

BAD DISIGN



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When creating a new typeface, a designer can inject the most artistic flair into the ampersand character. The term ampersand, as Geoffrey Glaister writes in his “Glossary of the Book,” is a corruption of *and* (& *per se and*, which literally means “(the character) & by itself (is the word) and.” The symbol & is derived from the ligature of *ET* or *et*, which is the Latin word for “and.”

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One of the first examples of an ampersand appears on a piece of papyrus from about 45 A.D. Written in the style of early Roman capital cursive (typical of the handwriting of the time), it shows the ligature *ET*. A sample of Pompeian graffiti from 79 A.D. (fig. 1) also shows a combination of the capitals E and T, and is again written in early Roman script. Later documents display a more flowing, less formal Roman lowercase cursive, which evolved into our italic, and the appearance of a ligature *et* (fig. 2) becomes more frequent. While the connection between the capital letters E and T was initially formed by writing quickly, later calligraphic manuscripts show the middle part of the E, consisting of semicircles, joined to the T by a more intentional, flowing horizontal line. Eventually, this tight combination began to look like one symbol (fig. 3). By the time scribes developed Carolingian minuscule about 775 A.D., the ligature had become a standard part of their repertoire (fig. 4). Depending on the writing speed or the calligrapher’s concern for perfection, from the eighth century on, the combination of the letters E and T resembled the ligature that was adopted with the invention of printing in the early 15th century (fig. 5).

The lefthand portion of the ampersand is either a lowercase e or a capital E consisting of two semicircles. The oblique upstroke, often with a drop-shaped terminal (fig. 6), might be a leftover from the horizontal stroke in E or e, or it might have been one of the lines connecting to the next character, a technique preferred by calligraphers to increase the flow of writing. Compared to the italic form, the roman version of the ampersand in general shows only a meager remainder of the t-stroke (fig. 7).

Today, the & symbol is incorporated into the design of every new font and is a part of every existing roman alphabet. The variations of the

ampersand are manifold, particularly in italics. Apart from the straightforward &, which appears in the roman style, italic-style ampersands - influenced by calligraphy - show livelier forms. Some typefaces have especially beautiful ampersands; the illustration (fig. 10) shows italic ampersands for Garamond, Minion, Janson, Meridien, Baskerville, and Caslon. With the appearance of slab serif and sans serif typefaces in the 19th century, typefounders preferred the roman version of the ampersand (&), in italic as well as roman styles (fig. 11).

There are many interesting variations of the ampersand, such as those created by the talented Ludovico degli Arrighi, the Renaissance writing master (fig. 8), and Robert Granjon, the gifted 16th century French type designer (fig. 9). The new Poetica typeface family, which was designed by Robert Slimbach of Adobe and based on Cancelleresca, the commercial writing hand used during the Italian Renaissance, offers a rich collection of 58 different ampersand characters (fig. 12).

Ampersand usage varies from language to language. In English and French text, the ampersand may be substituted for the words *and* and *et*, and both versions may be used in the same text. The German rule is to use the ampersand within formal or corporate titles made up of two separate names; according to present German composition rules, the ampersand may not be used in running text. In any language, the ampersand’s calligraphic qualities make it a compelling design element that can add visual appeal and personality to any page.

The ampersand is a fascinating character, actually- you should read this article.

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