



Questioned Documents Section - 2012

J16 Basics of Typography for the Forensic Document Examiner

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After attending this presentation even the experienced forensic document examiner should have an increased level of familiarity with systems used internationally for type measurement, typestyle classification, as well as with the nomenclature used to describe the classifying features of type designs, and how these fundamentals of typography can ultimately be used in practical applications for forensic examinations requiring the differentiation of similar designs. This introductory presentation should provide awareness of some areas for the kind of further education, training, and experience needed to achieve the knowledge, skills, and abilities of the domain-specific expertise required in actual case work.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by providing an historical perspective on typographic development over the half-millennium plus since the Gutenberg Bible (ca. 1454) as well their calligraphic and inscriptional underpinnings. Socio-economic and aesthetic trends as well as technological advances will be considered.

This presentation will seek to provide forensic document examiners and other attendees with an overview of forensically relevant technical and design aspects of typography. In an age when the overwhelming majority of documents submitted for examination are produced on computer printers using adapted or evolved versions of traditional printers' type styles, the forensic document examiner needs a basic knowledge of typography.

The domain-specific terminology developed by typographers and printers over the centuries will be emphasized because of the role of language in comparison type examinations in facilitation of the perception and labeling of significant features and patterns, both the similarities and the differences. The use of correct and specific terminology should also increase effectiveness in note taking, report writing, and demonstrative presentations.

Aspects of various typographic classification systems will be considered. Traditional classification systems have been historically based, such as the Association Typographique Internationale (ATypI) system based on the work of Maximilien Vox, and the similar, but more restrictive, British Standards Classification of Typefaces (BS 2961). Such systems are subject to criticism as inadequate in an age of computer-aided revivals, hybrids, and combinations of type designs and other material from diverse centuries and sources. The various versions of the PANOSE system, originating from the work of Benjamin Bauermeister, are largely measurement based with minimal subjective decisions or typographic background required. The system devised by Catherine Dixon from England considers the various design sources along with a series of formal attributes, factors that can combine in the patterns of commonly seen groups of type styles.

A variety of criteria have been used for these various classification systems, and their relevance to forensic document examination is that they provide the examiner with strategies of comparative measurements and an extensive starting list of selected characteristics for focused attention in the analysis and comparison of type. Covering both the major elements as well as fine and subtle features of the designs, these classifying characteristics include: overall style, posture, treatment of terminals, including presence and style of serifs, weight, proportion, degree of contrast and axis of contrast or stress, stroke variation, midline placement and x-height, as well as features of certain key characters.

Some information on typewriter type styles will also be provided because of the prolific use of these machines in creating documents in the last century that still need to be examined in this century, and also the ongoing use of this technology in certain areas. Accordingly, the presentation will also address classification systems developed by Ordway Hilton, David A. Crown, Joseph Haas, and Interpol for monotone typewriter type styles, as well as the overall style classifications developed by Gerry de la Durantaye and Philip D. Bouffard.

Typography, Classification, Differentiation