

# What is the Best Typeface for Exhibit Labels?

## From the Exlibris Listserv

Date: Wed, 3 Aug 2011 16:03:05 -0400

Wondering what the consensus is on the best typeface for exhibit labels?

Thank you in advance,

Kim

Kimberly Tully

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Hello, Kim.

There is a lot of info online regarding the legibility of typefaces. The graphic designer/typographer world seems to come to a consensus over the following two fonts:

1. Garamond is particularly beautiful and classic, and is one of the most readable typefaces. According to Wikipedia,

"Garamond is considered to be among the most legible and readable serif typefaces for use in print (offline) applications. It has also been noted to be one of the most eco-friendly major fonts when it comes to ink usage."

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Garamond>

2. There is the ubiquitous and more contemporary Arial/Helvetica, also lovely in its minimalism. Again, Wikipedia:

"Contemporary sans serif design, Arial contains more humanist characteristics than many of its predecessors and as such is more in tune with the mood of the last decades of the twentieth century. The overall treatment of curves is softer and fuller than in most industrial style sans serif faces. Terminal strokes are cut on the diagonal which helps to give the face a less mechanical appearance. Arial is an extremely versatile family of typefaces which can be used with equal success for text setting in reports, presentations, magazines etc, and for display use in newspapers, advertising and promotions."

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arial>

Just don't go anywhere near Comic Sans...

Happy exhibit labeling!

Janet

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The definitive answer to your question may be found at  
<http://www.rarebookschool.org/miscellaneous/>  
Click on the "what" at the top of the page.

Terry Belanger

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Comic Sans makes a somewhat discourteous case for itself:  
<http://www.mcsweeneys.net/articles/im-comic-sans-asshole>

Mike Garabedian

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Whatever type face you settle on, make the type large enough to be easily read !

Norman Kane

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To reinforce the theological approach:  
[http://informal.science.org/researches/VSA-a0a2e7-a\\_5730.pdf](http://informal.science.org/researches/VSA-a0a2e7-a_5730.pdf)

Joel Kovarsky

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I like Terry Bellanger's answer, but can't resist two quick additional comments. 'Whose version' is often more important than 'what typeface'. I rarely dismiss a typeface as rubbish, but I might use that word for ITC Garamond. Adobe Garamond is an excellent face. And Arial was designed with the constraints of Helvetica's set widths so that people

can interchange them without disturbing spacing. Is that really the criterion you want as the foundation for a type design?

John A. Lane

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Hi,

Good question. The choice depends upon your audience and the amount of text on your label. For example, Arial may work well for 6-year olds, while Garamond may better suit 45-year olds at a conference exhibition.

Equally important is the typesetting that you use. For captions, you might consider increasing the word-spacing and line-spacing over what you use for other texts, because captions are read from further away than normal reading distances, so that losing registration through eyeskip is particularly difficult. Don't justify both left and right!

Multilingual captions provide another challenge.

We have spent some time developing a font that suits multiple European languages (so far Western European as well as Russian, Greek, Hebrew, and Arabic). We call it Bembino, inspired by Bembo, one of the most beautiful fonts ever devised.

Among other virtues, our new high-quality digital font is FREE. As our copyright, the Research Group on Manuscript Evidence grants otherwise unrestricted use of the output of the Bembino program, for both private and commercial uses. (Although acknowledgments and donations are welcome.)

Bembino has now reached the stage of initial release, which we have begun to circulate individually, to see how it suits various applications, platforms, and purposes, before the wider launch through our website. Anyone wishing to learn more about it or to receive it could contact me directly.

Best,

Mildred Budny

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