

## ALPHABET VISUAL FORM COMBINATION THROUGH ANATOMY AND STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS

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### ABSTRACT

*Typographic expressions often employ various experimentation of alphabet visual forms. Some experimentation sometimes mistreats the letters and typeface design, hence creating a typographic design that sometimes feels forced and unbalanced. This unpleasant result represents a poor knowledge and understanding of typeface design and typography of the designer. To enhance typographic prowess, the author then develops a visual form exploration method that requires an understanding of anatomy and structural analysis. The method was developed by observing and analyzing student designs from two batches. By utilizing the anatomy and structure of a letter, a designer can create typographic designs that had a better-structured form. Through this paper, the author hopes to be able to share the method as a reference for any typographic designs.*

Keywords: *Typography, Typeface, Letters, Structure, Anatomy*

### INTRODUCTION

Bryan Lawson explained that the formalization of design education is relatively new compared to other disciplines (Lawson, 2005, p. 6). While the formal education of design itself is new, that doesn't necessarily mean that the practices are new. The practice of typography was known as early as the early fifteenth century, by Johannes Gutenberg's moveable type printing mechanism (Lupton, 2004, p. 13). The development of typography practice itself is also said to be closely related to the advancement of technology, such as most design practices (Hananto, 2020, p. 130; Heskett, 2002, p. 130). However, as the practice grew and flourish, the practice itself is seen as inadequate based on Heller's review on the portfolio of most designers (Heller, 2004, p. vii). Though Heller's view was based on his observations for more than ten years ago, the author also found similar findings through several pieces of research that the understanding of typography nowadays is poor (Hananto, 2019b, p. 205). This raises the necessity to evaluate and further develop methods of teaching typography as a whole in format education.

Saltz argued that though typography had changed & developed because of the advent of new mediums, the fundamental principles of typography itself remains the same (Saltz, 2009, p. 6). Bringhurst stated that the reason of typography's relevant fundamental across the mediums is its origin: handwriting (Bringhurst, 2004, p. 142); while Solomon argued that typography itself is an art (Solomon, 1994, p. 11), which the basic 'rules' of art can be applied on typography. However, in many cases, basic principles of design, like balance, are often under-considered in typographic designs (Hananto, 2018, p. 82). This understanding of typography reframes the focus to teach typography as is it is an art form, with compositional and structural considerations to consider.

Through this mindset, the author had conducted several classroom action research towards teaching typography in terms of teaching typographic fluency through rational and methodological approaches. One particular research had just concluded its second cycle. The research aims to build an alphabet visual form exploration method through alphabet structure understanding. Though the result of the research had been published, this paper will attempt to summarize and also

synthesize the results of the two pieces of research before. Therefore, this paper will discuss the methods and also results that the author had developed through the two cycles of classroom action research.

## METHODOLOGY

The research that the author had conducted is classroom action research. Sukardi explained that classroom action research is conducted to solve practical problems in a classroom setting (Sukardi, 2015, pp. 20–21). The author's research had reached two cycles, which each occurred in the 'Tipografi Dasar' or Foundational Typography course in the Visual Communication Design's program at Universitas Pelita Harapan. The first cycle was conducted in the 2017/2018 academic year, while the second cycle was conducted in the 2018/2019 academic year.

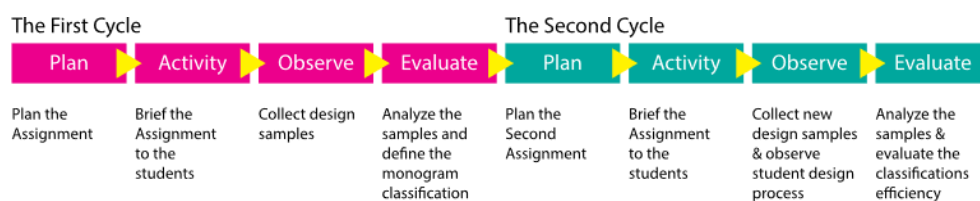


Figure 1. The Two Cycles of Classroom Action Research by the Author  
Source: Author, 2020

The first cycle research was used to determine the tendency of visual explorations in typographic design, to create a two-letter monogram design. The participants of the class & research cycle are of 102 students. The first cycle research also helped the author to define a monogram exploration taxonomy based on the relationship of letters. The second cycle of the research then utilizes the exploration taxonomy as a method for design exploration. The participants of the second class & research cycle are 83 students. The second cycle supports the notion that the taxonomy can be used as a method for design exploration, though there are adjustments and distinction that had to be readjusted for the categories in the classification.

## DATA DESCRIPTION & DISCUSSIONS

### *The First Cycle Research*

The first research and assignment in the class focus on letting the students freely to visually explore monogram designs. To help the students understand the brief, the author formed a method to breakdown letter anatomy as stroke lines, and then combine the lines to form a new shape to produce the monogram design.

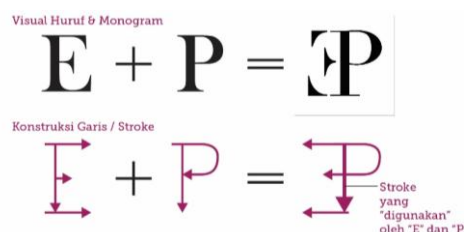


Figure 2. The Illustration on How to See Letters as Stroke Lines and Combine them as Monograms  
Source: Hananto, 2018

The students are taught that each letter are shapes that are formed by lines (Figure 2). These lines had direction and can the lines are the skeletal structure of a letter's

anatomy. By understanding the logic behind the drawing/writing of letters, the student is hoped to be able to see letters as shapes that can be further re-shaped according to their needs.

Based on the 102 samples collected from the students, the author then selects some representable samples and then classifies them to several categories based on how the letters on the monogram relate and interact with one another (Hananto, 2019a, pp. 68–70). The result of the research's first cycle was a monogram classification that was hoped to help the visual exploration of monogram designs which can be seen in Figure 3 and Table 1.

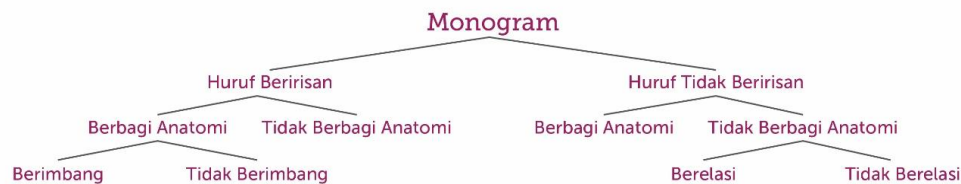






Figure 3. Taxonomy and Classification of Monogram Design

Source: Hananto, 2018

Table 1. Several Samples from the Author's First Research Cycle

Monograms with overlapping letters & sharing anatomy	Monograms with overlapping letters & aren't sharing anatomy	Monograms without overlapping letters & sharing anatomy	Monograms without overlapping letters & aren't sharing anatomy
The monogram had to have letters that overlap to create a direct relation, and the area of the overlapping letters had to correspond to the anatomy or stroke lines, hence making the relation between letters more prominent.	The monogram had to have letters that overlap to create a direct relation, but the area of the overlapping letters does not need to correspond to the anatomy or stroke lines.	The monogram doesn't have to have letters that overlap, but the area of the overlapping letters had to correspond to the anatomy or stroke lines to establish some kind of connection.	The monogram doesn't have to have letters that overlap and the area of the overlapping letters do not need to correspond to the anatomy or stroke lines.
			

Source: Author, 2020





### **The Second Cycle Research**

The second cycle research uses the taxonomy that had been defined from the first cycle as a visual method for designing a monogram. The new batch of students is tasked to design four monograms based on the classification mentioned in Table 1. The simplification of the anatomy was made to simplify the evaluation process of the anatomy. The students are also equipped again with the understanding of letter anatomy to abstract them as line strokes and then use them to construct new forms (Figure 2). One key difference between the two cycles of monogram design assignment was the use of three letters instead of the previous two-letter monogram.

Based on the 322 monograms that are designed from the second cycle, the author observes that the monogram design process had become simplified with the taxonomy as a visualization method. The method enables avid students to quickly design monograms with similar or even better results than the first Cycle (Table 2).

However since the classifications were previously made from two letter monograms, the distinction between each category became less visible when using three-letter monograms. This indicates the need to recategorize and update the classifications that were previously made.

Table 2. Several Samples from the Author's Second Research Cycle

Monograms with overlapping letters & sharing anatomy	Monograms with overlapping letters & aren't sharing anatomy	Monograms without overlapping letters & sharing anatomy	Monograms without overlapping letters & aren't sharing anatomy
The monogram had to have letters that overlap to create a direct relation, and the area of the overlapping letters had to correspond to the anatomy or stroke lines, hence making the relation between letters more prominent.	The monogram had to have letters that overlap to create a direct relation, but the area of the overlapping letters does not need to correspond to the anatomy or stroke lines.	The monogram doesn't have to have letters that overlap, but the area of the overlapping letters had to correspond to the anatomy or stroke lines to establish some kind of connection.	The monogram doesn't have to have letters that overlap and the area of the overlapping letters do not need to correspond to the anatomy or stroke lines.
			

Source: Author, 2020

One point that the author observes during the design process, the classification of the monogram had to limit some student's effort to further explore their monograms. After completing their objective to design a monogram with a certain category, they simply move on and do not push the creative process further, this indicates that on some levels, methods facilitate exploration but gave a false sense of completion once it had been achieved. Despite the counter-productive issues, the author had also found new approaches by some students that cannot be categorized on the four classifications mentioned before. These findings prompted the author to redefine the classification and its necessity.



Figure 4. Some Monograms that Can't be Categorized based on the Classifications

Source: Hananto, 2018

### Discussions

The result of the second cycle had revoked the classification that was proposed in the previous cycle. This, however, pushes the author to breakdown the notion behind the classifications, to form a method of visual exploration for monograms. If the result of the research was the categorization of how letters are combined than perhaps that is the research's supposed conclusion. The overall classroom action research had hoped to simplify the teaching process of typography by increasing the students' fluency with composing with letters, and by establishing new methods (not the classification), the author realized that the research had somewhat succeeded. The result of the two-cycle research was the method of seeing letters as a shape (previously explained in Figure 2), which helped the student to shift their paradigm and conception about letters overall; and also how to combine letters, may it be visually obvious or structurally matched. The two methods, that

can stand alone from one another, had been a great foundation for students to explore their monogram designs, but the classification itself had to limit the possibilities of better typographic design.

## CONCLUSION

### Summary

To summarize, the ongoing research made by the author had two cycles completed. The first cycle attempts to formulate and establish a classification to define monogram designs in hopes to reverse the classification and use it as a method for design. The second cycle of the research attempts to evaluate and push the limits of the classifications established by the first research. This is done by changing the monogram from a two-letter monogram (on the first cycle) into a three-letter monogram. After observing and evaluating the samples from the second cycle, the author had concluded that the classifications cannot be used as flexible as the author had hoped. The author then broke down the classification to a more substantial level: the alphabet 's anatomy analysis (Figure 2) and the alphabet visual form combination (Table 2 & Table 3).

### Conclusion

The two cycles can be seen as somewhat a thesis and anti-thesis; in which after re-evaluating both results, the author had achieved a synthesis. The research had shown that methods can drive and initiate designers to design, however, if the method became rigid and confining, the result can be counterproductive. This can be seen in the second cycle, which had better results than the first cycle, but for some students, they limit themselves to push further.

The result from the first cycle to the second cycle had changed. Before, the result of the research was a proposal for the classification of monogram design. The second cycle research opens up the possibility of other typographic design by simplifying the classification to a humble method for analyzing a letter's shape and combining letters.

For the research itself, the author finds the necessity to further evaluate and test the result of the synthesis on a third cycle. The need for a third cycle came from the realization that there are still many areas to study typography education.

### Recommendation

From the research, the author recommends other scholars to increase their focus on classroom action research, in which the result of the research can further enhance the pedagogy itself. The idea of having research while teaching in class made the whole concept of education more integrated.

The author also recommends the use of the letter structure analysis method and the letter combination method to initiate typographic exploration. It must be remembered that the method is guidelines to start a design, not a goal itself.

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