

## WHAT KIND OF AD?

Typography is truly the invisible art of the 20th century even though it is in plain sight, everywhere. Most graphic design students learn this right away, but we also discover just as quickly that we're in the vast minority. It all becomes distressingly clear once we leave the rarified halls of learning, enter the steaming ranks of the working learned and show them classic typefaces, correct letter spacing, proper line leading and exacting proportions.

And they don't give a damn.

"I can't read it."

"Make it bigger."

"Make it smaller."

"It's too precious."

"It's too plain."

"It all has to fit on one page. Make it sing!"

"Cut some of the copy? You're joking."

To them, it's just words, but to us, to graphic designers, it's *type*. We've learned to look at it a whole other way. Notice I said "look" instead of "read." Once again, Form and Content take center field – will they go to war? Will they get married? Will they at least hold hands?

This is the eternal typographic conundrum. What most people don't understand is that typography is the use of language that in itself is its *own* language – one that can take a lifetime to learn and perfect, and few ever do. Put simply: The Content is what the words say, the Form is what they look like. But alas, it's rarely as simple as that. Before the advent of what was called Commercial Art this was less of an issue than it is now, but as we find ourselves thick into the age of the visual dispatch there is no turning back. It's not just about what you're saying anymore, it's how you're saying it. In the wrong hands, mixed messages abound. Suppose you have something important to convey to a loved one:

*I hate you.*

Misrepresents your sentiment. As opposed to:

*I hate you.*

Right? And yet, this same design solution would not be wanted in a letter from your personal physician:

The test results are in:  
You have inoperable cancer!!

Now let's try solicitation, as we constantly apply it in the ad trade.  
This can get tricky. To wit:

**PLEASE TOUCH ME.**

Whoops! I don't think so. Which brings us back to:

*Please touch me.*

You see? Endless possibilities. And pitfalls.

Now, let's apply what we've learned to practical use. Take for example the newspaper advertisement I was commissioned to design in the summer of 1961. The client placed the order by phone, which can complicate the choosing of typefaces, but luckily in this case that was one aspect of the job about which — surprise! — the client couldn't have cared less.

"Hello. I'd like to place an advertisement in the *Register*, please."

"Yessir. What kind of ad?"

"It's for the Yale Department of Psychology. We're conducting an experiment and we'd like to solicit volunteers from the community."

"I see. What do you want the ad to say?"

He explained. After what seemed like hours:

"Gee. That's a lot of information. Is this a full-page ad?"

"Oh, heavens, no. We couldn't afford that. We checked the rates — this would be less than a quarter page."

"Less than a quarter page, with all this copy? Can you cut any of it?"

"Well, no."

"Right. Uh, this will be quite a challenge. Let me spec this out. I could show it to you tomorrow afternoon."

"That ... won't be necessary. Just run it. Today if you can. I'm sure it will be fine."

"Really?"

"Yes, just make all the information as big as possible."

They all say that. ALL of them.

"Okay, will do."

"Thanks."

So, here is the final ad, as it ran, with several notations:

**PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT**

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**WE WILL PAY YOU \$4.00 FOR  
ONE HOUR OF YOUR TIME.**

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Persons needed for a study of memory.

- We will pay 500 New Haven men to help us complete a scientific study of memory and learning. The study is being done at Yale University.
- Each person who participates will be paid \$4.00 (plus 50¢ carfare) for approximately 1 hour's time. We need you for only 1 hour. There are no further obligations. You may choose the time you would like to come (evenings, weekdays, or weekends).

**NO SPECIAL TRAINING, EDUCATION, OR EXPERIENCE IS NEEDED. WE WANT:**

|                 |                     |                      |
|-----------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| Factory Workers | Businessmen         | Construction Workers |
| City Employees  | Clerks              | Salespeople          |
| Laborers        | Professional People | White-collar Workers |
| Barbers         | Telephone Workers   | Others               |

ALL PERSONS MUST BE BETWEEN THE AGES OF 20 AND 50. HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE STUDENTS CANNOT BE USED.

- If you meet these qualifications, fill out the coupon below and mail it now to Professor Stanley Milgram, Department of Psychology, Yale University, New Haven. You will be notified later of the specific time and place of the study. We reserve the right to decline any application.
- You will be paid \$4.00 (plus 50¢ carfare) as soon as you arrive at the laboratory.

**TO: PROF. STANLEY MILGRAM, DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY,  
YALE UNIVERSITY, NEW HAVEN, CONN.**

I want to take part in this study of memory and learning. I am between the ages of 20 and 50. I will be paid \$4.00 (plus 50¢ carfare) if I participate.

NAME (PLEASE PRINT) .....

ADDRESS .....

TELEPHONE NO. .... BEST TIME TO CALL .....

AGE ..... OCCUPATION .....

I CAN COME: WEEKDAYS ..... EVENINGS ..... WEEKENDS .....

First, note that there are no less than 11 different kinds of information to be considered, in a space that is 3 3/4-inches wide x 6-inches tall. Even so, only three typeface “families” are used (Trade Gothic, Bodoni, and Baskerville), each with its own set of variations to provide enough typographical “color” without appearing busy or jammed. In order to maintain proper proportions, some of the type must be reduced to 7 points, widely regarded as the absolute minimal for legibility (a theory with which those over 50 years of age may strenuously disagree).

1. This must be listed first, for legal reasons, but is by no means the most important piece of information. I used 9-point Trade Gothic Condensed, a classic sans-serif typeface used primarily in tabloid newspaper headlines and can easily withstand this kind of reduction and still look important, especially in all capital letters.
2. All caps again, but this time in a classic 12-point Bodoni medium weight, which commands center of attention – it is designed to be the first thing you see. It took some convincing for Yale to accept that this is the reason people would respond, as opposed to any sense of “civic duty” to further the cause of “science.” It is offset by two .5-point lines, or “rules,” for emphasis.
3. Back to Trade Gothic, in a lighter weight and caps/lowercase. This should be the second line you see/read.
4. The first block of what we call “body copy,” in 7-point Baskerville, a popular text face for English literature. The dots, or “bullets,” prioritize the two distinct groups of information within. Note that the amount of compensation to the solicitee is mentioned four times throughout the ad.
- 5, 6. By grouping this list into three columns, I not only saved space, I made it easier to for the eye to process. A solid paragraph with the titles offset by commas would be far more taxing.
- 7, 8. The second block of body copy is set off by a headline in all-caps Baskerville (the only one). It is noticeably wider than the first block (4), both to economize space and to make it distinct.
- 9, 10. Coupons, it must be said, are a burden for both the designer and the typesetter, but at least in this case it serves to “anchor” the entire composition. The border is a series of short straight lines, indicating detachment, while the “blanks” to be filled in are denoted by dots. The professor’s name and position, as it were, are italicized to impart a sense of urgency on the part of the viewer. Ideally, two lines should be allocated for the Address, but space limitations made this impossible.
11. If you look closely you’ll see one dot less after the word “Weekends.” This provides a subtle but undeniable message: weekdays and evenings are preferred.

There. That seems innocent enough, doesn't it? That's what I thought. I thought, 'Now *that's* an ad that I would answer?'  
Wouldn't you?