

Legato: to play the notes of music ‘connected’.
The idea of connecting separate units to enhance the overall expression can be applied to the letters of a text in exactly the same way.

The typeface determines the extent to which the characters of the alphabet will visually connect, will build proper word and line images, as typographers say. When a typeface succeeds in doing this, texts will be more legible.

Most sanserifs have very basic geometric shapes (like Futura), even those built using classical proportions (like Gill Sans). But this is not the most satisfactory approach when trying to visually connect separate characters, which in turn usually leads to most long texts being set in serifed typefaces.

FF Legato abandons the idea of a sanserif consisting of simple rigid forms. The mirrored image below shows how (different from typefaces like Gill Sans and Syntax) movement and direction is expressed by outer- and inner-forms behaving relatively independent, and is maintained through all weights. It makes characters refer to previous and next letters to build better words and lines.



From left to right:
1 - 'o' with black inner shape,
2 - inner shape of 'o'
3 - outer shape of 'o'
4 - inner shape of 'o' enlarged.

Many sanserifs published these days combine a ‘pleasant’ appearance with a conventional construction. This is just what I wanted to avoid designing FF Legato. In discussions FF Legato has been compared with typefaces like Finnegan (Linotype) and Cronos (Adobe). Contrast of such faces is strong and along a single vertical axis; vertical bars are emphasized. This becomes clear when looking at a character like the lowercase ‘o’ at bolder weights. The construction establishes a strong rhythm but does not necessarily improve word images.



First line: Vesta by Gerard Unger, second line: FF Legato.

On the contrary; it optically splits up words into single letters with stems as independant elements, just as our alphabet already splits up terms in separate units on a ‘system-level’. Often the resulting austerity is then masked, for example by decorative details suggesting the touch of a brush or nib. Such typefaces will work fine for packaging etc. but their use for larger texts is questionable and may not fit contemporary, transparent graphic design.

In 1993 my rather experimental FF Balance was published. It completely reverses the conventional contrast (‘incorrect contrast’); horizontal parts are thicker than vertical parts. The illustration below compares the sanserifs Univers (emphasizing vertical parts), FF Balance (emphasizing horizontal



Brochure of FF Balance, 1993.

parts) and FF Legato (emphasizing diagonals from the upper left to the lower right). Each one of them builds a different rhythm, creates a different interaction between the characters; a different *continuity*.

