

Project four
Avoid classic pitfalls

Typeface Solomon Black Deco (www.typefor.type.com)

Typoogr dos and

Anne Wollenberg gathers 40 top type tips from the world's leading experts, covering everything from typeface creation to 'cooking with type'

typographical don'ts

What do you need to know to create and design with type? We've rounded up leading creatives from across the world and asked them to share the philosophies and processes that inform their own design practice. From London to New York, Australia and Argentina, we've picked the brains of typeface designers, art directors, typographers and graphic designers to bring you the best tips for creating and using typefaces.

Our experts have shared plenty of practical pointers that you can easily incorporate into your work. Cypher13 and Bruno Maag outline the steps of creating a typeface, Dan Reynolds reveals why you should never draw type in Illustrator and Frank Jonen shares advice for making text legible on the iPad and iPhone.

Designing with type is the other side of the typographic coin. Here you'll find tips on selecting and testing fonts, kerning, spacing, design harmony and more, while the *NME*'s Joe Frost talks us through his new font selections, and Vince Frost enthuses about the sheer joys of playing with type.

Turn over for everything you need to know about type design... →

Typeface design

Take our top advice for creating your own typeface from scratch

DO



01 Use a grid
Todd Berger, Alex Henry and Lucian Foehr
Partners and designers
Cypher13
www.cypher13.com

"Draw a specific symmetrical grid and look for opportunities in that framework. This particularly applies to geometric type, rather than more organic designs, but it's so important. Your oppositional skills improve greatly when you use a grid. You do sometimes have to break it, though."



02 Establish control characters
Bruno Maag
Managing director
Dalton Maag
www.daltonmaag.com

"Start with 'n', 'o', 'H' and 'O': your four basic control characters, as they're more or less symmetrical and have straights and rounds. It's important to establish those four in terms of wider appeal, font weight and proportions – width to height, x-height and cap-height."



03 Prioritise legibility
Alex Haigh
Type designer
HypeForType
www.hypefortype.com

"Legibility is key in design for the masses, such as corporate identity, literature or signage. You have a responsibility to present information in an understandable, intelligent way. More than a title on a design, typography is one of your only tools to catch customers."



04 Make a Multiple Master font
Dino dos Santos
Designer
DSType
www.dstype.com

"If you want several weights, design the thinnest and save it. In FontLab, select Tools>Multiple Master>Define New Axis>Weight>OK. You'll get two masters, Wt0 and Wt1, with the same font. Manipulate the points in the Wt1, corresponding to the heavier weight."



05 Design with a purpose
Ken Barber
Type director
House Industries
www.houseind.com

"If you're not working to a brief, define what you want to accomplish. Do you need a text face or display font? Under what limitations must it work, such as exceedingly small sizes, or poor printing conditions? Should it feature a stylistic flair not found in an existing face?"



06 Perfect the overshoots
Dan Reynolds
Font designer
Linotype
www.typeoff.de

"Overshoots need changing the most as they're like little optical illusions. If you're drawing a square and circle, you make the circle bigger so it looks the same size. In the same way, the top and bottom of 'O' and 'o' are bigger than 'n' or 'x'. You need to print and test them out."



07 Use handwriting samples
Jill Bell
Type designer and lettering artist
Brandlettering
www.jillbell.com

"Create a handwriting font from actual samples of normally written text. In addition to a complete character/glyph set. That way, you can see how the different letters join and terminate, and how they actually look in context."



08 Think twice about alternates
Kris Sowersby
Type designer
Klim Type Foundry
www.klim.co.nz

"OpenType makes it easy to throw everything into a character set, usually with mixed results. Will your seven alternate 'g' glyphs add anything to the inherent quality of your typeface? Be wary. Hundreds of alternatives is no longer the unique selling point it once was."



09 Watch stems on iPad and iPhone
Frank Jonen
Visual effects artist
www.frankjonen.com

"Face proximity is closer on the iPhone, but both require attention to stems. A 1pt stem won't provide a perfectly filled pixel column, rather a very thin line with a soft edge. Keep your thinnest necessary lines at 1.25pt and let your serifs make the softer transitions for you."



10 Consider structure and hierarchy
Raymond Brekelmans
Type designer
Fontoville
www.fontoville.com

"Don't hide your content – you need a strong structure with visual hierarchy to separate the most and least important objects. Put contrast in font sizes, spacing, lining and colours. Ensure people can scan the content – it makes reading easier and gives your work balance."

DON'T



01 Let errors destroy you
Dino dos Santos
Designer
DSType
www.dstype.com

"If you use a Multiple Master font, you can avoid common errors with undesirable counters and get the points in the right places. But if you're new to type design you're going to make a lot of mistakes. It's just life. Try to pick up ways to avoid making mistakes, but learn to live with them."



02 Cheat the interpolation
Kris Sowersby
Type designer
Klim Type Foundry
www.klim.co.nz

"It's easy to spot lazy designers who only draw ultra light and ultra black poles, then interpolate lots of in-between weights. You'll definitely need intermediate poles for a large number of weights. Only kern at the end – everything should be as perfect as possible first."



03 Rush ahead
Todd Berger, Alex Henry and Lucian Foehr
Partners and designers
Cypher13
www.cypher13.com

"You may design a few letters and think you've got something good. Once you build all these letters, they'll be messy if you haven't looked at ascender and descender height, baseline and x-height. Slow down, focus on a few characters and begin to build a ruleset."



04 Draw fonts in Illustrator
Dan Reynolds
Font designer
Linotype
www.typeoff.de

"Backgrounds are finer and larger than in FontLab, so when you copy outlined letters it has to convert the sizes. If you import them one at a time, their scale relations aren't maintained. You'll have to resize every letter, and other details can get overlooked while you do."



05 Think text behaves the same in 3D
Frank Jonen
Visual effects artist
www.frankjonen.com

"Text modelled in stereoscopic 3D can have dull side areas with a straighter line from ascender to descender. Retouch in compositing to balance the rendition. Or keep 2D text but delay the left eye by a half or full frame, and darken or brighten the secondary type, to give depth."



06 — Ignore your surroundings

Alex Haigh

Type designer
HypeForType
www.hypefortype.com

"When you pay attention to your surroundings, you start to notice design and typography. Over time, you'll build up an acute eye for detail: the spacing between letters, the colours, forms, weights, feelings. All are elements you put into practice when designing yourself."



07 — Confuse spacing with kerning

Bruno Maag

Managing director
Dalton Maag
www.daltonmaag.com

"They're distinctly different but are often confused. Spacing refers to the space between two characters throughout. Kerning is for critical pair combinations, such as 'T' and 'A'. It's important to get your spacing right first; if not you'll have to fix a lot with kerning."



08 — Live by the rules

Raymond Brekelmans

Type designer
Fontville
www.fontville.com

"It's a cliché to learn the rules and break them, but it's true. Typography has a lot of rules. Some people stick with each one, seeing if text is spaced, kerned or aligned-right by just looking at the metrics. That gets boring. You want rock 'n' roll in your designs, so improvise."



09 — Expect fonts to replace writing

Jill Bell

Type designer and lettering artist
Brandlettering
www.jillbell.com

"Don't expect a handwriting font to replace handwritten text, no matter how many alternatives are included or how incredibly it's designed. While randomising programs can create infinite variations of letter outlines, they lack the flow and rhythm of a trained, free hand."

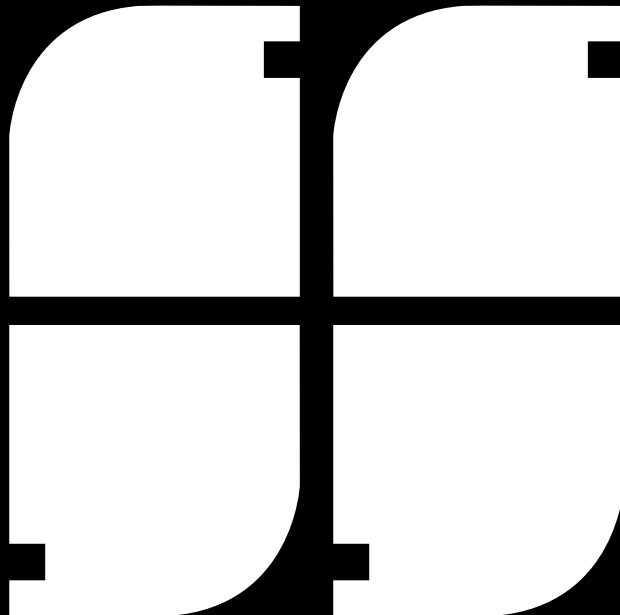


10 — Undervalue type design

Ken Barber

Type director
House Industries
www.houseind.com

"Creating a typeface involves finding consistency in letterforms that are often relatively inconsistent. Individual letters must exhibit overall visual uniformity, and as a whole must work together in any combination, over a vast range of sizes and environments."



Q&A

Take the right first steps in the process

Nadine Chahine

Type designer
Linotype
www.arabictype.com

How do you create a mood for a typeface?

The first step in the design process is to have a proper idea of what the typeface is going to do. Is it going to be headline type or a text typeface? What's the purpose and function? Once you have decided on the function, the next step is the mood. Then you can brainstorm and do your research, before you start the actual designing.

What do you need from a type brief?

If the work is for a specific client, the brief needs to contain their name and any visual support material they can provide, in terms of whether it's a new branding exercise or new elements that are being introduced. If it's a brand uplift project, you need to see the existing material and typeface that they have, and understand why they are changing it and what their current one is doing – or not doing.

To move ahead, you will also need a character set. Where does the client operate? Are they all over Europe, or in other countries that use other scripts? You should start with basic Latin and have support for eastern European languages. The next step is usually support for Greek and Cyrillic, then you have all sorts of other scripts – Chinese, Japanese, Hebrew, Korean – depending on the market.

What if you disagree with the client?

I had a project where a client wanted to modify Frutiger to a specific set of requirements. They said they wanted the typeface made lighter. I thought it should go bolder. So we did both, and when we presented the options they instantly saw the other option was better.

What are your must-have tools for type design?

FontLab Studio does almost everything you need. I draw very rough sketches – not the kind you would show anyone, just scribbles where I get the basic idea out of my head. I don't scan sketches though, I work straight onto my computer. You also need a good black-and-white laser printer with PostScript support – you rely less on printouts with more experience, but it's still very important.

You also need to make a good test document, with the basic character set in large and smaller sizes, and sample text in different sizes. You need to be able to compare a consistent set of text and characters.

How do you know when it's time to stop designing?

At some point you have to tell yourself to stop. If you're redesigning it, not making it better, then you just need to stop.

Design with type

Expert tips for perfecting your typography as a graphic designer

DO



01 Put function first Caroline Archer

Typographer
UKType
www.uktype.com

"Know a typeface's characteristics: is it greedy for space or economic? What's the relationship between the x-height, ascenders and descenders? How much leading does it need? Once practical problems are solved aesthetics can be considered, but function comes before form."



02 Try type for size Ilene Strizver

Typographic consultant
The Type Studio
www.thetypestudio.com

"Consider how it will look at the size you plan to use it. For example, when using a thick/thin script, or any typeface with a height/weight contrast for a headline, make sure it doesn't look too clunky at large sizes. What looks great at 18pt may lose its elegance at 96pt."



03 Manually space larger type Bob Abbott

Creative director
Future Publishing
www.futureplc.com

"It depends on the font, but the larger the type, the tighter the letter spacing needs to be. For best results, kern each space between characters individually. Experiment with spacing: work out which kern, track and leading settings get the best from your font choice."



04 Avoid expressive type William Longhauser

President
Longhauser Design
www.longhauser.com

"Avoid typefaces designed to create an expressive look with no relation to context. These so-called expressive fonts shout for attention but reduce the meaning to silence. Expression evolves through a process including careful analysis, invention and discovery."



05 Squint when designing layouts Paul Willoughby

Creative director
The Church of London
www.thechurchoflondon.com

"With blurred vision you see type and images as abstract forms and shapes, and balance weights and compositions without over-analysing content. When considering how a graphic is held within the page, it narrows your view of positive and negative space."



06 Proof on paper Emiliano L. Suárez

Art director and designer
Watafak Argentina
www.watafak.com.ar

"If you're working on editorial or print projects, print it out to preview your design. Don't work only on screen, especially if you're combining small and display size fonts as you can get confused – make sure you're not zooming in at 6400% to read your smallest font size."



07 Read as well as see Vince Frost

Founder and creative director
Frost* Design
www.frostdesign.com.au

"It's critical to understand the words you're designing, and the point of the story. Design for effect and for engagement. You can create desire and add positive value to people's lives without creating garbage. Don't just lay out type so it looks nice in a portfolio."



08 Keep it simple Arem Duplessis

Art director
NYTimes Magazine
www.nytimes.com/magazine

"Spend the bulk of your time doing research and sketches before you go jumping onto the computer. Know your strengths and weaknesses, trust your instincts, and always work within your comfort zone. And know when to stop – self-editing is always key."



09 Strike a balance Joe Frost

Art director
NME
www.nme.com

"Think hard about the right balance of fonts. When I redesigned the *NME*, I wanted them bold and no-nonsense to reinforce the new editorial tone. I chose Gotham, with Hoefler Text to counter it for adaptability – it's serious, but more playful when used with swash letters."



10 Brush up on your history Ross MacDonald

Illustrator and designer
Brightwork Press
www.ross-macdonald.com

"A grasp of typographic history will inform your work in profound and subtle ways, and may make you appreciate some golden rules. The nuances of kerning and leading can seem obscure. Set a little lead type by hand, and it becomes obvious why things work or not."

DON'T



01 Let familiarity set in William Longhauser

President
Longhauser Design
www.longhauser.com

"Familiarity with letter forms and words breeds indifference; replace it with observation and perception. Working with type requires application of the same abstract qualities that inform basic design fundamentals: size, weight, texture, shape, line, contrast, composition and negative space."



02 Underestimate new fonts Emiliano L. Suárez

Art director and designer
Watafak Argentina
www.watafak.com.ar

"After working in design for a while, you usually stick to 10 or 15 good font families. Helvetica and Bodoni will always work, but you may miss good fresh fonts – type foundries are doing strong work with new stuff, such as House Industries and Hoefler & Frere-Jones."



03 Try too hard to be quirky Joe Frost

Art director
NME
www.nme.com

"It's a mistake to use something overly elaborate or really kooky for a magazine that's more than a one-off. Once the novelty wears off you'll get sick of the quirkiness that once drew you to that font. Often something classic, maybe with a small twist, is better."



04 Distort your typeface Ilene Strizver

Typographic consultant
The Type Studio
www.thetypestudio.com

"Type that has been electronically expanded, slanted, bolded and condensed is very amateurish and unprofessional, and can be annoying to the eye. So don't go distorting your type with the features available in design software."



05 Get stuck in a rut Ross MacDonald

Illustrator and designer
Brightwork Press
www.ross-macdonald.com

"Never breaking the rules is a slow death – they just discovered a new chemical element by trying something that shouldn't have worked. Read about John Baskerville and 19th century typography to appreciate the importance of smashing habits every once in a while."



06 Make your readers work too hard

Bob Abbott

Creative director
Future Publishing
www.futureplc.com

"Never set large amounts of copy in range-right: guessing where the next line starts each time is very tiring. Large areas of white-out-of-black type, or type reversed out of a picture, are harder to read. If you must run copy out of an image, go up a weight from your standard body copy style."



07 Use noisy fonts

Caroline Archer

Typographer
UKType
www.uktype.com

"Don't choose a typeface for text that draws attention to itself. A noisy unusual character will only come between the design and the reader, and distract from its primary role: communicating a message. Fiddling with the font without reason is also a distraction."



08 Be afraid to play

Vince Frost

Founder and creative director
Frost* Design
www.frostdesign.com.au

"I love typography and playing with words. It's a matter of trial and error – immerse yourself in the project. Colours, shapes, textures and fonts add the flavour and aura of what you're creating – like cooking with type. Play and have fun with the power of the word."



09 Be an egotist

Arem Duplessis

Art director
NYTimes Magazine
www.nytimes.com/magazine

"Don't discount other people's opinions, or think you're better than them. But don't fold immediately, either. State your case in an intelligent and meaningful manner. Don't over-design or over-think a layout, and don't get into this game unless you're a nerd about it."

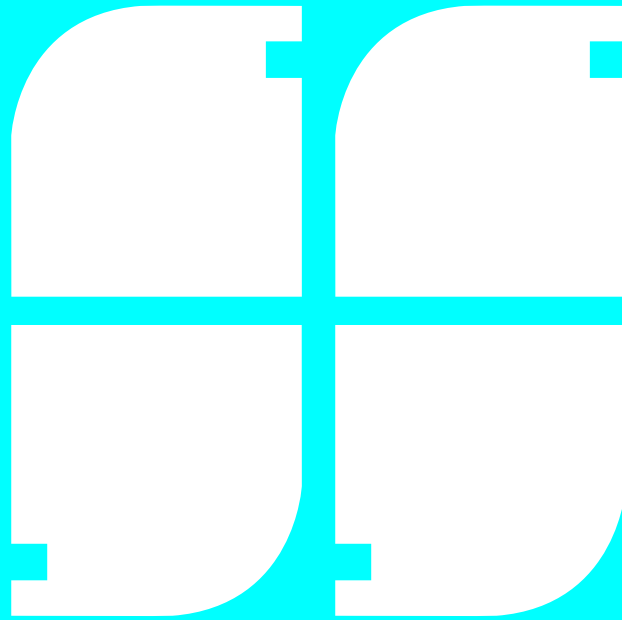


10 Drop body copy below 7pt

Paul Willoughby

Creative director
The Church of London
www.thechurchoflondon.com

"Anything smaller stops you reading – small print on adverts is 6pt or less because they don't want you to read it. Anything above 10pt looks clumsy on a standard magazine page unless it fits your concept, like when I wanted to emulate 1980s primary school books."



Q&A

Choose fonts wisely to suit the project

David McKendrick

Art director
Esquire
www.esquire.co.uk

What are your priorities when choosing a typeface?

When choosing a headline typeface it should have enough character to give it a distinctive feel, and invite you into whatever you're about to read. I commissioned a typeface to be drawn by B&P Type Foundry to give *Esquire* a unique look and feel: it's aptly named *Esquire*, and we also had a series of ligatures drawn up to go with it.

With body fonts, I wanted a fully functional typeface that would be easily read and not complicated. We picked Mercury, which is quite a robust font for print. It's designed in so many different weights, it can be printed really badly and still look good. I also picked Akkurat, a sans serif, which is very straightforward – very Helvetica.

How do you approach the testing process?

You need to test from a reader's point of view, not just a design perspective. I spent about three weeks in a room just testing, seeing what line lengths and point sizes worked. There's a bit of maths involved, as well as just creating a good look and feel.

Some people forget that magazines are based on a three-column grid, so sometimes type flows from the outside to the inside. You need to keep the line lengths fairly short.



What's your view on kerning?

It's much better to work a layout than to squeeze text in. We set a body font with a standard line width and character spacing. It should always be like that, unless you really cheat. It's better to cut text out than to kern a lot, especially if it reaches the point where it's visible to your eye.

Don't go reverse leading, either. It just doesn't function and it's not what type was invented for. You can get away with it occasionally, if it's simple, but type is for people to read, not to make funny things.

What's the worst mistake you can make with type?

Don't overcook it. People try to make it complicated when it doesn't need to be. If type is working well, it should go unnoticed: it shouldn't have to speak too loudly.

Another mistake people make is following trends for using particular fonts. You shouldn't follow, you should be inventing; if you follow trends then things become of a certain time, instead of being timeless. There's a longevity to these things and design should still look good in 10 years' time. On the other hand, you can over-think things in terms of trying to be different – it's all about the balance.