



ABBREVIATIONS IN FONT NAMES

The Definitive Guide

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OVERVIEW: A SIMPLE GUIDE TO A COMPLEX TOPIC

Electronic font development began decades ago, and in many instances fonts developed long ago can still be in use today. With this long history of font development, font naming standards have evolved through the years.

If you've been collecting fonts for long, you will notice that many fonts in your collection likely often contain cryptic abbreviations. This guide covers many common abbreviations in font names. Due to the varying standards and individual approaches that each type foundry may take, it's not likely to ever be entirely comprehensive, but we have strived to include as much as possible.

Abbreviations mostly fall into several common categories:

FOUNDRY NAME — usually in the form of one or two letters at the beginning or end of the name (LT, MT, A, BT, FB, URW). “Foundries” are the companies that create fonts, a term going back to the days of metal type.

LANGUAGE DESIGNATION — comes at the end of a name (Cyr, Grk, CE). Generally this only applies to older fonts where a separate font was issued for different languages. In most cases, newer fonts put all the languages in a single font.

FONT SIZE (Text, Display, Poster/Caption, Small Text, Regular, Subhead, Display) — This is usually a print-focused designation; if one is using print fonts for screen/web, using fonts designed for smaller sizes in print at somewhat bigger sizes on screen is often a good idea. A “caption” font might be great for body text on screen.

WIDTH — designates that a font is more condensed or extended/expanded than usual. How much space the letters take up.

WEIGHT — how bold is the font? Besides “regular” and “bold” there are degrees in between, and there can be styles even lighter than regular and bolder than bold. Three to six weights is not unusual in a typeface, and typefaces with ten or even fifteen weights have been issued!

Extremely light and extremely heavy weights are generally only useful at very large sizes. The full names for some common weights, in approximate increasing order: Hairline, UltraThin, UltraLight, Thin, ExtraLight, Light, Regular, Book, Medium, Semibold or Demibold, Bold, ExtraBold, Heavy, Black, ExtraBlack, UltraBold or Ultra.

Common Abbreviations

A: ADOBE

The type foundry and software company based in California.

A2: NOT AN ABBREVIATION.

A foundry based in London.

AEF: ALTERED EGO FONTS FOUNDRY

A foundry

ALT: ALTERNATES

A font that has different shapes for some characters than those found in the default version of the font. In OpenType, alternates may be built into the base font and accessed via OpenType features instead.

AOE: ASTIGMATIC ONE EYE FOUNDRY

A foundry

AT | ATT: AGFA

A foundry. (ATT is “Agfa TrueType” and was used for an early pack of TrueType fonts.) Later acquired by Monotype.

ATF: AMERICAN TYPE FOUNDERS

A defunct foundry, once the dominant cold metal type foundry (1892-1993)

BALT: BALTIC LANGUAGE SUPPORT

Accented characters for Latvian, Lithuanian and Estonian. Usually also included in CE.

BD: BOLD

BK: BOOK

A designation of weight close to “regular” which may exist in place of regular, or be slightly lighter or heavier, depending on the foundry’s preferences.

BL | BLK: BLACK

A very bold weight, beyond Extra Bold

BT: BITSTREAM FOUNDRY

A foundry.

CAPT | CP: CAPTION

A font designed for very small sizes in print, such as 8 points or less. Term standardized by Adobe around 2000.

CC:

If seen after the font name it means Carter & Cone. If before the name, it means Comicraft.

CE: CENTRAL EUROPEAN

A separate font with coverage of Central European accented latin letters for languages such as Polish and Czech. Usually also includes coverage for Baltic languages and Turkish. New fonts tend to have all such languages in the main font file.

CG: COMPUGRAPHIC

Bought by Agfa, who were later bought by Monotype.

CM | COMP: COMPRESSED

A really narrow version of a font. Narrower than Condensed.

CN | CON | COND: CONDENSED

A narrower version of a font. Not as narrow as “Compressed”

COM: COMMUNICATION

Linotype’s name for fonts aimed at corporate customers, which are TrueType flavored OpenType fonts that have a specific extended character set (close to Western + CE, actually “LEEC”) and generally lack extensive OpenType alternate glyphs.

CY | CYR: CYRILLIC

A separate font with coverage for the Cyrillic alphabet used for Russian and numerous other languages. Does not usually cover all Cyrillic languages, as some have additional character set needs. New fonts tend to have all such languages in the main font file.

D | DISP: DISPLAY

A font intended for use at quite large sizes in print, typically 24 or even 48 pt and up. 72 points might be an ideal size, at typical reading distances. “D” by itself is URW’s abbreviation.

DFR: DEUTSCHE FRAKTUR

A font in the Fraktur style of blackletter, that includes a few characters needed for setting traditional fraktur text, notably the ck and ch ligatures and the long “s”.

DM | DEMI: DEMIBOLD

A weight in between regular and bold.

EF: ELSNER + FLAKE

Pronounced “FLOCK-uh” not “flake”. A German foundry.

EX | EXT | X: EXTRA OR EXTENDED

“Extra” usually goes with a weight designation such as Light, Bold or Black. “Extended” is a designation for a font that is wider than usual, most often in relation to a regular-width member of the same type family.

EXP: EXPANDED

Another way of saying a really wide font, like “extended.” Expanded may be wider than extended.

FB: FONT BUREAU

A New England foundry.

FF: FONTFONT

The “house brand” of FontShop.

GR | GRK: GREEK

Usually means monotonic Greek, suitable for setting modern Greek, used since 1982. Classical Greek requires “polytonic” Greek, which is much less common.

HAIR: HAIRLINE

The lightest possible weight for a font, with strokes so thin they pretty nearly vanish at small sizes. Only usable at very large sizes!

HV | HVY: HEAVY. A VERY BOLD WEIGHT

Bolder than bold but not so bold as “black” or “ultra.”

IHOF: INTERNATIONAL HOUSE OF FONTS

A distribution imprint of the P22 foundry.

ITC: INTERNATIONAL TYPEFACE CORPORATION

A once-large foundry very influential in the 1970s and early 1980s, later bought by Monotype.

IT | ITAL: ITALIC

An angled companion to an upright face. Unlike oblique fonts, italic fonts are not merely slanted, but carefully designed counterparts to their upright companions, generally with noticeable design differences.

LEEC: LINOTYPE EXTENDED EUROPEAN CHARACTERS

A Linotype character set standard, roughly equivalent to Western + Central European (CE).

LP: LETTERPERFECT

A foundry featuring the designs of Garret Boge and Paul Shaw.

LT: LINOTYPE

A large foundry dating back to the 19th century (but see also Lt), later acquired by Monotype.

LT: LIGHT.

A font with strokes a bit thinner than usual. (But see also LT)

LTC: LANSTON TYPE CO.

Originally the US counterpart of Monotype a century ago, recently acquired by P22.

MED | MD: MEDIUM

A font with strokes just a tiny bit bolder than “regular”; in some families there may be a “Medium” in place of a “regular.”

M | MONO: MONOSPACED

A typewriter-like font in which all the characters have the same width. “M” by itself is URW’s abbreviation.

MT: MONOTYPE

A large foundry dating back to the 19th century.

MVB: MVB FONTS

A foundry, featuring the designs of Mark van Bronkhorst.

ND: NEUFVILLE DIGITAL.

A foundry.

NO2: NUMBER TWO

Designation used for a revised version of a font in a few cases.

NR | NARR: NARROW

A condensed font, sometimes in particular a font that has been simply squished mechanically, without being redrawn or adjusted so that the lines and curves look right (e.g. Helvetica Narrow, which is Helvetica but squished by 17%).

OB | OBL: OBLIQUE

A slanted counterpart to an upright font. Oblique differs from italic in that the design is essentially unchanged. In many cases there has not even been any compensation for the unpleasant optical effects caused by mechanical/mathematical slanting. Generally a real italic font is preferable. In most applications, hitting an “italic” button on a font that has no italic style available results in a particularly gruesome OS-improvised oblique, at about double the angle of typical designed obliques or italics. Compare Italic.

OFFC: OFFICE

Linotype’s standard for fonts intended to be mostly used in common office applications which are not necessarily OpenType savvy. Supplied as style-linked TrueType fonts. Alternate glyphs, if available, are put in separate fonts. Often have matching Pro versions.

OSF: OLDSTYLE FIGURES

Numbers that have parts that go up and down like lowercase text, instead of all being aligned the same. Georgia is a well-known typeface that has oldstyle figures as the default.

OT: OPENTYPE

A format for scalable computer fonts. Built on its predecessor TrueType, OpenType retained TrueType’s basic structure while adding many intricate data structures for prescribing typographic behavior. OpenType is a registered trademark of Microsoft Corporation.

PLUS: NOT AN ABBREVIATION, NOR A COMPLETELY STANDARDIZED TERM

For Japanese fonts can be the same as “Std” indicating the Adobe-Japan1-3 character set. OurType uses it to indicate a variant typeface that has longer ascenders/descenders than the version that does not have “Plus” in its name.

P: POSTER

A font intended for use at really huge sizes in print, such as 144 points and up. “P” by itself is URW’s abbreviation.

P22: FOUNDRY BASED IN BUFFALO, NY.

Not actually an abbreviation.

PR5, PR5N, PR6, PR6N: ADOBE’S JAPANESE CHARACTER SET STANDARDS

Pr5 indicates Adobe-Japan1-5, Pr6 is Adobe-Japan1-6. The “N” suffix indicates glyph shapes conform to the newer “JIS2004” Japanese standard.

PRO: PRO

Not an abbreviation, really. Can have different meanings depending on the foundry. Term first used by Adobe as a designation for western OpenType fonts that have added (at least) Central European language support in addition to Western European. They may have Greek and/or Cyrillic, but there is no guarantee. “Pro” is also used by Adobe for Japanese OpenType fonts with the Adobe-Japan1-4 character set.

PS:

Either “PostScript” (as in PostScript Type 1 format, or compatibility with a PostScript version of the same typeface), OR “Proportionally Spaced” (as opposed to monospaced).

PT: PARATYPE

A large foundry from Russia.

PTF: PORCHEZ TYPOFONDERIE

A foundry from France, featuring the designs of Jean François Porchez (pronounced Zhon Frahn’-swah Pore-shezz’).

REG: REGULAR

This is usually in reference to weight, but it can also be width related.

RO: ROMANIAN

Generally used for older fonts where there would be many different fonts with different language support. Romanian support is generally included in “CE” (Central European) fonts as well. New fonts tend to have all such languages in the main font file.

RTF: RIMMER TYPE FOUNDRY.

A foundry. Later acquired by P22.

SC: SMALL CAPS.

Usually indicates small caps in place of lower case letters in the font. Often combined with oldstyle figures (OsF).

SM | SEMI:

A weight in between regular and bold. Can also be used as an adjective with “condensed” or “expanded” to indicate an intermediate width font.

SM TEXT | SM: SMALL TEXT

A font designed for use at small text sizes in print, such as about 9 pt. Smaller than “regular” but not as small as “caption.”

STD: STANDARD

Can have different meanings depending on the foundry. Invented by Adobe as a designation for western OpenType fonts that do not have added language support beyond Western European. Also used by them for Japanese OpenType fonts with the Adobe-Japan1-3 character set.

SUBH: SUBHEAD

A font intended for use at intermediate sizes between body text and display. Term standardized by Adobe around 2000.

T: TEXT

A font intended for use at body text sizes in print. Abbreviation used only by URW.

T1: TYPE 1, OR “POSTSCRIPT TYPE 1”

A font format invented by Adobe circa 1984, that had separate Mac, Windows and Unix flavors. Not supported as a web font format and not much seen in new releases, having been replaced by OpenType. But still a dominant part of many graphic designer’s type collections.

TH: THIN

A designation of font weight which is bolder than “hairline,” but lighter than “light”; much lighter than “regular.” Often only usable at larger sizes.

TT | TTF: TRUETYPE

A font format invented by Apple circa 1991, and licensed to Microsoft. Originally had separate Mac and Windows versions, but the Windows “TTF” flavor has become dominant, except for Mac system fonts. Also the basis of OpenType.

TU | TURK: TURKISH

Generally used for older fonts where there would be many different fonts with different language support. Turkish support is generally included in “CE” (Central European) fonts as well. New fonts tend to have all such languages in the main font file.

ULT: ULTRA

May be short for “Ultra Black” or “Ultra Bold” which would be the heaviest possible weight. Sometimes also used with “Light” or “Lt” to indicate an extremely light weight with very thin strokes.

URW | URW++: A FOUNDRY.

No longer an abbreviation, as they no longer use their original full name at all (Unternehmensberatung Rubow Weber is a bit of a mouthful!). The original URW (1972) went bankrupt, and was revived as URW++ in 1995. The name is a play on the name of the programming language C++, a sequel to C.

X: SHORT FOR “EXTRA”

See “Ex, Ext” above.

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