

# Emphasis: Italics & Boldface

**W**HEN IT'S TIME TO EMPHASIZE a word or phrase, do you automatically reach for the font style menu? Boldface and italics are two of the most common techniques for lending emphasis to text, but these basic styles are often used incorrectly. Here's how the pros handle text that needs to stand out from the crowd.

## Italics and Obliques

True-drawn italics (the ones that are an actual font, not just a computer-generated style) are angled typefaces, usually designed as adjuncts to a roman (or straight-up-and-down) design. Italics are usually quite distinct from their companion romans; they may have different design features and character widths, and often appear more calligraphic in style.

True-drawn obliques (again, not to be confused with computer-generated italics) are slanted versions of their roman companions, with few or no design changes. Both obliques and italics are used for emphasis in roman body text, but obliques offer much less contrast. While italics speak softly, obliques whisper.

Italics and obliques draw attention without making a major change in the color of the text. They're ideal for creating subtle emphasis of words or phrases. Italics and obliques are also used to set off the titles of books, films, newspapers and periodicals, as well as foreign phrases. For maximum readability, use the same weight italic and roman (i.e.: Book and Book Italic, not Book and Medium Italic). However, if a dramatic contrast is desired, try jumping two weights between roman and italic.

## Boldface (or weight contrast)

Boldface creates emphasis by contrasting lighter and heavier weights of the same typeface. Boldface is often used for captions, subheads and stand-alone words and

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The design of true-drawn italics is usually quite distinct from their companion romans, as shown here in ITC Galliard Roman and Italic.

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ITC Avant Garde Gothic Medium Oblique is a slanted version of its roman companion, with few or no design changes.

phrases. Use boldface sparingly within text, and only where a strong emphasis is desired, because it creates a harsh visual interruption.

When setting boldface text with a typeface family that has gradual weight changes, try to jump at least two weights to create a meaningful contrast. A too-small weight contrast is ineffective and may even look like a mistake.

#### **NOTE: USE THE MENU, NOT THE BAR**

On a Mac, obliques and italics should always be accessed from your font menu, not from the style bar. The reason is this: some manufacturers link true-drawn italics to their roman counterparts via the style bar function, but others don't. If the fonts aren't linked, or if true italics aren't

available, computer-generated italics are created on the fly. Avoid these! Their distorted character shapes degrade the design of the typeface and are unattractive to the eye.

The same holds true for boldface: select the heavier weight from your font menu, not the style bar. It's worth the slight extra trouble: as with italics, not all bolds are linked to their lighter-weight companions in the style bar; even when they are, the default might not be the weight you want to use. If the font isn't linked or if there is no bold font, the dreaded computer-embolding will result—a poor imitation of a true-drawn bold.

On a PC, bolds and italics can only be accessed through the style bar or menu. Always check the font menu in your application to be sure that the true-drawn versions are loaded in your system. ■

## Tips for emphasis Tips for **emphasis**

When selecting a bold from a family of several weights, make sure you go bold enough. Try jumping at least two weights to create a strong enough contrast.

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Avoid computer-generated italics and bolds (top); they are inferior in design, width and spacing to true-drawn originals (bottom).