



Text v. Display

By Allan Haley

THE BEST TEXT TYPEFACES ARE EASY TO READ IN LONG BLOCKS OF COPY. They do not call much attention to themselves and have been designed to perform best between 6-point and 14-point. Conversely, display typefaces are used to entice a reader into text copy, to create a mood or feeling, or to announce important information.

Sometimes, they accomplish all these purposes at the same time. They are intended to stand out, and they perform well when they are appropriate. However, display typefaces can look peculiar in applications where text typeface designs are warranted.

Different Designs for Different Sizes

Type and typography are visual media that are very much affected by size. In metal type, almost every point size of a given typestyle was designed with subtly different proportions.

In serif typefaces, for example, the thin parts of a character became proportionally heavier as the point size decreased. If they had been left the same weight as larger sizes, the contrast between thick and thin would have been too great, causing an effect called “dazzling” which makes text copy difficult to read.

The lowercase x-height is also generally larger in text sizes than in display designs, and serifs are more pronounced. In addition, inter-character spacing is more open in text faces. All of these characteristics optimize the typeface for reading at small sizes.

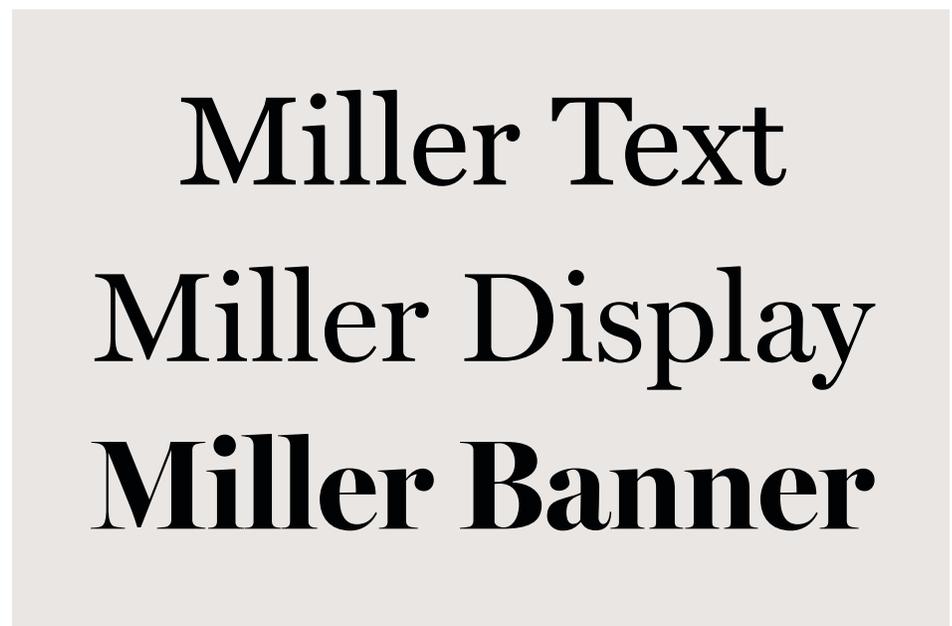
Phototype and Early Digital Fonts

When font foundries began making phototype versions of metal typefaces, the overwhelming trend was simply to produce a single design that would be used at all point sizes. This made the production of fonts easier for the foundries and dramatically reduced the price of building a reasonably large typeface library. The phototype version of Bembo for example, was developed from original text drawings or typeset samples at a specific size. This meant

that the phototype fonts performed well at the size for which they were originally intended, but that their performance was marginalized at other (usually larger) sizes. The first digital fonts were just copies of phototype fonts, so this problem persisted.

Size-Specific Designs

Now that fonts are relatively easy (compared to metal type) to produce and very affordable to purchase, type designers and font foundries are



Three versions of Miller.

Text v. Display (con't)

Bembo
Bembo Book

releasing designs specifically for either text or display applications. Matthew Carter's Miller typeface family is a perfect example. Miller is a general-purpose type of Scottish origin, widely used in the U.S. in the 19 century.

When Carter revived the metal typeface for digital typesetting, he created three versions of the design for use at various sizes. There is a text version, called Miller Text; a version called Miller Display, a typeface primarily intended for larger sizes; and Miller Banner, which is somewhat more condensed and intended for newspaper headlines.

If each of these typefaces were set at the same size, the overall designs would be very similar but would vary in individual proportions. Monotype has also released Bembo Book, designed especially for use at larger text sizes. ■

ITC Bodoni Six
ITC Bodoni Twelve
ITC Bodoni Seventy-Two

Subtle but noticeable differences distinguish designs used for different sizes.