

CSS font stacks by classification

Written by Frode Helland

When Johann Gutenberg printed his famous Bible more than 600 years ago, the only typeface available was his own. Since the invention of moveable lead type, throughout most of the 20th century graphic designers and printers have been limited to one - or perhaps only a handful of typefaces - due to costs and availability.

Since the birth of desktop publishing and the introduction of the worlds first WYSIWYG layout program, MacPublisher (1985), the number of typefaces available - literary at our fingertips - has grown exponentially. Still, well into the 21st century, web designers find themselves limited to only a handful.

Web browsers depend on the users own font files to display text, and since most people don't have any reason to purchase a typeface, we're stuck with a selected few. This issue forces web designers to rethink their approach: letting go of control, letting the end user resize, restyle, and as the dynamic web evolves, rewrite and perhaps also one day rearrange text and data. As a graphic designer usually working with static printed items, CSS *font stacks* is very unfamiliar: A list of typefaces were one take over were the previous failed, instead of that single specified Stempel Garamond 9/12 pt. that reads so well on matte stock.

Am I fighting the evolution? I don't think so. Some design principles are universal, independent of medium. I believe good typography is one of them. The technology that will let us use typefaces online the same way we use them in print is on its way, although moving at slow speed. While we're waiting - and even when we get there - the need for fallback options is evident.

This article connects fonts across multiple platforms by visual appearance, giving web designers an expanded overview of their possibilities. The historical classification helps bring typographic principles to the Web, without letting go of its dynamic nature.

Sources:

<http://www.apaddedcell.com/web-fonts>

<http://www.webspaceworks.com/resources/fonts-web-typography/48/>

<http://support.microsoft.com/kb/837463>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Microsoft_Windows_fonts

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Core_fonts_for_the_Web

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_fonts_in_Mac_OS_X

<http://webtypography.net/fontmatrix/>

<http://www.microsoft.com/typography/fonts/unix.htm>

<http://andrew.triumf.ca/fonts/fonts.html>

<http://mondaybynoon.com/2007/04/02/linux-font-equivalents-to-popular-web-typefaces/>

<http://www.sabi.co.uk/Notes/linuxFonts.html>

Notes:

The percentage numbers for Linux fonts are based on Codestyle's survey, dated June 6th 2009.

Only Linux fonts with more than 70% coverage were picked.

Sans serif:

Grotesque

Neo Grotesque

Humanist

Geometric

Sans serif: Grotesque

Fonts

NAME	COVERAGE	STYLES/WEIGHTS	NOTES
Franklin Gothic	Office 03 Windows Office 07 Windows	Book Demi Heavy	
Franklin Gothic Med.	Windows Office 03 Windows Office 07 Windows	Medium	
News Gothic MT	Office 04 OSX	Regular	News Gothic and Franklin Gothic were originally created to be part of the same family
Haettenschweiler	Office 03 Windows Office 07 Windows	Regular	
Impact	Windows OSX	Regular	

CSS code examples

Basic

- font-family: Franklin Gothic Medium, Franklin Gothic, News Gothic MT, Helvetica, sans-serif;

Helvetica (Neo Grotesque) is a bit off, but it's as close as you get, since there are no grotesques bundled with OSX.

Heavy

- font-family: Franklin Gothic Heavy, Arial Black, sans-serif;
- font-family: Haettenschweiler, Impact, Arial Black, sans-serif;

Arial Black (Neo Grotesque) is a bit off, but it's as close as you get, since there are no grotesques bundled with OSX.

Sans serif: Neo Grotesque

Fonts

NAME	COVERAGE	STYLES/WEIGHTS	NOTES
Helvetica	OSX Linux	Regular Italic Bold Bold Italic	46% Linux coverage, bundled with XFree
Helvetica Neue	OSX	Regular Italic Bold Bold Italic Condensed Bold Condensed Black Ultra-light Ultra-light Italic Light Light Italic	A new version of Helvet- ica with more weights and styles
Arial	Windows OSX Linux	Regular Italic Bold Bold Italic	Based on Helvetica, 66% Linux coverage
Geneva	OSX	Regular	In the same genre as Helvetica, but different
Nimbus Sans	Linux	Regular Italic Bold Bold Italic Regular Condensed Regular Condensed It. Bold Condensed Bold Condensed Italic	Similar to Helvetica, 90% Linux coverage, bundled with Ghost- script
Arial Black	Windows OSX	Black	
Arial Narrow	OSX Office 03 Windows Office 07 Windows Office 04 OSX		
Arial Rounded MT Bold	OSX Office 03 Windows Office 07 Windows Office 04 OSX	Bold	

CSS code examples

Basic

- font-family: Helvetica, Arial, Nimbus Sans, sans-serif;
- font-family: Geneva, Arial, Nimbus Sans, sans-serif;

Narrow/Condensed

- font-family: Arial Narrow, Nimbus Sans Condensed, sans-serif;
- font-family: Helvetica Neue Bold Condensed, Arial Narrow Bold, Nimbus Sans Bold Condensed, sans-serif;

Heavy

- font-family: Arial Black, Franklin Gothic Heavy, sans-serif;
- font-family: Arial Black, Haettenschweiler, Impact, sans-serif;

Rounded

- font-family: Arial Rounded, sans-serif;

Sans serif: Humanist

Fonts examples

NAME	COVERAGE	STYLES/WEIGHTS	NOTES
Verdana	Windows OSX Linux	Regular Italic Bold Bold Italic	58% Linux coverage
Tahoma	Windows OSX	Light Regular Bold	Tahoma is essentially a narrow companion for Verdana
Trebuchet	Windows OSX Office 07 Windows Office 04 OSX	Regular Italic Bold Bold Italic	Has some characteristics that set it apart from other designs, most notably the lower case g, 56% Linux coverage
Lucida Sans	Office 04 OSX Linux	Regular Italic Bold Bold Italic	80% Linux coverage, bundled with XFree
Lucida Sans Unicode	Windows Office 07 Windows Office 08 OSX	Regular Italic Bold Bold Italic	Similar to Lucida Sans
Lucida Sans Regular	Windows Office 07 Windows	Regular	Similar to Lucida Sans
Lucida Grande	OSX	Regular Bold	Similar to Lucida Sans
Gill Sans	OSX	Light Light Italic Regular Italic Bold Bold Italic	Could also be classified as a geometric sans serif
Gill Sans MT	Office 03 Windows Office 07 Windows Office 08 OSX	Regular Italic Bold Bold Italic	
Corbel	Windows Vista Office 07 Windows Office 08 OSX	Regular Italic Bold Bold Italic	
Calibri	Windows Vista Office 07 Windows Office 08 OSX	Regular Italic Bold Bold Italic	

Bitstream Vera Sans	Linux	Regular Oblique Bold Bold Oblique	Somewhat similar to Verdana, 83% Linux coverage
Deja Vu Sans	Linux	Extralight Book Oblique Bold Bold Oblique Condensed Cond. Oblique Cond. Bold Cond. Bold Oblique	Based on Bitstream Vera Sans, 87% Linux coverage

CSS code examples

Basic

- font-family: Verdana, sans-serif;
- font-family: Tahoma, sans-serif;
- font-family: Lucida Sans, Lucida Sans Unicode, Lucida Grande, sans-serif;
- font-family: Gill Sans, Gill Sans Mt, sans-serif;

Sans serif: Geometric

Fonts

NAME	COVERAGE	STYLES/WEIGHTS	NOTES
Futura Std	OSX	Condensed Medium Condensed Extra Bold Medium Medium Italic	
Tw Cen MT	Office 03 Windows Office 07 Windows Office 08 OSX	Regular Italic Bold Bold Italic Condensed Condensed Bold Condensed Extra Bold	Tw Cen MT (Twentieth Century) is very similar to Futura
Century Gothic	Office 03 Windows Office 07 Windows Office 04 OSX	Regular Italic Bold Bold Italic	Century Gothic is a remake of Twentieth Century to match the proportions of Avant Garde
URW Gothic	Linux	Book Book Oblique Demi Demi Oblique	Similar to Avant Garde, 95% Linux coverage, bundled with Ghostscript

CSS code examples

Basic

- font-family: Futura, Tw Cen MT, Century Gothic, URW Gothic L, sans-serif;

Narrow

- font-family: Futura Condensed Extra Bold, Tw Cen MT Condensed Extra Bold, sans-serif;

Serif:

Old Style
Venetian
Transitional
Modern

Serif: Old Style

Fonts

NAME	COVERAGE	STYLES/WEIGHTS	NOTES
Garamond	Office 03 Windows Office 07 Windows Office 04 OSX	Regular Italic Bold	
Hoefler Text	OSX	Regular Italic Black Black Italic Ornaments	Hoefler text is quite similar to Garamond
Palatino Linotype	Windows Office 03 Windows Office 07 Windows	Regular Italic Bold Bold Italic	
Book Antiqua	Office 03 Windows Office 07 Windows Office 04 OSX	Regular Italic Bold Bold Italic	Book Antiqua is considered an imitation of Palatino Linotype
URW Palladio L	Linux	Roman Italic Bold Bold Italic	Similar to Palatino Linotype, 91% Linux coverage, bundled with Ghostscript

CSS code examples

Basic

- font-family: Garamond, Hoefler Text, serif;
- font-family: Palatino Linotype, Book Antiqua, URW Palladio L, serif;

Serif: Venetian

Fonts

NAME	COVERAGE	STYLES/WEIGHTS	NOTES
Centaur	Office 03 Windows Office 07 Windows	Regular	
Felix Titling	Office 03 Windows Office 07 Windows	Regular	Only capitals

CSS code examples

Basic

- font-family: Centaur, Perpetua, Hoefler Text, serif;
Perpetua (Transitional) and Hoefler Text (Old Style) are both a bit off, but share some similarities. with Centaur. There is no Venetian Serif bundled with OSX.
- font-family: Felix Titling, Centaur, Perpetua, Hoefler Text, serif;
Only capitals.

Serif: Transitional

Fonts

NAME	COVERAGE	STYLES/WEIGHTS	NOTES
Baskerville	OSX	Regular Italic Semibold Semibold Italic Bold Bold Italic	
Baskerville Old Face	Office 03 Windows Office 07 Windows Office 04 OSX	Regular	Somewhat similar to Baskerville
Perpetua	Office 03 Windows Office 07 Windows Office 08 OSX	Regular Italic Bold Bold Italic	
Times New Roman	Windows OSX	Regular Italic Bold Bold Italic	
Times	OSX Linux	Regular Italic Bold Bold Italic	Another version of Times New Roman, 39% Linux coverage, bundled with XFree
Nimbus Roman No9 L	Linux	Regular Italic Medium Medium Italic	Similar to Times, 87% Linux coverage, bundled with Ghostscript
Bookman Old Style	Office 03 Windows Office 07 Windows Office 04 OSX	Regular Italic Bold Bold Italic	
URW Bookman L	Linux	Light Light Italic Demi Bold Demi Bold Italic	Similar to Bookman, 93% Linux coverage, bundled with Ghostscript
Georgia	Windows OSX Office 07 Windows Office 04 OSX Linux	Regular Italic Bold Bold Italic	57% Linux coverage
Cambria	Windows Vista Office 07 Windows Office 08 OSX	Regular Italic Bold Bold Italic	

Constantia	Windows Vista Office 07 Windows Office 08 OSX	Regular Italic Bold Bold Italic	
Lucida Bright	Office 03 Windows Office 07 Windows Office 04 OSX	Regular Italic Demibold Demibold Italic	Somewhat similar to Cambria, at least at small sizes, 80% Linux coverage, bundled with XFree
Big Caslon	OSX	Medium	
Century Schoolbook	Office 03 Windows Office 07 Windows Office 04 OSX	Regular	
Century Schoolbook L	Linux	Roman Italic Bold Bold Italic	Similar to Century Schoolbook, 94% Linux coverage, bundled with Ghostscript
New Century Schoolb.	Linux		37% Linux coverage, bundled with XFree
Charter BT	Linux	Roman Italic Bold Bold Italic	Also called Bitstream Charter, 89% Linux coverage, bundled with XFree
Vera Serif	Linux	Regular Bold	Has some characteristics that set it apart from other designs, most notably the lower case g and it's slab like serifs, 73% Linux coverage
DejaVu Serif	Linux	Book Bold Italic Bold Italic Condensed Condensed Bold Condensed Italic Condensed Bold Italic	Based on Bitstream Vera Serif, 79% Linux coverage

CSS code examples

Basic

- font-family: Baskerville, Baskerville Old Face, Times New Roman, Nimbus Roman No9 L, serif;
Only regular.
- font-family: Baskerville, Perpetua, Times New Roman, Nimbus Roman No9 L, serif;
- font-family: Perpetua, Baskerville, Times New Roman, Nimbus Roman No9 L, serif;
- font-family: Times, Times New Roman, Nimbus Roman No9 L, serif;
- font-family: Bookman Old Style, URW Bookman L, Georgia, serif;
- font-family: Century Schoolbook, Century Schoolbook L, Big Caslon, serif;
Big Caslon is a bit off, but still similar.

Serif: Modern

Fonts

NAME	COVERAGE	STYLES/WEIGHTS	NOTES
Didot	OSX	Regular Italic Bold	
Bodoni MT	Office 03 Windows Office 07 Windows	Regular Italic Bold Bold Italic Black Black Italic Condensed Condensed Italic Condensed Bold Condensed Bold Italic Poster Compressed	Bodoni and Didot are quite similar
Modern No. 20	Office 03 Windows Office 07 Windows Office 04 OSX	Regular	In the same genre as the two others, but slightly different

CSS code examples

Basic

- font-family: Didot Regular, Bodoni MT Regular, Modern No. 20 Regular, serif;
- font-family: Didot, Bodoni MT, serif; font-style: italic;

Visually related

Big Caslon (Transitional)

New Century Schoolbook (Transitional)

Century Schoolbook L (Transitional)