Typography is the interface of writing. As designers arrange texts in space and time, they use the forms, structures, and signals of typography to guide readers through streams of content. Thinking with Type is a critical handbook that lays out general design principles within a theoretical and historical context. The book, published with a companion web site, is meant to be a useful tool for students of graphic design as well as for writers, editors, and content workers from any discipline. The book is introductory, but not “dumbed down.” It would be an appropriate text for a basic type course in an undergraduate BFA program; it would also be a useful guide for multi-media developers requiring an introduction to typographic communication.

In my own teaching, I have been unable to find a textbook that is both thoughtful and practical, and that presents the “big picture” of typography without getting bogged down in details. I have wanted for my own students a textbook that provides readings as well as direct practical information. This year, I decided to create my own text, which I have begun to prototype and test in the classroom. I am now researching and writing material for a larger project, which will be ready for publication by August 2004.

Thinking with Type will have the character of a guide or handbook that can be casually opened and explored. It will provide satisfying critical essays for the reader looking for analysis and theory, and it will present clear, practical information about typefaces, layout strategies, and grid structures in well-organized, accessible spreads. The web site will present comparable and complementary content oriented toward screen-based design. Screen issues are also covered in the bound book, integrated throughout the work.

My project is practical but not technical. It is not a guide to specific software applications or a recipe for legibility in all media. The goal is to create a work that will remain relevant even as technologies change over the next decade. As a textbook, Thinking with Type delineates the structures of typographic form, describing principles of design that have been built and unbuilt, invented and and reinvented, across centuries, or—in the case of the web and interactive media—in the course of a few years. The search for basic principles leads not to a bedrock of absolutes but to an open mesh of possibilities.
Most typographic guides focus on the medium of the book. Robert Bringhurst’s excellent *Elements of Typographic Style* (Hartley & Marks, 1992) presents technical information in an inquisitive, often poetic voice. Bringhurst’s work, however, fails to illuminate the design of such modern print media as posters, magazines, and institutional identities, or time-based media such as film, television, interactive CD-ROMS, or the web. *Stop Stealing Sheep*, by Erik Spiekermann and E. M. Ginger (Adobe Press, 1992) takes a broader view, but has an annoyingly chatty tone. Willi Kunz’s *Typography: Macro + Micro Aesthetics* (Verlag Niggli, 1998) is a beautiful book that ultimately reflects Kunz’s own aesthetic as a designer rather than providing a general view of typography. The most contemporary and comprehensive book is *Type and Typography*, by Phil Baines and Andrew Haslam (Laurence King, 2002). Although well written and researched, Baines’s and Haslam’s book has a hectic, over-packed layout that makes it unappealing as a reference or text book.

*Thinking with Type* is organized into three sections: Letter, Text, and Grid. Each section opens with a narrative essay, approximately 10,000 words, about the cultural and theoretical issues that fuel typographic design across a range of media. The essays focus on major ideas and concepts rather than historical details. Each essay is illustrated with approximately 24 four-color reproductions of typographic works, both historical and contemporary, as well as digital diagrams and specimens. Demonstration pages presenting principles of typographic form and structure follow each essay. Demonstration pages are illustrated typographically, in black plus 2 spot colors. The book is designed so that each essay occupies its own 16-page signature, followed by two demonstration signatures. A shift in paper stock will further differentiate essays from demonstrations.

**Projected Schedule**

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Author to provide text, design, and art for reproduction
# Table of Contents

## Front Matter

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## Back Matter

- Glossary, appendices, index, colophon

## Basic Specifications

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SECTION I: LETTER

The first section deals with the letter, typography’s fundamental code. The essay charts the evolution of typefaces as they responded to technological, intellectual, and economic changes. Writing itself is a technology with an enormous impact on human history, and typography was the first form of mass production. Early typefaces were directly linked to the body, their forms emulating the work of the hand. As typography developed, it became increasingly abstract and systematic, from the upright characters of the Enlightenment to the severe abstractions of neoclassicism. Such abstractions ultimately unleashed the bizarre experiments of nineteenth-century commercial printing. Geometric typography was explored as theory and practice by the avant-garde, while letters proliferated across the commercial environments of the twentieth century. As typeface design emerged in the late 1980s as a form of underground publishing, fonts pursued new geometries and new narrative content.

The essay explores the following issues and events:

- writing as technology (the origins of the alphabet)
- the mass production of writing (the invention of typography)
- typography and the body (humanism and its discontents)
- rational typography (letters of the Enlightenment)
- monster typography (the freaks of nineteenth-century job printing)
- systems of the avant-garde (visionary geometries)
- luminous typography (neon and bulbs, vectors and bitmaps)
- the inflatable sign (Pop and post-modernism)
- narrative typography (returns to the body)

Demonstration pages present the following information:

- anatomy of letterforms
- display of letterforms on the screen
- type classification
- modern type families
- visual glossary of historic and contemporary typefaces
SECTION II: TEXT

The second section, Text, considers the massing of letters into words, lines, and bodies of copy. “Text” has a specific meaning within design. It is also a concept embedded in theories of writing and communication, connecting graphic design to broader cultural discussions. Technology has influenced the design of typographic space, from the concrete physicality of metal type to the endless flexibility (and peculiar restrictions) imposed by digital media. The typographic text has evolved from a body that is solid, stable, and closed to one that is open, malleable, and unfixed.

The essay explores the following ideas:

- text as body (the integrity and closure of print)
- technologies of spacing (from physicality to flexibility)
- authors and editors (confirming authority)
- electronic media and the hybrid body (cut/paste, upload/download)
- hypertextuality (the rise of the web)
- the open body (type in the age of the user)

Demonstration pages present the following information:

- mind the gap (kerning, tracking, ligatures)
- reading between the lines (leading and line spacing)
- alignment (ideologies of the column)
- marking paragraphs (shaping text)
- title : subtitle (defining hierarchies)
- heading 1, heading 2 (the hierarchy problem in HTML)
- display (the editorial headline)
- size is relative (questions of scale, from page to screen)
- film forms (strategies of motion)
section iii: grid

The third section, Grid, looks at the spatial organization of typography and the formatting of page and screen. The opening essay shows how grids are embedded within the systems of typography, from the mechanics of metal type to the ubiquitous “tables” of the web and HTML. The essay considers the meaning of grids in modern painting and architecture, and the cult of the grid in the high modern phase of graphic design. The grid is part of the imagery and ideology of the network, from William Gibson to The Matrix. This section will also look at the role of framing in graphic design.

The essay explores the following issues and events:

mechanizing the grid (movable type)
resisting the grid (Futurism, Dada, Constructivism)
regulating the infinite (the New Typography)
expressing the grid (from Muller-Brockman to Weingart)
emotional grids (manuals for American advertising layout)
the romance of the net (imagining the digital infrastructure)
slicing the page (tables and HTML)
off the grid (beyond technology)

Demonstration pages present the following information:
margins (the visible edge)
columns (the upright body)
horizons (cutting across)
page formats (layout for print)
screen formats (layout for the web)
picture windows (image and grid)
framing with text (image and caption)

She is chair of the Graphic Design Department at the Maryland Institute, College of Art in Baltimore, where she is launching a new graduate program.


In 1993 *I.D.* magazine named Lupton one of America’s forty design innovators. She received the Chrysler Design Award with J. Abbott Miller in 1993. Lupton and Miller each received the 1996 New York Magazine Award, given to ten New Yorkers who have helped shape the cultural life of the city.