

ALPHABET FAMILY TREE

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may have started out as, well,
a tail.*

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The letter Q

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The letter Q

For as long as there have been Qs, designers have been having fun with the letter's tail. This opportunity for typographic playfulness may even date back to the Phoenicians: the original ancestor of our Q was called "ooph," the Phoenician word for monkey. The ooph represented an emphatic guttural sound not found in English, or in any Indo-European language.

Most historians believe that the ooph, which also went by the name "gogh," originated in the Phoenician language, with no lineage to previous written forms. Historians also believe that the character's shape depicted the back view of a person's head, with the tail representing the neck or throat. It's possible, but if you consider that the letter's name meant monkey, then perhaps the round part of the symbol represents another kind of backside, and the tail of what became our Q may have started out as, well, a tail.



Phoenician

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The Greeks adopted the ooph, but found it difficult to pronounce, and changed it slightly to “koppa.” The Greeks also modified the design by stopping the vertical stroke, or tail, at the outside of the circle. The koppa, however, represented virtually the same sound as “kappa,” another Greek letter. One of them had to go, and koppa was ultimately the loser, perhaps because it had begun to look much like another Greek letter, the P.

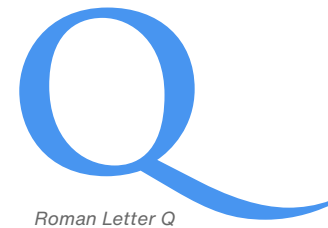


Early Greek

Unlike the Greeks, the Etruscans could live with the somewhat redundant nature of the koppa, and continued to use the letter. In fact, they had two other k-sound letters to contend with. The Romans elected to use all three signs when they adopted much of the Etruscan alphabet.

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The first Roman Q had the Etruscan vertical tail, but over time it evolved into the graceful curved shape that cradles the U which usually follows it.



Q Facts: According to an Oxford English Dictionary analysis, the Q is the least common letter in the English alphabet. It is also the only letter not used in any U.S. state name.

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Typographic Lexicon: **Quench**[®]

Quench is an exuberant and, pretty much, one-of-a-kind typeface from Hannes von Döhren. It is unmistakably characterized by its strong contrast of inside and outside forms. The counters are nearly straight and have many right angles. Conversely, the outside curves are smooth and rounded making them soft and almost bubbly. The italics are reminiscent of brush lettering. Used together or individually, the four weights and styles can be used for a wide variety of projects including magazines, advertising, logos, and branding.

