17 FONT USERS

What strange things fonts are, good for all manner of purpose, for all manner of person

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1. Those who read. Variously known as the target market, the customer, consumer or end user. But in truth the reader never really uses fonts, any more than someone listening to a guitar is using a guitar. They are perceivers of typography whose sole concern, oblivious to all efforts to manipulate their experience, is decoding the text.

2. Those who are learning to read. The very young and the late starter, for whom the forest emerges leaf by leaf, branch by branch, tree by tree.

3. Those who read with difficulty. Sorry, no one-size-fits-all, quick fix font for dyslexia or visual impairment, but no end of placebos empowered by the grace of good intentions.

4. Those who set type. The compositor abides, precariously, and few in number. But these days everyone with a desktop computer—that would be over a billion—is a typographer (not to be confused with a type designer). Web type, however, is never really SET, merely thrown at the layout and left to fall into place, according to the vagaries of browser, device, and user preferences.

5. The client. Does not use or choose, but beware if they think that Papyrus would be appropriate for their yoga business (it would).

6. The client's spouse. Has valuable input on fonts, colours, and the size of the headline.

7. Those who hoard free software downloads. Collectors who may never assign a font to text—it's just cool to have lots, like the perpetual virgins in a drill bit set.

8. Pirates. Those who illegally distribute software because, you know, information wants to be free—and all those hits will bring in some nice ad revenue.

9. Those who write design history. Neither set nor read the text, but are adept at contextualizing the cultural DNA embedded in ancient foundry specimens. Type history was design history before there *was* design history.

10. Curators. Semantic creep expands their domain: the *Museum of Modern Art* in New York, for instance, "acquired" 23 typeface designs in 2011, not to mention the @ symbol.

11. Unicode workers. Linguists and paleologists, ethnic preservationists and megacorp empire builders, emoji enablers.

12. Those who judge type design competitions. Paragons of the profession.

13. Neurological researchers. Poor souls for whom the value of typography is how quickly it may be read.

14. Journalists who have just discovered a new Comic Sans meme. And will therefore take the opportunity to explain What Fonts Are, Their History and Gosh They're Everywhere.

15. Helveticans. Fundamentalists who worship the Holy Neutrality, ever faithful to the doctrine of Modernism.

16. Foundry self promoters. Designed the font and the specimen in which it is set, describing its own merits in text they also felt obliged to write. Are we dizzy yet?

17. Those who are reading this magazine. Can read any publication with argus-eyed disinterest, because they are professionals—but who, one hopes, will pay slightly more attention to the text if it happens to be in a graphic design journal.