



Choosing a Font for Legal Briefs

MANY LAWYERS MISTAKENLY THINK that court rules require them to submit briefs in Times New Roman. But most jurisdictions actually allow a wide variety of fonts. California, for example, requires only that you use a font “essentially equivalent to” Courier, Times New Roman or Arial. CRC 2.105. In other words, any monospaced, serif or sans serif font (just not something like Comic Sans or **Braggadocio**). Other states, such as Oregon, don’t mention fonts at all in their rules. See, e.g., UTCR 2.010.

But even if court rules allow fonts other than Times New Roman, why should lawyers bother to switch? *Because Times New Roman is actually a really bad typeface for legal briefs.* It was designed for newspapers—that is, for small columns of tiny text. It was not meant to be used for long passages of 12-point text printed on 8½-by-11-inch paper. In that context it’s hard to read, which makes it harder for your reader to

absorb and retain your message.

Of course, designing a better legal document involves a lot more than simply choosing the “right” font. But the simple act of using a font *other than* Times New Roman can have a noticeable (and positive) impact on your briefs.

So which font should you use instead? In an ideal world, we would all purchase top-quality fonts that are designed for our purpose (e.g., long-form text). But the reality is that most of us are limited to the system fonts installed on our computers. Even in that limited set, however, there are better and worse options. Below is a list of system fonts that I would recommend for legal briefs. To add some variety to your document, try pairing two different fonts—a serif for body text and a sans serif for headings.

For a more extensive treatment of system fonts, see Matthew Butterick’s *Typography for Lawyers* (2d ed. 2015).

SERIFS

Calisto MT

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
1234567890 ,;:!?“”@#%&*§¶

Century Schoolbook

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
1234567890 ,;:!?“”@#%&*§¶

Charter

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
1234567890 ,;:!?“”@#%&*§¶

Garamond

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
1234567890 ,;:!?“”@#%&*§¶

Goudy Old Style

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
1234567890 ,;:!?“”@#%&*§¶

Iowan Old Style

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
1234567890 ,;:!?“”@#%&*§¶

SANS SERIFS

Avenir/Avenir Next

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
1234567890 ,;:!?“”@#%&*§¶

Franklin Gothic

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
1234567890 ,;:!?“”@#%&*§¶

Gill Sans/Gill Sans MT

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
1234567890 ,;:!?“”@#%&*§¶

Helvetica/Helvetica Neue

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
1234567890 ,;:!?“”@#%&*§¶

Optima

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
1234567890 ,;:!?“”@#%&*§¶

