College Student Preferences for Trendy versus Classic Typefaces

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Abstract: *The user-generated content trend extends beyond the blogosphere and into the arenas of visual communication—particularly that of typography. Researchers have little knowledge about the implications of this typography boom, although young people today have been exposed to the user-generated trend for well over a decade. This study discerns groups of college students based on their opinions about both trendy user-generated typefaces and classic typefaces in college textbooks. Q methodology is used to collect and analyze data about typeface preference. This methodology is especially suited to preliminary research used to obtain a deeper understanding about under-explored concepts like aesthetic typographic preference. The researcher identified four distinct groups of college students based upon individual subjective preferences for classic or trendy typefaces.*

Introduction

Textual passages, whether in magazines, books, web pages, newspapers, or any other medium, are created with a consideration of the visual appearance of the piece as well as the legibility of the content. The advent of readily available graphic-design software programs and the internet as a marketplace for their distribution has led to a rise of new typeface production. At one time, a new typeface was the result of a tedious design process. Scarce research exists into preferences for current trendy typefaces as compared to the classic typefaces that existed before desktop computers were mainstream. In recent years, amateur designers and independent companies have created and distributed myriad ephemeral typefaces (Samara, 2004). Hobbes (1998) believed that a perceived change in taste among youth coincides with a technological shift that has taken place during the lives of today's current high school and college students. Palmer wrote, "The single most liberating aspect of [the] technical revolution was the sudden availability in digital format of hundreds and hundreds of hitherto inaccessible typefaces" (2007, p. 94).

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Typographers and designers assert that type is a matter of visuals—not of content and communication alone (e.g., Drucker, 2006; Harkins, 2011; Kunz, 2000; Lupton, 2010; Rogers, 1949). New technology has allowed a larger group of people to publish their amateur work, and subsequently there exists an exploitation of the aesthetic, creative side of typeface design and perhaps less emphasis on the typographic rules of legibility and readability. Additionally, the phenomenon of Web 2.0 has led to an increase in cheap and easily available web visuals and applications, including typefaces. Young people of this revolution are bombarded by highly sensory media (Mirzoeff, 2009) and attention is positively influenced by the presence of visuals (e.g., Boerman, Smit, & van Meurs, 2011; Kiefer, 2004; Keane & Kim-Shyan, 2005; Knoblch, Hastall, Zillmann, & Callison, 2003).

Young people have been exposed to these new typefaces for well over a decade. The question becomes whether some or any of them prefer "trendy" typefaces to "classic" typefaces in everyday applications. Typographical preference studies have always been scarce (Brumberger, 2003), but even the existing research largely ignores the impending popularity of what this researcher calls "trendy" typefaces—those freely distributed online, often by amateur designers. Previous literature has focused mainly on typographic persona (e.g., Wendt, 1967; Brumberger, 2003; Gutschi, 2008), legibility (e.g., Arditi & Cho, 2005; Cranford, Southard, & Bates, 2006), screen legibility issues (e.g., Ayama, Ujike, Iwai, Funakawa, & Okajima, 2007; Dyson, 2004; Lin, et al., 2009; Sheedy, Tai, Subbaram, Gowrisankaran, & Hayes, 2008), and message comprehension (e.g., Barth, 2008; Hughes & Wilkins, 2000; McTigue, 2007; Post, 2004). But few have examined visual preference.

This study examines whether discernible groups of college students prefer trendy typefaces or the more conventionally used classic typefaces.

Review of the Literature

The pioneers of the printing press, who drew individual artistic sketches of the letters that were later cast into molds, appreciated the artistic facets of type. Bruce Rogers (1949), famed designer of the typeface *Centaur*, said he "became aware of letters as something more than mere units in a word" (p. 1). Drucker (2006) posed the question, "What could matter more than material, or be more truly 'matter' than manifest text?" (p. 269). Stephen Heller, who worked for 33 years as an art director for the *New York Times Book Review*, asked type historian and designer, Cyrus Highsmith, if he was required to be a good graphic designer, too. In reply, Highsmith reported: "I like to see myself as a letter drawer" (Heller, 2007, p. 4). Typographic author David Jury (2006, 2011) said that typography is judged by two criteria: utility and

aesthetics (p. 17), and Mills and Donnelly (1999) in an early book addressing online type foundries, said that fonts can communicate as much as the words themselves (p. 9).

While little research exists regarding the aesthetics of typefaces, numerous scholarly studies have demonstrated that the visual aspects of media are important to viewers. In 2007, Poynter conducted the largest eye-tracking effort researchers have ever undertaken, which tracked the eyes of 605 diverse readers to record how their eyes moved through a newspaper or a news website. Poynter found that headlines and photos are the first visual stops for print readers, with large headlines being viewed more frequently than small ones, large photos being more effective than small photos, and color photos outperforming black and white photos (Adam, Quinn, & Edmonds, 2007). Although these findings are related to visuals *within* text, they nonetheless support the claim that visuals are important when capturing a viewer's attention toward a body of typed words. Because the landmark semantic-differential study of typographic "congeniality" by Wendt (1967) had not been added upon for decades, Brumberger (2003) conducted a new semantic-differential study to develop persona profiles of typefaces. She emphasized the role of the *viewer* in the process of reading, not only the role of the *reader.* The important conclusion she drew was that "the document design process is a problem-solving task in which decisions regarding visual language are made as carefully as are decisions about verbal language" (p. 221).

Textbook companies, too, are beginning to understand the importance of visual preference. Houghton Mifflin (2006), for instance, launched a series of textbooks based on market research and focus groups examining students' visual preferences. They found that highlighting, large amounts of white space, wide margins, bullets and checklists, ample color and graphics, as well as direction toward audio and video clips on the web are very important to college students. Yasar and Seremet (2007) conducted another piece of research investigating visual impressions of textbooks, and concluded both that "visual elements provide motives for learning individuals by attracting their attentions [and] keeping their attentions alive" (p. 158) and that visuals within textbooks attract the interest of the reader, introduce a concept, and increase attention.

The introduction of a new typeface used to be a relatively rare celebration and long-fought accomplishment, as was the case when Stanley Morrison introduced *Times New Roman* for the *Times of London* in 1931 (Blackwell, 1998) and when Bruce Rogers introduced *Centaur* in the 1940s with such pride he embellished it by releasing a book of the same name (1949). In recent years, however, type conception has

changed dramatically. Samara's *Typography Workbook* (2004) pointed out that letter design was historically restricted to a rare few typographers who had a scholarly background, but with the popularity of graphically interfaced computers, typeface design has been "democratized" (Samara, 2004, p. 112). Independent type foundries such as Shinntype, Veer, Rimmer, and Adobe have made type more creative, accessible, and varied in style. Typographic author Ellen Lupton said one of the current trends is "the design of fun, useful, ephemeral, yet well-designed display faces, such as those marketed by Veer" (personal communication, February 22, 2008). Designers with few financial resources can also download countless free typefaces on sites such as dafont.com and freefonts.com. Cyrus Highsmith, who has designed a dozen or more successful typefaces and studies type legacy, claimed a need for even more letterforms (Heller, 2007). Erik Spiekermann, the founder of FontShop and MetaDesign, predicted that the future belongs in these independent foundries because their types are not over-produced nor treated like commodities (Kegler, Grieshaber, & Riggs, 2007). Robin Williams (2006) said that the advent of desktop computers has come with a need for "the average person to understand how to create beautiful, professional typography" (p. xi). This democratic change in the typographical landscape calls for new research regarding typographical preferences.

Ernst and Kahle (1979) undertook one such exploration using Q methodology more than thirty years ago. They examined attitudes toward "fashionable" versus "conservative" type treatments in print advertisements. Upon observing that designers were making decisions using a more aesthetic, rather than functional, instinct they sought to determine if type treatments that varied from expert guidelines in legibility would be seen as disrupting or enhancing the overall layout. To conduct their study, 20 versions of an automobile advertisement were created mixing nine variations of typographic treatment for each of the hypothesized advertising approaches, "fashionable" and "conservative." The actual contents of each of the ads differed slightly to keep the sorting task interesting—a subtle change which may have led to a clouding of the interaction between the typography itself and the content (Ernst & Kahle, 1979). Participants sorted the ads for appeal and perceived effectiveness. The results revealed five distinct groups of people and confirmed the distinction of the two hypothesized approaches to advertising typography.

Few researchers (exceptions include Ernst & Kahle, 1979; Fordham, 1991; Sanders, 1968) have heeded Kahle's (1978) suggestion to pursue design-preference research through the use of Q technique. The Ernst and Kahle (1979) Q study, specifically pertaining to typographic research, is outdated and does not reflect modern typographical trends.

Studies have repeatedly found that the visual aspects of bodies of text are influential to readers' perceptions of that text. These studies have examined layout and photography, and the text-based studies have mainly focused upon persona, communicative ability, learning, and legibility/readability issues. Combined studies of both visual preference and typography are rare, and updated studies which take current typographical trends into consideration even more so. A clear gap exists in current research into typographical preference. To help fill this gap and direct future applied typesetting design decisions, the following research question was posed: Will discernible groups of students emerge who prefer either visually unique "trendy" typefaces or "classic" typefaces?

Method

Kahle (1978) wrote, "Perhaps the most obvious area of graphics research for which Q-technique could be employed is typography" (p. 7). This method was chosen to answer the research question. Q methodology allows participants to define their attitudes by sorting statements of opinion or other items or visuals, called a Q set (van Exel & de Graaf, 2005). Accounting for one's individual tastes is difficult, but "[t]hat is, however, exactly the heart of the matter: Q is accounting for tastes!" (Brouwer, 1999, p. 35). Subjective behavior is studied with full scientific sanction (Stephenson, 1953, p. 25). Q sorting generates categories that are operant, or produces and discovers *new* effects (Smith, 2001).

According to Brown (1993), "[s]ince the interest of Q methodology is in the nature of the segments and the extent to which they are similar or dissimilar, the issue of large numbers . . . is rendered relatively unimportant" (p. 94). For the present study, 32 college students were asked to participate. A quota convenience sample was taken from a mid-sized mid-western university. The participants were acquired through volunteer sampling, Facebook, and viral recruitment. Care was taken to include participants that vary in majors.

The researcher designed twenty black-and-white textbook pages—ten with a trendy typeface and ten with a classic typeface—as the display heading (see Appendix). Each textbook page also contained gray or black boxes, of one to three lines and 400–500 body-text characters in *Times New Roman*, consisting of InDesign's *nonsense text*, and two or three display headings using the display type. The researcher also decided to add a small amount of content variation to make the sorting process more interesting. The textbook was chosen as the object of research because of its type-intensiveness as well as its uniform necessity among college students. Textbooks used in college do not necessarily contain graphics and photographs, therefore the actual text

can be singularly investigated. Similarly, textbooks are not generally purchased because of the interests of the reader, as some printed materials such as magazines are, but out of necessity. In this way, the content of the typed words is assumed to be less influential and topical bias is avoided.

In operationalizing typefaces as "classic," graphic designers at Pearson; McGraw Hill; Guilford, Jones and Bartlett; and Houghton Mifflin were contacted and asked which typefaces they most frequently use. The definition of a "trendy" typeface was operationalized by accessing the most-downloaded typeface lists from popular online-type distributors, DaFont, MyFont, and Veer. Once the top-downloaded lists were accessed, the researcher used some discretion. The chosen typefaces could not be pictorial, for instance, *Dingbats*. They could not obviously resemble, or be based upon a well-established typeface such as *Times New Roman*. And the trendy typefaces must have been released in the past ten years.

The pages were placed in a pile and numbered for coding purposes and presented to the participants in a large room with plenty of floor space for sorting. Participants were told that these were all pages from various hypothetical textbooks. They then sorted the pages after being given the prompt: "Please look at these sample textbook pages and sort them from 'most visually appealing' to 'least visually appealing.'" The sort was based on a seven-point continuum (2-3-3-4-3-3-2) as suggested by Keith Sanders, Professor Emeritus at the University of Missouri School of Journalism (personal communication, September 14, 2008). Qualitative post-sort questionnaires allowed participants to explain their individual page selections, particularly those appearing at the extreme ends of the preference sort, as advised by van Exel and de Graaf (2005).

The data were subjected to factor analysis, and correlations between different people according to subjective preference were summarized (Brown, 1993). Analysis was conducted using Norman Van Tubergen's QUANAL software with the expertise of Keith Sanders. Q-factor analysis provided information about the similarities and differences among people's viewpoints of typefaces and revealed different modes of subjective behavior (Stephenson, 1953, p. 25). The Q-sort data were subjected to principal components factor analysis, which initially produced three factors. Sanders used varimax rotation to provide the best mathematical solution. Because Factor 1 was bipolar—indicating that roughly half of the people on the factor held opposite views about the test text pages than the other half—the negatively loaded sorts on Factor 1 were split off and formed into a new Factor 4.

Findings

Once factor analysis has grouped like people, it is common for each to be given a descriptive name based on an interpretation of the factor. Z-scores are noted parenthetically throughout this section.

Factor 1: The Trendy People

This group of seven students clearly preferred trendy typefaces, particularly scripts or those appearing to be handwritten or having elaborately styled designs. The four most preferred pages were the "Chapter One" page with the trendy typeface *Jellyka* (1.93; see the Q set reproduced in the Appendix), the "About the Authors" page with the trendy typeface *Baka Too* (1.55), the "Note to the Students" page with the trendy typeface *Charade* (1.46), and the "In Review" page with the trendy typeface *Birth of a Hero* (1.46). *Jellyka, Charade,* and *Baka Too* would all be considered script or handwritten-style typefaces and *Baka Too* and *Birth of a Hero* are both characterized by a grungy, worn appearance. Contrarily, the pages least preferred were those with classic typefaces: the "Checklist" page with the classic typeface *Times* (-.88), the "About the Authors" page with the classic typeface *Palatino* (-1.13), the "Questions for Thought" page with the classic typeface *Optima* (-1.13), and the "Table of Contents" page with the classic typeface *Caslon Bold* (-1.23). These typefaces are essentially the status quo of textbook design; they adhere to the rules of readability and legibility. These practical characteristics were not as important to The Trendy People, who valued unique and fresh visuals.

Factor 1 was more concerned about how boring or interesting a page appears, and its group members were generally aware of the chosen typefaces as playing an important role in the appearance of the page. Most post-survey comments made mention of the "text," "font," or "type" being a component in their choices, as either enhancing or diminishing the aesthetics of the page. In their post-survey written comments regarding those pages, participants frequently described the least-appealing choices as "very plain," "blah," "boring," "dull," and "typical," and one person said a classic page was "too symmetrical and boring." These students are interested in the uncommon appearance of the pages. Bored of the classic typefaces, their adventurous tastes welcome a new breed of textbook design that looks more like the web pages they've grown up viewing, which make use of these Web 2.0 typefaces. Very few comments alluded to the usability of the pages, and virtually none of The Trendy People made mention of readability as playing a role in their favored typefaces. Instead, comments about the most appealing pages mentioned that they liked pages that were "attention grabbing," "spicy," and "enticing."

The Trendy People consisted of six females, and one male, aged 19 to 22. For the most part, they used all media types, but reported using Facebook, MySpace, and other social networks slightly more frequently than other media. There were no participants in Factor 1 in the more math-intensive majors, such as engineering, pre-med, pharmacy, and math.

Factor 2: The Practical Comfort Seekers

The Practical Comfort Seekers, consisting of 12 students, were perhaps more distinguishable by their choices for pages chosen as least appealing than those chosen as most appealing. These students generally rejected those pages with typefaces that are characterized by clean, thin lines and the absence of serifs. These rejected typefaces—the "Title" page with the trendy typeface *Mostra Too* (-.99), the "Dedication" page with the trendy typeface *Dienstag* (-1.48), the "Checklist" page with the trendy typeface *Museo Sans* (-1.53), and the "Dedication" page with the classic typeface *Univers* (-1.76)—are all more sterile and simple in appearance and lack a strong or distinguishing personality. The first three of these pages are trendy, suggesting their ambivalence toward the typefaces originating from the web-produced typeface movement. The bold visual impact of the typefaces influenced their choices more than the categorization of the typefaces as either trendy of classic.

Similar to Factor 1, The Practical Comfort Seekers preferred pages that they didn't perceive as boring. They, too, were interested in styles that were somewhat different from the orthodox textbook typeface. However, use of space within the full page as well as spacing and relative thickness of the individual letters was perhaps more important to them. Conversely, they were more dissuaded by empty spaces or what they perceived as a poor usage of space than by the actual test items (the typefaces). The Comfort Seekers frequently mentioned a dislike for "wasted space," "open space," and "too much space." Practicality in the use of space played a large role in their preference decisions.

The sterile and empty organization, along with the sterile and plain fonts rejected by Factor 2, contrasts with the descriptive words and phrases this group used to explain their "most appealing" choices, such as "softer," "nice and flowing," "relaxed and inviting," and "more personal looking." One participant said his most appealing choice "doesn't look as intimidating as some of the others." These students were comforted by the softer and more inviting appearance of some of the typefaces and thus less intimidated by them. The four most appealing choices were the "In Review" page with the classic typeface *Gill Sans* (1.47), the "Note to the Students" page with the trendy typeface *Charade* (1.28), the "Table of Contents" page with the trendy typeface *You are Loved* (1.18) and the "About the Authors" page with the trendy

typeface *Baka Too* (1.08). Their choices for both least and most appealing typefaces were largely trendy, demonstrating neither full preference nor rejection for the Web 2.0 trendy typefaces. What is clear from their post-sort comments, however, is that this Factor prefers bodies of text that are somewhat unorthodox.

The demographics indicate a fairly varied mix of students. The age range was 18 to 25. There were four males and eight females. The Practical Comfort Seekers use all kinds of media, with cell phones, Facebook, MySpace, and the internet being the top choices. Majors were mixed.

Factor 3: The Detail-Oriented Analytics

The students in Factor 3 were concerned about organization and structure, but they had this concern mostly as it related to the typefaces themselves as well as to the micro-organization of the pages and the minutest details. These students examined all elements of the pages closely and nitpicked at elements of some of the typefaces. They generally chose trendy typefaces as both the most and least appealing of the pages; trendiness had some impact on their selections. The "Chapter One" page with the trendy typeface *Jellyka* (1.59), the "About the Authors" page with classic typeface *Palatino* (1.55), the "About the Authors" page with the trendy typeface *Baka Too* (1.20), and the "Questions for Thought" page with *Evanscence* (.96) were factored as the top four most appealing pages. Aside from the "About the Authors" page with *Palatino*, the pages placed at the most appealing end of the continuum contain some of the most unconventional-appearing typefaces, particularly *Evanescence,* with its ghoulish, novelty design. Once again, this type appreciates an unexpected visual appearance.

However, at the least appealing end of the continuum, the "Table of Contents" page with the trendy typeface *You are Loved* (-2.05), the "In Review" page with the trendy typeface *Birth of a Hero* (-2.05), the "Dedication" page with the trendy typeface *Dienstag* (-1.26), as well as the "Dedication" page with the classic typeface *Univers* (-.92) also contained rather unconventional and trendy typefaces. The grunginess of some of the trendier typefaces was not welcomed. While the Detail-Oriented Analytics are ready to accept some of the trendy typefaces, the most unorthodox of these were generally rejected. The technical soundness and cleanness of the individual letters and the arrangement of the pages appear to be more important than the overall typeface design.

The Detail-Oriented Analytics had some most appealing choices similar to those of The Trendy People and some least appealing choices similar to those of The Practical Comfort Seekers. It seems that the reasoning behind such choices, as explained in their own words, is what

distinguishes them the most from the other types. For instance, they complained that the least appealing pages were "distracting or too busy," "hard to follow," "fuzzy," "not crisp and clean looking," and "messy." One person pointed out that "The 'V' in 'Review' is different than I think it should be." And another said a certain font "looks like it is a 'smarter' font than the other fonts." Yet other participants carefully observed that "the chapter heading was offset" and "the letters in the headings aren't quite equal." These people are clearly detail-oriented and bothered by typefaces that appear drastically different from what they are used to seeing.

In contrast to the other two groups discussed thus far, The Detail-Oriented Analytics were more accepting of clean lines and plain fonts. They were also somewhat more concerned about readability in their selections. The typefaces on the pages chosen as most appealing were described as "clean and not busy," "uncluttered" and "logically organized." It was mentioned that "a plainer font would be better" and one person "prefer[s] clean lines." As previously mentioned, The Detail-Oriented Analytics seem to be more swayed by their dislikes than their likes.

The demographics of Factor 3 reveal little or no patterns or consistency. Their ages range from 18 to 23. Their majors include music, agriculture, family and consumer sciences, engineering, and nursing. The internet is reportedly used slightly more than other media options, but television, radio, and cell phones are close behind.

Factor 4: The Conservative Readers

Eight people made up the fourth group, which had the most distinguishing items. These Conservative Readers preferred pages that made use of those typefaces that are classic—that is, the typefaces that are actually being used in current textbooks of all majors. The pages containing classic typefaces were ranked exclusively at the top of the preference continuum and those pages with trendy typefaces were ranked at the bottom. The "Questions for Thought" page with the classic typeface *Optima* (1.53) was ranked as the most appealing page, followed by the "In Review" page with the classic typeface *Gill Sans* (1.26), the "Title" page with the classic typeface *Futura* (.99), and the "Note to Students" page with the classic typeface *Myriad* (.99). These were all simple sans- or semi-serif typefaces, generally considered by typography experts to be the most readable (Arditi & Cho, 2005; Chaparro, Shaikh, Chaparro, & Merkle, 2010). These people place greater value upon the utility of the typefaces that comprise the textbooks than upon the aesthetics. The pages chosen as the least preferred were all in a handwritten style or a script typeface and were exclusively trendy; specifically, the "Preface" page with the typeface *FG Petra* (-1.13), the

"Note to Students" page with the typeface *Charade* (-1.44), the "Chapter One" page with the typeface *Jellyka* (-1.60), and the "About the Authors" page with the typeface *Baka Too* (-1.76). These least appealing pages as chosen by Factor 4 generally appeared at the most appealing end of the continuum for the other groups.

The Conservative Readers were highly concerned about the readability of the text on the pages. Seven of the eight people in this group mentioned the readability of the page in their post-survey comments, either complaining that the least appealing pages were difficult to read or asserting that the most appealing pages were easy to read. The comments suggest that the students in this group are interested in making studying as productive as possible, commenting that the "main information is clear and at the top of the page," and "I like checklists, because I can mark off all the tasks I completed." Other comments mentioned that the organization was clear, the flow was easy to follow, and "the eye knows where to go first." The less readable pages were described as amateur in appearance with such comments as: "Looks like an Applebee's menu," "Looked like a middle school student wrote the material and therefore it was unprofessional and childish," and "Reminds me of Halloween." From these comments, it can be inferred that aesthetics matter less to this group than the readability and perceived professional design of the typefaces.

Quite the opposite of The Trendy People, The Conservative Readers contained many math-intensive students, with two engineering, two pre-med, and one pharmacy major. The age range of these students is 18 to 23, and there are five males and three females.

Discussion

The overall conclusion of this study is that distinguishable groups of college students do exist according to preferences for either trendy or classic typefaces or both. Three of the four groups that emerged based upon subjective preference clearly appreciated the visual qualities of some of the trendy typefaces. Even though most textbooks—and most media in general—still make use of classic typefaces, at least some readers accept and prefer the trendy typefaces that emerged as a result of Web 2.0. The Q study revealed four factors or types of students who have similarities and differences in the way in which they evaluated the appeal of the pages based upon the typeface used. The typical rules of readability commonly followed by current textbook publishers were found not to be important to Factors 1, 2, and 3, but were important to Factor 4. Generally, students' majors were not related to their typographic preferences, although no math-intensive majors were associated with Factor 1 and many with Factor 4.

The Trendy People are bored with the typical typefaces appearing in their textbooks. They were attracted to hypothetical pages containing trendy typefaces, particularly scripts, handwritten typefaces, and those with a grungy and worn appearance. For The Practical Comfort Seekers, more pages with trendy typefaces were chosen as most appealing, but their preference for trendiness was less stark than that of The Trendy People. They were more influenced by boldness and use of space in the typefaces, rejecting clean, thin lines and open space. The Detail-Oriented Analytics were not concerned about whether a typeface was trendy or classic, but rather with the minute details of the individual letters and the organization of the pages. These students were more concerned about the utility of the pages, and the trendy typefaces sometimes were perceived as busy, hard to follow, fuzzy, and messy. The technical soundness of the individual letters appeared to have been more important than the overall typeface trendiness. Unlike Factors 1, 2, and 3, Factor 4, The Conservative Readers, very clearly preferred pages which contained classic typefaces—that is, the typefaces that are actually being used in current textbooks. These students were more impressed by the usability of the book, and identified the trendy typefaces as hampering productivity. Readability and legibility were of most interest.

Reflecting the literature, this study showed that readers are influenced by the visual aspect of their reading material. The students who participated were enthusiastic about voicing their subjective preferences regarding the visual appeal of textbooks. All groups had strong opinions about why they liked and disliked the pages they ranked, and frequently mentioned the typefaces as reasons in their post-sort questionnaires. Some students were more attracted to the typefaces that emerged through Web 2.0, while other students were not ready to accept these burgeoning typefaces when applied to print textbooks. Stark preference for either trendy or classic typefaces occurred in Factors 1 and 4 only, while the other two groups remained ambivalent. Students who were concerned about the usability of the book leaned toward classic typefaces.

It is well documented that measuring aesthetics is difficult (e.g. Brumberger, 2003; Ewing, 2001; Pandir & Knight, 2006), particularly in the niche of typography, where content is inseparable from form. Thus, results tend to be skewed by participants' preference for the content. A review of previous relevant aesthetic measurement revealed several effective techniques minimizing content influence, including using non-native type, uniform layout elements, and objectively measuring subjectivity with Q methodology, including using rich post-sort questionnaires based upon the Q sort. The typographic issues examined in this study may have been clouded to a degree by the interaction

between typefaces and the layout of the pages. It was the decision of the researcher to add a small amount of content and layout variation to make the sorting process more interesting to the participants.

Q method does have some weaknesses. For instance, since it is a small-sample technique and the sample of items and participants is usually purposive, the results lack generalizability. However, it is considered a precursor to doing further research with a large, random sample (Kahle, 1978). Indeed, this study attempted to begin further research into the visual impacts of typography.

It has been widely accepted that readers tend to be more perceptive of the kinds of communication that they visually prefer. Because this study showed that different groups exist according to visual typeface preference, these specific preferences should be more deeply examined with larger samples. Also, because it can be inferred that cleanness and readability are very important to some, but not all, college students, more research into these patterns should be pursued by graphic designers. Future studies would serve designers well if they answered the question of whether these preferences can actually lead to better textbook-reading habits. Less emphasis on readability in display headings and more emphasis on visual appeal may be in order for some textbooks. However, further study into exactly which majors and demographic groups of students tend to have similar preferences needs to be undertaken. Young people today are used to visual communication as the dominant mode. Incorporating more visual thought into text selections through careful research may be merited.

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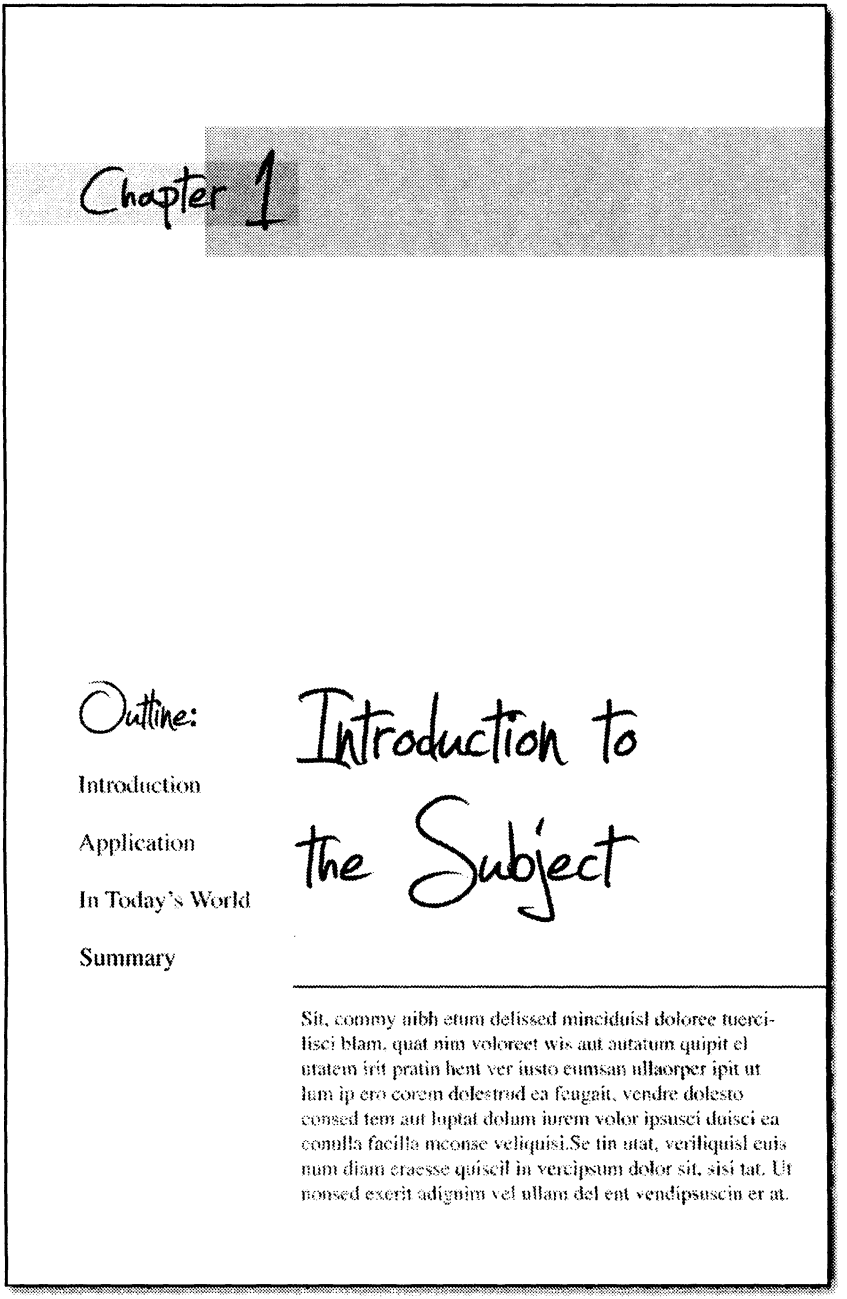
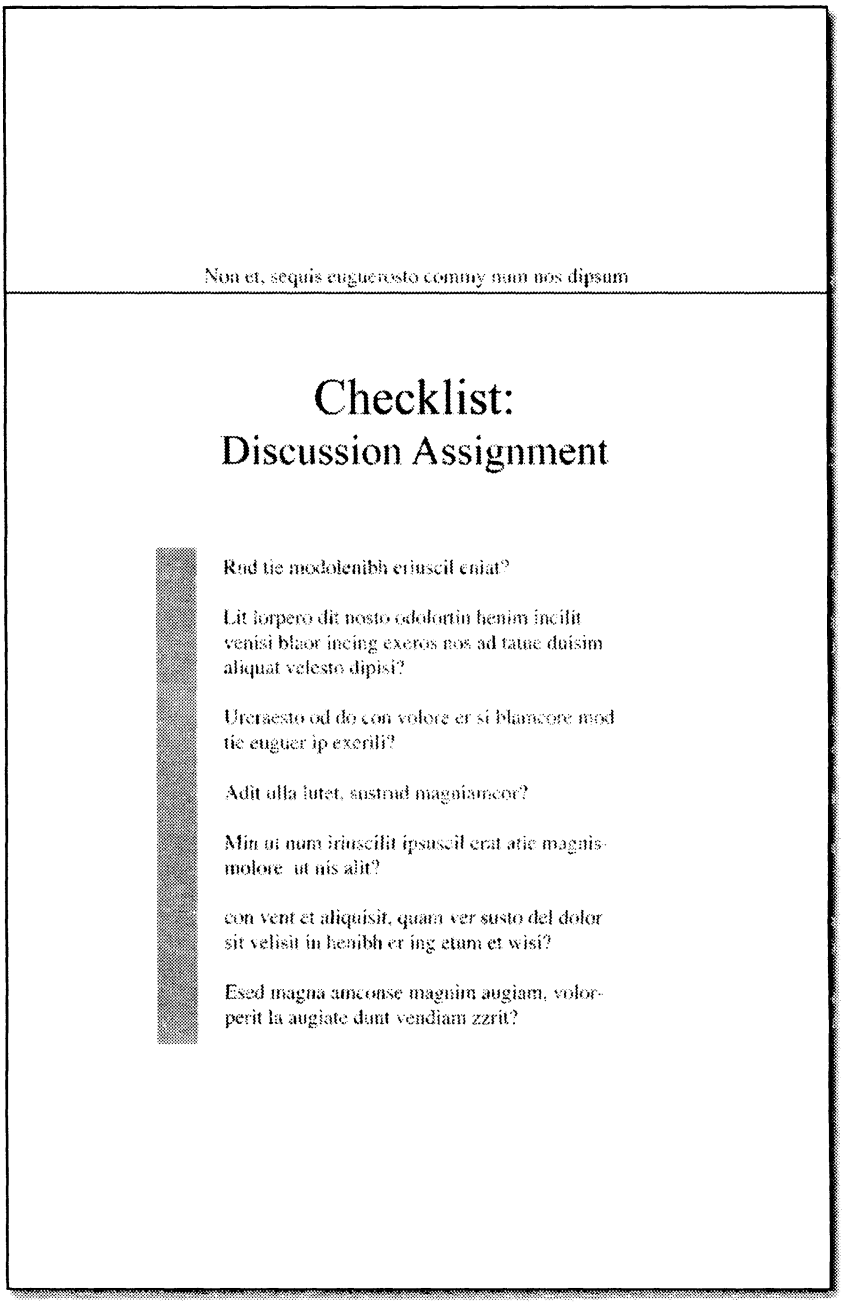
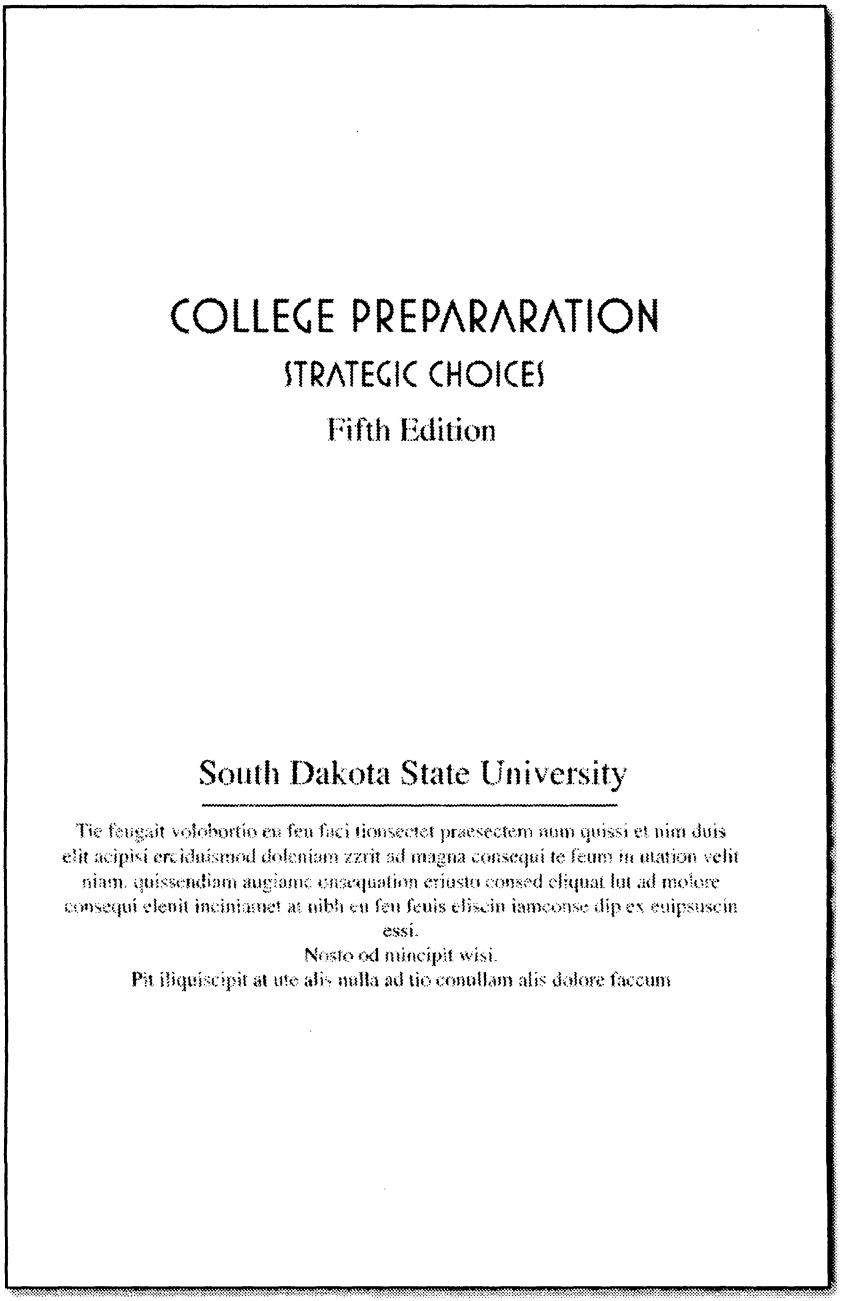
Appendix: The Q Set



Chapter One page with the trendy typeface *Jellyka*, a loopy, fun script



Checklist page with the classic typeface *Times*, a serif



Title page with trendy typeface *Mostra Two*

In Review

Section 1

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   b. lorpero
   c. commy

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   a. in utat
   b. lorpero
   c. commy

Section 2

3. Faccums andrcetum zzriuscipit velendre magna faccum quamet, del *ullum*?

   a. in utat
   b. lorpero
   c. commy

4. Ros augiamet ad mincidunt prat irilit dolent lum num vercidunt alit in henit in eu faccum ea con at augiat praessi et, velismolore dolum?

   a. in utat
   b. lorpero
   c. commy

In Review page with the classic typeface *Gill Sans*, a bold sans-serif

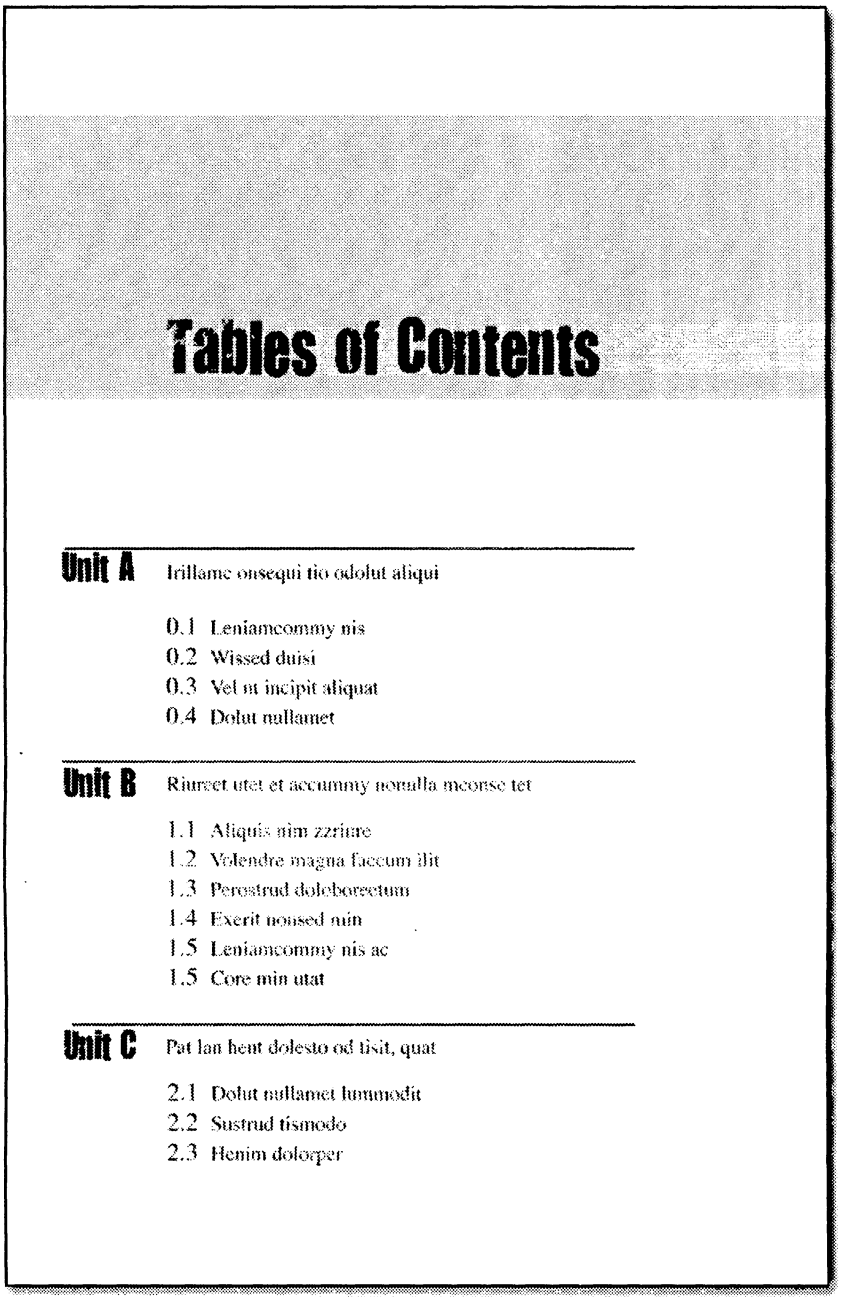

Table of Contents page with the trendy typeface *You are Loved*, a grungy, worn typeface

Questions for Further Thought and Study

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Writing to Learn the subject

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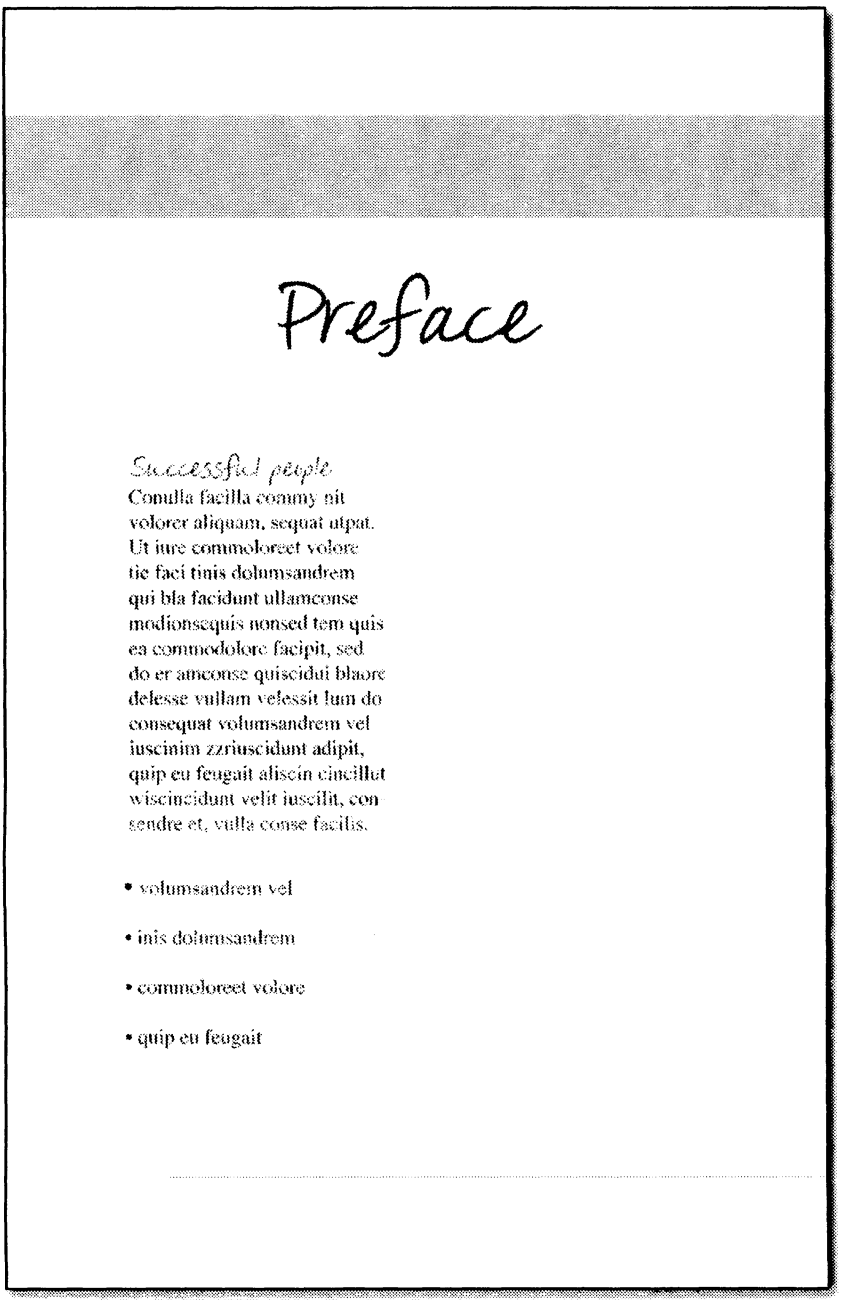
Questions for Thought page with the classic typeface *Optima*, a semi-serif



Preface page with the trendy typeface *PG Petra*, a handwritten-style typeface

Questions for Further Thought and Study

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Writing to Learn the Subject
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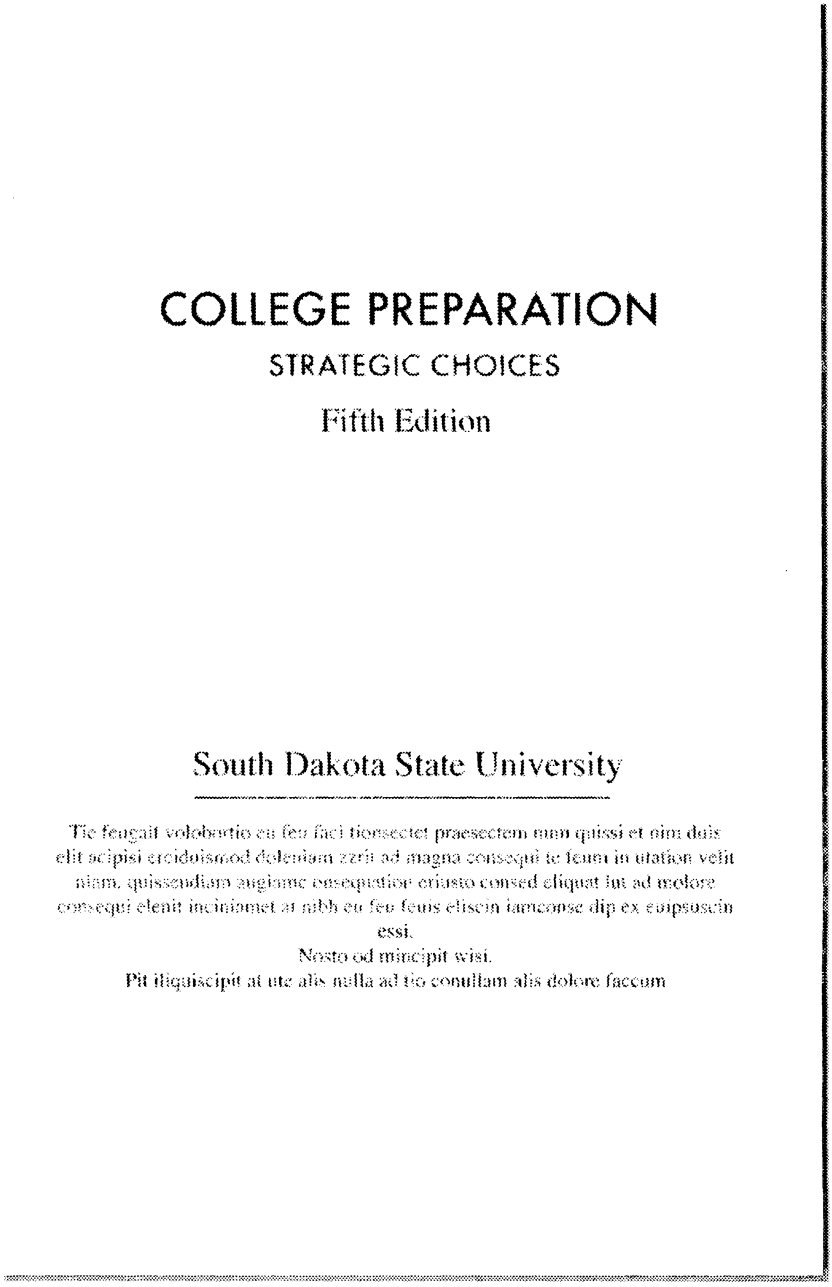
Questions for Thought page with the trendy typeface *Evanescence*, a ghoulish-looking serif



Title page with classic typeface *Futura*, a sans-serif

A note to the students

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Note to Students page with trendy typeface *Charade*, a casual handwriting-style typeface

In Review

Section 1

1. Ipsum iriure comny nos accum quis ad tis acipit?

   a. in utat
   b. lorpero
   c. comny

2. Ad tis acipit Ostrud mexdigniat atue miniscit adipit velit wisi dolor sis nit in henis?

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Section 2

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   c. comny

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In Review page with the trendy typeface *Birth of a Hero,* a grungy sans-serif

Dedication

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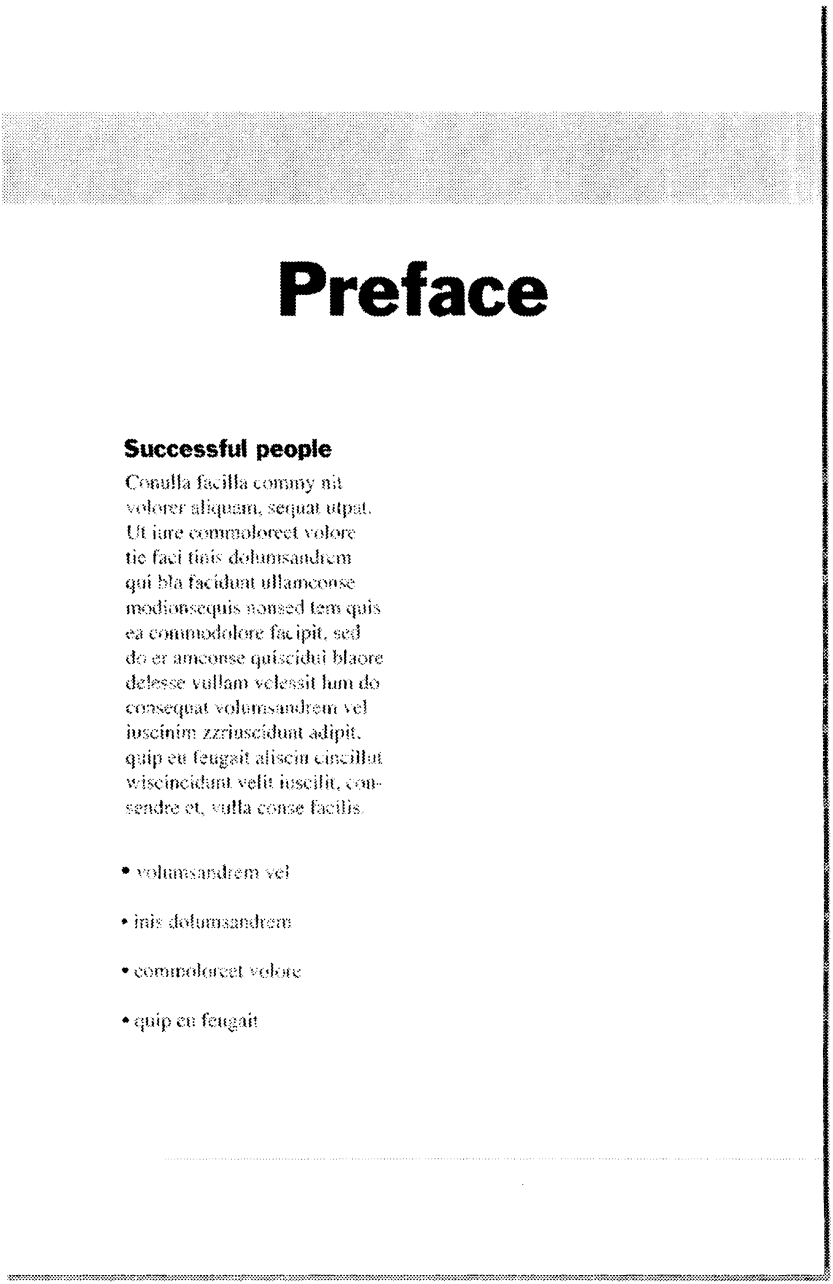
Dedication page with the classic typeface *Univers,* a clean sans-serif



Preface page with the classic typeface *Franklin Gothic,* a bold sans-serif

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Checklist:
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Checklist page with the trendy typeface *Museo Sans*, a semi-serif

A Note to the Students

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How to use this revised version of the handbook

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INDEX Duisit wisci tatum il ut adigna feugue dolore tisisis nulpute magnit ulputpa tuerit nos autpat.

Note to Students page with the classic typeface *Myriad,* a bold sans-serif

Tables of Contents

Unit A Iriliame onsequi tio odolut aliqui

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0.4 Dolut nullamet

Unit B Riureet utet ut accummy nonulla iscinisse tet

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Unit B Pat lan henit dolessto od tisit, quat

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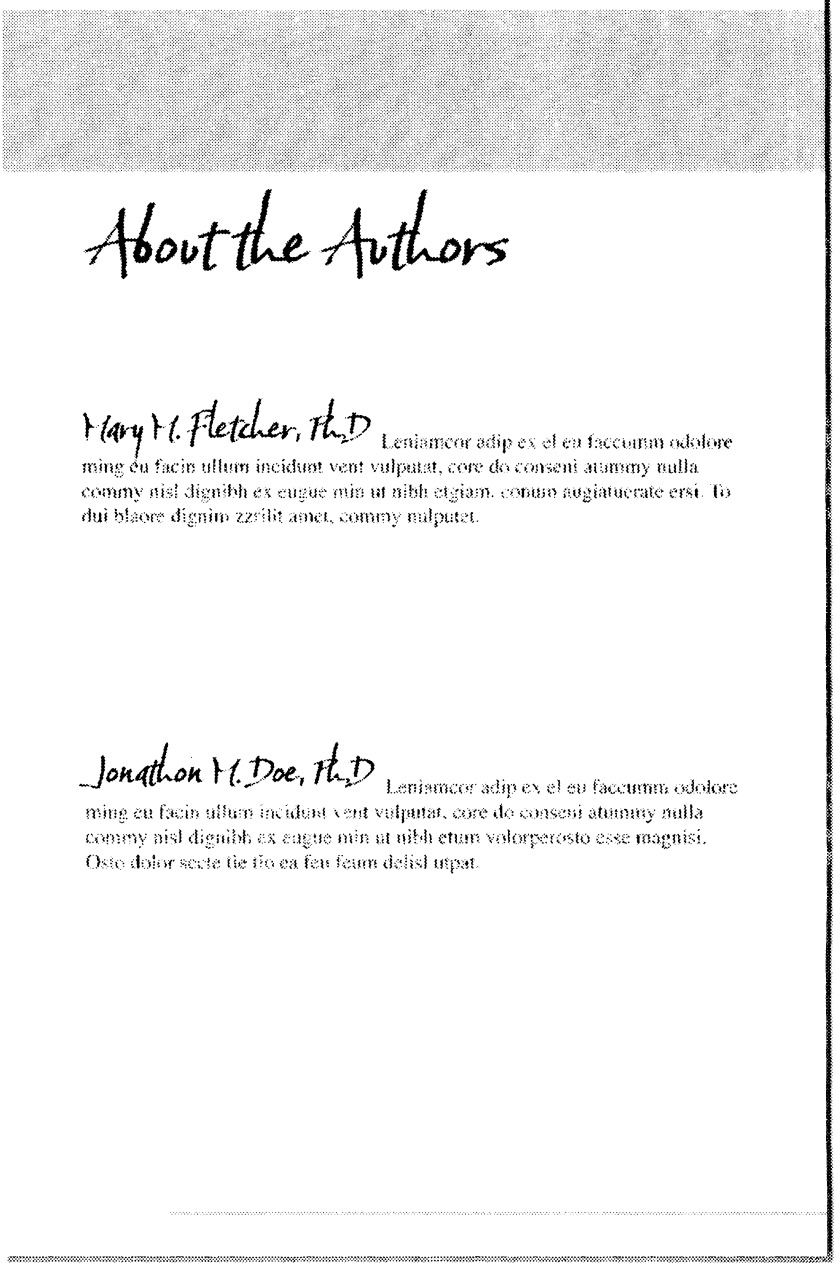
2.3 Henim dolorper

Table of Contents page with the classic typeface *Caslon Bold,* a bold serif



About the Authors page with the trendy typeface *Baka Too*

Dedication

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-- Andiat Verci

Dedication page with the trendy typeface *Dienstag,* a simple sans-serif

About the Authors

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About the Authors with classic typeface *Palatino*, a serif

Chapter 1

Outline:

Introduction

Application

In Today's World

Summary

Introduction to the Subject

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Chapter One page with the classic typeface *Helvetica*, a sans-serif