

DESN 130 - TYPOGRAPHY

Swashes

Swashes are extremely decorative characters that contain a flourish extending from the terminus of a stroke. They can add style and elegance to display type. They are never used in body text. Born out of calligraphy and handwriting, swashes are commonly used with script typefaces, but they are not limited to that style. They can also be effective as part of italics, roman and even sans serif style. A good example would be Old Style typefaces, such as Garamond or Caslon. Swashes may be used to create ligatures, but this is not a requirement for a swash.

Many fonts will include a set of swash characters as alternate characters. Typically, these will be the Open Type fonts that have “Pro” in the name. You can check the Open Type palette to see if the swash button is available. Turn on the swashes to see the swash alternatives. You may not want to use all of the available swashes, so apply them only to the characters you want.

RULES OF THUMB FOR USING SWASHES:

- Absolutely never use them on all caps type! It is too hard to read and ugly!
- Always use swashes on upper and lower case type.
- Normally the first and last letters are good choices for swashes, but you can also use them on lower case letters in the middle of words. You must be careful how they interact with the letters next to them. Do not let them destroy legibility.
- Consider how the swash will work with type on lines above or below.
- Don’t use too many swashes at a time. Sometimes less is more.

If your display type is the main focus of your design, or the font that you are using does not include swashes, you may consider creating your own custom swashes.

THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN CREATING YOUR OWN CUSTOM SWASHES:

- Make the swashes look natural. They should flow out of the characters in a way that feels right. Look for obvious places that would accept a swash, such as cross bars, ascenders, descenders, etc.
- Keep the curves flowing and natural.
- Make the thickness and stress match the rest of the letters. If the swash is very extensive, it may need to lighten the stroke weight ever so slightly.
- You may duplicate parts of other letters in the font to use as a starting place for the swash.
- Do not hurt legibility. Be careful how the swash affects the letters and the word.
- If creating multiple swashes, keep them consistent with each other.