

# PHOTOSHOP TYPOGRAPHY: ELEMENTS OF THE CHARACTER PANEL



Learn how to utilize Photoshop typography to create stunning images by effectively pairing text and photos together.

Many Photoshop users don't have access to other programs that allow them to combine type with images, such as Adobe InDesign.

Adobe knows that many people use Photoshop to create text-and-image documents, and has expanded the type tools available to Photoshop users.

In light of this, I've started the "Photoshop Typography" series to help you make your type in Photoshop look professional.

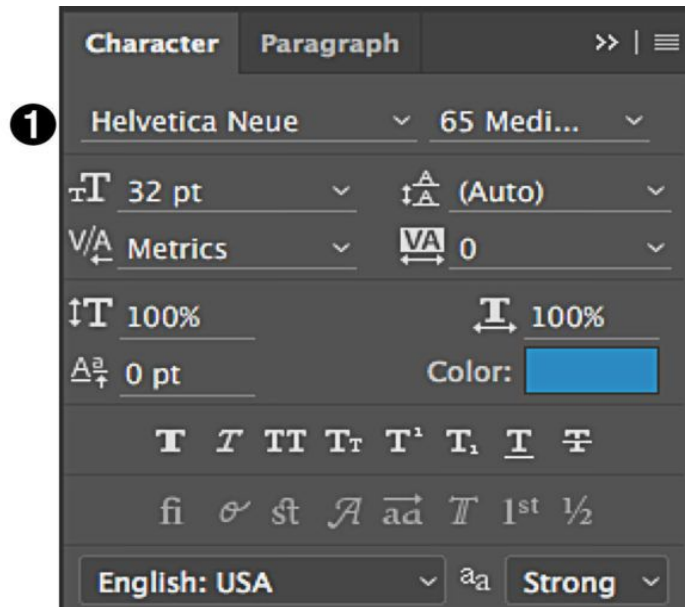
## **THE CHARACTER PANEL IN PHOTOSHOP**

Open Character panel by going to Type Menu → Panels → Type Panel.

You can also type Cmd/Ctrl-T to open the window. All sorts of type choices and options become available to you through this window.

It's time to go exploring. I've numbered various areas to draw your attention.

## #1 – Select A Font



Pick the font you want by clicking on the name of the font at the top left of the panel – the screenshot is currently showing Helvetica Neue.

Click on the downward pointing arrow at the right of the box to see the whole menu of fonts currently available, or put your cursor at the front the field and type the first few letters of the font name you want.

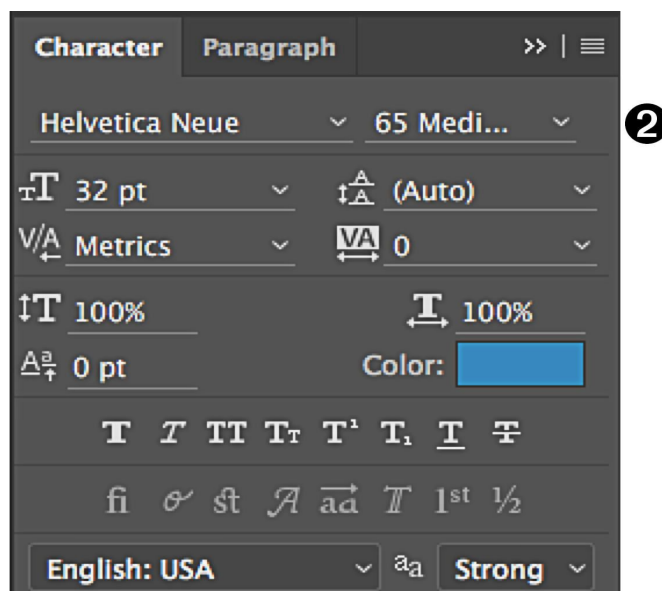
Photoshop will automatically display the font you type from the first few letters.

By the way, if you have a font you want to install and use, you can install it at any time, and do not have to restart Photoshop to use the newly installed font.

When you install a new font, you may notice that Photoshop will hesitate a second or two the first time after installation when you click on this menu, while it updates its inventory of available font choices.

This is normal, and certainly nicer than having to restart.

## #2 – Pick A Specific Style Of Font



Across from the font's name, you pick the specific style of your font; e.g. Bold, Light Italic, etc.

You can click and hold to see all the options in any installed font family.

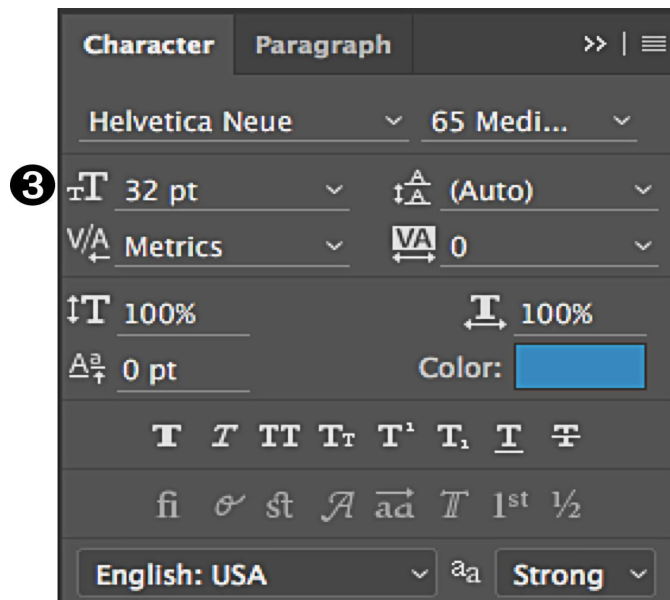
This is useful when trying to use varying weights and widths to provide visual contrast while using only one or two font families for a polished final document.

Each option is previewed using the word “Sample” next to the name, so you can compare.

You can also select a block of type, then put your cursor in the Styles box and move up and down using the arrow keys to compare styles, as Photoshop automatically applies the type to your selection to show you a preview of how your type will appear.

This tip of using arrows to raise and lower values in a box applies to all the boxes in this panel, not just this one.

### **#3 – Pick A Type Size**



Pick the size of type you want here. By default, the number refers to points (pt). There are 72 points in an inch.

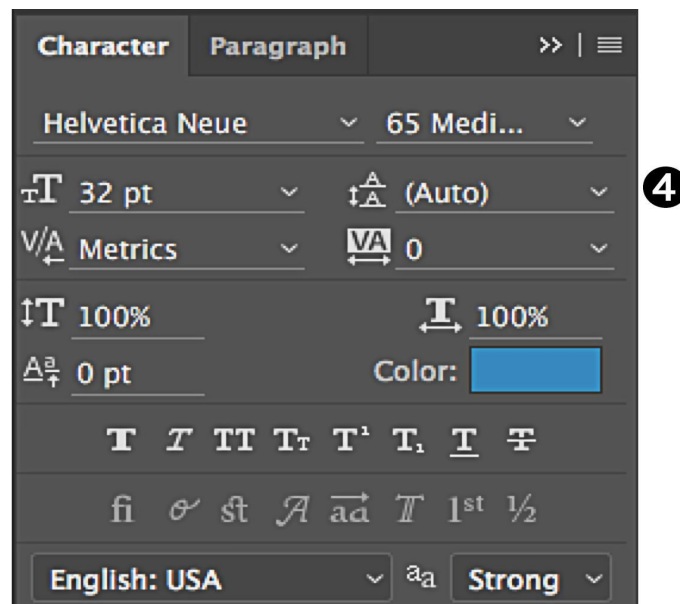
You can also type in other units of measure, such as 1 inch, and Photoshop will figure out the exact equivalent point size and show the result in points.

You can choose one of the preset type sizes in the pulldown, such as 18 pt type, or key in a custom size.

You can use the arrow keys to raise or lower the point size simply by selecting the number in the point field, then tapping on the up and down arrows.

The entire selection of highlighted type will change size as you use the arrows.

#### #4 – Set The Leading



This field sets the leading, a term meaning the space between each line. It's a legacy of when all type was set by hand, and the metal strips used to separate each line of metal type were made of lead.

You can either keep the leading value set to automatic or set a number.

By default, the automatic leading setting is 120% of the type size you choose. So, if you choose 30 point type, the automatic leading will be 36 points.

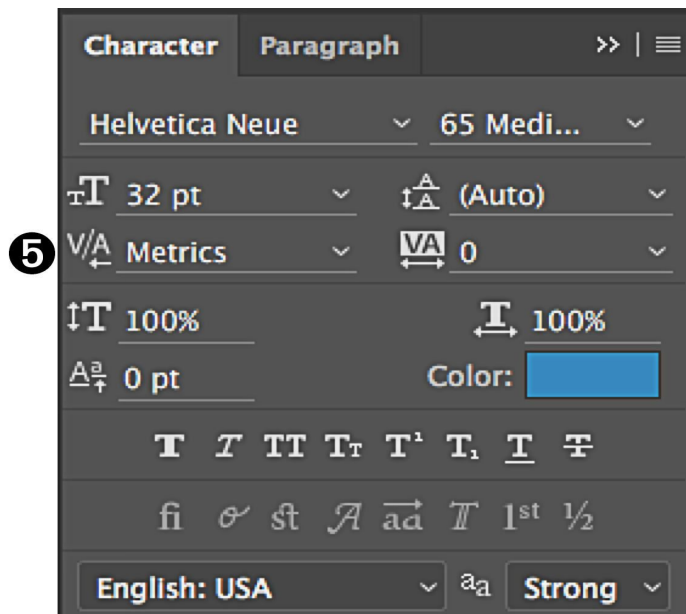
This default can be changed permanently in Photoshop by opening the Paragraph Panel, selecting Justification from the flyout menu, and changing the value from 120% to something else.

We'll talk more about the Paragraph Panel later.

If you'd like a bit more or less space between lines, for effect or to enhance legibility, you can set a specific number, such as 30 points with 42 point leading, sometimes written as 30/42 (thirty over forty-two).

For best results, every single space and character in every line you want to change must be selected first, before you change the leading value.

## **#5 – Set The Kerning**



Metrics vs. Optical lets you select between two different ways of spacing between type automatically. To see what they do, select a block of type, and click on the pulldown arrow.

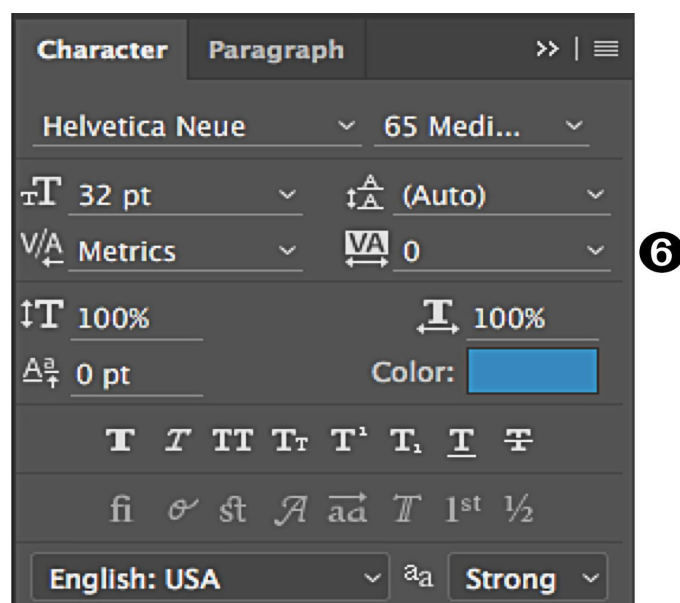
Click on Optical. Most of the spacing will change and frequently will result in a more pleasing arrangement of your type.

I almost always use Optical, but will always check Metrics to see if I like it better.

Regardless of which you choose, it's important to check individual kerning pairs in your type to make sure each pair works well.

This is particularly important when working with inexpensive fonts, as the quality of each font's kerning depends on how much care and time type designers invest in building the spacing between each pair of letters.

## #6 – When Needed, Change The Tracking



This box lets you change the spacing between individual letters, using the tracking control.

Font designers build numerical spacing values into their font designs to provide automatic tracking, varying spaces between letters proportionately, helping the different shapes of letters fit together in the most balanced fashion.

Many Photoshop users will never need to touch this box, but people who are persnickety about type often use this to adjust the spacing between individual letter pairs.

Not all fonts are created equal, and you may find the particular font you're using doesn't have perfect automatic kerning.

In my own case, I frequently need to adjust kerning in my last name.

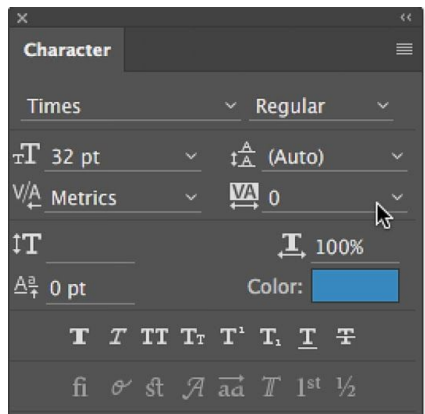
It seems to be a challenge to space the O, the apostrophe and the C of O'Connor correctly in many fonts, so I adjust the kerning pairs manually to tighten up or loosen the space between individual sets of characters for best results.

For a specific size and style that I'll use often, such as putting my name on a print, I'll make the properly kerned type into a brush that I can use to click once to stamp my name, elegantly kerned, whenever I need it.

## **#7 – Scale Fonts With Type Height**



When you do so, some fonts will scale much more attractively than others, as shown in the sample below.

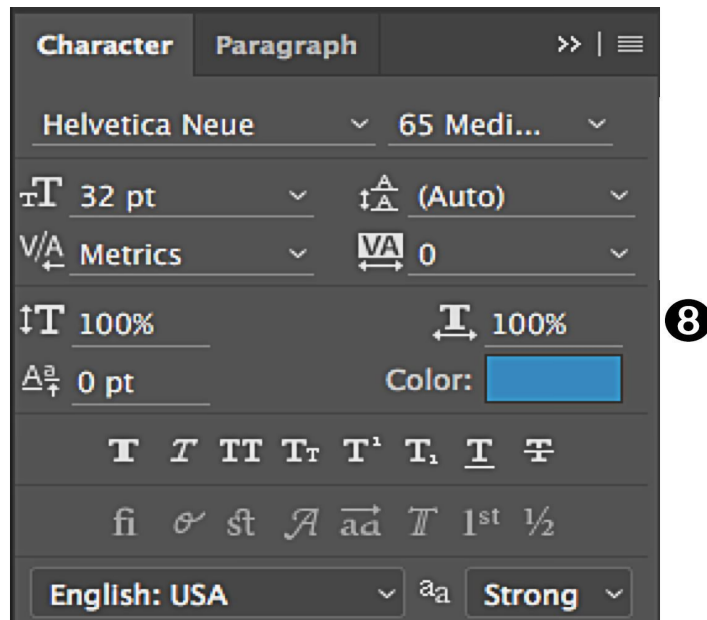


A A box of typ

The comparison to the original size A shows the more slender appearance of the stretched A, though a closer look at the serifs (the little cross bars at the bottom of the letter) shows they didn't scale correctly, and look a bit heavy.

Many letters look much worse when scaled this way. Still, always approach this tool carefully.

## #8 – Scale Fonts With Type Width



The width of the type can be scaled in the same way.

In my experience, it's more common to see artists scaling type horizontally to make type fit than to scale it vertically, and only after they have tried using the two tools directly above in this panel, usually setting Optical kerning and then tightening up tracking.

When adjusting the fitting between individual letters or in entire paragraphs doesn't quite make the grade, a couple percentage points wider or narrower can be applied without being too obvious.

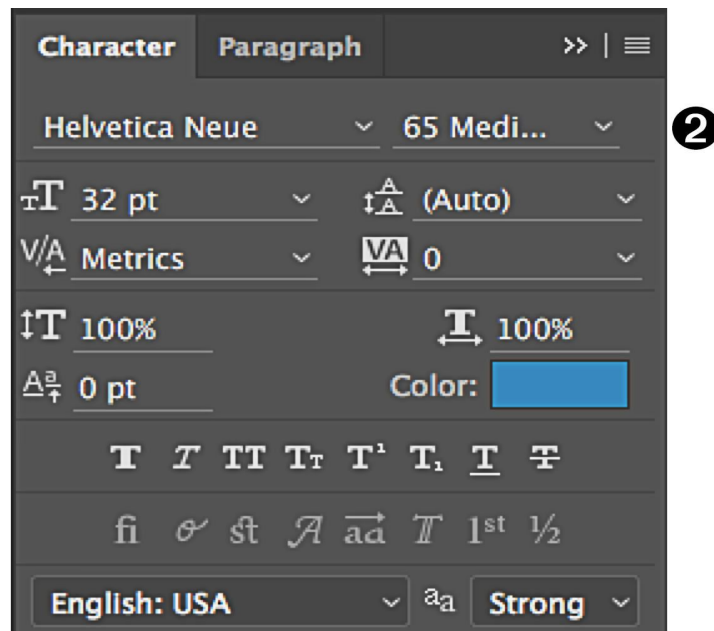
Here, the same 171% previously applied to the A for height makes a very wide letter, compared to the normal A just before it, and the scaled A before the normal A.

The image displays three variations of the uppercase letter 'A' in a blue serif font. The first 'A' is the standard height and width. The second 'A' is significantly wider, maintaining its original height. The third 'A' is both wider and taller, representing a full 171% scale. To the right of these three letters, the words 'box of type' are written in the same blue serif font.

As an alternative to scaling your type wider or narrower, some font families include Extended or Wide versions, in addition to normal.

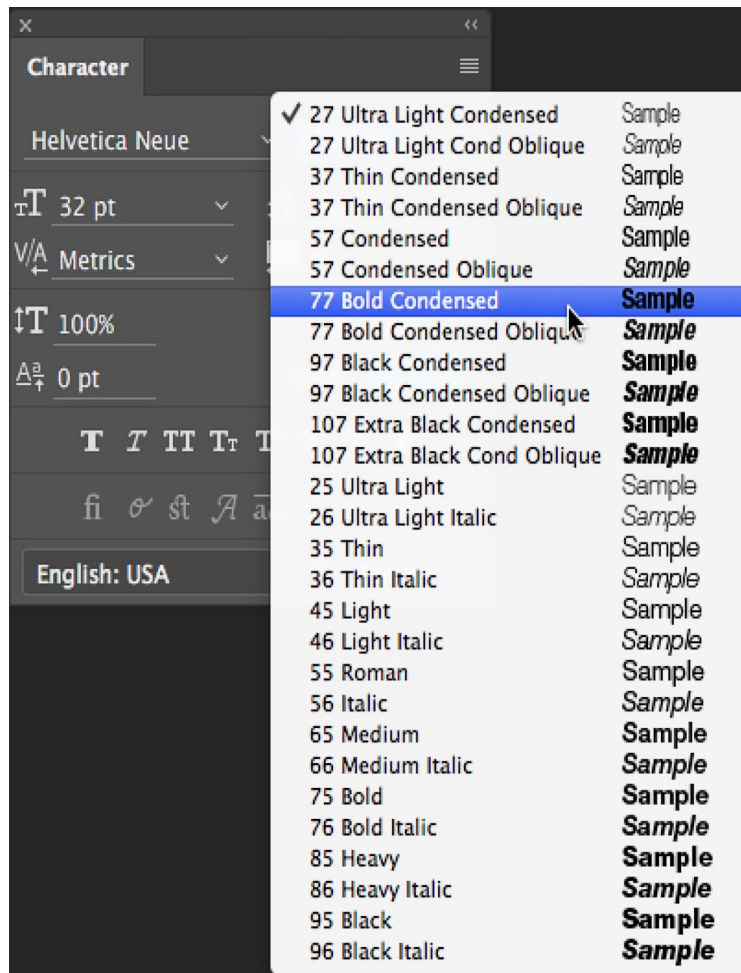
These deliberately-drawn wider or narrower versions of glyphs show good balance and aesthetics and are visually preferable to using Photoshop to scale a letter for effect.

The best thing to do is to check the font you have already first, by clicking on the type styles pulldown menu identified with a 2 below.



When you do this, all the styles available in a particular font will appear for you to choose, and you can see if you have condensed or expanded versions of a particular font you like, as shown in the screen capture below.

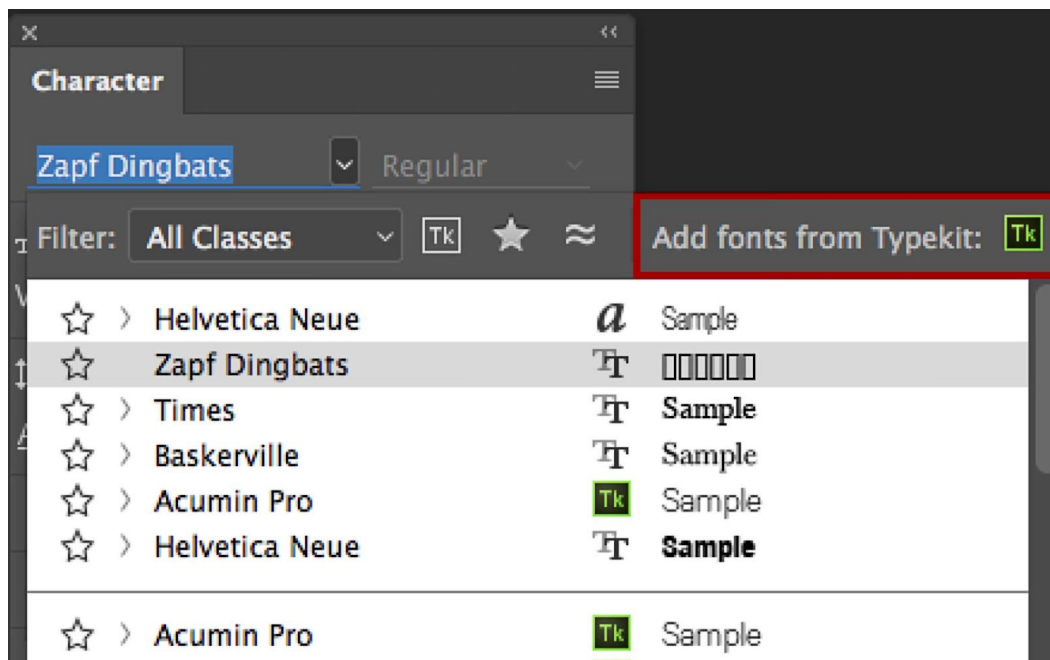
In this font, an Extended set is also available, though I don't have it installed on my computer currently.



If you don't have any fonts that offer Extended or Condensed character sets, you have access to various options.

Your monthly Photoshop subscription includes access to a wide selection of fonts in various styles, varying depending on which subscription you have.

To find new fonts included in your monthly subscription, you can go to the first field at left in Photoshop's Character Panel, where the current font name is displayed.

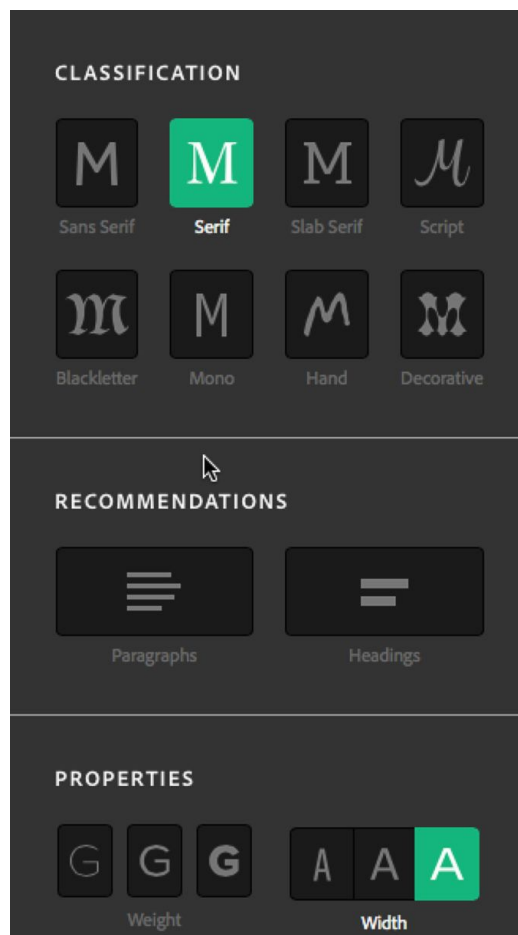


Click on the arrow to the right of the name of the font menu to display all available fonts, and then click on the area outlined in red in the screenshot above.

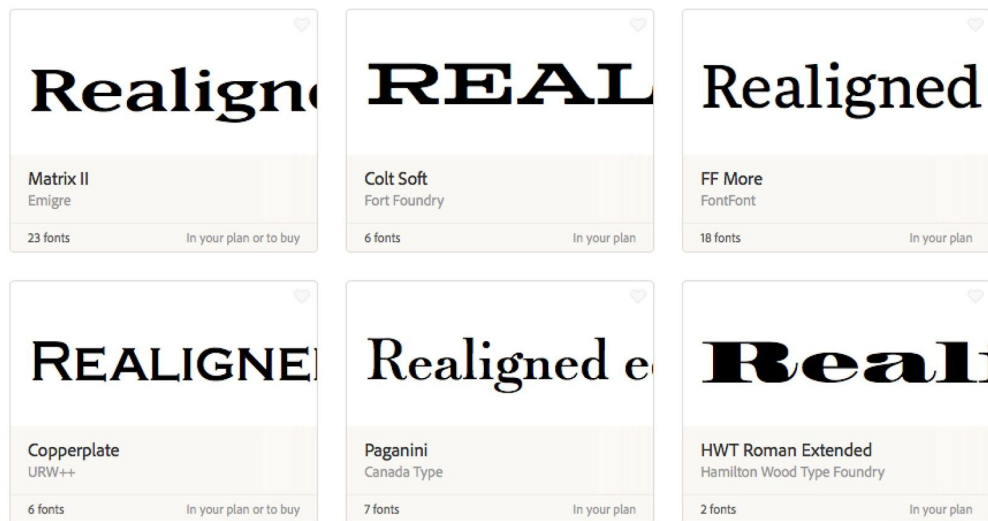
When you do this, your default browser will open, and you'll be connected to an Adobe selection window offering a variety of typefaces.

At the right of the screen, you'll see a panel allowing you to select by style, as shown in the screenshot below, so that if you are seeking fonts with extended styles, or condensed styles, you can search using specific criteria just by clicking on the buttons.

In the screen capture, I've selected Serif fonts and extended (wider) characters.

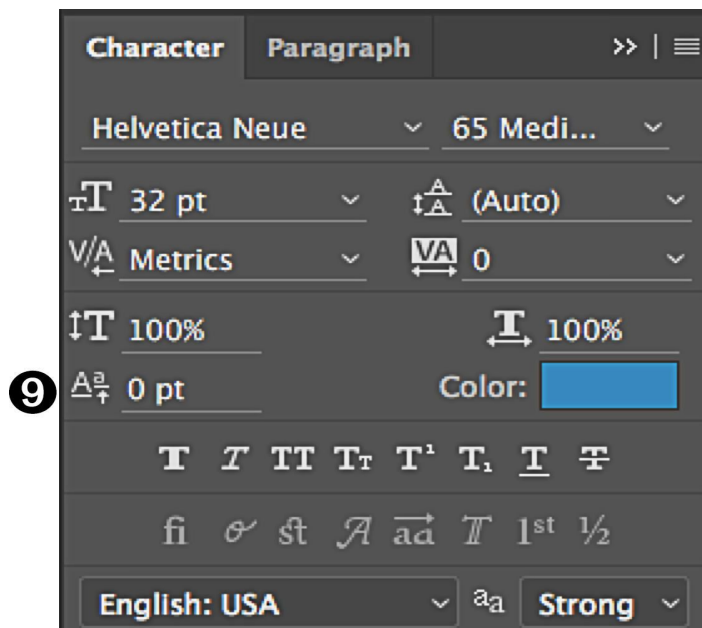


Various font families will be presented, and the larger the number of fonts in the family, the more variations you can choose.



Thus, in the screen capture above, the font Matrix II has 23 styles, while the font Realigned has only 7 styles. More options are usually better.

## #9 – Adjust With The Baseline Shift Tool

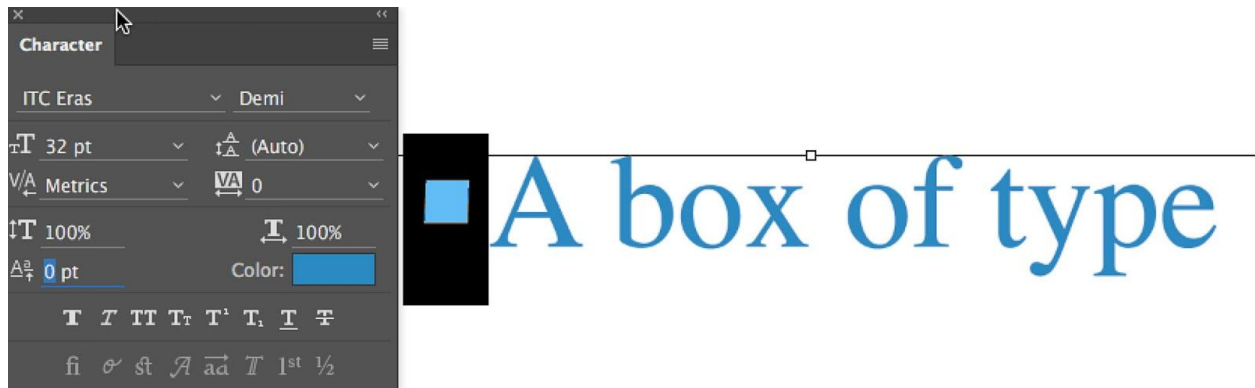


The Baseline Shift tool lets you select one or more characters to move up or down relative to the baseline.

Some people use this tool to make a line of type go exactly where they want it, instead of fine-tuning leading for this line or this block of type.

This should be done sparingly, if at all, so that if you need to make changes you're not having to change a whole bunch of baseline adjustments after changing.

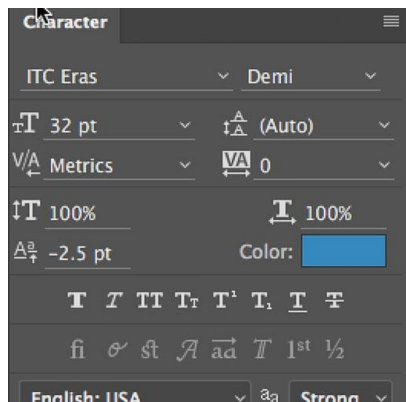
Other times, the tool is used to move a single character to adjust it for visual perfection.



In the sample shown above, I've added a bullet using ITC Eras, a font which has a squared-off bullet shape I like to use, but with a slight change.

The bullet sits a bit high for my taste relative to the baseline, so I'll move it down using the baseline shift tool, visually balancing it against the letters.

I may use the arrow keys to test moving it up and down to see the effect of one or two more points up or down.

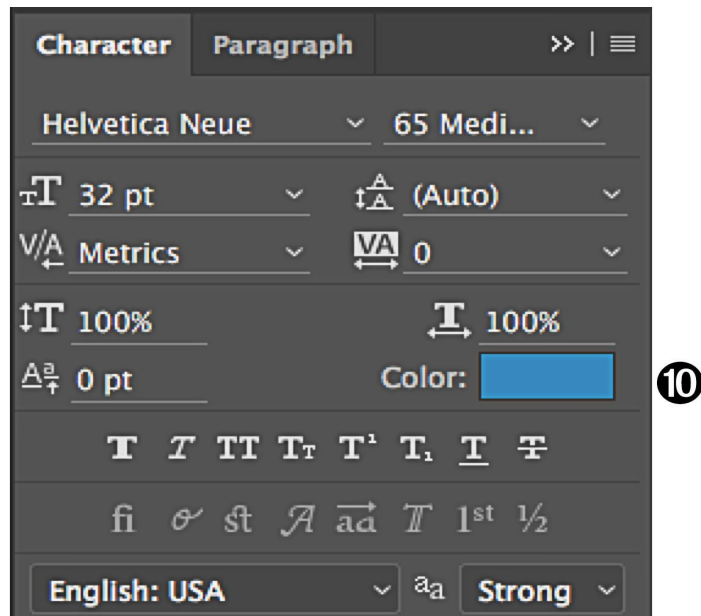


■ A box of type

In the screenshot above, I've applied a negative value of 2.5 points to the highlighted bullet, which moves it down, the better to balance its center with the cross-stroke of the A and the center of the lower case characters in the whole line of type.

I think this looks nicer, as shown above (some type lovers will disagree).

## #10 – Modify Type With The Color Box



The Color box lets you modify a selection of type, from one character to all characters, by highlighting the text you want to change, then double-clicking on the Color box to select any color you desire for your text.

You can select a color by clicking on the big square showing various shades of color, or on the slider to move the color range to a range of color more to your liking.

In addition, if you have specific color values required for a particular job, such as logo colors, you can type them into the various color systems shown (HSB, RGB, Lab, or CMYK).

Remember to set your color profile correctly for your document, in order to be sure your color matches.

For example, a set of CMYK values typed into one profile's document may deliver a different red when typing into a different document with a different color profile.



In the example shown, I selected text in blue, and then chose a bright red.

The new color box at the top displays a warning that the color selected is outside the printable gamut of the color selected, by showing a triangle with an exclamation mark in it next to the new color's box.

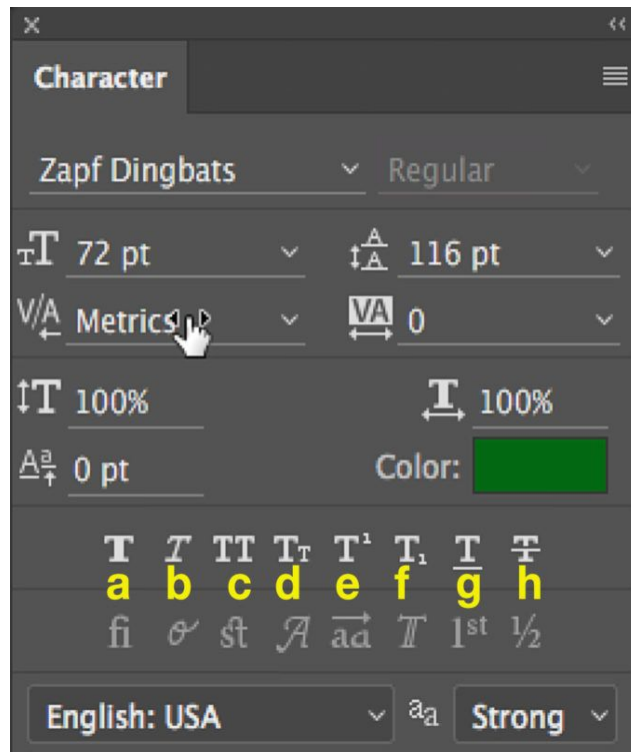
Your options are two: if the current profile is required for use, pick a different shade that will not trigger the gamut warning, or assign a different profile with a larger gamut, if this is permitted in your workflow.

Assigning a different color profile in a workflow that won't honor it correctly is usually disastrous, so if you are preparing files to go elsewhere, it's important to be sure the recipient of your file will be able to print using the newly-assigned profile.

Check with the print provider for their requirements to be certain you're giving them an optimal file for best results, and be sure your choice of a different profile doesn't change the image in ways you don't like.

Sometimes, it will be necessary to convert the image to the new profile (Edit Menu → Convert to Profile → select the profile and use Relative Colorimetric rendering intent to convert) before picking the color you want to use.

## STYLES AND FINISHING TOUCHES



These tools here modify selected type by applying various styles to them.

Using the letters in yellow which I added to the screenshot, I'd like to tell you what each tool does.

## A – Faux Bold

Faux Bold  
Faux Bold

This tool applies a Faux Bold style to characters. Faux (pronounced Foe) is a French word meaning artificial or false.

So, if you select a block of type, and you click on the chubby-looking T character shown with a yellow 'a' below it, Photoshop attempts to bold a normal font by thickening it up, faking a true bold style.

This is almost never preferable to using a correctly drawn bold version of a font.

## B – Faux Italic

Faux Italic  
*Faux Italic*

This tool applies a Faux Italic style by leaning characters over to the right.

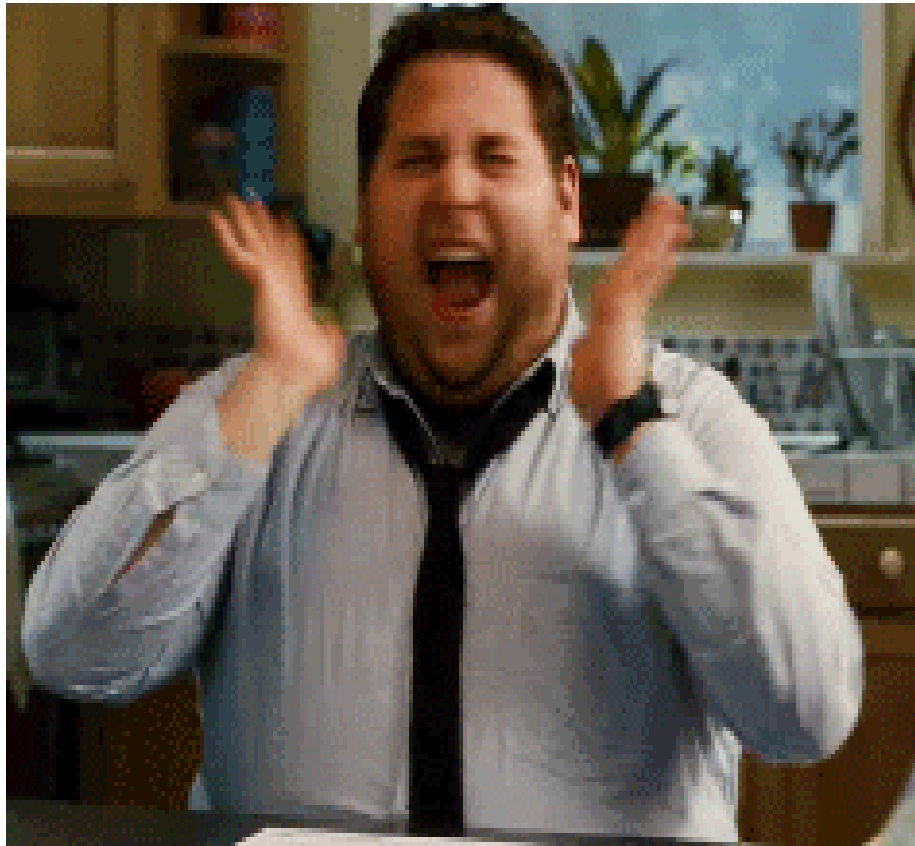
Again, a correctly drawn italic, sometimes called by other names, such as Oblique, is preferable to faking one.

## C – All Caps

All Caps  
ALL CAPS

This tool applies the All Caps command.

What have we said previously about using All Caps makes it seem as if you're SHOUTING at someone? Most of the time, Small Caps shows much more class.



D – Small Caps

Small Caps  
SMALL CAPS

Text set with capital first letters and lowercase can be changed to Small Caps using this button.

It changes any lower case letters in your type selection so that they are scaled down versions of the capital letters.

Good small cap typesetting can be very elegant and is usually preferable to all capitals.

However, instead of using this button, for most elegant results, find a font that has a correctly drawn set of small caps, instead of applying this faux effect.

## **E – Superscript**

Superscript  
**Superscript**

This button makes the type smaller, and raises the baseline of the selected character(s), making a super-script.

Superscripts are most often used to footnote, or to describe order, such as 2<sup>nd</sup>.

## **F – Subscript**

Subscript  
Subscript

Yep; you guessed it; this tool does the same thing as the Superscript tool, but the Subscript tool drops the letters below the baseline and scales them smaller.

## G – Underline

Underline  
Underline

The Underline tool works like any other Underline button. This is not a good thing, as underlining is a relic of the manual typewriter.

Now that we no longer need typewriters, changing the font for emphasis is preferable to putting a line under type that will often run right through descending characters, a serious typesetting error.

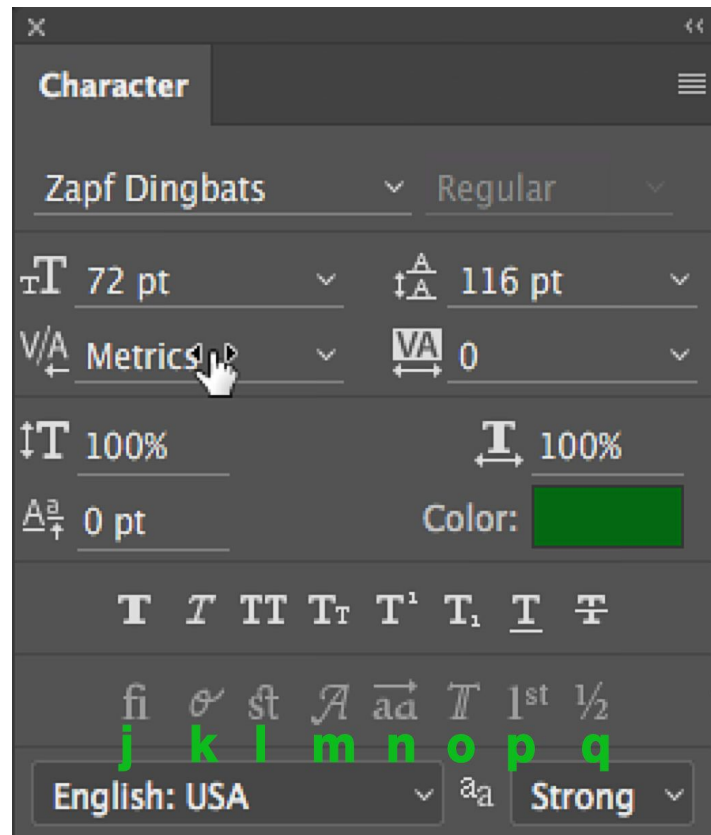
## H – Strikethrough

Strikethrough  
~~Strikethrough~~

The Strikethrough tool applies a line through the middle of characters you've selected, just as its name implies.

I have never used this tool in Photoshop, but I'm sure somebody, somewhere, finds it useful.

## FLOURISHES AND SPECIAL TOUCHES



The bottom row of buttons allows you to add some nice touches to your type, making it more decorative or more professional looking, or both.

I've put new letters in green to identify each tool.

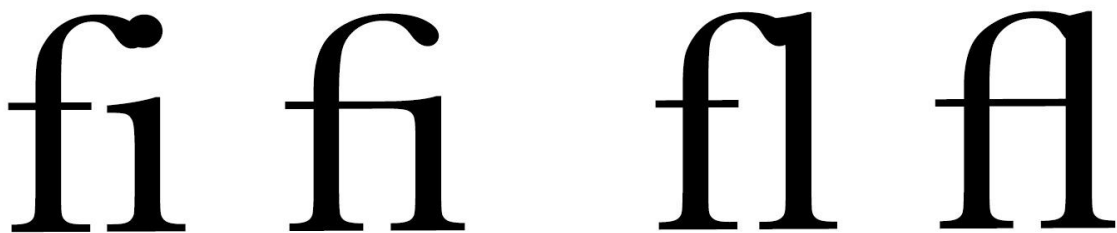
## J – Standard Ligatures

A ligature is a specially drawn character (glyph) which connects two or more characters together into one.

The most common examples for this are the letters f and l, and f and i, fl and fi, drawn as one glyph.

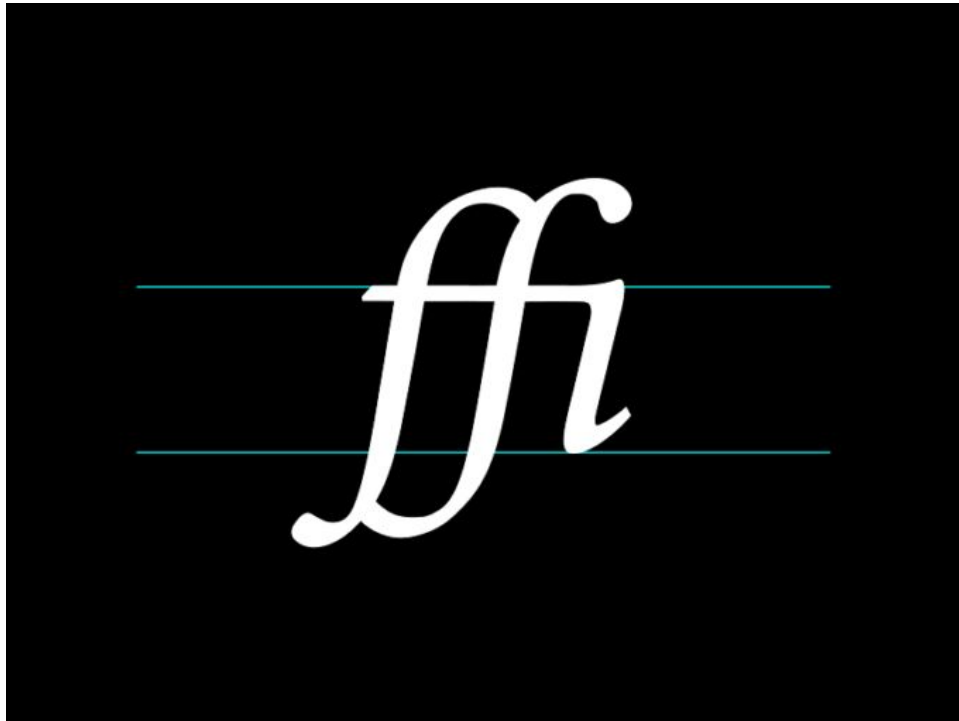
These are drawn as one character for aesthetic reasons.

It looks better drawn this way, than to have the dot over the “i”, for example, bumping into the “f”, as shown in the image here, or the rounded serif of the “f” banging into the “i”.



Some fonts include discretionary ligatures for letter pairs such as ct, st, and ft.

Note that when ligatures are substituted by the program automatically, even though the characters in ligatures appear to be joined, they are fully editable and do not cause the spell checker to flag a word erroneously.



Typographers use ligatures and other special characters to elegance to their typesetting—and you can also.

Earlier font technologies (Type 1 and TrueType) were limited in the number of characters (glyphs) that could be stored in each font, having an upper limit of a maximum of 256 characters per font.

If you want more characters, such as an extended selection of ligatures, it would be necessary to install a second font, which extends the character set offered.

These fonts are called Expert Sets.

OpenType fonts can store much more characters than this limit (most recently 128,172 separate glyphs), so if you're interested in using ligatures, you'll usually do best with OpenType fonts.

Other special characters often part of the extended glyph set in high-quality OpenType fonts include specially accented characters for languages other than English, and in some cases, even different alphabets, such as Greek or Cyrillic.

## **Adobe *Jenson* Pro**

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ  
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

It's hard to find out which fonts have extended ligature sets without doing a little sleuthing, but in case you're interested, some of the fonts which are often

used to demonstrate extended ligature sets include Adobe Jensen Pro, Adobe Caslon Pro, Bickham Script Pro, and ITC Avant Garde Gothic Pro.

In general, the word "Pro" after the font name indicates an OpenType font with an extended ligature set.

Before you buy a font, it's important to find a glyph chart for the entire character set, to be sure the special characters you need are part of the set.

Responsible font designers and vendors will make these available, either online or as a downloadable PDF.

## K – Contextual Alternates

Contextual alternates (enabled using the second button from the left in the Character Panel) are alternate characters included in some script typefaces to provide better joining behavior.

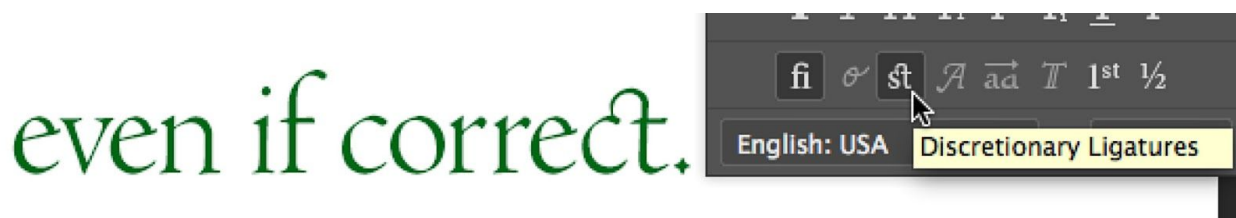
*blossom vs. blossom*



For example, when using Bickham Script Pro with contextual alternates enabled, the letter pair “bl” in the word “blossom” is joined so that it looks more like handwriting.

## L – Discretionary Ligatures

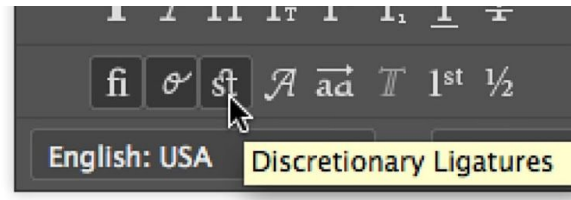
While some ligatures are automatically enabled by clicking on the Contextual Alternates button, with Photoshop assuming you’ll like the changes it makes, others can be made at your discretion, one by one.



For example, in the word “correct”, selecting the word in Photoshop, then clicking on the Discretionary Ligatures button changes the “c” and the “t” to a glyph joining the two together with a curved link at the top.

Some people will think this is elegant; others find it a bit affected, hence the need for using discretion.

*offbeat v. offbeat*



The second example shows a dramatic contrast between the two “ffs” default design on the left and the discretionary ligature which Photoshop selected to replace the double “f” shown on the right.

It’s best to use these judiciously, striking a good balance that doesn’t detract from your words’ message.

### **M – Swash, Usually For Capital Letters**

A swash is a decorative style of drawing a character with a certain flair, which can be used as an alternate to the standard drawing of characters.

Some swashes are shown below.

These are often reserved for the first letter in a line of type, rather than using them for each word in a line.

This is a question of differing tastes rather than a hard and fast rule.

A A B B C C D D E E F F G G



In a font such as Bickham Script Pro, multiple options exist for using lots and LOTS of swashes, often several different options for the character(s) you’ve chosen.

You can see alternates in the screen capture above.

It’s always good to check the options in the Glyphs Panel to see what choice you’ll like the best. To do this, select the type you want to change, such as the word “of” shown below, and then click on various buttons.

Clicking on the Swash button does nothing, but clicking on the Contextual Alternates button gives you one choice, clicking on the Discretionary Ligatures button gives you a different look, and clicking on the Stylistic Alternates button gives you a third look – this one being not particularly effective because it applies alternates to the letters “o” and “f” separately.

Even with these options, two of the five glyphs available for the word “of” in this font aren’t shown until you go to the Glyphs Panel.

A large number of other stylized glyphs are offered for various other letter combinations in various fonts.

## N – Stylistic Alternates

Pretty cool, eh? There are four choices here for the word “of”.

You’ll notice the Glyphs palette clips the tail of the f in “of” on a couple of the bigger glyphs.



You can make the displayed glyph size smaller in the Glyphs Panel to see more detail.

Not every character will have multiple stylistic alternates, but they’re always worth searching out, to add special touches to your typesetting.

## O – Titling Alternates

Titling Alternates are usually employed when setting larger type, and almost always are capital letters or start with capital letters.



You can see in this screenshot that the “Th” in “This” offers two different ways of setting the capital “T” with an “h”, one with a bigger flourish.

## P – Ordinals

Ordinal numbers tell the position of something in a list/series. 1st and 2nd are ordinals, for example.

When ordinals are typeset correctly, they look like this: 1st and 2nd.

Selecting the ordinal you typed and clicking on the ordinals button will change the letters after the number for some fonts.

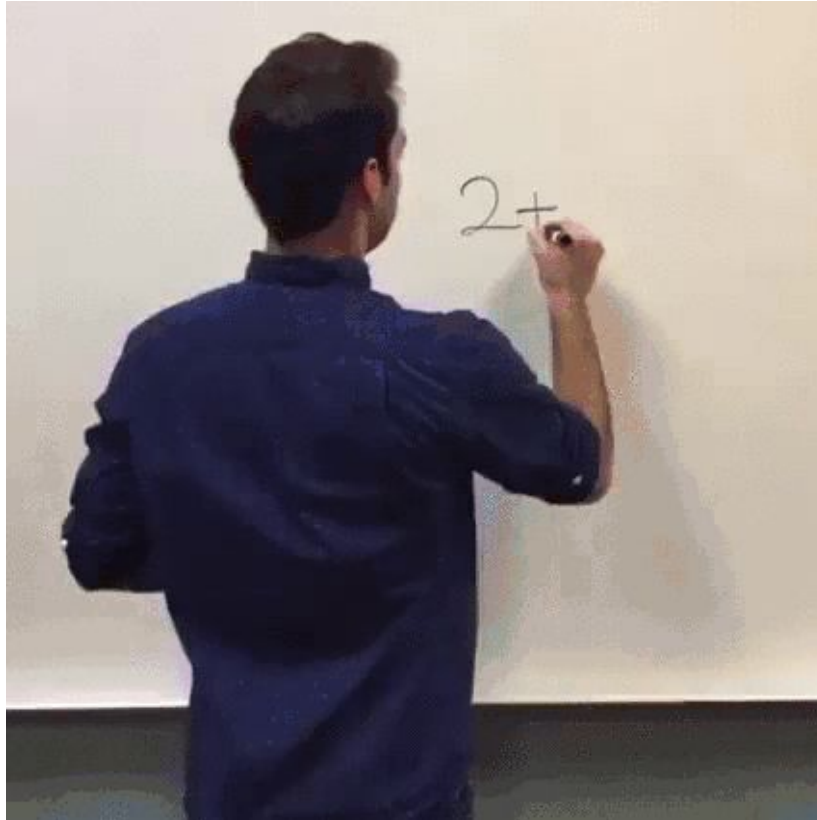
For others, you'll have to find the glyphs manually in the panel, double-clicking on them with your text cursor inserted where you want the ordinal characters to appear.

## **Q – Fractions**

Of course, you could always have your fractions look like this: 1/5, 2/7, etc. However, great typesetting requires diagonal fractions, which look like this:  $\frac{1}{5}$ ,  $\frac{2}{7}$ , etc.

In well-designed fonts, certain frequently used fractions are pre-built as one glyph, such as  $\frac{1}{2}$ ,  $\frac{3}{4}$ , etc.

Some extremely well-built OpenType fonts will have more fractions built as one glyph.



To take advantage of these in Photoshop, select the type, and click on the Fractions button in the Character Panel (letter q in the graphic above).

Those glyphs that match the fractions you typed will be converted automatically.

For all others, use the Glyphs Panel to find the correctly-drawn ascending character (the numerator), then type a standard forward slash, then use the Glyphs Panel again to find the denominator (the descending character).

## FINDING A FONT YOU WANT TO MATCH

A fairly recent addition to Photoshop allows you to find a font you're trying to match using image & pattern recognition.

Adobe recommends that you choose only a single line of text when using this tool.

If you'd like to try it out, use the Marquee tool to draw a box around a line of type, excluding any edges of type characters above or below the line you've selected.

Then, from the Type Menu, select "Match Type". A bounding box with adjustable handles appears using the selection marquee you drew, and next to it, the fonts found to match your selection—Shazam! Multiple options are shown, in a list, as shown below.



You can adjust the crop of your selection if needed to ensure best results. In this example, Hoefler Text Regular was the font used, and it was identified quickly and correctly.

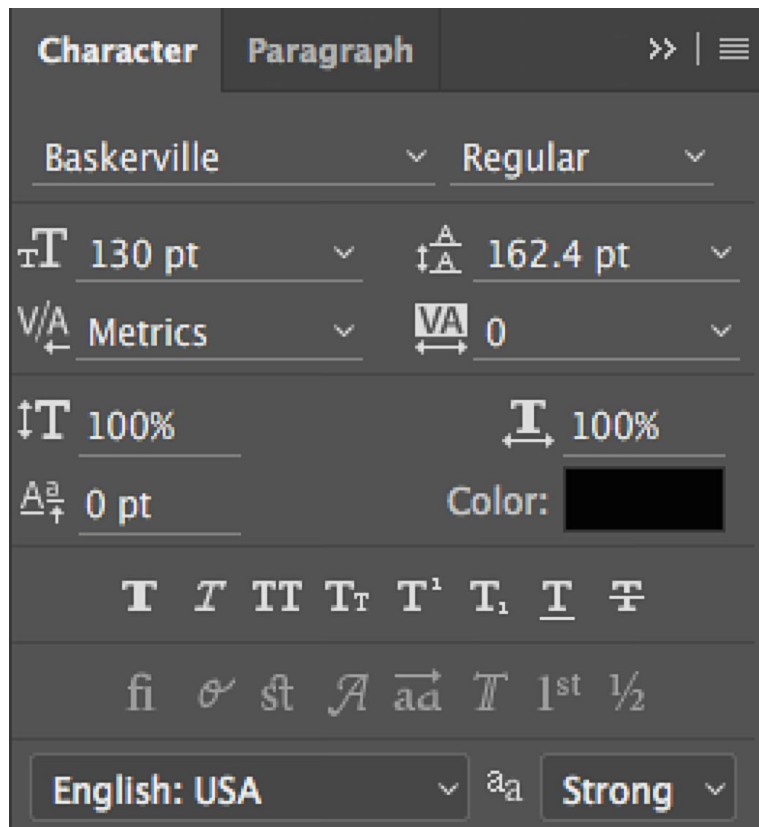
A couple cautionary notes for this tool: be sure to only select one typeface and style.

Mixing them will damage your chances of getting the correct match. It's also important to avoid distorted or crooked images to improve accuracy.

## **LANGUAGE AND ANTI-ALIASING CHOICES**

On the left, the very last line of the Character Panel provides choices for the language dictionary used for a type selection, such as when you use a French phrase within the block of English text, or when you want to set type entirely in a language other than your default choice.

This can be handy when you don't feel totally comfortable with your ability to type in another language, as you can use Photoshop's built-in spell-checker to help flag and fix any unusual characters or spelling errors.



To the right of this selection pull-down menu, you can choose from several different anti-aliasing treatments of the type you've selected.

Anti-aliasing is a technique used to address the stair-stepping effect on type edges drawn by Photoshop at lower resolutions.

Photoshop averages the color values of the pixels at an edge of an image to smooth out the edges.

The names of the anti-aliasing choices give some hint to how each will change the type's appearance.

The image shows the words "fox" and "ju" in a green, pixelated serif font. The letters are composed of a grid of small squares, with some squares being lighter or darker than others to create a smooth, anti-aliased appearance. The font is a classic serif style, and the overall effect is a digital, pixelated version of a traditional typeface.

In the first screen capture, the setting used is “Strong”.

Notice that most pixels are fully solid, but toward the edges, they display in varying shades of lighter and darker but not solid values. This is the averaging mentioned earlier.

The image shows the words "fox" and "ju" in a green serif font. The letters are smooth and have a slight blur, indicating that anti-aliasing is applied. A small mouse cursor is visible near the top of the letter 'j'.

By contrast, the second image shows the “None” setting for anti-aliasing.

The image shows the words "fox" and "ju" in a green serif font. The letters are pixelated and have a jagged appearance, indicating that no anti-aliasing is applied. A small mouse cursor is visible near the top of the letter 'j'.

The third image shows the “Crisp” setting, which uses different averaging.

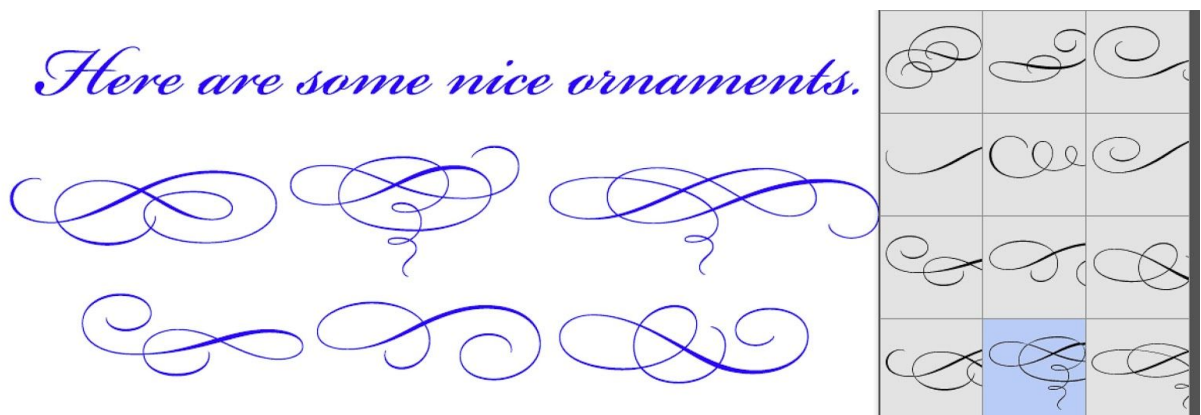
Best advice? Try several, viewing at 100% onscreen, to be sure you choose the one you like best.

## ORNAMENTS: A FINAL TOOL FOR ADDING FLOURISHES AND FINESSE

The Glyphs Panel can show you decorative glyphs drawn to add unique identity to a particular font.

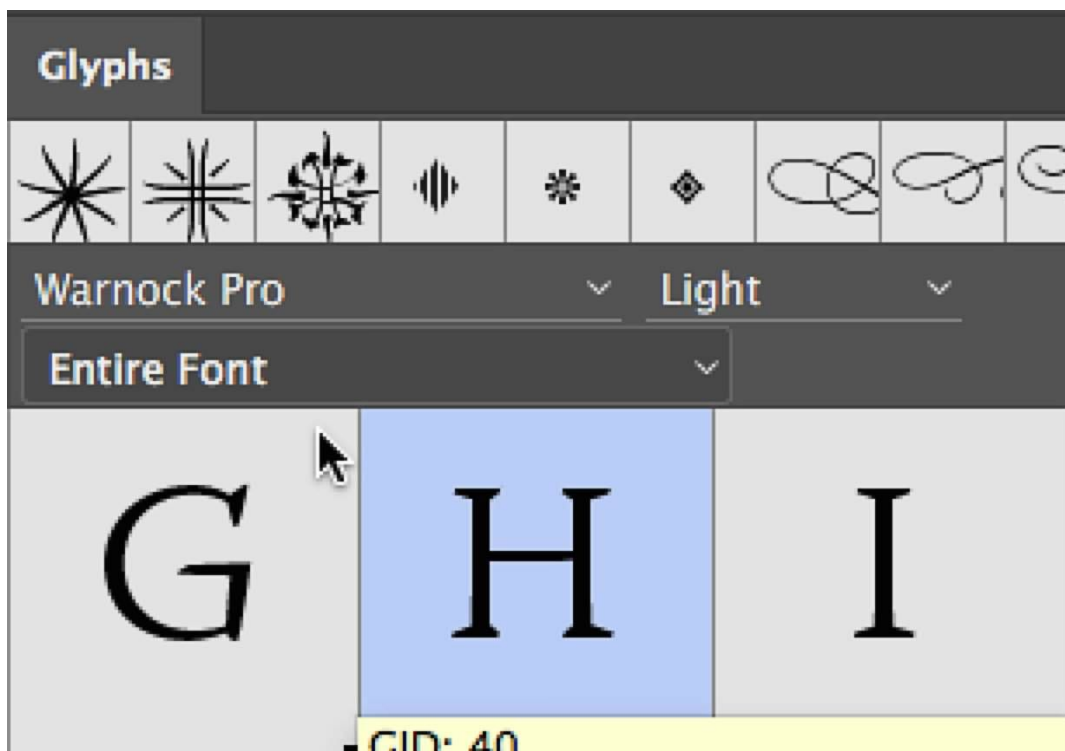
These vary widely, with some fonts offering lots of ornaments, some offering few or none. In the two screen captures below, the first shows ornaments in Bickham Script Pro.

The second shows ornaments in Warnock Pro, drawn to honor Adobe founder John Warnock by master typographer Robert Slimbach.



To discover what ornaments are available in an OpenType font, with your cursor in the block of the type you're wishing to ornament, you can click on the menu in the Type Panel directly under the name of the font.

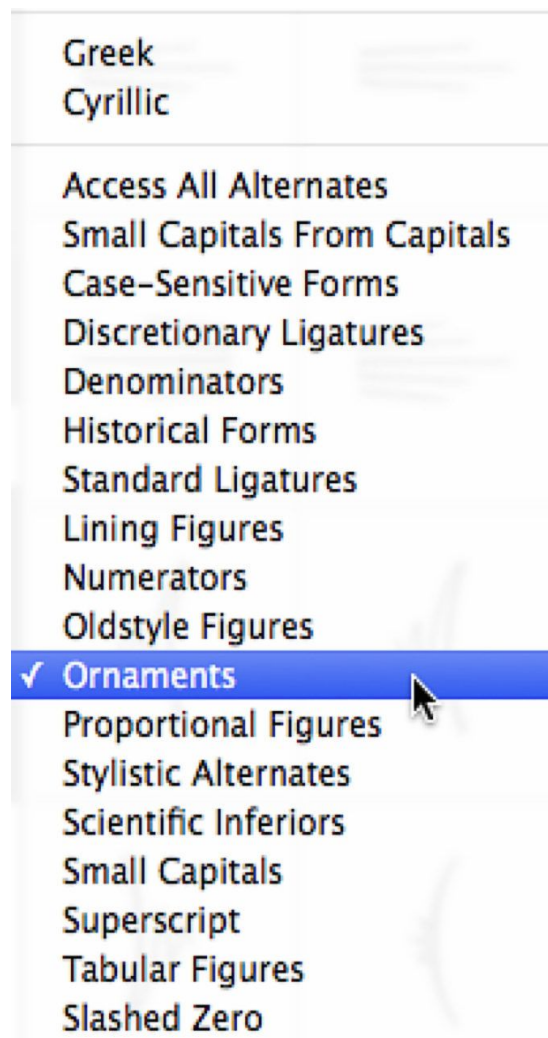
In this screen capture, it says "Entire Font". Click on those words, and a pop-up menu appears, with multiple choices.



The items offered will change with each font; the screen capture below shows only the bottom half of the choices available for the font Warnock Pro, including the word "Ornaments". In older fonts, not OpenType, you may not

see the word “ornaments”, but there may be some present if you carefully inspect the Glyphs panel.

In other fonts, you’ll have to look at the supplemental font accompanying some older fonts, called an Expert Set or other names to indicate more characters available in this accompanying font.



A nice feature of the Glyphs Panel is to show the most recently used characters you've selected in this panel.

You can double-click on them to reuse them, which is a nice time-saver when using various characters multiple times.

## **CLOSING THOUGHTS**



This article has dug into the depth and breadth of typesetting controls in Photoshop, concentrating on the Character Panel.

It's a lot to absorb, and not everyone will take the time to master every control.

Let me encourage you to master as much as possible, especially if you're someone who combines words with your images.

The increased quality of your final images' appearance justifies the time invested in mastering some professional typesetting tips and tools featured in this article so that the beauty of your typesetting matches the beauty of your images.

Next up in the "Photoshop Typography" series, I will focus on the Paragraph Panel and the Styles Panels which are powerful tools for speeding up and enhancing your type in Photoshop.



Kevin O'Connor helps design and test software, is a graphic designer and photographer for multiple clients and companies, and fixes people's (and companies') color.

He has consulted to multiple companies, including Apple, Sony, Fujifilm USA, and X-Rite. He loves teaching good color practices to enthusiastic learners.

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