The curious world of Fonts and Typography

Typography. Explore a Typeface. **Letraset**® revolutionised display type in the print industry. It had ease-of-use and a vast stock of attractive typeface's, suitable for almost any project. typeface's are still important in any design choice. We spend a lot of time choosing a suitable typeface and now you can too with a **'digital font'.*** But is that enough?

Choosing the right font.
Its an acquired skill choosing the right font. And not all fonts are easy to read, or suitable for what you may have in mind. Some are designed for book publications, Newspapers and others for Posters and display packaging. Its a challenge to find the right **'look'** but when you find the *'right'* type - it becomes memorably linked to your product *(or services)* by that unique typeface.

This is part of the fun of graphic design. Its also the most hard to get right!

You can try some typeface's here, right now*.
https://www.fonts.com/font/itc/letraset-arta/book

That typeface is made by font foundry ITC® *(for example)*
"By far, the most influential and successful type foundry of the 1970s and well into the 1980s was International Typeface Corporation. For nearly four decades, ITC has designed and marketed typeface's to creative professionals. The ITC® Library — comprised of more than 1,650 designs — features the work of world-class typeface designers."…
https://www.fonts.com/font/itc

This is just one font foundry, however, many more are available.

Letraset® was unique in licensing major display types for its unique rub-down lettering for the print industry for 'headlines' and 'display faces'. Widely used in the publishing industry at the time and still in usage but now for mainly 'arts and craft' usage now. It is still fun-to-use on one-off labelling.

typeface's *(we call Fonts)* fall into broadly three groups:

(1) SERIF
Serif, where each letter has a minute *'tail'* to mitigate ink on the press 'spreading' onto the next letter. Most modern Newspapers and publications still choose a serif font as its easy to read quickly at smaller sizes. There are thousands of variations based, at one time on *'Latin Calligraphic texts'* as *'scripts'* but now more formally made into 'Letterpress' print fonts such as the now famous **'Times'** font that is now a daily feature of most *(not all)* UK newspapers, designed to be readable at smallest sizes of print.

There are now many types of similar **"Times"** styled typeface's, many of which are even older than the standard font called **'Times'**. Without a doubt, you will find **'Times'** on your word-processor - but it will not be the 'real' thing and may

lack many of the real refinements of fonts such as the real **'Times'** font, such as weights, flourishes and type embellishments.

Many of the typeface's we explore have **'hidden characters'** that are linked to hidden key strokes (*you can find using a system* **'keyboard map'**). This is only apparent when you explore the full range of key sequences, which you can see here: Each Typeface may be different but have similar attributes to what you can see here. A professional designer can make full use of a chosen fonts characters. **[@£$%&]** is just a small selection of hidden characters you can find. *See link below.*

Explore your keyboard:
https://texteditor.com/characters/letters/

(2) SAN SERIF (*meaning no serif*) - *as in no tail*.
A lot of modern fonts have a clear **'no frills'** style. No serif, a clear 'open type' such as (*Eric Gill inspired*) Gill Sans (*England*) is actually quite old; 1940's , a wartime Poster favourite, but Germany inspired Fonts since have given us: Akidenz Grotesk (*circa 1956*) and the ubiquitous (*at one time*) Univers were all considered modern for their time. All will look a bit dated by 2025. Moderna or (*Adrian Frutiger*) Frutiger (*Swiss*) is a more modern type face, (*my own favourite*). The word 'modern' spanned the 1920's until the late 1940's. Modernism strives for simplicity, although, I think it can be rather boring when it becomes a standard issue.

Legibility and clarity is as important as it always was. In contrast for more visually 'IMPACT' appealing typeface's that have a larger display usage, designed solely to catch your attention with little novelty. As widely used by Shop-fronts and Poster designed displays of almost very description. They are usually short and can be read at distance. The downside is that they are sometimes harder to read. That is however deliberate. That is part of what makes it work, ambiguity. It commands your attention more. You do take slightly longer to read it, and therefore it becomes more memorable, and often, not always for the best of reasons!

It can also equate **directly** to the service or product you sell. Although nobody would wish for a pack of sausages being displayed in a strange font called (*say*) **'frankfurter'**. There are, of course, limits to what is tolerable, amusing or fun. That is why, Designers, can take some time choosing a font, its not obvious what works as its a key '*fashion*' statement for our times.

(3) DISPLAY typeface's: (*everything else*).
Some display faces go 'off' fashion very quickly. I shall give you just one example **'Souvenir'** was at one time very fashionable and on almost everything (*it seems at the time*) printed. You won't see that today unless you want a memory back to the 1970's. **But it was very 'fashionable' for that era to use on everything.**

Here is a example of that typeface style.

Souvenir

So knowing what to avoid - is also part of the print Designers job.!
Happily we can choose from a wide selection on fonts now, chosen with care.
And typeface's are further complicated by the fact that FONTS are now considered
by many users as practically **'free-to-use'** when you buy a computer (*as being
supplied built-in*) but they are actually 'licensed' typeface's by the big font foundries.
Some of the free fonts are also very similar to existing font foundries to be almost
exact copies but with small *'detail changes'* that are often hard to spot, unless you
have an interest in such things! Typeface system fonts have 'Names' that can be
misleading. True font families are much more extensive and valuable, but only IF
you value legible punctuation and quotes, as well as differing 'weights' (*thickness of
characters*), and *italics may be missing.*

As a typical example.:
A computer may give an indication of **'italics'** when none exist.
(May not print italic or bold, as indicated with basic system fonts).

Fonts have an interesting history I may well explore in later pages. I grew up with
LinoType®, MonoType® and many more obscure German owned font foundries
which licensed type for the established publishing industries. Letraset was unique
in that you could just buy a sheet A-Z letters in hundreds of styles, for whatever
reason you had at relatively low cost. It also had a creative element, in that you
could both trace and rearrange individually each letters into something different
and with skill, make a decorative element. Now we try to do the same thing on
Computer but that takes some digital skills, a modern computer, a drawing pack-
age that can dismantle raw text, regroup, resize with (*almost*) unlimited font
selection. A unique 'style' that becomes the display headline or emblem.

That is the real playground of the print designer!

Introducing: The new style internet typeface's
I would add that Internet based typeface's are a new **'sub'** group, that are licensed
to what we call '*Google™*', '*Apple™*', '*Microsoft™*' etc. who make their own licensed
versions, - effectively for **free** to enable the widest possible usage within your
web browser. So some fonts are considered **'standard'**, such as '*Helvetica*' and '*Times*'
(*in system fonts*) whilst others would be custom '*display*' fonts. The Web Designer (*for
the same reasons as the Print Designer*) *may* have opted for 'decorative' effect or just 'legi-
bility.' So there is a skill in choosing different, but its a small selection, now
increasingly reliant on Google fonts to create the exact web page you are reading
today on any browser. Its an almost invisible art. Note: if your are reading this on
your browser window, the intended font is not used, instead and that is held
within the PDF itself.

Fonts are often still restricted to single use in publishing, in books and magazines.
although font matching is a skilled service provided by designers.

But Print Designers are not restricted to Google fonts, we can effectively create
new fonts and hand-scripts with a few simple techniques. But really there is a fan-
tastic range of typeface's to choose from and the better examples usually come

with an interesting history. But you would be hard pushed on the internet to spot a difference in typeface's, as there are not that many to choose from. Most of the web typeface's are *'default'* which means they are usually whatever is installed on your own computer system. Print designers are not limited to a Google font .
For example, on our own website, we chose LATO for readability..
The main body text is a text font called **'Lato',** *(from Poland)* and adopted by Google as a modern font for general use*.
https://www.latofonts.com/

It is very similar to a Swiss typeface called: **'Frutiger',** the font designer also was responsible for '**Avenir'** and the widely used **'Univers'** font*
https://www.linotype.com/281/frutiger.html

Both based the 'Grotesk'* font style.

https://creativemarket.com/blog/grotesque-fonts

The world of typeface's, all stemmed from the type foundry revolution which makes publishing possible. Everything we read, or take instructions has been printed in some way. Today that means increasingly a PDF document or a service manual (pdf) that locks in the font *(called font embedding).* Embedding has been controversial, even today due to license limitations on use.

As an example:
London Transport has exclusive use of its own typeface called simply '**Johnston'**, which is used only for the London Underground.
http://luc.devroye.org/fonts-66504.html

UK Roads and Highways has its own font called **'Transport'**.
http://www.newtransport.co.uk/

Fonts are fashionable, and designed for a particular industry in mind, such as better clarity in low light conditions and then updated slightly over the years.

Designer's fonts are a key feature in industrial publishing. The choice of typeface's was always key to a wider recognition of 'understanding' *(decorative)* as well as a *(perhaps critical)* 'readability' balance. In today's rush to get online *(as its much easier to publish web content – than is often ignored)*, but taking a step backwards it is always worth exploring more creative solutions, to age old problems.

The pleasure of reading something in a more pleasing typeface, is still valid. But for now, that's mainly books and publications and well designed pdf's'.

But one can dream, of an ideal font. In practice, no font is ideal but a compromise of fashions, prior usage, licensing, distribution, practicality.

Typeface's are an exploration and always a bit of a challenge to get right.

So typeface's are, for me as a Designer, just as important as good photography.

This is my own personal view on my own world of fonts and typeface's which is heavily influenced by Letraset but I still recognise the early font designers from Germany who led in Modern font Design and technological leap into digital fonts, and typesetting. Its changed, almost beyond recognition in todays Google font technology, however its all based on the old fonts styles.

By Philip Searle | Art Services
© featured article on Fonts & Typography.
A curious world of words, Fonts and typography

Please link with original content. **Thank you!**

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