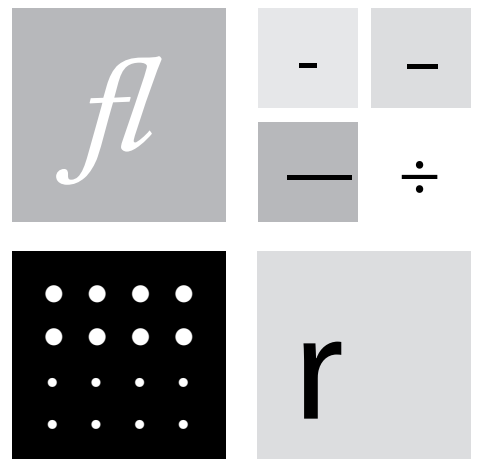# The Typographer's Glossary

Common Type Terminology

# A as in Ascender

ACCENTS

See Diacritics.

ALTERNATES

Different shapes (or glyphs) for the same character in a typeface, for example small caps, swash characters, contextual alternates, case-sensitive forms, etc.

When alternates are built-in as OpenType features, certain (older) operating systems and applications will not be able to access them.

ALTERNATES EXAMPLE:

FONTS USED:
FF META
FF DINGBATS 2.0
MINISTRY SCRIPT

TYPE GLOSSARY | **a** b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z
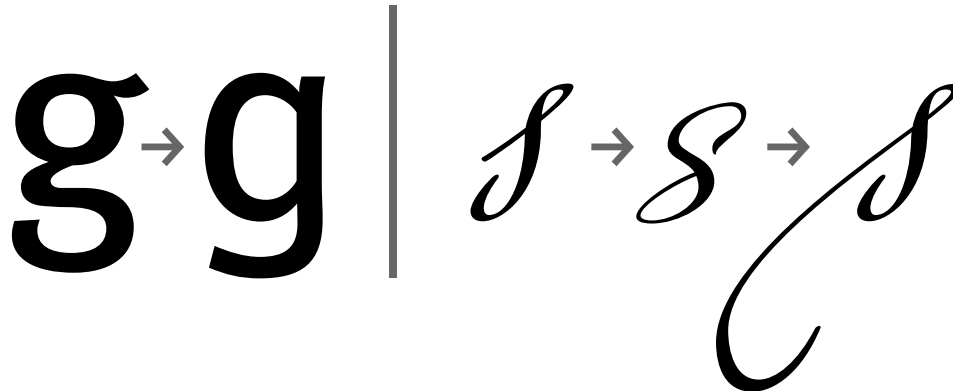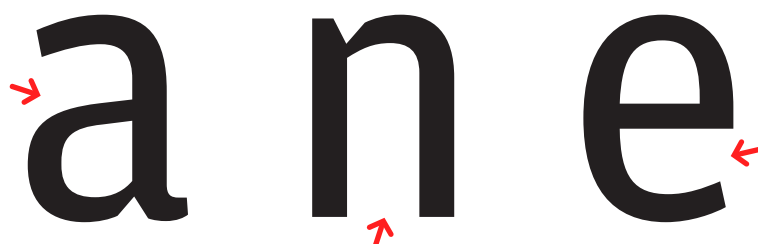
Aperture

The aperture is the partially enclosed, somewhat rounded negative space in some characters such as 'C', 'S', the lower part of 'e', or the upper part of a double-storey 'a'.

APERTURE EXAMPLE:

FONTS USED:
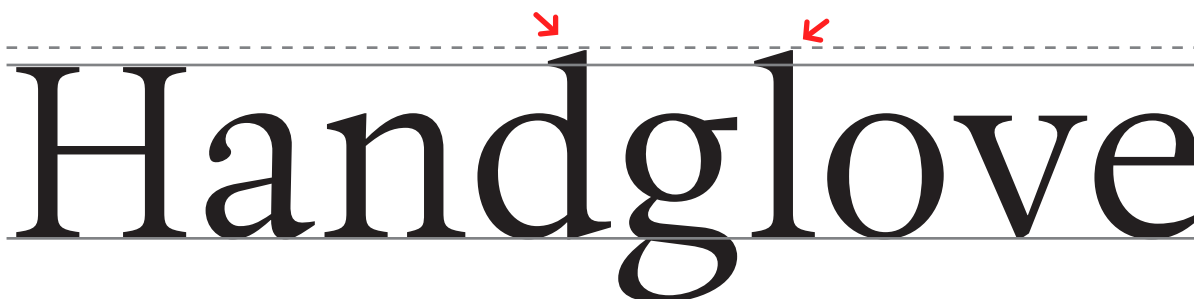**AMPLITUDE**
FF DINGBATS 2.0

a n e

ASCENDER

Any part in a lowercase letter that extends above the x-height, found for example in b, d, f, h, k, etc. Some types of ascenders have specific names.
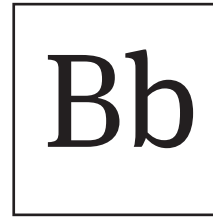
ASCENDER EXAMPLE:

FONT USED:
LEITURA NEWS

Handglove

AXIS

An imaginary line drawn from top to bottom of a glyph bisecting the upper and lower strokes is the axis.

TYPE GLOSSARY | abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

B as in Baseline

BALT (BALTIC)

(appended to a font or volume name) Language support; includes all necessary accents and characters for Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian (also included in CE – for Mac only). The supported languages may vary a little depending on the foundry.

BASELINE

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

BASELINE EXAMPLE:

FONT USED:
BREE

Cityscape

BODY

Originally the physical block on which each character sat, in digital type it is the imaginary area that encompasses each character in a font. The height of the body equals the point size; its width is related to the width of the character.

TYPE GLOSSARY | a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z

BOWL

The curved part of the character that encloses the circular or curved parts (counter) of some letters such as 'd', 'b', 'o', 'g', 'D', and 'B' is the bowl.

BRACKET

The bracket is a curved or wedge-like connection between the stem and serif of some fonts. Not all serifs are bracketed serifs.

Cc | Cc
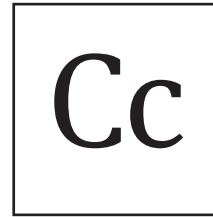
C as in Cap height

CAP HEIGHT

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

CASE-SENSITIVE

The position of a number of punctuation marks like hyphens, brackets, slashes etc. is centred on the x-height of the lowercase letters. Fonts with case-sensitive punctuation also have slightly raised alternates of these characters that are centred on the cap height (the height of the uppercase).

When case-sensitive forms are built-in as OpenType features, certain (older) operating systems and applications will not be able to access them.

CAP HEIGHT AND CASE-SENSITIVE EXAMPLE:

FONTS USED:
MUSEO

(Spider-man)

CASE-SENSITIVE OFF

(SPIDER-MAN)

CASE-SENSITIVE ON

TYPE GLOSSARY | a b **c** d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z

CENTRAL EUROPEAN (CE)

(appended to a font or volume name) Language support; includes all necessary accents and characters for Albanian, Croatian, Czech, Estonian, Finnish, Hungarian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish, Romanian, Slovak, Slovenian, and Sorbian (lower and upper).

CENTRAL EUROPEAN EXAMPLE:

FONT USED:
FF META

Mogę Cię pocałować?
POLISH

Hová valósi Ön?
HUNGARIAN

Jednolůžkový
CZECH

CHARACTER

Any letter, numeral, punctuation mark, and other sign included in a font. Some characters can be represented by more than one glyph.

COM

Linotype's "Communication" (or Com) fonts have been optimised for international communication and for use with Microsoft Office applications. They are TrueType-flavored OpenType fonts and are compatible with Mac and Windows operating systems.

CONTEXTUAL

Feature-rich OpenType fonts with *contextual alternates* can detect certain characters or character combinations before and/or after specific characters and substitute them with alternate glyphs or ligatures according to the context.

TYPE GLOSSARY | abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

COUNTER

The enclosed or partially enclosed circular or curved negative space (white space) of some letters such as d, o, and s is the counter.

CROSSBAR

The (usually) horizontal stroke across the middle of uppercase 'A' and 'H'.

CYRILLIC (CYR)

(appended to a font or volume name) Language support; includes the Cyrillic alphabet and all necessary accents for the Cyrillic languages.

The supported languages may vary a little depending on the foundry.

CYRILLIC EXAMPLE:

FONT USED:
FF DIN

Очень приятно

TYPE GLOSSARY | a b **c** d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z

D as in Diacritics

DESCENDER

Any part in a lowercase letter that extends below the baseline, found for example in g, j, p, q, y, etc. Some types of descenders have specific names.

DESCENDER EXAMPLE:

**FONT USED:
CO HEADLINE**

yukon gold

DIACRITICS

A diacritic is a ancilliary mark or sign added to a letter. In the Latin alphabet their function is to change the sound value of the letters to which they are added; in other alphabetical systems like Arabic or Hebrew they may indicate sounds (vowels and tones) which are not conveyed by the basic alphabet.

DIACRITICS EXAMPLE:

Áá Àà Ãã Āā Ăă

Đđ Êê Ěě Ęę Ëë

Ġġ Łł Şş Ůů Űű

DISPLAY

A category of typefaces designed for decorative or headline use. As opposed to text typefaces, display typefaces are usually meant for larger settings.

TYPE GLOSSARY | abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

E as in Ear

EAR

Typically found on the lower case 'g', an ear is a decorative flourish usually on the upper right side of the bowl.

EAR EXAMPLE:

**FONTS USED:
FF NEXUS SERIF**

EMBEDDING

Including font information in a digital document, to ensure that the text is rendered with the font specified by the author. Some EULAs restrict embedding.

EOT (EMBEDDABLE OPENTYPE)

File format developed by Microsoft to enable TrueType and OpenType fonts to be linked to web pages for download, to ensure that the text is rendered with the font specified by the author. Some EULAs restrict using EOT files.

TYPE GLOSSARY | a b c d **e** f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z

EULA (END USER LICENSE AGREEMENT)

As with most software, fonts are licensed to individuals and organisations. The EULA defines the terms and provisions for use of the font software. The EULA also indicates the number of CPUs or concurrent Users the fonts may be installed on. The number of CPUs/Users for which a font is initially licensed can vary depending on the manufacturer/foundry.

EXPERT SET

A font that contains special characters, such as small caps, fractions, ligatures, extra accents, and alternate glyphs. Because TrueType and PostScript only support a limited number of glyphs, some characters that are not used as frequently come in an expert font. OpenType fonts on the other hand, have the capacity for thousands of glyphs, so one font can include all these extras plus other alphabets etc.

EYE

Much like a counter, the eye refers specifically to the enclosed space in a lowercase 'e'.

EYE EXAMPLE:

FONTS USED:
FF AMMAN SANS
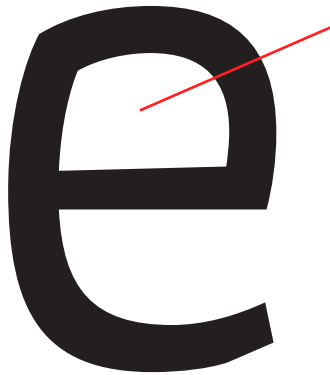
F as in Font

FAMILY

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 font or typeface.

Super families are very extensive with a very large number of weights and widths. Type systems are collections of related type families that cross type classifications.

FONT

A collection of letters, numbers, punctuation, and other symbols used to set text (or related) matter. Although font and typeface are often used interchangeably, font refers to the physical embodiment (whether it's a case of metal pieces or a computer file) while typeface refers to the design (the way it looks). A font is what you use, and a typeface is what you see.

FOUNDRY

A company that designs and/or distributes typefaces; a type manufacturer. FontShop.com carries fonts from over 80 foundries.

TYPE GLOSSARY | a b c d e **f** g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z
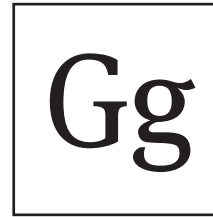
G as in Glyph

GLYPH

Every character in a typeface, (e.g: G, $, ?, and 7), is represented by a glyph. One single type design may contain more than one glyph for each character. These are usually referred to as alternates.

GREEK

(appended to a font or volume name) Language support; includes the Greek alphabet and all necessary accents for Greek.

HANGING FIGURES

See Oldstyle figures

HYBRID FIGURES

An intermediary style between oldstyle figures and lining figures, hybrid figures are somewhat smaller than the capital letters and have a consistent body size, yet some parts extend slightly upwards and downwards.

When the different figure sets are built-in as OpenType features, certain (older) operating systems and applications will only be able to access the default figures.
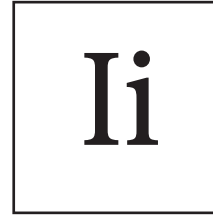
I as in Italics

ITALIC

A (mostly) slanted type style which takes its basic shapes from a stylised form of handwriting, and is usually narrower than its roman counterpart. Italics are commonly used for emphasis in text. They are primarily found in serif designs, while obliques originally were associated with sans serifs.

LEADING

The vertical space between lines of text (baseline to baseline). Also known as linespacing.

LIGATURES

Special characters that are actually two letters or more combined into one. In cases where two adjacent characters would normally bump into each other, a ligature allows the letters to flow together more gracefully. This usually makes word shapes more aesthetically pleasing.

LIGATURE EXAMPLE:

FONT USED:
GARAGE GOTHIC

waffle irons

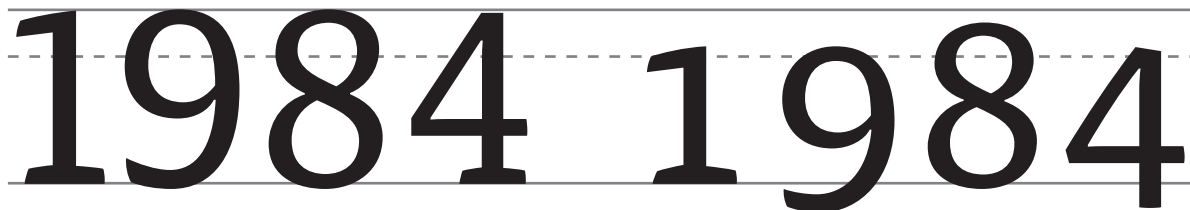**TYPE GLOSSARY** | a b c d e f g h **i** j k **l** m n o p q r s t u v w x y z

LINING FIGURES (LF)

Numbers that rest on the baseline, and are usually the same height as capital letters. Lining figures may be tabular or proportional.

LINING FIGURES EXAMPLE:

FONT USED:
FF TISA

1984 1984

LINING FIGURES   OLD STYLE FIGURES

LOOP/LOBE

In a double-storey 'g', the loop is the enclosed or partially enclosed counter below the baseline that is connected to the bowl by a link. The enclosed or partially enclosed extenders on cursive 'p', 'b', 'l', and similar letters are also called loops.

LOWERCASE

The small letters in a typeface. The name refers to the days of metal type, as the small letters were kept in the lower part of the type case.

TYPE GLOSSARY | abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

M as in Monospaced

MONOSPACED

A font in which every character has the same width, and no kerning pairs. This allows for neatly setting columns of text and tables, for example in programming code, accounting, etc.
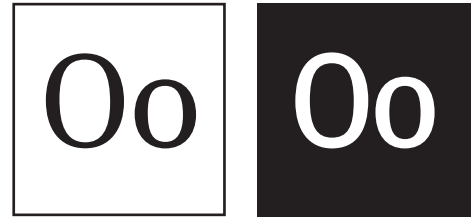
MONOSPACED EXAMPLE:

FONTS USED:
THE SANS
THE SANS MONO

Transfigure

PROPORTIONAL SPACED

Transfigure

MONOSPACED

TYPE GLOSSARY | a b c d e f g h i j k l **m** n o p q r s t u v w x y z

O as in Oldstyle Figures

OBLIQUE

A font that is slanted. Oblique fonts are different from italic fonts, in that they are mechanically sheared, then slightly adjusted. Italic fonts, on the other hand, are designed differently from upright or roman versions. They are usually narrower than their roman counterparts, and reflect more of a calligraphic sensibility than lowercase oblique fonts.

OBLIQUE EXAMPLE:

FONT USED:
URW ANTIQUA

*Swag, Swag*

ITALIC   OBLIQUE

OFFC

FontFont offers a TrueType-flavored OpenType format called Offc (or Office). Offc fonts are ideal for users of Microsoft Office and other word processing and spreadsheet applications. They are style-linked so as best to take advantage of the applications' style selection options. Offc fonts also offer full compatibility across platforms.

OLDSTYLE FIGURES (OSF)

Numbers that have different heights, some aligning to the baseline, some below. Oldstyle figures harmonize well with lowercase letters. Using oldstyle figures helps keep the numbers from standing out too much and disturbing the overall flow of the typography on the page.

OLDSTYLE FIGURES EXAMPLE:

FONT USED:
FF TISA

1984 1984

LINING FIGURES   OLD STYLE FIGURES
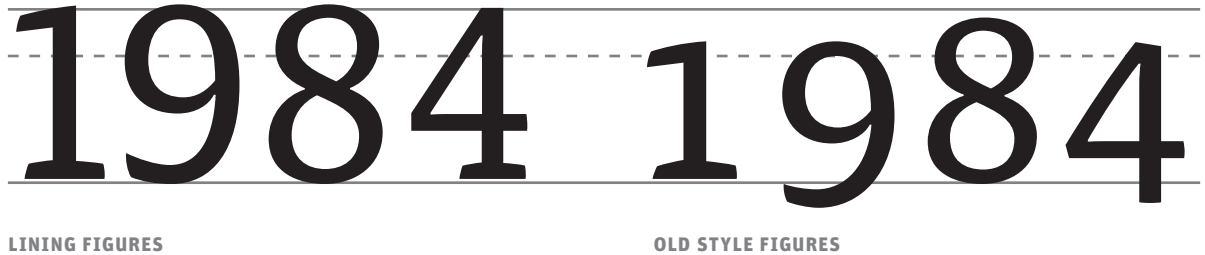
OPENTYPE

The most recent font format emerged at the beginning of the new millennium. OpenType was initially developed by Microsoft. In a few years time it has become the new standard format for digital fonts. The biggest advantages shared by all OpenType fonts are their single file structure, cross-platform compatibility, and advanced typographic functionality. This means any single OpenType font file will work on both Mac and Windows systems, and some OpenType fonts include expanded character sets and special features like automatic ligatures and alternate glyphs. OpenType is the best format for most purposes.

OPTICAL SIZE

Some type designs come in different versions optimized for use in specific point sizes. Subtle variations in weight, contrast, and proportion make them as legible in small text as they are beautiful in big headlines.

TYPE GLOSSARY | abcdefghijklmn**o**pqrstuvwxyz

P as in Pica

PETITE CAPS

Slightly smaller than small caps, petite caps are capital letters that are exactly as high as the x-height of the lowercase letters.

PICA

A typographic unit of measure corresponding to $\frac{1}{72}$nd of its respective foot, and therefore to $\frac{1}{6}$th of an inch. The pica contains 12 points. The standard in contemporary printing (home computers and printers) is the computer pica ($\frac{1}{72}$nd of the Anglo-Saxon compromise foot of 1959, i.e. 4.233 mm or 0.166 in). At 100% zoom one computer pica corresponds to 12 image pixels on a computer monitor display, thus one computer point corresponds with one image pixel.

PIXEL

Pixel fonts are modular type designs that take advantage of the pixel grid to render often very small type on screen. They are very popular in web design, but also became an aesthetic on their own.

POINT

Type sizes are generally expressed in points. The point is a typographic unit of measure corresponding to $\frac{1}{12}$th of a pica. At 100% zoom one computer point corresponds with one image pixel on a computer monitor display.

TYPE GLOSSARY | a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o **p** q r s t u v w x y z

POINT SIZE

The point size of a typeface refers to the size of the body, the imaginary area that encompasses each character in a font. This is why a typeface with a large x-height appears bigger than a typeface with a small x-height at the same point size.

POSTSCRIPT

A technology developed and trademarked by Adobe Systems, Inc. On older systems, PostScript fonts require Adobe Type Manager. On the Mac, PostScript fonts consist of a printer font and a bitmap suitcase, which should always be kept together.

PostScript fonts are generally more difficult to maintain, and PostScript fonts can have compatibility issues with some operating systems like Vista.

PRO

OpenType Pro fonts share the same technical specifications as OpenType Standard (Std, or simply OT) fonts, but support a broader range of languages. Standard OT fonts contain support for Western languages, while Pro fonts include Central European and often Latin Extended, and often Greek and/or Cyrillic and Extended Cyrillic.

PROPORTIONAL FIGURES

Proportional figures are different from Tabular figures 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. There are Proportional Lining Figures and Proportional Oldstyle Figures.

TYPE GLOSSARY │ a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o **p** q r s t u v w x y z

R as in Roman

ROMAN

The (standard) upright type style. The term Roman is also sometimes used to denote the Regular weight.

SMALL CAPS

Small caps are capital letters that are approximatively as high as the x-height of the lowercase letters. When properly designed small caps are absent in the selected font, many applications can create small caps by scaling down the capitals. However this makes these fake small caps too light and narrow, and they don't harmonise properly with the lowercase. Originally small caps were only available for the roman text weight(s), but nowadays many type families also have them for the italics and the bolder weights.

When small caps are built-in as OpenType features, certain (older) operating systems and applications will not be able to access them.

SMALL CAPS EXAMPLE:

FONT USED:
FF QUADRAAT

BEGUILING

TYPE GLOSSARY | abcdefghijklmnopq**rs**tuvwxyz

SPACING

Spacing refers to the distribution of horizontal space on both sides of each character in a font to achieve a balanced and even texture. Spacing problems in difficult letter combinations (exceptions) are solved with kerning. Well-spaced fonts need comparatively less kerning pairs.

STD/OT (OPENTYPE STANDARD)

(appended to a font or volume name) OpenType Standard fonts support the basic range of languages. Some foundries use the abbreviation Std, while others simply use OT. In the latter case OT identifies both the font format and the language support. Some foundries do include Central European (CE) and Turkish in their OpenType Standard fonts.

STYLE

Any given variant in a type family; the equivalent of a single font or typeface.

STYLE-LINKING

Families of fonts that are grouped together under a single item in the font menu. To access other styles in a style-linked family, use the style buttons in the application that you are using. Some applications like for example the Adobe Creative Suite don't support style-linking, yet still conveniently list the fonts by family.

STYLISTIC SET

In OpenType fonts with alternate glyph shapes for certain characters, different character sets can be grouped in stylistic sets. Instead of having to manually switch individual characters, the user can select the appropriate stylistic set which has all the desired alternates.

Certain (older) operating systems and applications cannot access the stylistic sets, making only the default character set available.

TYPE GLOSSARY | abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

SWASH

An elegant extension on a letter form, either a modification of an existing part or an added-on part.

When swash characters are built-in as OpenType features, certain (older) operating systems and applications will not be able to access them.

SWASH EXAMPLE:

FONTS USED:
DEAR SARAH

Carmen

Carmen

GLOSSARY | a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r **s** t u v w x y z

T as in Typography

TABULAR FIGURES (TF)

Numbers that share identical character widths (that is, they are monospaced). Using tabular figures enables you to set columns of numbers, and have them neatly line up vertically. This is especially useful for tables, thus "tabular". Tabular figures are often lining.

When the different figure sets are built-in as OpenType features, certain (older) operating systems and applications will only be able to access the default figures.

TAIL

In typography, the descending, often decorative stroke on the letter 'Q' or the descending, often curved diagonal stroke on 'K' or 'R' is the tail.

TERMINAL

The end (straight or curved) of any stroke that doesn't include a serif.

TRUETYPE (TT/TTF)

A font format developed by Apple Systems, Inc. and licensed to Microsoft Corp. TrueType fonts are natively supported by the Windows and Mac operating systems. On the Mac, both the printer and screen fonts are combined in a single TrueType font suitcase file.

TURK/TU (TURKISH)

(appended to a font or volume name) Language support; includes all necessary accents and characters for Turkish.

TYPE SYSTEM

Also called super families, type systems are collections of coordinated type families that cross type classifications, and are designed to work together in perfect harmony. They can be sans and serif companions, text and display cuts, or any other combination. The different families in a type system or super family share common character architecture, proportions, x-height, weights, and pedigree, to name a few.

TYPEFACE

An artistic interpretation, or design, of a collection of alphanumeric symbols. A typeface may include letters, numerals, punctuation, various symbols, and more — often for multiple languages. A typeface is usually grouped together in a family containing individual fonts for italic, bold, and other variations of the primary design.

GLOSSARY | a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s **t** u v w x y z

U as in Uppercase

UNICASE

Type design with upper- and lowercase letter forms that share the same height.

UNICASE EXAMPLE:

FONT USED:
INGEBORG

SHOWMan

UPPERCASE

The capitals in a typeface. The name refers to the days of metal type, as the capitals were kept in the upper part of the type case.

V as in Volume

VOLUME

Fonts can be purchased individually, but packages or volumes always offer the best value and performance. A font volume is a collection of fonts that are sold as a unit. This can either be a type family, part of a type family, or a collection of fonts that are stylistically or thematically related.

WEIGHT

A single style or iteration of a typeface. Sometimes, the term "weight" refers specifically to the heaviness of a typeface. However, it is often used as a general term for any style: Italic, Small Caps, Bold, Light Expert, etc.

WESTERN

Language support; includes all necessary accents and characters for Albanian, Breton, Catalan, Danish, Dutch, English, Finnish, French, German, Icelandic, Irish, Italian, Norwegian (+ Bokmål & Nynorsk Norwegian), Portuguese, Rhaeto-Romance, Spanish, and Swedish.

X-HEIGHT

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

TYPE GLOSSARY | abcdefghijklmnopqrstu**vwx**yz

FontShop Education

FontShop is more than a shop that sells fonts — we want to help you do great work too. Get more typography tips and tutorials at fontshop.com/education.

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**