

A Type of email.

A handbook for working with HTML typography in email

Paul Airy

Foreword by

Justine Jordan, *VP of Marketing, Litmus*

EEC Email Marketer Thought Leader of the Year, 2015

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“Typography (from the Greek words **τύπος** *typos* *form* and **γράφειν** *graphein* *to write*) is the art and technique of arranging type to make written language most appealing to learning and recognition.”

[Wikipedia](#)

“I think type doesn’t get near the attention it deserves, given email is so dependent upon it.”

Fabio Carneiro, Lead Email Developer, MailChimp.

“Major on the message.”

Paul Airy.

Dedication

To my God, my wife Lisa, my children Jude and Olivia, and my very good friend Mark Kelly without whom this book would never have been ... sent.

Acknowledgements

I'd like to acknowledge a few special people for their part in this edition of *A Type of Email*.

Mark Kelly, friend and MailChimp user, who was there at the very beginning of my journey into email. Thank you for continually asking me, 'how are you getting on with your book?'

Jason Rodriguez, who read *A Type of Email* during its latter stages, and provided some extremely useful feedback, from both an authors and a readers perspective.

Justine Jordan, who kindly wrote the foreword for *A Type of Email*, and to whom the email community owes a great deal.

Lisa Airy, my wife, who along with my children, Jude and Olivia, patiently allowed me the time to write this book.

I'd also like to acknowledge the people who've shared in, or had an influence on, directly or indirectly, my journey into email, and particularly my journey into typography in email, some of whom I've mentioned on the following page. I've been instructed by you, encouraged by you, challenged by you and inspired by you.

I doff my cap to you all.

Alex Ilhan
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Justine Jordan
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Kevin Mandeville
Lauren Smith
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Michael Francis
Mike Ragan
Nicole Merlin
Paul Dean
Richard Welch
Ros Hodgekiss

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Foreword

The first time Paul Airy's name crossed my desk (okay, let's be honest, it was via an email on my computer screen) was in June 2013. His speaking submission for "The Naked Email," a talk on HTML typography for email, both surprised and delighted me.

As a visual communication major in college, I spent three semesters hand-drawing letterforms, carefully setting movable type into a composing stick, and obsessing over kerning and tracking adjustments. Needless to say, I was left with – as Paul would say – a particular fondness for typography.

Tasked with the weight of carrying critical messages for both brands and individuals, email is a communication workhorse filled with typographic opportunity – opportunity that has largely been ignored until now.

Paul's commitment to bringing the craft of typography to a medium better known for promotional content than the careful arrangement of letterforms is unprecedented. This book represents an important step forward in the way designers, developers, and marketers approach the art of communication in the email industry.

Anyone that has a hand in creating emails should read this book. Paul has laid an important foundation for creating beautifully accessible emails that celebrate the art of communication in email.

Justine Jordan

VP of Marketing, Litmus

Preface

Why I decided to write this book

It was during my school and college years that I fell in love with letterforms and the art of typography. Ever since then, I've continued to work very closely with type, as a graphic designer, web designer, and in recent years as an email designer.

Frustratingly, though, when I began working with HTML typography in email, I found that the resources available to help me with the challenges it presented were dispersed sparingly across the internet. I recognised the need for a single resource that I could refer to quickly, especially during the email development process.

This led me to write *A Type of Email*, a 'one-stop' handbook for working with HTML typography in email, drawn from extensive and thorough research, testing, retesting, observations, conversations and plain old experience.

I trust it benefits you, as much as it has me.

Paul Airy.

How to use this book

A Type of Email is a handbook for working with HTML typography in email. You can use it in any of the following ways:

1. **Read it from ‘cover’ to ‘cover’**

Read *A Type of Email* from ‘cover’ to ‘cover’, for a comprehensive overview of working with HTML typography in email.

2. **Read the section you’re interested in**

Read the section that covers the typographic element that interests you the most.

3. **Read what you need to read when you need to read it**

Refer to the book while you’re coding your emails, to remind yourself what CSS you need to style a text link, for example, or what the entity code is for an en dash.

Using sections

A Type of Email is divided into sections. Each section covers a single typographic element or a group of related typographic elements.

Within each section you’ll find some or all of the following subsections:

Background

The background subsection covers how the typographic element is typically used within an email.

Styling

A guide for styling the typographic element.

Layout

A guide for using the typographic element within an email layout.

Tips **TIP**

Tips, indicated by a symbol (see above), offer helpful advice on the respective typographic element.

Code Snippets **</>**

Code snippets, indicated by a symbol (see above), demonstrate how to code the respective typographic element, and are all available on [Codepen](#). The code snippets are colour-coded in the book as follows:

Blue Code

Blue code highlights the specific piece of code being discussed within the section.

Red Code

Red code provides the context of the blue code, and how it sits within an email.

An example of colour-coded code!

```
<!-- Paragraph styling with <p> tags -->  
    <p style="font-family:Arial, sans-serif; font-size:14px; line-height:21px; color:#666666; margin:0;">Paragraph of text.</p>  
<!-- Paragraph styling with <p> tags End -->
```

Figures

Figures provide a greater understanding of the subject being discussed in the section.

Links

Throughout the book, you'll find [green links](#), each of which will take you to a relevant section, or a relevant website. To help you find your way around the book, each entry in the [contents](#) page is also a link.

Getting started

To get started with this book, you'll need:

- an understanding of HTML and CSS
- a Source Code Editor
(e.g. Litmus Builder, Sublime Text, Coda, Adobe Dreamweaver)
- a Web Browser with Developer Tools
(e.g. Firefox with Firebug).

Oh – and did I mention a passion for typography in email?
(Not compulsory, but it certainly helps!)

With that sorted, you're ready to go.

Introduction

Subscriber conscious

Throughout the HTML email design and development process, the subscriber is always uppermost in my thinking.

The subscriber is a V.I.P., a very important person, and yes, the subscriber is a person, and not simply an email address amongst a myriad of other email addresses or a statistic in a report (though I love reports). A real person, with a real life, living in a real place, in the here and now.

So, when I send my carefully crafted email, it's into their hands I'm placing it, and it's they who decide whether or not my email is of value, whether they should open it, read it, delete it, or simply mark it as junk!

Message conscious

That's why HTML typography in email is so important, as it's the typography in an email that the subscriber sees before the images make their appearance. In the case of some email and webmail clients (looking at you Microsoft Outlook), they never make an appearance at all unless the subscriber allows them to do so. It's the HTML typography that carries the message the email is sent to communicate to them.


The aim of this book, therefore, is to equip you with the tools required to put the subscriber first, so that you may also embrace HTML typography in email alongside beautiful and well-chosen imagery,

so whatever message your email carries, it arrives in the subscribers
Inbox unhindered.

“Typography in email is not the same as typography in print. You have to think fluid, not static.”

Paul Airy.

Blue Links



16:50	Madrid	AA6283
17:00	Boston	BA203
17:00	Stockholm	BA782

Above: Departure Board, Terminal 5, Heathrow Airport, UK.

Background

A quirk of iOS Mail is that it renders dates, telephone numbers and addresses as 'blue links', and applies functionality to them that it assumes will be helpful to the subscriber.

Selecting a date rendered as a blue link will invite the subscriber to 'Create Event' in their calendar. Selecting a telephone number rendered as a blue link will invite the subscriber to 'Call' the number on their iPhone, or 'Add to Contacts' on their iPad, and selecting an address rendered as a blue link will locate the address in Maps.

In spite of its best intentions, however, iOS Mail sometimes makes mistakes when rendering pieces of text as blue links. It may, for instance, mistake an order number for a telephone number, render it as a blue link, and allow the subscriber to call it (or, at least, attempt to)!

Such mistakes need to be rectified, by restyling and disabling the affected text, so that it appears in the same style as the text that surrounds it, and so that it no longer triggers the functionality. Legitimate links, such as dates, telephone numbers and addresses also need to be restyled to reflect the colour palette of the email.

It's worth noting that you won't be able to identify blue links in a browser, but only in situ, in iOS on an iPhone or an iPad. It's necessary, therefore, to send a test of your email to these devices.

Styling

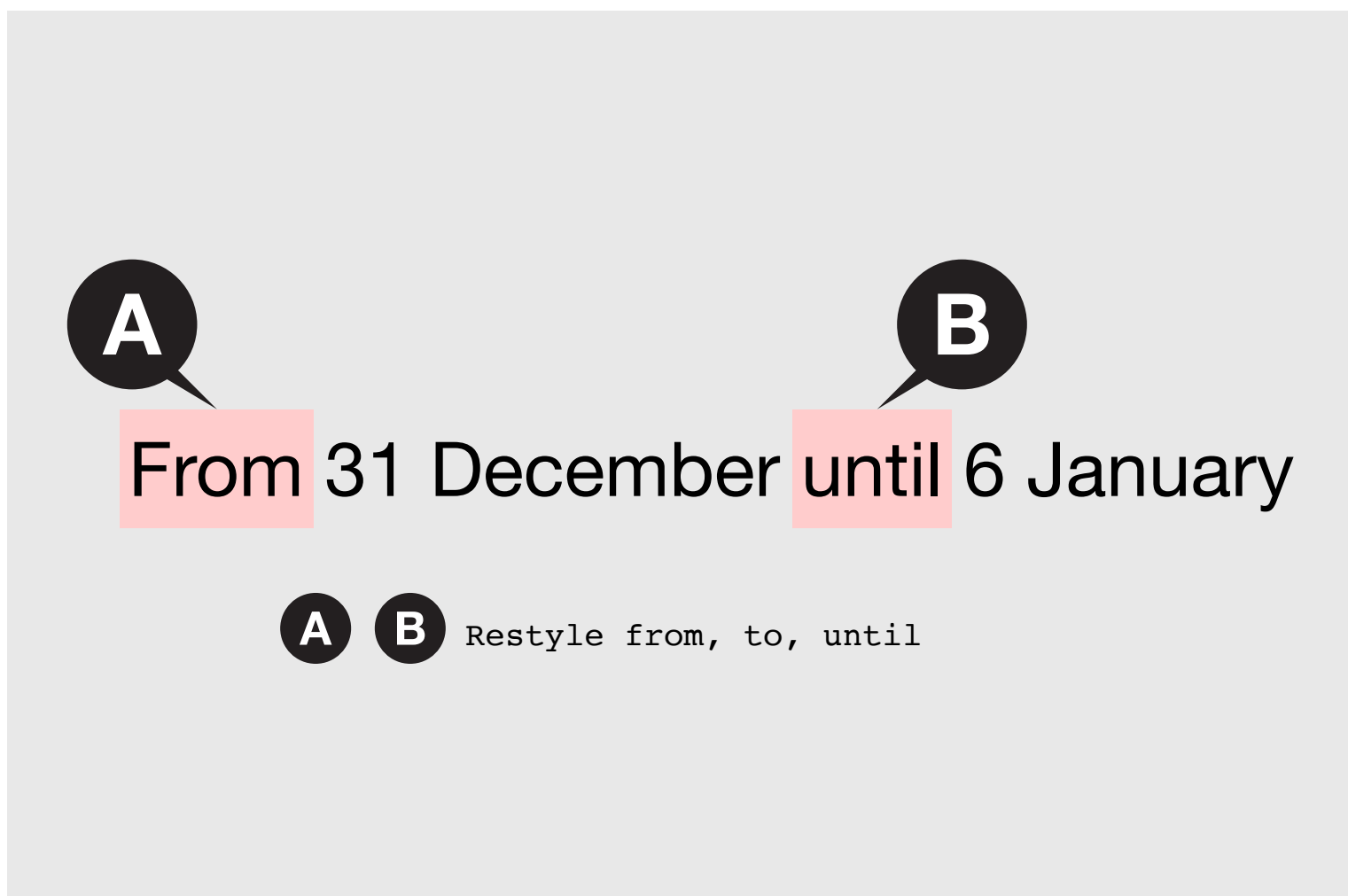
Identify if there are any pieces of text being rendered as blue links, by sending a test of your email to an iPhone or an iPad, using a tool such as [Putsmail](#). If there are, start to resolve them one at a time, by restyling them.

TIP

If any text is added or removed during the email development process, retest your email again to ensure no further pieces of text have been rendered as blue links.



Figure i: 'From', 'To' and 'Until' – words that are often rendered as blue links.



Once you've identified a blue link, wrap the affected text within a pair of `` tags, and add a class of `blueLink` inside the opening `` tag (see *Code i*).

</>

Code i: Adding the class, 'blueLink'.

```
<!-- Adding the class blueLink -->
    <span class="blueLink">31 January 2016</span>
<!-- Adding the class blueLink End -->
```

Then, referencing the class, `blueLink`, restyle the text rendered as blue links, inside the `<head>` (see *Code ii*).

</>

Code ii: Styling the blue link.

```
<!-- Styling the blue link -->
    <style type="text/css">
        .blueLink a {color:#666666 !important; text-
decoration:none !important;}
    </style>
<!-- Styling the blue link End -->
```

TIP

Decide how you'd like the blue links to appear in your email. You may want to 'hide' them, in which case style their `color` to match the surrounding text, and the `text-decoration` as `none`. If you'd like them to appear as links, but in a colour reflecting the colour palette of your email, style them accordingly.

While the blue links have been restyled, they remain enabled, meaning they can be ‘accidentally’ selected. To disable the blue links, apply the style `pointer-events:none !important;` to the class `blueLink` (see *Code iii*).



Code iii: Disabling the blue link.

```
<!-- Disabling the blue link -->
  <style type="text/css">
    .blueLink a {color:#666666 !important; text-
decoration:none !important; pointer-events:none
!important;}
  </style>
<!-- Disabling the blue link End -->
```

TIP

Create some styles to reflect the different colours in your email’s colour palette, and where you wish to retain the functionality, omit the style `pointer-events:none !important;`.



About the Author

Paul ‘fell into’ email in 2011, and quickly ‘fell in love’ with it. Since then he’s practiced email design and development, primarily in the fashion and financial sectors.

He’s spoken on the subject of HTML Typography in Email at the Email Design Conference, Boston, 2014, and the Email Design Conference, London, 2015, both hosted by [Litmus](#), and in November 2015, published a tutorial for web developers in [net magazine](#), entitled *Master HTML Typography in Email*.

Paul also publishes an email newsletter, [Type E:](#), devoted to typography in email.

Yes, you could say that he has a particular fondness for typography.

***A Type of Email* is a practical handbook for working with HTML typography in email.**

- Quick and easy access to help you with the typographic element you're working with.
- Code samples throughout each section, enabling you to recreate the typography in your emails.



Code i: Typography.

```
<!-- Typography -->
    <h1 style="font-family:Arial, sans-serif;
font-size:40px; line-height:45px; mso-line-height-
rule:exactly; color:#ee0000; margin:0;">Headline
    </h1>
<!-- Typography End -->
```

- Tips drawn from years of practice.



A font-size of 1em, related to a font-size of 12px = 12px.

- Figures illustrating typographic elements.



- 'One-stop' resource.

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