

# Beautiful Typography

A GUIDE TO CHOOSING  
& USING THE BEST FONTS  
FOR A PROFESSIONAL-  
LOOKING BRAND

*by Pamela Wilson  
of BIG Brand System*

**BIG** BRAND  
SYSTEM

## About the Author



I'm Pamela Wilson of **BIG Brand System**.

Big Brand System is devoted to helping people like you who are building an online business.

I'm an author, keynote speaker, and online educator. I've been helping large organizations and small businesses get their ideas out into the world since 1987.

*This guide is an educational resource and isn't a substitute for working with a business consultant. Business is risky — we all know that! I can't guarantee the outcome of following the recommendations here. Read on, and if you need professional help, consider hiring a business consultant.*

# A Guide to Choosing (and Using) the Best Fonts for Your Brand

**W**hen your message is presented using the right font and top-notch typographic handling, you gain major authority points with your prospects and customers. We associate well-typeset pages with authority in our culture.

Think about beautiful type you've seen in books, diplomas and magazines. Impressive, right?

Authority speaks with beautiful type, and good typography makes a message clear.

It's not simple to pull off, though. First off, there are so many typefaces to choose from. Some of us have bad habits from our typewriter days we need to unlearn, too.

Then there's the issue of web typography. The small group of standard web fonts has expanded to include thousands of custom fonts. How can we choose from the massive selection available, and know for sure that our offline and online fonts look cohesive?

## What You'll Learn in This Guide

You're about to learn guidelines for choosing typefaces that will communicate your marketing messages in a clear and authoritative voice. You'll discover good typographic practices so everything you create looks more polished and professional.

You'll become familiar with the basics of good typography and get a glimpse of advanced typographic skills you can implement once you have basic skills in place.

You'll get a "Good Type Cheat Sheet" you can use as a reference, too. On the last page, there's information that will help you find your ideal customer. Ready to get started?

## How to Use This Guide

First, read through the material once, from start to finish.

Don't begin choosing fonts yet! It's important you understand how all the pieces fit together before you begin choosing between font families. As you understand the major font categories, you'll have a better idea about what will work for your business.

And once you get through this entire guide, you'll have a high level of understanding about how to use the fonts you choose just like the pros do.

You'll choose two fonts to represent your business, *and* you'll know how to use them so they look great.

## What's the Difference Between a Font and a Typeface?

Let's start off with a quick definition. Although the terms are often used interchangeably, they refer to different things.

**A typeface is a collection of letter forms.** For example, Helvetica is a typeface. The Helvetica typeface has regular, bold, italic and bold italic weights and is available in many different sizes, but they're all the Helvetica typeface.

Within the Helvetica typeface, you can find an individual font like Helvetica Bold 18 point. **The font is the actual unit of the typeface that you use**, with the weight (bold, regular, light) and size.

## Choose a Typeface that Speaks for Your Business

**In order to pick the right typeface for the job, consider how you'll use it:**

### **YOUR IDEAL CUSTOMER:**

Just like with everything else design-related, it's best to start your efforts by thinking about your ideal customer. What age group comprises your biggest customers? What's their gender? Are they traditional, contemporary, formal or casual?

**YOUR MESSAGE:**

The content you're delivering should influence your typeface choice. The typeface you choose for an invitation to a black-tie event will be very different from the one you use for a technical manual you create. Consider the majority of what you want to communicate, and use a typeface that's appropriate.

**YOUR TONE OF VOICE:**

How would you like to convey your message? Do you want to use a formal or casual tone? Do you want your marketing materials to seem upscale and high-end, or down-to-earth, friendly and approachable?

**HOW MUCH TEXT YOU'LL HAVE:**

Are you going to use long blocks of text in any of your materials? If so, the readability of your typeface is vital. Do you need just a small amount of text at a large size? (Like for a sign with just a few words.) In that case, readability is still important but you can get by with a font that is more decorative.

**MESSAGE DELIVERY:**

How will your message be delivered? Will it be primarily on the web, or in print? Does it need to look good in both places? If it will be printed, how will it be printed? Will the document be photocopied or printed on a high-end offset printing press?

## What to Look for When Judging Typefaces

There are thousands of fonts to choose from, and there's no formula I can give you to make choosing them fast and easy.

What I can do is provide some ways to eliminate major groups of typefaces that won't work for your business. You can completely ignore them, because they're not good choices.

And then, from the group that remains, I'll show you what to look for, and how to choose and combine fonts that will give your words the authority they deserve.

## WHAT TO AVOID

The first job of any font is to make words readable. Period.

So all those funky, “quirky” fonts you come across that are interesting ... but that slow you down when you read them? Avoid them at all costs!

Stick with fonts that may seem a little plain and boring at first. Within the scope of highly readable fonts there are still thousands of fonts available that will express your brand’s personality, and make your words shine.

## LOOK FOR LARGE X-HEIGHTS

We’re going to get a little technical in this part, but once you understand this concept, it will make spotting highly-readable fonts easy.

The x-height of a font refers to the size of the bottom portion of lower-case letters. It’s the height of the lower-case letter “m,” the round part of a lower-case “p” and the size of all the vowels. See the illustration below.

X-height refers to the size of the bottom part of lower-case letters. Look for fonts with large x-heights, like the one on the right.



As you look at font samples, avoid those that have small x-heights. That style is fine for a few words at a time, but for text of any length, it’s hard to read.

Fonts with large x-heights are easy to read, even when you need to use them small. So make this another one of the “filters” you use to eliminate fonts and narrow down the group you’ll choose from.

## HOW MANY FONTS DO YOU NEED?

I recommend you choose no more than two fonts to represent your business.

This may seem limiting at first, but here’s the thing: most people start to lose track of your font style once they see more than two fonts.

And for you, the person who'll put these fonts to work, it's confusing to have too many fonts to choose from when you're trying to decide how to set up your text.

**Choose one font for your headlines.** Make sure it has a nice bold weight, because headlines look great when they're bold and stand out.

**Choose one more font for your body text.** Review the readability recommendations, and read on to understand how to best set up your text so it's easy to get through.

### **SERIF OR SANS-SERIF?**

The answer is *yes*.

What I mean by that is, why choose? One of my favorite things to do when picking fonts for a business is to find a serif and a sans-serif font that look great together. This gives you a tremendous amount of flexibility.

There will be times you'll want to communicate with your sans-serif font, and other times your serif font will fit the bill.

And there will be plenty of places where you'll use them together on the same page. As long as they combine flawlessly, you can put them together and expect they'll look great.

### **COMBINING SERIFS AND SANS-SERIFS**

There are a few tips to keep in mind when combining serifs and sans-serifs.

The most important thing is to make sure the letter forms look related. Look for similarities in as many letters as possible. Let's compare the fonts in the previous example:

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz  
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

Look at the lower-case alphabets of both fonts closely. Which letters have similar shapes? Which are a little different, but not dramatically? And which are totally different? On the next page, we'll give this font combination a score.

Type Type

Serif fonts, like the one on the left, have little "feet" at the ends of the letters. Sans-serif fonts, like the one on the right, are streamlined and have no "feet."

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz  
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

I see three lower-case letters with different shapes, c, e, and w. And I see one letter with a completely different shape between the fonts, the g.

Overall, this combination works. Let's look at two more serif and sans-serif fonts.

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz  
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

This combination doesn't work as well. The first major red flag is that the font on the top line has an especially small x-height, and the one on the bottom line has an especially large one. This difference alone makes them incompatible.

In addition, there are seven different shapes, and two that are completely different. These two fonts won't work well together.

## RESOURCES FOR CHOOSING FONTS

Since we all need to represent our businesses online, it's smart to start by choosing fonts that you can use on a website. My favorite resources for web-ready fonts are:

**Google fonts:** <https://fonts.google.com/>

Google hosts an ever-growing collection of fonts you can use both on your site and for offline marketing. They're well organized and easy to use — and free!

**FontSquirrel:** <http://www.fontsquirrel.com/>

FontSquirrel is a repository for free fonts, but they have a variety of licenses: some are for personal use only, and many have no restrictions at all. Use the font filters to select fonts that meet your needs.

**Typekit:** <https://typekit.com/fonts>

Typekit is owned by Adobe, and has a vast collection of very high-quality fonts by some of the top foundries and type designers working today. It's a paid service, and works flawlessly once you get it set up.

## Using Your Fonts

This section is all about how to use the fonts you've chosen. I'm going to cover font basics, and then show you some sophisticated typographic tricks used by professional graphic designers that will make you look like a pro, too.

### HOW TO MEASURE FONTS

Type is measured different ways depending on where you use it. **In print**, type is primarily measured in *point size*, and is abbreviated *pt*. **On the web**, type is measured in *points (pt)*, *pixels (px)* and *ems*.

### PROPORTION COUNTS

The important thing to master no matter what measurement system is used in the software program or website theme you're using, is **proportion**. What does proportion have to do with typography? Read on for sizing guidelines that will help you master typographic proportion.

### TEXT SIZING GUIDELINES

Your text typeface should be chosen and typeset for readability. You want your marketing messages to be easily consumed and digested, after all, so don't make your ideal customer work too hard.

When setting your text typeface, I wish I could give you a "magic number" as a guide. For example, wouldn't it be nice if you knew for sure that the smallest size you should use for text type was 12 point? But it's not that easy. 12 point type varies dramatically from one font to another. See the examples on the next page.

Many typefaces look great and are very readable at 9, 10 and 11 pts. Magazines are regularly set using 9 and 10 pt. type. But certain typefaces look way too small at 9 pts. Use your eyes as a guide!

Here's an example of 12 pt. Times Roman. This is the standard size that many word processing and design programs use as a default for setting type.

Here's an example of 12 pt. Bernhard Modern. This is the standard size that many word processing and design programs use as a default for setting type.

Here's an example of 12 pt. Century Old Style. This is the standard size that many word processing and design programs use as a default for setting type.

### USE PROPORTION TO SIZE YOUR TYPE

Select your text typeface first. Before you decide what font and size you'll use, look at paragraph-long samples set in the font. Check readability in the medium you plan to use to present your message — whether it's on screen, in a photocopy or in a printed piece.

Decide what size will work for your text, and then use that size as a base number that you can make the rest of your size decisions off of. Your headlines, subheads, call out and disclaimer text sizes should all relate proportionately to your text size.

*Call outs (sometimes called pull quotes) are text that you highlight to break up your page visually, just like this!*

### TYPE PROPORTIONS CHEAT SHEET

Here are general size guidelines:

**Headlines:** text size x 2

**Subheads:** text size x 1.5

**Call outs:** text size x 1.5

**Disclaimers:** text size x .75

**Headline** text can be approximately twice the size of your body text. If your body text is 12 points, your headlines can be 24 points, and will stand out from the body text at that size. Depending on the typeface, you could go larger ... but don't go smaller.

**Subhead** text can be 50% larger than your body text, so for 12 point type, you can use 18 pt. subheads. They will stand out from the body text, but be less prominent than your headlines.

**Call out** text usually looks good at about the same size as the subhead text. You want to avoid having too many sizes on your page, so keeping it to the same size as the subheads will lend visual unity.

**Legal or disclaimer text** can be about 25% smaller than your body text. This helps to visually communicate that it's less important.

## LINE SPACING GUIDELINES

The amount of spacing between lines of text is another decision you can make that will influence readability. This is called leading (pronounced to rhyme with 'sledding').

Leading is a term that comes from the days that type was set using pieces of lead. The typesetter inserted blank lines of lead between the lines of type to space them apart, and the larger the width of the leading blocks, the more space appeared between lines.

A guideline for leading is to give your text lines 20–50% more leading than your text sizes. So, 10 pt. type would have 12–15 pt. leading.

**Add 20–50% to your point size to get your recommended leading.**

10 pt text + 20% = 12 pt leading  
10 pt text + 50% = 15 pt leading

**This is an example of the Folio typeface set in 10 pt. type with 12 pt. leading.**

Cea vendendam aut dunt assumtem con coreperum volorit, quas nest id que perocus abor magnis sumquatet ipis dellatusandi utem facea ditaecusam ut odis mi, to tem quis nimet quatur moloria voluld mil moditio nsequia dipid este volore dendipsam untem quia inveres dolupti onsequam audita sus deribus cilitib usan-ihicim eliquia dolesed moluptum faciisqui

**This is an example of the Folio typeface set in 10 pt. type with 15 pt. leading.**

Cea vendendam aut dunt assumtem con coreperum volorit, quas nest id que perocus abor magnis sumquatet ipis dellatusandi utem facea ditaecusam ut odis mi, to tem quis nimet quatur moloria voluld mil moditio nsequia dipid este volore dendipsam untem quia inveres dolupti

## LINE LENGTH GUIDELINES

When it comes to line lengths, you want to find a balance. Too-short lines mean your reader has to scan back and forth too much in order to absorb your text, and that can be tiring. Too-long lines mean your reader takes such a long trip from left to right that they may have a difficult time finding their place again when they search for the beginning of the next line.

The ideal line length is somewhere **between 50-75 characters** of whatever typeface you are using. It might be easier to remember it like this: make your lines no longer than two to three alphabet lengths, which would be 52-78 characters (i.e. 26 x 2 = 52, and 26 x 3 = 78).

### LETTER SPACING GUIDELINES

Typefaces are generally drawn to be used small. The exception to this would be display typefaces ...

# Bodoni Poster Display Typeface

... which are drawn to be used large, as in headlines.

When type designers create typefaces, they draw the letter forms, and also calculate the spacing between individual letter pairs, which is called **kerning**. It's a painstaking process, but a well-kerned typeface is visually unified. One of the clues to a well-made typeface is how nicely the letter pairs fit together right out of the box.

In general, though, even well-kerned typefaces start to look too spaced out once you start using them larger than about 24 pts. Once you make a typeface this large, the spacing that looked fine at a smaller size just doesn't work, and you need to apply **tracking**. Tracking means to reduce the space between a group of letters by the same amount.

Tucked In Warm & Cozy



The lower case "u" and "a" are tucked under the capital letter they follow.

# Tucked In Warm & Cozy

↑ ↑  
This typeface isn't kerned as carefully. The result? The words read like "T ucked" and "W arm."

## No Tracking Applied

## Tracking Applied

If you want to make a word mark logo, which is a type-only logo, careful tracking and kerning will help to make the letter spacing look nice and evenly tight.

This is a visual skill that you can improve the more you use it, but the effect you want when using type at large sizes is for letters to look like they're tightly but evenly spaced.

You want to make sure it doesn't look like another word is being formed because there's too much space between one group of letters and another.

### Greene's Bakery

Here's the Bell Gothic typeface, typed out straight with no tracking applied. Not bad, but it could be better.

### Greene's Bakery



In this example I've applied overall tracking to tighten up the letter spacing by the same amount between each letter. It looks much better, but now I'm looking carefully to see if any letters look like they are pulling away from the others. I see too much space between the **G** and the **r**, around the **apostrophe**, and between the **B** and **a**, and **k** and **e**.

### Greene's Bakery

Much better! Now both words "stick together" as a unit. There aren't any letters that are pulling away from the others. Spacing is even and tight, which is what you want in a word mark.

## Please Don't

**Don't** distort type electronically. If you need a condensed or expanded typeface, look for one that is drawn to be that way.

### Don't do this to condense letters **Use the right typeface for the job**

**Don't** use ALL CAPITAL LETTERS for more than a few words at a time. We don't read letter-by-letter. Instead, our eyes take in word shapes when reading. All capital letters turn words into rectangles and slow down reading time.

**Don't** use all capital letters when using script typefaces, ever. It's a disaster! Script typefaces have specially drawn capital letters with dramatic swashes that don't combine well when you put them next to each other.

## *YIKES! DON'T DO THIS!*

**Don't** use typefaces that are too similar to one another. Either use typefaces that are part of the same family, or choose contrasting styles that will help your headlines stand out from your body text.

**Don't** use two spaces between sentences. For some of us, this is a holdover from the typewriter days when typefaces were mono spaced. For others, it's simply the way they were taught. Two spaces between sentences leaves too large of a hole in the middle of the text.

**Don't** stack letters on the vertical, unless you are creating a sign for a HOTEL. Letters have different widths, so they're hard to read when they're stacked. (The letters HOTEL are about the same width, so it's the exception!)

Don't use the same typeface at the same size all over your page. Good typography creates a road map through your information, and guides the viewer so that they can quickly read and understand your message. Headlines and subheads that contrast with your text typeface in style, boldness, size and color will make your text easier to scan. Go ahead and mix it up with more than one typeface, but don't choose more than two. It's hard for people to see the subtle difference between them, so find two typefaces with lots of weights, and work within those two families. For some of us, double spaces between sentences is a holdover from our typewriter days.

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Go ahead and mix it up with more than one typeface, but don't choose more than two. It's hard for people to see the subtle difference between them, so find two typefaces with lots of weights, and work with just those two families.

**Don't** use centered type, unless you're creating a wedding invitation. With centered type, the starting point of each line moves, making it hard to read more than a few lines at a time.

**Don't** use justified type. Justified type is where type lines up along the left and right sides. In order to justify type, your computer has to insert spaces between words. Because this space varies from line to line, the reading experience becomes uneven. The easiest-to-read type is left justified.

**Don't** use light type on a dark ground for more than a line or two. It's hard on the eyes, and if

White type on a dark ground is hard to read and understand.

Dark type on a light ground is easier to read and understand.

you're printing it uses too much ink.

Don't use the same typeface at the same size all over your page.

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**Don't** use two spaces between sentences. For some of us, this is a holdover from the typewriter days when typefaces were mono spaced. For others, it's simply the way they were taught. Two spaces between sentences leaves too large of a hole in the middle of the text.

Justified type creates "rivers" of white space that run between your words.

**Don't** put complex type on a complex background. If you must lay type on a complex background, make sure you have a bold, simple typeface that you can use large enough to hold up to the background busy-ness.



## Advanced Type Tips

If you've mastered the basics and want to try out some advanced typesetting tips, here are a few:

**Rachel said,  
"I can't believe  
my eyes. Is this  
really happening?"**

**Rachel said,  
"I can't believe  
my eyes. Is this  
really happening?"**

### **HANGING PUNCTUATION**

When setting a block of text, if there's a punctuation mark you can use **hanging punctuation**. This means you don't include the punctuation when you're lining up letters, but instead let it "hang" off the edge. This allows your letters to line up in a nice, clean line.

You don't have to worry about using hanging punctuation within text. If you're setting a headline, or a website header, or anything that will be viewed large, you can use this technique.

## HANGING CURVES

When lining up a block of type, curved letters can hang off a little. Your eye will think they're aligned if the rounded part of the letter hangs past the alignment line just slightly.

**Douglas  
Frozen Foods  
Company**

**Douglas  
Frozen Foods  
Company**



Because of the space above and below the "bowl" of the C, it doesn't seem to align with the D and F above it. Moving the C to the left just a little makes it align visually with the straight edges of the letters above.

## FIX ORPHANS AND WIDOWS

When setting text in columns, avoid **orphans** and **widows**. Widows are single words that are left alone at the bottom of a column of text. Orphans are single words that are alone at the top of a column.

You can eliminate orphans and widows by either breaking lines of type so that words don't stand alone, or by applying negative tracking just slightly to pull the word up one line.

Nobis doloraerum quaerum que odio eum que et ani- moluptus, excepro officid et es eicium elendem olore, quae nonsequist fugia sit eari resecum quisque eatquam voloria nihiliq uatquid elendis nobitas et, cus, quos ipsae lant voluptat recae esto voluptis nam ariam que nimpere.	Nonsedias sam inctemp adiatin ptatate apeliass delia v porpor est, vel noness taquis ut lis p omniti anit la in res il il eos ne dol	Nobis doloraerum quaerum que odio eum que et ani- moluptus, excepro officid et es eicium elendem olore, quae nonsequist fugia sit eari resecum quisque eatquam voloria nihiliq uatquid elendis nobitas et, cus, quos ipsae lant voluptat recae esto voluptis nam ariam que nim- pere nonsedias sam	inctemp. Volor adiatin con- secu ptatatempos sandips apeliassi- num ea delia vitiuri tatemporpor aut hitas est, veliti di officim nonessit et landitaquis quiat liquam, ut lis peles dem et omnitis modiatatis anit laboreptum evel in res quostis cillici il il eost, voles aut re
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## GET YOUR DASHES RIGHT

There are several kinds of dashes on your keyboard. Learn which is which!

**Hyphens (-)** are used between two words, as in a compound adjective like yellow-green leaves, or to signify a break in a word at the end of a line.

**En dashes, (–)** which are longer than hyphens, indicate a range in values, like Monday – Friday or 9 am – 6 pm.

**Em dashes, (—)** are the longest of all. They indicate a break in thought — like this — in the middle of a sentence.

En dashes and em dashes should have spaces before and after them so that you don't create one very long phrase that your computer doesn't know how to divide if it comes at the end of a line.

## It's Your Turn

Your job now is to take this information and choose two typefaces to represent your brand and your business.

Once you've chosen your typefaces, use the tips here to typeset your pages like a pro.

On the next page, you'll find a cheat sheet that will guide you as you use your fonts to build your brand.

## Good Type Cheat Sheet

### **Size Your Type:**

Headlines: text size x 2

Subheads: text size x 1.5

Call outs: text size x 1.5

Disclaimers: text size x .75

### **Line Spacing:**

Add 20-50% to your point size to get the best leading proportion. On the web, this is done either through your theme's design controls, or through CSS.

### **Line Lengths:**

Keep line lengths between 50-75 characters of whatever typeface you're using.

### **Tracking:**

When using a typeface larger than 24 points, apply tracking to tighten up the letter spacing and make the letters "stick" together.

### **Choosing Typefaces:**

When combining typefaces, use enough contrast so that their differences are obvious. Use typographic contrast – different typefaces, sizes and weights – to make your page interesting and easy to read.

Use the right typeface for the job: pick condensed or extended fonts if you want that effect. Don't squeeze or stretch typefaces electronically.