

ANATOMY OF TYPE

A typeface consists of many different characters. Each character is made up of different parts, all of which have a name. Knowing the terminology not only makes it easier to communicate about typefaces and their characteristics but also educates your eye to see and recognize the underlying structure of various designs and, subsequently, the differences between them.

arm: An upper horizontal (E, F, T) or diagonal (K, Y) stroke that is attached on one end and free on the other.

ascender: The portion of the stem of a lowercase character (b, d, f, h, k, l, t) that extends above the meanline (the height of the lowercase x).

axis: The angle of stress of the round part of a character.

bar: The horizontal stroke in characters that join two stems together (A, H) or intersects the stem (e, f).

baseline: The invisible line on which the flat part of characters sit.

bowl: The rounded form that describes a counter. May be open or closed.

bracket: The transition between the serif and the stem.

cap height: The height of capital letters from the baseline to the top of caps.

counter: The negative space in a letterform, either fully or partially enclosed.

descender: The part of a character (g, j, p, q, y, and sometimes J) that descends below the baseline.

ear: The small stroke that projects from the top of the two-story lowercase g.

leg: A lower horizontal or diagonal stroke that is attached on one end and free on the other.

link: The stroke that connects the top and bottom part (bowl and loop) of a two-story lowercase g.

loop: The lower portion of the two-story lowercase g.

serif: The right-angled or oblique foot at the end of a stroke. Serifs come in two styles: bracketed and unbracketed. Brackets are the supportive curves which connect the serif to the stroke. Unbracketed serifs are attached sharply, usually at 90 degree angles.

shoulder: The curved stroke of the h, m, n.

spine: The main curved stroke of the S, s.

spur: The extension at the junction of a curved and rectilinear stroke.

stem: The significant vertical or oblique stroke.

stress: The orientation of the letterform, indicated by the thin stroke in round forms.

stroke: Any line that defines the basic letterform.

swash: The flourish that extends the stroke of a letterform.

tail: The curved or diagonal stroke at the finish of certain letterforms (Q, j).

terminal: The end of a stroke not terminated with a serif.

x-height: The height of lowercase letters, specifically the lowercase x, not including ascenders and descenders.