SELECTING BODY TEXT

Generous X-Height

Open Apertures

SELECTING BODY TEXT

The shorter the x-height, the smaller the letter will appear, which can cause the type to become illegible. Legibility is also reduced if the x-height is too tall.

faux   faux   faux

Garamond   Minion Pro   Spartan

Open apertures aid readers to decipher the letters. In contrast, closed apertures negatively affect legibility.

coco chex's   coco chex's

Myriad Pro   Helvetica

Even Spacing

Clear Terminals

Distinguishable
Ascenders &
Descenders

Typefaces for the web should have even letter-spacing to establish a steady rhythm for reading and pick out shapes quicker.

Sally, Wednesday & Veronica

ITC Officina Serif

In long-form text, letters with clear terminals (distinguishable shapes of ball, beak, or teardrop) are easier to spot; therefore, they are more readable than letters with lacking terminals.

Hoefler, Garamond & Helvetica

The more distinguishable the ascenders and descenders are, the more legible the letters. Most serif typefaces are often ideal choices for reading text due to the noticeable strokes in their ascenders and descenders.

Zbqtyjf, Zbqtyjf & Zbqtyjf

Styles and Weights

High Contrast

Low Contrast

Font families with no bold or italic font styles, the browser will render faux styles, making it hard on the eyes. Pick a font with real italic and bold styles.

Contrast refers to the thick and thin strokes of a letter. High-contrast typefaces like Didot and Bodoni work well at larger sizes—posters and fashion advertising—but not for running text. In these fonts, thin strokes can be lost and thick strokes can be too prominent at a small size.

Didot   Bodini

Geometric typefaces like Arial and Helvetica can also result in a similar poor reading experience, as they have very little contrast. The uniform letter shapes in these fonts make long-form reading dull and tiresome. For reading text, choose typefaces with medium to low contrast.

Helvetica   Arial

PRACTICAL
TYPOGRAPHY

Quotes

One Space Between
Sentences

TYPE COMPOSITION, PAGE FORMATTING & PAGE LAYOUT BEST PRACTICES

Use curly quotes over straight quotes. This applies to single and double quotes.

Foot and Inch marks are the one exception.

This applies to sentences and punctuation. This is the case for books, magazines and the common rule held by professional typographers.

Question Mark?

Exclamation Point!

Emoticons

Use the question mark more often in composing a sentence, it is underused.

Exclamation points are over-used, use them once for every three pages.

Shorthand illustrations composed of punctation characters. Emoji's are based on emoticons. They don't suffer from rendering differences on devices, unlike emoji.

Emoji

Semicolon;

Colon;

Pictorial characters/images that are ligatures for emoticons. They are rendered differently on devices, so beware.

Used as a conjunction to combine two sentences. Don't use before the conjunction (and, or), just use a comma or start a new sentence.

Used as a connector between the idea introduction and it's completion

Hyphen -

En Dash –

Em Dash —

A hyphen is used when a word breaks onto a new line, multipart words and in phrasal adjectives like 'high-school grades'

About half the size of the width of the letter H, the en dash is used for ranges (1990–1996) and connection or contrast between pairs of words such as 'Dodd-Frank Act'

The em dash is great for putting a break between parts of a sentence — stroner than a comma but weaker than a colon, semicolon or parantheses.

Ampersand &

Underlining

Bold or Italic?

Ampersands are completely correct when they're part of a proper name (Fromage & Cracotte Inc.). Past that, they should be handled like any other contraction: the more formal the document, the more sparingly they should be used. Here and there, but not everywhere.

If you feel the urge to underline, use bold or italic instead. In special situations, like headings, you can also consider using all caps, small caps, or changing the point size.

Underlining is a leftover from the typewriter, but it is acceptable for the web.

Don't use together and use them both sparingly and only for emphasis.

Use italic for gentle emphasis and bold for heavier emphasis for a serif font.

For a sans serif font, skip italics and use bold since the emphasis is typically less noticeable.

Boldness

All Caps

Small Caps

Some bold styles use Black or Ultra
which are meant for headlines.
Consider using small caps or all caps
as alternatives.

Caps are suitable for headings shorter
than one line, headers, footers,
captions, or other labels.

Add 5–12% extra letterspacing to text
in all caps or small caps, particularly
at small sizes.

Small caps are short capital letters
designed to blend with lowercase text.
They're usually slightly taller than
lowercase letters.

You'll have to buy them, most of the
time they are faux small caps by
the browser. Check the OpenType
features for it.

Letterspacing

Kerning

Proportional or
Monospace

Also known as character spacing or tracking, it is the white space adjustment between the letters applied equally to all characters.

Kerning is the adjustment of specific pairs of letters to improve spacing and fit.

Most fonts come with hundreds and sometimes thousands of kerning pairs inserted by the font designer.

A proportional typeface contains glyphs of varying widths, while a monospaced (non-proportional or fixed-width) typeface uses a single standard width for all glyphs in the font. Tabular is another term used for monospace.

FONT STYLES

Old Style

Transitional

HOW TO IDENTIFY FONT STYLE CLASSIFICATIONS

The contrast of strokes is low (1) and the hairlines are heavier, head serifs are angled (2), serifs are bracketed (3), the axis of curved strokes shifts to the left (4), and the x-height is relatively small.

These styles are still very common in books as they're traditional and evoke feelings of warmth and familiarity.

The contrast in strokes is noticeably higher (1), the head serifs are oblique (2), the serifs are still bracketed (3), and the strokes have vertical stress (4)—this is where the departure from the handwritten letterforms is the most obvious.

Baskerville is by far the most iconic example of a transitional typeface.

Neoclassical & Didone

Slab

Clarendon

The contrast between thick and thin strokes is abrupt and dramatic, stroke terminals are "ball" shapes, the axis of curved strokes is vertical, and there's little or no bracketing for serifs.

Bodoni is the most famous typeface of this style.

Changes in stroke weight are imperceptible, the axis of curved strokes is vertical and the serifs are very heavy and without bracketing.

The slab was the first style that was meant for advertising, it was meant to stand out. The typefaces of this style generally look good in big sizes but generally shouldn't be scaled down and used for body text.

The contrast in strokes is noticeable, the axis is vertical, and the serifs are short to medium length, thinner and bracketed.

Comparing the Clarendon to the Slab style, the similarity in their construction is noticeable but it's the small details that divide them. Clarendon is clearly "softer" and more pleasing to the eye.

Grotesque

Neo Grotesque

Geometric

There's a noticeable contrast in strokes, usually have a "bowl and loop" lowercase "g", have a general squared feel to them and the strokes have vertical stress.

Initially called grotesque because they were seen as ugly typeface styles compared to the earlier modern styles (Transitional, Didone etc.).

The contrast in strokes is less pronounced, they usually have a "single bowl" lowercase "g", have less of the squared feel to them and the strokes have a vertical stress.

Helvetica is by far the most iconic and common Neo grotesque typeface.

The contrast in strokes is minimal, letter "o" is nearly a perfect circle, these designs are also famous for introducing "single-story" letter designs, a great example is the lowercase "a".

Very much influenced by the Bauhaus movement, these typefaces were based on the basic geometric shapes.

Humanist

Neo Humanist

WEB FONTS

The return to the more calligraphic style is noticeable in these styles, so is the contrast in strokes which can be low to moderate.

This is a sans-serif style that takes inspiration from the traditional letterforms, mostly the serif font styles and even calligraphy.

The contrast is higher, especially compared to other sans serif styles and the x-height is larger.

The main focus of these designs was legibility. The style gained more support and traction in the 1970s and 1980s as a reply to the demand for highly-legible fonts on the early (and low-resolution) computer screens.

WEB FONTS

@font-face

Font Matching Algorithm

Font Synthesis

Allows custom fonts to be used on the web page with CSS. Fonts can be from an external server or the user's computer.

How the browser matches a font-family CSS property on an element to an appropriate @font-face block. Not all the properties have to match exactly to descriptors—just the font-family. The rest are fuzzy-matched. If there isn't an exact match, this may result in font synthesis.

Also known as Faux-bold or Faux-italic rendering. Controls how bold and italic variations of a roman web font are rendered, if independent web fonts for these variations don't have appropriately matched @font-face blocks.

System Fonts

Subsetting

Flash of Invisible Text (FOIT)

Fonts that are available locally on an operating system without making any network requests. Think Helvetica or Arial, Times or Times New Roman. Availability varies by operating system.

Modifying the font file to include only a small portion of the original glyphs and features, typically used to optimize a font file for a single language on the web. This results in smaller font files but may also violate your font's license agreement. Use with the unicode-range descriptor for even better results.

Default browser behavior to render text invisible while the web font is loading. In modern browsers, FOIT lasts a maximum of three seconds. When people say that web fonts are blocking resources, they are likely referring to FOIT. FOIT is our enemy.

Flash of Unstyled Text (FOUT)

Flash of Faux Text (FOFT)

FONT ANATOMY

Default behavior to render text with the fallback system font while the web font has loaded. Fallback text renders after the FOIT timeout has passed—usually three seconds. FOUT is preferable to FOIT but care must be taken to minimize its reflow effect.

A font loading strategy to render a roman web font first, and then use font-synthesis to render bold and italic variations immediately while the remaining true bold and true italic web font variations continue to load.

FONT ANATOMY

Font

Typeface

Baseline

The font is the physical file, not the
design of the characters

The design and look of the characters
make up the typeface

A line of text for example

The imaginary line upon which the
letters in a font appear to rest.

X-Height

Cap Height

Aperture

A line of text for example

The height of the lowercase letters, disregarding ascenders or descenders, typically exemplified by the letter x. A typeface with a large x-height looks much bigger than a typeface with a small x-height at the same size.

A Line of Text For Example

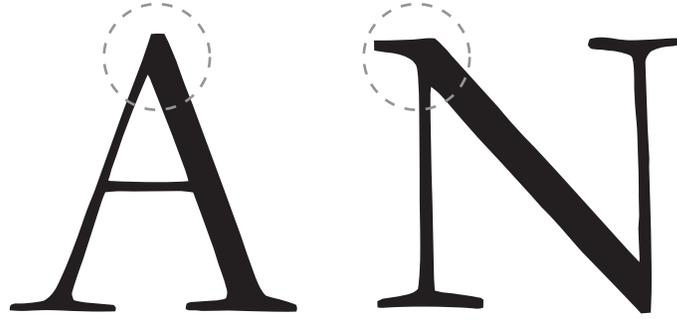The height from the baseline to the top of the uppercase letters (not including diacritics).

S c n

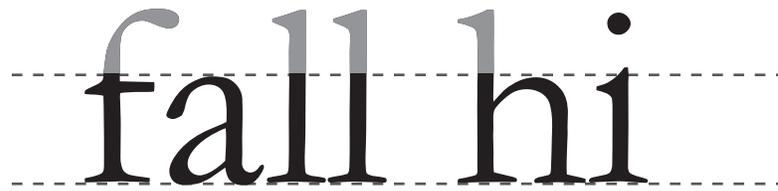The opening of a partially enclosed counter shape

Apex

Ascender

Arc of Stem

AN

The uppermost connecting point of a letterform where two strokes meet; may be rounded, sharp/pointed, flat/blunt, etc.

fall hi

A part of a lowercase letter that rises above the main body of the letter (above the x-height).

jack

A curved stroke that is continuous with a stem.

Descender

Stroke

Stem

pepsi

A piece of a letter that extends below the baseline.

Refine

A single linear element that forms part of a character; may be straight or curved.

Refine

The main (usually vertical) stroke of a letterform.

Joint

Vertex

Crotch

Return

The point where a stroke connects to a stem.

Wave

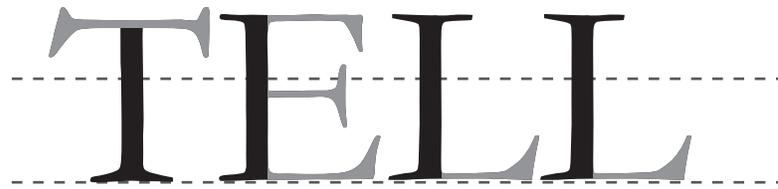The point at the bottom of a character where two strokes meet.

Way

The inside angle where two strokes meet.

Arm

Leg

Shoulder

TELL

A horizontal stroke that does not connect to a stem on one or both ends.

Rack

A short, descending stroke on a letterform.

monah

A curved stroke extending down from a stem.

Crossbar

Cross Stroke

Bowl

AH

An enclosed horizontal stroke.

foot

A line that extends across/through the stem of a letter.

bag

loop

The closed, round or oval curve of a letter.

Counter

dander

closed

eye

open

An enclosed or partially enclosed area of white space within a letter; could be bounded by curves, strokes, or stems.