

BBC Learning English  
6 Minute English  
*Handwriting for the modern age*



NB: This is not a word for word transcript

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**Rob:** Hello, I'm Rob...

**Cath:** And I'm Cath.

**Rob:** And this is 6 Minute English from BBC Learning English. Today we're talking about **fonts**.

**Cath:** That's the typeface or style of letters we type on a computer screen.

**Rob:** Yes and when we type a document we have **an array** of different fonts to choose from. So Cath, surely you must have a favourite font that you use?

**Cath:** I do, at work; I like Arial for some reason. It's very plain, very straightforward. I also like Gil Sans, it looks very nice – it's a lovely one.

**Rob:** It's quite interesting because the font that you use can indicate what kind of person you are! I'll tell you more in a moment but first I think we should have a question.

**Cath:** I'm going to get it wrong!

**Rob:** Do you know which language the word 'font' originates from? Is it:

- a) Spanish
- b) German
- c) French

**Cath:** I'm going to go for French I think this week.

**Rob:** OK, well, we'll see if you're right at the end of the programme. Now let's get back to the subject of **typography** or the use of text in printing. We've

mentioned that the style of text is called the font and now experts say the font you use can say a lot about you.

**Cath:** Like handwriting. Whether you write neatly with beautiful joined up letters, or write messily so that nobody can read it, can give us an insight into the type of person that you are.

**Rob:** Yes, handwriting can even be seen as an art form – called **calligraphy** – but in this modern age it's the keyboard most of us use to type words on a computer screen.

**Cath:** It's true! I can't actually remember the last time I actually wrote a letter using a pen. But Rob, you're saying we can even interpret someone's personality by the font they use?

**Rob:** Exactly. And as we can hear from author, Simon Garfield, there are thousands of fonts we can choose from.

### **Simon Garfield, author**

We have 60 fonts on our computer. And we have a choice of, I haven't counted them all, something like a hundred thousand fonts that we can find online. You fall in and out of love with fonts the way that one can do with people.

**Cath:** So author Simon Garfield says there are around a hundred thousand fonts available online. And he says that we often change the fonts we use.

**Rob:** Yes, he said just like people, we fall in and out of love with fonts. Our mood can affect the style we use. And also who we are typing a letter for can influence our choice.

**Cath:** So using round and large letters can be seen as being friendly...but also **unsophisticated**. In the world of marketing, using the correct font is vital for creating the right image for a brand.

**Rob:** Fonts have **characteristics**, like a sort of personality. This is something that a font designer like Jason Smith, tries to create. He spoke to BBC correspondent David Silletto and told him more about the characteristics that fonts might represent in the people who have picked them.

### **David Silletto, BBC and Jason Smith, Font Designer**

This is Rufus, who is a humanitarian, slightly odd, slightly wide – (and you really think that people will judge you on your letters?) Oh absolutely, it's the handwriting for the modern age. (So you could look sort of grown up and competent with this, charming and friendly with this?)...oh I think you can look competent with this as well but this is much more friendly.

**Rob:** That's Jason Smith, who describes fonts as people. For example the font Rufus, is **humanitarian**, slightly odd, slightly wide!

**Cath:** Humanitarian! So it shows that you're concerned with reducing suffering. That's how people will judge you if you use this font.

**Rob:** Apparently so and it makes you look grown up too. A font like Tiresias Infofont can make you look **competent** too but more friendly. As he said, this is the handwriting of the modern age.

**Cath:** But there's one font that seems to be **loathed** by many people. That's a sort of rather **jaunty** font called comic sans. It's warm and its inoffensive font and to some it looks homely and perhaps handwritten.

**Rob:** But others think it's so simple it looks childish – so much so that an anti-comic sans website has been set up!

**Cath:** Well that shows you how controversial fonts can be. They are like our online personality so I think next time I'm on the computer I'll give more thought to the font I use.

**Rob:** Me too. But Cath how much thought have you given to today's question?!  
Earlier I asked you which language the word 'font' originates from?

**Cath:** And I said French but I haven't got a single one right yet.

**Rob:** Today's your lucky day because you're right. It does originate from the French 'fonte' which means something that has been melted and refers to the metal that was melted to make letters for printing presses and typewriters. Right Cath, could you please remind us of some of the vocabulary we've used today:

**Cath:** Sure. We had:

**fonts**

**an array**

**typography**

**calligraphy**

**unsophisticated**

**characteristics**

**humanitarian**

**competent**

**loathed**

**jaunty**

**Rob:** Thanks Cath. We hope you've enjoyed today's programme, and maybe you'll think more about the fonts you'll be using! Please join us again for another 6 Minute English very soon.

**Both:** Bye!

## Vocabulary and definitions

<b>fonts</b>	different styles and sizes of letters that are used in printing or typing.
<b>an array</b>	a group or collection of things or people, often large or impressive
<b>typography</b>	the way of preparing and arranging printed material, especially designing how text will appear when it's printed
<b>calligraphy</b>	the art of producing beautiful handwriting often using a brush or a special pen
<b>unsophisticated</b>	simple and basic
<b>characteristics</b>	qualities or features that are typical of someone or something
<b>humanitarian</b>	concerned with reducing suffering and improving the conditions that people live in
<b>competent</b>	efficient and effective
<b>loathed</b>	disliked very much
<b>jaunty</b>	light-hearted, full of confidence and energetic

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