Steve Pitt.com

GRAPHIC DESIGN

Choosing a typeface?

Compelling images, beautiful colour and an engaging layout are key to a successful design, as are the fonts you select to tell your story. Typography is not a science. Typography is an art. choosing a typeface that will not to hinder reading pleasure, but to aid it. Good typefaces are designed for a good purpose, but not even the very best types are suited to every situation.

Knowing which font to use is not following a set of rules, but more a selection of guiding principles.

Knowing which typefaces are most effective can mean the difference between a design that works or turns people off. There are a myriad of fonts from which to choose…

Here are some basics about fonts.

Serif vs. Sans Serif
In the world of typography a lot of time is wasted attempting to prove that one is better than the other. Basic types of fonts are: serif, sans serif, scripts, graphic and display typefaces. Of these, serif and sans serif fonts are normally used for bodies of text.
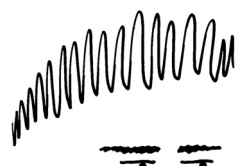
A possible first step in selecting a font is to decide whether you need a serif or sans serif font. How do they differ?

Serif fonts have small strokes or lines that extend from the ends of letters and symbols. They can look like small feet, caps, tails, flags or dots. Because the lines make each character more distinct, serif text is easier to read. Serif fonts have been used for centuries in printed books, magazines and newspapers, and are the preferred fonts for text.

Consider a serif font to convey warm, personal, artistic, stately, traditional, conservative or intellectual themes.

Sans serif fonts are simple and straightforward, and lack the "lines" of the serif fonts ("sans" is French for "without"). Because the individual characters of sans serif fonts are less distinct, they are sometimes harder to read. A lack of individual detail also gives them less personality. These fonts are typically used for newspaper headlines, photo captions and technical documents. Because computer screen resolutions vary, serif fonts can look blurred on many computers. The simplicity of sans serif fonts makes them easier to read on computers. They are they are usually a good choice for web site and powerpoint presentations.

Consider a sans serif font if you wish to convey technical, cool, clean, crisp, youthful, modern or uncluttered. However, sans serif fonts can also be viewed as cold and impersonal.

Some examples of guiding principles which guide a designers typeface choice:

Honour content
This should be every typographer's mantra.

Read it
If you're setting text, read it — reading the text may give vital clues, for choosing the right typeface, but will also be an aid in the overall design of the page.

Additionally attempt to understand it. This is not always possible. However, attempt to understand the thrust or theme of the text.

Target audience and medium
Who will be reading the text? Scientists, lawyers, engineers, creatives, children? If it's not obvious from the text, then find out.

Consider too the medium, the page. Perhaps you're setting text within someone else's page design and you have no control over margins or page dimensions.

Does it look right?
If your text's final destination is paper, then print it and see. If setting for the screen, then check it on both PC and Mac, and at different resolutions and screens.

Typography is an art and that many of the decisions that are made, including type choice, are subjective. If you're unsure, ask others (designers and non-designers) to look your branding.

Steve Pitt

GRAPHIC DESIGN

95 WAVERLEY CRESCENT
ROMSLEY
HALESOWEN
WEST MIDLANDS
B62 0NY

telephone 01562 710 218
mobile 0771 737 8155
e-mail stevepitt@stevepitt.com
web www.stevepitt.com

*This is an amalgamation of two or three different articles, that I have then adapted for my own purposes. So if the original author reads this and recognises his own words my apologies for reproducing without permission!