

As with any craft that has evolved over 500 years, typography employs a number of technical terms. These mostly describe specific parts of letterforms. It is a good idea to familiarize yourself with this lexicon. Knowing a letterform's component parts makes it much easier to identify specific typefaces.

(In the entries that follow, **boldface** text indicates terms described elsewhere in the list.)

ABC

Stroke
Any line that defines the basic letterform.

AMV

Apex/Vertex
The point created by joining two diagonal **stems** (**apex** above, **vertex** below).

FTY

Arm
Short **strokes** off the **stem** of the letterform, either horizontal (E, F, T) or inclined upward (K, Y).

b d h k

Ascender
The portion of the **stem** of a lowercase letterform that projects above the **median**.

CGS

Barb
The half-**serif** finish on some curved **strokes**.

ETL

Beak
The half-**serif** finish on some horizontal **arms**.

b d p q ft

Bowl
The rounded form that describes a **counter**. The bowl may be either open or closed.

Tl

Bracket
The transition between the **serif** and the **stem**.

a d P C

Counter
The negative space within a letterform, either fully or partially enclosed.

AH

Cross Bar
The horizontal **stroke** in a letterform that joins two **stems** together.

ft

Cross Stroke
The horizontal **stroke** in a letterform that intersects the **stem**.

KV

Crotch
The interior space where two **strokes** meet.

p q y

Descender
That portion of the **stem** of a lowercase letterform that projects below the **baseline**.

gr

Ear
The **stroke** extending out from the main **stem** or body of the letterform.

M d p

Em/en
Originally referring to the width of an uppercase M, an em is now the distance equal to the size of the typeface (an em in 48 pt. type is 48 points, for example). An en is half the size of an em. Most often used to describe em/en spaces and em/en dashes.

fa

Finial
The rounded non-**serif** terminal to a **stroke**.

LKR

Leg
Short **stroke** off the **stem** of the letterform, either at the bottom of the stroke (L) or inclined downward (K, R).

Baseline
The imaginary line defining the visual base of letterforms (see the diagram below).

Median
The imaginary line defining the **x-height** of letterforms (see the diagram below).

X-height
The height in any typeface of the lowercase 'x' (see the diagram below).

ascender height
cap height
median
baseline
descender height

Mphx x-height

f i f i f l f l h n

Ligature
The character formed by the combination of two or more letterforms.

g

Link
The **stroke** that connects the **bowl** and the **loop** of a lowercase G.

g

Loop
In some typefaces, the **bowl** created in the **descender** of the lowercase G.

A T M

Serif
The right-angled or oblique foot at the end of the **stroke**.

h n

Shoulder
The curved **stroke** that is not part of a **bowl**.

S

Spine
The curved **stem** of the S.

b q G

Spur
The extension that articulates the junction of a curved and rectilinear **stroke**.

T V b p

Stem
The significant vertical or oblique **stroke**.

O O e e

Stress
The orientation of the letterform, indicated by the thin **stroke** in round forms.

A T W

Swash
The flourish that extends the **stroke** of a letterform.

Q j

Tail
The curved or diagonal **stroke** at the finish of certain letterforms.

T t

Terminal
The self-contained finish of a **stroke** without a **serif**. This is something of a catch-all term. Terminals may be flat ('T', above), flared, acute, ('t', above), grave, concave, convex, or rounded as a ball or a teardrop (see **finial**).

The font

The full font of a typeface contains much more than 26 letters, 10 numerals, and a few punctuation marks. To work successfully with type, you should make sure that you are working with a full font and you should know how to use it.

Uppercase
Capital letters, including certain accented vowels, the c cedilla and n tilde, and the a/e and o/e ligatures.

À Á Â Ã Ä Å Æ B C Ç D E É
È Ê Ë F G H I Ì Í Î Ï J K L M N
O Ó Ô Õ Ö Ø Æ P Q R S
T U Ú Û Ü V W X Y Z

Lowercase
Lowercase letters include the same characters as uppercase plus f/i, f/l, f/f, f/f/i, and f/f/l ligatures, and the 'eset' (German double s).

a á à â ä å ã æ b c ç d e é è ê ë
f f i l f f f i l g h i i i j k l m n ñ
o ó ò ô õ ö ø æ p q r s ß
t u ü û ù ú v w x y z

Small capitals
Uppercase letterforms, drawn to the x-height of the typeface. Small caps are primarily found in serif fonts as part of what is often called an expert set. Most type software includes a style command that generates a small cap based upon uppercase forms. Do not confuse real small caps with those artificially generated.

À Á Â Ã Ä Å Æ B C Ç D E É È Ê Ë
F G H I Í Î Ï J K L M N Ñ
O Ø Ó Ò Ô Ö Æ P Q R S Š
T U Ú Û Ü V W X Y Ý Z Ž

Aa
Baskerville
small cap
artificially
generated

Aa
Baskerville
small cap
from the
font

Typeface shown:
Monotype Baskerville