

Letter Style

“Though it is commonly done, it is not right to use the same type faces for poems as for the reports of Board meetings.” – Design as Art, Bruno Munari

I am using a broad term (letter style) for two interrelated concepts: 1) font choice and 2) style of handwriting. While nearly all traditional poems are typewritten, a visual poem needn't be, and so we can and should consider handwriting as a tool of the visual poet. Devan Murphy and Bianca Stone are two visual poets whose work engages with handwriting (and illustrations).

Fonts and handwriting share a capacity for expressiveness. This is somewhere between an art and a science. Based on their appearance alone, how do each of these font choices make you feel:

Who will believe my verse in time to come

If it were filled with your most high deserts?

Though yet, heaven knows, it is but as a tomb

Fonts can evoke elegance, playfulness, romance, seriousness, severity, fancy, tradition, authority, motion—the list goes on. These qualities apply as well to your natural handwriting. Consider the difference in a handwritten letter that is written carefully versus hurriedly, or one written in print versus calligraphy. How might each of these make you feel? Is there something in the personality of the person you can see in their handwriting or font choice?

Think too about choices you may make when writing. **WHAT IS THE EFFECT OF RESPONDING TO A TEXT MESSAGE LIKE THIS?** How would you

expect a whisper to be written in a comic book? What color would you choose for someone's words if you wanted to show they were angry?

Another function of type is historical and referent. Many fonts have deep histories, both in their creation and their use. Caslon was designed in 1722 and was historically used in textbooks. Helvetica is famously used in hundreds of company logos (Microsoft, Toyota, Target, Motorola). A title can contextualize a poem, and so too can a font.

There is no shortage of graphic design resources on typefaces. [Practical Typography](#) is an excellent one.

Further Examples:

- Douglas Kearney – *Black Automaton*
- Sasha Stiles – “When It’s Just You” (from *Technelegy*)
- Kameelah Janan Rasheed – *No New Theories*
- Avery Young – *neckbone*
- Tarik Dobbs – “Bracelet of Silence”