

# Typographic Legibility for the Web

On the web, designers are limited to fonts that users have. We recommend choosing your fonts based on legibility and availability.

## What affects legibility?

### Typeface

Whatever font you use, make sure that it is clear and easy to read. These fonts have been specially designed for screen legibility: Verdana, Georgia, Comic Sans, Trebuchet

### Size

At small sizes, characters on screen can lose their shape – especially bold and italic characters – so typefaces on the web need to be larger than in print.

### Color

There needs to be a lot of contrast between the background of a page and the type in order for the type to be legible. Dark text on a light background is the easiest to read.

### Line Length

Type that spans the entire width of the page is difficult to read. It is recommended that a given block of text is no more than two alphabets (or 104 characters) wide.


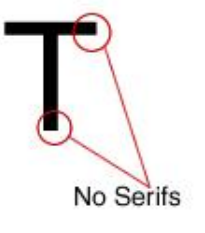
### Leading

Leading is the space between two lines of type. Increasing the leading between rows of text can help to make it more legible. (Ex. The leading of this paragraph has been increased.)

**Note:** You can only adjust the leading using style sheets.

## Ensuring Availability (Hedging your bets)

Web designers rely on the user's system to provide the typeface displayed on the screen. Because designers don't have control over the user's system, we specify a list of several typefaces. The user's system displays the first typeface in the list that it has available. These typefaces fall into two families:

Serif Fonts	Sans-Serif Fonts
Times Times New Roman Georgia	Helvetica Arial Verdana
	

Example T's are Georgia & Verdana, specifically designed for the web.

Screen resolution is much lower than print resolution, so that serifs don't render as cleanly. Choosing a typeface is a subjective decision, but the most common practice for the web is to use a sans-serif font (usually Verdana) for body copy. You might consider pairing it with a serif font for accent on smaller blocks of text, like headers or navigation elements. If you decide that you want to use a serif font for the body copy, use Georgia. It was specifically designed for legibility on the web.

### Font Family – Serif

In serif fonts, a small decorative line added as embellishment to the basic form of a character.

### Font Family – Sans-Serif

Sans-Serif fonts do not use serifs or embellishments.

**Typical serif font list:** “Georgia, Times New Roman, Times, serif”

**Typical sans-serif font list:** “Verdana, Arial, Helvetica, sans-serif”

As you can see, we list several fonts and at the end of each declaration is the font family, serif or sans-serif. This is to ensure that at least the font family chosen by the designer is respected.

### Which fonts are more legible – serif or sans-serif?

Conventional print design standards hold that serif text is easier to read than sans-serif text, but on the web, the conventions change.

## Using non-standard fonts

### Now

Currently, the only effective way to use nonstandard fonts (one's not installed on the user's machine) is to make an image of the text. This is appropriate for small pieces of text (navigation buttons), but not appropriate for large blocks of text.

There are some issues to consider when using images of text.

- Images aren't searchable
- Images can't be selected for cutting & pasting
- Images are slower to download than html text
- Can't readily be read by screen readers/text browsers (alternate text has to be specified)

### In the future

Downloading fonts onto the user's machine would give web designers a little more control, and it would radically change web typography. Although forays have been made into supporting font downloading using CSS, it is not yet common practice, because it takes too long to download and install the font. Perhaps this will be a viable option in the future.