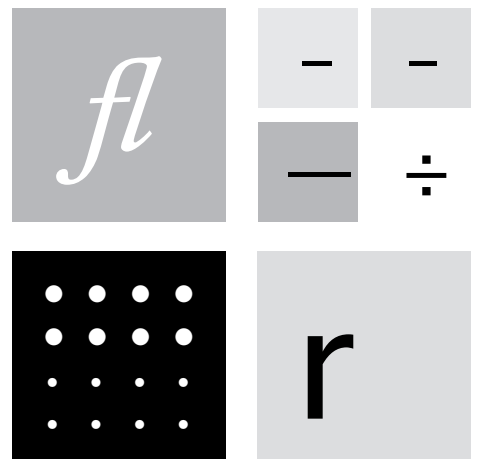
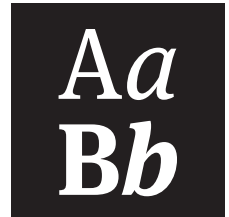


# Styles, Weights, Widths

*It's All in the (Type) Family*



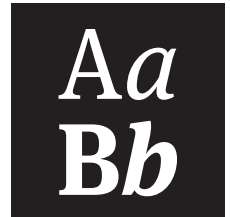


**STYLES, WEIGHTS, WIDTHS**

*It's All in the (Type) Family*

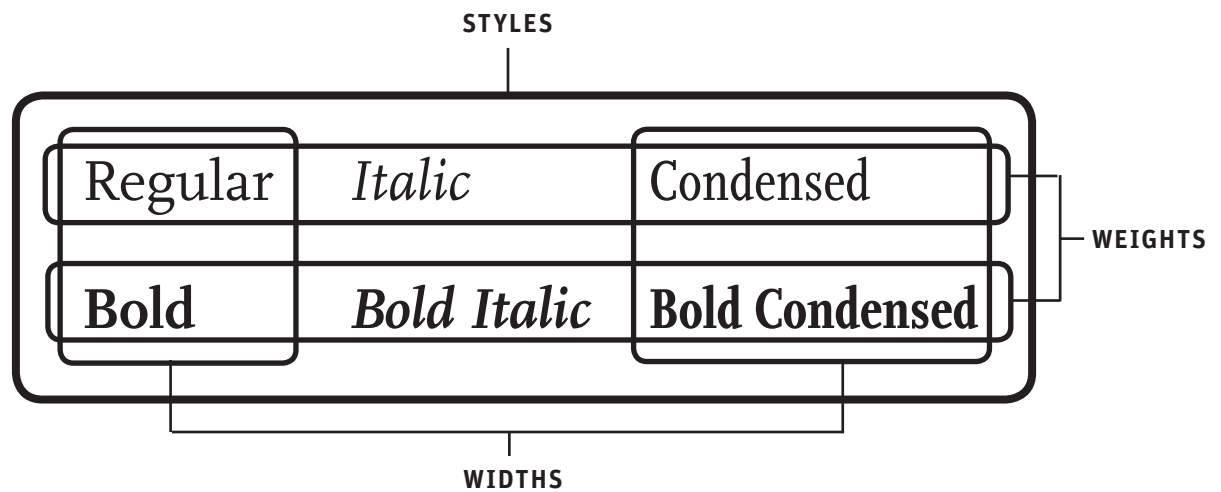
## Introduction

A quick note before we start – when we talk about typographic terms there is the official, “correct” terminology, and then there is the commonly accepted terminology. Because of the dramatic technological changes that occurred in the type industry in the previous century, definitions have shifted. For example in metal type a “font” is one single typeface design in one specific point size, which means that metal Palatino 12 pt and Palatino 16 pt are two separate fonts. Yet when phototypesetting started replacing metal typesetting in the 1970, type became scalable (thus size-independent) and “font” came to signify a single type style, disregarding point size. And the terms “typeface” and “font” are now often used interchangeably. A similar thing happens when talking about typefaces and type families, and styles, weights, and widths.



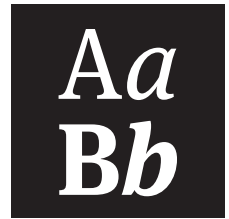
STYLES, WEIGHTS, WIDTHS  
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## Typefaces and Type Families



The different variants in a type family demonstrated on FF Scala by Martin Majoor.

The above diagram illustrates the names for the different variations in a type family. A type family is a collection of related typefaces which share common design traits and a common name. A type style means any given variant of this coordinated design and is the equivalent of a typeface. Just like with the typeface/font debate we understand that some divisions have become blurred. This explains why the term typeface is not only used to specify a single style, but also quite often a type family with a number of weights and styles. When a regular user talks about the “typeface FF Scala” we understand that he or she



**STYLES, WEIGHTS, WIDTHS**

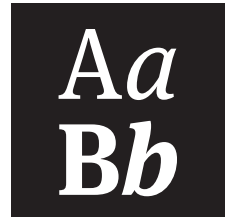
*It's All in the (Type) Family*

means FF Scala in its basic variations Regular, Italic, Bold and Bold Italic, and sometimes even including the condensed widths and sans serif variants.

However – strictly speaking – the “typeface FF Scala” designates FF Scala Regular, and FF Scala Italic is another typeface. This distinction is quite important. When type foundries, vendors and resellers claim they carry a certain number of typefaces, they use the strict definition of the term. So even if ARS Type for example has 13 type families on sale, they are correct when they announce to offer 44 typefaces. And 88 fonts, as all their typefaces are available in two font formats: Mac PostScript and PC TrueType.

## Styles

The concept of coordinated type families consisting of different related typefaces or styles is a fairly recent phenomenon. The two most common styles are roman (upright) and italic (a different, slanted design). The basic shape of italics is a stylized form of handwriting. It took form in the Renaissance when Aldus Manutius looked for a space saving alternative to roman faces. Without going too much into details, originally italics were designs in their own right, unrelated to roman designs and used independently. Only by the sixteenth century did the italic assume its current role as emphasis, a variation on the roman design.



**STYLES, WEIGHTS, WIDTHS**

*It's All in the (Type) Family*

Monotype Bembo is generally regarded as one of the most handsome revivals of Aldus Manutius' 15<sup>th</sup> century roman type, but the original had no italic counterpart. The story is told that Stanley Morison commissioned Alfred Fairbank, a renowned calligrapher, to create the first italic for Bembo, which was released as metal fonts in 1929.

**BEMBO MT PRO ROMAN**

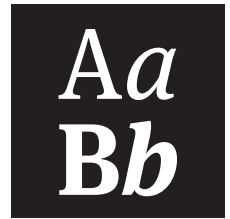
*Alfred Fairbank's design was based on the work of sixteenth-century writing master Ludovico degli Arrighi. However, Fairbank claimed that he drew it as an independent project and then sold his drawings to Monotype. According to him, "the statment has been made that I was asked to design an italic for the Bembo roman. This is not so. Had the request been made, the italic type produced would have been different."*

**FAIRBANK MT PRO**

*Whichever version you believe, it was obvious that Fairbank's design—while undeniably beautiful—was not harmonious with Bembo roman. A second, more conventional italic was eventually drawn and added to the Bembo family.*

**BEMBO MT PRO ITALIC**

Comparison between Fairbank MT, presumably the original italic design for Bembo MT, and the eventual Bembo Italic MT. The small caps, oldstyle figures and alternates featured in the sample above are incorporated in the OpenType Pro digital fonts.



STYLES, WEIGHTS, WIDTHS  
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# Typefaces and Type Families

FF NEXUS SERIF REG

a g e f n x y z

FF NEXUS SERIF ITALIC

*a g e f n x y z*

FF NEXUS SERIF REG OBLIQUED

*a g e f n x y z*

Comparison between the Roman and the Italic of FF Nexus Serif, and an artificial oblique at the same angle of the Italic.

Both italics and obliques are slanted designs. They both serve the same function in text, namely emphasis. Italics are primarily found in serif designs, and obliques originally were mostly associated with sans serifs. Yet there is a crucial difference. While an oblique looks like a slanted version of the roman weight, an italic has a different design. Most notably the double-storey lowercase “a” and “g” turn into single-storey forms, although some designs preserve the double-storey “g”. Because of its origin in hand writing and calligraphy the position of serifs changes as well, with serifs being preserved on the in- and outgoing strokes (upper left and lower right), but removed in the opposite spots.



STYLES, WEIGHTS, WIDTHS  
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furry handgloves &  
BOOKMAN HEADLINE

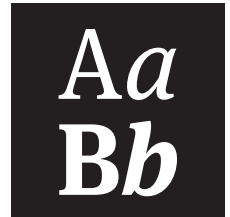
*furry handgloves &*  
BOOKMAN ITALIC HEADLINE

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BOOKMAN STD LIGHT

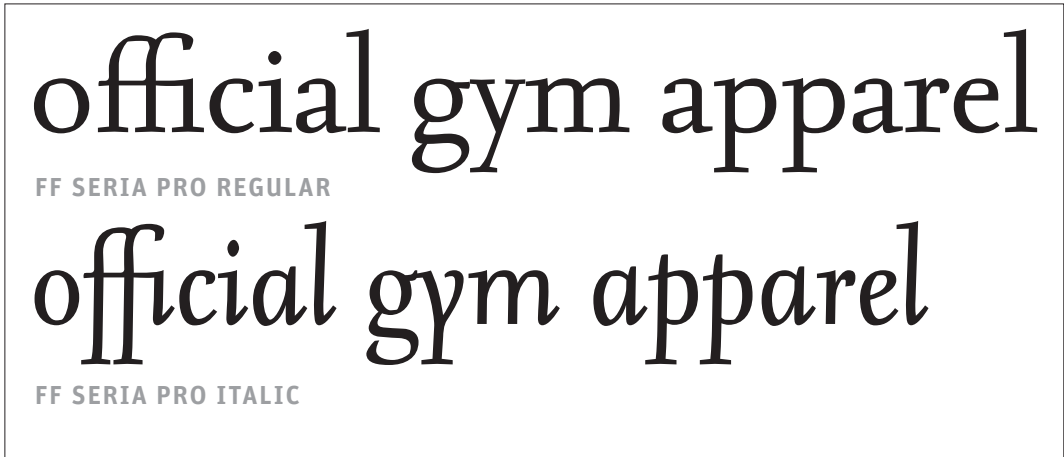
*furry handgloves &*  
BOOKMAN STD LIGHT ITALIC

Although it is called “Italic”, the original Bookman actually has an oblique; don’t let that swashalicious ampersand fool you. The Ed Benguiat redesign ITC Bookman on the other hand received a “proper” italic. But I largely prefer the original version – more bite and lots of attitude.

As the term italic refers to a design trait rather than simply the slant of the characters it is possible to have an upright italic. Some type designs use the name Italic when in fact they have an oblique, some call their obliques Slanted, and typefaces from German-speaking designers or foundries sometimes use Kursiv.



**STYLES, WEIGHTS, WIDTHS**  
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Although its slant is almost imperceptible, FF Serif clearly has a true Italic.

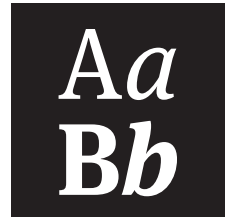
Due to the rising popularity of humanist sans serifs nowadays it has become quite common to have true italics in sans serif families as well, just like the presence of small caps, hanging figures and extended ligature is not exceptional anymore.

## Weights and Widths

Any variation in a type family can be called a style. There are two additional, more specific terms for certain types of variations: weight and width.







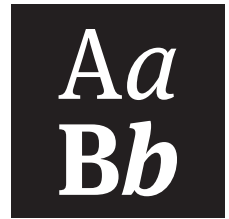
**STYLES, WEIGHTS, WIDTHS**

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The width on the other hand determines how wide the characters are. Contrary to the weights the standard width usually doesn't have a specific name. The traditional widths are Condensed and Extra Condensed or Compressed towards the narrow end of the scale, and Extended to the opposite side, but here as well certain families nowadays offer up to six different widths.

**Bureau Grot Wide**  
**Bureau Grot(esque)**  
**Bureau Grot Condensed**  
**Bureau Grot Compressed**  
**Bureau Grot Compressed**

Font Bureau's gorgeous Bureau Grot is a versatile interpretation of the English nineteenth-century sans by 2007 SOTA Award winner and type design icon David Berlow. It comes in five weights and five widths, ranging from an extremely narrow Extra Compressed to a generous Wide.



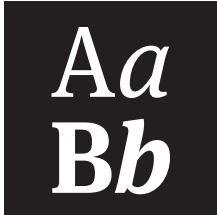
**STYLES, WEIGHTS, WIDTHS**

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There is some confusion regarding the exact definition of a weight. Many users will call a weight any variation of a type family, be it weights, widths, italics, small caps et al. Others insist that the term weight only covers the meaning as outlined above. So although the former group may say Taz III comes in 30 weights, the latter will insist the family has 15 weights with matching italics. Similarly the former group consider Bureau Grot to be a 25 weight family, while the latter defines it as a type family in five weights and five widths. This is an ongoing discussion which is not likely to be resolved – just like the distinction between typeface and font.

## **Alternate Naming Systems**

Now if anyone ever tries to fool you into believing Helvetica is the ultimate Modernist typeface, think again. Despite it being the preferred choice of the International Style, and in spite of all the hubbub for its fiftieth anniversary in 2007, the concept and structure for Helvetica as a type family didn't match the Modernist standards. It originally started out as just a couple of weights and gradually expanded into the larger family we now know. Yet the end result was far from consistent, even so that in 1983 the entire family had to be reworked into Neue Helvetica, a family with a more structurally unified set of heights and widths.



**STYLES, WEIGHTS, WIDTHS**

*It's All in the (Type) Family*

39  
univers

45 univers	45 <i>univers</i>	47 univers	47 <i>univers</i>	49 univers
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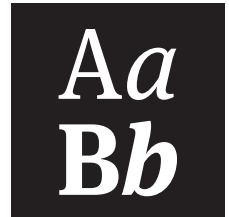
53 univers	55 univers	55 <i>univers</i>	57 univers	57 <i>univers</i>	59 univers
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63 univers	65 univers	65 <i>univers</i>	67 univers	67 <i>univers</i>
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73 univers	75 univers	75 <i>univers</i>
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**93**  
**univers**

Forget Helvetica – Univers is the original Modernist face, the first type family that exemplifies the International Style.



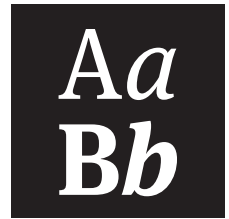
**STYLES, WEIGHTS, WIDTHS**

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The original type family to wholly embrace the Modernist principles is Adrian Frutiger's Univers. It is the first ever family of typefaces designed according to a rational system of coordinated weights and widths. Remarkable for Frutiger's approach is that he does away with the conventional naming of weights and widths, and uses numbers to define them – a revolutionary system at the time of its creation.

Indeed, the conventional names can be interpreted in different ways and sometimes lead to confusion. For example the Book weight intended for standard text setting is slightly heavier than the Regular/Roman/Normal in certain families yet lighter in other families. The Medium weight can be either heavier than the regular weight or actually be the regular weight. And one can only guess where a weight called News is located in the weight spectrum.

The numbering system on the other hand is perfectly unambiguous. The first digit defines the weight of the family member. As the number increases the weight gets bolder; the 30s being the lightest and the 80s the boldest in Univers. The second digit defines the width, with odd numbers for roman or upright styles and even numbers for italics or obliques. Logically 5 and 6 stand for the normal widths, at the centre of the width spectrum. Decreasing the second digit makes the design wider, and increasing it makes it more narrow. This allows the user to immediately know that Univers 73 is two increments wider and three increments heavier than Univers 48, and that Univers 48 is an oblique design and Univers 73 an upright one. Frutiger's numbering system and variations thereof have become quite common for larger type families.



STYLES, WEIGHTS, WIDTHS  
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## Abbreviations

Type styles often are abbreviated in application menus and such. Here is a handy overview:

Rm	<i>Roman</i>	Sm	<i>Semi Bold</i>
It	<i>Italic</i>	Hv	<i>Heavy</i>
Obl	<i>Oblique</i>	Bd	<i>Bold</i>
Sl	<i>Slanted</i>	Blk	<i>Black</i>
Th	<i>Thin</i>	Comp	<i>Compressed</i>
Lt	<i>Light</i>	Cond	<i>Condensed</i>
Rg	<i>Regular</i>	Nar	<i>Narrow</i>
Nr	<i>Normal</i>	W	<i>Wide</i>
Bk	<i>Book</i>	Ext	<i>Extended</i>
Md	<i>Medium</i>	Ex, X	<i>Extra</i>
Dm	<i>Demi Bold</i>	Ult	<i>Ultra</i>



### FontShop Education

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### About FontShop

Founded by Erik Spiekermann and Neville Brody in 1989, FontShop is the original independent retailer of digital type. We offer more than 100,000 fonts from dozens of expert-selected foundries, including our house brand: FontFont.

### Colophon

This document is set in  
FF Meta  
FF Meta Serif  
FF Dingbats 2.0

### Further Reading

- [FontShop Fundamentals 2 Alternatives to Helvetica](#)
- [Erik Spiekermann's Typo Tips](#)
- [The Right Font for the Job](#)
- [Type Anatomy](#)

### Online Resources

- [FontShop.com](http://FontShop.com)
- [FontFeed.com](http://FontFeed.com)
- [Spiekermann.com](http://Spiekermann.com)

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