

Type Families

IT MAY SEEM LIKE TYPEFACE FAMILIES have been around forever, helping us organize our type libraries and create documents with consistent, harmonious typography. Truth is, the idea of a typeface family only dates back to around the turn of the century. Considering that type has been around with us for over five hundred years, typeface families are a relatively new concept.

The person generally credited with coming up with the idea of typeface families is Morris Fuller Benton (1872–1948), who served as director of typeface development for American Type Founders. Benton's premise was that the typefaces in a family all maintain the basic characteristics of the parent design, but with individual design variances. The Cheltenham, Century, Cloister and Szymie typeface families are just a few of the designs for which Benton was directly responsible.

Benton's original idea has been modified and expanded several times over the years. Type families have become larger, more diverse, and better thought-out.

Planning By the Numbers

In 1957, Swiss designer Adrian Frutiger created a new kind of family, providing a full range of completely compatible

variants planned in an orderly fashion. Frutiger felt that the traditional system of providing names (bold, semi-bold, semi-bold condensed, and so on) was confusing and outdated. Instead, he proposed what he believed was a logical and systematic number scheme.

In Frutiger's innovative system, each typeface was given a two-digit suffix. The first digit classified the alphabet weight, with the figure 3 indicating the lightest weights in the family and the figure 8 the boldest. The second digit identified the typeface proportion: higher numbers were used for condensed designs and lower numbers for expanded designs. In addition, if the second number was odd, the typeface was a roman design; if it was even, the typeface was italic. Thus, Univers 39 is a light condensed roman, while Univers 56 is a medium-weight italic of normal proportions.

Univers 45
Univers 65
Univers 85
Univers 39
Univers 56

Alinea Roman
Alinea Sans
Alinea Incised
ITC Legacy Serif
ITC Legacy Sans

Extended Type Families

There are typeface families that are made up of different family groups. Alinea and ITC Legacy are perfect examples. Alinea has three family groups: serif, sans, and incised. ITC Legacy has sans serif and serif family groups. The basic designs have the same cap heights, lowercase x-heights, stem weights, and general proportions. Each typeface has been designed to stand on its own as a useful communications tool, but is also part of a large integrated family that can be mixed easily with other members of the family. They can be used together with the confidence that they work well together, offering options for subtle variations

in headlines, text, subheads, captions and other typographic applications.

ITC Bodoni has yet a different kind of family. It is comprised of three size-sensitive variants which are named Six, Twelve and Seventy-Two. These were designed to imitate the subtle yet critical differences in the progressively sized metal punches that Giambattista Bodoni created for his original type. His refinements allowed for the optical distortions that occur as a font is set at different sizes. The numerical names indicate the point size around which each variant should be set, but of course, there are no hard and fast rules. ■

ITC Bodoni Six
ITC Bodoni Twelve
ITC Bodoni Seventy-Two
ITC BODONI ORNAMENTS

