

Jeff Croft

April 17th, 2007

Future of Web Design, London

Elegant Web Typography

Introduction

I'm Jeff Croft.

What do I do?

- Design online properties for The World Company, a regional news media company headquartered in Lawrence, KS USA.
- Support and evangelize Django, an open source, Python-based web application framework that originated at The World Company.
- Help to develop Ellington, a Django-powered commercial content publishing system designed for news companies, built and sold by The World Company.
- Write about web design, Mac nerdery, and whatever else strikes my fancy at jeffcroft.com.

What is typography?

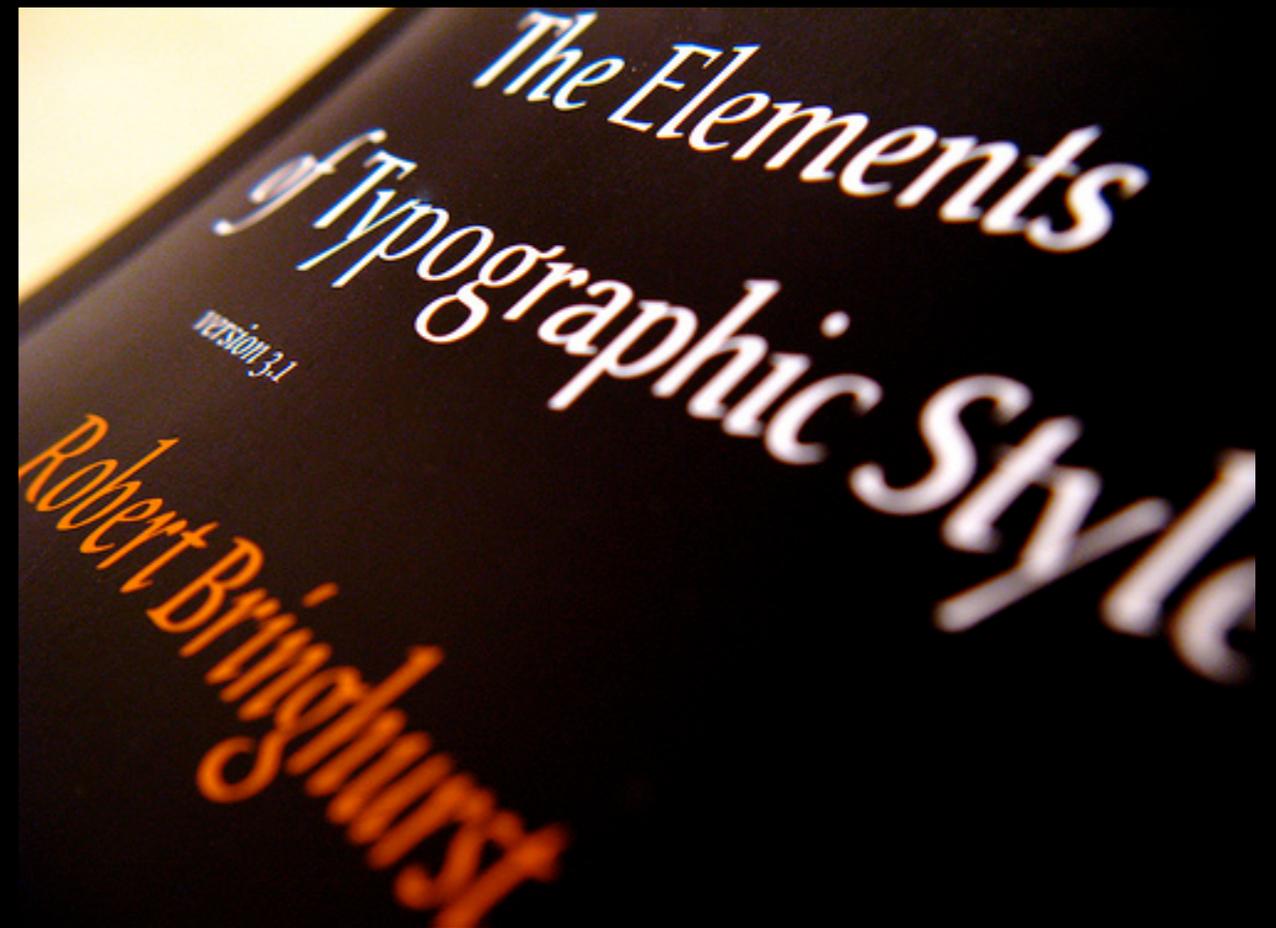
The art of setting type.

This art exists to honor the content it sets—to enhance legibility and embody the character of the words within.

Typography is *not* “picking a cool font.”

The bible

The Elements of Typographic Style
by Robert Bringhurst



“One of the principles of durable typography is always legibility; another is something more than legibility: some earned or unearned interest that gives its living energy to the page.”

Robert Bringhurst

The Elements of Typographic Style

“In a world rife with unsolicited messages, typography must often draw attention to itself before it will be read. Yet in order to be read, it must relinquish the attention it has drawn. Typography with anything to say therefore aspires to a kind of statuesque transparency.”

Robert Bringhurst

The Elements of Typographic Style

**What do we know
about **web** typography?**

A lot of things.

- Always use sans-serif fonts for type on-screen.
- Always use ems for sizing type with CSS. Do not use pixels.
- Text links should always be blue and underlined.
- Always use dark text on a light background.
- Always use web safe colors.
- Arial, Verdana, and Georgia are the only safe fonts for the web.
- Never use italic type on the web.

[useit.com](#) → [Alertbox](#) → March 2007 User Experience
Annoyances

Search

[Jakob Nielsen](#)'s Alertbox, March 26, 2007:

Does User Annoyance Matter?

Summary:

Making users suffer a drop-down menu to enter state abbreviations is one of many small annoyances that add up to a less efficient, less pleasant user experience. It's worth fixing as many of these usability irritants as you can.

So far this year, we've watched users shop on about 50 e-commerce sites. All but one of the sites violated a documented [guideline for checkout design](#): they required users to **manipulate a drop-down menu to enter their state abbreviations**, rather than simply let them **type in the two characters**.

The exception was Amazon.com, which offered the faster and more pleasant typing option. Amazon thus confirmed that even though the average [e-commerce site should not copy its overall design](#) it continues to be the leader in complying with usability guidelines for individual design elements.

Knowing a better design exists made it painful to sit, day after day, and watch users fight with the mouse to scroll through the huge menu. Sometimes users selected the wrong menu option and then had to waste even more time with the drop-down. And, in this study, we mainly tested young, able-bodied users; the situation is even worse for [elderly users](#), who have more difficulty with extensive, fine-tuned mouse manipulations. And it's worse yet for [users with disabilities](#).

Right?

Thankfully, no.

These are, at worst, myths. At best, they're antiquated rules of thumb that have been taken as gospel by far too many web designers. It's time to reevaluate them.

Achieving quality typography with CSS

First, reset everything.

Each browser has its own set of default styles for (X)HTML elements. These defaults configure initial margins, padding, font size, and more. Sadly, not all browsers implement the same set of defaults. Rather than fight with the browser inconsistencies, it's simpler to just reset everything upfront, giving you a clean slate to work with.

Just one example

```
body,div,dl,dt,dd,ul,ol,li,h1,h2,h3,h4,h5,h6,
pre,form,fieldset,input,p,blockquote,th,td{margin:0;padding:0;}
table{border-collapse:collapse;border-spacing:0;}
fieldset,img{border:0;}
address,caption,cite,code,dfn,em,strong,th,var{font-style:normal;font-weight:normal;}
ol,ul {list-style:none;}
caption,th {text-align:left;}
h1,h2,h3,h4,h5,h6{font-size:100%;}
q:before,q:after{content:' ';
```

Several reset stylesheets are freely available, including this one from the Yahoo! User Interface Library. Or, you can easily make your own.

Sizing type

Before we can deal with font sizes in CSS, we need to understand how the size of type is measured.

Type size refers to the em square, not character size.

Think of an em as a square unit—a box. A single em is the distance between baselines when the typeface is *set solid* (without leading). This unit differs from font to font, and is relative to the size of the type.

The key point to understand is that the size of the em square does not in any way define the size of individual characters within a font. Most fonts have characters that are either larger or smaller than an em (in height or width).

When we refer to the size of type, we're referring to the size of the em square, not the size of individual characters.



72 pixel square
containing 72 pixel
Helvetica text.



72 pixel square
containing 72 pixel
Zapfino text.

In CSS, the em square is sized using font-size.

The font-size CSS property takes a numeric value in any of CSS's available units of measurement. When it comes to type sizing, it's important to understand the implications of using either *absolute* or *relative* units.

The most commonly-used absolute unit is pixels, and commonly-used relative units are ems and percentages.

The typographer's scale

6,7,8,9,10,11,12,14,16,18,21,24,**36,48,60,72**

Traditionally-set type, just like most music, is composed to a scale. The sizes above make up the classic typographic scale. You should not feel limited to this scale, but you should understand that the relationships between different sizes of type within a composition is meaningful. Use the classic scale or make up your own, but create a scale thoughtfully and then *stick to it*.

Absolute vs. relative

Relative font sizes

Relative font sizes are based upon the existing font size. This existing size may be the browser's default text size, or it may have been inherited from a parent element. Consider this example, assuming a typical browser default text size of 16px:

```
p { font-size: 80%; }  
li { font-size: 80%; }
```

Initially, this appears simple. 80% of the default 16px is 12.8px, so paragraphs and list items will be display at that size. But what happens when we put a paragraph inside a list item? Our parent element's font-size value is 12.8px, so our inner paragraph will be rendered at 80% of that—or 10.24px.

Actually, the 12.8px text will be rounded off to 13px in most browsers.

This can quickly become confusing.

The 62.5% trick

In May of 2004, Richard Rutter wrote a seminal piece in web typography in which he outlined a trick that helps make this math easier. Because typical browsers default their text size to 16px, one can set the font-size value of the body element to 62.5%, effectively resetting the default to 10px.

From there, Rutter suggests using ems for font-size, which acts as a scaling factor. This makes for simpler math: 15 pixels is 1.5em. 18 pixels is 1.8em. Nine pixels is 0.9em. And so forth.

However, this only remains this simple if no inheritance is involved. As in our paragraph-inside-a-list-item example before, things still get complicated when items with different font-size values are nested.

Absolute font sizes

Absolute font sizes are specified explicitly by the designer or CSS author. Most often, this is done in pixels. By sizing text in pixels, you are overriding any preference for larger or smaller type a user may have indicated in his or her browser settings.

```
p { font-size: 13px; }  
li { font-size: 13px; }
```

Here, both paragraphs and list items will always be rendered at 13px—even when one is contained inside the other. There is no inheritance at play. Text is explicitly set to 13px, no questions asked.

This is considerably simpler than the math of relative font sizing.

But absolute sizes have their downsides, too.

- You are taking control away from the user by overriding their default font size preference. This can be looked at as an accessibility issue in the case that user needs larger text to accommodate for low vision.
- Internet Explorer 6's text resizing functionality (ctrl-+) does not affect absolute-sized text. So, not only are you taking away the user's influence on the initial text size of your page, you're also denying them the ability to change it once the page has been loading—in Internet Explorer 6, anyway.

This is en route to a holy war.

Hardline accessibility gurus will assert that one should never break the ability to resize text in any browser. Progressive designers will counter that the release of Internet Explorer 7, with its page zoom functionality, has largely made this a moot point. Sure, not everyone has upgraded from IE6, but they now have an easy migration path that doesn't involve switching to Firefox or another browser.

My personal opinion?

As with most things in design, the answer is “it depends.” Consider your target audience, your design, your resources (sizing relatively will almost certainly take you more time), and pick your poison. For the most part, I prefer to use pixels to size text absolutely, but there are some definite edge cases where I’ve gone with percentages or ems (relative sizes). They include:

- Sites whose target audience is primarily older and thus more likely to have low vision.
- Situations in which I’ve decided to use abnormally small text for stylistic reasons.
- Projects for which I have copious amounts of extra time and days when I’m *really* in the mood to do a lot of division.

Coloring type

Dark on light? Or reversed out? Web safe?

Typographic contrast

Shades of gray

In order for legibility to be achieved, a certain degree of contrast must exist between the background and foreground colors.

However, it's important to remember that computer screens have much greater black/white contrast than the typical printed page. To that end, many web designers prefer off-black to pure black on white backgrounds. Likewise, it is usually more elegant to use very light gray instead of pure white on black backgrounds.

Technical Specifications

In the Box

- iMac
- Apple Keyboard
- Mighty Mouse
- Apple Remote⁽¹⁾
- Power cord
- Install/restore DVDs
- Printed and electronic documentation



Processor and memory

- 1.83GHz, 2.0GHz, 2.16GHz or 2.33GHz Intel Core 2 Duo processor
- 4MB shared L2 cache at full processor speed on iMac with 2.0GHz, 2.16GHz, or 2.33GHz Intel Core 2 Duo processor
- 2MB shared L2 cache at full processor speed on iMac with 1.83GHz Intel Core 2 Duo processor
- 667MHz system bus
- 17-inch model with 1.83GHz processor
 - 512MB (2x256MB) of PC2-5300 (667MHz) DDR2



Optical drive

- 17-inch model with 1.83GHz processor with slot-loading 24x Combo drive (DVD-ROM/CD-RW)
 - Reads DVDs at up to 8x speed
 - Writes CD-R discs at up to 24x speed
 - Writes CD-RW discs at up to 16x speed
 - Reads CDs at up to 24x speed
- 17-inch model with 2.0GHz processor, 20-inch model and 24-inch model with slot-loading 8x SuperDrive (DVD+R DL/DVD±RW/CD-RW)
 - Writes DVD+R DL discs at up to 2.4x speed
 - Writes DVD-R and DVD+R discs at up to 8x speed
 - Writes DVD-RW and DVD+RW discs at up to 4x speed
 - Reads DVDs at up to 8x speed
 - Writes CD-R discs at up to 24x speed
 - Writes CD-RW discs at up to 16x speed

Play all day

With all that music at your fingertips, you may never want to stop listening. Lucky thing your iPod plays audio for up to 20 hours.² Or, if you'd rather watch, you can feast your eyes on movies and TV shows for up to six-and-a-half hours.³



Pack light

It might be a miracle. Otherwise, it's hard to explain exactly how 30GB of storage⁴ can fit into an iPod that's over 30% thinner than the previous fourth generation. Or

how an 80GB iPod can be the same size as the 60GB model before it. However it happened, it means you can carry your entire music collection — plus a nice selection of video — absolutely everywhere you go. And a 60% brighter, more vibrant display gives your album art, photos, and video extra oomph.

Search and enjoy

Finding what you want to hear among 20,000 songs could be quite a chore — unless you have an iPod. A new interface lets you search your iPod using the patented Click Wheel. And if you're a fan of live albums, classical works, or anything that sounds best when it's continuous, iPod supports gapless playback that seamlessly transitions from one song to another.

B. Fabulous BY BABETTE CROWDER

No more losing the perfect lip color

By [Babette Crowder](#)
BoomerGirl Contributor
March 2, 2007

Story tools

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I recently had a slight existential lipstick crisis. Let me explain.

Although I have worked in makeup for 20 years, when it comes to myself, I am pretty much a minimalist. Indeed, my mother and my coworkers are often puzzled by my lack of makeup; most days, my routine consists of only foundation, groomed brows and most importantly, lipstick (I am including gloss here, too). And I own a lot of lipstick. I must own at least 60 lipsticks (not including gloss here), 55 of which are all some sort of beige. But I only really use two or three of those 60, and when I went to replace one I had used completely, I found the color had been discontinued.

I don't usually panic about much, and I appreciate that there are more important things in the world to be concerned about than the color of my lips on any given day, but in that moment, I had to stop.

What would I do?

Smallest effective difference

“Make all visual distinctions as subtle as possible, but still clear and effective.”

Edward Tufte
Visual Explanations

trio
hair studio

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Sarah Casto

Sarah Casto has been a hair stylist for three years now. She is excellent with cuts as well as curly hair, attributing her hair to her fun and creative client base of Topeka Sarah attended Community Cosmetology in Topeka, KS. She is not great life here in Lawrence.

Hair coloring

- Multiple Color/Highlight
- Single Color Root Retouch
- Single color

Hair design

- Bang Trim
- Haircut
- Neck Trim
- Style

triohair.com

Subtle difference between primary and secondary navigation

Links More links / Feed

Scenes From a Blog Paula Scher of Pentagram diagrams the life cycle of a blog's comment thread for the NY Times Op-Ed page. You know you've seen it happen.

The Most Hated Family in America BBC2 did a documentary on Topeka's own Fred Phelps and his family. Their protests were a regular sight in Lawrence, but it seems like they've been getting out more lately.

CSS Developer at Apple We're hiring in my group. If you can stand to work with me (or don't know any better) this is a great opportunity to do some great work.

IE 7 does not resize text sized in pixels It's true, IE's page zoom feature is a very shoddily implemented and unpleasant to use feature. It would make much more sense for them to just make text scaling work properly. But what feature in IE isn't shoddily implemented and unpleasant to use?

Apple Unveils Higher Quality DRM-Free Music on the iTunes Store EMI will make its catalog available at 256kbps with no DRM for 30 cents extra. Personally I'm more interested in the higher-quality downloads but the DRM-free precedent from a major label is a Big Deal.

Software Development as a Collaborative Game Alistair Cockburn: "Software development is a 'game', a game of speed and cooperation within your team, in competition against other teams. It is a game against time, and a game for mind-share. You should spend your money to win that game."

wilsonminer.com

Subtle difference between background and foreground

Link colors

Again, smallest effective difference.

Once upon a time, we were told all links should be blue and underlined. Those days are over.

It's imperative that links are recognizable as such, but there are many ways to accomplish this. Follow the "smallest effective difference" principle and don't make links stand out more than needed.

Note that links within bodies of text will almost certainly require more visual distinction than navigation links and lists of links.

When color has
nothing to do with color

Typographic color

“The density of texture in a written or typeset page is referred to as its color. This has nothing to do with red or green ink; it refers only to the darkness or blackness of the letterform in mass. ... evenness of color is the typographer’s normal aim.”

Robert Bringhurst

The Elements of Typographic Style

Though my heart was racing and body flooded with adrenaline, I was confident my explanation was correct. I settled back into my bed—a simple straw mattress on the floor—put the pillow over my head, and resolved to catch another hour of sleep.

Suddenly, the doors to my house burst open. Huckleberry entered the room as if shot from a cannon. I screamed and sat bolt upright; Huckleberry, upon seeing me, charged. He scrambled to wedge himself between me and the wall. In doing so, he became ensnared in the mosquito netting, and pulled it from the four nails that kept it suspended from the ceiling over my bed.

Within moments the two of us were completely enmeshed, thrashing around wildly—I trying to get out, Huckleberry, shaking in terror, determined to bury himself under the mattress.

* * *

Like survivors of a war, Huckleberry and I became fast friends after the Independence Day Debacle of '95. Though he would still return to his family every evening, thereafter he spent the days in my company, following me as I hiked up and down the river valley to attend functions and work on various projects.

The measure

Typographers refer to the length of a single line of text *the measure*. Choosing an appropriate measure is a key element of readability.

In CSS, the measure is specified using the various width properties.

Although the width, min-width, and max-width properties can be specified in any unit of measurement, it's usually advisable to use ems or percentages to set the width of blocks of text, as these units are directly proportional to the size of the type itself.

The min-width and max-width properties are very helpful in ensuring a readable measure length, even when text is within larger elements.

How long should a measure be?

- Typically, a measure of 45-75 characters in length is recommended for optimal readability.
- Characters average about two-thirds of an em in length.
- Therefore, between 30 and 50 ems can be seen as an ideal line length.
- YMMV.

Subtraction

Version 7.0
Khoi Vinh's Web Site[Home](#)[Archives](#)[Elsewhere](#)[About](#)Mon 09 Apr
2007

Illustrate Me for March

Posted 10:36 PM

Author **Khoi Vinh**Categories **Drawings & Illustration, Subtraction**

Body



March's Illustrate Me is by **Liz Danzico**, the multi-talented interaction designer, writer, editor and information architect who is partly responsible for, among other things **Boxes and Arrows** and **AIGA Voice**, serves as a senior development editor at **Rosenfeld Media**, and on the advisory board for **The Information Architecture Institute**. Whew. To say that she's prolific is an understatement; there are about a dozen other significant things on her résumé that I don't have room to mention here, but somehow she made time to produce a really wonderful, whimsical interpretation of three of my posts for last month. Go see it right now on the **March 2007 archive page**.

EXTRA CREDIT

This is exactly how much energy Liz has: on top of her countless other sideline projects, she actually produced *two illustrations* for this month's archives. The first one can be seen on the archive page. The second is a riff on a diagrammatic convention she used in graduate school, she says, and is also something of a delight.

subtraction.com

Displays traditional measure length.



What is Spivot? Simply put, its an RSS reader at its core. But don't let that part fool you. It's also much more. My hope is that with the design and implementation we chose, Spivot will actually wind up being a lot more for a lot more people than what you see in the current RSS offerings today.

Spivot has hints of being a Bloglines like tool, one where you can sign up for a free account and then enter your own feeds so you can keep up with your favorite web sites. You'll also notice a few buttons across the top of the page, like "Most Read" and "Highest Rated." These buttons switch the sorting of the currently selected content to reflect the reading behaviors of the Spivot community and thus can provide some Digg like approach to browsing media content. Further, given that the default set of feeds in Spivot is from a wide array of mainstream media sources, you'll also find a little of Google or Yahoo! news in the experience.

designbyfire.com

Narrower measure length, but still well within the bounds of comfort.

Daniel Mall

→ [BACK TO HOME PAGE](#)

Aftermath

I'm a little late to the [sxsww](#) round-up, but I have to get it out: I'm actually a bit depressed that it's over.

It's one of the—if not *the*—lowest priced web conferences around. It draws more people than many others combined. Its panels feature the latest and greatest in the web world, but it's not about that. In fact, I never really learn much from the panels. When it comes to training and knowledge gain, I'd pick [AN EVENT APART](#) or a [CARSON WORKSHOP](#) over it any day.

But [sxsww](#) is about people. For that reason alone, I'd pay thrice the price without batting an eyelash.

Honestly, being in Austin just shy of a full week and coming back seems like a strangely awkward and abrupt breakup. Don't get me wrong; it's great coming back to [THE WIFEY](#), friends, family, and work is refreshing, but there's still something missing.

danielmall.com

Narrower measure length, but still well within the bounds of comfort.

ABOUT THIS ARTICLE

- Posted March 23, 2007 01:01 AM
- Filed under:
 - [CONFERENCES](#)

OTHER CATEGORICAL ARCHIVES

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Cast and characters

[\[edit\]](#)

Main article: [Characters of Lost](#)

The opening season featured sixteen regular speaking roles, making it the second largest cast in American primetime television behind *Desperate Housewives*. While a large cast makes *Lost* more expensive to produce, the show's writers benefit from more flexibility in story decisions. According to series executive producer Bryan Burk, "You can have more interactions between characters and create more diverse characters, more back stories, more love triangles."^[31]

The initial season had fourteen major roles getting star [billing](#). [Naveen Andrews](#) portrayed former Iraqi Republican guard [Sayid Jarrah](#). [Emilie de Ravin](#) played the pregnant Australian [Claire Littleton](#). [Matthew Fox](#) acted as the troubled surgeon and lead role [Jack Shephard](#). [Jorge Garcia](#) portrayed [Hugo "Hurley" Reyes](#), an unlucky lotto winner. [Maggie Grace](#) played [Shannon Rutherford](#), a former dance teacher. [Josh Holloway](#) acted as con man [James "Sawyer" Ford](#). [Yunjin Kim](#) played [Sun-Hwa Kwon](#), the daughter of a powerful Korean businessman and mobster, with [Daniel Dae Kim](#) as her husband [Jin-Soo Kwon](#). [Evangeline Lilly](#) portrayed fugitive [Kate Austen](#). [Dominic Monaghan](#) acted as an ex-rock star drug addict [Charlie Pace](#). [Terry O'Quinn](#) played the mysterious [John Locke](#). [Harold Perrineau](#) portrayed construction worker [Michael Dawson](#), while child actor [Malcolm David Kelley](#) acted as his young son, [Walt Lloyd](#). [Ian Somerhalder](#) played [Boone Carlyle](#), chief operating officer of his mother's wedding business and step brother of Shannon.

Spoiler warning: *Plot and/or ending details follow.*

During the first two seasons, some characters were written out to make room for new characters with new stories.^{[32][33]} Boone Carlyle was the first major character to be written out in season one. Malcolm David Kelley became a guest star after the events of the first season's finale, making rare appearances throughout season two. Maggie Grace's departure six episodes into season two made way for newcomers [Adewale Akinnuoye-Agbaje](#) as Nigerian Catholic priest and former criminal [Eko](#), [Michelle Rodriguez](#) as airport security guard and former police officer [Ana Lucia Cortez](#), and [Cynthia Watros](#) portraying the purported clinical psychologist [Libby](#). Ana Lucia and Libby were written out of the series toward the end of season two, as were Michael and Walt.

In season three, [Henry Ian Cusick](#) received star billing as former Scottish soldier [Desmond David Hume](#), as did [Michael Emerson](#) in the role of [Benjamin Linus](#) (formerly known as Henry Gale), the possible leader of the "Others." In addition, three new actors joined the regular cast: [Elizabeth Mitchell](#), as [Dr. Juliet Burke](#) and [Kiele Sanchez](#) and [Rodrigo Santoro](#) as couple [Nikki Fernandez](#) and [Paulo](#). Mr. Eko was written out early in the season; Nikki and Paulo were killed mid-season in their



The principal characters of the mid-third season of *Lost*; 

wikipedia.org

Uses liquid layout without controlling line lengths, thus leading to extremely long lines that are difficult to read.

Leading

Typographers refer to the space between lines of type as leading (rhymes with “bedding”). The name comes from traditional letterpress-style typesetting, in which strips of lead or other metals are used to separate one line of text from the next.

Establishing appropriate leading is one of the fastest ways to make your site feel more professional.

In CSS, leading is specified using the line-height property.

Although the line-height property can be specified in any unit of measurement, it's unique in that it can also accept a unit-less integer as a value. This number acts as a scaling factor. It is advisable to indicate leading values this way, as it is related to the size of the type and ensures line-height is also scaled when text is resized.

Leading rules of thumb

- Blocks of text almost always require positive leading. They rarely read well *set solid* (i.e., no leading) and almost never read well with negative leading.
- Short bursts of text—like headers—usually require less leading, and sometimes work with negative leading.
- Darker (heavier) faces usually need more lead than lighter ones.
- Sans serif type usually requires more lead than serif type.
- Longer measures usually dictate a need for more leading. Shorter measures require less leading.

But it also includes some more unusual business attributes. Stuff the Yahoo's and Google's of the world aren't likely to provide. Marketplace tells users what payment methods are accepted. It tells them what the business hours are — including hours for kitchen staff (or other alternate sets of hours). It tells users, right at the top of the page and in plain English, that the business "Closes today at 10pm." Or, if it's already closed, that it "Opens tomorrow at 8am." Business owners can upload photos of their establishment. They can add videos — be they TV spots, footage of events at their place of business, staff profiles, etc. They can even upload scans of print advertisements and coupons for users to print and redeem. Like I said, it will almost certainly be the most comprehensive directory of local businesses anywhere (will be, I say, because this thing just went live about 30 minutes ago and not too many business owners have gotten their hands on it yet).

For a few nice examples of business profiles that have been filled-out with a few of the more interesting profile bits, check out [Sunflower Outdoor and Bike Shop](#), [Headmasters](#), [The Bourgeois Pig](#), or [Kief's Audio/Video](#). And, be sure to compare these to Yahoo! Local's pages for the same companies ([Sunflower](#), [Headmasters](#), [Pig](#), [Kief's](#)). The difference is clear. Yahoo has nothing but the basics, littered with text ads and strange speech bubbles that compete for attention. Not only do we give users everything they need (and most of it within the first 150 pixels), but we give the business the entire page to promote itself.

KANSAS LEGISLATURE

A bill that allowed expanded gambling with destination casinos and slot machines passed the House and Senate but has yet to receive Gov. Kathleen Sebelius' signature, according to a report in the Topeka-Capital Journal on Thursday. The bill has a fund reserved for state infrastructure needs, and funds would have to be appropriated to the account on an annual basis, Peterson said.

Regents president Reginald Robinson issued a statement about gambling in a press release on March 29.

"The Board of Regents understands that the issue of gaming is a difficult one for state policy makers," Robinson said in the release. "We certainly appreciate the perspectives of all of the members of both the House and the Senate who were called upon to vote on the recently adopted proposal.

"In today's complex budget environment, with a multitude of competing demands for a limited amount of state dollars, securing new sources of revenue is so vital for the future viability of the state's higher education system."

jeffcroft.com

Positive leading lends an more open, airy feel, and a comfortable read.

kstatecollegian.com

Very tight leading—probably set solid—resulting in an uncomfortable read.

Vertical rhythm

“...the total amount of vertical space consumed by each departure from the main text should be an even multiple of the base leading.”

Robert Bringhurst

The Elements of Typographic Style

Establishing a baseline grid

What is a baseline grid?

In most traditional typography, all elements (body text, headers, images, etc.) on the page are set according to an invisible grid of horizontal lines, spaced evenly, running all the way down the page. Usually, the distance between these lines is equal to the line height of the body text.

For example:

If we are using 12 pixel tall text and an 18 pixel tall line height (usually referred to as 12/18), we might:

- Set h1 elements at 24/36 ($18 * 2 = 36$)
- Set h2 elements at 18/18 with 9px of padding above and below ($18 + 9 + 9 = 36$)
- Craft images that are exactly 360px tall, and give them 8px of padding and a 1px border on the top and bottom ($360 + 8 + 8 + 1 + 1 = 378$)
- Set callouts and sidebars at 10/18.
- Add 18px of margin both above and below bulleted lists.

Impeccable timing

APRIL 09, 2007

Setting Type on the Web to a Baseline Grid

by **WILSON MINER**

Published in: [HTML and XHTML](#), [Layout](#), [Typography](#) | [Discuss this article »](#)

We web designers get excited about the littlest things. Our friends in the print world must get a kick out of watching us talk about finally being able to achieve layouts on the web that they've taken for granted for years. Let's face it: it's easier these days to embed a video on the web than it is to set type consistently or align elements to a universal grid.

But we're scrappy folks, web designers. We don't give up easy. In the long slow battle with browser support and platform inconsistencies, we've been able to bring more and more sophisticated print techniques onto the web—sometimes kicking and screaming.



<http://www.alistapart.com/articles/settingtypeontheweb>

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet

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Baseline grid example
from Wilson Miner's A List
Apart article on the topic.

Note that all text aligns to
the grid lines, even that
which follows interruptions
such as images and
headers, and even that
which has a smaller font
size, such as the callouts.

A few more points on baseline grids

- Baseline grids can be crafted with relatively-sized text, too—but the math is a bit more complicated.
- Creating a background image with your grid lines to be used during development can be a big help.
- Not always 100% achievable when dealing with images coming out of CMSes that aren't of predictable size—but it's still an admirable goal, and getting most of the way there will still be a dramatic improvement to your page.

Dealing with paragraphs

Traditional paragraph versus block paragraphs

White line or no white line?

Common practice in print media is to not include a white line after a paragraph. Instead, the succeeding paragraph uses indentation to set it off.

On the web, block paragraph—those followed by a white line—have become the norm. One can argue that the web's lack of space requirements and the tendency towards single, long columns warrant more whitespace.

Ultimately, it's a stylistic decision that you'll have to make on a per-project basis.

Mr. Cooper said he had considered but ultimately rejected the possibility of bringing criminal charges against the accuser, who continues to insist she was attacked at a team party on March 13, 2006, and asked him to go forward with the case. Mr. Cooper said his investigators had told him that the woman “may actually believe the many different stories that she has been telling.” He said his decision not to charge her with making false accusations was also based on a review of sealed court files, which include records of the woman’s mental health history.

Mr. Cooper reserved his harshest criticism for the Durham County district attorney, [Michael B. Nifong](#), at one point even depicting him as a “rogue prosecutor.”

“In this case, with the weight of the state behind him, the Durham district attorney pushed forward unchecked,” said Mr. Cooper, who took over the case in January. “There were many points in the case where caution would have served justice better than bravado. And in the rush to condemn, a community and a state lost the ability to see clearly.”

ONLINE: PLUSES AND MINUSES



On the Web, an interactive calculator allowing readers to compare the costs of buying and renting.

nytimes.com/business

der way, The New York Times has done an analysis of buying vs. renting in every major metropolitan area. The analysis includes data on housing costs and looks at different possibilities for the path of home prices in coming years.

It found that even though rents have recently jumped, the costs that come with buying a home — mortgage payments, property taxes, fees to real estate agents — remain a lot higher than the costs of renting. So buyers in many places are basically betting that home prices will rise smartly in the near future.

Over the next five years, which is about the average amount of time recent buyers have remained in their homes, prices in the Los Angeles area would have to rise more than 5

percent a year for a typical buyer there to do better than a renter. The same is true in Phoenix, Las Vegas, the New York region, Northern California and South Florida. In the Boston and Washington areas, the break-even point is about 4 percent.

“House prices have to fall more before housing becomes a clear buy again,” says Mark Zandi, chief economist of Moody’s Economy.com, a research company that helped conduct the analysis. “These markets aren’t as overvalued as they were a year ago or two years ago, but they’re still unfriendly. And that’s one of the reasons the market is still soft — people realize it’s not a bargain.”

There is obviously no way to know what home prices will do in the next few years. But there are two big reasons to doubt the real estate boosters who insist that it’s once again a great time to buy.

The first is history. After the last big run-up in house prices, in the 1980s, a long slump followed. In the New York area, prices peaked in early 1989 and then fell 9 percent over

Continued on Page C6

nytimes.com

Block paragraphs, each followed by a white line and not indented.

The New York Times (print)

Successive paragraphs are indented, but no white line is used.

Indicating new paragraphs

There are several ways to indicate a new paragraph.

- Indent
- Outdent
- White line
- Pilcrow or other ornament
- Drop cap
- A header appearing before the graph

Don't overdo it.

The point is not to make things “look cool.” The point is to indicate a new paragraph. Therefore, it shouldn't be overdone. Usually, only one means of indicating the paragraph is necessary. You don't need both a white line and an indent, for example. one or the other will suffice. Because of this, most good typography does not indent the first paragraph—only those that follow another paragraph.

Remember the “smallest effective difference” principle?

Alignment and justification

Alignment

Alignment in CSS is set using the **text-align** property

```
p { text-align: left; }  
p { text-align: right; }  
p { text-align: justify; }
```

Justification

Justification rule of thumb

Usually, justified text doesn't work as well with sans serif typefaces as with serif typefaces.

Justification rule of thumb for the web

Usually, justified text doesn't work.

But why?

Justified text, whereby neither side of the textual column is “ragged,” relies on hyphenation of longer words. If words are not hyphenated, word spacing becomes very inconsistent, often creating large and unsightly “rivers” of whitespace flowing down the page.

Sadly, good hyphenation on the web is nearly impossible. No browser supports automatic hyphenation, and the many variables in display environments make it impractical to hyphenate manually.

CSS3 hyphenation

CSS3 does propose a property, `hyphenate`, which takes values “auto” and “none,” as a solution. However, no browser yet supports it.

In order for browsers to properly support this, a dictionary would have to be built into them.

The soft hyphen

There is a character entity—­—that aims to help with the hyphenation problem. It is to be inserted into words at places where hyphenation is allowed to occur. Obviously, doing this manually would be impractical, but it's conceivable one could write a server-side script to insert them based on a dictionary before a page is served.

However, this is all fantasy, because no browser currently supports the soft hyphen in a useful way.

Someday. Maybe.

Until then

A crafty fellow did put together a JavaScript (client-side) solution, but weighing in at 170Kb, it's not exactly a practical, real-world solution. It can be useful, though, in the case that you know your audience will be running good browsers on fast computers with fast connections (such as on a corporate intranet).

Mostly, it's a proof of concept (and a cool one, at that).

<http://www.duckwizard.com/portfolio/client-side-hyphenation-library/>

Or, do it anyway.

There are cases of justification being used well online. Usually, it works best with a narrower measure. By all means, give it a try. You may find that you can work out a typeface/measure combination that works well enough, even without hyphenation.

But if you decide to justify type online, pay extra care to avoid those rivers of whitespace.

On drinking one's own Kool-Aid

~ 12 April 2007 ~

Last week, in need of contractor assistance, I posted a listing on Authentic Jobs and thus began a test to see just how well the site would perform. I've heard plenty of second-hand stories of the success companies and individuals have or have not had with their listings, but this was my first direct exposure in the shoes of an "employer".

The listing title was "Front-end coder familiar with Tabifier", a fairly specific request for an XHTML/CSS coder with knowledge of Patrick Fitzgerald's [Tabifier](#) script. Surprisingly (or not), the results were pretty good: Within the first 24 hours I received emails from 15 candidates, more than one-third of which seemed qualified for the job. After reviewing qualifications in greater detail, I selected [Dale Cruse](#), who is currently completing the project (carry-over fixes for a client from my days as a freelancer).

CameronMoll.com

A great example of justified text being used effectively online.

**Using the right
characters the right way**

Bullets

Traditionally, bullets “hang” in the gutter

Although the convention has changed somewhat in recent years, typographers still usually consider it “correct” for list item bullets to appear in the left-hand margin, thus creating a consistent line down the left where the text begins.

Hanging bullets is quite simple to achieve in CSS:

```
ul { list-style-position: outside; }
```

Hanging bullets - Correct

- Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur
- Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed diam nonummy nibh
 - Duis autem vel eum iriure
 - Souvlaki ignitus carborundum e
- Defacto lingo est igpay atinlay. Marquee selectus non provisio incongruous feline

Indented bullets - Incorrect

- Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur
- Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed diam nonummy nibh
 - Duis autem vel eum iriure
 - Souvlaki ignitus carborundum e
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Graphics courtesy of Mark Boulton

http://www.markboulton.co.uk/journal/comments/five_simple_steps_to_better_typography_part_2/

Quotes and Apostrophes

Quotes versus similar characters

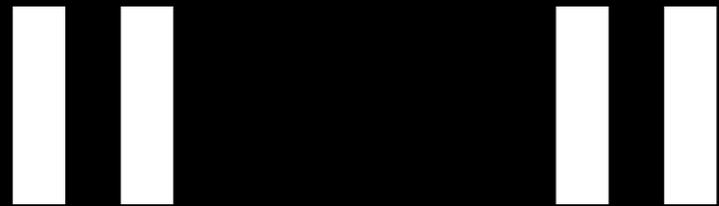
Compare and contrast:

“This is a quotation!”

Compare and contrast:

"This is a group of words
surrounded by tick marks."

Compare and contrast:



Compare and contrast:

“ ”

Compare and contrast:



Compare and contrast:

;

Hanging quotation marks

Traditionally, quote marks “hang” in the gutter

As with list item bullets, it is traditional for opening quote marks to be placed in the left margin.

This is not so easily achieved with CSS, but is often “faked” using background images on the blockquote element.

Hanging quotation marks - Correct

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur
“ Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur
adipiscing elit, sed diam nonummy nibh ”
Defacto lingo est igpay atinlay. Marquee
selectus non provisio incongruous feline

Indented quotation marks - Incorrect

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur
“ Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur
adipiscing elit, sed diam nonummy nibh ”
Defacto lingo est igpay atinlay. Marquee
selectus non provisio incongruous feline

Graphics courtesy of Mark Boulton

http://www.markboulton.co.uk/journal/comments/five_simple_steps_to_better_typography_part_2/

“ Can I get a version that uses the Twitter API to automatically tell all my Twitter friends when someone has rang my doorbell? Please? And can it, besides chirping, also do a little dance. Also, I think the window should be brought to the front automatically when it chirps. I'm looking for the maximum amount of distractions possible. Also, maybe it could e-mail me when someone rings my doorbell. And also send me an SMS.

Jeff Croft, Mint claquer (via email)

“ *I have had just about enough of your raddness. You guys are absolutely fantastic. If you don't mind I would love to open mouth kiss the both of you.*

The new look of the site? (bomb) The new store directory? (sonuva) You keep making us here at Robata want to literally commit crimes of passion against you. So watch your collective backs- in a good way.

- **Mark & Dan**, robatabrand.bigcartel.com

Shaun Inman
shauninman.com

bigcartel
<http://blog.bigcartel.com/>

Dashes and hyphens

All dashes are not created equal

Several different types of dashes and hyphens are available in the standard character sets, and it's important to understand their subtle differences and when each is appropriate.

Note that different style guides may vary slightly in their interpretations. That's okay—just pick one and stick to it.

A quick reference:

- hyphen

Jacob Kaplan-Moss

– en dash

2:00–3:00p.m.

Phrase separation – with spaces.

— em dash

Phrase separation—without spaces.

—Robert Bringhurt

– minus

Subtraction (20–5=15)

Tools that can help

Character entity references

Reference guides to the HTML character entities can be found online, and in many books on web design. Additionally, most web-oriented text editors and WYSIWYG environments have some kind of character palette built-in.

Smarty pants

John Gruber's Smarty pants translates plain ASCII punctuation characters into "smart" typographic punctuation HTML entities on the fly. It is written in perl, but has probably been ported to your favorite language.

<http://daringfireball.net/projects/smarty pants/>

Typefaces (or, fonts)

Giant elephant in the room

It's true. There aren't that many "safe" fonts for use on the web. Because HTML is rendered on the client side, the only fonts available are those installed on the visitor's computer. Since we have no way to predict what those will be, it's common practice to only use those typefaces that come pre-installed on most computers.

However...

There fonts that *are* available are actually of pretty good quality. And traditional printing techniques always suffered from a lack of selection, as well—but they didn't let it stop them, and neither should you.

While it would be great to have more available typefaces, the truth is that there's no reason we can't create elegant, beautiful typography with what we have.

With that out of the way...

Typeface classification

Most useful typefaces boil down to one of two primary classifications: *serif* and *sans serif*.

Serifs are non-structural details on the ends of some of the strokes that make up letters and symbols.

serif sans serif

Serifs can help legibility

Serifs can help the eye move smoothly along a line of text, thus aiding legibility. This idea has been challenged online, primarily on account of the relatively low resolution computer displays offer.

However, serif typefaces designed specifically for the screen, developments in display technology, and the growing prevalence of anti-aliasing has made this argument mostly moot.

A quick tangent...

Anti-aliasing

Anti-aliasing has been the systemwide default from Mac OS X since its inception, as is now the default for Internet Explorer 7 on Windows, as well.



Aliasing
Displays jagged edges



Anti-aliasing
Uses transparency to help smooth edges

A note on italics

Just as serifs were shunned early in web typography, so were italic characters. Italics are, with their slanted nature, somewhat at odds with the pixel grid of a computer display.

Once again, the creation of typefaces designed for the screen and anti-aliasing has made italic type web-friendly again.

Pairing sans and serif

A very common and effective technique is to pair a serif and a sans serif typeface, using one for headers and the other for body text. Most often, the serif is used for body text and the sans serif for headers, but this can be reversed.

Hand-crafted pixels & text.

SimpleBits is a **tiny web design studio** founded by designer and author Dan Cederholm. We create simple, readable interfaces balanced with a standards-based methodology. [Learn more >](#)



SimpleBits.com

Serif headers with sans-serif body type

Kiwi Chronicles BY LINDA FROST

Sea birds and chocolate

By [Linda Frost](#)
BoomerGirl Contributor
April 16, 2007

After a couple of weeks traveling by public transportation, we felt ready to rent another car and do some more driving on the left. We decided to visit Oamaru and Dunedin for some bird watching and a factory tour.

Driving south from Christchurch through sheep farms, vineyards and dairies, we arrived at the seaside town of Oamaru. Oamaru has put itself on the tourists' map by building some protection for blue penguins as well as additional nesting burrows along the shoreline.

Next to this conserved area, stadium-style seating has been built so that tourists can comfortably sit and watch the blue penguins come to shore each evening. There is an admission charge for this seating, and advance booking is suggested. Tour buses full of folks hoping to view the nightly arrival of the sea birds also arrive nightly.

Story tools

[E-mail story](#)

[Read 1 comments](#)

[Print story](#)

BoomerGirl.com

Serif headers with sans-serif body type

On Kanye, Bush, and Black People

September 6th, 2005 at 11:52 a.m. from [KSU Foundation Center](#)

What's this? A political post on JeffCroft.com? It's true, my interest in politics is nearly non-existent, but faithful readers do know that I'm a Kanye West fan, so I feel obliged to comment on K-West's *soundbite heard 'round the world*. If you've had your head buried in your arse for the past five days, it went something like this: President Bush doesn't care about black people.

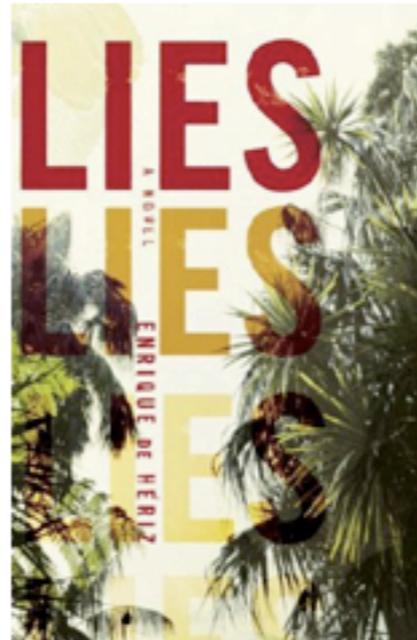
Certainly he does not really believe Bush, Chertoff, Brown, and their compadres sat around a conference table somewhere in Washington and said aloud, "well, they're black and poor, so there's really no need to hurry." Obviously, that's absurd. I personally believe that race and class probably did play a part *on a subconscious level*, but that doesn't mean it was smart for Kanye to spout off about it.

JeffCroft.com (older version)

Sans serif headers and serif body type

***Lies* by Enrique de Hériz (Doubleday, 432 pages)**

Young(-ish) Enrique de Hériz who has worked as an editor and translator of Annie Proulx, Stephen King, Peter Carey, John Fowles, and others presents anthropologist Isabel Azuera, who, while researching in northern Guatemalan jungles, is misidentified as a mutilated body—a happenstance she does not correct. She takes her situation as an opportunity to study and weed out her curious family history, while at the same time her daughter, thousands of miles away, embarks on a similar task. It's from the platform of two-headed family archaeology that de Hériz weaves a complex multileveled narrative exhibiting a rich array of factual plumage, not the least reference to eight century Chinese poet Li Po. **The recent coverage of Juan Goytisolo**, Roberto Bolaño (which will snowball), and now this impressive novel are some good reasons to place Spain on the contemporary literary map. Not that they were ever off.



» [Read an excerpt from *Lies*](#)

TheMorningNews.org

Sans serif headers and serif body type

APRIL 09, 2007

The Geniant Blog

The [Geniant blog](#) is live and kicking. After a month of squeezing in extra time here and there, we've managed to pull together some ideas and create a forum for sharing what's going on behind the curtain.

Geniant is an interesting company. Like any company, it has its challenges, but unlike many of the companies I've seen, Geniant evolves and responds to those challenges pretty darn well. Since the acquisition of Bright Corner, Geniant has evolved considerably and done a pretty impressive job of incorporating user experience and design into our everyday approach. We're not quite there yet, but when I step back and think about other companies that I'm familiar with, we're moving along at a pretty good clip.

GarrettDimon.com

Sans serif headers and body type with serif subheaders

Other types of type

Image replacement

Image replacement is a CSS technique whereby textual content from the HTML markup is hidden and replaced with an image, usually containing the same text.

For static headers, logos, and other non-dynamic content, this can be a very effective means of creating powerful type online. Creating type as an image allows for a wider selection of typefaces and more fine-tuned control over kerning.

Why not just use an `img` element?

Using an `img` element for textual content ignores the need for semantic HTML markup. If a piece of text is a header, for example, it should be marked up as such.

Semantic HTML markup enhances accessibility and facilitates good search engine indexing.

In the beginning, there was Fahrner...

Todd Fahrner came up with the first image replacement technique way back in 2003. Since then, newer, more elegant methods have been crafted—but we all owe a debt of gratitude original to Fahrner method.

The text-indent trick

My personal favorite method today is the negative text-indent technique, created by Mike Rundle.

```
<h1>This text will be replaced</h1>↵
↵
h1 {↵
  text-indent: -9000px;↵
  background: url(bg.gif);↵
  width: 200px; /* width of image */↵
  height: 80px; /* height of image */↵
}↵
```

Server-side image generation

The one downside of standard image replacement is that it's only really useful on static content. Server-side image generation is possible to achieve the same effect with dynamic text.

It's a bit out of scope, but...

The programming required for server-side image generation is out of the scope of this presentation, but the basic process is that the text of certain HTML elements is passed to an imaging library like ImageMagick, GD, or PIL, which in turns creates an image of the text with the specified font and options.

This image can then be used for CSS image replacement.

(See your local nerd for more details.)

Flash replacement (sIFR)

A technique first created by Shaun Inman, and later perfected by Mike Davidson, Thomas Jogin, and Mark Wubben, sIFR allows for dynamic, on-the-fly text in the typeface of your choice without the need for server-side processing.

How sIFR works

sIFR is the result of very clever use of several modern technologies, including CSS, JavaScript, the DOM, and Action Script.

The text of certain HTML elements is read in by JavaScript, passed to Action Script within a SWF file which renders the type in an embedded font. If the Flash Player is unavailable, the text is simply rendered with HTML and CSS.

Advantages of sIFR

- Allows designers to use any typeface *they* have, rather than only the one the site's *visitor* has.
- Doesn't require the designer to craft images for each header.
- Processes on-the-fly and on the client side, so no server-side scripting is required and no server CPU time is used.
- Pretty flexible—allows for colors, links, italics, and so forth.
- Smart people behind it—you can count on the quality being very high.

Disadvantages of sIFR

- Requires the designer to have Flash.
- A bit slow—replaced text “pops in” after the page loads.
- Still doesn’t allow the fine-grained control that a designer can achieve in Photoshop over things like kerning.

Questions? Comments?

Some resources

Web typography resources

- webtypography.net
- webtypography.net/sxsw2007/
- webstyleguide.com/type/
- usabletype.com

Cheers, mate.