

DESN 130 - TYPOGRAPHY

Ligatures

LIGATURES

A ligature is a special character that combines two (or sometimes three) letters into a single character. Type designers create ligatures because they look better than setting the same character combinations individually, and also to solve the problem of characters that “crash” into each other when set in adjacent positions.

F-LIGATURES

The most commonly used ligatures are the f-ligatures: fi, fl and sometimes ff, ffi and ffl. These specially designed letter combinations avoid the unattractive collision that occurs in some typefaces between the hook of the ‘f’ and the dot of the ‘i,’ or the ascender of the ‘l’ or second ‘f’.

The fi and fl ligatures are standard in most fonts. They can be accessed manually by typing a specific combination of keystrokes, but the simplest way to take advantage of these characters is to turn on the ‘automatic ligature substitution’ feature in your software application. This helps ensure consistent use of ligatures throughout your project.

Ligatures should be used with extreme care (or avoided entirely) if you plan to adjust the overall letterspacing of the text containing these combinations. Since a ligature is a single character, its internal spacing won’t change when you tighten or loosen the letterspacing. If the ligatured letters don’t match the spacing of the rest of your text, use non-ligature characters.

DECORATIVE LIGATURES

Decorative ligatures come in many varieties, but they’re all intended to add visual interest to your typesetting. Also called discretionary ligatures, some of these characters combine frequently occurring letter pairs (like ‘Th’) into a single, graceful design. Other ligatures, such as the ‘ck’, ‘ct’, and ‘st’ combinations found in faces such as ITC Dyadis and ITC Founder’s Caslon, originated from historical usage and add elegance and individuality to a setting. Still others, like the joined ‘oo’ in ITC Rennie Mackintosh and the LL and TT in Jokerman, are designed purely for fun and spontaneity, creating an almost hand-lettered appearance.

A ligature is treated as a single character by your application. Take care when you open or close the overall letter spacing of a word containing these combos; the ligature’s internal spacing will remain unchanged and might look too tight or too open compared to the rest of your text.

LOGOTYPES

Logotypes are usually small, commonly used words – such as the, for, and, of and to – that are designed as a unit. Like ligatures, logotypes are treated as a single character by your application (and are usually accessed with one keystroke or keystroke combination). Unlike ligatures, the letters within a logotype are not necessarily connected. In fact, the sky’s the limit when it comes to the design of these useful little words.

Logotypes are most likely to be found in fonts that are decorative, highly stylized display designs. They can have creatively spaced or interconnected characters, varying baselines, irregularly sized characters, and even vertically stacked characters! When appropriately and tastefully used, logotypes can add a custom, hand-lettered look to an otherwise straightforward project.

fi fl

fi fl

fine flavor
fine flavor

PETTING
ALLOWED

The first lick
is the sweetest.

The best
of the
bunch.

THE FOR F B

For of To

The The

THE F A

The The and of