
The Typographic Desk Reference is neither a how-to book nor “Typography for Dummies.” It is not intended to compete with Robert Bringhurst’s The Elements of Typographic Style (Hartley & Marks, 2004) or James Felici’s The Complete Manual of Typography (Peachpit Press, 2003). The title supplies a truthful narrative; it is a reference book. Consider it as a supplementary dictionary or a concise encyclopedia.

The Typographic Desk Reference (TDR) begins with the most significant terms in typography. The definitions are succinct and relevant to the profession of typographers, graphic designers, and those in related disciplines. The section includes traditional typographic terms as well as those related to electronic manipulation of type.

The following section on glyphs, forms that are used as characters or symbols within a writing system, also includes a list of the phonetic alphabet used by dialogue scientists and linguists. Each symbol exists for each sound. Included is the proofreader’s chart, which might be familiar to most in the field, but a plus to have in this practical volume. Throughout each section there are wonderfully simple drawings that accompany text for clarification and example.

The chapter on “anatomy and form” is perhaps the favorite section for most type enthusiasts. It begins with a three-dimensional letterform, identifying the parts of a letter. This chapter is dense with content, yet descriptions are concise. Again, tiny images, aligned with respective text in the margins, allow the reader to both read and visually comprehend the connected meaning. For example, for “apex” the image details what the apex actually is by showing the top of the capital letterform A in solid black and the bottom portion of the letter in halftone. The terms such as serif, loop, counter, swash, and ascender are included along with the lesser-known such as double struck and slope. Once more the differentiation between solid black and halftone for illustrative purposes works remarkably well.

Rosendorf also includes a chapter is on classification and specimens. There are several classifications for type and a long history of debate surrounding them. In order to keep the book a handy reference guide, Rosendorf uses the ATypI-Vox classification system, although several other schemes exist. The case for type classification is necessary due to the enormous number of typestyles that exist and continue to be produced. To that end, the apparent discrepancies in uniformity among professionals illustrate the difficulty involved with classification. The seven categories used in the TDR reflect the similar classifications by expert typographers. Typographers use several characteristics for classification, including by designer, form, geographic location, style, or foundry.

A computer cannot make all the decisions regarding typography so this reference title is a great tool for undergraduate and graduate students as well any typophile. It contains a careful compilation of a few strange aspects of typography; it’s an easy-to-use and portable book. Another benefit with this title is the size. Under six inches by nine inches at 136 pages, its pint size encloses a collection chock-full of quality content. The hardbound book has an embossed cover, on smooth paper stock, and set in attractive Adobe Caslon. The book and pages are well-designed, clean and symmetrical. The margins are somewhat narrow but not distracting.

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