

Type (*& Life*)

Type is the basic building block of any printed page. Often it is irresistibly compelling and sometimes absolutely imperative to design a page with more than one typeface on it. But how do you know which typefaces work effectively together?

In *Life*, when there is more than one of anything, a dynamic relationship is established. In *Type*, there is usually more than one element on a page—even a document of plain body copy typically has heads or subheads or at least page numbers on it. Within these dynamics on the page (or in life), a relationship is established that is either concordant, conflicting, or contrasting.

A **concordant** relationship occurs when you use only one type family without much variety in style, size, weight, and so on. It is easy to keep the page harmonious, and the arrangement tends to appear quiet and rather sedate or formal—sometimes downright dull.

A **conflicting** relationship occurs when you combine typefaces that are *similar* in style, size, weight, and so on. The similarities are disturbing because the visual attractions are not the same (concordant), but neither are they different (contrasting), so they conflict.

A **contrasting** relationship occurs when you combine separate typefaces and elements that are clearly distinct from each other. The visually appealing and exciting designs that attract your attention typically have a lot of contrast built in, and the contrasts are emphasized.

Most designers tend to wing it when combining more than one typeface on a page. You might have a sense that one face needs to be larger or an element needs to be bolder. However, when you can recognize and *name the contrasts*, you have power over them—you can then get to the root of the conflicting problem faster and find more interesting solutions. And *that* is the point of this section.

Concord

A design is concordant when you choose to use just one face and the other elements on the page have the same qualities as that typeface. Perhaps you use some of the italic version, and perhaps a larger size for a heading, and maybe a graphic or several ornaments—but the basic impression is still concordant.

Most concordant designs tend to be rather calm and formal. This does not mean concord is undesirable—just be aware of the impression you give by using elements that are all in concord with each other.

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
that struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
and then is heard no more; it is a tale
told by an idiot, *full of sound and fury,*
signifying nothing.

This concordant example uses Cochin. The first letter is larger and there is some italic type (Cochin Italic), but the entire piece is rather subdued.

Hello!

My name is _____

My theme song is _____

When I grow up I want to be _____

The heavy typeface combines well with the heavy border. Even the line for writing on is a bit heavy.

~

You are cordially invited

to share in our

wedding celebration

~

Popeye & Olive Oyl

~

April 1

3 o'clock in the afternoon

Berkeley Square

~

The typeface, the thin border, and the delicate ornaments all give the same style impression.

Look familiar? Lots of folks play it safe with their wedding invitations by using the principle of concord.

Conflict

A design is in conflict when you set two or more typefaces on the same page that are *similar*—not really different and not really the same. I have seen countless students trying to match a typeface with one on the page, looking for a face that “looks similar.” Wrong. When you put two faces together that look too much alike without really being so, most of the time it looks like a mistake. *The problem is in the similarities.*

Concord is a solid and useful concept; **conflict** should be avoided.

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
that struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
and then is heard no more; it is a tale
told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
signifying nothing.

As you read this example, what happens when you get to the phrase, “full of sound and fury”? Do you wonder why it's in another typeface? Do you wonder if perhaps it's a mistake? Does it make you twitch? Does the large initial letter look like it is supposed to be there?

What's up?

My name is _____

My theme song is _____

When I grow up I want to be _____

Look particularly at the “a,” the “t,” and the “s” in the headline and the other lines. They are similar but not the same. The border is not the same visual weight as the type or the lines, nor are they in strong contrast. There is too much conflict in this little piece.



You are cordially invited
to share in our
wedding celebration



Ropeye & Olive Oyl



April 1

3 o'clock in the afternoon

Berkeley Square



This small invitation uses two different scripts—they have many similarities with each other, but they are not the same and they are not different.

The ornaments have the same type of conflict. The piece looks a bit cluttered.

Contrast

There is no quality in this world that is not what it is merely by contrast. Nothing exists in itself. —Herman Melville

Now this is the fun part. Creating concord is pretty easy, and creating conflict is easy but undesirable. Creating contrast is just fun.

Strong contrast attracts our eyes, as you learned in the previous section about design. One of the most effective, simplest, and satisfying ways to add contrast to a design is with type.

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
that struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
and then is heard no more;
it is a tale told by an idiot,
full of sound and fury,
signifying nothing.

In this example it's very clear that the phrase "full of sound and fury" is supposed to be in another typeface. The entire piece of prose has a more exciting visual attraction and a greater energy due to the contrast of type.

Hello!

My name is _____

My theme song is _____

When I grow up I want to be _____

Now the contrast between the typefaces is clear (they are actually in the same family: Antique Olive)—the very bold face contrasts the very light face. The line weights of the border and writing lines also have a clear distinction.

*You are cordially invited
to come to our
garden party!*

Popeye & Olive Oyl

April 1

3 o'clock in the afternoon

Berkeley Square



This invitation uses two very different faces—they are different in many ways.

The graphic picks up the strength of the dark typeface, adding another contrast to the script and creating a repetitive touch.

Summary

Contrast is not just for the aesthetic look of the piece. It is intrinsically tied in with the organization and clarity of the information on the page. Never forget that your point is to communicate. Combining different typefaces should enhance the communication, not confuse it.

There are six clear and distinct ways to contrast type: size, weight, structure, form, direction, and color. The rest of this book talks about each of these contrasts in turn.

Although I elaborate on each of the contrasts one at a time, rarely is one contrast effective. Most often you will strengthen the effect by combining and emphasizing the differences.

If you have trouble seeing what is wrong with a combination of typefaces, don't look for what is *different* between the faces—look for what is *similar*. It is the similarities that are causing the problem.

The one rule to follow when contrasting type is this: *don't be a wimp!*

But...

Before we get to the ways to contrast, you need to have a familiarity with the categories of type. Spend a couple of minutes with each page in the next chapter, noting the similarities that unify a category of type. Then try to find a couple of examples of that kind of type before you move on to the next category. Look in magazines, books, on packages, anything printed. Believe me, taking a few moments to do this will make everything sink in so much faster and deeper!