



# DESIGNER'S Toolbox

Fonts are communication tools.  
Choose the right tool for the job!

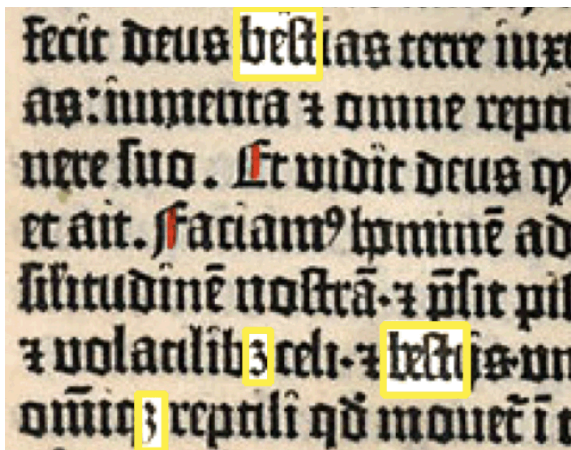


Beginning, middle and final shapes for the Arabic letter noon

## Using OpenType Features: Alternate Characters

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The OpenType font format was a big upgrade to the designer's toolbox. It was designed to support non-Latin fonts which require several different shapes for the same character. Arabic, for instance, has as many as four different shapes for each letter depending on where it falls within a word (figure 1). A nice side effect of this bit of technology is that Latin fonts may now have more than one shape for each letter too.



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Alternate z and b/e combination used in Gutenberg's 42-Line Bible

### Historic Origins

Gutenberg's 42-line Bible, printed in around 1450 used dozens of alternative letter shapes and connected letters to make it possible to neatly align columns of text. Experts believe he had around 300 letters and ligatures (connected letters) in his font allowing for many possible substitutions (figure 2). With the advent of OpenType, computer fonts may now contain an equally rich complement of letters.

### Many Alternative Uses

Designers today use alternate letters for a wide variety of purposes for both style and function.

#### *The Secret Sauce*

If variety is the spice of life, alternates can be the secret sauce which gives a design the added distinction to stand out from the crowd. (Figure 3) Pokerface™, by Ascender's Jim Ford, juxtaposes several styles of typeface *within the same typeface*. The effect is as dizzying as Las Vegas light shows with impact to match.

(Figure 4) Perciles Pro™ is full of alternates for elaborate headlines or for simulating ancient inscriptions.

#### *Handwriting Simulation*

Alternate shapes in handwriting fonts help give a more convincing handwriting effect by adding a sense of randomness in letter shapes. Segoe™ Script and Lindsey Pro™ (figure 5) substitute letters based on their context within a word.

3 **MIXED up style**  
**MIXED up style**

4 GREEK  
GREEK  
GREEK

5 *alphabet letter*  
*alphabet letter*

## 6 alternative alternative



Bertham Pro™ (A), Consolas™ (B), Romany™ (C), Goudy Forum™ Pro (D) and Fine Hand™ (E) include alternate letter designs to expand the possibilities available to the designer.

### Legibility

Alternate forms can provide a functional use as shown in figure 6. The typeface Miramonte Pro™ has an alternate a for use at small sizes when the original a might appear too much like the letter o.

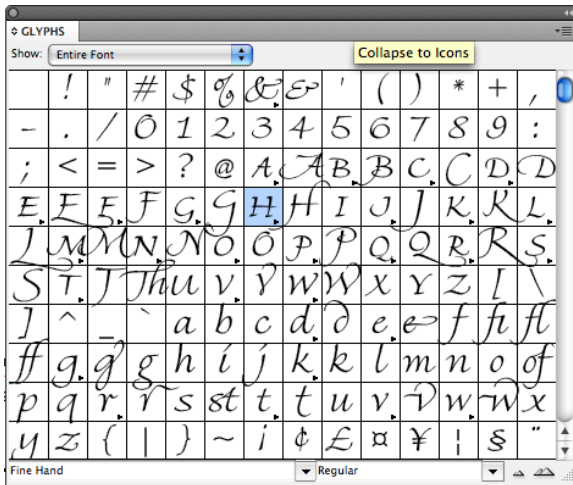
### Expanding Possibilities

There are many fonts which simply strive to offer choice to the designer. Certain details may be better-suited for one setting but not another – or a designer may simply prefer a slightly different effect (figure 7).

### Using Alternates with Adobe InDesign

To access these alternate letters simply hand-pick them from the Glyph Palette. To open this palette go to the Type menu then select <Glyphs>. You can also find this palette by going to Window, then Type & Tables, and finally select Glyphs. The glyphs are shown in a grid. A glyph which has an alternative form will have a small black arrow in the corner. Click and hold to view alternates for the selected glyphs and double-click to insert it in a text frame where your cursor is located. Sorting the glyphs using the drop-down menu may help you find certain glyphs (figure 8).

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A screenshot of the Glyph palette. Use the drop-down menu to sort the glyphs. In the palette options, you can even make your own custom glyph set. This option is available in both Adobe InDesign and Illustrator.

By exploring the glyph palette for fun and useful alternative letters you'll begin to make unique and more thoughtful designs. Your choice of letterforms will more accurately convey your message and may even reflect a bit of your own personality.

Next month we'll look deeper into our designer's toolbox and separate the ligatures from the diphthongs – it's not as messy as it sounds!

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