



Mixing Typefaces

by Allan Haley

WHEN YOU WANT TO USE MORE THAN ONE TYPEFACE FOR A PARTICULAR PROJECT, it is always safe and easy to rely on a single large type family. The various weights and proportions will complement one another, ensuring design harmony and providing suitable options for headlines, sub-heads and text copy. In short, mixing within a single typeface family is easy and gives good results. However, this direction usually produces a relatively bland typographic solution.

For any but the simplest typographic layout, using two different typeface designs will do a better job of establishing hierarchy and creating visual interest. There is a typographic rule of thumb for combining fonts from unrelated families: The more dissimilar the type designs, the better the mix. The rule, however, carries a caveat: one typeface should take the lead, and the other should be a supporting player. Two highly distinctive designs rarely combine well.

The least risky “out of family” pairing is a serif and a sans serif. Select virtually any sans serif, combine it with just about any serif, and you’ve elevated the job above absolute conservatism.

If you want to combine two serif designs, pair very different typefaces from two of the six serif classifications. Try an oldstyle type like ITC Weidemann with a modern type like Bodoni or ITC Fenice, or a transitional like Baskerville with a glyphic like Friz Quadrata. Weight contrasts also help to differentiate. Sometimes two faces from similar stylistic categories can work together if their designs and/or weights used are markedly dissimilar. For example, the

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Very different typestyles usually pair well. Upper set in ITC Bodoni 72 and ITC Weidemann; middle set in Friz Quadrata and ITC New Baskerville; lower set in Sauna and ITC Berkeley Oldstyle.

Mixing Typefaces (cont.)

delicate stroke weight of ITC Berkeley Oldstyle Book contrasts nicely with the rotund weight of Sauna Black.

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Sans serifs that are similar in design almost never work well together. Set in Trade Gothic Bold and Univers 55.

Pairing two sans serif typefaces, however, tends to be more risky, because many of them are similar in design – especially to the average reader. Generally, the eye, trained or not, is drawn to graphic images that are either

in harmony or counterpoint. Strong visual contrasts usually don't create a problem, but when typefaces from different families that look alike are combined, visual discordance or uneven typographic harmony result (not unlike wearing navy socks with black shoes).

If you must use two sans serif typefaces, keep in mind that only vastly different styles and weights from these families should appear together on a page or screen. A 19th century sans serif like

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Very different sans serif designs can work together. Set in ITC Franklin Heavy and Futura Book.

ITC Franklin can work with a geometric sans serif like Futura because the two are distinctly different. But sans serifs that are similar in design – Trade Gothic and Univers, for example – rarely work in combination.

Lingerie Bridal Shower

She's tossing out the cotton and making room for all the lace. If only we could see the look on his face!

Script typefaces rarely pair successfully. Set in ITC Edwardian Script and ITC Redonda

Script designs are also included in this "no mix" category – for a different reason. Scripts come with strong personalities, each design wanting to make its own statement and go its own way. Trying to pair them almost always results in typographic chaos. ■