Basic Font and Font Family Facts

What is a font? A font is a complete set of characters in a single size and typeface. One of the most effective ways to impact any project is the font you choose. There are many fonts available and knowing which font to use is often confusing. Do not use a font only because it looks great – it must also be legible in the layout. This factsheet will guide you in the basics and help you choose the best font for your project.

Basic Font Hints

1. Be consistent – don't change fonts mid-project for no reason.
2. Use sans serif fonts for online or onscreen projects.
3. Use serif fonts for printed projects.
4. Do not use more than three fonts per page.

Serif vs. Sans Serif

In typography there are five basic types of font families: serif, sans serif, monospace, cursive, and fancy (or fantasy).

Serif Fonts are among the oldest type of fonts in existence; some have been around since the year 1200. Serif fonts have small lines or strokes that extend from the tips or ends of letters and symbols. They look like small feet, tails, flags, or caps on the letters.

T serifs

Basic Font and Font Family Facts, *continued*

Serif fonts are more suitable for print media due to the high resolution. The higher resolution makes the extra information (tails, feet, flags) clearer and more legible. Serif fonts are not generally used for online or onscreen materials unless the font point size is larger than normal. Examples of serif fonts are Times New Roman, Georgia, Book Antiqua, Palatino, and Garamond.

Serif

Sans serif fonts are fonts that are simple and do not have any serifs. These fonts are generally used for headers, captions, onscreen documents, and technical documents. They are well suited for online media because they have less detail and can be read from a distance. Examples of sans serif fonts are Arial, Helvetica, Veranda, Lucinda, and Impact.

Sans Serif

Monospace fonts are fixed-width fonts in which all characters are the same width. This makes them more difficult to read. These fonts are the type that typewriters used. Today, they are most often used by computer programmers for source code and code samples. Courier New is an example of a common monospace font.

Monospace

Basic Font and Font Family Facts, *continued*

The final two font families are **cursive** and **fancy (or fantasy)**. These are special and should not be used for the body text. They are generally used for headers, logos, invitations, or decorative purposes. Examples of these type fonts are Comic Sans, Script, Jokerman, Calligraphy, and Chancery.

Cursive

Fancy

References

About.com. (n.d.). *What is a Font?* Retrieved November 12, 2008, from www.about.com
Site-Reference.com. (2008). *Fonts - The history and basics*. Retrieved November 12, 2008, from www.site-reference.com

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