From primitive times, man has sought to communicate with his fellow men through symbols and graphics which conveyed meaning. Slowly he evolved signs and hieroglyphics which became the visual expression of his language.

Ultimately, this process evolved into the writing and the alphabets of the various tongues and civilizations. The early scribes and artists refined these alphabets, and the development of printing led to the design of alphabets of related character and ready readability.

Memorial art—one of the oldest of the arts—was among the first to use symbols and “letters” to inscribe lasting records and history into stone. The sculptors and carvers of each generation influenced the form of letters and numerals and used them to add both meaning and beauty to the monuments and structures which they devised.

Today, as always, our monuments are given meaning and become permanent pages in our history through the symbols and the letters cut into the lasting stone. Today, to endurably “write” our messages into memorials, we use letters which have both artistic merit and adaptability to our advanced methods of carving them.

In keeping with memorial art, we do not inscribe our monuments and markers in either crude or garish or awkward letters, but in letters of harmonized alphabets which have dignity, balance and legibility. At the same time, they are letters which are designed to engrave or incise cleanly and clearly into monumental stone, and to resist change or obliteration through year after year of exposure.

The purpose of this book is to illustrate the basic styles or types of alphabets which have been proved in memorial art, and which are both appropriate and practical in the lettering of monuments and markers.

Lettering or engraving of family memorials or individual markers is done today with superb fidelity through the use of lasers or the sandblast process, which employs a powerful stream or jet of abrasive “sand” to cut into the granite or marble.

The sandblast cutting-agent is guided onto and into the stone through a precise stencil-like pattern which is prepared for each design or inscription.

**History of fonts**

Modern letter forms have their most immediate heritage in Roman inscriptions from around 50-120 AD, such as the on the base of Trajan’s Column in the Roman Forum (114 AD).
Blackletter

Blackletter fonts, the earliest fonts used with the invention of the printing press, resemble the blackletter calligraphy of that time. Many people refer to them as gothic script.

Sample: Old English.

Serif

Serif fonts, sometimes called roman, covers four major groups: Renaissance or Oldstyle (with only slight differences in thickness within each letter).

Sample: Garamond.

Serif

Baroque or Transitional, where the thickness within each letter has greater variety.

Sample: Times New Roman

Serif

Classic or Modern, with the most variance of thickness within each letter.

Sample: Bodoni.
Serif

*Contemporary*, especially those designed primarily for decorative purposes.

Sample: Rockwell.

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Script

*Script* fonts simulate handwriting. They do not lend themselves to body text, as they are harder to read than many serif and sans-serif fonts.

Sample: Zapf Chancery

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San-Serif

*Sans-serif* designs appeared relatively recently in the history of type design. They serve commonly for display applications such as signage, headings, and situations that need clear meaning without the need for continuous reading.

Sample: Arial.

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Novelty fonts

*Novelty* fonts have unusual shapes. They usually have very specific characteristics (e.g. evoking the Wild West) and hence very limited uses.

Sample: Western.
Proportional vs monospace

A proportional font displays letters using varying widths, while a non-proportional, fixed-width or monospace font uses fixed letter-widths. Most people generally find proportional fonts nicer-looking and easier to read.

Using fonts in memorials

Beautiful memorial don’t just happen. Our job is the arrangement of text and graphics within the boundaries of the memorial. This is why we create a balanced layout. Good design requires:

- balancing of positive and negative space.
- any text on a memorial is pleasing to the eye.

Anyone can stack letters...but the professional designer makes them look good!

Positive & Negative Space

A tricky part of the process is balancing of positive and negative space. For those that are unaware, here are some definitions of the terms:

- Positive Space: the lettering and design work
- Negative Space: the area around and between text and design work - also called white space.

Which one of these items look more balanced?
The key to a successful layout is to achieve a pleasing arrangement and a balance between positive and negative space.

There are three types of letter spacing:

1. Kerning or Selective Spacing
2. Tracking or Overall Spacing
3. Leading (ledd-ing) or Line Spacing

**Kerning**

Kerning is the use of selective spacing between letter pairs. It creates a smooth rhythm in each word and along each line of text, as well as adjusts the negative space between letters.

Rule of thumb: Equal visual space or weight between letter pairs - not a fixed distance.

Kerning is best done by eye, not at a fixed distance. It is used to fit capital letters, such as T, V, W, and Y, closer to some other capital letters on either side (especially A) and to some minuscule letters on the right side, such as the combination Ro. It is also used to fit a period closer to these and to F, as well as the minuscule letters y and r. Some other combinations are AC, FA, and OA. If you design on a computer, you can double check your work on screen by squinting or by printing it out and look at in reverse or upside down.
Kerning aids legibility
If kerning is off, words can be hard to read. The human eye recognizes words as much by shape as individual letters. Unusual segments can disrupt the flow and rhythm; making it difficult to read.
Script Lettering
This font, more closely resembling handwriting, can either beautify or create conflict in your text. However, the same kerning principals apply. This lettering should always be done in both upper and lower case, never in one of them alone. Also remember that script fonts are more closely spaced than other font types.

Considerations for kerning
Distance is a consideration when determining how tight or loose your kerning is. When the reader is closer to the text, it’s best to tighten up the spacing. The further away the reader, looser spacing or more air is needed (think of a family name on a monument.)

Additional aspects that must be taken into consideration include:

• Weight (i.e., thickness or “boldness”) of the font.
• Color of the stone.
• Lettering styles (i.e., frosted or polished, deep-sunk or skin-sunk letters).

Kerning Dates
When lettering dates, keep periods and commas kerned in so they don’t become their own group.
Overall Spacing - Tracking

Tracking is increasing or decreasing the space between all letters in a block of text. Tracking is sometimes called character spacing or letter spacing. It is commonly confused with kerning, but these are two separate concepts.

Considerations for Tracking

Much like kerning, distance is a consideration when determining how tight or loose your tracking should be. When the reader is closer to the text, it’s best to tighten up the spacing. The further away the reader, looser spacing or more air is needed (think of a family name on a monument.)

You can, however, have tight and loose tracking on the same stone. Consider an endearment at the bottom of a companion inscription that applies to both people interred. While the names might have a tighter tracking, it’s advised to loosen the tracking to spread out the inscription.

Word spacing

Not only is it important to consider kerning and tracking for individual letters, but it is imperative to separate words so they are legible. Be careful not to separate them so far that they become their own block of text. Watch middle initials like A or names that begin or end with V, W or Y

MARTIN V. SMITH
MARTIN V. SMITH
Leading or line spacing

Now that we’ve examined the spacing between letters and the spacing between words, it’s time to change or viewpoint from horizontal to vertical! Leading is the space between lines of text.

It’s very much an idea that is the same as kerning - one must balance the positive and negative space while keeping a smooth rhythm and flow of the text.
Resourceful designers who understand the carving of stone have developed many special lettering-treatments based on either their own creative concepts or on individual preferences of memorial purchasers. It is important that such special lettering be in harmony with the basic design, and that is also be suited to the carving process.

You can create a new font by modifying an existing font. For example, take Optima Medium and increase tracking or character spacing by 125% and force length to 65%. This creates a tall narrow font that is very distinctive and useful for frosted outlined letters.
Modified by Forcing Length

Times New Roman, normal
Times New Roman, forced 85%

Zapf Chancery Bold, normal
Zapf Chancery Bold, forced 85%

Modified by Outlining .01"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ABCDEFG</th>
<th>ABCDEFG</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HIJKLMN</td>
<td>HIJKLMN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OPQRSTU</td>
<td>OPQRSTU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VWXYZ</td>
<td>VWXYZ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0123456789</td>
<td>0123456789</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Modify individual letters

Carolyn Anderson
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Carolyn Anderson
Carolyn Anderson
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GREER
GREER
GREER
GREER
Clients may not always notice but they do know when text on one memorial “for some reason looks better” than another. Our job is to know why it looks better and use that knowledge to improve our craft.

References
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Mastering Layout by Mike Stevens, ST Publications
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