



Uses of Bold Type in Text

by Allan Haley

BOLD TYPEFACES, AS COMPANIONS TO REGULAR TEXT WEIGHTS, did not become fashionable until the mid-19th century. Although it is hard to imagine today, the original fonts of Baskerville, Caslon, Garamond and Bodoni did not include bold weights. Bold type grew out of the Industrial Revolution and the birth of advertising. In fact, the first popular bold typefaces were display designs intended to be used at large sizes to grab the reader's attention.

It was only later that bold designs were regularly added to typefaces used to set text copy.

Bold typefaces can go by many names: demi bold (sometimes just "demi"), bold, extra bold, and black and ultra. As the names imply, their stroke weights are incremental degrees heavier than the basic roman or medium weight of a

typeface. Their primary use in text copy is to provide emphasis or establish a typographic hierarchy that conveys relative ranking of information. In this context, bold weights clarify content.

Typical Text Uses

Bold weights of type can easily establish priority. Typographic hierarchy is about creating different levels of importance

To keep the jump lines from being read as part of the copy, they need to contrast with the body text.

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Jump lines are often set in bold.

Text v. Display

The best text typefaces are easy to read in long blocks of copy. They do not call much attention to themselves and have been designed to perform best between 6-point and 14-point.

Different Designs for Different Sizes

Type and typography are visual media that are very much affected by size. In metal type, almost every point size of a given typestyle had subtly different proportions. In serif typefaces, for example, the thin parts of a character became proportionally heavier as the point size decreased.

Headings and subheads can be set in bold type.

through typeface choice and text arrangement. Used sparingly, different typeface weights (and proportions) can guide the reader through long or complicated documents. Think of the various typeface weights as graphic road signs: a few, well-placed, will help the reader navigate the content. Too many will distract and confuse.

Headings are often set in bold type, as are subheads and page numbers. "Jump Lines" – short messages to the reader at the end of a column, explaining where the text continues –, are also frequently set in bold type. In addition, if used sparingly, bold type on a page adds a touch of graphic diversity to otherwise monotone pages of text copy.

Uses of Bold Type in Text (con't)

Creating emphasis is an **important** and **integral** part of communicating with type. Handled with **good judgment** it can help direct and inform the reader. When **too many words** are treated as important, however, the copy looks like a **typographic battlefield**.

Too much bold type is distracting.

Things to be Aware of

As visual punctuation, bold type is more commanding than italics or a point size change. Because it does stand out, however, too much bold type on a page can be distracting and even disruptive to the reading process. For this reason, italics are normally used in running text when more than a couple of words are to be emphasized.

Some typeface families have relatively subtle gradations in change from one weight to another. In these designs, a jump of two weights may be advisable to create an obvious contrast.

When working on an Apple computer, select heavier weights of typefaces from the font menu, not the style bar. If the

font weights are not linked, or if there is no bold font, a digital embolding will result. This looks more like type dipped in chocolate than like a professionally drawn variation on the basic design.

When using Microsoft® Windows® OS, bold typefaces can only be accessed through the style bar or menu. ■

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Set in Avenir Regular, Medium and Demi.