Typography evolved from handwriting, which is created by making a series of marks by hand; therefore, the fundamental element constructing a letterform is the linear stroke (stem). Each letter of our alphabet developed as a simple mark whose visual characteristics clearly separated it from all others.

By learning the vocabulary designers and typographers can develop a greater understanding and sensitivity to the visual harmony and complexity of the alphabet.

As with any craft that has evolved over 500 years, typography employs a number of technical terms. We will be learning these terms throughout the semester. The following describes specific parts of letterforms. Knowing the letterform component parts will make it much easier to identify specific typeface in the future.

serif: the short strokes that finish off the major strokes of the letterform.

bracket: a curving joint between the serif and the stroke

baskerville
transitional

bodoni
modern
extreme thick and thins

rockwell
slab serif
nearly mono-weight

baskerville
transitional

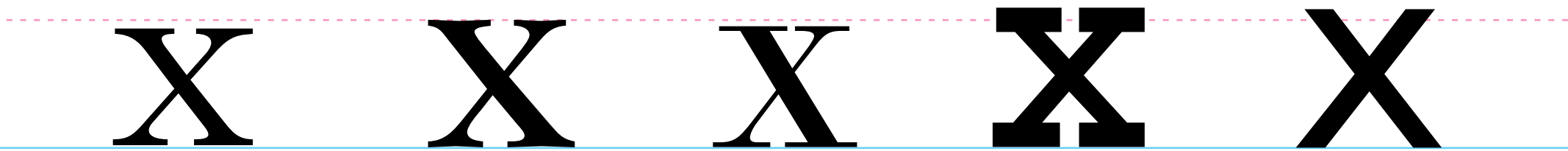
bodoni
modern
extreme thick and thins

rockwell
slab serif
nearly mono-weight

baseline:
the imaginary line defining the visual base of the letterform.
all letterforms sit on the baseline.

cap height:
the height of the upper case in a font, taken from the base-line to the top of the character.

x-height:
the height lowercase x. if you compare typefaces
of the same point size they may not have the same x-height.
all of the lowercase x's are the same point size.



bembo
old style

Immaculate typography is certainly the most brittle of all the arts. To create a whole from many petrified, disconnected and given parts, to make this whole appear alive and of a piece – only sculpture in stone approaches the unyielding stiffness of perfect typography.
8/13

baskerville
transitional

Immaculate typography is certainly the most brittle of all the arts. To create a whole from many petrified, disconnected and given parts, to make this whole appear alive and of a piece – only sculpture in stone approaches the unyielding stiffness of perfect typography.
8/13

bodoni
modern

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8/13

rockwell
slab serif

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8/13

futura
sans serif

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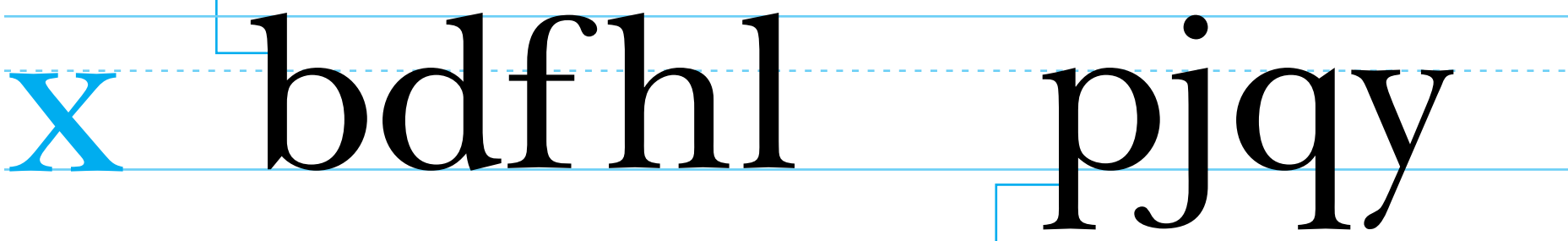
8/13

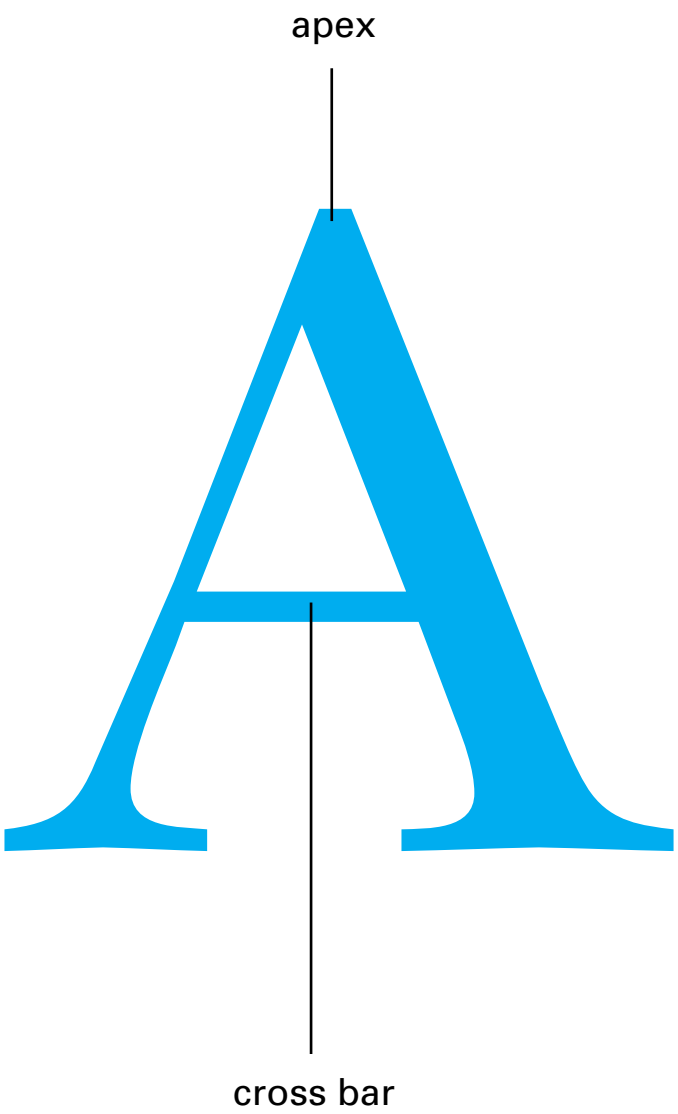
ascender

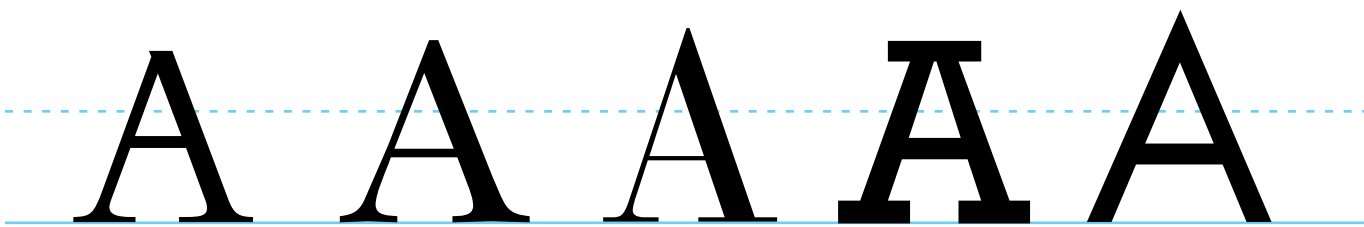
a stroke on a lowercase letter that rises above the x-height



descender

a stroke on a lowercase letterfom that falls below the baseline.





bembo
old style

baskerville
transitional

bodoni
modern

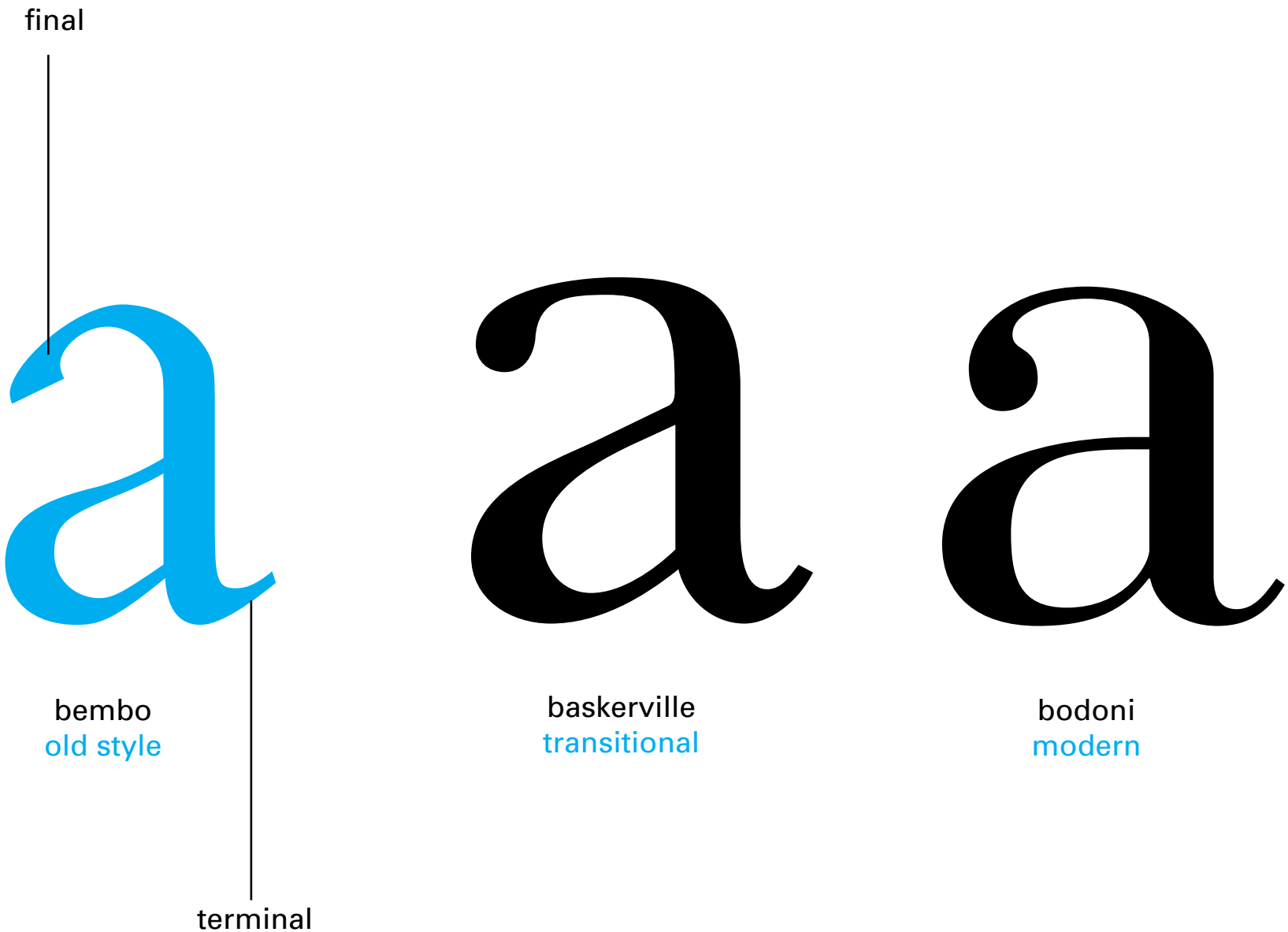
rockwell
slab serif

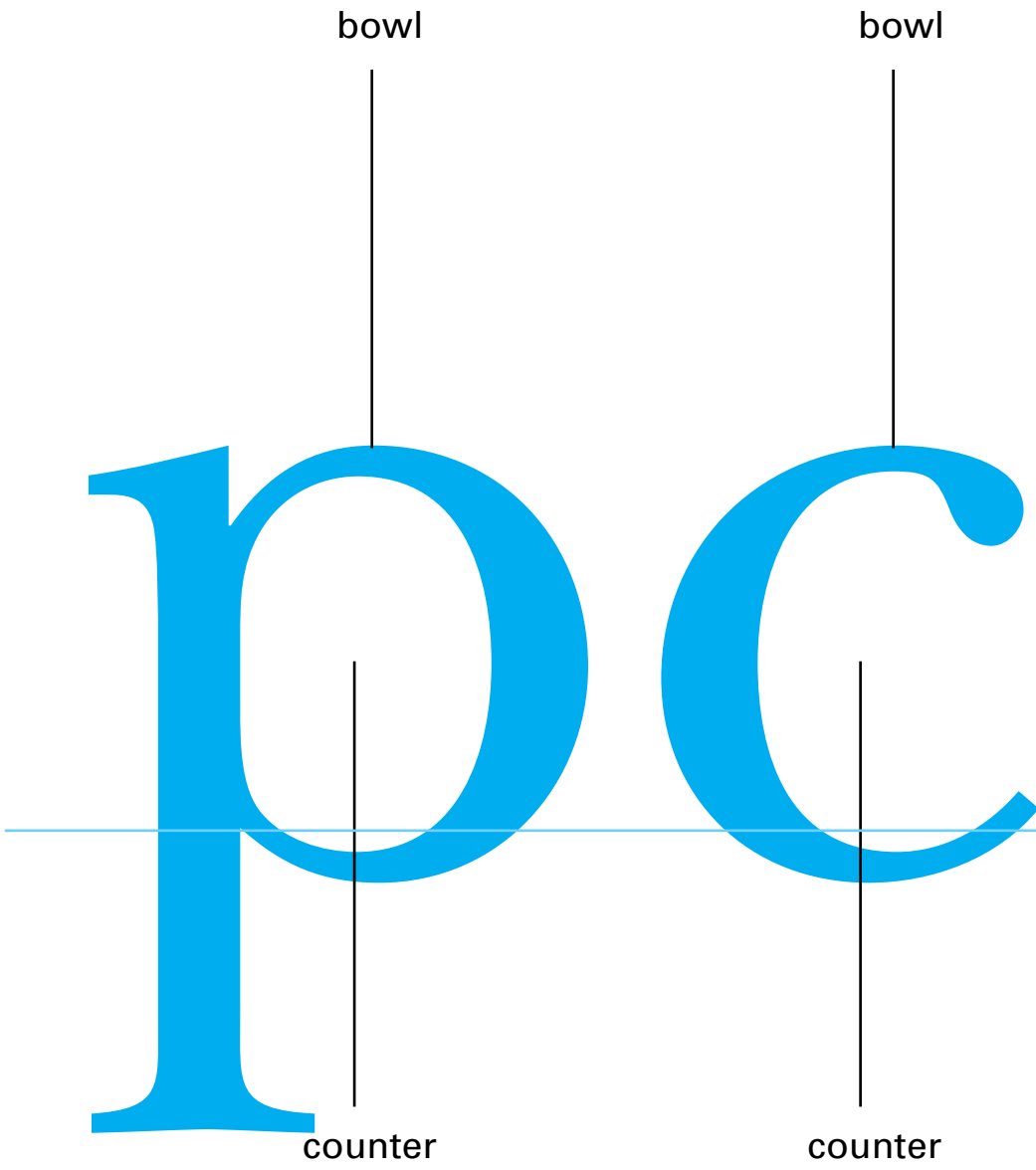
futura
sans serif

bembo
old style

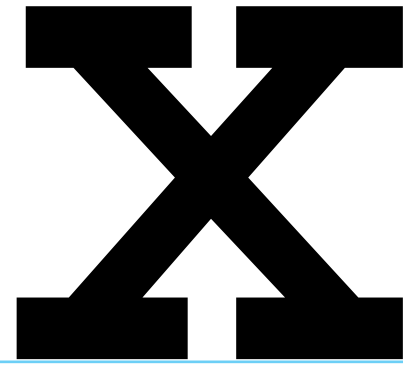
baskerville
transitional

didot
modern


final
terminal
bembo
old style
baskerville
transitional
bodoni
modern

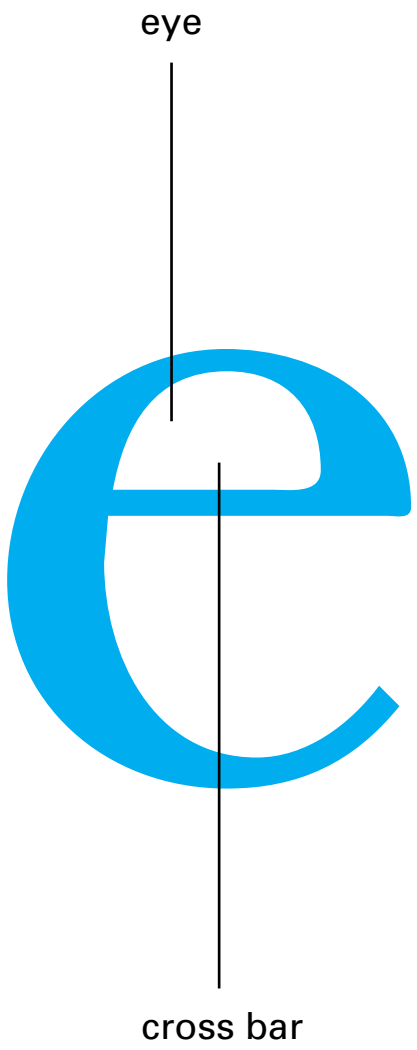


bowl:
the rounded form that describes a counter. the bowl may be either open or closed



counter:
the negative space within a letterform either fully or partially enclosed.

example:
of how counterform can be used in design and especially logos.



e e e e e

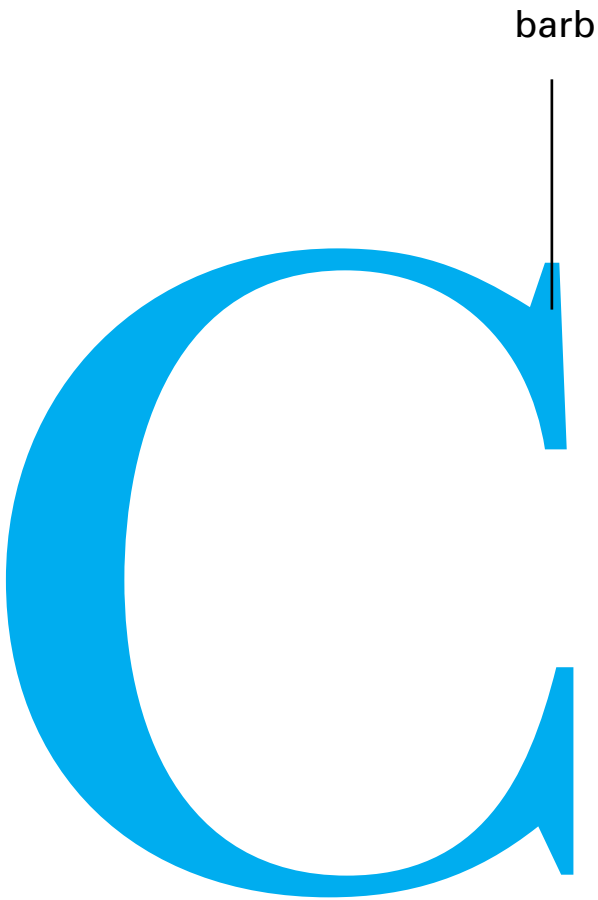
bembo
old style

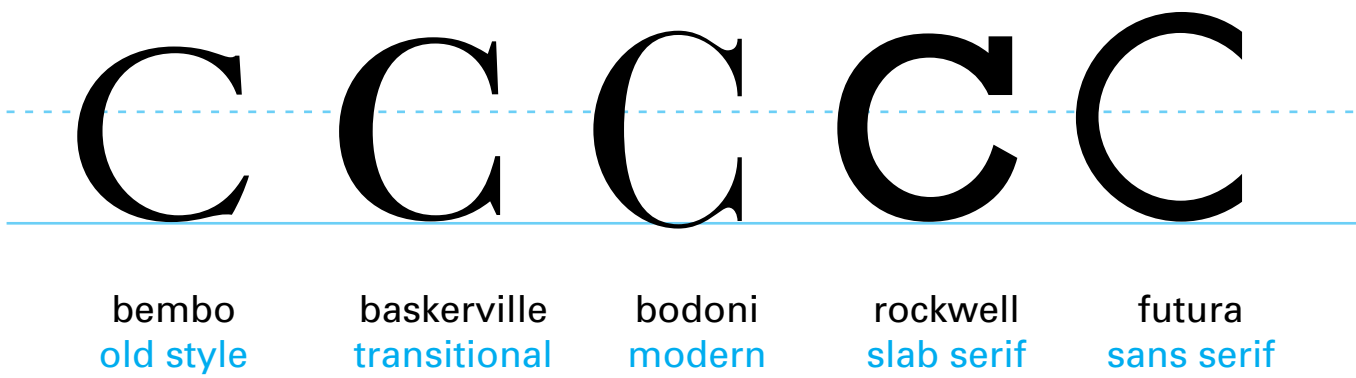
baskerville
transitional

bodoni
modern

rockwell
slab serif

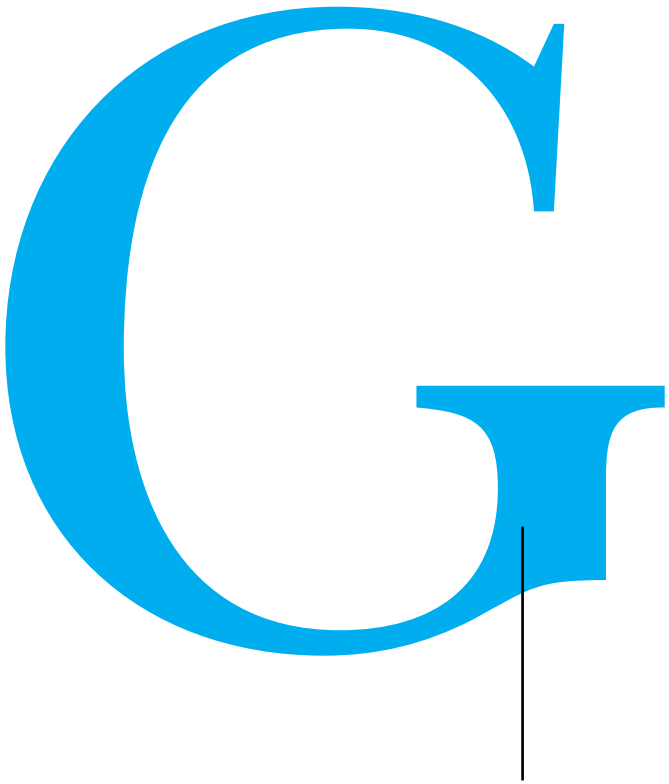
meta
sans serif





bembo	baskerville	bodoni	rockwell	futura
old style	transitional	modern	slab serif	sans serif

b b



spur

G G G G G

bembo
old style

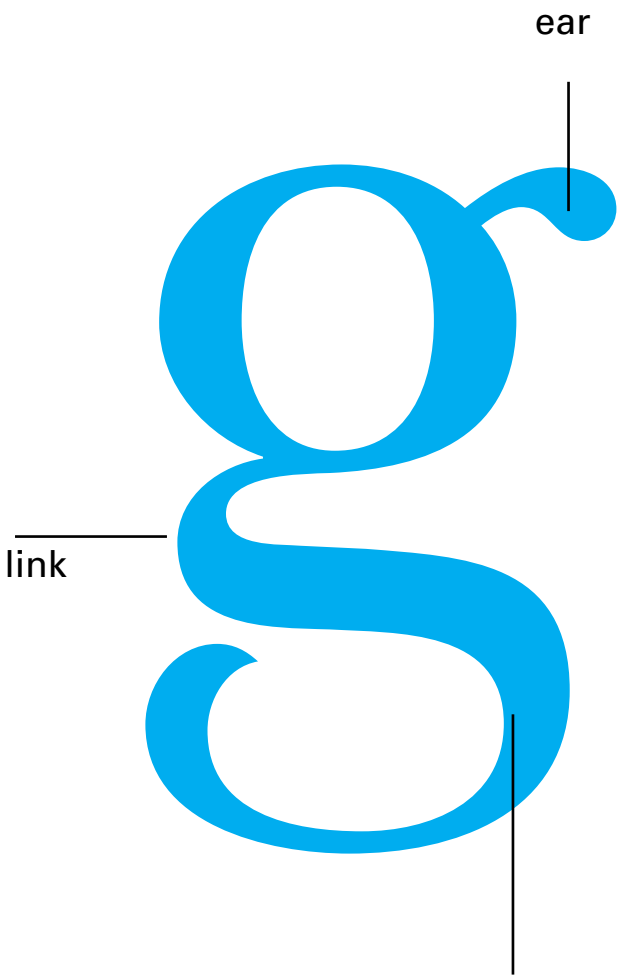
baskerville
transitional

bodoni
modern

serifa
slab serif

meta
sans serif

link: the stroke that connects the bowl and the loop of the lowercase g.



bembo	baskerville	bodoni	rockwell	meta
old style	transitional	modern	slab serif	sans serif

loop
the bowl at the lower part of the lowercase letter g. it can be open or continuous.

tail

Q Q Q Q Q

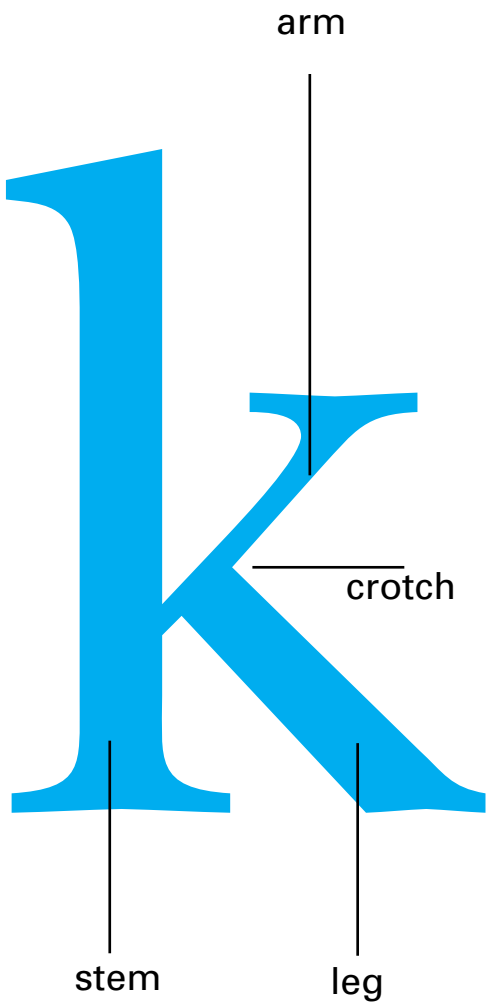
bembo
old style

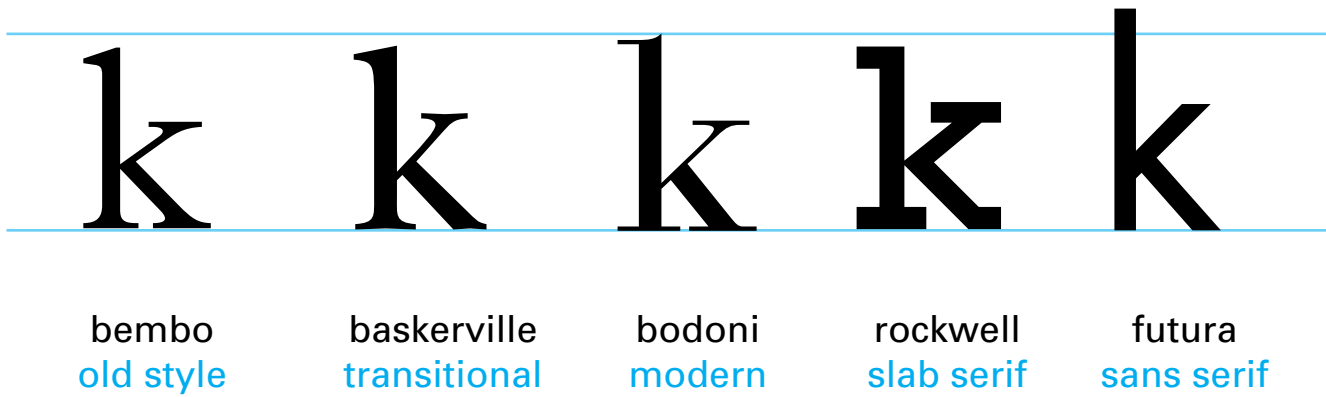
baskerville
transitional

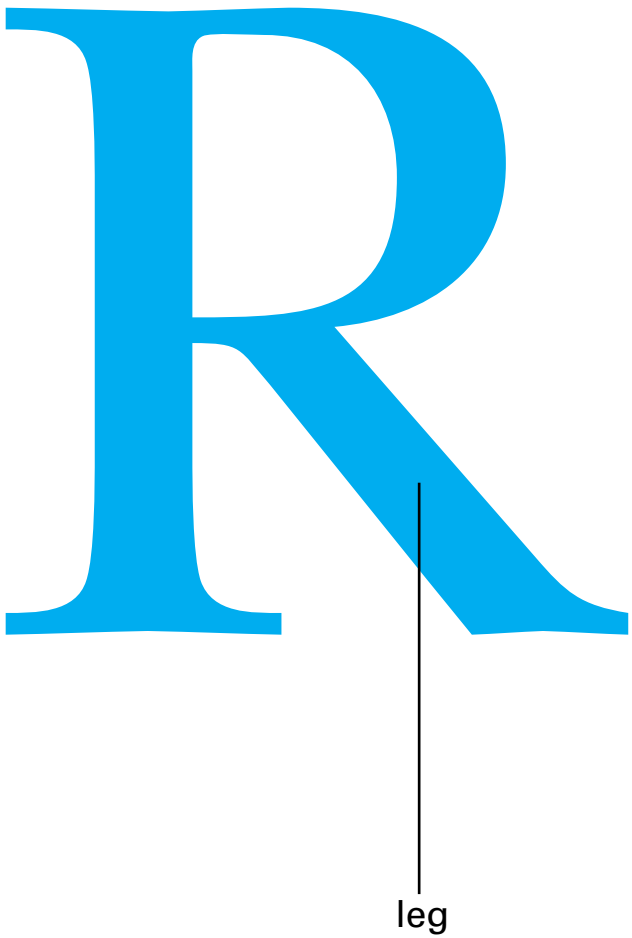
bodoni
modern

rockwell
slab serif

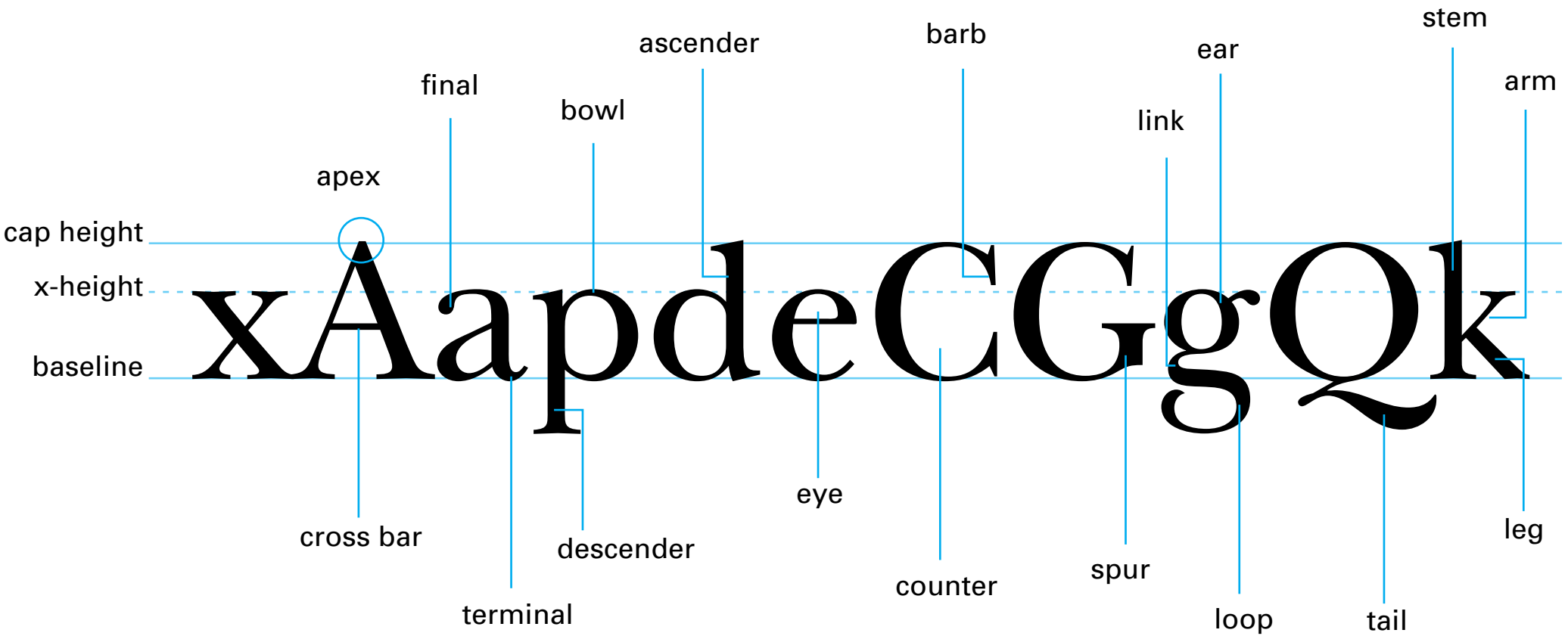
futura
sans serif


arm
crotch
stem
leg


k k k k k
bembo
old style
baskerville
transitional
bodoni
modern
rockwell
slab serif
futura
sans serif



bembo	baskerville	bodoni	rockwell	futura
old style	transitional	modern	slab serif	sans serif


cap height
x-height
baseline
xÅapdeCGgQk
apex
final
bowl
ascender
barb
link
ear
stem
arm
cross bar
terminal
descender
eye
counter
spur
loop
tail
leg