

CAFL Appellate Practice Tip

CAFL Appellate Panel Support Unit
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CHOOSING A FONT FOR YOUR APPELLATE BRIEF

Are you suffering from font anxiety? New Rule 20 of the Rules of Appellate Procedure allows attorneys to choose a 14-point proportionally spaced font instead of the traditional monospaced font Courier New. If you choose to venture out into the world of proportionally spaced fonts, the Rules limit the brief length by word-count instead of the number of pages.

Choosing the “best” proportionally spaced font comes down to personal preference and, more importantly, what is easiest to read. Keep in mind that most judges are reading briefs on their tablets, often at the end of a busy day when their eyes are tired.

Here are some tips for choosing the best font for your brief:

- Look for a font that has a high contrast, where there is a bigger difference between the skinnier and wider parts of the letters.
- Avoid fonts that are very thin and tend to disappear when printed on a page or when pixelated on screen.
- Times New Roman is often maligned by attorneys as a boring, fallback option. Matthew Butterick, author of [Typography for Lawyers](#), calls Times New Roman “the font of least resistance,” causing the reader “to gaze into the void.” But it is specifically mentioned in Rule (a)(4)(B), so if you like it, feel free to use it.
- Fonts are generally divided into “serif” and “sans serif.” Serif fonts have little tails, lines, or tapers at the tips of the letters. “Sans” means “without,” so sans serif fonts have nothing hanging from the ends of the letters. Look at the box to the right. Verdana and Arial are sans serif fonts – no tails. The others are serif fonts. While some studies have shown that long passages of serif type are easier to read and comprehend, and therefore recommend that you use a serif font for a brief, other studies suggest that there really isn’t any difference. See U.S. 7th Cir. Ct. App., “Requirements and Suggestions for Typography in Briefs and Other Papers.” <http://www.ca7.uscourts.gov/type.pdf>. Besides the fonts in the box at right, other serif fonts include Caslon, Garamond, and Calisto MT. Other sans serif fonts include Eurostile, Trebuchet, and Univers.

When choosing a font, don’t rely on how a single word looks; look at an entire page. Do your eyes get tired? Is it harder to read than other fonts you are considering? Be creative, but make sure that the font you choose is easy on the eyes of a tablet-reading judge. Note: This practice tip was written in Georgia (12-pt).

*Examples of Proportionally Spaced
Fonts Include:*

Times New Roman

Arial

Georgia

Verdana

Baskerville

Book Antiqua

Century

Century Schoolbook

Bookman Old Style

Palatino
