

Type History Presentation: Akzidenz Grotesk

Process Documentation and Reflection

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Choosing a Typeface

During the first discussion, we found out that all of us in the group actually appreciate simple, functional fonts that are not flourish nor elaborate. We all agreed that Helvetica fitted that criteria and it was a very popular typeface that are commonly used in modern context. However, we also felt that it has more than enough exposure on its own. Afterall, it is the most popularised font of the 20th Century. After researching a little bit more on Helvetica, we chanced upon its forefather, **Akzidenz Grotesk**, and decided to do an in-depth research on its history.

Research Process

We decided to split up the research work according to the guideline as follows:

- 1) Reason of existence and origins (Trey)
- 2) The context in which it originated (Clara)
- 3) Who designed it? Why was it designed? (Jia Le)
- 4) Examples of application and existence (Sylvester)
- 5) How has this typeface influenced us? (Sylvester)

When we doing our research, we found that there were actually many duplicated information that were actually quite helpful for us. It helped to ensure that all of our information were aligned and accurate. We also tried to research more than what we were assigned to and helped one another to strengthen the information. Overall, it was a very collaborative research process.

Through our research, we saw the progress of Swiss Design and how they changed the game of communication design from the early 1910s. San serif fonts like Akzidenz Grotesk are politically neutral and helped with majority of communication materials in the 20s. Also, we found many articles online that compare between Akzidenz Grotesk and Helvetica. Many graphic designers have different opinion on whether which typefaces, Akzidenz or Helvetica is a better typeface. **Joseph Müller-Brockmann**, for example, preferred Akzidenz Grotesk over Helvetica simple because it is "more expressive and its formal foundations are more universal. The end of the 'e', for instance is a diagonal which produces right angles. In the case of Helvetica and Univers the endings are straight, producing acute or obtuse angles, subjective angles. Its strength derives from its neutrality and the fact that it doesn't over dominate when used, allowing the designer more freedom and versatility." Many also agreed that Haas basically took Akzidenz Grotesk, studied it, and only changed tiny aspects of it, which created a new design. Hence, we were quite surprised how both typefaces closely resemble each other:



Poster by Shannon Andrews

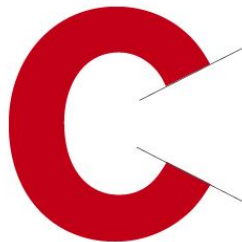
Hence, that was the main turning point for our presentation to focus on not only the history of Akzidenz Grotesk, but how it is related to Helvetica and how to differentiate between the 2 typefaces.

Understanding Akzidenz Grotesk And Its Application

Through our research process on Akzidenz Grotesk, we started to understand its differences from Helvetica. Akzidenz Grotesk was designed with functionality in mind. As you can see, Akzidenz Grotesk's S and C has a more angular end while Helvetica has a straight end. In comparison, Helvetica is more geometrical which is what impacted its readability in small pt size. Upon understanding all these subtle differences, we decided to make the type reference book in transparency sheets that is seen later on.



Akzidenz Grotesk



Akzidenz Grotesk



Akzidenz Grotesk



Helvetica



Helvetica



Helvetica

We were also pleasantly surprised to find out that the Red Cross America uses Akzidenz Grotesk in its design.



Brand identity at a glance

Logo suite

Logo files are available at redcross.org/brand.

Required 2x clear space is indicated by blue lines. 1x=height and width of one arm of the cross.

Button logo family



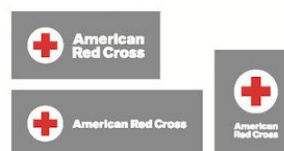
The button logo was inspired by a vintage pin as an engaging symbol of enthusiastic participation. It is a personal, grassroots and unique expression for the Red Cross. Use this logo in any of its three forms for most printed marketing and communications materials as well as television, Web and email.

Classic logo family



The classic logo should be used in disaster situations, corporate materials, exterior building signage or when the marketing-oriented button logo is not appropriate.

Flat disc logo family



Use the flat disc logo when you have a dark background or printing restrictions preclude using the button logo. (Note that the white circle behind the cross must be present, so this is not suitable for white backgrounds).

Print minimum sizes



Digital minimum sizes



Clear space

Clear space minimums (shown above with blue lines) are built into the logo files.

Separating button graphic and wordmark

As long as minimum size requirements are followed, the button can be separated from the wordmark and scaled on its own. Remember to include the wordmark in the viewing area.

Color breakdowns

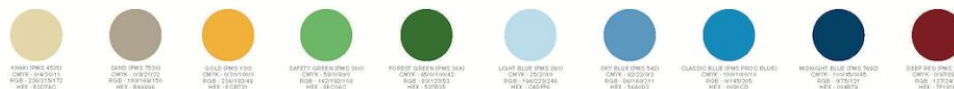
Primary



Neutral

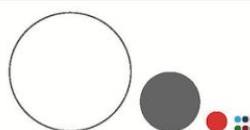


Secondary



Color proportion

Although individual pieces may vary, notice that the cumulative effect keeps the overall brand color balance.



Typography

	Information	Voice
Name and use	Akzidenz-Grotesk Standard family is used to clearly and objectively communicate information.	Georgia Regular family is used for storytelling, expressing opinions and calls to action.
Weights	Regular or Bold for heads and subheads. Regular for body copy. Bold or <i>Italic</i> for emphasis.	Regular for heads, subheads and body copy. Bold or <i>Italic</i> for emphasis.
Cases	Upper- and lowercase or ALL CAPS. Sentence case, NOT title case.	Upper- and lowercase. Sentence case, NOT title case.
Colors	Preferred: Red Cross Gray When necessary: Red Cross Black Use sparingly: Red Cross Red White Secondary colors	Preferred: Red Cross Gray When necessary: Red Cross Black Use sparingly: Red Cross Red White Secondary colors
RESTRICTED DIGITAL USE	When Akzidenz is unavailable in digital situations, use Arial. In addition, use Arial in external, customizable pieces. Akzidenz should be available on Red Cross computers. If not, email brand@redcross.org .	Georgia is a system font and should be available on any Mac or PC.

Tone of voice

How we talk is as important as what we talk about.

Uplifting. The work we create will often be highly emotional, but never with a focus on the devastation, destruction or disaster. We want to leave people with a feeling of hope and possibility. We want them to feel that they can make a difference through the American Red Cross.

Empowering. We are a brand that relies on people—both the people we help and those who embody the Red Cross and deliver on our mission. We want everyone to feel empowered to be a part of this network, to help us make a difference in times of need.

Inviting. We are open and accessible to anyone and everyone who wants to assist us in our mission. We are not intimidating or directive.

Personal. Our care is selfless, not self-serving. We treat every person we help and everyone who helps us as an individual. We want them to feel care and compassion every time we interact with them. We are not yelling our message from the rooftops. We treat every individual with respect.

Exhibition Style Presentation

We also researched on how we wanted to present our findings. Hence we looked through Pinterest to get inspiration and found out that Designer/Design Studio such as Max Bill and The Good Form commonly used Akzidenz Grotesk for their clean exhibition aesthetics. Hence we want to incorporate that into our presentation to make it more engaging and interesting. Here's the initial moodboard that we created:

Colour Scheme 1



Execution methods - Hanging Posters



Colour Scheme 2



Possible interactivity idea/ takeaway for the class - tear offs at the posters



In terms of the materials selection, the off white paper style is a tribute to the past industrial revolution roots of Grotesk typefaces. The metal clips are also carefully chosen to fit the overall theme to match industrialisation. We have also curated past and present application of the font to explain how influential Akzidenz Grotesk is:

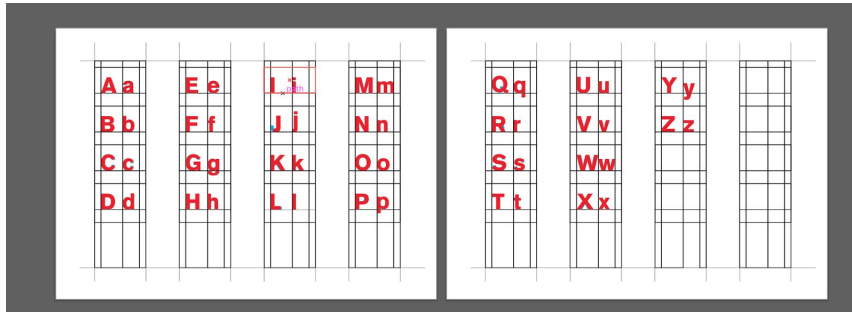


Engaging the Audience

We were thinking of ways to ensure that the audience actually learn how to differentiate between Akzidenz Grotesk and Helvetica. Hence we came out with 2 ways to engage them:

Transparency Book

We created a book using transparency paper. We aligned each character of Helvetica (Cyan) and Akzidenz Grotesk (Red) and overlay them on top of one another to allow our audience to see the differences between the letters of each typefaces clearly.



Let's Play Ak-Game

We came up with this idea of using projector and transparency to create an interactive game. Firstly, we project a word (using either Helvetica or Akzidenz Grotesk) on the screen with a missing character. For e.g. we project a word "H_ndgloves". The audience have to select a correct character printed on the transparency and hold it up in front of the projector to match fill in the missing character projected on the screen. This will help the audience to understand the anatomy of each of the typefaces more clearly.

Choose the character with
the correct typeface.
Match it below:

H_ndgloves



Reflections

It's always amazing to know the backstory of typefaces and the development it has made to be readily available to us digitally. We chose to work on this typeface as it was one of the few sans serif type available and we wanted to avoid working on Helvetica. Akzidenz Grotesk really led us on an amazing journey and it was a great insight for us as we unraveled its rich history.

For Clara personally, Akzidenz Grotesk was an endearing tribute to Massimo Vignelli who once said, "set his tomb stone with Helvetica". For some of us, Akzidenz Grotesk had already overtaken Helvetica in our hearts a long time ago. Even though the two typefaces are so similar, there's something alluring about the compactness and efficiency of Akzidenz Grotesk in smaller prints in comparison to Helvetica. In contrast, due to the geometrical form of Helvetica, it looks better when it's enlarged. From what we have learnt in our research, we discovered that Akzidenz Grotesk was made to be a more efficient type where functionality was the key design philosophy whereas Helvetica is just that little bit more flashy.

It's great to see the roots of the most popularised type come a full circle. The continual strive to make design better, to make type more legible and value add to the everyday life is why we do what do. The art of typography is really understated - it does not call for obvious or obnoxious attention. Instead, it helps designers in ways they never knew it could. We truly feel that Akzidenz Grotesk has quietly helped generations of citizens lead better lives without ever asking anything in return.