

Through the Looking-Glass

- **Typography 1** is a deliberate consideration of letterforms, and an appreciation of the spaces within and around them.

Why

Knowledge of letterforms—an evolved sense of their structural qualities and consideration for their material and cultural qualities—lays the foundation for a finely nuanced practice of communication with text.¹ Across

disciplines, consistency and clarity-of-voice—in conjunction with good form—are ways of respecting the reader’s² time and effort. It is also fun to make letters do more than spell words out.

What

In two weeks, we shall consider letterforms in detail and put them to work. We shall look at how letters are and have-been constructed, and explore our own ways of constructing them—as a means to an end and otherwise.³ We will work with Latin and (to whatever possible extent) Devanagari and other Indian scripts that the students are familiar

with, and appreciate how the identity of people and the contexts of use—material and social—shape the letterforms and colour our perception of these shapes. Wherever appropriate, these inquiries will be through hands-on-exercises.⁴ We will also be reading from and responding to a handful of texts on type.

What For

To Appreciate Good Form: So we form our own versions of the ‘mechanics’ to achieving desirable letterforms.⁵

To Really See Letterforms Anew: So we recognise and value the work that goes into making text come alive. It is also a critical skill to be able to reconsider our

relationship with everyday things by looking at them through a *tourist’s eye* for details and connections.

To Write and Reflect: So we give form to our thoughts and let others partake in the delight of looking at things critically.

How

Demonstration and discussion of basic concepts and skills (referring to our own work and the work of others that we admire)

In-classroom critique of work

Room for experimentation and improvisation beyond the exercises’ scope

Reading, interpreting, reviewing, and documentation

Evaluation

Concept comprehension and the ability to communicate what you learn. (Discussions with the faculty and showing the learning put to use in your work; both are valid ways of doing this.)

Openness to exploration and the diversity of materials, methods and concepts you work with. (Work beyond what is strictly required of you in class. This doesn’t mean quantity so much as variety approached with no self-imposed restrictions.)

Contribution to classroom discussions and the ability and inclination to learn from peers. (Be present in more ways than one.⁶)

Learning and developing skills. (When we see all your work from day 1 to day 10, do we see the ease with which you switch from one approach to another in search of a possible solution?)



Typography 1

Notes

1 That is a two-way-street.

2 “Typography is design for reading.” From *Typography: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press—a book that introduces typography to a general audience (not necessarily design students). To paraphrase *Elements of Typographic Style*, typography honours content and respects the reader.

What does ‘general’ mean, *in effect*?

3 In the sense that we will value the scenes-from-the-journey more than the destination in some cases. There is a beautiful poem called *Ithaka* by C P Cavafy that is in the same vein.

Short poem (poemlette?).
Look it up.

4 ...and we will use writing and dialogue to give a shareable form to what we learn from these form-based exercises. Call this note-making or documentation as long as it makes you want to do this regularly. (Daily or once-in-two-days.)

5 Not much different from the Gestalt Principle of a similar name. Most typographic decisions are *visual* even if they seem to have formulaic/mathematical origins. There are principles that help, yet one has to *look* for good form.

6 Beyond being physically present, you may want to engage in conversations along with work that defies (and goes around) briefs, offer help to other students in need, and find ways to keep track of these discussions-and-concepts outside class-hours.