



Selecting Type for Text: Factors to Consider

By Ilene Strizver

SELECTING AN APPROPRIATE TYPEFACE OR FAMILY FOR TEXT USAGE is a key aspect of a design project. The best starting point is to confirm the requirements of your client and the needs of the audience. Making the time to explore appropriate font options – whether it takes a few minutes or most of a day – is a smart investment. It will pave the way for an effective design solution and save time in the long run.

Here are seven key factors to consider when searching for an appropriate typeface for text applications:

Demographics: Know who your intended audience is, including their age range and particular interests. Be clear on the goals of the piece. Whether you are selling a product or service, or providing information or entertainment, your typographic objective is to engage the audience. For instance, a very young audience (such as that for children's books) requires a typeface with simple letterforms that "beginning reader" eyes can easily make out. On the other hand, designing for a high tech audience might warrant a typeface that looks clean and modern, or even edgy.

Legibility: To attract and hold the reader's attention, typefaces intended for text should be legible and easy to read. Save more decorative, eye-catching designs for headlines, titles, and other more prominent usages. For more on legibility, read [It's About Legibility](#).

Copy length: For a book, magazine or newspaper, the typeface you select

Sassoon Primary
Gill Sans Schoolbook
Bembo Schoolbook

Consider the demographics of your audience when selecting a text typeface. These typefaces are appropriate for children...

ITC Franklin Gothic
ITC Stone Informal
Rabeneau

...these are great for seniors...

Biome
Odyssee
Handel Gothic

...and these more contemporary designs for teens or a techie audience.

will be used to set lengthy copy. For this purpose, the degree of required legibility is greater than if the typeface were being used for just a few lines or

Nimrod Medium
Abadi Regular
ITC Stone Serif Medium
Scherzo Medium
ITC Officina Sans Book

These typefaces are extremely legible because of their open, easy-to-read features.

a paragraph or two. For shorter copy, a typeface with a bit more personality can be considered, because the reader's attention is less likely to be distracted.

Serif vs Sans: It is commonly accepted that serif typefaces are easier to read for lengthy copy than sans serifs, especially at smaller sizes. This is true in many situations, but not an absolute rule. Other factors to consider before making your decision include the reading environment, meaning whether it will be in print or on the Web, and the design characteristics – especially the legibility – of the typeface being considered. For a more detailed explanation, read [Serif v. Sans for Text](#).

Selecting Type for Text: Factors to Consider (con't)

Font family size: Explore the project's typographic requirements, and determine beforehand how large a font family is needed to meet all of your typographic needs. While two weights with italics might be enough for some jobs, others might require additional weights and versions to create good visual hierarchy necessary for a strong, effective piece.

Special features: Many projects can benefit from the use of small caps, multiple figure styles, fractions, an expanded range of ligatures, alternate characters and perhaps even swashes – or expanded foreign language support. Many of today's OpenType fonts come with some or all of these features. Be sure to check for those you require when conducting your search.

Print, Web, or other media: What media do you need the typeface for? Be aware of all media in which the typeface or family will need to appear. If just print,



Consider the size of the font family when selecting a typeface for text. Make sure enough weights and versions are available to meet all your typographic needs.

then your font search will be simpler. But if it is needed for the Web (via Web fonts), ebooks, smart phones, or other



When doing your font exploration, make sure the families you are considering have all the additional features you might need.

uses, you will need a typeface that is available, appropriate, and performs well in all required environments.

The key to choosing a typeface for text is to do your homework first, narrowing down your choices to those that meet the needs of the job and will express your client's message most effectively. ■