

Crabby's Font Facts 102: Best practices



[Print](#)

Crabby Office Lady

In Font Facts 101 we got comfy with some of the basics. Now it's time to learn how to use those fonts like a pro.

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Now that you understand some of the basics of fonts (and if you don't, please re-read [Crabby's Font Facts 101: Some basics](#)), let's take a crack at some basic font etiquette — when to use certain fonts, and when to avoid them. Then, as a bonus, I'll show you how to change the default font in Word, a request that pops up often in the feedback we receive. Finally, once you've mastered these best practices, we'll take a look at what's in store for you in Font Facts 103.

Best practice #1: Pin the tail on the font (or don't)

Serifs are the funny little "tails" at the end of the stems of some letters in a particular font, such as Times New Roman and Georgia. Sans serif fonts don't have the tails (kind of like my Australian shepherd, although he does have a little stump). Examples of these are Times New Roman (serif) and Tahoma (sans serif):

1 Ad 2 Ad

1 [Serif](#)
2 [Sans serif](#)

When you're trying to figure out whether to pick a serif or sans serif font, consider if this is for an on-screen job or a print job.

Studies show (although I'm not a font scientist and I don't play one on TV, either), a serif font is easier to read in print, while a sans serif font is better when reading something on the computer.

The theory is that serifs form a visual guide, or train, which helps the reader's eye follow the type and read groups of words, rather than single words one at a time. And while this works great for print, it doesn't work as well for the screen. So, to sum up:

- Use a serif font for printed materials such as books, reports, and catalogs.
- Use a sans serif font for documents or other things you'll be popping up onto the Web.

Best practice #2: Have fonts, will travel

When you install new fonts, each font will only work with the computer you've installed it on. If you share Office documents with other people (why keep all that goodness to yourself?) or plan to use or view your documents on a different computer, the new fonts you've so carefully used in the documents might not be displayed the same way on the other computer and you will end up angry, embarrassed, or perplexed — or perhaps all three.

Files and fonts: hand-in-hand

What's the fix? You can either install the new font on the other computers you plan to use, or, if you're using a TrueType font in Word or PowerPoint — and most likely you are — you can embed the font; that saves the characters with your document.

Legal notes! Legal notes!

- If you've purchased your fancy fonts, you'd better make sure that the company you bought them from hasn't specified that you can only use them on one single computer.
- Not all TrueType fonts can be embedded (due to licensing restrictions).
- To sum up: Make sure you're walking the straight and narrow here; you don't want to end up in font court.

That being said, here is how you do all that once you're sure you're playing by the rules.

In Word 2007 or PowerPoint 2007



1. Click the Office button , and then click **Word Options** (or **PowerPoint Options**).
2. On the left side of the dialog box, click **Save**, and then select **Embed fonts in the file**.

NOTE Embedding fonts takes up lots of valuable space. Rather than embedding the entire font (and all its characters), you can choose to save only the characters you're using. Select **Embed only the characters used in the document**.

In Word 2003 or 2002 or PowerPoint 2003 or 2002

1. On the **Tools** menu, click **Options**, and then click the **Save** tab.
2. Under **Save options**, select the **Embed TrueType fonts** check box.

To embed only the characters you're using in that particular document, select **Embed characters in use only**.

In all three versions, you can also select **Do not embed common system fonts** to save even more space since it's likely that the computer you'll be taking your presentation or document to will have the normal sets of fonts that most programs use.

NOTE For more information about TrueType fonts (and other font types) visit the [Microsoft Typography](#) Web site.

When sending e-mail and instant messages

Now, if your default e-mail or messaging font is some funky esoteric font that you bought online, chances are your recipients don't have it and your text will end up looking odd at best (or, at worst, actually say something nasty in a very strange language, one your recipient happens to know).

The best practice here is to stick with the tried and true fonts, the ones that came with Outlook (or whatever program you're using). Chances are your recipients have the same fonts and communication will flow freely. You and your readers will become of one mind. Ohmmmmmm.

Let's review: Use standard fonts to guarantee readability. However, if you just feel the need to express yourself with special fonts, be sure to embed them (but watch out for bloated document sizes). When you're sending e-mail or instant messages, definitely stick with a standard font or your message may be muddled, along with your font.

Best practice #3: Choose the right font for the job

If you're creating a presentation, spreadsheet, or whatever, for a business meeting, you really shouldn't use what I like to call "cutesy fonts." The rules change, however, if that document or slide show is for a group of children. (If your co-workers act like children, you're on your own.) Just like shoes, some fonts are more suited to some purposes than others.

In the image below, the top font seems more businesslike while the bottom font is more playful. Which font would you use to pitch your small business to a busy investor? Which font would you use to pitch extra milk and cookies after naptime?



1 abcdefghi
2 abcdefghi

1 Times New Roman
2 Comic Sans

Best practice #4: Limit how many families you're using

You've already learned that you must consider your audience when choosing which font family you want to use. But consider this: When you're thinking about combining multiple fonts into a single document, presentation, or anything else that someone is going to read ... think again. If you use too many fonts, it looks ugly, it's distracting, and it makes your reader work too hard. Give them a break, will you?

1 Lorem ipsum
2 Nibh euismod tincidunt ut
3 Ut wisi enim ad minim
4 veniam, quis nostrud
5 exerci tation ullamcorp
6 commodo consequat.
7 Consectetuer adipiscing
8 elit, sed diam
9
1 Arial
2 French Script MT
3 Lucida Bright
4 Curlz MT

Remember: too many fonts spoil the broth.

Special tip: How to change the default font in Word

NOTE While this one isn't exactly a "best practice," it is a commonly-asked question.

When you open a program, usually the "normal" or "default" template opens up and it's already been set up to contain formatting defaults, including the font. But I know you; you are unique with unique needs and unique desires. You can change that default font if you don't like the one we chose for you.

In Word 2007

1. If your document already contains text formatted with the properties you want to use, select that text.
2. Select the **Home** tab.
3. On the **Font** group, click the arrow to display the **Font dialog box**.
4. Select the options you want to apply to the default font. If you selected text in step 1, the properties you want will appear in the dialog box.
5. Click **Default**.

In Word 2003 and 2002

1. If your document already contains text formatted with the properties you want to use, select that text.
2. On the **Format** menu, click **Font**.
3. Select the options you want to apply to the default font. If you selected text in step 1, the properties you want will appear in the dialog box.
4. Click **Default**.

Any new document you open will use the font settings you selected. If you want to know how to change the default font in other programs, see Help in those particular programs.

Next up: Designing with fonts

For the third installment of my fonts series, I'll be demonstrating how you can add vim and vigor to your documents with:

- WordArt
- Drop caps
- Borders and shading

...and more.

Tip of the week

Lisa Lewin wrote to tell me about one of her favorite tips: Converting tabled contents that she's copied off a Web site into text.

"Who doesn't copy and paste info off of Web sites and into their own documents? (Don't answer that — but I'm sure there are others like me.) The only trouble is that most Web pages are formatted into tables. and when you paste into Word, those pesky tables make it very challenging to reformat or set up your page how you want. With the table to text feature, I can easily remove the table formatting and then it is a lot easier to set up my page how I want or get the Internet info to look seamless within my document. I do this so often, I even set up a macro (with a button on my toolbar) to do it for me. I knew you'd be proud."

I sure am proud, Lisa! You go girl! Readers, here is what Lisa is talking about:

- [Office 2007: Convert text to a table or vice versa](#)
- [Office 2003: Convert text to a table or vice versa](#)

"Good ideas are not adopted automatically. They must be driven into practice with courageous patience." — Hyman Rickover

About the author

[Annik Stahl](#), the Crabby Office Lady columnist, takes all of your complaints, compliments, and knee-jerk reactions to heart. Therefore, she graciously asks that you let her know whether this column was useful to you — or not — by entering your feedback using the **Was this information helpful?** tool below. And remember: If you don't vote, you can't complain.

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