Art & design in Photoshop

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Steve Caplin

Focal Press

Art & design in Photoshop

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Introduction

THERE ARE MANY books that will teach you how to use Photoshop. This isn't one of them.

Throughout all the editions of *How to Cheat in Photoshop* – a book which will, incidentally, teach you how to use Photoshop – I've maintained a website and reader forum to help readers with their photomontage-related problems. This has included a regular weekly contest, the Friday Challenge. And I've noticed that one of the major issues facing Photoshop artists is not how to use the Curves dialog, or the Pen tool, or how to save work for the web. One of the major stumbling blocks, it turns out, is the design process.

There are several areas of difficulty. Typography has been a particular problem: with so many dozens of fonts shipping with every new computer, and with thousands more available through the internet, how are we to select one that's appropriate for the task we're working on? Is there more to choosing the right font than merely picking one that stands out on screen, or which happens to appeal to us? Of course there is, which is why I've devoted a chapter to explaining how typography works, and how to make it work in your favor.

There are several different visual arts disciplines, and each has its own set of conventions and received wisdom. Art students will be familiar with the laws of perspective and the notion of balance; photographers will recognize the Rule of Thirds, and how movement must flow from the edge of an image towards the center; designers will understand how to lay out a page that incorporates white space and visual elements to break up the text, and how to draw the reader's eye through a layout.

At this point, I have a confession to make. I didn't go to art school. I'm not a trained photographer, or an accredited designer. (When pressed, I tend to refer to myself as an 'unqualified success'.) All the 'rules' that I suggest in this book are those I've figured out through years of trial and error, of creating montages and then wondering why they don't look as good as they should do. Only later, in some cases, have I found that there's a perfectly

good rational explanation for why some compositions work and others don't, and when this is the case I've tried to phrase the explanations in a way that's meaningful to photomontage artists.

Of course, not all of this book is on a purely theoretical level. After a couple of chapters in which we explore the basic principles of typography and design, we roll up our sleeves and get down to the work of examining individual design concepts, to see how they're put together. We'll explore the fields of art and commerce, of packaging and advertising, to see what works and what fails to make the grade.

While the main theme of this book is the intrinsic design ideals that underlie each topic, we will of course show how you can achieve the effects yourself. This book isn't designed for you to reproduce the examples I've created, but rather for you to see the principles in action so you can go on to produce your own better, more original designs. It's not a cookbook, so much as a spare parts catalog.

At the back of the book you'll find a Photoshop Reference section. It's referred to several times within the tutorials; use it to brush up your Photoshop knowledge on specific points.

Of course, any Photoshop artist will occasionally struggle with some sticking point in the application itself. And so I'd like to invite all readers of this book to visit the Reader Forum at *www.howtocheatinphotoshop.com* where you can ask questions, exchange ideas and show off your work. If you have any difficulties with Photoshop techniques, or with tutorials in this book, post a message there and I (or another reader, if they get in first) will do my best to help you out the same day.

Steve Caplin
London, 2008

This book is dedicated to Carol, of course.

I'm grateful to the following:

Ben Denne and Hayley Salter of Focal Press

Keith Martin, for helping create the keyboard shortcuts font

MacUser magazine, for allowing me to repurpose some of my artwork

Adobe Systems Inc., for making Photoshop in the first place

The type designers Ray Larabie, Dieter Steffmann, Manfred Klein, Christophe Feray, Andrew Leman, Paul Lloyd, Graham Meade, Pat Snyder, Julius B. Thyssen, Walter Velez and Ben Weiner for so generously creating their outstanding fonts and making them freely available to designers.

Some of the images in this book are from Wikimedia Commons, part of Wikipedia. Some are images I've photographed myself. The remainder are taken from the best subscription site I know: **www.photos.com**. With a huge range of royalty-free photographs available for instant download, both cutout objects with clipping paths and full frame images, it's always my first stop when I'm looking for the perfect image. Many thanks to them for allowing me to include low resolution versions of some of their outstanding pictures in the tutorials in this book. On the CD you'll find a link to the photos.com home page, and a special offer for a discount membership.

How to use this book

THIS BOOK ASSUMES that you have a fair working knowledge of Photoshop. It's beyond the scope of this book to teach readers how to use the Pen tool, or the Curves adjustment, or Layer Masks. That's what *How to Cheat in Photoshop* is for. But just in case any readers come across a wholly unfamiliar concept, there's a crash course in Photoshop basics at the end of the book: the final chapter, Photoshop reference, outlines some of the most common tools and techniques.

Some Photoshop tutorials, both in print and on the internet, will specify precisely what you have to do, step by step. I tend to avoid including numerical values wherever possible: rather than telling you to apply a 6-pixel bevel with a depth of 65, for example, I'll ask you to adjust the bevel until it looks right. The purpose of this book is not to get you to recreate the examples on these pages, but to help you to understand the principles so that you can then apply them to your own work. So I make no apologies for being a little vague at times. This is deliberate, and it's in order that you can work the details out for yourself.

On each of the tutorial pages in this book, you'll see an indication of whether there's an associated image, texture or font on the CD. These are provided so you can try the tutorials out with the book propped up against your monitor (you'll never need to turn the page, as each tutorial is complete on a double page spread). The font required for each tutorial is mentioned in the text.

If you get stuck anywhere, the Reader Forum for my other book, *How to Cheat in Photoshop*, is available for your use. Post a question and it will most likely be answered the same day:

www.howtocheatinphotoshop.com/cgi-bin/simpleforum_pro.cgi

Finally, have fun with this book. It's what working in Photoshop is all about. If you aren't enjoying it, then you aren't doing it right.

Entrance to Death Row, San Quentin prison

Typography

The photograph on the facing page shows the entrance to the holding block for prisoners awaiting the death penalty at San Quentin prison, California. This isn't a museum exhibit, but the current entrance to the only Death Row facility in the whole of the state.

The iron cage itself looks like something from a torture gallery, but what interests us here is the choice of typeface, both in the sign above the door and in the notice regarding the use of the telephone. It's a highly stylized version of an Old German gothic lettering style, of the kind that was popular four hundred years ago.

We're not suggesting that being typographically up to date is uppermost in the mind of the prison governor, but consider the subtext of this choice. Does this typeface put us in mind of a progressive, efficient 21st century correctional facility? Or does it make us think of a medieval dungeon, complete with iron cages for the display of the executed?

Whether we're conscious of it or not, the typefaces we're presented with affect our emotional response to the subject. When we work in Photoshop, we must ensure that the fonts we choose are appropriate to the message we want to send. In this chapter, we'll look at how different typefaces can send the right or the wrong message.

Ty·pog·ra·phy

1. The art and technique of printing with movable type.
2. The composition of printed material from movable type.
3. The arrangement and appearance of printed matter.

[French *typographie*, from Medieval Latin *typographia*: Greek *tupos*, impression + Latin *-graphia*, -graphy.]

American Heritage Dictionary

01.01

Serif fonts

Serif type can be recognized by the fine lines on the end points of all the strokes, roughly at right angles to the stroke.

The form was devised by ancient Greek and Roman stonemasons, who found that if they tried to carve a thick stroke – such as the letter I – there was a strong chance that the stone would split while they were carving.

To prevent this happening, they first carved short 'stoppers' at the top and bottom of the intended stroke, to prevent the stone splitting beyond this point. These were the beginnings of serifs.

Although modern serif fonts have these serifs at most junctions, the Romans used them only where they were needed: so there were no serifs at the joins in the letters N and M, for instance, since the corner made its own natural stop point.

SERIF FONTS may have originated with ancient stonemasons (see left), but their appeal has lasted to the present day. The serifs themselves form a visual rule at the top and bottom of all the characters, making it easier for the eye to follow each line of type.

Because of their increased legibility, serif fonts are used for extended reading: novels, newspaper articles and most magazines use serif fonts for the main body of the text as they make it easier to read large chunks of text. There are exceptions – see the following pages on sans serif fonts for details.

All serif fonts are based, more or less, on the Roman originals. So-called 'old style' serifs originated in the 15th century with designs such as Garamond: these are characterized by a variation in thickness between horizontal and vertical strokes, inspired by calligraphic writing, and usually feature an oblique stress – the letter 'o', for example, will tend to have its stress at an angle, rather than directly vertical.

Serif type
Garamond (oldstyle)

'Transitional' serif fonts first made their appearance in 1757, and are characterized by strong differences in weight between the thick and thin strokes. This font was designed by John Baskerville, who had to reinvent not just the printing press but paper-making techniques in order to reproduce his fine designs.

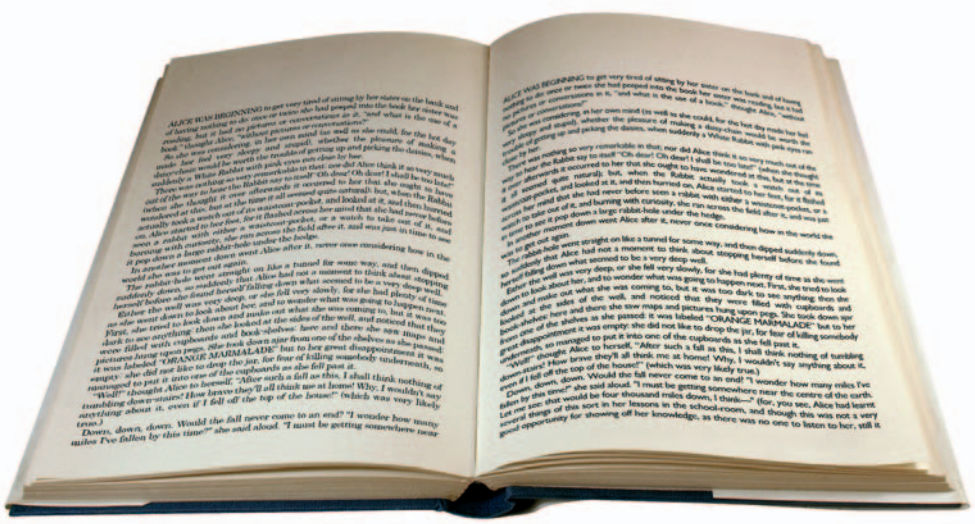
Serif type
Baskerville (transitional)

In around 1800, a new form of serif appeared, known as 'slab serif' or 'Egyptian'. These have very little variation in weight, and have thick, chunky serifs that are far bolder than had previously been seen. They're most commonly seen in Victorian and 'Western' posters, and are distinctively retro in appearance.

Serif type
Egyptian (slab serif)

The first truly 'modern' serif font was Times Roman, designed for *The Times* newspaper in 1932 by Herbert Morrison. Intended to be the most readable font that could easily be reproduced on newsprint, Times has been a firm favorite ever since, and is the standard serif font installed on contemporary computers.

Serif type
Times (modern)



Because the serifs form horizontal lines above and below each character, serif fonts are much easier on the eye: the serifs guide the reader along each line. Text that requires sustained reading on a wide measure is almost always set in a serif font, whether it's in a book, a magazine or a newspaper. Serif fonts also have more variations in weight than sans serif, which makes the page more 'colorful' and appealing. In the example above, the left-hand page is set in a serif font; the unattractive right-hand page is in sans serif.

Serif fonts convey tradition and respectability (top), as opposed to the more modern appearance of sans serif typefaces (bottom). When this is a key requirement, only a serif font will do the job correctly.

MORE INFO

- Serif fonts have changed considerably over the years. If you're replicating an antique document, or a Victorian book, or a contemporary newspaper, make sure you choose a font that existed at the time.

- Because of the variable line weights in serif fonts, you may find the fine strokes become hard to discern when complex effects such as chrome are applied to the type layer. Bold versions of serif fonts will always hold a chrome effect more clearly than regular weights. Pay close attention to legibility: if in doubt, use a heavier weight of the font to ensure that it will be readable.

- The variable weight in serif fonts means that we can condense or expand them to a considerable degree without them looking distorted – something we cannot do with sans serif fonts. If you need an extra-narrow font and don't have a condensed type available, consider shrinking a serif font instead.

- Times Roman is the most commonly used font on computers. This is a good reason to avoid it in your artwork: it's so bland and commonplace that it just tends to look dull. Choose a font that expresses the feeling you want the artwork to evoke in your audience.

- When setting long pieces of text, such as body matter in books or magazines, choose a serif font for its legibility, rather than its uniqueness. If a font is quirky and distinctive, it's less likely to be legible when set in large chunks. Save the fancy fonts for your headlines, where only a few words have to be read at a time.

01.02

Sans serif fonts

'Sans' is the Latin word for 'without' – and, pronounced rather differently, it's also the French word for the same thing. A sans serif font is, literally, a font without serifs.

Although sans serif fonts are much closer to handwriting, they didn't appear as typefaces until the early 19th century.

Sans serif fonts appear in a variety of forms, but are characterized by a largely even weight with minimal distinction between thick and thin strokes. They're more resolutely 'modern' than serif fonts, and are used to catch the eye in posters and newspaper headlines.

Sans serif fonts are not designed for continuous reading, but are clearer and more legible at a distance than serif fonts. Almost all road signs use sans serif fonts for their clarity and lack of ambiguity.

SANS SERIF FONTS don't have serifs, as their name implies, and so take up less space than their serif equivalents. For this reason, they're used in print where a large amount of information needs to be compressed into a small space: so while newspapers will use serif fonts for main articles, they'll almost always use sans serif for television and financial listings, weather reports and other detailed purposes. They're harder on the eye for long periods of continuous reading, which is why you rarely see books set in a sans font.

The earliest sans serif fonts appeared in around 1800, and were called 'Grotesque' or 'Gothic' – that's gothic in the sense of vandalistic. Very bold, and designed for posters and headlines, they were initially considered too ugly for any other purpose. Contemporary versions include Franklin Gothic and Akzidenz Grotesk.

Sans type
Impact (grotesque)

In 1913, the London Underground subway system commissioned a 'humanist' font created by Edward Johnston. Designed for increased legibility, its revolutionary design led to fonts such as Gill Sans, Frutiger and Optima: these fonts had a weight variation that made them more appealing and less austere than earlier sans serifs.

Sans type
Johnston (humanist)

More extreme are the 'geometric' fonts such as Futura, designed in 1927, as well as Avant Garde and Century Gothic. As their name implies, these are based on pure geometric forms, and tend to have a perfectly round letter O. These fonts typify the 1930s in look and feel, reminiscent of the Art Deco movement with its emphasis on geometric simplicity and lack of clutter.

Sans type
Futura (geometric)

The 'transitional' sans serifs are typified by Helvetica, which appeared in 1960. With a perfectly even stroke weight, it was designed to be an everyday sans font for general purpose use, and has remained the standard for sign design ever since. Other fonts similar to Helvetica are Univers and Arial. The style is sometimes called 'anonymous' sans serif, due to its plain, uncluttered appearance.

Sans type
Helvetica (transitional)

Sans serif fonts have an immediacy that's hard to ignore. Notices such as the one above have far more impact when set in sans serif (left) than they would in a serif font (right). Because the characters are less fiddly, they're also far easier to read from a distance: this is why road signs are typically set in sans serif typefaces.

Because the letterforms are simpler, sans serif fonts are easier to take in at a glance. This means they can be used smaller with the same degree of legibility. In the example above, a sans serif font has been used for the listings on the left; a serif font, of an optically equivalent size, has been used on the right. The listings on the left are clearer and easier to scan, but take up less space on the page.

MORE INFO

- Sans serif fonts tend to come in many more weights than serif fonts. This is partly because they have to communicate quickly in a variety of conditions, and partly because you really can't condense them artificially. Here are examples of Futura Condensed Medium (left) and Futura Medium that has been artificially condensed to the same width (right).

The 'real' font is elegant in weight, and an attractive shape; the artificial version has poor balance, and introduces a weight variation that wasn't there in the original.

- For informational signs, Helvetica is still about the best choice there is. But for just about any other purpose it's just too commonplace and too bland to be of interest; any text set in Helvetica screams that it's been created on a computer, thanks to its ubiquity on every operating system.

- When recreating historical documents or signage, try to use fonts appropriate to the period. Use Grotesque fonts for Victorian posters, Gill Sans or Futura for items set in the 1930s to 1950s, and – as an alternative to Helvetica – try the Adobe font, Myriad, for a contemporary sans serif that combines legibility with a modern, clean look. The headlines in this book are set in the sans serif font Griffith Gothic.

01.03

The Danger sign above is not just inappropriate, it's downright dangerous in its own right. Is this the kind of warning we'd take seriously? Or would we see this lettering as a suggestion, rather than a strict command?

Typography is an art, not a science. Our appreciation of which font to use is based as much on an emotional response as on a close examination of the correct classification of a particular typeface.

But why should this matter to the Photoshop artist? Because we're chiefly concerned with reproducing a plausible version of reality. Viewers of our work will be able to tell at a glance when something is wrong, and we'll lose their trust.

On these pages we'll look at typography that has gone wrong; on the following pages, we'll take the same examples and show how to put it right.

Picking the wrong font

What's in a font? Two examples of design gone wrong

THE COMPUTER REPAIR STORE on the left has chosen two fonts for its signboard: Arnold Bocklin and Perpetua. They may have looked attractive in the catalog, but they don't fit the purpose. Old fashioned and nostalgic, they convey entirely the wrong message for a business that claims to be operating in a high tech industry. We wouldn't trust these people to have up-to-date expertise. Similarly, the store on the right claims to be selling handmade furniture: but the typeface is one more commonly seen on car radiator grilles. It speaks of mechanization rather than hand tooling and individual attention.

The lettering on this brass plaque (left), for instance, is designed to give prospective clients confidence in the firm of attorneys. But the casual nature of the typography has the opposite effect: this doesn't look like the sort of outfit in which you'd place your trust. Being seen as friendly is one thing; portraying your business as overly casual can backfire. And while this may be an obvious example, the opposite can be less immediate.

Too casual? Would you trust this firm to represent your interests?

Fonts that are too modern, or too casual, can turn us off

How much would you pay for a bottle of champagne that looked like this? Would you present this as a gift?

Would you be confident that this spray has the power to destroy the bugs in your home?

when we're looking at items that should be conveying tradition and luxury, such as this champagne bottle. Photoshop artists will frequently resort to that old standby, Times Roman, for all sorts of purposes for which it's patently unfit – such as the bug-killer spray can above. The stolid, boring, traditional serif font has no place in a situation like this. What's needed is something that shouts, that has energy to it: this sort of design requires a font with an edginess that's wholly lacking in Times Roman.

There's nothing technically wrong with the Burger Bar lettering on the left: it displays the name of the restaurant clearly. to represent their brands. But does this look like the kind of place you'd go for a satisfying meal? Or is it somehow lacking?

Would you expect this outlet to sell juicy burgers?

MORE INFO

● So far we've talked exclusively about the choice of typeface when creating logo, packaging and shop signs. But color also plays a vital role in the process. Consider the logo above: would you choose to eat at this establishment?

● Two logos for a science museum. The lettering style works, suggesting a mathematical formula: but the brown and red are warm colors which suggest homeliness rather than the raw spirit of scientific discovery. Does science really have a color?

01.04

This Danger sign is clear and unambiguous. The typeface is a plain, bold sans serif that reeks of authority: ignore this at your peril. I photographed this sign in 2008, and it's likely it had stood in place for fifty years: there was no need to replace it when it was obviously doing the job perfectly.

When choosing a font, we need to think above all about the effect it will have on the reader. It's not just a question of what looks attractive on the page, but of whether it's going to do the job we demand of it.

As we've seen on this and the previous pages, fonts can be modern or old fashioned, commanding or inviting, playful or serious, strong or insipid. It's up to us to make the right choice, which means we need to be psychologists as well as Photoshop artists. Because the wrong choice can be catastrophic.

Picking the right font

The careful choice of typeface can make all the difference to a business's public image

THE FONTS ON THESE TWO STORES are now far more appropriate to the nature of their businesses. The computer store uses a font whose clean lines and unfussy approach speaks of competence and reliability. But the font is just quirky enough to show that it's decidedly modern: the tail on the 'y' and the compressed shape of the 'S' lend this an up to date quality without being transitory.

The handmade furniture store now looks like the sort of place where care is taken, where design matters, and where quality will be more important than mere cost. Enlarging the first and last letters of the word 'Handmade' is a typographic trick that's used to express tradition and old fashioned values: it harks back to label design of the 1940s, suggesting the care and attention that would have been taken in a bygone era.

They may not be forward looking, but they'll do the job you need

The brass plaque (left) may not show this firm of attorneys to be bright, thrusting young people with their eye on the future. They do, however, now look stolid and reliable, and rather more trustworthy than they did before, if perhaps a little unimaginative.

A vintage bottle, indeed, and one you'd be proud to hand over at a dinner party: this is clearly quality stuff

One spray from this can and your home will certainly be bug free

How much difference does a wine label make? All the difference in the world. Most people buy wine based on how impressive the label looks, and that's especially true of champagne – particularly when we can't afford the more expensive brands.

The use of the stencil font for the bug spray can suggests military strength: and the choice of black and yellow for the product name is reminiscent of nuclear warnings. Both of which make us think of killing power, which is what this product needs.

The burger bar uses a plump, juicy lettering to convey the meatiness of its products. Check out the lettering used by McDonald's, or Burger King, or Wendy's, and you'll see fat, thick lettering – albeit in a variety of different typographic styles.

Full, fat, plump: all you can eat, and all you need

MORE INFO

JUICY FOOD

● Red and yellow are the colors we associate with food, probably because they represent cooking flames. You'll see these colors used in fast food logos more than any other because they work on a subliminal level: they suggest the idea of eating.

Sci SCIENCE MUSEUM

Sci SCIENCE MUSEUM

● Blue and green are both good, solid scientific colors. Perhaps it's because they're cool, dispassionate, detached. They suggest an antiseptic environment as well, which is why hospitals so often use shades of blue and green in their floor and wall coloring.

01.05

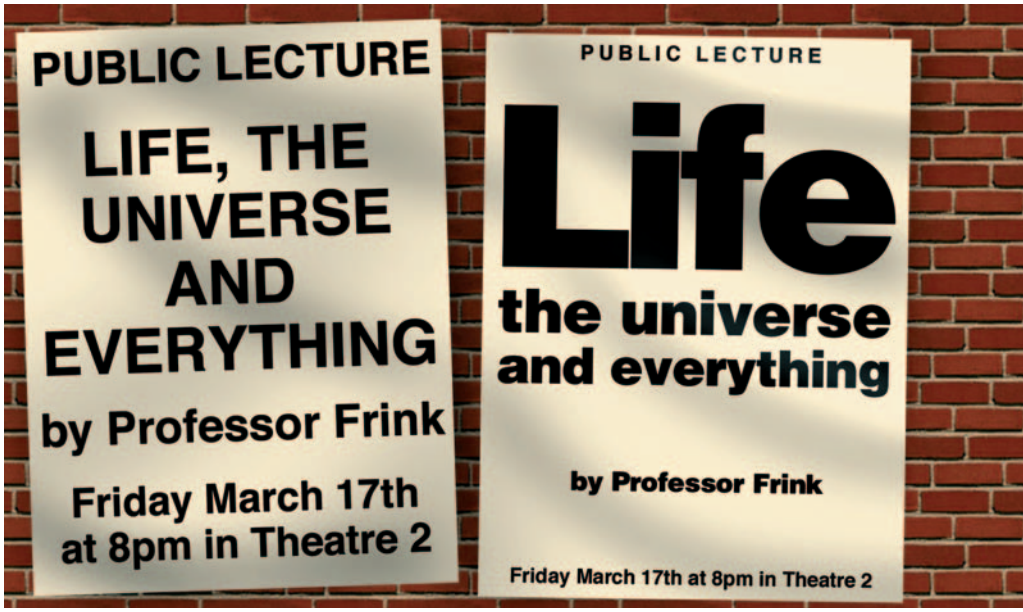
Size and arrangement

The arrangement of type is essential for creating the mood and feel that we intend. We can take great liberties with relative sizes in order to achieve this goal.

The poster for the movie *Pirates of the Caribbean*, above, shows the two key words pulled out and centered above each other. The more insignificant 'of' and 'the' are tiny in comparison: they've been shrunk down to a size that's almost unreadable, and tucked into the space above the 'N' where there happens to be a suitable gap.

Similarly, the letter 'C' has been detached from the word which follows it, and enlarged and wrapped around the 'A' in the shape of a cutlass.

When designing posters, we need to be prepared to use several different text blocks, often splitting words themselves, to experiment with size and placement.



You don't need to make everything scream for attention in order to get your point across

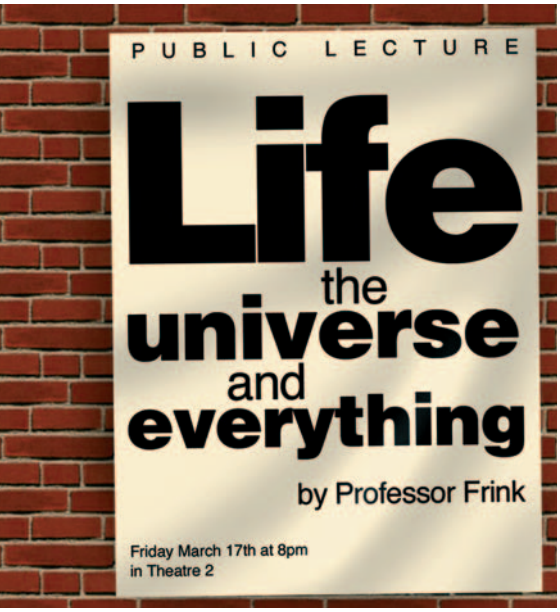
WHEN BEGINNERS USE WORD PROCESSORS to design posters, flyers and other information sheets, there's always a strong tendency to make everything as big as possible, filling all the space on the page. After all, the bigger the text, the more readable it's going to be, right? Well, to some extent – but balance is more important.

In the flyer above left, all the text is more or less the same size. Which means that nothing here stands out; the result is that most people would walk straight past this without noticing it. And the purpose, first and foremost, is to attract attention.

The second example, above right, changes the balance of the text dramatically. The fact that this is a public lecture isn't important; so that piece of information can go in tiny text right at the top. Similarly, the date isn't something to scream out loud, since if anyone's interested in the lecture they'll take the trouble to find out the date. By making the word 'Life' huge, we guarantee it will attract attention; the remainder of the lecture title slots neatly beneath it. Giving Professor Frink so much white space around him means his name can go far smaller. It stands out because of its location, not because of its size.

The third version, on the facing page, is another reworking of the design. Here, we recognize that the words 'the' and 'and' are minor, and don't need the same emphasis as the words which follow them; and so they're pulled out and made smaller. In addition, we've now set them in a far lighter version of the font to make them less imposing.

We've made another change in the third version, and this is to move the words 'the', 'and' and 'by Professor Frink' off-center. Although you might expect that centering everything produces a neater design, it also produces one that's dull and monotonous. Symmetry is rarely a bonus in design terms. Instead, off-setting the words gives the design a more edgy feel, which in turn draws attention to it. By making the wording less of a comfortable symmetrical device, we force people to read it.



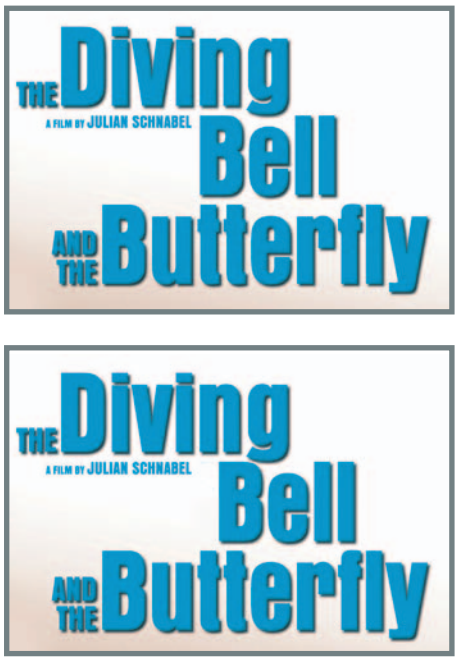
When we off-center text, though, we need to make it all line up with some element of the design to avoid it looking messy. This is where the designer's eye comes in: there are no set rules to make it look right. In our lecture example, the word 'the' lines up with the vertical stroke on the 'f' above it; the 'd' in 'and' lines up with the bottom of the 'v' above and the corresponding angle in the 'y' below, and the 'by' lines up with the left of the 'y' above it.

The typography for the poster for the movie *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*, below, is a good case in point. Here, the text all appears to be randomly arranged; but there's a strong vertical line that runs through the left of the 'n' in 'Diving', the beginning of 'Bell', and the vertical stroke of the first 't' in 'Butterfly'. In addition, the 'g' of 'Diving' fits neatly into the space between the 'B' and the 'l' of 'Bell'.

Compare this with the second version of this lettering, in which I've moved the word 'Bell' a fraction to the right. Here, the text is awkward: the words sit uncomfortably together, the 'B' of 'Bell' presses too close to the 'g' above it. The whole effect is one of disharmony.

It's not that we consciously look for elements that line up with each other when we view these posters, any more than the casual viewer would recognize when an inappropriate font is used; but we notice when something's wrong, and we trust the design that much less.

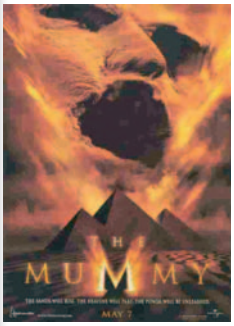
Ultimately, the size and arrangement of type on a page comes down to what looks right. But we have to learn what looks right, since it isn't always immediately obvious. In particular, if something is wrong it can be hard to spot exactly what the offending element is – and even harder to put it right. But as with all Photoshop work, learning to use the tools is the easy bit; getting the design right is the trickiest part of the process.



The importance of lining elements up: right and wrong

MORE INFO

● In the first Public Lecture poster, on the far left, the text was all in one big block. And we kept it in a single block in the second version, even though the relative sizes changed – adding spacing and increasing leading as required. But in the third version, we separated it into individual words in order to achieve the correct placement. It would have been possible to leave it in a single block, adding spacing before the words as required; but the effort would have been huge, and the degree of control minimal.



● There's nothing special about the middle 'M' of 'MUMMY' here – except that enlarging it makes a good graphic device. Feel free to be creative with type!

● When we resize text in Photoshop the type remains live – it isn't yet in the form of individual pixels, as most Photoshop layers are. This means we can make text larger or smaller at will, without worrying about pixellation or raggedness. But the moment we 'rasterize' the type by turning it into a regular layer, we lose that ability. Always get the basic arrangement of text final before rasterizing: remember, a lot of effects can be added using masks and Layer Styles.

01.06

Designing with type

The design above was created by Ilia Zdanevich in 1923, as a poster for an event he created with Tristan Tzara. As a piece of pure typography it was years ahead of its time: even now, it has the power to shock.

Whether we're designing posters or books or magazine features, we always have to work with words. It's a constant battle between the editor – who wants as many words as possible and sees the images as an often unnecessary intrusion, and the designer – who resents the volume of wordage which means he has to reduce the size of his specially commissioned illustrations.

Often, we simply can't lay our hands on appropriate images to accompany the texts we have to lay out. But we can make the type itself do a lot of the work: here, we'll look at how to liven up a page using type alone.

Too tight: we don't need to use every square inch of space on the page

Too dense: there's no room for the text to breathe here

Too dull: we can make this headline look more appealing than this

Too wide: the three column grid gives little room for flexibility

Il Designato di Luciano Zuccoli

Parve il libro d'un uomo che avesse lunga esperienza d'anni e di casi, ed era il libro d'un giovanissimo; parve la critica implacabile d'un malcontento marito, e l'autore era scapolo. Ma era uno scapolo e un giovane che viveva a occhi aperti, in una grande città, precocemente; era l'opera d'uno scrittore nato, che a una sensibilità eccezionale accoppiava per istinto uno spirito d'osservazione fresco e sincero.

E in verità, chi volesse analizzare le qualità principali di questo libro,—di questo, e osiamo dire di quasi tutta l'opera di Luciano Zùccoli,—troverebbe ch'esse provengono dalla sincerità dell'osservazione, dalla facoltà di sentire acutamente, dalla precisione originale nell'interpretare i moti interni dell'animo e gli avvenimenti cospicui della vita vissuta. L'autore afferra movimenti psicologici non veduti da altri e li vivifica con uno spirito tra il sentimentale e lo scettico, il quale è caratteristica di lui; rende con brevi tòcchi le scene, di cui mette in rilievo i particolari che sfuggono ai più e che vi lascian più duratura l'impressione; e riflette nel giudizio delle cose e degli uomini una sua filosofia malinconica e indulgente, lepida e disperata nel tempo stesso, che se non ha stupito più nell'autore di Farfui e del *L'amore di Loredana*, fece la maraviglia dei critici che nell'autore di Il designato dovevan giudicare, un giovane di ventiquattr'anni.

Si è, ripetiamo, che Luciano Zùccoli, prima ancor che uno scrittore, è un uomo che ha vissuto e vive, e della vita, nonostante quella sua filosofia, è amico e ammiratore.

Indipendente come tutti coloro,—e tutti qui vuol dir pochi—i quali hanno una personalità rilevante, egli ha sempre un'opinione sua e una sua volontà; non per il piacere di contrasto, benchè un certo qual gusto per la contraddizione gli si potrebbe a quando a quando rimproverare, ma perchè non dice se non ciò che sa, che ha visto, che ha constatato; non ha gli occhi, insomma, che alla vita e alla realtà.

Parrebbe che uno spirito così formato dovesse essere arido e freddo; e sarebbe, se Luciano Zùccoli pretendesse troppo dalla realtà e dalla vita e si disgustasse facilmente d'ogni cosa dolce per quel fondo d'amaro che vi si trova quasi sempre alla fine. Ma in questo medesimo libro il lettore può aver la prova della sensibilità che l'autore ha saputo conservare fra le delusioni, la lotta, le tempeste della sua non mai pacifica esistenza. Si leggano, ad esempio, il capitolo in cui è descritta la prima notte di matrimonio, e l'altro in cui è ritratta la protagonista tutta affaccendata nelle sue frivole compere, e quello in cui si racconta della morte e dei funerali di Laura Uglio, e si veda con qual delicatezza di tocco ha saputo lumeggiare, argomenti gravi o teneri, leggeri o tristi, scabrosi o sentimentali. E si confrontino con l'arguzia onde son delineati certi altri personaggi, com l'ironia di certe scene di famiglia, col senso di ribellione con cui sono affermate o rapidamente esposte certe verità della vita comune; e non ci si darà torto se diremo che lo studio del vero, quasi istintivo nello Zùccoli, presta alla sua opera, una varietà mirabile.

Non è certamente un autore monocorde colui che vicino a questo può allineare altri dieci volumi, in cui ciascun personaggio ha una figura sua propria; dieci volumi nei quali sfilano i tipi di tutte le classi sociali, dall'aristocrazia al popolo minuto, dal superbo patrizio del L'amore di Loredana ai ladri e ai teppisti della Compagnia della Leggera, dalla candida fanciulla di certe sue novelle alla donna ardente, volitiva, disdegnosa, che è la protagonista di Farfui, dal bambino ingenuo al libertino inquieto e curioso, dal soldato fanfarone e generoso al trionfatore freddo, taciturno e senza pietà. Mille sono i tipi che lo Zùccoli ha animato della una arte, e quelli che popolano

Il designato hanno un carattere di realtà e un rilievo indimenticabili. Il libro che vede ora la luce nella sua edizione definitiva, dopo che l'autore vi ha arrecato notevoli e pazienti ritocchi, fu pubblicato la prima volta a Milano nel 1894, presso una Casa editrice, che oggi non esiste più. Se il primo romanzo di Luciano Zùccoli era subito parso opera indipendente e originale, questo, che veniva a un anno di distanza da *I Lussuriosi*, diede a divedere che lo scrittore non intendeva la letteratura come un dilettantismo giovanile, ma come un'alta faticosa nobilissima arte, alla quale voleva dedicare tutto il suo ingegno. E in realtà, ingrandendo la fama dell'autore e confermando la speranza che il primo libro aveva fatto fiorire, *Il designato* decise dell'avvenire di Luciano Zùccoli.

Parve il libro d'un uomo che avesse lunga esperienza d'anni e di casi, ed era il libro d'un giovanissimo; parve la critica implacabile d'un malcontento marito, e l'autore era scapolo. Ma era uno scapolo e un giovane che viveva a occhi aperti, in una grande città, precocemente; era l'opera d'uno scrittore nato, che a una sensibilità eccezionale accoppiava per istinto uno spirito d'osservazione fresco e sincero.

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tti qui vuol dir pochi—i quali hanno una personalità rilevante, egli ha sempre un'opinione sua e una sua volontà; non per il piacere di contrasto, benchè un certo qual gusto per la contraddizione gli si potrebbe a quando a quando rimproverare, ma perchè non dice se non ciò che sa, che ha visto, che ha constatato; non ha gli occhi, insomma, che alla vita e alla realtà.

ONE OF THE MOST DIFFICULT PROBLEMS facing a designer is what to do with a story that has no graphics, photographs or other imagery to accompany it. Simply setting column after column of long, dull text is unimaginative and turns off readers.

We can create our own design elements on a page by using purely typographical devices. Many of these seem odd when we examine them closely; but we're so used to seeing these techniques in books, magazines and newspapers that we barely even give them a second glance.

The most obvious typographic device is the 'drop cap', short for 'capital' – the enlarged first letter that spreads over three or four lines. This clearly marks the beginning of the story, drawing the reader into the article. But we can also use drop caps further down the page, simply to break up long chunks of text. They don't necessarily have to mark a change in direction in the story itself, although it helps the reader if they do.

Designers frequently use 'pull quotes' – sections of the text cut out from the main body of the work and set in a larger font, often floating within white space. These serve two

purposes: first, to pull juicy, tempting morsels of the article out to encourage readers to look further into the piece; and second, to provide design elements, once again breaking up monotonous flows of print. Pull quotes can either appear within a column or between two columns of type.

In newspapers, you'll commonly see a typographic device whereby the first paragraph is printed large, over two columns. This makes it easier for the reader to begin reading the text. The problem is, with two regular width columns beginning just below, how do they know which one to read? The answer is to use a 'byline' – the author's name, often set as a 'wob' (white on black). These 'slugs', as they're known in the newspaper industry, aren't there to buoy up a journalist's ego: they serve a more basic design purpose.

Of course, the most significant improvement we can make is through our choice of typeface, both for headlines and for body text. But in the examples on this page, we've stuck with boring Times Roman so that we can better explore the design possibilities that type alone can offer.

MORE INFO

- Photoshop offers very little in the way of typographic tools. We can set text within a block, by dragging with the Type tool and then typing into the resulting rectangle; changing the width of the block will wrap the text, but we can't automatically create drop caps or spaces around pull quotes. Unfortunately, these need to be created laboriously, by hand, with multiple text blocks: which means we need to think about the page design carefully before we begin.

- If you're using page designs in a Photoshop document, it's always best to design them in another application – Xpress, or InDesign, or even Word – and save them as a PDF from that application, to be imported into Photoshop later. You'll generally get more control this way.

- Although the examples here show pages with no pictures, it's always possible to find photographs to accompany any text. The problem most designers face is that they're looking for relevant images; but the images are made relevant by their captions. An article on farm subsidies in a newspaper, for instance, might include a photograph of a mound of potatoes. Is this because the readers don't know what potatoes look like? Let's check the caption beneath the image: 'Farmers complained that subsidies were not at sufficient levels...' and so on. The caption may sit with the image, but it doesn't have to relate to it in any way. As long as it ties in with the main story, we're fooled into believing that the picture relates to the article. We can be easily fooled.

01.07

Customizing film logos

Reproducing a distinctive typeface, like those often associated with movies or books, is often a wonderful tool for doing a parody or satire, or making a private joke. Here, we'll make some lettering in the Harry Potter style, to go with another Harry entirely – the second in line to the throne of England.

To make this Harry Windsor lettering, we'll first make our canvas area bigger so that there's room above the original. Copying the word 'Harry' into place will help us to align the rest of the letters.

Each time we copy a chunk of lettering, we'll select it (generally with the Lasso tool) and then use ctrl J ⌘ J to make a new layer from it. This way, we can manipulate each chunk independently. We'll end up with a lot of layers, but it's worth it for the convenience of increased ease of editing.

1 The original lettering is far from easy to work with. It's drawn as if lit from the center, so that the shadows are on the left on the word 'Harry', and on the right on 'Potter'. We'll have to be careful to make the new version match this lighting. We'll begin by making space above the wording, so we can copy and paste elements into it.

2 The 'P' of 'Potter' is marked by a strong vertical lightning bolt, so we should reproduce that with our first letter. Nothing could be easier than selecting the vertical from the 'P' and copying it to a new location. The other strokes in the 'W' are made from verticals in the 'H' and the 't'; the spike in the center comes from one of the spikes on a letter 't'. When stretched and rotated, they fit together well.

3 The letter 'i' is the vertical stroke from one of the two letter 'r' instances, flipped horizontally and with the curl cut off. There are several ways we could have made the dot on top; this one has been built from the spike on top of the 'i', duplicated and flipped vertically to make a triangle.

4 The 'n' seems, at first, to be a little trickier to construct. But we've already got a usable left and curved top, from the 'r'; we can repurpose it here. We need to use the 'r' from the end of 'Potter' in the original, to be certain that the lighting will be on the correct side. The other vertical stroke in the letter is the 'i' again, with the top cut off and rotated to fit into the curve on the former 'r'.

5 The only difficult part of the letter 'd' is the rounded portion – and we've already got one of those, in the letter 'o' from the word 'Potter'. We can combine this with a vertical stroke taken from the 'r' and flipped, once again; with the spiked base removed and a little distortion, it slots neatly into the side of the 'o'.

6 The only really tricky letter in this construction is the 's', which appears to have no similarity to any other letters in the words. But we do have a curved top – we can copy one from the top of the letter 'a' and flip it horizontally. It would be good to be able to rotate this to make the bottom half – but the lighting would be wrong. So we'll add a straight section and a hook at the bottom, and both of these can be taken from a letter 'r'.

7 The final two letters of the word are easy – we already have them in the word 'Potter', and since we're not using that word at all now there's no problem about simply dragging these into place. Some tidying up is needed to blend the character elements together, and the result – when the full name is viewed as a whole – is convincing.

ON THE CD

✔ image
texture
font

MORE INFO

- This lettering was originally part of the Harry Potter poster, which I found using Google Images. Most of the images turned up on a typical search are far too small to use: choose Large or Extra Large images from the pop-up menu on the Google Images search page to constrain your search to just those images that are big enough to work with.

- In order to work with the text, we first needed to separate it from its background. This was done by selecting the black in the poster with the Magic Wand tool. But because the lettering is so dark, a lot of it was included in the selection; QuickMask was used to paint back in the portions of lettering that had been selected by accident. See page 227 for more about using QuickMask.

- Most film lettering isn't nearly as tricky as this one: the strong side lighting and metal texture present extra problems. Even though movies and TV shows frequently use custom-designed text for their titles, you can be fairly sure that someone will have created an entire font based on it. Check out www.dafont.com for an outstanding collection of free-to-use fonts.

SHORTCUTS

MAC WIN BOTH

01.08 Monogram letters

The picture above shows monograms carved into the rock to commemorate royal visits to the Norwegian town of Kongsberg. The most recent entry is from 1995; the earliest monogram here dates from 1623.

The rich, the powerful and the plain vain have been commemorating their initials in elaborate monograms for centuries. Monograms are routinely added to tableware, pyjamas and commemorative plaques.

The process of intertwining letters is a subtle one. We have to judge each pair of letters according to its individual characteristics in order to find the best fit. Not all pairs can be intertwined easily, which is why we often see letters at different heights in monograms.

1 We'll use the letters R and S for this example, as they can be intertwined in a complex and multi-overlapping manner. First, create the two letters as separate text objects: we need to be able to manipulate them individually. I've set these in two different colors so we can see what's going on more clearly.

2 Use Layer Styles to add a stroke to the letters. Make sure the stroke style is set to 'outside', so it doesn't interfere with the characters themselves. Here, I've applied an 8pt stroke to both characters; the color doesn't matter at this stage.

5 There's a problem. When we zoom in on the masked portion of the R, we can see that the stroke curls in unnaturally because the stroke is following the character. We want the stroke hidden along with the character: so open the Layer Effects dialog, and set the options to Layer Mask Hides Effects as shown here.

6 This presents us with a second problem. With the stroke and the mask both set to exactly 8 pixels around the letter S, we end up with a slight fringe that we can see when we zoom in. The solution is to delete the mask, and reapply it with the Expand setting set to 7, rather than 8: this hides any gaps.

3 We need to hide the R selectively where the S lies in front of it. Load up the letter S as a selection by holding ctrl ⌘ and clicking on its thumbnail in the Layers palette; then use Select > Modify > Expand to make the selection 8 pixels larger (the same width as the stroke).

4 Create a layer mask for the letter R (see page 233), then use a hard-edged brush to paint out those areas where the S wants to lie in front. We could intertwine the letters two different ways; here, the tail of the R and the bottom of the bowl are painted out so they lie behind the S.

7 With the new Expand setting one pixel smaller than the stroke, we get a tighter effect. Once the letters are wound together, deselect and then paint out extraneous areas – the end of the tail on the R, for example, looked ugly; so remove it. Appearance is always more important than sticking to the rules.

8 With the characters interwined as we want them. we can look at the fill and stroke colors. Setting the stroke to white, so making it invisible against our white background, is the standard procedure for monogrammed letters; I've also hidden a little of the lower serif of the R on the mask to fit better.

MORE INFO

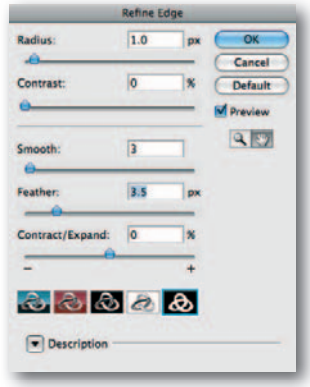
- The tradition when winding character pairs together is for the elements to pass alternately above and below each other. There are, naturally, two ways of beginning this process – they're both shown above. It's up to you which method you choose, but it's worth trying both; generally, one will work significantly better than the other.

- Of course, you don't need to stick rigidly to the 'over/under' rule. When designing the lettering for the cover of this book, the way it looks was far more important than any theoretical mode of procedure.

- When intertwining three or more characters together, as is often the case, it can take time to find the perfect fit. Always put the extra time in at this stage, before you begin the masking procedures set out here: it's much more difficult to adjust the masks later, and is straightforward once the characters have been arranged in their final position. On the other hand, you should always be prepared to delete your masks and start again if the arrangement proves not to be working further down the line.

01.09 MAG NETS

Font smoothing



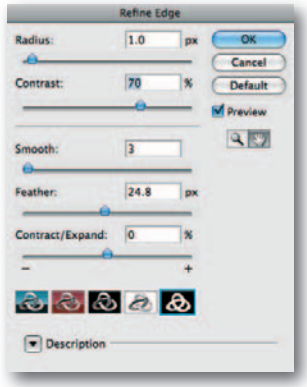
There are many reasons why we might want to smooth type. We might need to create rounded lettering for refrigerator magnets, as in the above example: here, plain old Times Bold has been turned into the rounded plastic form in just a few seconds.

If we're using type as the basis for a stone carving, or want it to look as if it's cast in metal, then rounding the corners can make the end result far more convincing. We also need to round the edges of type for making neon signs, embossing effects, and so on.

This technique uses the Refine Edge dialog found in Photoshop CS3 and later (and there's also a version of it in Photoshop Elements 6). You'll need this version in order to use the technique – although there is an alternative approach. See the More Info panel on the right for details.

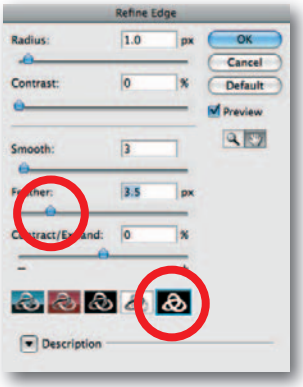
1 Begin by setting the text you want, in the font of your choice. Add extra letter spacing to give the characters room to expand – they can always be tightened up by hand later. Hold ctrl ⌘ and click on the layer's icon in the Layers palette to load the selection.

2 Open the Refine Edges dialog, either from the button on the Options bar or by pressing ctrl alt R ⌘ ⌥ R. With the default settings, we'll just get a slightly fuzzy version of our wording; but we're going to change the settings next.

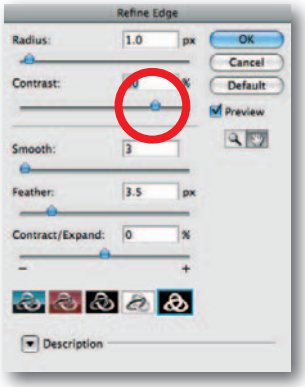


5 The higher we increase the Feather amount, the more rounded the text becomes. We can even increase it so far that the lettering begins to lose its shape, producing the highly stylized version seen here. This would be a great choice for sci-fi movie posters due to its organic, alien feel.

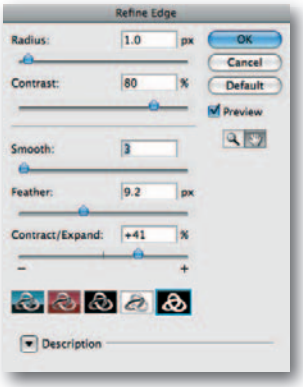
6 We're not constrained by the need to keep the edges crisp, of course. Here, lowering the Contrast setting to just 70% produces a blurry version of the type that's still entirely legible. Again, this would be a good choice for a sci-fi context.



3 Click the final icon, bottom right, to view the selection as a mask. This shows the selected area in white against a black background. To begin the process of rounding off the text, increase the Feather amount. This produces the blurry, out-of-focus look we see here.



4 To get rid of that blurring, increase the Contrast by dragging the slider to the right. Dragging it all the way to 100% will tend to produce a rather ugly, stepped bitmap edge to the lettering; start at around 80% and adjust upwards if necessary.



7 With the contrast back up to 80% to achieve a smooth outline, we can change the apparent weight of the font. Here, raising the Contract/Expand slider allows us to offset the outline, producing a much bolder, chunkier version of the type. The possibilities here are practically endless.

8 Finally, when you're happy with the appearance, click OK to dismiss the dialog. You'll be left with the original lettering, showing the new form as a selection outline. Make a new layer, and fill the selection with color. Here, I've used Layer Styles to add a simple emboss and shadow effect.

ON THE CD

image
texture
Aa font

MORE INFO

- In step 1 here, we began by spacing our text more widely than usual. To do this, select the words with the Type tool, and use alt ⌥ to add letterspacing. The reason for this is that font outlines can enlarge (as seen in step 7), or merge together (as seen in step 6). By greatly increasing the spacing, we prevent this happening accidentally.

- If you don't have Photoshop CS3, you can still produce similar results – but you have to do it manually. First, merge the type into the background layer. Use Gaussian Blur to soften the edges of the text: you should end up with a result similar to that seen in step 3 (except your type will be black on white, rather than as shown here). Next, open the Levels dialog. You'll see three small triangles beneath the histogram. Drag the black and white triangles towards the center, so they almost touch the gray triangle. This simulates the Contrast step, tightening up the feathering. Move all three triangles to the left or right to expand or contract the outlines. This method is a little hit and miss – expect a fair amount of Undoing, changing the Blur amount, then trying again.

SHORTCUTS

MAC WIN BOTH

01.10

Don't try this at home

I was baffled each time I drove past this sign – until it was pointed out to me that Fresh Pond is the region of Massachusets where this gas station is located. But you can see why a tourist might be confused by the idea.

The sign above is an example of how a bit of typographical thought – such as setting the word 'gas' in a larger, or a different font or color – would have avoided any confusion.

But there are many worse typographic mistakes than this in common use, and we'll see examples of them each time we open a newspaper or click on a website.

Shown here are some of the most common mistakes designers make with type. They're all easily avoidable; you just need the confidence to ditch an idea once it's become clear that it really isn't going anywhere.

1 Fonts such as Old English (above) and those with fancy, swash capitals are designed so that these capitals are used at the beginnings of words only. When an entire word is set in these capitals the result is an ugly, unbalanced mismatch of styles. Whatever it is, it certainly isn't Old English.

2 Placing opposite colors together creates an instant 'wow' effect. Unfortunately, that's all the effect is – instant. It has no lasting merit, and it's both painful and difficult to read. The effect is bad enough in one or two words; a whole paragraph set in this way is simply infuriating for the reader.

3 Photoshop allows us to apply all kinds of Layer Styles to text – including texture overlays. You may think for a fraction of a second that this is a cool and classy way to liven up dull type, but you'd be wrong. It simply makes the text illegible. Avoid at all costs!

4 The idea of filling bold words with a series of images that illustrate the concept isn't a new one, and it's one that can work very well – in the right hands. But you do need to be especially careful about the placement of images: don't cut off an image half way through a letter, for instance, and don't chop people's heads off.