

CHARACTER ANATOMY

punctuation, diacritical marks & a few odd sorts

- Acute** Accent that alters sound or emphasizes, as in *risqué* or *café*.
- Ampersand** Ligature formed from an upper or lowercase *e* conjoined with *t* which spells *et* (“and” in Latin).
- Aperture** Partially enclosed space in characters such as *e* and *C*.
- Arm** Horizontal stroke that is free on one end.
- Ascender** Stems of lowercase *b*, *d*, *f*, *h*, *k*, *l*, and *t*, that extend above the x-height.
- Asterisk** Reference to a footnote or annotation, or symbol for omitted matter (e.g., “f*ck”). From Greek *asteriskos*, “small star.”
- At Sign** Commercial symbol meaning “at the rate of.” Not a traditional typographic sort, but its use in email addresses has made this character a consideration in modern type design.
- Ball Terminal** (or teardrop terminal) a circular end of some letter parts in many romans and italics of the Romantic period, such as Bodoni and Clarendon.
- Bang** Old printing trade term for the exclamation mark. One still occasionally hears the term, as in “Postscript files always begin with percent-bang-P-S” (%!PS).
- Bar** Horizontal stroke in the *A*, *H*, *e*, *t*, etcetera.
- Bowl** (or eye) a curved stroke which makes an enclosed space.
- Bracket** (or fillet) rounded perpendicular angle between serifs and stems that softens the transition.
- Counter** Fully or partially enclosed space within a character.
- Dagger** (or obelisk) indicates a footnote if an asterisk has already been used. A double dagger marks a third footnote. The asterisk and dagger placed beside years indicate year of birth and of death respectively.
- Descender** Part of the letters *g*, *j*, *p*, *q*, *y*, and sometimes *J*, that extends below the baseline.
- Dieresis** Dots to indicate that a vowel is sounded, as in “naïve” (unfortunately “coöperation” is now spelled “coopertion”).
- Dingbat** Pictogram or symbol: fist, checkbox, arrow, fleuron or other glyph that can be placed into text (often for esoteric usage, as the suits of cards or chess pieces).
- Ear** The small projection from the top right of the lowercase *g*.
- Fist** Pointing hand dingbat.
- Fleuron** Botanical ornament, often the *Hedera* (ivy leaf), used to separate chapters and other blocks of text.
- Hairline** Thin stroke usually common to serif typefaces.
- Italics** Cursive alphabet which is matched with a roman face and used chiefly for emphasis and for foreign words in text.
- Leg** Downward stroke on the *k*.
- Ligature** Characters conjoined, usually to avoid overlap. Common ligatures are: *fi*, *fl*, *ffi*, and *ffl*, and *&*.
- Link** The connection between the top and bottom of a lowercase *g*.
- Loop** The lower portion of the lowercase *g*.
- Number Sign** On telephones the pound sign, on keyboards the pound key and in social media the hashtag. This hard-working character was ignored by typographers in the past, but perhaps 21st century type designers will craft suitable hashtags for new type designs.
- Pilcrow** Scribal mark to separate paragraphs, and now an invisible digital character doing the same job. Largely ignored by type designers because it is so rarely seen.
- Prime** Abbreviation for feet (1' = 12") and minutes in an arc (60' = 1°).
- Old Style Figures** (or text figures) lower case numbers, valued for their elegant invisibility in body text.
- Section Sign** Scribal form of double S (§) now chiefly used in legal documents to cite sections of codes and statutes.
- Serif** Small projection added as a stop to finish the beginning and end of letter stems and strokes.
- Shoulder** Curved shape connecting strokes of the *h*, *m* and *n*.
- Small Caps** Upper case type designed at the lower case height in an extended font family. Used for acronyms, initialisms and common abbreviations (e.g., WWII) in text. Like *old style figures*, valued for invisibility in blocks of text.
- Solidus** Thinner and more oblique than the keyboard slash (virgule), typographers use it to improvise fractions.
- Spine** Main curved stroke of a lowercase or capital *S*.
- Spur** Small projection found on many capital *G*s.
- Stem** Main stroke that is more or less straight.
- Stress** Direction of thickening in a curved stroke.
- Stroke** Straight or curved diagonal line.
- Swash** Flourish added for decoration, verve or panache.
- Tail** Descender of the *Q* or short diagonal stroke of the *R*.
- Terminal** End of a stroke not terminated with a serif.
- Tilde** *Virgulilla* in Spanish, the ñ represents a palatal sound, like the French and Italian *gn*.
- Virgule** Slash found on the keyboard.
- X-height** Height of the lowercase letters excluding ascenders and descenders.

