



Font of Information: How Typefaces Can Make or Break a Brand (Part 1)

In the world of design, everything matters. Each color, space, shape, and angle presents an opportunity to tell a story about many things; from yourself to a company and your products, to your history, mission, and beyond... Even a seemingly basic decision like choosing the right typeface makes a world of difference in shaping your brand's identity.

As one of the in-house graphic designers for Coeus Creative Group, I've learned to navigate the nuances of typeface and studied countless font families. Now, I can't encounter an ad on TV without theorizing, "I think they're using Avenir Bold..." So, I'm here to share some insights about the importance of typefaces in design.

Let's get into some of the secrets of typeface usage and explore the subliminal branding messages they tell us.

Typeface VS Font

First, let's get some vocab out of the way. Did you know "typeface" and "font" mean two different things? A typeface is the name of the overall design of letters and characters ("Arial"), while a font specifies their weight, width, or style ("Arial Black," "Arial Narrow," "Arial Italic"). You can think of a typeface as the umbrella under which slight variation occurs. All of the variations within a typeface are called a "font family."

Legibility & Readability

When you're choosing a typeface for a project, the first question is: is it legible? Meaning, can you make out what the words are? If yes, full steam ahead! If no, then it's back to the drawing board. Be sure to take note of the elements you liked about this typeface; you may find similar characteristics in another, more legible one.

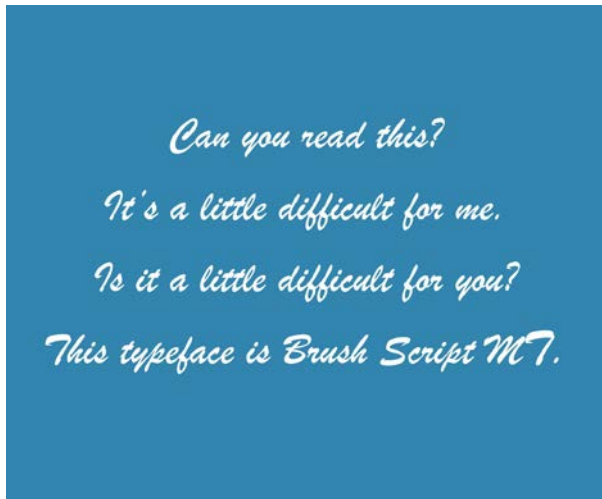
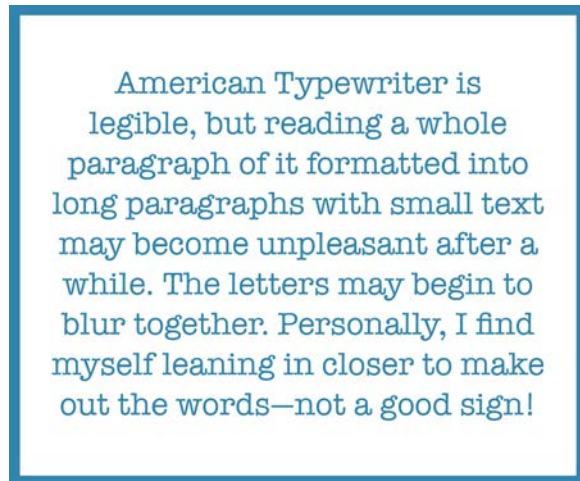


Photo #1 Caption: Wingdings is an extreme example of an illegible typeface.

Photo #2 Caption: Brush Script MT is another typeface that can be tricky to read.

The second question to consider is: is the typeface readable? Now I know what you're thinking: "Didn't we already cover this?" But readability goes a step further than legibility. While legibility asks, "Can you read this?" readability asks, "Can you read this for an extended period of time without strain?" A typeface can be legible in the short-term but not readable in the long-term.

Readability is important for body paragraphs and larger swaths of text, but it's not a major concern for titles and headings, which tend to be limited to one or two lines. If you're really drawn to a font that is legible but not readable, then it's best to limit its usage to titles and headings only.



Photos #3-4 caption: American typewriter is legible, but not the best in terms of readability.

Franklin Gothic

Franklin Gothic is my favorite sans serif font. (What's sans serif? More on that later...) It's legible *and* readable, perfect for both short headings and lengthy body text. You don't need to worry about miscommunication with this typeface; it's clean, clear, and stylish—at least in my opinion.

Photos #5-6 caption: Franklin Gothic is both legible and readable!

In part two, we will start to look into serif and sans-serif, handwritten typefaces, and identity.

If you're interested in accessing part two and three, please sign-up for our email newsletter and we will give you access to the downloadable PDF's! Want to learn more on topics like this? Contact us today and visit our services page to read more about our mass selection of trainings and coaching opportunities!

**Font of Information:
How Typefaces Can Make or Break a Brand (Part 2)**

Serif & Sans-Serif Typefaces

Next, we'll get into the major differences between typefaces, so you'll be able to more easily identify the right type for your purpose. There are two primary categories of typefaces: serif and sans-serif. Serif typefaces have small, decorative strokes attached to the ends of each character. Some examples of serif fonts include Times New Roman, Garamond, Palatino, and Bodoni 72.

Times New Roman Regular
Times New Roman Bold
Times New Roman Italic

Aa Bb Cc Dd Ee Ff Gg
Hh Ii Jj Kk Ll Mm Nn Oo Pp
Qq Rr Ss Tt Uu Vv Ww Xx Yy Zz

Garamond Regular
Garamond Bold
Garamond Italic

Aa Bb Cc Dd Ee Ff Gg
Hh Ii Jj Kk Ll Mm Nn Oo Pp
Qq Rr Ss Tt Uu Vv Ww Xx Yy Zz

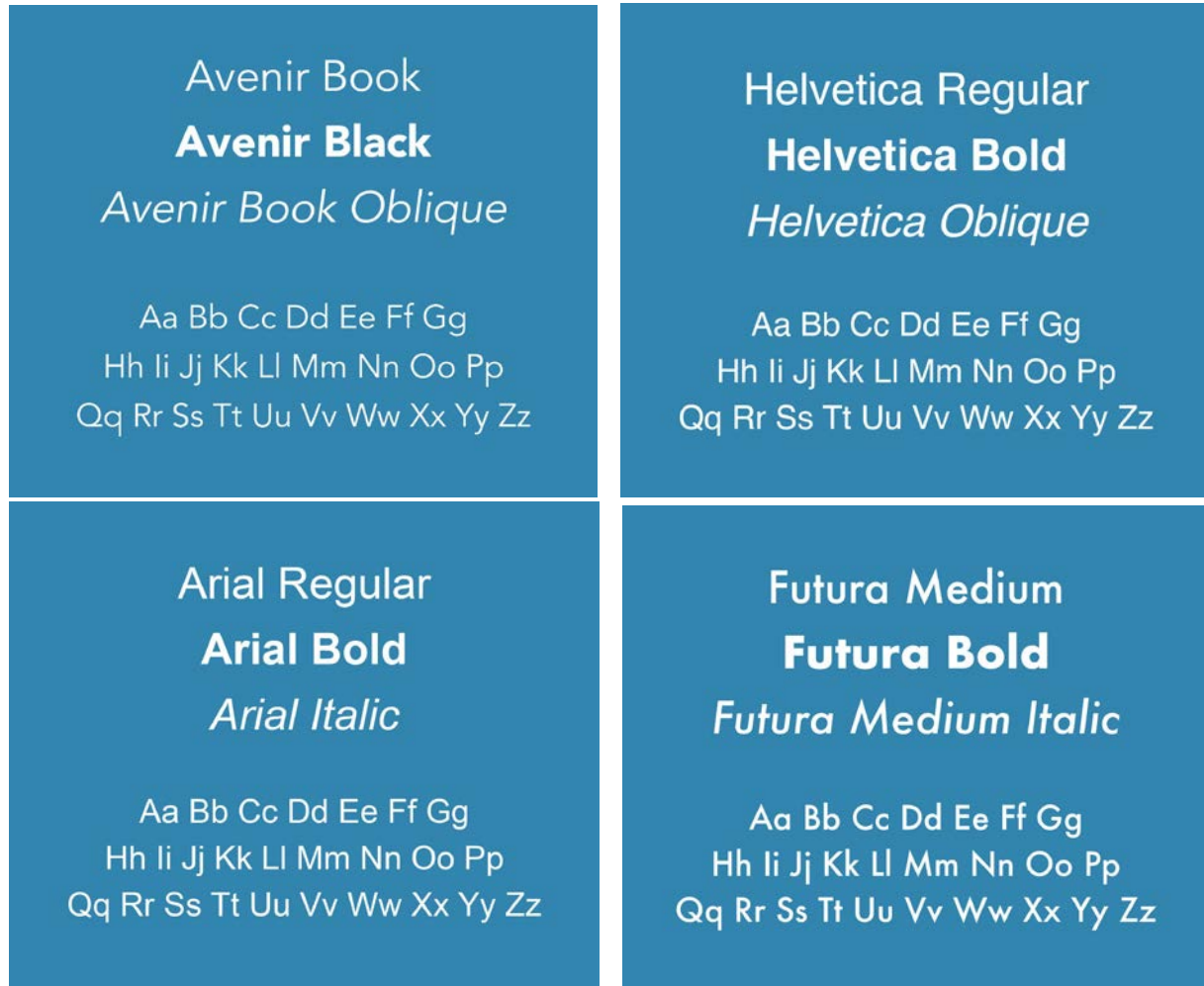
Palatino Regular
Palatino Bold
Palatino Italic

Aa Bb Cc Dd Ee Ff Gg
Hh Ii Jj Kk Ll Mm Nn Oo Pp
Qq Rr Ss Tt Uu Vv Ww Xx Yy Zz

Bodoni 72 Book
Bodoni 72 Bold
Bodoni 72 Book Italic

Aa Bb Cc Dd Ee Ff Gg
Hh Ii Jj Kk Ll Mm Nn Oo Pp
Qq Rr Ss Tt Uu Vv Ww Xx Yy Zz

Sans serif typefaces are exactly that: without serifs. They lack the embellishments and instead favor simpler edges.



Of course, there is variation even within these two categories. Some serif typefaces have decorative strokes that are longer, thicker, or more extravagant than others. Some sans-serifs have flat ends, while others are rounded. The nuances go on and on.

Usually, serif typefaces indicate an attitude of formality while sans-serif present as more casual. Additionally, serif typefaces draw inspiration from history while sans-serifs appear more modern and futuristic.

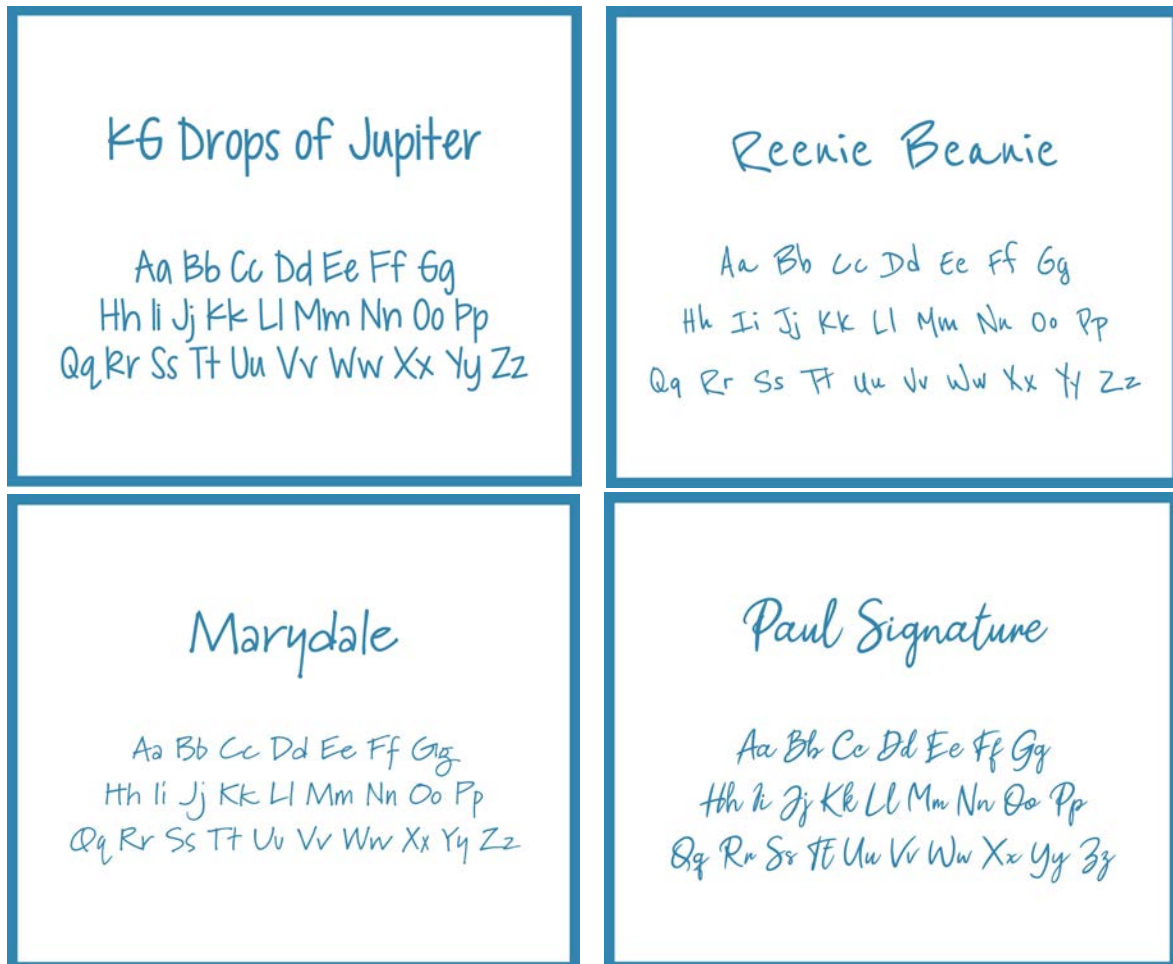
These are important connotations to keep in mind when matching typefaces to your brand. If you're marketing, say, high-tech headphones, you probably want to select a sans serif typeface. On the other hand, if you're promoting the 150th anniversary of a newspaper, you may want to

pay homage to its past with a serif typeface. Otherwise, a mismatched typeface can cause dissonance and confusion about a brand's purpose.

The Third Camp

I like to add a third, and totally separate, camp to the serif/sans serif divide: handwritten typefaces. These are typefaces that mimic handwriting, whether it be print or cursive script. They are usually intentionally imprecise, for extra charm and unique appeal.

While they are uncommon in standard programs, you can download them from many typeface databases. Or, you can even create your own custom typeface with the help of sites like calligraphr.com. Handwritten typefaces are an excellent way to make a brand feel deeply personal. They usually work well with rustic brands and small businesses. Just be careful because some of them can have legibility and readability issues! Here are some of the handwritten typefaces I have installed on my computer:



Identity

Now for the (more) fun part: what do typefaces have to do with identity? The answer: a lot, in many subtle ways. The curvature or angularity of the letters, the ornamentation of the serifs, the amount of white space enclosed in an “a” or an “e” or an “o” -- all of it contributes to a brand’s personality and character (no pun intended).

Even before you fully read the text, the shape and stroke of it leaves a visual impression that conveys feeling and meaning. In Part 3, we’ll look at some case studies and hone in on what the typefaces reveal and emphasize about the overall brands.

Font of Information: How Typefaces Can Make or Break a Brand (Part 3)

Close-Reading Typefaces

Let's look at some examples of typefaces that expertly communicate a brand's identity. Like "close-reading" literature, we'll get in the weeds about their significance and visual messaging.

1. *Coca-Cola*



Coca-Cola's custom typeface perfectly captures the image of the company and its product. The sweeping, curled script is fluid and—dare I say—*refreshing* to the eye. It looks like liquid; the letters are almost pouring into each other in artful streams. Notice how both C's in "Coca" have a serif droplet at the top, grounding the company in the past, as it was founded in 1892 and has a long history to boast. Also, notice the luxurious, lazy loops in the letters. These letters lean into relaxation and ease, feelings the company likes to advertise as they push their icy-cold soda. Additionally, the interconnectedness of the script reminds me of a common message of unity and harmony in their video ads i.e. the "share a Coke" tagline. Finally, take note of the slight italicization of the script, which leans a little to the right. I think this prevents the script lettering from looking too straight-backed and uptight. It also hints at forward motion, nodding to the momentum of the company's likely long and prosperous future, and also perhaps to the energy the brand hopes to convey.

2. Adidas



Adidas's typeface is sans serif, with short and round letters. The type is clean, minimal, and modern, much like Adidas products themselves (notice now the ends of the letters are cut at perfect 90-degree angles). Other important characteristics are the short stems on the "d's", the perfect circles inside the letters, and commitment to using all-lowercase instead of capitalizing the first "A." To me, these details make the letters feel youthful. Additionally, the wide white space feels friendly and unthreatening; I can see Adidas branding itself as approachable, down-to-earth, and unpretentious while retaining its fashion-forward image with the stark and cleanly-cut letters. Most important, as a large sportswear company, I can tell they are targeting their young, active audience.

3. Vogue



VOGUE *teen*VOGUE

Vogue uses Didot, a serif font with extreme variation in its thickness. The delicate ends of the "V" and "U" contrast with the deep black of the thicker regions to create an air of

refined elegance and nobility. The sharp points at the edges of the “G” and “E” feel like stilettos. Overall, the type feels precise and exquisitely cut. The letters stretch tall and statuesque, like most of the models featured in the magazine.

And as a bonus: Teen Vogue adds vibrant, friendly red sans serif in front of the original typeface to emphasize that the content is fun and energetic enough for a younger audience. The word “teen” is all lowercase, while “VOGUE” is all-caps, emphasizing the age difference. However, I appreciate how the word “teen” is the same size as “VOGUE.” This weighs the words (and the ages, and the content of each magazine) equally.

Finally, the way the letters of “teen” appear cut off makes it feel like they’re peeking through window blinds, or squeezing into a tight space. It’s as if Vogue is saying, “Teens, we’re letting you in on this secret.”

The Art of Noticing

Due to the stay-at-home orders issued for COVID-19, many of us have (unwillingly) acquired more time. We’ve been forced to slow down, to pause, to wait and it can be incredibly frustrating. But in your free moments, consider practicing this bit of mindfulness: Take a few extra seconds and look a bit longer at the text surrounding you: your cereal boxes, your newspaper headlines, your book titles, your social media feed... What do you notice? What are the typefaces suggesting? What’s working, and what isn’t?

Just the pure act of observation can strengthen your skills as a visual communicator and further open you up to the everyday power of design. And as we become more and more inundated with content from all angles, I have a feeling that we can only benefit from tuning into the designs we constantly encounter — both on and off the screen.

Do you have a design project you’d like us to take on? The CCG Design Team is always excited to elevate your brand and help you put your best foot forward with striking designs. If you or your company could use help designing flyers, booklets, business cards, infographics, logos, or other promotional materials, please reach out to us!

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