

# Are you the type to want to type type?

**Book:** The Complete Manual of Typography, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.  
By James Felici, Published by Adobe Press, 2011

Print \$54.99, 374 pages

Rated: ★★★★★

If you can't appreciate the curves of a good ligature or the nuance of the wedge serif versus the bracket serif, you may not need *The Complete Manual of Typography*. Naw, I lied. Anyone who uses fonts to create a look on a page needs this book, regardless of its inane detail and its strange organization.

The book did, however, describe the history of typesetting in the beginning. I learned that lowercase letters appeared in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, but initial caps arrived before that. And when the printing press was invented 600 years ago, type emulated handwritten text. I also learned the changes that led from Postscript to TrueType and now OpenType (types of computer font files).



**Compare the look of serifs—the softening of a bracketed serif versus the chiseled look of the wedge serif (see top and bottom serifs)—when choosing a typeface (a.k.a. font).**

The author shows disdain for desktop page design programs because they don't offer some of the intricate niceties that 30-year-old dedicated typesetting equipment once had. He waxes nostalgic in his ode to those now-obsolete machines that once produced elegant visuals versus the clunky desktop publishing software that encourages anyone who can click a mouse to think they can handle the subtle art of

typesetting. But he does tell how to best use the modern equipment.

To control the look of type takes more than powerful software, however; the designer needs a good eye to see the texture and color (in gray, of course) the type creates on the page. "The potential for creating unspeakably ugly type is practically unlimited," he writes.

The book's examples of good versus bad typesetting on nearly every one of its 374 pages helps readers see the differences between vaguely adequate typesetting and gorgeous displays of type. Sometimes the descriptions sound as though the author is discussing fine wine with words such as sharp, chiseled, and emphatic strength to describe a typeface, but I almost wanted to know his take on every one of the near 200,000 fonts available today (though, mercifully, the detail was not that inane). He reminds the reader not to trust font naming conventions because they are arbitrary.

Though he emphasized that most typesetting relies on the visual appearance rather than rules, in various chapters, the standard typesetting guidelines slipped in:

- Traditional five-space-deep paragraph indents are too deep.
- Use only one space after a period.
- Don't allow three hyphens in a row.
- Display size needs tighter leading to avoid looking like it floats on the page.
- Avoid hyphens at the second-to-last line of a paragraph for a less sloppy look.

In typography, alignment matters, especially for lines of type in adjacent columns. Using grid alignment (matching all type baselines, for example) rather than frame alignment (which uses the top of the frame) helps you better control the position of the type. "In terms of grid alignment, a better option is to make the distance from frame to the first baseline equal to the text's leading," the author writes.

Other good advice included avoiding the use of blank lines between text elements such as a

(Typography, cont. on page 9)

## Typography, cont. from page 8

body text and subhead because desktop publishing software can't tell when to ignore that space as the text wraps to the top of the next column. Use leading to create spacing instead.

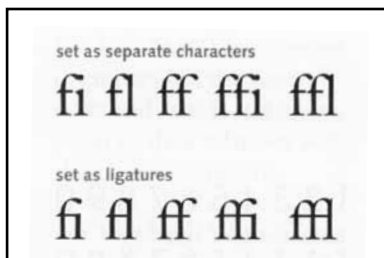
Lingo, such as glyph, x-height, font versus typeface, and measurements, such as picas, points, agate lines, appear in both the extensive glossary and index and full explanations are in various chapters on first reference.

Details abounded and most were welcome. The book helpfully explains the difference between a caption, cutline, and a legend; I also learned how and when to track and kern text (methods of spacing text horizontally)—and in what order.

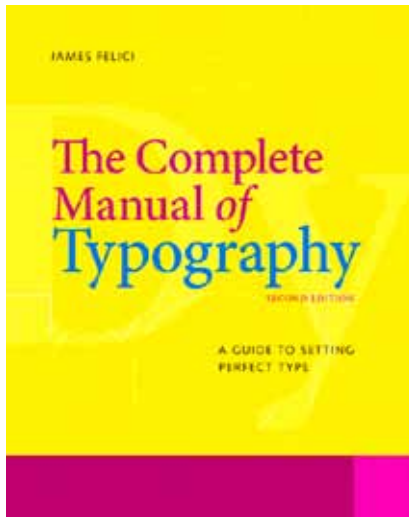
I was frustrated that topics I perceived to go together are discussed in separate chapters—such as finding valuable information on drop caps in two separate chapters. The same went for the em dash—separated information that seemed better used in the same section.

The author dedicates an entire chapter to creating tables with desktop publishing software—including the workarounds needed because software is notoriously weak for making them. If you are designing a book or publication, another chapter provides the conventions of jump lines, indexes, captions, tables of contents, and more. Yet another chapter talks about language-specific differences in capitalization, hyphenation, punctuation, letters, accents, and more. For example, the French do not capitalize months except in reference to holidays.

Three quarters of the way into the book, you find lists of character and paragraph attributes to standardize in style sheets. The book points out that no programs let you print a style sheet, which would be helpful for editors. Setting up keyboard shortcuts are the fastest way to apply preset styles, but using floating



**Ligatures replace the overlapping letter parts (see the dot of the letter *i* and the top of the letter *f*) for an elegant look.**



palettes is more convenient because no human memory is needed.

Another chapter gives tips for resolution problems such as avoiding tiny type sizes, angled letters, and reverses. Web design has its own resolution and typesetting peccadilloes. The Cascading Style Sheets (CSS2) for HTML has sophisticated logarithms, but it's so complex that few designers know how to use it. The book outlines every detail. "Practicing typography on the Web today is like practicing cabinetry with a stone axe," he writes.

So if you think type is sexy, as I do, and you appreciate subheads such as "Size Changes Everything" and "Degrees of Boldness," join me in my passion and embrace this book.

—Chris Johnson, GGCS

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