

Type History & Classification

Humanist

Originating in the 15th century by Venetian printers, Humanist faces sought to imitate the formal hands of calligraphy. They have short, thick serifs, and low contrast. They're a little rough around the edges. Examples include Schneidler, Verona, Centaur, Cloister, Golden Type, and Kennerley.

Voice of the Text *Centaur*

Old Style/ Garalde

These faces have broad strokes with greater contrast in weight than the humanist typefaces. The weight is distributed according to an oblique axis, and the serifs are slightly cupped. Examples include Bembo, Galliard, Garamond, Goudy, Minion, Sabon, Weiss, and Hoefler Text.

Voice of the Text *Garamond*

Transitional

Transitional typefaces have a nearly vertical axis, still-higher stroke contrast, and are generally a bit more rational. Their serifs have flattened out, as have the serifs and terminals on the base and topline. They're the result of Louis XIV's wishes to invent new typographical forms. Examples include Baskerville, Bulmer, Caslon, Zapf Intl, Times, Janson, Fournier, Mercury, Yale, and Century.

Voice of the Text *Baskerville*

Modern

Modern typefaces from the end of the 18th century have a high contrast, vertical axis, and extremely fine serifs. They made it possible for the First French Empire to employ typefaces different from those used in the Ancien Régime. They're elegant and great for headlines, but not the best for screen, long-form text, or wayfinding. Examples include Bodoni, Didot, and Walbaum.

Voice of the Text *Bodoni*

Blackletter

With ornate characters, rough, diamond-shaped serifs, and thick strokes, blackletter typefaces are associated with the earliest days of printing. They're also very German. Digital incarnations arose directly from calligraphic forms. Examples include Fette Fraktur, Goudy Text, and Cloister.

voice of the text *fette fraktur*

Mechanistic/ Egyptian/ Slab Serif

These typefaces have even stroke weights (low contrast) and heavy, block serifs. They originate in woodblock printing. Examples include Clarendon, Serifa, Rockwell, Courier, Memphis, and Lubalin.

Voice of the Text *Clarendon*

Calligraphic

These decorative typefaces most obviously represent their calligraphic origins. Use sparingly, like for a wedding invitation, and nowhere else, unless you're being ironic. Examples include Bickham Script, Kuenstler, Edwardian Script, Mistral, and Zapfino.

Voice of the Text



Grotesk/
Grotesque/
Gothics

Ushering in modernism and a rejection of the past, the earliest sans-serif faces appeared in England in 1816. They were awkward and 'unappealing' because they lacked serifs. A hundred years later they came into demand during the Bauhaus movement. This one was simply called Grotesque no. 6. Others include Headline, News Gothic, Franklin Gothic, Monotype 215, and Sackers Gothic.

VOICE OF THE TEXT GROTESQUE NO.6

Geometric

Geometric faces, as the name suggests, are based on pure circles and lines. They have strict uniformity and lack of contrast, making them least useful for copy. When Renner designed Futura in 1927, he aimed to express modern ideals and reject decorative, non-essential elements like serifs – principles shared by the Bauhaus. Examples include Erbar-Grotesk, Bayer Universal, Futura, Avant Garde, Avenir, Mark, Landmark, Neutraface, Verlag, and Gotham.

Voice of the Text Futura

Neo-Grotesque

Neo-grotesque typefaces are relatively straight in appearance and have very little line width variation (low contrast). Sometimes called "anonymous" for their plain appearance, they work very utilitarian jobs and sometimes come from large families. Examples include Standard, Helvetica, Highway Gothic, Bell Centennial, Knockout, and Univers.

Voice of the Text Univers

Humanist

These sans-serifs have more variation in stroke thickness, sometimes a larger x-height, and are generally more readable than their predecessors. Their interior spaces are opened up more to the outside than the neo-grotesques and are generally more readable. Frutiger, for instance, was designed specifically for wayfinding applications. Examples include Gill, Meta, Myriad, Optima, Frutiger, Scala Sans, Whitney, Thesis, Clearview, and Johnston.

Voice of the Text Gill

Screen

Early screen fonts were designed in the 1980s and 90s for use on ultra low-resolution screens. By 2012, as screens met and surpassed the resolution of print, earlier designs were rendered obsolete. New screen fonts, like Apple's San Francisco, serve the purpose of making text readable on tiny screens like a watch. Adobe Source Code is an excellent, very readable mono-space font. Outdated examples include Verdana, Georgia, Chicago, Trebuchet, Lucida, and Calibri.

Voice of the Text San Francisco

Grunge

Often called the convergence of Bauhaus and Dada, grunge type is a rebellion against the styles that preceded it and sometimes against readability itself. These typefaces and fonts came at the end of the 20th century when the "rules" of type were shredded as a proclamation of a generation. Examples include Dead History, Manifesto, and Darwin. This movement has become passé. The turn of the 21st century saw a classical resurgence propagated by Hoefler & Frere-Jones.

VOICE OF THE TEXT DARWIN