
“From the Greek words τύπος (typos) meaning *form* and γραφία (grapho) for *write*, the practice of creating, selecting and arranging or setting type” – typography.

This small but stylish book will be a real jewel in any reference department. As a book historian, I know something of typography and its history, but reading Rosendorf’s *Typographic Desk Reference* has made me realize that I still have much to learn. Some concepts were familiar, but others completely new. Moreover, the author’s manner of presenting the information is so attractive that one is tempted to plough through this reference work as though it were a novel.

It starts with a foreword by the writer, curator of contemporary design, and graphic designer, Ellen Lupton. Her refreshing text sets the tone for the rest of the book – amusing, light, but highly informative. Next comes the author’s introduction, in which his web site (http://typedesk.com/theodore-rosendorf-design-consultant/) receives first mention. Theodore Rosendorf is a design consultant. He keeps us informed on the world of typography and on his own projects through this web site, not to mention his blog and Twitter. Of particular note is his invitation to contact him with any questions, suggestions, or observations, which will no doubt lead to many future revised editions of this book.

The 136 pages are divided into six sections, which are clearly identified on the fore edge and are therefore easily searchable. First come the terms, a broad range ordered alphabetically, including items such as gutter, DIN (Deutches Institut für Normung, the German Institute for Standardization), moveable type, and Johannes Gutenberg. The “see also” references help the neophyte find necessary information and at the same time learn more about a specific subject. Synonyms are given. The definitions move beyond type proper to human agents (proofreader) and historically specific technology (monotype machine). Some definitions are more historical, others more etymological. An appealing feature throughout the book is the presence of small illustrations accompanying the majority of entries. How can one identify a type or the different parts of a letterform (*ascender, descender, ball terminal*, etc.) without knowing what it looks like? Here, more than ever, a picture is worth a thousand words.
The second section, the most voluminous, concerns **glyphs**, “a shape used to represent a character or symbol within a writing system.” Many are letters, but there are also the **ampersand** (&), the **at symbol** (@), the **manicule** (\(\in\)), borders, and complete foreign alphabets such as the Greek. Again, all are illustrated by a figure in the margin, and the Unicode for each is helpfully supplied. One would think that the small size of the book would prevent the inclusion of regional details, but this is not the case. For example, the **comma** entry notes, “It is used as a decimal point […] in […] French Canada.”

We plunge into further specialization in the third section, “**Anatomy & Forms,**” which concerns the structure of the letter and its space on the page. This section begins with an illustration of a piece of movable type that labels its different parts. The terms defined range from the most common (**uppercase**, **exponent**, **ligature**) to the most specific and technical (**stem**: “A letter’s principal upright stroke”; **counter**: “The white space enclosed within a letter”). The fourth section, “**Classification & Specimens,**” broaches what can be a controversial topic among specialists. The classification of typefaces has always been a delicate subject: it can be approached from different angles. Usually they are placed into historical categories, but a new approach in the last few years is more concerned with classifying them according to their physical descriptions (weight, height, etc.). Rosendorf plays it safe with a classification system “based on major historical changes.” Aside from the classic categories (**blackletter**, **serif**, **sans serif**), there are also a few examples of **calligraphic**, **display**, and **special-use** types.

The book concludes with a good bibliography. The different sources recommended for further reading are various, including books, periodicals, websites of type foundries and distributors, associations and conferences, blogs, and forums. There is also a very detailed index. Anyone interested in learning more about typography, whether seriously or simply for curiosity, should have a look at this book. It is delightful and chic, with high-quality paper, a simple but elegant binding, a black silk bookmark for that favourite new term … and its typography is lovely, too.

**Isabelle Robitaille**

*Université de Montréal*