



The Death of Typography?

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As a creative director I get to cast my eye over my fair share of portfolios from fellow creatives and I am often asked for my opinion on the contents. Lately I have found myself increasingly at a loss for words as I attempt to sugarcoat my response. The reality is; I am often left deeply saddened by the amount of students and young designers that simply neglect typography and don't actually know an ampersand from their elbow.

As a Typographer and Type Designer myself, I am always naturally drawn to the intricacies and nuances of the way designers set type and the reasons for their choice of typeface. I believe this detail speaks volumes about the way a person approaches their work and problem solving in general. Interestingly, it isn't the lack of detail that concerns me – these are skills you learn over time with experience – it is the lack of the basic knowledge of typography and its rules that are most alarming. Many students fail to understand basic terminology such as leading, kerning, ascenders, widows, orphans and counters. And one didn't even know what an ampersand was!

I'm not saying everyone should know what colour tie [Max Miedinger](#) was wearing when he designed [Haas-Grotesk](#) for [Eduard Hoffmann](#) at the [Haas'sche Schriftgießerei](#) in 1957. But the basic anatomy of our alphabet and its application surely isn't too much to ask from any human being, let alone a design graduate.

As a young designer, I was always led to believe that if you want to be a rule breaker and rock the boat, you first need to learn the rules and understand them. The difference between incompetent and incredible is knowledge.

My greatest fear is that the traditional rules and typographic techniques that were drilled into me as a young graduate are being lost forever. Students today are either not being educated correctly or for some reason are not interested in this essential design skill. I know that the years I spent hand drawing letterforms and pestering experienced typographers for tips and advice were not wasted. I know this because they have made my life as a communicator a simpler one.

Of all the design crafts, typography has to be the most important. As a designer it is the most powerful tool at your disposal and one you will use every day of your life. The ability to set type and control the connotations of the message is to control the minds of the reader. An appropriately chosen typeface can make copy appear sad, happy, aggressive, exciting, modern or traditional. In fact, when used effectively, it is without doubt THE most powerful communication tool available to a graphic designer. That is why in my humble opinion; the most influential designers in history were also typographers, typesetters or type designers.

A long time ago, I was taught to choose a typeface based on how it made you feel – not because you have seen it somewhere else. A lot of students no longer want to create and discover techniques for themselves; they would rather replicate ideas found on one of the many design compilation blogs. These '[hipster](#)' blogs have become a short cut to thinking for many students – they don't want to go out on a limb and experiment anymore. Instead, they create disposable design and judge its success based upon appearance on a blog. They should be creating real long lasting solutions to real problems for real clients. That is successful design.

If these skills are not passed on correctly, the future will be bleak. It will consist of generations of designers who believe that it is ok to set an email in [Comic Sans!](#)