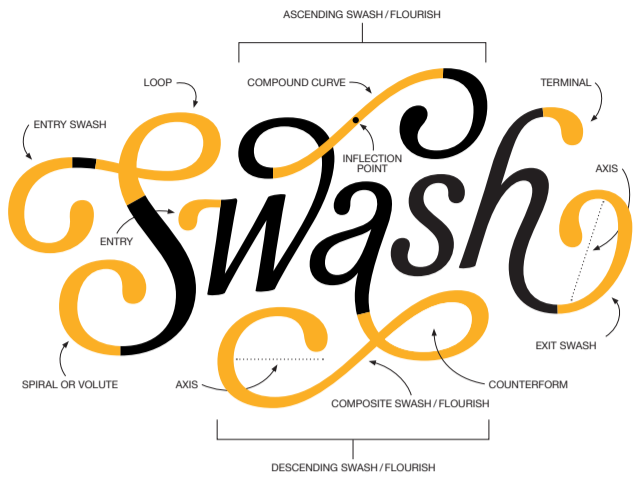


# Swash it!



## Swash Types

The most convincing swashes extend from natural departure points in uppercase and lowercase letters. These places are usually where a stroke begins or ends. Swashes can also

continue primary vertical, horizontal, or curved strokes, called stems. There are loads of possibilities for adding swashes, but these are the most common areas for embellishing strokes.



**ENTRY SWASH**  
Entry swashes typically begin initial uppercase letters, but they can also extend from lowercase forms. They are useful for calling attention to capital letters and filling layouts.

**EXIT/FINIAL SWASH**  
As the name implies, exit swashes (also referred to as finial swashes) typically finish the last letter of a word. They can extend as an ascending, descending, or horizontal stroke



**ASCENDING SWASH**  
This swash extends from a vertical or diagonal stem of an uppercase or lowercase letter. Ascending swashes can end in a simple spiral, or have a more complex construction.

**DESCENDING SWASH**  
The counterpart to ascending swashes, these swashes extend downward from stems of uppercase and lowercase letterforms, usually from a vertical or diagonal stroke.



**CROSSBAR SWASH**  
This horizontal swash can extend from either an uppercase or lowercase letter. It frequently forms the cross stroke of the lowercase t, or extends from the horizontal bar of upper-

case letters such as the A, E, F, H, and L. In some cases, a crossbar swash may comprise the entire stroke of a letter form, as in the upper horizontal stroke of a capital T.

## Departure Points

This diagram illustrates swash points for sans and serif capitals. The arrows indicate where swashes enter or exit. A letter can have multiple swashes, but it's often best to limit them. (Use extenders and bars as departure points for lowercase.)

As an example, the H poses many places to add a swash. I suggest keeping the letter's design to one ascending and one descending swash. Position them on opposite vertical strokes to avoid making a single stem overly long, voluminous, ambiguous, or complex. (An exception is diagonal strokes which are often embellished at both ends.) Only add one swash to a terminal or join where multiple departure points are possible. If you draw an upper entry swash, reduce the size and length of the crossbar swash if your design includes one. When in doubt, remember the adage that sometimes less is more.

Swash letters originate in handwriting, so their placement and direction are influenced by history and convention.

Swash letters originate in handwriting, so their placement and direction are influenced by history and convention.



## Swash Terminals

Swash stroke endings can be stylized in many different ways. Ideally, *terminals* reflect the weight of the letters' strokes, or borrow details from the letter style. Like swashes themselves,

terminals can have a variety of flavors and forms, although these shapes are among those you're likely to encounter. It's advisable to use only one variety in a piece of lettering.



HIGH CONTRAST

LOW CONTRAST

### PLAIN TERMINAL

Plain terminals have no discernible shape, though they do benefit from a little extra volume in high-contrast examples. They are most common in low-contrast sans serif styles.



HIGH CONTRAST

LOW CONTRAST

### FLARED TERMINAL

Imagine a plain terminal with significant weight in which the stroke ending appears to expand to a heavy blunt ending. Most noticeable in high-contrast serif letter styles.



HIGH CONTRAST

LOW CONTRAST

### BALL TERMINAL

No mystery here; ball terminals have an elliptical form that's usually circular in shape. Although most common in high-contrast serif styles, they can be used for sans, too.



HIGH CONTRAST

LOW CONTRAST

### DROPLET TERMINAL

This terminal branches smoothly from the end of a swash, creating a curvy droplet-like shape. Alternatively, drop the term *lachrymal* (tear-like) to wow clients and colleagues.



HIGH CONTRAST

LOW CONTRAST

### SCALLOP/CRESCENT TERMINAL

This terminal spirals to form a point creating a scallop or crescent-like shape. Impactful in high-contrast styles, the effect is more subtle in low-contrast sans serif lettering.



HIGH CONTRAST

LOW CONTRAST

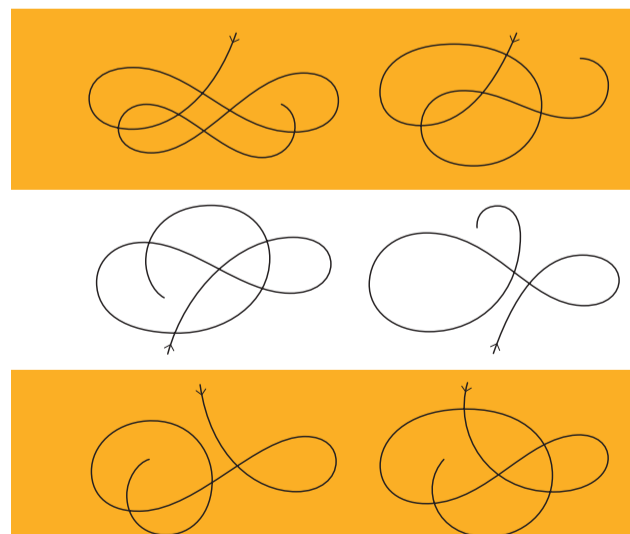
### SPLIT/SPLAYED TERMINAL

These terminals separate into two or more parts, and can be formed in many ways, adding elaborate detail to swashes. Break the ice at parties by using the term *bifurcated* instead.

## Flourish Construction

The shapes of swashes and flourishes are usually dictated by the layout and style of the lettering. A good rule is to keep their structure simple, balancing the areas of resulting negative space. Use them to enhance a composition and fill voids; just remember to keep placement and complexity consistent.

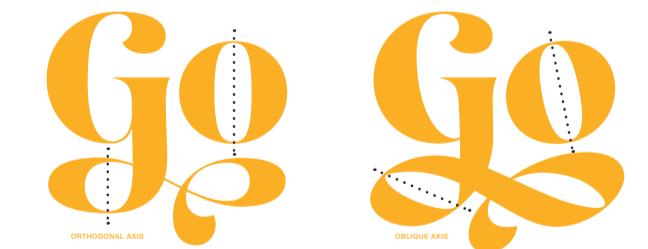
The arrows in these flourish diagrams indicate the direction that strokes can take as they extend from potential departure points, like a lowercase letter's ascender or descender. To make freestanding flourishes, simply curl the form's starting point into a spiral, and shape the strokes to fit your layout.



## Contrast and Stroke Modulation

Contrast refers to the difference in thickness of the strokes forming a letter or its embellishments. The effect is primarily caused by the modulation of a stroke as it varies in weight between thick and thin. High-contrast strokes and letter styles exhibit distinct differences in stroke thickness. Low-contrast ones, with more subdued modulation, usually display subtle differences in thickness. Bisection of a curved stroke, in a letter or swash, at its thin parts will reveal its axis. This imaginary line determines how a stroke divides its shadow, or weighted,

parts. An *orthogonal axis* (meaning: at a right angle) is either vertical or horizontal, and is a common feature of *Modern*, *Fi Face*, and *Geometric Sans Serif* styles and their flourishes. *Old Style*, including its relatives like *Bookman* and *Cooper Black*, have oblique axes which are sloped. The angle of an oblique axis becomes more horizontal as the vertical alignment of the axis' intersection points are more offset. Although both kind of axes are seen in some cases, stroke contrast and modulation should be treated consistently throughout a piece of lettering



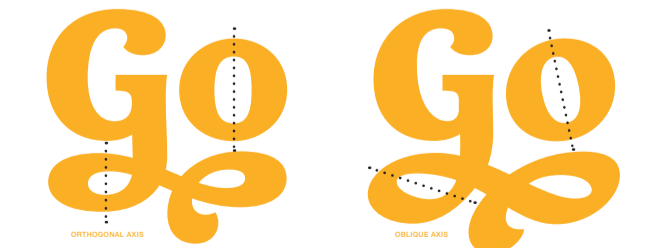
ORTHOGONAL AXIS

OBLIQUE AXIS

### HIGH-CONTRAST SWASH

High-contrast swashes are composed of strokes that have a significant difference in thickness. Their heavy parts can be lighter than the stems of the letters they decorate, but it's very common for swashes to match the letters' weight

and contrast. Typical styles include *Modern* and *Fat Face*. Although seen less frequently, high-contrast sans serif can be swashed, too. While any kind of terminal can be used, stroke endings should ideally match the letters' qualities.



ORTHOGONAL AXIS

OBLIQUE AXIS

### LOW-CONTRAST SWASH

The difference in thickness of low-contrast strokes and swashes is usually more subtle. In fact, any variation in stroke thickness can often be nearly imperceptible, especially in mono-weight Geometric Sans Serif letters. While

other common serif examples like *Bookman* and *Cooper Black* exhibit slightly more contrast, their weighty strokes and heavy serifs still require that embellishments have a low degree of difference in the thickness of their components.

## Swash Composition

The size, construction, and placement of swashes and flourishes ultimately depend on their context in a lettering piece. Flourishes can favor the top or bottom of a layout, while in

other cases only the first and last letters are embellished. The most ambitious compositions envelop letterforms in an outer silhouette formed by decorative strokes called a *cartouche*.



### INITIAL/FINIAL SWASHES

Although swash lettering tends to be highly decorated, many pieces benefit from more restraint depending on the context or final application. In these instances, one strategy is to embellish only the initial letter (whether upper or lower-case) often adding a finial swash as a counterbalance.

### UPPER SWASHES

Some layouts only allow tops of words to be embellished, but the contrast between upper swashes and a clean baseline can be dramatic. Letters with natural ascenders—like the b, d, f, h, k, and l—are obvious candidates. The crossbar of the t offers another opportunity for decoration.



### LOWER SWASHES

Swashes and flourishes positioned at the base of a layout serve to visually underscore a word or group of words. Extending an embellishment from a single letter, especially one that has a natural descender like a g, j, p, q, or y, is often enough to add interest to the foundation of lettering.

### CARTOUCHE SWASHES

A *cartouche* is produced when swashes and flourishes in a group of letters create a silhouette surrounding the lettering. The outer profile can form a distinct shape, or it can appear more organic in nature. These compositions make for the most challenging, yet attention-getting, swash lettering.

## Common Swash Letter Styles



### MODERN

Popular for flourishing, this early 19th-century high-contrast style has thin unbracketed serifs (joined at right angles) and a vertical axis. Ball and droplet terminals are most common.



### FAT FACE

*Fat Face* (yes, a technical typographic term) is a bold 19th-century version of Modern that was developed for advertising, but works well with swashes and other embellishments.



### OLD STYLE

*Old Style* has an oblique axis and smooth bracketed serifs. Although originally used for book text, its moderate contrast takes droplet swashes nicely. Caslon is the classic example.



### BOOKMAN

*Bookman* is a 19th-century modernization of Old Style. Its enduring popularity began in the 1960s and 70s when the style was commonly swashed with heavy droplet terminals.



### COOPER BLACK

*Cooper Black* is a *Poster Roman* type designed by Oswald Cooper in the early 20th century. The style is characterized by heavy stems, bulbous serifs, and moderate contrast.



### GEOMETRIC SANS SERIF

An early 20th-century sans, this simple style works with swashes surprisingly well. Plain and ball-shaped terminals complement Geometric's low contrast and circular forms.

## Frequent Mistakes

Swash lettering can be difficult at times, so don't get down in the dumps if you run into a few hurdles as you get a hang of the style. When you draw, remember these key points: 1. Keep the weight and contrast of letters, swashes, and flourishes

consistent. 2. Try to keep the counterforms created by swashes and flourishes—as well as the negative spaces inside and between letters—uniform in volume. 3. Attempt to balance the composition by carefully positioning decorative strokes.

