

Book Review

Typography A Very Short Introduction

by Paul Luna

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Oxford University Press started a series of books *Very Short Introductions* in 1995. In 2018, Paul Luna wrote *Typography A Very Short Introduction*. Among many qualifications he is Emeritus Professor in the Department of Typography & Graphic Communication at the University of Reading and former Head of Corporate Design at Oxford University Press.

At one time, prior to the widespread use of desktop computers and the ubiquitous use of word processors and graphics software, the domain of typography was primarily that of specialists working in the printing and composition industry. Typography and typefaces are seen everywhere, yet little attention is usually paid to them. In this book Paul Luna provides a very readable introduction to a variety of typographic topics.

For readers with little knowledge of the subject the first two chapters of the book are especially valuable. Chapter 1 entitled *Perfect Letters* reviews the historical development of type from the emergence of the Roman inscriptions on stone that were carved into regularly designed areas to maximise legibility and permanence, and how this led to the development of lower-case letter forms known as Carolingian minuscule. The post Roman Empire era was one of scribes and hand produced books which heavily influenced early typefaces during the development of printing in Europe. Later developments on typefaces saw the

emergence of letters without serifs and the dominance of optical/visual appearance rather than strict adherence to geometric regularity.

Practical Letters, the title of Chapter 2 provides a summary of some key typographic terms including families, weight, and variants. The general development of type forms from the metal type of the Renaissance to the 20th century, and to the electronic typefaces of today is summarised. The point system and its evolution from 18th century France to the American Type Founders Company point and the PostScript point is provided. Examples of type usage in different time periods are illustrated to stress that modern times have permitted a greater ability to use different typefaces and their variants than was possible with only metal type. Within this chapter, the development of mechanical means to set type is described. A non-technical explanation of typefaces defined by mathematical means (Bézier splines) is described along with how this permits scaling without distortion. This chapter also shows examples of typesetting and how justification and character width can influence the appearance on the page.

While not generally the primary interest in document examination issues, the organisation of text on a page to communicate ideas is the focus of Chapter 3 *Presenting Language*. The division of text into lines and the manner of word hyphenation, page breaks and related formatting

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can be a rather complex one. The developer of the computer-based typesetting program TeX, Donald Knuth, along with Michael Plass, wrote a groundbreaking algorithm in the 1980s that is the basis of many modern typesetting systems. This algorithm seeks to find an idealised typographic presentation. This chapter closes with a discussion of “in-house guides” for publishers such as *New Hart’s Rules* for Oxford University Press, *The Chicago Manual of Style* and *The Guardian’s* style guide. Style guides are influenced by the targeted audience, for example academic vs newspaper reader, as well as the medium, for example wide-page book vs newspaper columns.

The remaining chapters of the book are probably less practical for day-to-day document

examination matters as they focus on details of aesthetics, legibility, functionality, symbols/picture language, among other topics in type design. At the end of the book, Appendix 1 *Dogma for typographers* and Appendix 2 *Good practice in typesetting* provide a snapshot of what may be called a best practices summary for the typographer and typesetter. A list of additional references nicely rounds out an excellent introduction to typography which can be on the bookshelf or easily taken anywhere as the book measures only 11 cm by 17.4 cm. It is listed at a price of £7.99 or \$11.95 making it an economical addition to the document examination laboratory.