

# Typography

Typography in Action | The Language of Type | Font Pairing and Hierarchy

## National Visual Art Standards

**VA:Cr1.1.Ia:** Use multiple approaches to begin creative endeavors.

**VA:Cr10.1.IIa:** Utilize inquiry methods of observation, research, and experimentation to explore unfamiliar subjects through art making.

**VA:Cr7.1:** Evaluate the effectiveness of images to influence ideas, feelings and behaviors of specific audiences.

**VA:Cr8.1:** Analyze differing interpretations of an artwork or collection of works in order to select and defend a plausible critical analysis.

## Guiding Questions

- What is typography and how does it effect design, communication, and function?
- What are specific typographic influences and how did they have an influence on the development of written alphabet?
- Why are having an alphabet and typography important?

## Objectives

Students will...

- Analyze the role of typography in everyday life;
- Explain the effects of functional typography;
- Identify experiences or products that need typographic redesign.

## Vocabulary

**Alphabet:** a set of letters or symbols in a fixed order, used to represent the basic sounds of a language; in particular, the set of letters from A to Z.

**Character (of type):** a printed or written letter or symbol.

**Hand lettering:** is the art of drawing letters by hand, typically crafted for a single use (see Smashing Magazine's article *Understanding The Difference Between Type and Lettering*—<https://www.smashingmagazine.com/2013/01/understanding-difference-between-type-and-lettering/>).

**Hieroglyphics:** a formal writing system used by the ancient Egyptians that combined logogram and alphabetic elements.

**Ideograph:** a written character symbolizing the idea of a thing without indicating the sounds used to say it.

**Kerning:** to adjust the spacing between two characters in a piece of text to be printed.

**Time Period: at least two classes, 45-60 minutes in length**

## Unit Introduction

**Typography** incorporates all the visual components of the written word. It is the art (and also technique) of arranging type to make written language legible and readable, with the goal of (typically) making it appealing. Arranging type involves selecting **typefaces**, point size, line length, line-spacing (**leading**), letter-spacing (**tracking**), and adjusting the space between specific pairs of **characters** (**kerning**). Typography is the study of **type** and how to use it to aid

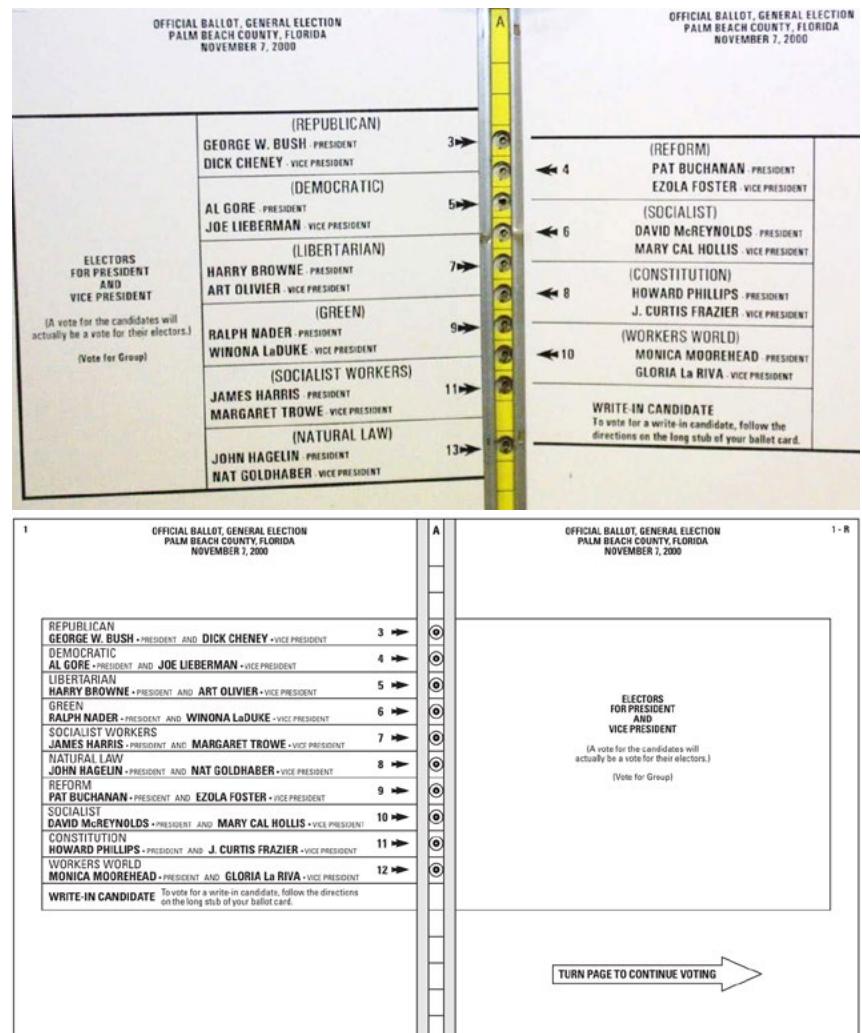


FIGURE 1: (top) Contentious 2000 presidential election butterfly ballot from Palm Beach County, Florida; (bottom) Ballot redesign, *Universal Principles of Design*, William Lidwell, Kritina Holden, and Jill Butler. Typography can influence how people perceive and interpret information. There was confusion with the function of the Florida ballot. Confusion could have easily been remedied by better use of type and organization.

**Leading:** the amount of blank space between lines of print.

**Pictograph:** a written symbol that depicts an object.

**Tracking:** the uniform increase or decrease in the spacing between a range of characters.

**Type:** printed characters or letters.

**Typeface:** a particular design of type.

**Typography:** the style and appearance of printed matter; the art or procedure of arranging type or processing data and printing from it.

**Symbol:** a thing that represents or stands for something else, especially a material object representing something abstract.

## Materials

- None for the introduction

## Figures

- Contentious 2000 presidential election butterfly ballot from Palm Beach County, Florida; Ballot redesign, *Universal Principles of Design*, William Lidwell, Kritina Holden, and Jill Butler.
- Cursive hieroglyphs from the Papyrus of Ani.
- Ideographs at the Church of the Visitation, Jerusalem.
- Phoenician alphabet.
- Greek alphabet.
- The Column of Trajan, on Trajan's Forum, Rome, Italy; Roman inscriptional capitals on the base of Trajan's Column, c. 113.
- Blackletter or Gothic script.
- Movable type.
- Neue Haas Grotesk, Christian Schwartz, Linotype Corp, The Font Bureau, Inc.

## Art Context, Cultural Connections and Relevancy

Typography touches almost every aspect of a student's life from their schoolwork, digital devices, and movie tickets to road signs, menus, and casual reading books. It's important to make connections between type and function. Understanding where type has come from and how important the written alphabet is will enable students to solve more effective typographic problems.

## Artists/Designers to Reference

**Christian Schwartz:** is an American type designer and partner at Commercial Type who digitally redesigned Neue Haas Grotesk (2004-2010). Neue Haas Grotesk was originally designed in 1957-1961 by Max Miedinger with art direction by Eduard Hoffmann and was released as Neue Haas Grotesk by the Haas'sche Schriftgiesserei, and then revised and released as Helvetica by Linotype AG. Schwartz brings back many of the original features that made it a Modernist favorite that have been lost in translation over the years. The typeface restores features like optical size

in the communication of specific messages. Designers use type to organize content, lead the eye around a page, command attention, and even move the reader through a document. It can be used to make artful design out of letters and words to emphasize the meaning of a design. Type also makes the content (text) easy for the reader to read and comprehend. Poor use of type can cause comprehension problems and lead to real issues as seen in the 2000 presidential ballot debacle in Florida (see Figure 1). Poor design, including the use of type, can have far reaching effects. For this reason, it's important for young designers to understand typography and the communicatory ability that is affords.

## A Brief History of the Alphabet

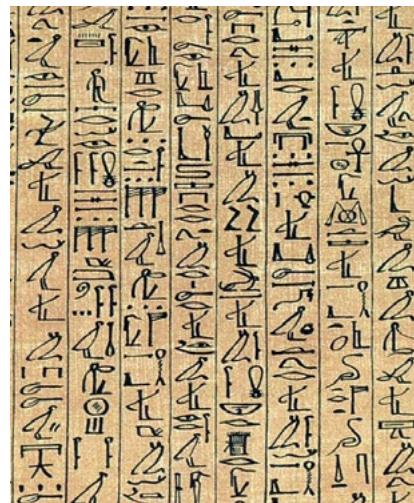


FIGURE 2: Cursive hieroglyphs from the Papyrus of Ani. This is an example of the Egyptian Book of the Dead.



FIGURE 3: Ideographs at the Church of the Visitation, Jerusalem. These are examples of symbols that represent ideas instead of direct things or sounds. Other examples include Chinese characters and numerals.

The story of typography begins with a fascinating history of the **alphabet**. A written language was developed in Egypt around 2000 BC. **Symbols** were used to represent an object, like **hieroglyphics** (see Figure 2). These symbols are called **pictographs**.

Five-hundred years later, pictographs evolved into **ideographs** (see Figure 3)—symbols that represent an idea. These type of alphabets had an immense impact on the development of more useful alphabet systems to come.

One of these where created by the Phoenician merchants. They developed an alphabet (see Figure 4) as a way to record business transactions. The first two letters were "Aleph", meaning ox and



FIGURE 4: Phoenician alphabet. There were no vowels in the Phoenician Alphabet and several of the letters were ambiguous.

variations, properly corrected obliques, alternate glyphs, refined spacing, and more.

**Johannes Gutenberg:** invented the printing press and movable type in 1450.

**Max Miedinger:** designer of the typeface Helvetica.

## Handouts

- Handout 4A.1-History of the Alphabet.pdf

"beth", meaning house. "Aleph" and "Beth" combine to form an origin of the word alphabet. The Phoenicians were the first to use a symbol to represent a spoken sound. This allowed for far less total characters and made the written language much more accessible to the layperson.

# Ελληνικό αλφάρβητο

FIGURE 5: Greek alphabet. This is an example of the modern Greek alphabet. It was the first alphabetic script to have distinct letters for vowels as well as consonants.

In 800 BC, the Greeks adopted the Phoenician alphabet as a way to preserve knowledge (see Figure 5). Soon after, the Romans adopted the Greek alphabet, revising some letters and adding "F" and "Q". The style of the letters carved into Trajan's column in Rome became the world's first typeface, Trajan (see Figure 6).



FIGURE 6: (left) The Column of Trajan, on Trajan's Forum, Rome, Italy. The Roman triumphal column commemorates Roman emperor Trajan's victory in the Dacian Wars.

(top) Roman inscriptive capitals on the base of Trajan's Column, c. 113. This is an example of the Roman alphabet and a precursor to the alphabet currently in use.

About a thousand years later, Rome fell to the Visigoths and the Gothic blackletter style began in 1100 AD. Blackletter style was used by scribes who hand lettered books (see Figure 7). At the time, a book could cost as much as a house.

In 1450, Johannes Gutenberg revolutionized the printing process by using movable type. (See the BBC's *The Machine that Made Us*, <http://www.veoh.com/watch/v18714625RMJnrG8x>, to experience

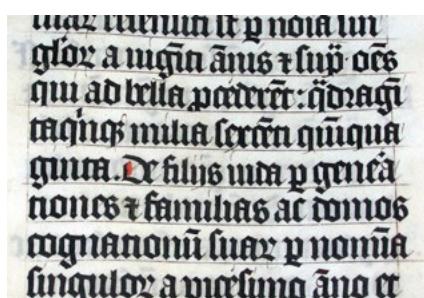


FIGURE 7: Blackletter or Gothic script. Calligraphy in a Latin Bible of AD 1407 on display in Malmesbury Abbey, Wiltshire, England. The Bible was hand written in Belgium, by Gerard Brils, for reading aloud in a monastery. The text on display is Latin, and it comes from the book of Numbers (Num 1:24-26).



FIGURE 8: Movable type. With the invention of movable type, printers were able to set type by the page and print as many copies at a time as they needed. Before this, each page of a book would have been scribed by hand, one at a time. Think of the amount of time this would take. The set metal type in the photo says: "The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog and feels as if he were in the seventh heaven of typography together with Hermann Zapf, the most famous artist of the".

a journey to recreate Gutenberg's printing press. It's an interesting and educational perspective.) This changed the world as much as the Internet has changed the present time. People could afford to buy books. Literacy was within the reach of many more people. Books could be printed much more cheaply and in mass quantities, which was much faster than **hand lettering** books. But it put many scribes out of business.

With the invention of the printing press and movable type (see Figure 8), a new industry started and quickly evolved. The Industrial

# „ Neue Haas Grotesk

Introduction   Features   Specimens   History

New Haas Grotesk  
Display 75 Medium  
136 points  
120 points  
line spacing

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNPQRSTUVWXYZ  
YZ1234567

FIGURE 9: Neue Haas Grotesk, Christian Schwartz, Linotype Corp, The Font Bureau, Inc. Type designer, Christian Schwartz, has restored the original Neue Haas Grotesk, originally design by Max Miedinger. He's brought back features like optical size variations, properly corrected obliques, alternate glyphs, refined spacing, and more (<http://www.fontbureau.com/NHG/>).

Revolution brought about the ability to set type in a much faster way than hand setting individual letters, as was previously done. After World War II, Europe had been devastated to the point where a whole new look was needed to reflect the post-war world. In 1957, Max Miedinger designed the Neue Haas Grotesk font (see Figure 9), which was later renamed Helvetica. It became the most used font of the 1960s, early 70s, and is still prolific today.

By 1988, the Linotype machine made it possible to do digital publishing from a computer. Seven years later, typography is published on the web. Today, hand lettering is making a comeback, in print and on the web.

This snapshot of the history of the alphabet will help students understand the rich history and amount of time written language has taken to come into existence. A lot of information has been presented, for a quick reference refer to the printable poster, *Handout 4A.1-History of the Alphabet.pdf*. Watch the video, *The History of Typography, in Stop-Motion Animation* (<http://www.theatlantic.com/video/index/277376/the-history-of-typography-in-stop-motion-animation/>). It's an engaging and fun reinforcement of the history of the alphabet. For more resources on typography, refer to Unit 5A References.



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