



DESIGNER'S Toolbox

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

Using OpenType Features: Figure Styles

MAY 2009

This month we take a closer look at what OpenType fonts have to offer the user. It's not a simple answer because there is no 'standard' set of added features and characters common to all OpenType fonts. Application developers like Adobe and Microsoft support these added features in different ways and sometimes not at all!

The following article discusses a single set of OpenType options called figure styles and how they can be used to polish your typographic document.

The OpenType font format allows four figure design styles to reside in the same font. Each style has a unique job and solves a specific typographic problem.

A) Lining figures – or uppercase figures. They align with each other vertically and sometimes with the capital letters. Sometimes they are slightly shorter than the capital letters so they don't stand out too much in text.

Lining figures are also usually **tabular**, meaning each number, has the same width allowing them to align in columns. This alignment is useful for setting numerical information.

Some OpenType fonts also offer **proportional** lining figures. This allows the figures (particularly the figure 1) to space more evenly in text.

B) Oldstyle figures are also called ranging or lowercase figures because they ascend and descend like lowercase letters. They were introduced into typography so that they would not stand out from the rest of the words on a page. They look elegant and they do not disrupt the flow of text.

Oldstyle figures are typically proportionally spaced for better text setting but some OpenType fonts include oldstyle figures which are tabular. This allows the user to set columns which align vertically using figures designed to ascend and descend like lowercase letters.

Tabular **Lining** Figures

A)	Hotel	318.99
	Airfare	921.25
	Supplies	186.79
	Software	540.89

Proportional **Oldstyle** Figures

B)	Hotel	311.99
	Airfare	921.15
	Supplies	186.79
	Software	540.89

Figures such as 2038 and 1964 should blend with words to continue the flow of reading.

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The top sentence uses old style figures which are designed to blend in with text.

80105 vs. 80105 80105 vs. 80105

The tabular figure one will tend to have a great deal of white space on the left and right sides in order to make it align vertically with the other figures. This makes some number combinations look awkward (left). A proportionally spaced figure one will remedy this issue for better text but it will prevent columns from aligning.

Using Figure Styles in Adobe InDesign

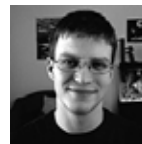
If the OpenType font you have selected contains additional figure styles, the figure style options will become available via the Character or Glyph palettes.

Using the Character palette, click on the pop-up menu in the right hand corner, select OpenType and the figure styles appear at the bottom. If the feature is unavailable in the particular font, the feature will appear within brackets.

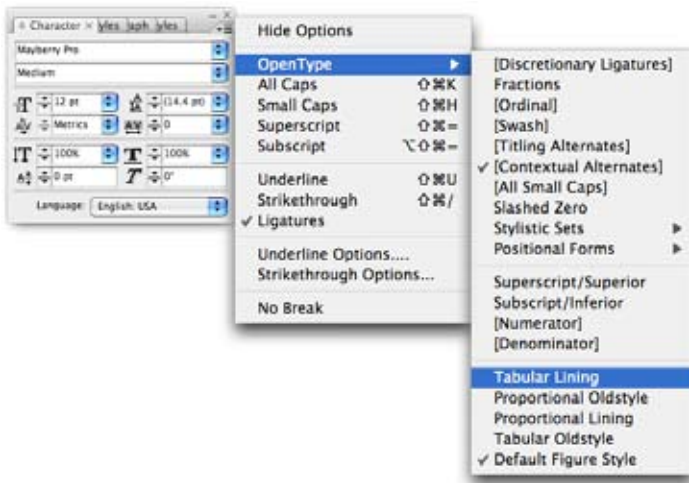
An alternative way to use these glyphs is to hand-pick them from the Glyph Palette. To open this palette go to the Type menu then select Glyphs. You can also find this palette by going to Window, then Type & Tables, and finally select Glyphs. The glyphs are shown in a grid. A glyph which has an alternative design will have a small black arrow in the corner. Click and hold on the cell to view alternatives for the selected glyph and double-click to insert it into the text frame where your cursor is located. Sorting the glyphs using the 'Show' drop-down menu may help you find certain glyphs.

Carefully selecting the proper figure style will create more professional-looking typography and make the meaning of your document more clear. Old style figures in text will read more fluidly and tabular figures will make numeric information align properly when it needs to.

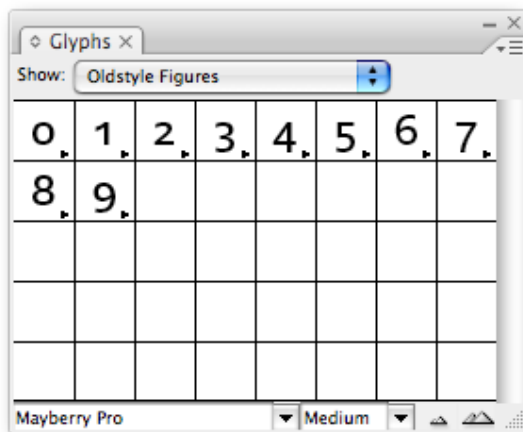
Next month we'll investigate more OpenType features including 'Swash', a potentially dangerous but beautiful effect for a calligraphic touch.



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A screenshot of the Character Palette in Adobe InDesign CS3 accessing OpenType features. The check mark indicates that a feature is available. Bracketed features are not available in that font.



A screenshot of the Glyph palette. Use the 'show' drop-down menu to show the glyphs that are included in that feature. In the palette options, you can even make your own custom glyph set.