

Type Anatomy

Art & Design

The names for the parts of a letterform, and the lines they are built on.

The vocabulary you need in order to say what is wrong with a setting.

Lines

Baseline - where the letters sit

x-height - the height of a lowercase x

Cap height - the height of a capital

Ascender line - the top of b, d, k

Descender line - the foot of g, p, y

Parts

Stem - the main vertical stroke

Bowl - the closed curve of b, p, o

Counter - the space inside a bowl

Aperture - the opening of c, e, s

Terminal - the end of a stroke

Details

Serif - the finishing stroke

Spur, ear, tail, spine, crossbar

Ink trap - a notch cut for ink spread

Overshoot - round forms set slightly proud

Why it matters

A large x-height reads bigger at a size

Open apertures help at small sizes

Tight counters fill in when printed small

Two faces at the same point size can look wildly different sizes.
x-height, not point size, is what a reader perceives.