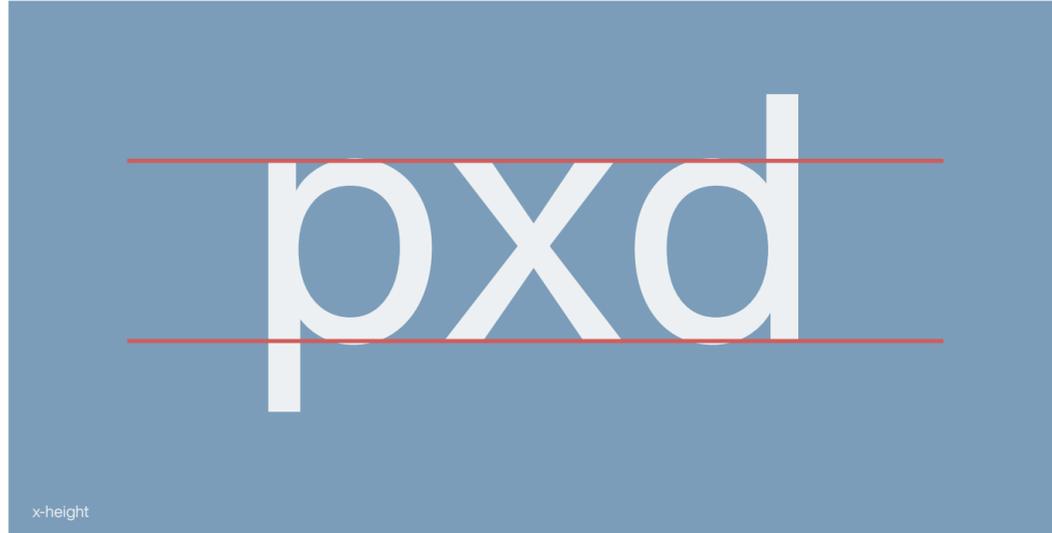


x-height

Typeface x-height can be an important consideration in creating fine typography. It refers to the height of the lowercase x in proportion to the caps, ascenders and descenders.

Point Size Is Different Than x-Height

The point size of any typeface is basically a measure of its overall height, from the top of the tallest character above the baseline to the longest descender beneath the baseline. The x-height of a typeface, however, can differ markedly from one design to another.



x-height

x-height

Seemingly similar typefaces may have very different x-height proportions. For example, the lowercase characters in Brandon Grotesque are noticeably smaller than those in Gilroy. The lowercase letters in Alkes are considered to have a relatively generous x-height, while those in Opal™ are small.

Since, somewhere around 95% of letters read in the Latin Alphabet are lowercase, x-height is an important factor in creating content legibility and readability.

Large x-Heights

Large x-heights generally make a typeface more visible at any given size. Display faces with very large lowercase characters tend to communicate with clarity and emphasis. Text typefaces that incorporate large x-heights generally do so in an attempt to increase legibility and readability. Times New Roman® Small Text, designed to be legible at minute sizes, has a much larger x-height than the basic design of Times New Roman, which is intended for text composition within a normal point-size range.

xBrandon GrotesquexxGilroyxxAurorax

xITC LegacyxxSerifxxAlkesxxOpalx

xTimes New RomanxxTimes New Roman Small Textx

x-heights can vary dramatically from typeface to typeface

Small x-Heights

Although a large x-height may be preferable in some situations, bigger is not always better. Visibility tends to come at a price. As the x-height increases, the length of the ascenders and descenders decreases. Taken to the extreme, this can reduce character legibility. As a result, typefaces like Antique Olive™ can be fairly difficult to read at small sizes.

As with most things typographic, there are few fixed rules regarding the choice of typefaces with various x-heights. Considering the audience, the reading environment, and the typographic application is the best place to start when determining the best typeface for any given situation.

Because of its large x-height Antique Olive can be difficult to read at small sizes

Typefaces with small x-heights can also save space in another way. If lines of copy are set with no additional line space, the proportionally longer ascenders and descenders of typefaces with smaller x-heights create the illusion of more white space between lines of type.

As with most things typographic, there are few fixed rules regarding the choice of typefaces with various x-heights. Considering the audience, the reading environment, and the typographic application is the best place to start when determining the best typeface for any given situation.

As with most things typographic, there are few fixed rules regarding the choice of typefaces with various x-heights. Considering the audience, the reading environment, and the typographic application is the best place to start when determining the best typeface for any given situation.

Small x-heights can give the illusion of additional line spacing

As with most things typographic, there are few fixed rules regarding the choice of typefaces with various x-heights. To determine the best typeface for any given application, first consider the audience, reading environment, and typographic application.

The following fonts were used in this article

Alkes

Antique Olive™

Brandon Grotesque

Gilroy

Linotype Didot

Moneta

Opal™

Times New Roman

Times New Roman® Small Text