

The typography of each paragraph: typeface, alignment, typesize, line length and leading, is taken from printed items designed by Fraser Muggeridge studio between 2003–09, shown at actual size. The footnotes indicate each source.

Typography with words¹

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I’ve always been drawn to letters. As a schoolboy my parents asked me if I wanted to play a musical instrument. I said I would prefer to be taught calligraphy, so once a week I would sit at the kitchen table with the only graphic designer in the town, drawing letters. This was the start of my study of typography, a process which still continues today. Everywhere I go, I am fascinated by what I can learn through my obsessive observations of typography: from paper bags in Kolkata to haulage trucks on the M1 motorway.³

At the University of Reading, on the only course in typography in the UK at the time, I attended a lecture given by Professor Michael Twyman. ‘Typography without words’, used a simple notation to explicate the graphic variables of typography. Twyman offered examples of different combinations of lines using ‘x’, ‘o’ and ‘i’ typed out, as if the text had been simplified into an abstract graphic form. At this point typography began to make sense to me.⁴

At the same time I was tackling the relationship between type size, line length and leading. My tutor, Alan May, showed me a small publication entitled *Dimensional relationships in the composition of text* which compared the same piece of text, set in two typefaces (Baskerville and Gill Sans) at five sizes (8, 9, 10, 11 and 12 points) and three line lengths (27, 20 and 13 picas). Through actual examples I could immediately see the effect that each variable had on each other: the longer the line length the more leading required.⁵

Peter Burnhill, *Dimensional Relationships in the Composition of Text*, Stafford College of Art and Design, 1970

I have developed my own principles of typography, adding to those theories which are inherited like those illustrated above. Some have made themselves obvious, while others are subconscious or felt, and are harder to articulate in words. These principles are not fixed and have never been written down until now, as they are forever motile and responsive to shifting demands.⁷

Principles are developed over a whole lifetime and form a very personal collection. Typographical decisions that are made, however subtle, become part of a designer’s style.⁸

Like Twyman’s ‘Typography without words’, this Stafford paper has remained an important resource. I constantly refer back to both these studies in my own work.⁶

Constraints can be useful. In letterpress, only a limited amount of sizes and typefaces were available (I’m thinking here of Anthony Froshaug’s outstanding work using 9 on 12 point Gill Sans). Even though an extensive choice is available now, finding one’s own parameters as a designer is crucial for clarity of communication.¹⁰

Collect everything typographical that holds your attention for some reason, even if not conventionally ‘good’. Items that aren’t designed or are designed badly may hold as much inspiration in some aspect of their construction as an iconic piece by Jan Tschichold.¹²

The quality of typesetting is crucial, especially as designers now undertake this as part of the design process. Line endings need to be carefully crafted, avoiding widows and orphans. Take care with typographic detail such as letter spacing, hyphenation and justification. It is possible to make a badly spaced typeface look good by adjusting the kerning pairs for each character combination and its overall ‘fit’.¹³

Print out copies of typographic work at all stages in the design process. Look at the work at actual size to make judgements with your eye on paper, not on a computer screen. This way the relationships between type size, line length and leading can be more tangibly assessed.¹¹

Be careful not simply to follow fashion, as new pieces of work do not necessarily have to be ‘new’. There is value in designing something well, with careful consideration of the content.¹⁴

Typography can be hypocritical: to break the rules, you need to know them. An understanding of the history of typography is essential to grasp the contexts in which typefaces were created and acknowledge their histories in their usage today. Knowing that Frutiger was originally designed for Charles de Gaulle Airport in Paris and knowing the sloped dash in Poliphilus and the square brackets of Bell. Having access to this knowledge facilitates a reasoning with typography in its practical applications.¹⁶

Know when to break the rules and try arrangements that you don’t think will work to get a different perspective. Intentionally doing things that go against the grain of one’s practice can create new possibilities and lead to new directions of work.¹⁵

Within my work, I engage with the craft that is integral to typography: the patterns and forms made by human effort that illustrate the history of the practice. I am not trying to find the perfect typographical form or arrangement but rather hope to continue in a life-long exploration of choreographing letters on changing pages.¹⁷

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1. David Austen, *Man Smoking*, poster, 2009
2. Marcel Broodthaers, solo exhibition catalogue, Milton Keynes Gallery, 2008
3. Emma Woffenden, *No Horizon Catalogue*, solo exhibition catalogue, Angel Row Gallery, 2003
4. *Implicosphere: Smoke*, broadsheet, 2008
5. Jem Finer, *Longplayer*, book and record, Artangel, 2003
6. Joana Vasconcelos, solo exhibition catalogue, The New Art Gallery Walsall, 2007
7. Phillip King, *Living with Colour*, solo exhibition catalogue, Bernard Jacobson Gallery, 2008
8. *Marcia Farquhar’s 12 Shooters*, book, Live Art Development Agency, 2009
9. *Figuring Space*, group exhibition catalogue, Henry Moore Institute, 2007
10. Carlos Bunga, *Milton Keynes Project*, solo exhibition catalogue, Milton Keynes Gallery, 2006
11. *After Art School*, group exhibition catalogue, London Gallery West, 2006
12. *In Between the Lines*, group exhibition catalogue, Trinity Contemporary, 2009
13. David Cotterrell, *Aesthetic Distance*, leaflet, Danielle Arnaud Contemporary Art, 2009
14. Emma Rushton & Derek Tyman, *Piccadillyland*, book, Art on the Underground, 2009
15. Peter McDonald, *Art for Everybody*, leaflet, Art on the Underground, 2009
16. Hayley Newman, *MKVH*, book, Milton Keynes Gallery, 2008
17. Hannah Rickards, *Thunder*, record, Media Art Bath, 2005
18. Anton Chekhov, *The Exclamation Mark*, book, Hesperus Press, 2008
19. A Map of London Art Galleries..., leaflet, 2008