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# Type Design

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## Picking good fonts

In this chapter, you will learn how to make your text look professional and readable.

First, you need good fonts. A font is a computer file that tells the computer what each letter looks like. Each font has its own unique look and purpose. Fonts like **ROSEWOOD** and *CRIME FIGHTER* and **Matura M7 Script Capitals** may be interesting, but they probably are not fonts you want to use for your book. This chapter will help you find fonts you *do* want to use for your book.

I won't teach you the name for every part of a letterform (the shape of a letter), but let's compare a few fonts. First, there is the difference between *serif* and *sans serif* fonts.

Notice the little tails at the tips of the lines in the serif fonts? Those tails are called *serifs*. They make the text "flow" from one letter to the next. Always use a serif font for your body text.

Serif

Sans Serif

Figure 2. Serif vs. sans serif fonts.

Some designers like to use sans serif fonts for headings.<sup>17</sup> That's fine, but I recommend you pick *one* font that's *really good*, and use it for your body text *and* your headings. (Just make headings bigger than your body text so you can tell them apart.)

Why use just one font? Matching fonts together is a complex art, one you don't have time to learn. Designers spend years learning that stuff. But trust me, your book will look good if you find one *great* font and use it for pretty much everything.

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<sup>17</sup> Sans serif fonts are also used on the web. Serifs often don't look good on the low resolution of a monitor.

## How to pick a good font

Do *not* use a font that came with your computer, like Times New Roman.

Avoid fonts that stick out. As Tom Christensen writes.<sup>18</sup> “Do not use any typeface that has clever squiggles or unusual letterforms. Do not use any typeface that appears especially dark, fat, tall, light, narrow, squat, broken, modern, antique, classy, elegant, light-hearted, or charming.” You do *not* want readers to notice your *font*. You want them to notice your *words*.

You want an “old style” font, which is best for readability. Old style fonts have *diagonal stress*, which means the thinnest parts of each letter are diagonal from each other, not on top of each other. They also have a small contrast between the thick and thin parts of each letter.

If you can, find a *font family* that includes bold, italic, light, and other versions. If the font family doesn't have a bold version, Writer will just try to make your bolded words *fatter*. But if the font family has a bold version, then that font is specially designed for bold and *looks better*.

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18 [www.rightreading.com/blog/2007/10/25/how-to-design-a-book-without-special-skills-or-software/](http://www.rightreading.com/blog/2007/10/25/how-to-design-a-book-without-special-skills-or-software/)

Same goes for italics. Without an italic font in the font family, Writer will just put your italicized words on a *slant*. Same story for small caps, too.

Buy a full font family if you can, from companies like Adobe, Bitstream, or ITC Fonts.

You also want a font that includes special characters, like text figures. These are different than lining figures, which have all the same width.

Lining figures draw too much attention to themselves within a paragraph. Text figures (o123456789), on the other hand, flow nicely because take up variable widths (in the same way that W is wider than I), and they don't draw too much attention to themselves because some of them fall below the baseline (like the tail of a j).

Text figures also look classier. Compare: This is 1492 in lining figures, but this 1492 is in text figures.

Good fonts also have special characters for subscripts, superscripts, and fractions. Adobe Caslon Pro, the font I'm using for this book, has them: <sup>0123456789</sup> <sub>0123456789</sub> ¼ ½ ¾ ⅓ ⅔ ⅛ ⅜ ⅝ ⅞.

Good fonts also have *ligatures*. A ligature is just a special way of drawing certain character pairs better, for example ff fi fl ffi ffl ft instead of ff fi fl ffi ffl ft. We'll talk more about ligatures later.

## Good fonts

To sum up, then, a good font for body text:<sup>19</sup>

- doesn't draw attention to itself.
- is not on everyone's computer.
- is an "old style" serif font.
- has a family of variations for bold, italics, etc.
- has special characters, including text figures and ligatures.

So, then, what are some good fonts? Here are a few classics, used by designers everywhere:

## ITC Bodoni

The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog.

0123456789 0123456789

[www.itcfonts.com/Fonts/Classics/Bodoni.htm](http://www.itcfonts.com/Fonts/Classics/Bodoni.htm)

## Adobe Caslon

The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog. 0123456789

0123456789 Th Th Th ct ff fj fh fi fl ff fi fl ffi ffi ft

[www.adobe.com/type/](http://www.adobe.com/type/)

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<sup>19</sup> Obviously, I'm oversimplifying. For a nice intro to what you should consider when selecting a font, read [typies.blogspot.com/2006/11/15-tips-to-choose-good-text-type.html](http://typies.blogspot.com/2006/11/15-tips-to-choose-good-text-type.html).

## Adobe Garamond

The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog. 0123456789

0123456789 ffj fj ff fi fl ffi ffl

[www.adobe.com/type/](http://www.adobe.com/type/)

## Adobe Jenson

The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog. 0123456789

0123456789 Th ffj fj fh fi fl ff fi fl ffi ffl ft

[www.adobe.com/type/](http://www.adobe.com/type/)

## Linotype Minion

The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog. 0123456789

0123456789 fb ffb ffh ffj ffk fft fh fj fb fh fi fk fl ff ffi ffl ff fi fl ffi  
ffl ft

[www.linotype.com/1236/minion-family.html](http://www.linotype.com/1236/minion-family.html)

## Linotype Sabon

The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog.

0123456789 0123456789

[www.linotype.com/1436/sabon-family.html](http://www.linotype.com/1436/sabon-family.html)

Free fonts aren't as feature-rich, but here are some of the best  
for body text:

## Garava

A complete family, including SMALL CAPS and **Heavy** variants.

A large character set. 0123456789 0123456789 fj fr ft fy fft ffy fty tt  
ty fi fl ff fi fl ffi

[www.aimwell.org/Fonts/fonts.html](http://www.aimwell.org/Fonts/fonts.html)

## Pali

Another font family with a large character set and text

figures. 0123456789 0123456789 fj fr ft fy fft ffy fty tt ty fi fl ff fi fl  
ffi ffl ft

[www.aimwell.org/Fonts/fonts.html](http://www.aimwell.org/Fonts/fonts.html)

## jGaramond

Both lining figures and text figures: 0123456789 0123456789 fi

[www.janthor.com/jGaramond/index.html](http://www.janthor.com/jGaramond/index.html)

## Akkhara

Based on Gentium (a free font that doesn't play well with  
OpenOffice.org). 0123456789 ff fi fl ffi ffl

[www.aimwell.org/Fonts/fonts.html](http://www.aimwell.org/Fonts/fonts.html)

## Day Roman

Text figures only. 0123456789 fl fh fj fk ff ff ffi ffi ft fi  
[praegnanz.de/essays/417/day-roman](http://praegnanz.de/essays/417/day-roman)

## Baramond

A full font family, with lining figures only. 0123456789 fi fl  
ff ffi ffl

[www.geocities.com/baramondfont/](http://www.geocities.com/baramondfont/)

## Liberation Serif

Lining figures only. 0123456789 fi fl

<https://www.redhat.com/promo/fonts/>

## Lido STF

A full font family, free from Stormtype. 0124356789 fi fl

[www.stormtype.com/typefaces-fonts-shop/free.php](http://www.stormtype.com/typefaces-fonts-shop/free.php)

If you need characters for uncommon languages or math formulas, you need a Unicode font. The best guide to free Unicode fonts is at [www.unifont.org/fontguide/](http://www.unifont.org/fontguide/).

These free fonts are okay, but if you're going to spend your money *anywhere*, spend it on a good font. Use the money you saved by designing with Writer instead of InDesign.

### Text figures only?

Actually, there is one advantage to a font that has text figures *only*. Writer can only use a font's default number figures for its automatic numbers (such as numbered lists and page num-

bers). If you use a font with both lining figures and text figures, you'll see lining figures for automatic numbering even if you use text figures in the body text.

I decided I *liked* to see a different style of numbers used in automatic numbering. I also think that `_heading1` looks better than `_headingI`. So, I use both text figures and lining figures in this book. Each has its purpose.

## Putting your fonts to work

If you're following my advice, you've chosen one really good font. Or maybe two: one for body text, the other for chapter titles. Change your paragraph styles to use your chosen font(s). All your lorem ipsum text will be updated automatically.

What follows is a list of type design rules you should usually follow, and how to apply them with Writer.<sup>20</sup>

There are dozens of other rules I could have showed you, but the whole point of this book is that you *don't* want to spend much time designing your book. Use as many of these rules as you have time for, and no more.

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<sup>20</sup> Here I'm imitating Bringhurst's *The Elements of Typographic Style*, and occasionally quote it directly.

Keep in mind that you'll learn ways of doing these things more quickly in the Your Workflow chapter (page 89).

### **Choose a comfortable line length**

Your body text should be 45–75 characters wide including letters, spaces, and punctuation. If your lines are too long, increase your margins (especially the outer one) and/or increase your body text size.

If your book has two columns, each column should be only 40–50 characters wide

### **Shrink lining figures**

If you chose a font without text figures, you can make the lining figures less distracting by dropping their font size by 1 pt or 0.5 pt. Create a character style called `_numbers` and apply it to each number you type. To make your work easier, create a macro with a keyboard shortcut for this character style, as described in the Your Workflow chapter.

### **Put acronyms in small caps**

Acronyms like NATO and NAMLA and PDF should be put in small caps. Create a new character style, `_caps`. If you're using a font family that includes a small caps font, set that as the font for the style.

If you don't have a small caps font in the family, you'll have to fake it. On the Font tab, under Size, type in something like 75% and click OK.

You may also want to add some letterspacing for small caps phrases. On the Position tab of the character style, under Spacing, choose Expanded and set by to something like 0.5 pt. Remember, you'll have to print to PDF to see what it really looks like.

Some acronyms may not look good in small caps. For example, an acronym that begins a paragraph. And do you really need to put "U.S." in small caps? It's up to you.

### **Kern consistently or not at all**

*Kerning* is the amount of space between letters. For example, we might want to tuck the first *o* in *Toronto* under the *T*. Most fonts have a "kerning table" that specifies how much space there should be between certain letter combinations. This is enabled on the Position tab of a style definition. Make sure Pair kerning is checked.

If you're not satisfied with a font's kerning tables, you can do your own kerning.

Let's say you don't like how the *W* and *a* fit together in your font. To solve this, create a new character style and change only one thing: On the Position tab, change Spacing

to Condensed and try something like 4.0 pt. Test this out on very large letters so you can clearly see the difference. And remember, only printing to PDF will give you an accurate preview.

You could name this character style `_kern_Wa`. And maybe there's another combination you don't like. You could make another style (with a slightly different Condensed amount) for, say, `_kern_To`.

Then, you can apply these styles to every instance of those letter pairs. Hit `Ctrl+F` to show the Find & Replace window. Check the box for Match case, type `Wa` and click Find All. Writer will highlight all instances of "Wa" in the document. Now just double-click your `_kern_Wa` character style to apply it to all those letter pairs.

### **Use a comfortable line spacing**

Body text is often described like this: "10/12 Bodoni," where 10 is the font size, 12 is the line spacing (the distance between two baselines), and Bodoni is the font. You need to adjust line spacing to make your text more readable. Usually, you need your line spacing to be a bit larger than your font size, but you should increase it further if:

- you have long lines of text, for example more than 70 characters long.

- your font is much smaller than 10 pt or much larger than 12 pt.
- your font is relatively thick or dark-looking
- you regularly use subscripts, superscripts, or different font sizes within the body text.

Line spacing, like font size, is usually given in *points*, which is  $1/72$  of an inch. So, 15pt line spacing would be  $15/72=0.21$  inches. When choosing a line spacing you can type in “20pt” and Writer will convert that to whatever Measurement Unit you chose in the Options.

This paragraph, like most in this book, is 11.5/19 Adobe Caslon. I use extra line spacing because I regularly use superscripts and a taller font, District Thin, for writing about interface or keyboard items.

This paragraph, in contrast, is 11.5/13 Adobe Caslon. As you can see, it is difficult to read because the lines are too tightly packed together. Be generous with your linespacing.

But not too generous. If your lines are too far apart, it may be difficult to tell the difference between a new line and a new paragraph. And of course, you will fit fewer words on the page. This paragraph is 11.5/30 Adobe Caslon.

The best way to set linespacing in Writer is in your paragraph style. Modify `_para_default` and click on the Indents &

Spacing tab. Set Line spacing to Fixed and type in something about 1.2 times as large as your font size. If you're using a 12 pt font, type in 14.4 pt and hit Enter. Start with that. See how it looks, and adjust as you go along.

### Set apart block quotations

This is what Robert Bringhurst writes about block quotations in *The Elements of Typographic Style*:

Block quotations ... can be distinguished from the main text in many ways. For instance: by a change of face (usually from Roman to italic), by a change in size (as from 11 pt down to 10 pt or 9 pt), or by indentation.

Combinations of these methods are often used, but one device is enough ...

Of course, you also want some space above and below your block quotations. You need three paragraph styles: `_block_quote`, `_block_quote_begin`, and `_block_quote_end`. The last two should be linked with the first, and only differ in that `_block_quote_begin` should have some Spacing Above paragraph, and `_block_quote_end` should have some Spacing Below paragraph.

Use the `_block_quote` style to make the quote italic (not recommended for long quotes, since italic text is less readable),

smaller (as above), or indented (using Indent Before text and After text).

### **Indent or center verse quotations**

Poetry and song lyrics should be centered if your body text line length is far longer than your verse line length:

*How odd  
of God  
to choose  
the Jews*

Use a line break (Shift+Enter) after each line. Make `_verse`, `_verse_begin`, and `_verse_end` styles, using some Spacing Above paragraph for `_verse_begin` and some Spacing Below paragraph for `_verse_end`. Use italics if your font has a good italic.

But most verse quotations should be indented and ragged right, not centered:

*Though not as odd as those who choose  
a Jewish God and spurn the Jews*