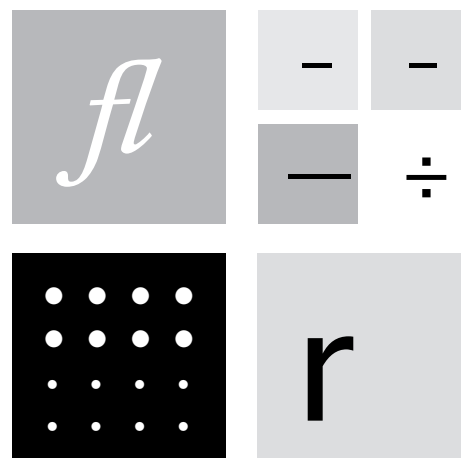


Figuring It Out

OSF, LF, and TF Explained



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OSF, LF, and TF explained

Introduction

Numerals (or figures) can take various forms. The figure style you choose ought to be appropriate to the project you are working on. Readability is key. But which style is best for which purpose? There are two main forms, **oldstyle figures** (OSF) and **lining figures** (LF). Each can come in tabular and proportional widths. See some examples above.

Oldstyle Figures

Oldstyle figures are Arabic numerals varying in height and position. Some sit on the baseline while others descend beneath the baseline. The 6 and 8 are commonly the tallest figures and the 3,4,5,7, and 9 descend below the baseline, while the 0, 1, and 2 are roughly the same height of the lowercase letters. This feature allows them to harmonize with other words on a page of text without becoming a distraction to the reader. So oldstyle figures are most appropriate in books or any running text. Oldstyle figures are also known as non-aligning figures, text figures or oldstyle numerals.

Lining Figures

By the year 1996, Roman Catholic nun Mother Theresa († September 5, 1997) was operating 517 missions in more than 100 countries.

Oldstyle Figures

By the year 1996, Roman Catholic nun Mother Theresa († September 5, 1997) was operating 517 missions in more than 100 countries.

BETTER

Lining Figures

Oldstyle Figures

7	scallions, thinly sliced
19	large shrimps or prawns
23	large eggs, lightly beaten
1 1/2	cup canola oil or cooking oil

Lining Figures

BETTER

7	scallions, thinly sliced
19	large shrimps or prawns
23	large eggs, lightly beaten
1 1/2	cup canola oil or cooking oil

Lining figures are derived from oldstyle figures. They are a modern style with all figures at a common size and position and even height as the uppercase letters (but sometimes smaller and lighter than the capitals). Today, most fonts use these as default. Lining figures sit on the baseline as opposed to oldstyle figures that appear at different heights and positions. They optically align along a height line and the baseline. The best applications are business reports, forms, tables or any place where alignment is crucial. Lining figures are also known as regular numerals or titling figures.

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Tabular Figures

Tabular figures are mono-width, they align vertically and thus appear in documents that compare numerical data in columns. Each figure shares the same width and space on both sides.

Tabular Figures

\$ 4219.82
\$ 23.11
\$ 257.00

Proportional Figures

Proportional figures are different in their total character width. They are spaced to fit together more like letters. For instance, the figure 1 is very narrow like the letter l and takes up less width than the number 6. Because their spacing appears more even, these figures are best in texts and headings where columnar alignment is not necessary.

Proportional Figures

\$ 4219.82
\$ 23.11
\$ 257.00

Now that you know the differences between the two figures styles and their two widths, you know what to buy for your particular needs. Fortunately, some foundries make it simple by including each available figure style for a typeface in a purchasable package. OpenType, though, makes it even simpler. Most OpenType fonts include all available figure styles within a single font. So there's no switching between fonts to get to the right figures.



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
- FontFeed.com
- Spiekermann.com

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