Type (& Life)

Type is the basic building block of any printed page. Often it is irresistibly compelling and sometimes absolutely imperative to design a page with more than one typeface on it. But how do you know which typefaces work effectively together?

In Life, when there is more than one of anything, a dynamic relationship is established. In Type, there is usually more than one element on a page—even a document of plain body copy typically has heads or subheads or at least page numbers on it. Within these dynamics on the page (or in life), a relationship is established that is either concordant, conflicting, or contrasting.

A **concordant** relationship occurs when you use only one type family, without much variety in style, size, weight, and so on. It is easy to keep the page harmonious, and the arrangement tends to appear quiet and rather sedate or formal—sometimes downright dull.

A **conflicting** relationship occurs when you combine typefaces that are *similar* in style, size, weight, and so on. The similarities are disturbing because the visual attractions are not the same (concordant), but neither are they different (contrasting), so they conflict.

A **contrasting** relationship occurs when you combine separate typefaces and elements that are clearly distinct from each other. The visually appealing and exciting designs that attract your attention typically have a lot of contrast built in, and the contrasts are emphasized.

Most people tend to wing it when it comes to combining more than one typeface on a page. You might have a sense that one face needs to be larger or an element needs to be bolder. However, when you can recognize and *name the contrasts*, you have power over them—you can then get to the root of the conflicting problem faster and find more interesting solutions. And *that* is the point of this section.

Concord

A design is concordant when you choose to use just one face and the other elements on the page have the same qualities as that typeface. Perhaps you use some of the italic version, and perhaps you use a larger size for a heading, and perhaps you use a graphic or several ornaments—but the basic impression is still concordant.

Most concordant designs tend to be rather calm and formal. This does not mean concord is undesirable—just be aware of the impression you give by using elements that are all in concord with each other.

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
that struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
and then is heard no more; it is a tale
told by an idiot, *full of sound and fury,*
signifying nothing.

▲

This concordant example uses Nofret.
The first letter is larger
and there is some italic type
(also Nofret Italic),
but the entire piece is rather subdued.

Hello!

My name is ______________________

My theme song is ______________________

When I grow up I want to be ______________________

▲ The heavy typeface combines well with the heavy border. Even the line for writing on is a bit heavy.

▶ The typeface, the thin border, and the delicate ornaments all give the same style impression.

You are cordially invited
to share in our
wedding celebration

Popeye & Olive Oyl

April 1
3 o'clock in the afternoon
Berkeley Square

Conflict

A design is in conflict when you set two or more typefaces on the same page that are *similar*—not really different and not really the same. I have seen countless students trying to match a typeface with one on the page, looking for a face that "looks similar." Wrong. When you put two faces together that look too much alike without really being so, most of the time it looks like a mistake.

Concord is a solid and useful concept; **conflict** should be avoided.

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
that struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
and then is heard no more; it is a tale
told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
signifying nothing.

▲
As you read this example,
what happens when you get to the phrase,
"full of sound and fury"?
Do you wonder why it's in another typeface?
Do you wonder if perhaps it's a mistake?
Does it make you twitch?
Does the large initial letter
look like it is supposed to be there?

What's up?

My name is ____________________

My theme song is ____________________

When I grow up I want to be ____________

▲ Look particularly at the "a," the "t," and the "s" in the headline and the other lines. They are similar but not the same. The border is not the same visual weight as the type or the lines, nor are they in strong contrast. There is too much conflict in this little piece.

► This small invitation uses two different scripts—they have many similarities with each other, but they are not the same and they are not different. The ornaments have the same type of conflict. The piece looks a bit junky.

You are cordially invited
to share in our
wedding celebration

Popeye & Olive Oyl

April 1
3 o'clock in the afternoon
Berkeley Square

Contrast

There is no quality in this world that is not what it is merely by contrast. Nothing exists in itself. —Herman Melville

Now this is the fun part. Creating concord is pretty easy, and creating conflict is easy but undesirable. Creating contrast is just fun.

Strong contrast attracts our eyes, as you learned in the previous section about design. One of the most effective, simplest, and satisfying ways to add contrast to a design is with type.

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
that struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
and then is heard no more;
it is a tale told by an idiot,
full of sound and fury,
signifying nothing.

▲
In this example it's very clear that the phrase "full of sound and fury" is *supposed* to be in another typeface. The entire piece of prose has a more exciting visual attraction and a greater energy due to the contrast of type.

Hello!

My name is ______________________________

My theme song is __________________________

When I grow up I want to be _______________________

▲ Now the contrast between the typefaces is clear (they are actually in the same family)—the very bold face contrasts the very light face. The line weights of the border and writing lines also have a clear distinction.

▶ This invitation uses two very different faces—they are different in many ways. The graphic picks up the strength of the dark typeface, adding another contrast to the script, and creating a repetitive touch.

You are cordially invited

to come to our

garden party!

Popeye & Olive Oyl

April 1

3 o'clock in the afternoon

Berkeley Square

Summary

Contrast is not just for the aesthetic look of the piece. It is intrinsically tied in with the organization and clarity of the information on the page. Never forget that your point is to communicate. Combining different typefaces should enhance the communication, not confuse it.

There are six clear and distinct ways to contrast type: size, weight, structure, form, direction, and color. The rest of this book talks about each of these contrasts in turn.

Although I elaborate on each of the contrasts one at a time, rarely is one contrast effective. Most often you will strengthen the effect by combining and emphasizing the differences.

If you have trouble seeing what is wrong with a combination of typefaces, don't look for what is *different* between the faces—look for what is *similar*. It is the similarities that are causing the problem.

The one rule to follow when contrasting type is this: *don't be a wimp!*

But . . .

Before we get to the ways to contrast, you need to have a familiarity with the categories of type. Spend a couple of minutes with each page in the next chapter, noting the similarities that unify a category of type. Then try to find a couple of examples of that kind of type before you move on to the next category. Look in magazines, books, on packages, anything printed. Believe me, taking a few moments to do this will make everything sink in so much faster and deeper!

Categories of type

There are many thousands of different typefaces available right now, and many more being created every day. Most faces, though, can be dropped into one of the six categories mentioned below. Before you try to become conscious of the *contrasts* in type, you should become aware of the *similarities* between broad groups of type designs, because it is the *similarities* that cause the conflicts in type combinations. The purpose of this chapter is to make you more aware of the details of letterforms. In the next chapter I'll launch into combining them.

Of course, you will find hundreds of faces that don't fit neatly into any category. We could make several hundred different categories for the varieties in type—don't worry about it. The point is just to start looking at type more closely and clearly.

I focus on these six groups:

Oldstyle

Modern

Slab serif

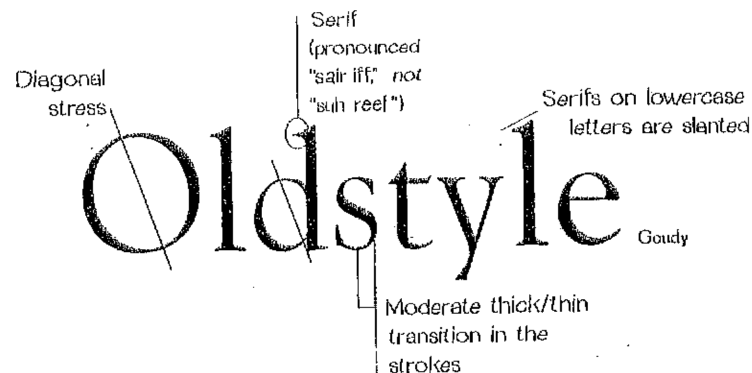
Sans serif

Script

DECORATIVE

oldstyle

Typefaces created in the oldstyle are based on the hand lettering of scribes—you can imagine a wedge-tipped pen held in the hand. Oldstyles always have serifs (see the call-out below) and the serifs of lowercase letters are always at an angle (the angle of the pen). Because of that pen, all the curved strokes in the letterforms have a transition from thick to thin. This contrast in the stroke is technically called the "thick/thin transition." This contrast in the stroke is relatively moderate, meaning it goes from kind-of-thin to kind-of-thicker. If you draw a line through the thinnest parts of the curved strokes, the line is diagonal. This is called the *stress*—oldstyle type has a diagonal stress.



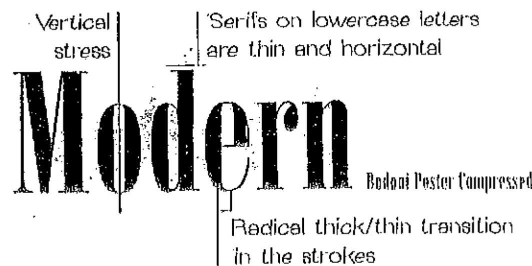
Goudy Palatino Times

Baskerville Garamond

Do these faces all look pretty much the same to you? Don't worry—they look the same to everyone who hasn't studied typography. Their "invisibility" is exactly what makes oldstyles the best type group for extensive amounts of body copy. There are rarely any distinguishing characteristics that get in the way of reading; they don't call attention to themselves. If you're setting lots of type that you want people to actually read, choose an oldstyle.

Modern

As history marched on, the structure of type changed. Type has trends and succumbs to lifestyle and cultural changes, just like hairdos, clothes, architecture, or language. In the 1700s, smoother paper, more sophisticated printing techniques, and a general increase in mechanical devices led to type becoming more mechanical also. New typefaces no longer followed the pen in hand. Modern typefaces have serifs, but the serifs are now horizontal instead of slanted, and they are very thin. Like a steel bridge, the structure is severe, with a radical thick/thin transition, or contrast, in the strokes. There is no evidence of the slant of the pen; the stress is perfectly vertical. Moderns tend to have a cold, elegant look.



Bodoni Times Bold

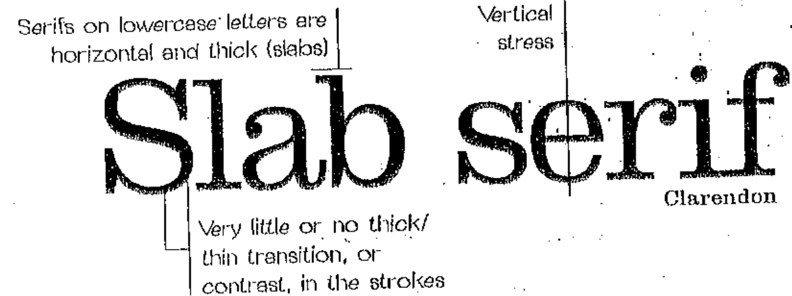
Fenice, **Ultra** Walbaum

Modern typefaces have a striking appearance, especially when set very large. Because of their strong thick/thin transitions, most moderns are not good choices for extended amounts of body copy. The thin lines almost disappear, the thick lines are prominent, and the effect on the page is called "dazzling."

Slab serif

Along with the industrial revolution came a new concept: advertising. At first, advertisers took modern typefaces and made the thicks thicker. You've seen posters with type like that—from a distance, all you see are vertical lines, like a fence. The obvious solution to this problem was to thicken the entire letterform. Slab serifs have little or no thick/thin transition.

This category of type is sometimes called Clarendon, because the typeface Clarendon (shown below) is the epitome of this style. They are also called Egyptian because they became popular during the Egyptomania phase of Western civilization; many typefaces in this category were given Egyptian names so they would sell (Memphis, Cairo, Scarab).



Clarendon Memphis

Memphis Extra Bold

New Century Schoolbook

Many of the slab serifs that have a slight thick/thin contrast (such as Clarendon or New Century Schoolbook) are very high on the readability scale, meaning they can easily be used in extensive text. They present an overall darker page than oldstyles, though, because their strokes are thicker and relatively monoweight. Slab serifs are often used in children's books because of their clean, straightforward look.

Sans serif

The word "sans" means "without" (in French), so sans serif typefaces are those without serifs on the ends of the strokes. The idea of removing the serifs was a rather late development in the evolution of type, and didn't become wildly successful until the early part of the twentieth century.

Sans serif typefaces are almost always "monoweight," meaning there is virtually no visible thick/thin transition in the strokes; the letterforms are the same thickness all the way around.

Also see the following page for important sans serif information!

No serifs anywhere

No stress because there's no thick/thin

Sans serif

No thick/thin transition in the strokes

Franklin Gothic

Antique Olive **Formata**

Gill Sans **Franklin Gothic**

Folio **Syntax**

If the only sans serifs you have in your font library are Helvetica and Avant Garde, the best thing you could do for your pages is invest in a sans serif family that includes a strong, heavy, black face. Each of the families above has a wide variety of weights, from light to extra black. With that one investment, you will be amazed at how your options increase for creating eye-catching pages.

Most sans serifs are monoweight, as shown on the preceding page. A very few, however, (only two or three in the vast collection of sans serifs) have a slight thick/thin transition. Below is an example of a sans serif with a stress, called Optima. Faces like Optima are very difficult to combine on a page with other type—they have similarities with serif faces in the thick/thin strokes, and they have similarities with sans serifs in the lack of serifs. Be very careful when working with a sans like this.

Optima, below, is an exceptionally beautiful typeface, but you must be very careful about combining it with other faces. Notice its thick/thin strokes. It has the classic grace of an oldstyle, but with the serifs removed.

Sans serif

Optima

Script

The script category includes all those typefaces that appear to have been handlettered with a calligraphy pen or brush, or sometimes with a pencil or technical pen. This category could easily be broken down into scripts that connect, scripts that don't connect, scripts that look like hand printing, scripts that emulate traditional calligraphic styles, and so on. But for our purposes we are going to lump them all into one pot.

Reporter Two Shelley Volante

Linoscript Cascade Zapf Chancery

Scripts are like cheesecake—they should be eaten sparingly. I mean, *used* sparingly. The fancy ones, of course, should never be set as long blocks of text and never as all caps. But they can be particularly stunning when set very large—don't be a wimp!

Decorative

Decorative fonts are easy to identify—if the thought of reading an entire book in that font makes you wanna throw up, you can probably put it in the decorative pot. Decorative fonts are great—they're fun, distinctive, easy to use, oftentimes cheaper, and there is a font for any whim you wish to express. Of course, simply because they *are* so distinctive, their powerful use is limited.

Addled EXTRAVAGANZA

FAJITA Improv, Inline

JUNIPER SCARLETT

When using a decorative typeface, go beyond what you think of as its initial impression. For instance, if Improv strikes you as informal, try using it in a more formal situation and see what happens. If you think Juniper carries a Wild West flavor, try it in a corporate setting or a flower shop and see what happens. Depending on how you use them, decoratives can blatantly carry obvious emotions, or you can manipulate them into carrying connotations very different from your first impression. But that is a topic for another book.

Be conscious

To use type effectively, you have to be conscious. By that I mean you must keep your eyes open, you must notice details, you must try to state the problem in words. Or when you see something that appeals to you strongly, put into words *why* it appeals to you.

Spend a few minutes and look through a magazine. Try to categorize the typefaces you see. Many of them won't fit neatly into a single pot, but that's okay—choose the category that seems the closest. The point is that you are looking more closely at letterforms, which is absolutely critical if you are going to combine them effectively.

Little Quiz #3: categories of type

Draw lines to match the category with the typeface!

Oldstyle	AT THE RODEO
Modern	High Society
Slab serif	Too Sassy for Words
Sans serif	As I remember, Adam
Script	The enigma continues
Decorative	*It's your attitude*

Little Quiz #4: thick/thin transitions

Do the following typefaces have:

A moderate thick/thin transitions
B radical thick/thin transitions
C no (or negligible) thick/thin transitions

Higgle
A B C

Piggle
A B C

Wiggle
A B C

Jiggle
A B C

Diggle
A B C

Giggle
A B C

Little Quiz #5: serifs

Do the lowercase letters in the examples below have:

A thin, horizontal serifs

B thick, slabby (hint) horizontal serifs

C no serifs

D slanted serifs

Higgle

A B C D

Piggle

A B C D

Jiggle

A B C D

Wiggle

A B C D

Diggle

A B C D

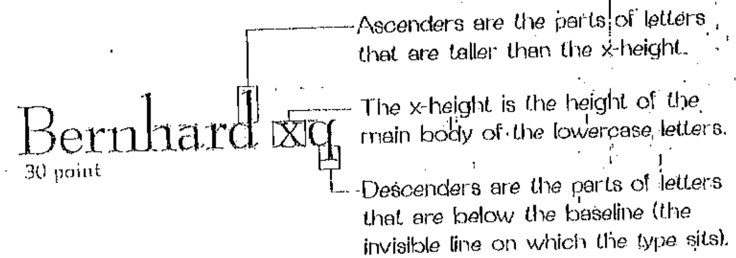
Giggle

A B C D

Summary

I can't stress enough how important it is that you become conscious of these broad categories of type. As you work through the next chapter, it will become clearer why this is important.

A simple exercise to continually hone your visual skills is to collect samples of the categories. Cut them out of any printed material you can find. Do you see any patterns developing within a broad category? Go ahead and make subsets, such as oldstyle typefaces that have small x-heights and tall descenders (see the example below). Or scripts that are really more like hand printing than cursive handwriting. Or extended faces and condensed faces (see below). It is this visual awareness of the letterforms that will give you the power to create interesting, provocative, and effective type combinations.



▲▼ Notice the x-height of Bernhard as compared to Eurostile. Look at the x-height in relation to the ascenders. Bernhard has an unusually small x-height and unusually tall ascenders. Most sans serifs have large x-heights. Start noticing those kinds of details.

Eurostile Bold 18 point

Eurostile Bold Extended

Eurostile Bold Condensed

▲ Extended typefaces look stretched out; condensed typefaces appear to be squished. Both are appropriate in certain circumstances.