

Crabby's Font Facts 101: Some basics



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Crabby Office Lady

You use fonts all day every day, but still you might be surprised by these pretty interesting facts about them.

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The word "font" is one of the most common search terms you Office users plug into Office Online. That's not surprising, since fonts have become an indispensable part of our lives. They're with us when we're creating a Web site, filling up a spreadsheet, or sending fan mail to, well, whomever you send fan mail to. (No rush, I'm patient.)

In this Fonts 101 column, I'll give you some basic facts. In two upcoming columns, Fonts 102 and Fonts 103, I'll offer some best practices about how and when to use various types of fonts. If there is something that you know about fonts that I don't (you overachiever, you), write to me at crabby@microsoft.com and I'll work it into our advanced font curriculum.

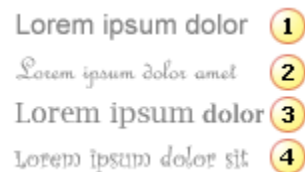
NOTE I got many of the definitions used below from [Webopedia](#), a priceless technology dictionary on the Web (not priceless because it's free; priceless because it's amazingly good. See? Definitions matter.)

Fact #1: What is a font?

Traditionally, the terms "typeface" and "font" were used separately, and were not synonymous. It used to be that a typeface was designed by a printer or publisher, made out of metal, and stuck into a printing press. The typeface was the designed look of the characters, while a font was a particular typeface in one size, one style, and one weight (Helvetica Bold 10 point was one font and Helvetica Bold Italic 10 point was another font). Printers needed to change fonts every time they wanted to change the look of a word.

Well, the times they are a-changing (hey, catchy title for a song, don't you think?) and we're not talking about type made from metal here. These days, it's pretty safe to assume that "font" and "typeface" mean about the same thing — maybe not to designers, but to you and me, non-designers who just want to get our work done.

The image below shows four different fonts.



- 1 Arial
- 2 French Script MT
- 3 Lucida Bright
- 4 Curlz MT

A **font family** is a collection of all the fonts in a typeface, with different sizes, weights (such as bold), and slants (such as italic). The image below shows some of the Arial font family members standing in formation.

abcdefghi ①
abcdefghi ②
abcdefghi ③
abcdefghi ④

- 1 Arial
- 2 Arial Black
- 3 Arial Narrow
- 4 Arial Rounded MT Bold

Fact #2: What is font style?

Ah, style. Some of us have it ... and some of us don't. (Of course, some of us know that, and some of us don't. You know who you are ... don't you?) Fonts are the *haves* in this case; they all have style. And just like making your daily decision between Gucci and Gap, every text situation calls for something different.

Diam ①
Diam ②
Diam ③
Diam ④
~~Diam~~ ⑤

- 1 Bold
- 2 Italic
- 3 Underline
- 4 Double underline
- 5 Strikethrough

And hey, don't forget small caps and outline, either. Those can be fun and useful too. ("How can I apply these wonderful styles to my fonts," you ask? On the **Format** menu, of course.)

Fact #3: Those in-between places have names

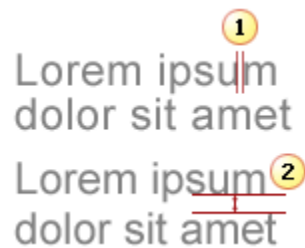
Space: the final frontier. In addition to lines, words, and characters on a page, there is space. And those spaces have names.

Kerning adjusts the spaces between letters so that the placement appears to be visually consistent. Certain letter combinations such as **Ta** have too much space between them. With kerning, you can adjust the spacing to make letters closer together (or farther apart) so that the words don't look jumbled.

Leading (rhymes with "bedding"), is also called "line spacing." Leading originally referred to strips of lead that typesetters placed between lines of type in order to space them out. When you're reading something, the spaces between the line you're reading and the lines above and below that line are supposed to guide your eyes from one line to the next. If that space isn't considered carefully, it's hard to keep track of

where you are. That's where leading comes in. You can adjust one sentence at a time but it's more common to adjust the leading of an entire paragraph so that it's uniform. (Don't you just love a paragraph in uniform?)

You can adjust the leading and kerning to make your text look any way you want and more importantly, flow well.



- 1 Kerning
- 2 Leading

Fact #4: More can be better

First things first: It's 10 p.m. — do you know where your fonts are? The easiest way is to open the Fonts folder. (If it were a snake ...)

- In Windows Vista or Windows XP, click **Start**, click **Control Panel**, and then double-click **Fonts**.

If you're anything like me, you get bored looking at the same old fonts all the time. Well, snap out of your bored state because nothing says you have to live with what you've got.

When you install any new program (Office or otherwise), that program comes with its own set of fonts that are automatically installed with the program. And get this: programs that are designed especially for document design projects, like Publisher, often come with lots of extra fonts that you can use with any other program on your computer.

What if you want more?

First, our very own Office Marketplace has a [fun-filled fonts aisle](#) ready and waiting for you to explore. Second, type the word "font" into any Internet search engine and you will find thousands of sites willing to sell (or sometimes even give) you their fonts. Third, the [Microsoft Typography](#) Web site provides links to other font foundries (companies or individuals outside of Microsoft who create fonts) that sell or share fonts designed for use with Microsoft programs.

NOTE We're going to have a little chat in my Fonts 102: Best practices column about when you can use those fancy new fonts and when you really shouldn't — font etiquette, if you will (and you will).

Fact #5: How to install those new fonts

Of course, you have to know how to install the fonts in order to use them. (I'm always thinking. Don't you love that?)

- [Install a font on your Windows Vista computer](#)
- [Install a new font on your Windows XP computer](#)

Ready to move on?

Tune in next week for the second installment of our foray into fonts with Crabby's Font Facts 102: Best practices. Learn about:

- How to choose the right font for the job

- How to travel with your favorite fonts
- How to make your text infinitely readable (or "when enough is enough")

... and more!

Tip of the week

Donna Dill sent me this tip — well, it's more like a rant, actually, and at first I thought she was referring to me! But when I realized that in fact I had never written Donna, it all made sense:

"When you send me an e-mail asking me to call you and troubleshoot something, don't make me look up your phone number! Include it in your signature!!"

OK, I can go along with that, Donna. Folks, learn how to [Create great-looking signatures for your e-mail](#) with this training course for Outlook 2007. And please, don't forget to add your phone number!

"Silence is a text easy to misread." — A. A. Attanasio

About the author

[Annik Stahl](#), the Crabby Office Lady columnist, takes all of your complaints, compliments, and knee-jerk reactions to heart. Therefore, she graciously asks that you let her know whether this column was useful to you — or not — by entering your feedback using the **Was this information helpful?** tool below. And remember: If you don't vote, you can't complain.

Remember: Send Crabby your Office tips at crabby@microsoft.com.

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