

## Choosing the Best Fonts

In these days of easy desktop publishing, popular programs come with lots of templates, graphic elements, and, of course, fonts. Sometimes, too many—so how do you decide which ones to use?

While there are entire books devoted to the subject of fonts and typefaces, the basic fact is that fonts can be grouped into stylistic categories, such as “decorative,” “serif,” and “sans-serif.”

**Decorative fonts**, including subcategories such as Pictorial or Script, evoke emotion or grab your attention like an image does. They aren’t too practical, since they aren’t very good for use in body text, because they lack easy readability in long passages. Save them for specialized uses only, such as in a banner or a logo.

**Serif fonts** have those tiny lines at the tops and bottoms of each character, which help your eyes flow from one word to the next. In general, in the right size, they are excellent for body copy. In larger sizes, bolder weight, or a contrasting color, they can be used for headlines, and also for subheads in longer articles to help break up longer passages of text. The most popular serif font for body text readability is Times or Times New Roman. Alternatives are Garamond, Century, Bookman, Palatino, Goudy, Minion, and Caslon. For the web, try Georgia.

**Sans-serif fonts** (“without” serifs in French) are without the tiny lines. Many designers prefer to use sans-serif fonts for body copy used on the web, while using serif fonts for body copy in print. Sans-serif fonts are very good for headlines and subheads. Arial and Helvetica are the most favored sans-serif fonts for body text. Popular alternatives are Univers, Franklin Gothic, Frutiger, and Futura. For the web, use Verdana.

**Body copy** is usually best when set at 10–12 points. Additional fine-tuning includes character, word, and paragraph spacing, line length, and line height. Professionals almost always tweak those default settings in their layout software to enhance readability. You should become familiar with those settings, too.

Most importantly, choose fonts with your audience and your message in mind. For example, an older, more conservative audience may respond more favorably to 12-point Century, while a younger, more hip crowd may respond more favorably to 10-point Franklin Gothic.

Finally, limit the choice of fonts to no more than two font families (which can include bold, italic, and condensed variations) per project. More than that, and you risk making your piece look inconsistent and cluttered. Remember, except perhaps for logos and banners, the name of the game is easy readability!