



# Typography Basics

A beginner's guide



*What is?*

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# Typography

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Typography is the art and science of arranging letters and words visually. Sounds simple enough, right? As with so much of design, however, all the hard work that goes into successful typography is invisible to the end user.





*As adman and graphic designer Herb Lubalin said:*

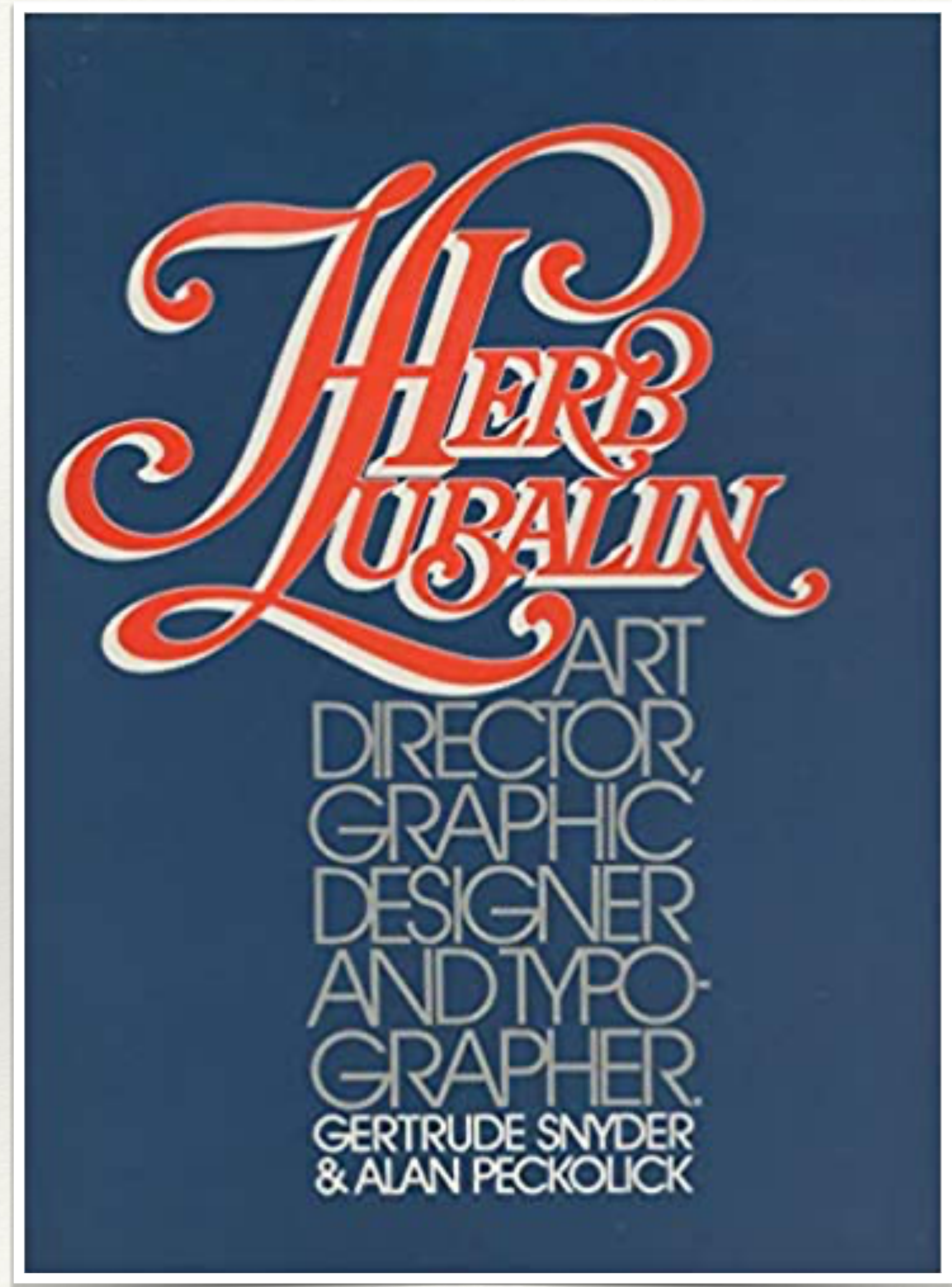
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**“When a good ad is set right, no one notices the letters– they’re too busy reading the words.”**

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The job of a typographer is to organize a piece of text so its information can be easily recognized and digested. That includes selecting effective typefaces and choosing the optimal sizes and spacing to use them in. Typographers also make choices like formatting, font style (e.g. italic, bold, condensed, etc.) and color.

Each of these formatting options provides different benefits to a piece of text. For instance: Bolded and colored text are used for emphasis, italics help designate special terms and titles, and bulleted lists help to organize chunks of information.





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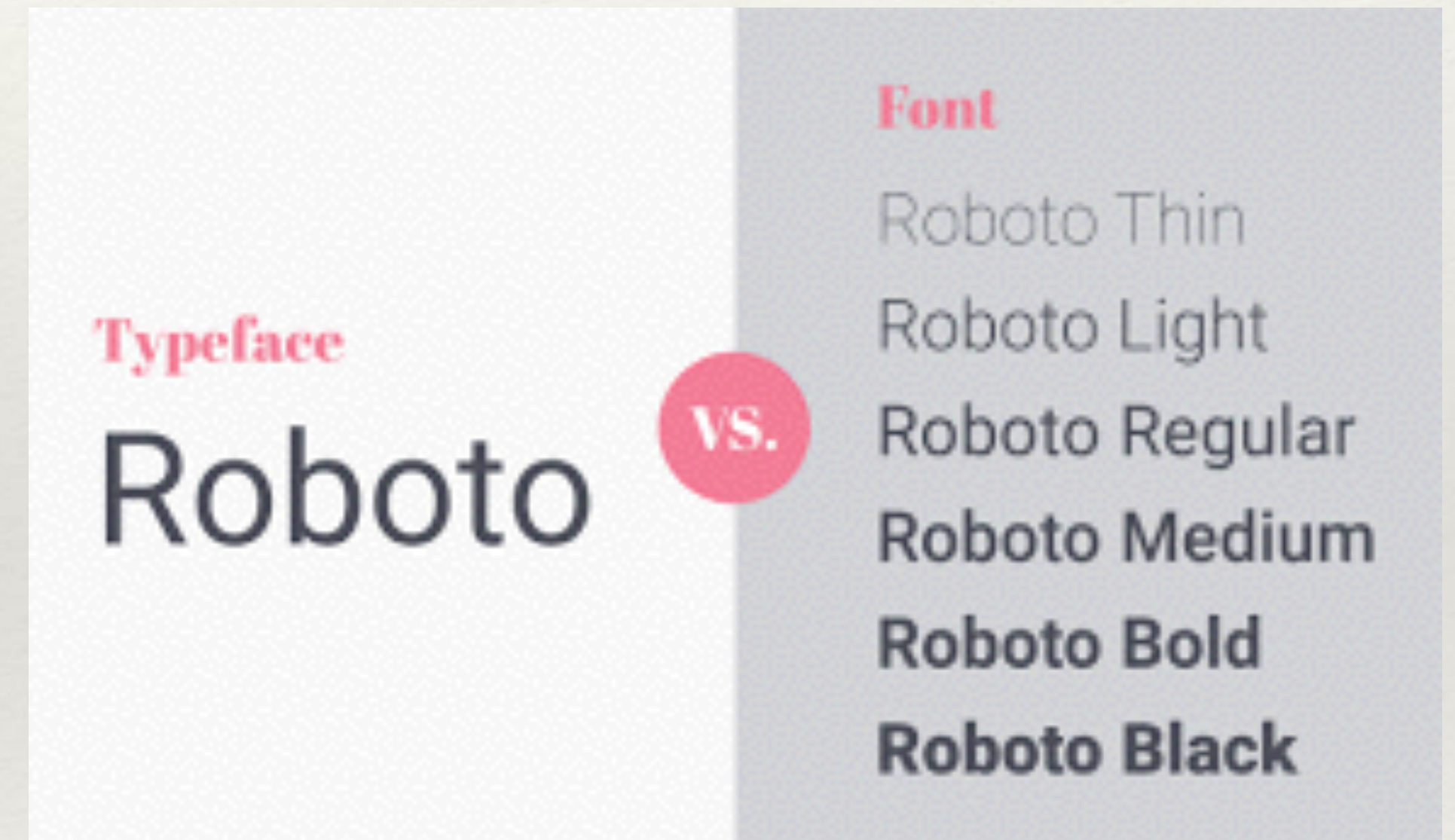
# Typography, Typefaces & Fonts

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Don't get typography confused with typefaces and fonts. These are different aspects that can fall within **typography**.  
Typography uses typefaces and fonts.

**Typefaces** are a specific design of type. These are your font families like Times New Roman, Arial, and Helvetica. They represent the shared patterns or designs across the collection of letters. Typefaces are *one of the type properties associated with typography*.

**Fonts**, on the other hand, refer to the different weights, widths, and styles that make up a typeface (*font family*). For example, you could be using Roboto, which is a typeface, but you are using the font bold in size 12 pt. Regular, Light, Bold, and Italic and the specific size are the different fonts that make up that font family or typeface.





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# A Brief History

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- ❖ The art of typography first began with calligraphy.
- ❖ The invention of the printing press replaced calligraphy with typesetting.
- ❖ The first typefaces were the printer's fonts, which were black letter, roman, and italic.
- ❖ Typography would take different shapes and sizes over the years, and each typeface would change in popularity depending on the country and the art movement of the time.
- ❖ Books were one of the best examples of the use of typography. One of the earliest books made with the printing press was the 42-lined bible.
- ❖ The typography rules at this time didn't include all of the type properties today. All of their letters would fall precisely on the baseline until much later.

For a more in-depth look at the history of typography check out <https://www.britannica.com/technology/typography/History-of-typography>.



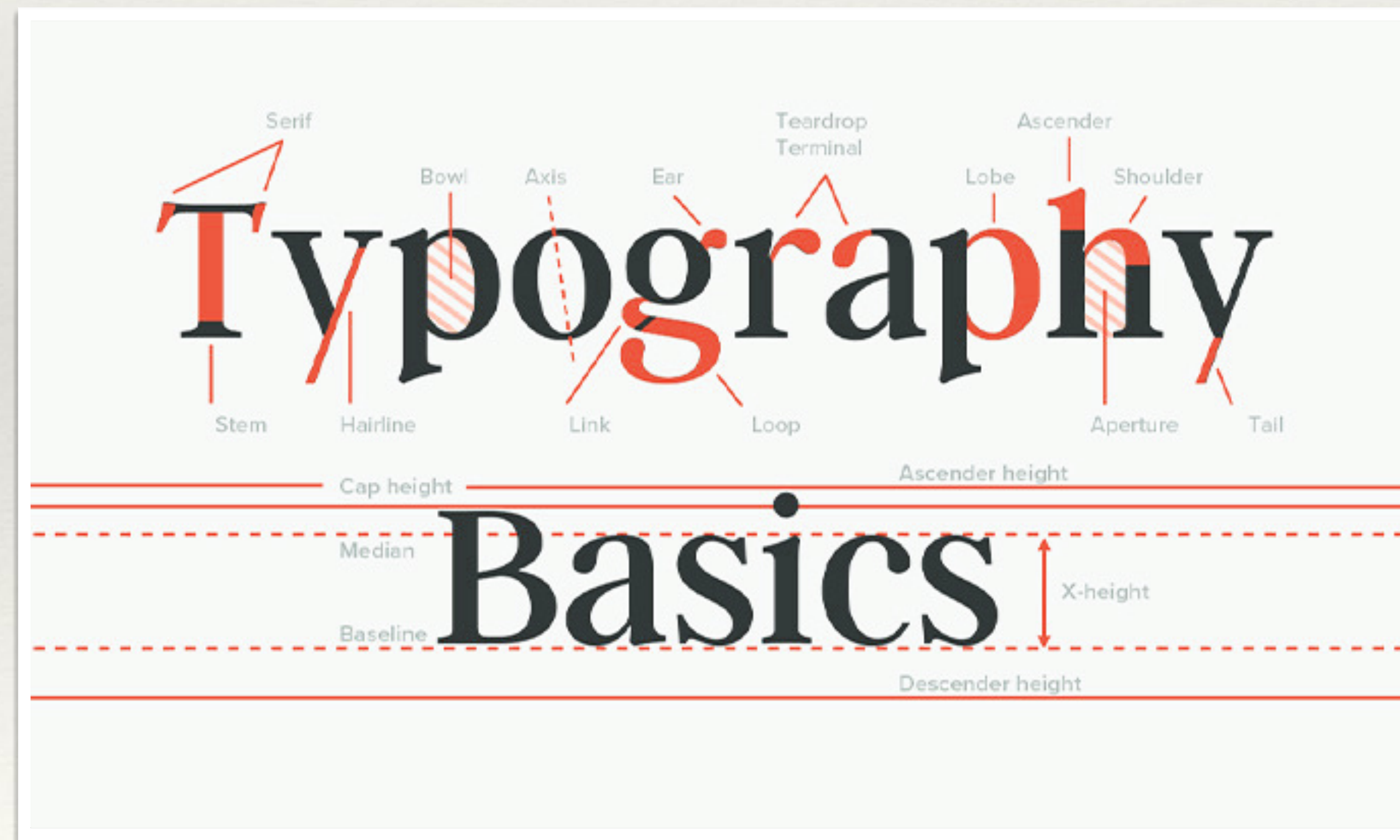
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# Type Properties

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Besides typefaces, there are many other type properties considered in typography.

Baseline, ascenders, descenders, cap height, x-height, letter spacing, and weight are all important aspects when it comes to understanding and manipulating typography.





# Baseline, Ascenders & Descenders

A **baseline** is simply an imaginary line that all of the text sits on. Looking at the lower case 'x' is the best way to see the baseline of a typeface. Baselines play a vital roll in the alignment of page elements. There are some exceptions to baselines, such as ascenders and descenders.

**Ascenders** are the vertical, upwards strokes that rise above the x-height. They indicate the height of a font. The ascenders are seen best in the letters like 'l' and 'h'. Any letter that stands taller than the lower case 'x' are ascenders.

**Descenders** are the part of a character that descends below the baseline. Letters like "g and 'q' show descenders best. If you look at these letters together with the lower case 'x', you can see how they have tails that fall below the baseline.





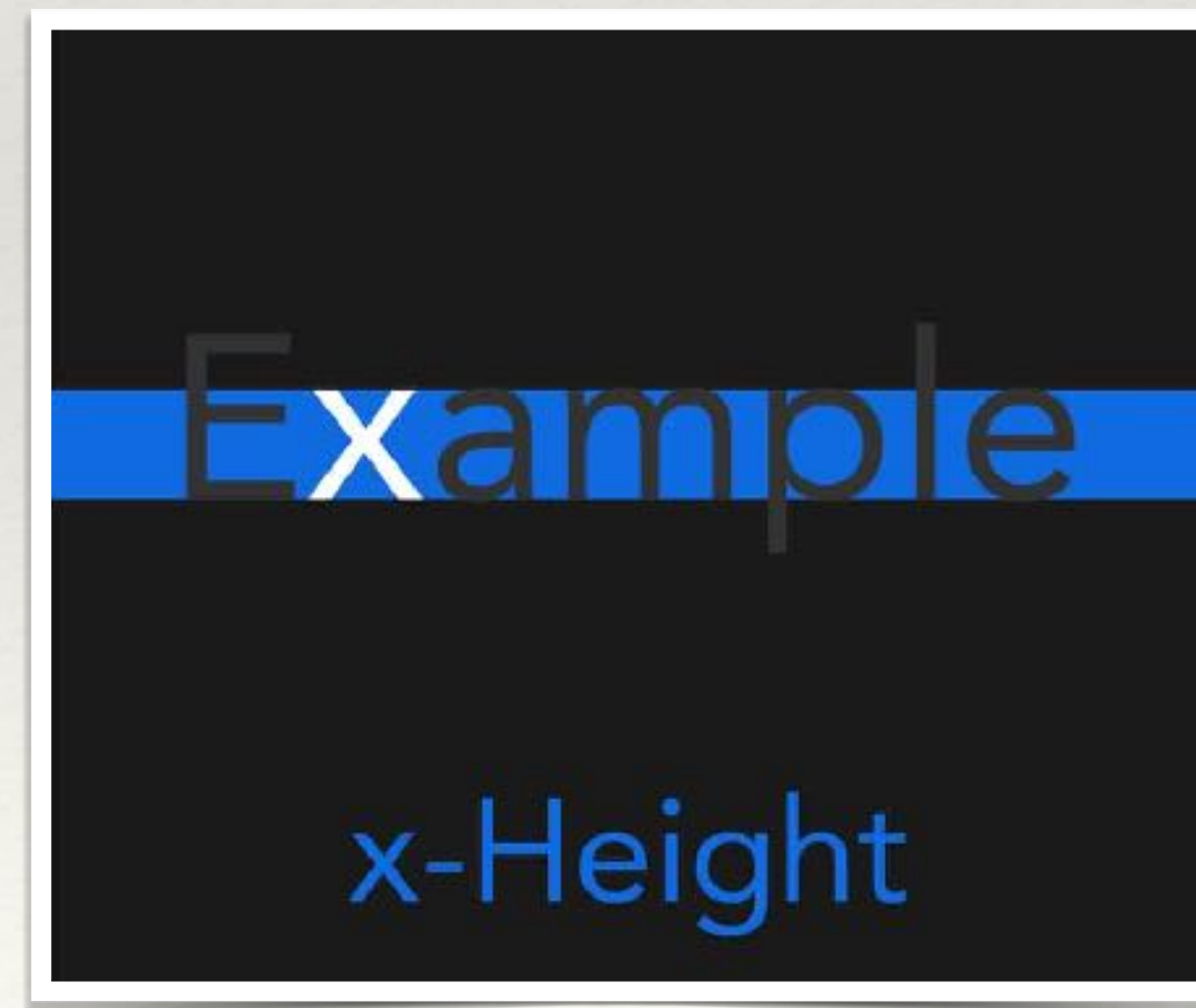
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# Cap Height & X-Height

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**Cap Height:** The height of capital letters from the baseline to the top of caps, most accurately measured on a character with a flat bottom (H, E, L). Capital letters, like 'S' and 'A', are optically adjusted by being drawn with a slight overshoot above the cap-height to achieve the effect of being the same size. Every typeface has a unique cap-height.

**X-Height:** The height of lowercase letters, specifically the lowercase x, not including ascenders and descenders. Flat lower case letters such as 'x', 'u', 'v', 'w', and 'z' define the x-height. Curved lower case letters are adjusted like in cap height to appear the same size.





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# Letter Spacing & Weight

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**Letter Spacing:** As the name implies, letter spacing is the space between letters. Some letter pairs sit closer together than others. Rounded letters sit closer together than flat letters. For example, 'ec' in 'Ecuador' sit closer than 'th' in 'Thanos'.

**Weight:** Weight refers to the thickness of a font's stroke. The most common weights are light, regular, medium, and **bold**. Some larger font families have more weights, including extra thin, thin, semibold, and extra bold. The bigger the family, the better for large, type heavy projects.



For a more in-depth look at all of the different type properties, there are, check out *Typography Deconstructed* at <https://typedecon.com/>.



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# Font Selection

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Font selection is the most crucial part of your project.

With your choice of font, you can say so much about the project you are designing. *Fonts and typefaces hold emotion.* A big swirly font can scream, happy, and fun, while a heavy black weight font can give a feeling of seriousness and strength. Your typeface and how it works with your layout makes the difference between a good, bad, and great design.





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# Serif

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- ❖ A **serif** font is any font with little tails or serifs, coming off of the letters. An easy example of this is **Times New Roman**.
- ❖ This kind of typeface is typically used for large blocks of text because serifs make it easy for the eye to travel over the letter.
- ❖ Publications like books, newspapers, and magazines use serif fonts for easy legibility.
- ❖ A serif font can give a classic professional look to any business.





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# Sans Serif

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- ❖ These fonts are like serif fonts but without the serifs.
- ❖ Sans in french means without, so sans serif means without serifs.
- ❖ These fonts feel more modern than serif fonts.
- ❖ One notable company to change its logo from a serif to a sans serif font was Google. With this change, it affected the entire brand.
- ❖ Sans serif fonts like Arial, Helvetica, and Roboto give a clean, modern look.





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# Handwriting

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- ❖ Handwriting fonts appear with a hand written look.
- ❖ There are different types of handwriting fonts, including black letter, scripts, and handwriting.
- ❖ These fonts can add a fun flair to your project, but should only be headings or subheadings.





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# Display / Decorative

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- ❖ These fonts are a collection of “fun” fonts that are shown best at a large point size, such as headers.
- ❖ Display or decorative fonts are also great fonts to look at when designing logos.
- ❖ For a fun way to test, your font identification skills play I Shot the Serif on <https://www.tothepoint.co.uk/us/fun/i-shot-the-serif/>.





# Leading, Spacing/Tracking & Kerning

**Leading:** The space between two baselines of type. The term dates back to when the typesetters would space out the lines of type evenly for printing. Today when you adjust leading, you are increasing or decreasing the space between the lines of text. proper leading allows for excellent readability. Too tight or too wide can make things difficult to read.

**Tracking/Spacing:** Tracking is uniformly increasing the space between all characters, like in a sentence or group of words. This adjustment can also increase readability. It is the overall amount of space between letters. You can set the spacing wide (200%) or tight (50%).

**Kerning:** Similar to tracking, kerning also affects the distance between characters. However, kerning affects ONLY the distance between LETTER PAIRS. So when you adjust the kerning between “c” and “o” that spacing is applied only to the letter pair “co”. Kerning can be a little confusing, but remember when it comes to kerning, it only affects LETTER PAIRS!

