. headings with paragraphs.

Whitespace...

...is your friend.

Design for web content

WHAT UNITS SHOULD I USE?

Typographic units

- There are a wide range of units that a designer may use when specifying the size of type in CSS.
- In practice, only **px** (pixels), **em** (ems) and **%** (percent) are commonly used.
- The px is an “absolute” measurement whereas both em and % are “relative” or scalable.
- It is best practice to use relative units because IE6 (or lower) will not scale fonts set with px.
- The em unit is the preferred unit for type.

Additional typographic units

- CSS3 introduces some useful new typographic units (**rem**, **ch**, **vw**, **vh** and **vm**).
- The new REM (Root EM) unit may be the most useful for typography.
- Because the EM unit is relative to its parent element size, it can be unpredictable or hard to calculate (or both!).
- REM solves this by being relative to the root element <html>, so the same value can be applied at different levels of the DOM with the same result.
- See [CSS values and units](https://generatedcontent.org/post/11933972962/css3values) for a complete description.

The EM has it!

In practice, most designers will use EM units for typography because, despite the apparent complexity, they work relative to the content context, which means that content will scale proportionally to its context (usually the parent element). This is helpful for responsive web design. Many designers will also use EM units when sizing typographic-related elements such as padding and margin. This allows whitespace to scale with type.

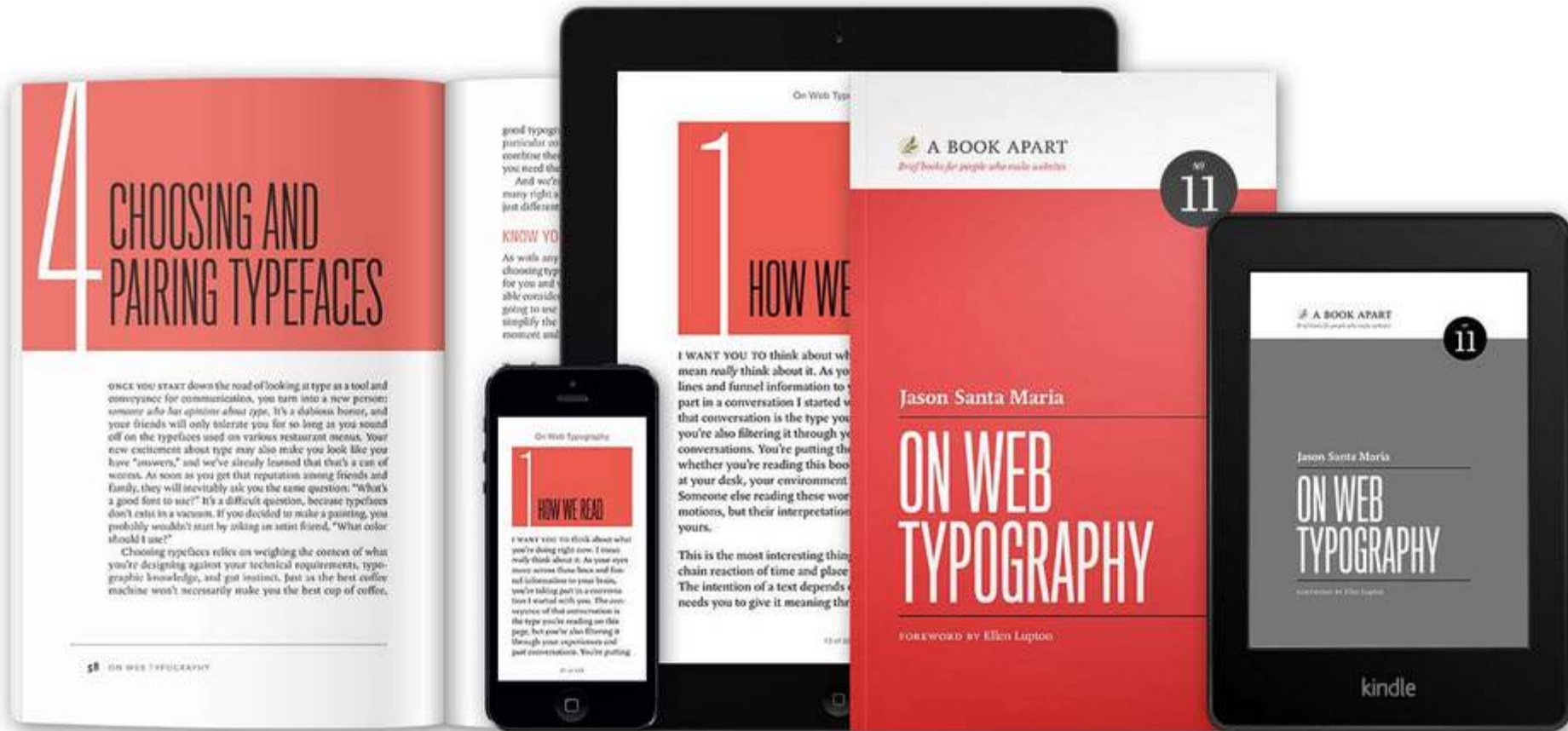
```
/*===== TYPOGRAPHY =====*/  
h1 {  
    font-size: 4.0em;  
    font-weight: 300;  
}  
h2 {  
    font-size: 2.0em;  
}
```

Learning more



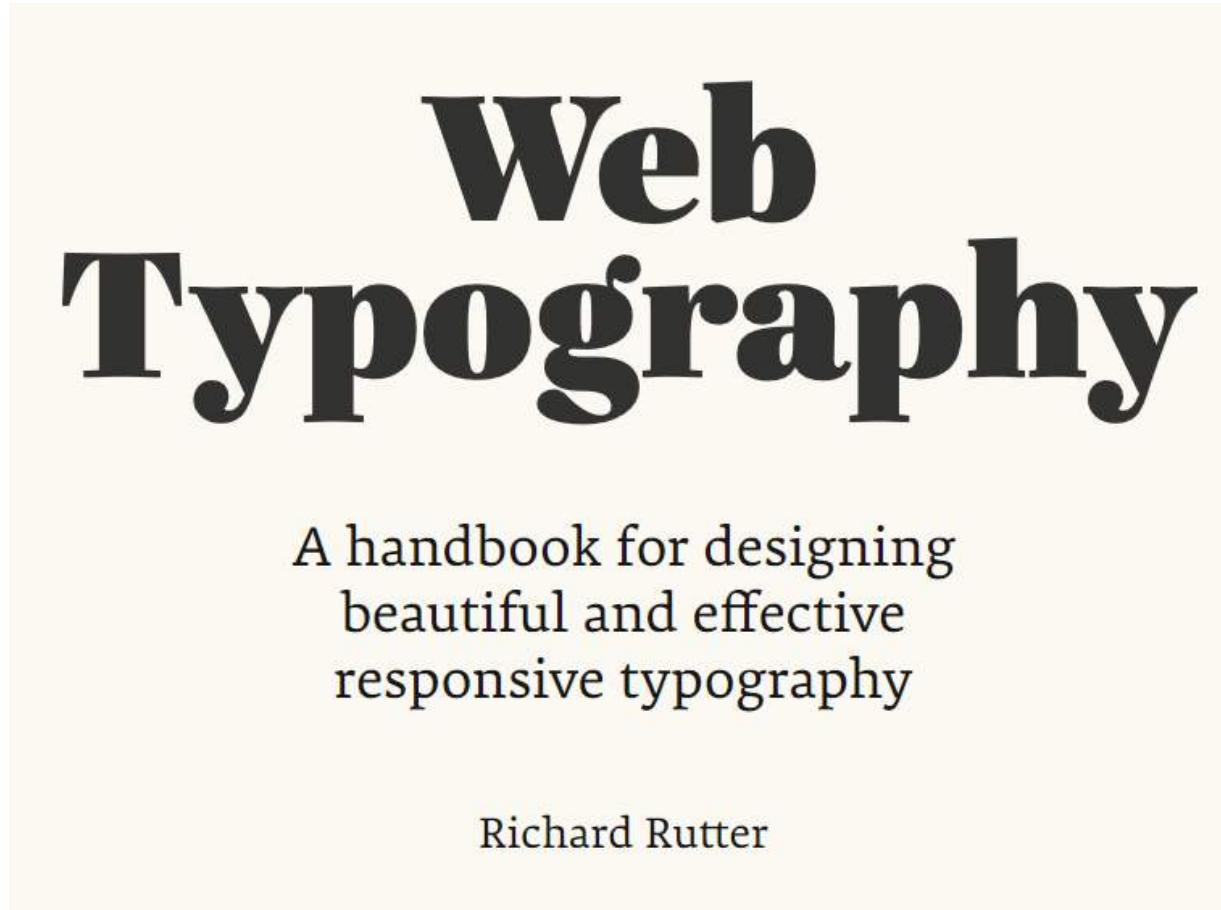
The fonts.com website has a fantastic learning resource for students of design. [Fontology](#) covers almost everything you need to know about general typography.

Learning more



[On Web Typography](#) by Jason Santa Maria is a good place to start. It's a slim volume and easy to read – highly recommended.

Learning more



[Web Typography](#) by Richard Rutter (Clear Left) is an excellent reference that will take you to the next level – also highly recommended.

The End
