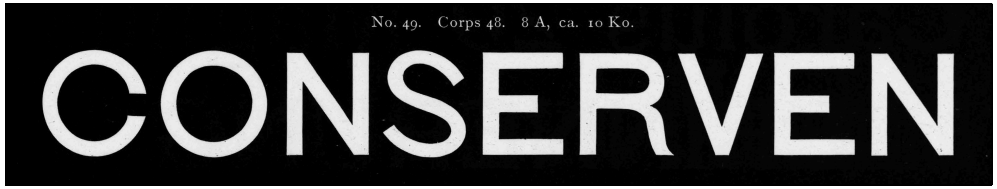
MD Primer

MD Primer is a digital reinterpretation of the flaws and inconsistencies of early grotesque typefaces, inspired by a range of both European and American designs produced in the late 19th Century. While these typefaces were produced by skilled craftspeople working for established foundries, at the time of their production the sans-serif style had yet to settle into the rhythms and traditions we're familiar with today.

The result was a diverse range of grotesques which, though well-made, to the modern eye seem somewhat naïve and unrefined. The proportions were often strange by the standards of today; the difference in weight between upper and lowercase more pronounced; shapes which in contemporary typefaces are usually harmonious would frequently appear very different from one another.

It's this era of early sans-serif designs, most of which have never been available in digital formats, that MD Primer is based on. Rather than faithfully reproducing any single design, the typeface reflects several — reducing or accentuating elements from them to better fit contemporary usage, while still referring to the source material in character.

The name of the typeface also reflects these distinctly analogue origins. *Long Primer* and *Great Primer* were both names given to sizes of metal type (around 10pt and 18pt, respectively), before the introduction of the numeric point size.



△ Halbbreite Groteske-Versalien (Benjamin Krebs Nachfolger, ~1889)

△ Interchangeable Gothic (Marder, Luse & Co., ~1889)

△ Boldface Gothic No. 13 (James Conner's Sons, mid-1800s; here Bauer'sche Gießerei, ~1915)

△ MD Primer Semibold

MD Primer is available in six discrete weights, from Light to Black, each with a matching italic style. The letterspacing is consistent across this weight range (though slightly narrower in the bolder styles), and is overall slightly tighter than what would be encountered in the original 19th-century references.

Although the effect is less pronounced than in some of the reference material, MD Primer's uppercase is somewhat bolder (and indeed wider) than the lowercase. This is most visible in the boldest styles, and more subtle towards the regular and light weights of the typeface.

The italic styles of MD Primer reference several early sans-serif typefaces which feature oblique, almost 'rotated-roman' italics, rather than conventional cursive designs. These styles are similar in width to the uprights, rather than slightly condensed (as would be typical), with the double-story *a* and *g* forms retained.

Roman

Light
Regular
Medium
Semibold
Bold
Black

Italic

Light Italic
Italic
Medium Italic
Semibold Italic
Bold Italic
Black Italic

96pt —

LITHOGRAPHS

72pt Single-story *a, g*

ARTIFICIAL 39 LAKE
Zero-G Racing League

48pt Notched *1* and *4*

TRACTION ENGINE REPAIR Co.
“Coal Stones; Lignite, Bitumen.”
Photographic 174 Supplies & Tools

96pt

Printed & Bound

72pt

DÜSSELDORF PRESS
High Quality Products

48pt

BOLDFACE GOTHIC No. 13 (1900)
Industrial Manufacture of Type
Engravers & Pantographic Cutters

96pt — Straight-tailed *j*

Koninklijke Stallen

72pt —

HISTORICAL ITEMS 6
“Rijksmuseum, Amst.”

48pt —

HAAS’SCHE GIEßEREI, BASEL
Metro 51 (Eastbound) → Isolatorweg
Annual Report 2025 · Figures

96pt

PRINTMAKERS

72pt

STS-7 · JUNE 18, 1983
Kennedy Space Center

48pt

“APPARENT MAGNITUDE 20.45”
Distant Star Navigation System
Orbital Manoeuvring Technique 8

96pt — Notched *1* and *4*

“Fahrenheit 451”

72pt —

26 COMMUNICATION
Hydrogen & Mercury

48pt —

PEREGRINE NESTING SPOTS
[Restricted Access March–October]
A380 Northbound Diversion

96pt —

Herald of Change

72pt Single-story *a, g*

LITERATURE 98 SALE
Journals & Magazines

48pt —

LETRASET® DRY TRANSFERS
Breite Halbfette Grotesk (1890/91)
J.G. Schelter & Giesecke, Leipzig

16 / 19 pt

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The cost of materials *and the unwieldiness of the great folio volumes* soon caused a demand for smaller books. Gutenberg's 36-line Bible was *almost immediately replaced by the 42-line Bible.* A reduction of *one sixth* in the number of pages of a book as large as the Bible would effect a very important saving *in the cost of material and labor,* especially when we remember that the early printing press was a *very laborious and slow affair.* Gutenberg's press was capable of printing *only twenty sheets an hour,* or one sheet every three minutes.

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***Northward of Sippara* the Tigris and Euphrates again trend apart from one another and enclose *the great plateau of Mesopotamia.* To the east of the Tigris come the mountains of Elam, *'the highlands,'* and to the north of them the Kurdish ranges, which were known to the primitive Babylonians under the name of *Guti* or *Gutium.* At the foot of these ranges, and *northward of the Lower or Little Zab,* the kingdom of Assyria arose. It took its name from its original capital of Assur, *now Kalah-Sherghat,* on the western bank of the Tigris, not far to the north of *the junction of the latter river with the Lower Zab.* The supremacy of Assur after-**

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The fact that the gold in a new British sovereign *(or pound sterling)* is worth $4.8665 in our money by no means proves, however, that *drafts payable in pounds in London can always be bought or sold for $4.8665 per pound.* To reduce the case to a unit basis, *suppose that you owed one pound in London,* and that, finding it difficult to buy a draft to send in payment, *you elected to send actual gold.* The amount of gold necessary to settle your debt would cost $4.8665, *in addition to which* you would have to pay all the *expenses of remitting.* It would be cheaper, therefore, to pay *considerably more than $4.8665* for a one-pound draft, and you would probably bid up until somebody *consented to sell you the draft you wanted. Which goes to*

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***The Theory of Quaternions* is due to Sir William Rowan Hamilton, *Royal Astronomer of Ireland,* who presented his first paper on the subject to the Royal Irish Academy in 1843. His *Lectures on Quaternions* were published in 1853, and his *Elements,* in 1866, shortly after his death. *The Elements of Quaternions* by Tait is the accepted text-book for advanced students. *The following development of the theory* is prepared for average students with a thorough knowledge of *the elements of algebra and geometry,* and is**

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Today the species is restricted* to two distinct populations existing on opposite sides of the Pacific. *One herd summers in the Sea of Okhotsk,* migrating southward to Korea where, in the open bays, calving takes place in January, February and March. *The larger population summers off the coast of Siberia and Kamchatka,* migrating clear across the Pacific Ocean to California and then south to the breeding lagoons near *Bahia de Sebastian Viscaino,

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It is obvious that i*f the sum of two finite steps is zero, then the two steps must be parallel;* in fact, if one step is AB, then the other *must be equal to BA.* Also, if the sum of *three finite steps* is zero, then the three steps must be *parallel to one plane;* in fact, if the first is AB, and the second is BC, then the third must be equal to CA. Hence, i*f a sum of steps on two lines that are not parallel* (or on three lines that are not parallel to one plane) is zero, then *the sum of the steps on each line is zero,* since, as just shown, the *sum of the steps on each*

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***The mold in which type is cast* consists of two essential parts—*the steel box* in which the body is formed, *and the matrix* which contains a sunken image of the character. The matrix covers the opening at one end of the mold, and on the opposite end *(which is the foot of the type)* is an opening *through which the melted metal* is injected. A mold is made for *a single body-size of type* but it is adjustable *sideways* to correspond to the various widths of the letters in an alphabet. O*ne mold may be used* to**

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The fiber mats are *the frayed inner side of enormous hornlike plates* which grow down from the palate. The main body of each plate is placed *edgewise to the outgoing water* so that *many plates are required* to complete the mat which runs *from the tip of the jaw to the corner of the mouth.* These plates vary in size and stiffness *from species to species.* Some of the plates from the mouth of the *bowhead whale* are 12-14 feet in length, whereas in the *finback whale* the plates are 2-4 feet. There can be *over 200 plates per side* in the filtering structure. The frayed inner edge is *constantly breaking off* and the plates keep growing and

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Large types, *such as are used for posters and large bills,* are made of wood. The smallest size for practical use is 48-point, or *4-line pica.* Sizes of wood type are multiples of the pica, and are so named, as *8-line, 10-line,* etc. They are much cheaper than metal types, though *not as durable or satisfactory for printing.* The wood commonly used is maple, and *the letter is made on the end of the grain.* It must be well seasoned and polished. Pine and other soft woods are used for *very large sizes of wood type* and poster engravings. The manner of cutting the letter is by *routing away the blank parts* with a small rapidly-revolving cutter. The strip of wood, large enough to make several letters, *and planed type-high,* is placed in a machine

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Uppercase	ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ		
Lowercase	abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz		
Proportional Figures	0123456789	Tabular Figures	0123456789
Punctuation	.,:;…!¡?¿·▪*#/\(){}[]-–—_"',„“”‘’«»‹›		
Symbols & Math	ªº@&¶§©®™°|¦†‡+−×÷=≠><~^%		
Currency	ƒ฿₵¢₡$€₲₴₺₼₦₽₹₪£₩¥		
Diacritics	¨ ˙ ` ´ ˝ ˆ ˇ ˘ ˚ ˜ ¯ ¸ ˛	Arrows	↑↗→↘↓↙←↖↔↕
Uppercase Extended	ÁĂǍÂÄẠÀĀĄÅÃÆǼḄƁĆČÇĈĊĐĎĐḌƊÉĔĚÊËĖẸÈĒĘƐƎẼƏĞ ǦĜĢĠḠĦĤḦḤIJÍĬǏÎÏİỊÌĪĮƗĨJ́ĴĶƘĹĽĻŁŃŇŅṄṆƝÑŊŊÓŎǑÔÖỌÒ ŐŌƆØǾÕŒṖÞŔŘŖŚŠŞŜȘṢẞŤŢȚÚŬǓÛÜỤÙŰŪŲŮŨɅẂŴẄẀ ẌÝŶŸỲƳȲỸŹŽŻẒ		
Lowercase Extended	áăǎâäạàāąåãæǽḅɓćčçĉċðďđḍɗéĕěêëėẹèēęɛẽəğǧĝģġḡħĥḧḥıíĭǐîïị ìijīįɨĩȷj́ĵķƙĺľļłńňņṅṇɲñŋóŏǒôöọòőōɔøǿõœṗþŕřŗśšşŝșṣßťţțúŭǔûüụùűū ųůũʌẃŵẅẁẍýŷÿỳƴȳỹźžżẓ		

Tabular Currency	ƒ฿¢₵$€₲₴₺₼₦₱₹₪£₩¥				
Single-story *a*	aáăǎâäạàāąåã	Single-story *g*	gğǧĝġģḡ		
Notched *1* and *4*	14	Straight-tailed *j*	ɲNijȷíĵɳ	Alternate *IJ*	Ʊ
Capital Forms	¿H? ¡H!				

`ss01` Single-story *g*	Argent	Argent
`ss02` Single-story *a*	Halcyon	Halcyon
`ss03` Notched *1* and *4*	1984	1984
`ss04` Straight-tailed *j*	Rijswijk	Rijswijk
`case` Case-sensitive Forms	¿H? ¡H!	¿H? ¡H!
`dlig` Discretionary ligature IJ	LIJN	LIJN
`ordn` Ordinals	1a 1o	1ª 1º
`tnum` Tabular Figures & Currency	€12.99	€12.99
`locl`* Localised Forms *(Romanian & Moldavian, Northern Sámi)*	Şţ ŋŋ	Şţ Ŋŋ
`calt`† Contextual Alternates	Logjam	Logjam

Using OpenType Features in CSS

The four-character tags (`ss01`, `tnum`, etc.) listed next to each feature above can be used with the `font-feature-settings` CSS property to toggle the relevant feature. For instance,

```
font-feature-settings: "calt" 0;
```

will disable the (on-by-default) *contextual alternates* feature, and

```
font-feature-settings: "ss02";
```

will enable the *single-story a* stylistic set.

We recommend referring to the MDN OpenType Font Features Guide for more information and best practices.

* Previous versions of MD Primer included the *'N-form'* letter Eng, used in Sámi languages, by default. This version now defaults to the *'n-form'* variant, which is more widely preferred.

† In rare cases, the straight-tailed alternate *j* is substituted automatically to avoid awkward spacing combinations. (This feature is on by default, but can be disabled manually.)

Showing 140 of a total 351 supported languages. You can view the complete list at mass-driver.com/typeface/md-primer.

Afrikaans
Akan
Albanian
Asu
Azerbaijani
Bafia
Bambara
Basque
Bemba
Bena
Bosnian
Catalan
Cebuano
Chiga
Colognian
Cornish
Corsican
Croatian
Czech
Danish
Duala
Dutch
Embu
English
Esperanto
Estonian
Faroese
Filipino
Finnish
French
Friulian
Fula
Ga
Galician
Ganda
German
Gusii
Hungarian
Icelandic
Ido
Igbo
Inari Sami
Indonesian
Interlingua
Irish
Italian
Javanese
Jju
Jola-Fonyi
Kabuverdianu
Kaingang
Kako
Kalaallisut
Kalenjin
Kamba
Kikuyu
Kinyarwanda
Koyra Chiini
Koyraboro Senni
Kurdish
Kwasio
Latvian
Lingala
Lithuanian
Lojban
Low German
Lower Sorbian
Luba-Katanga
Luo
Luxembourgish
Luyia
Machame
Makhuwa-Meetto
Makonde
Malagasy
Malay
Maltese
Manx
Māori
Meru
Morisyen
Nheengatu
Nigerian Pidgin
North Ndebele
Northern Sotho
Norwegian Bokmål
Norwegian Nynorsk
Nyanja
Nyankole
Occitan
Oromo
Polish
Portuguese
Rejang
Romanian
Romansh
Rombo
Rundi
Rwa
Samburu
Sango
Sangu
Sardinian
Scottish Gaelic
Sena
Shambala
Shona
Sicilian
Slovak
Slovenian
Soga
Somali
South Ndebele
Southern Sotho
Spanish
Sundanese
Swahili
Swati
Swedish
Swiss German
Taita
Taroko
Tasawaq
Teso
Tsonga
Tswana
Turkish
Turkmen
Upper Sorbian
Vunjo
Walloon
Walser
Welsh
Western Frisian
Wolastoqey
Wolof
Xhosa
Yangben
Zarma
Zulu

For languages with multiple scripts or writing systems, only the Latin is supported (unless noted otherwise).

While we take care to ensure our language support is as complete and accurate possible, we can’t guarantee that every regional or language-specific variation of a glyph is included. Please get in touch if you need a custom version to better fit your language.

Styles / Instances

Style	wght[1]	slnt[2]	OS/2 width/weight class
Light	300	0	5 / 300
Light Italic	300	−12	5 / 300
Regular	400	0	5 / 400
Italic	400	−12	5 / 400
Medium	500	0	5 / 500
Medium Italic	500	−12	5 / 500
Semibold	600	0	5 / 600
Semibold Italic	600	−12	5 / 600
Bold	700	0	5 / 700
Bold Italic	700	−12	5 / 700
Black	800	0	5 / 800
Black Italic	800	−12	5 / 800

[1] Equivalent to the CSS `font-weight` attribute.
[2] Example usage: `.italic { font-variation-settings: "slnt" -12; }`

MD Primer Variable (Available on request)

Axis		Min	Max
Weight	(wght)	300	800
Slant	(slnt)	0	−12

Formats / Sizes

Style	Filesize	Contour Type
OTF	95–100 KB	Cubic (CFF)
WOFF2	30–34 KB	Cubic (CFF)
WOFF	33–37 KB	Cubic (CFF)
Variable TTF	155 KB	Quadratic (TTF)
Variable WOFF2	57 KB	Quadratic (TTF)
Variable WOFF	66 KB	Quadratic (TTF)

General Information

Credits	Designed by Rutherford Craze. Italics by Luke Charsley. With particular thanks to Dan Reynolds for generously sharing his database of 19th-century sans-serif designs, as well as several articles on the same topic.
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First Release	May 2021
Latest Update	Feb 2024
Licensing	MD Primer may be used only as permitted by the terms of the Mass-Driver End User License Agreement (EULA). https://mass-driver.com/licensing
Specimen Credits	Halbbreite Groteske-Versalien and Boldface Gothic No. 13 scans (p.2): Dan Reynolds, ‘Database of sans serifs sold in 19th-century Germany’, TypeOff.de (last accessed 11 May 2021). Interchangeable Gothic scan (p.2) courtesy of HathiTrust (www.hathitrust.org).

mass-driver.com

Sample texts (public domain):

The Uses of Italic: A Primer of Information Regarding the Origin and Uses of Italic Letters. Hamilton, Frederick W., LL.D. (1918).

A Primer of Assyriology. Sayce, A. H. (1894).

Elements of Foreign Exchange: A Foreign Exchange Primer. Escher, Franklin (1915).

Whale Primer, with Special Attention to the California Gray Whale. Walker, Theodore J. (1962).

A Primer of Quaternions. Hathaway, Arthur S. (1896).

Type: A Primer of Information About the Mechanical Features of Printing Types. Stewart, A. A. (1918).

A Library Primer. Dana, John Cotton (1903).

A Primer of Mayan Hieroglyphics. Brinton, Daniel G., A.M., M.D., LL.D., Sc.D. (1895).

Supporting text in this document is set in MD System.