

Constructing Your Own Typeface

It is easier than ever to design your own typeface. Here's what you need to know before you start.

STAND OUT FROM THE CROWD

With such a plethora of typeface designs already out there, how can you make your own design stand out? Whether someone finds your typeface interesting depends on three things:

1) The design styles they are naturally drawn to. A florist who likes feminine, organic, hand-drawn fonts probably won't be too excited by a **plain sans serif typeface like Arial**.

2) The uniqueness of the styling. An original and creative design will always stand apart from a typeface that we've all seen a hundred times before.

3) How well it is doing its job. Typography communicates visually, as well as through words. A design that has a clear purpose is more likely to appeal.

START WITH A BRIEF

Even if it is a brief that you define for yourself, having a clear vision will greatly help the design process and make your efforts more focussed. Before you start you should consider:

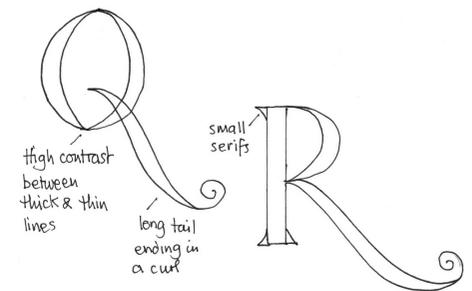
What is the purpose of the typeface, where will be it used and who needs to read it? Is it intended for headings, in which case it could afford to be a bit more decorative, or for body text where legibility is a priority?

Is the typeface intended for print or digital media? Is it for personal use or do you wish to get it published (in which case there are additional standards that will need to be followed). Is a complete character set needed or just certain letterforms? Do you need different fonts (e.g. Italic, bold etc.) and do you need to support different languages?

DO YOUR RESEARCH

Understanding the context in which you are working and the typefaces already available will ensure your design is relevant. If your brief is to design a typeface with an Arabic style to be used for the title of a Moroccan cookbook, it will help to understand what *arabic styling and typical typefaces might look like*.

GENERATE IDEAS



Sketching ideas out by hand enables quick experimentation with minimal effort.

The best place to start is designing by hand which will allow you to quickly sketch out ideas and experiment with different styling elements without having to make too much effort. Starting with key characters can help establish the main characteristics of the typeface design. 'N' is often used for the upright stems and 'O' sets the scene for curves. If you only need certain letters rather than an entire character set, focus your design on these.

Love

Type communicates its meaning visually as well as simply through words, as the romantic and carefree flourish of this word 'love' demonstrates.



The design of each letterform can be refined by sketching each letter within a series of guidelines to ensure consistency in heights.

DEFINE YOUR DESIGN 'RULES'

The letters of the alphabet have many repeating elements which, once defined, you will be able to reuse. For example, E, F and L are all effectively the same letter with horizontal bars in different places. p and q are mirror images of each other. I, K and lowercase l all have similar upright stems.

Designing these repeating elements in the same way can add consistency and clarity to your design, it also helps to simplify the design process.

Of course, similar elements don't have to be treated in the same way in your design - after all, rules are there to be broken!



Many components of letterforms are repeated. E, F and L for example reuse the same elements. Using the same design for similar components gives consistency to your design.

PLAN THE FULL CHARACTER SET

With your design rules defined, it's best to test them out on all the characters you need. For consistency, typically, characters which are a similar shape should be the same size and the typeface design can now be further refined by drafting the character shapes and sizes using guidelines.

All characters sit on a horizontal baseline. The x height is the height of the main body of lower case letters (excluding ascenders and descenders), and is quite literally the height of a lowercase x. The stems of lowercase letters such as 'b' and 'd' reach up to an ascender height and similarly 'g' and 'y' reach down to a descender height. Capital letters can be slightly smaller than the ascender height, aligning to a cap height.

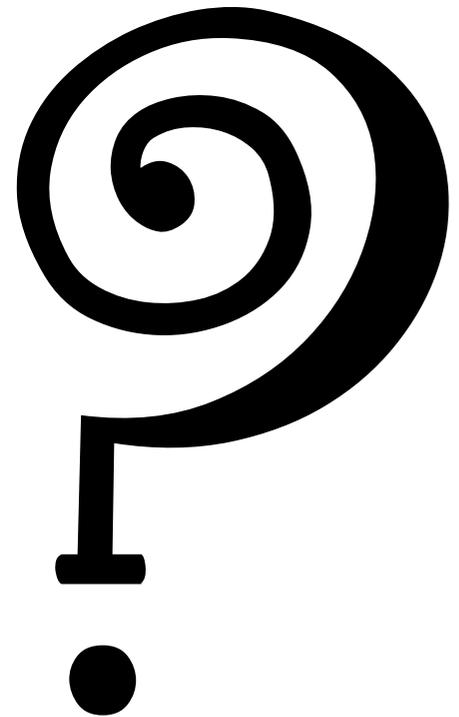
The width of your characters is much more of an individual design decision although letters of a similar shape are also often the same width, b, d, q and p for example. The width of your letterforms can give your typeface an overall condensed, standard or wide look.

TRY IT OUT

As your typeface design evolves it is worth testing it out on whole words. Letters don't exist in isolation and you may find you wish to refine your design when you see how your characters are working together.

GET CREATIVE

Some characters are more unique in shape than others and as such lend themselves to the application of a little creative flare, perfect for giving your typeface design its own personality. The question mark is a good example, combining curves, straight lines and a not-often-seen dot it is a good candidate to really showcase your design.



Certain letterforms with more unique shapes can be used to really showcase your design. These characters can really add personality to your typeface.