

By the 1500s renaissance book and type design became formal areas of artistic study. Leonardo da Vinci outlined a geographic font inspired by the human form in his *De Divina Proportione*. In 1525 Albrecht Durer wrote an influential essay “On the Just Shaping of Letters” which applied geometry to the subtleties of letterforms. Geoffroy Tory, a Parisian printer working for Henri Estienne moved to Italy where he developed type modeled after handwriting of the time, printing a famous *Book of Hours* in it. His 1529 essay *Champfleury* continued the development of geometric Roman capitals. Claude Garamond developed a famous Roman typeface that didn’t use the calligraphic forms of the day in Paris in 1530. It was used extensively by the Estienne family, and the rest of Europe for the next 200 years. It is still around today, bearing his name, and is known for its tight word spacing and beautiful lowercase letters. Robert Granjon, an apprentice of Garamond’s cut ten outstanding italic faces, and then in 1577 the first cursive face based on everyday handwriting called *Civilite*.

Printing with reusable type reflected the artistic sensibilities of the Renaissance when it was developed and used. The thick borders and elaborate designs of the handwritten works of the past dropped out of favor, instead clean, consistent designs were adopted. Old style families of type, small capitals, italic faces, printer’s marks, type registration, two-color printing, colophons, and movable type are all innovations from this era. Notable names from this era include Gutenberg, Jenson, Mantius, Garamond, and others. The number of books in Europe went up 180 times from 1450 to 1500. Most importantly, printing allowed the dissemination and democratization of ideas and information as books became cheaper allowing lower classes access to more knowledge than ever before.

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Resources:
 A *Typographic Workbook: A Primer to History, Techniques, and Artistry* by Kate Claire and Cynthia Busic-Snyder
 Wikipedia: *Printing Press* for images

Cover: A woodcut example of an early printing shop, circa 1568.



Robert Estienne's printer's mark.

RENAISSANCE

Typographic History



The Renaissance in Europe was a time of growth; cities, universities, culture, and the arts flourished. The time period started in the 1440s and continued to the late 1600s. A shift towards the thinking of the ancient Greeks and Romans, and away from the Christian based learning of the Middle Ages marks the defining philosophical change of the time.

Classic typography in Europe started with the invention of the printing press by Johann Gutenberg starting in 1438. Gutenberg also developed the method of casting metal letters with the same height but varying width, and formulated ink for use with the dense lead type. The main innovation was the ability to create individual reusable characters, so that instead of carving a whole page in one piece, it could be done by combining pre-carved letters. Gutenberg also created ligatures, which are two characters cast on the same lead platform. Gutenberg’s first printed book, called the 42-line Bible was produced from 1450 to 1456 in Mainz, Germany, and used a typeface similar to the handwritten scripting of the day.



Figure 1: An example of movable, reusable type.

“*Lettering was considered an art,*

as important as drawing and writing poetry.”

1438 Johann Gutenberg develops movable, reusable type for use in his printing press.

1458 French engraver Nicolas Jenson develops the first pure Roman typeface in Italy.

1490 Italian Aldus Mantius starts printing books as cheaply as possible.

1506 Francesco Griffo develops the first italic type for Mantius.

1525 Albrecht Durer writes an influential essay on applying geometry to type design called “On the Just Shaping of Letters”.

1530 Claude Garamond creates the most famous type of the Renaissance, now aptly named Garamond.

1577 Robert Granjon cuts the first cursive typeface, Civillite.

Typographic Timeline

Renaissance 1440-1600

1450 Gutenberg begins printing the 42-Line Bible in Mainz, Germany.

1478 William Caxton prints the first book in England in a Gothic face called Batarde.

1502 Henri Estienne, the head of a Parisian and Genevan printing family dies.

1509 Leonardo da Vinci analyzes the construction of letterforms and compares them to the human body.

1529 Geoffroy Tory publishes his seminal essay “Champfleury” on the theory of Roman capitals.

1550 Robert Estienne, son of Henri prints the New Testamant, loses favor with the French king and moves to Geneva.

1600 Copperplate engraving is introduced as a way to re-create the scrollwork of masters.