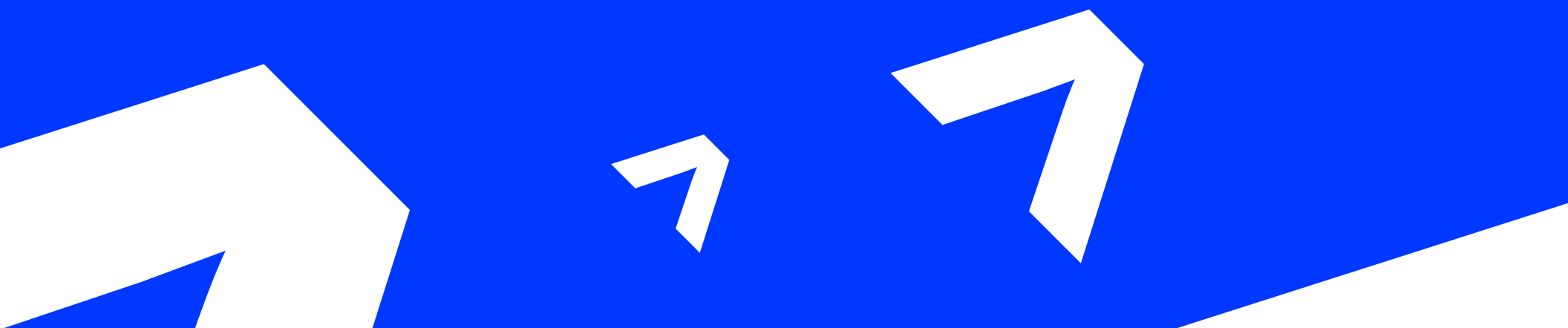


Thinking Small: Big Type at Little Sizes

Not all display fonts
handle small sizes well.



Thinking Small: Big Type at Little Sizes

Typefaces are generally designed with specific size ranges in mind. Display faces, made to shine at larger sizes, can sometimes work at smaller sizes – but not always. Here are some tips to help you get the best results when using display designs at small sizes.

Check legibility. Display fonts often have bold, attention-grabbing features that can hinder readability when set at small sizes. Always test the font at your intended size before committing.

Forte

Decorative Fonts Suffer at Small Sizes

Blackadder

Decorative Fonts Suffer at Small Sizes

Dancin'

Decorative Fonts Suffer at Small Sizes

Riptide

Decorative Fonts Suffer at Small Sizes

Wanted

Decorative Fonts Suffer at Small Sizes

Ziggy

Decorative Fonts Suffer at Small Sizes

Not Legible at Small Sizes

Look closely at design details. Some display fonts have delicate strokes, fine serifs, or tight counters that look elegant large but can break up or fill in when small. Pay close attention to these details when sizing down.

ALGERIAN

Avoid Fine Lines and Serifs

Burlington

Avoid Fine Lines and Serifs

Fashion

Avoid Fine Lines and Serifs

Mithras

Avoid Fine Lines and Serifs

Tempus Serif

Avoid Fine Lines and Serifs

More Legible But Details Are Lost

Adjust spacing. Letter and word spacing appear tighter at small sizes. After sizing the copy, increase tracking as needed. Once you set size and tracking, revisit kerning to fine-tune spacing.

Avant Garde Gothic

Out of the Box Spacing

Adjusted Spacing

Blackmoor

Out of the Box Spacing

Adjusted Spacing

Cinderella

Out of the Box Spacing

Adjusted Spacing

Cult

Out of the Box Spacing

Adjusted Spacing

Size, Track, Then Kern

Not all display fonts handle small sizes well. Be wary of formal scripts and calligraphic fonts – they often lose clarity and become visually fussy when reduced. Connecting scripts can also get too tight and lose readability since their spacing should not be expanded.

Edwardian Script

Scripts and Calligraphic Fonts

Ballerino

Scripts and Calligraphic Fonts

Grimshaw Hand

Scripts and Calligraphic Fonts

Katfish

Scripts and Calligraphic Fonts

Le Griffé

Scripts and Calligraphic Fonts

Party

Scripts and Calligraphic Fonts

Set Scripts and Calligraphic Fonts Large to Reveal Details

Some large newer font families will have specific designs for large sizes. They may be labeled as “Display” or “Headline.” The Display versions usually space tighter and are lighter in weight.

Helvetica Now Display
Helvetica Now Text

Helvetica Now Display
Helvetica Now Text

Notice the difference? It's subtle, but important.

The key is using both your eye and a little bit of careful judgment. Always create and set samples at actual sizes before making final font choices. In short: look before you leap!

Typefaces used in this article

[Algerian](#)

[Avant Garde Gothic](#)

[Ballerino](#)

[Blackadder](#)

[Blackmoor](#)

[Burlington](#)

[Cinderella](#)

[Cult](#)

[Dancin'](#)

[Edwardian Script](#)

[Fashion](#)

[Forte](#)

[Grimshaw Hand](#)

[Katfish](#)

[Le Griffe](#)

[Mithras](#)

[Party](#)

[Riptide](#)

[Tempus](#)

[Wanted](#)

[Ziggy](#)