

Type Basics

Fonts and Styles

Style / This broad term can describe several different aspects of a typeface; whether it has serifs or not; its historical or formal characteristics; how reserved or expressive its qualities are; and its intended use, whether for extensive reading or short, visually expressive display applications.

Although all characters exhibit a basic architecture, they may take on wildly different visual characteristics, or styles, that give them unique qualities. Characters that all share a single set of characteristics are members of a typeface, or font. Font styles differ based on the history of their development, how they are made, and how they are used.

M M M

Serif Sans Serif Script

STRUCTURAL CLASS

M M M

Neutral Stylized

RELATIVE NEUTRALITY

M M M

Oldstyle Transitional Neoclassical

HISTORICAL CLASS

M M

Text Display

APPLICATION

Font, Face and Family / These three terms can be confusing because they are often used interchangeably, and because they’ve been used to mean different things at different times.

For the record: The word *font* refers to the design of a single character set, all sharing the same proportional and stylistic qualities. The word *face*, short for typeface, means the same thing, although it’s often used to refer to all the variations of a character set’s style—meaning, the light, bold, italic versions. This latter usage is best described as a *family*, meaning the group of varied character sets that all share the same proportions and stylistic details.

AaHhGg AaHhGg

REGULAR OR ROMAN ITALIC

AaHhGg AaHhGg

BOLD BOLD ITALIC

Most font families consist of four basic variants to provide options for styling text of different function or of different levels of importance within a hierarchy.

AGMR AGMR AGMR

AGMR AGMR AGMR

AGMR AGMR AGMR

AGMR AGMR AGMR

AGMR AGMR AGMR

AGMR AGMR AGMR

AGMR AGMR AGMR

AGMR AGMR AGMR

AGMR AGMR AGMR

AGMR AGMR AGMR

AGMR AGMR AGMR

AGMR AGMR AGMR

Some font families comprise an extensive number of variants—those that vary in weight and posture, as well as width. The typical number of family variants has increased dramatically in recent years, aided by automated functions in font design software; many contemporary font designs comprise these so-called superfamilies.

RxmEgf RxmEgf RxmEgf

OLDSTYLE TRANSITIONAL MODERN (NEOCLASSICAL)

RxmEgf RxmEgf RxmEgf

GEOMETRIC NEOGROTESQUE HUMANIST

RxmEgf RxmEgf RxmEgfAs

GROTESQUE NEOGROTESQUE ITALIENNE

RmEgaf RmEgaf RmEgaf

SPENCERIAN CHANCERY INDUSTRIAL

RxmEgf A B C D E R X M E G F

INCISED / GLYPHIC BLACKLETTER (also called GOTHIC) GRAFFITI

RXEMGS RmEgaf Qs rxmedf

INLINE DISTORTED CONSTRUCTED

RXGS abcdefghijklm B X M E G F S

ORNAMENTED MODULAR SHADOWED

RXMEES RXEMGS R X M O S

ILLUSTRATIVE ENGRAVED VERNACULAR

RXEMGS R G M a d e f g R X E M G S

TWO-TONE BITMAP STENCIL