

Topographic Typography



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Make your statement stand up! Typography, with depth.

Typography is the art of arranging letter blocks to make written language legible and appealing when displayed. This involves selecting typefaces, point sizes, line lengths, line spacing, letter spacing, and spaces between pairs of letters to make a pleasantly accessible final product.

Many people associate the origin of typography to Johannes Gutenberg with his mechanical lead-alloy printing press in 1439. However, Gutenberg came in at the middle of the story of typography, as his printing press was aided by earlier inventions. Impressions on brick stamps were found in Mesopotamian cities dating from the second millennium B.C.! Mass-produced movable ceramic type was created in China during the Song dynasty (960-1279) and was used until the beginning of the Qing dynasty (1644-1911), when wood type fell into favor for being more durable and easy to repair. Metal movable type was first invented in Korea during the Goryeo Dynasty (918-1392).

Across the ages, people have always desired to “get the word out” cheaply, efficiently, and in great quantities. Today, nearly 600 years from Gutenberg’s printing press, typography is just as important, though the practice has become primarily digital, and the definition has expanded. Contemporary visual artists Barbara Kruger, Christopher Wool, and Oscar Murillo all use typography as an essential part of their work. Typography is also the work of graphic designers, art directors, manga artists, and comic book artists, as well as anyone who arranges words, letters, numbers, and symbols for publication, display, or distribution. Even this copy is typography!

In this lesson, students will create a raised, 3-dimensional typographical statement. Letters are made from chipboard and adhered to a base using plaster strips. The rough, textured plaster strips can be left white for a dramatic effect or be painted. Encourage students to create a font type that accentuates the written statement without compromising legibility.



Note: Instructions and materials are based on a class size of 24 students. Adjust as needed.

Ready to order materials?

Go to www.DickBlick.com/lesson-plans/Topographic-Typography/
to access a product bundle for your convenience.

Materials (required)

Bienfang Gridded Paper Pad, 4 x 4 grid, 50 sheets, 11" x 17", (10613-1016); share one pad across class

Saral Wax Free Transfer Paper, Graphite, 4 sheets, 12" x 3 ft, (12917-2612); share three packages across class

Utrecht Chipboard, Kraft, 29" x 46", 0.031" thick (13145-3146); need at least twelve sheets/share sheets

Blick Masking Tape, natural, 1/4" x 60 yds (24149-1014); share one roll between two students

Blick Plaster Cloth, set of 4 rolls, 4" x 62.5 yds (34134-2500); share one package across class.

Boxwood Clay Tool Sets, set of 38 tools, 6" long (30304-1009); share one set across class

Optional Materials:

Blickrylic Gesso, White, gallon (00711-1059); share one gallon across class

Blickrylic Student Acrylic Paints, assorted colors and sizes (00711-)

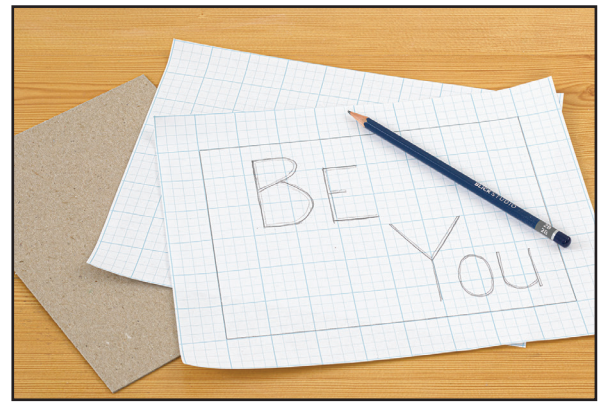
Blick Matte Acrylic Paints, assorted colors (00727-)

Preparation

1. Cut chipboard bases 11" x 14" or larger, one per student. A 29"x46" sheet will yield eight 11" x 14" bases, with a small remainder on each side. Save the remainder pieces for making the type.
2. Cut 1/2" to 1" strips. The amount needed by each student will vary, depending on their type.

Process

1. Direct each student to choose a personally meaningful, yet short, one-sentence statement.
2. In a sketchbook, write the phrase in various typefaces. Encourage students to consider the balance between legibility and artistic meaning.
3. Choose the option that best meets these objectives and sketch it at scale onto a sheet of graph paper. Use the grid as a guide to align letters and choose appropriate spaces (leading) in between each letter. Keep in mind that the letters will be made with strips of chipboard, attached on end, so that it stands up. Students will need to place letters far enough apart to reach with their fingers in between letter spaces. Outline the final type design in Sharpie.
4. Use transfer paper to transfer the lettering onto the 11"x14" sheet of chipboard.
5. Fold, bend, cut, and join 1/2" strips of chipboard to resemble the type. Attach to the chipboard base with masking tape. Work one letter at a time.
6. When all letters are taped to the base, use small strips of plaster cloth to cover the entire piece. Use a wooden modeling tool or fingers to press the cloth into creases, where the letter base meets the base of the piece at a 90-degree angle.
7. The rough texture of the plaster cloth can be smoothed out by rubbing with a wet finger.
8. When dry, display as is, or paint.



Step 1: Use graph paper to sketch a visually relevant type face that is reflective of the written phrase, then transfer the sketch onto a chipboard base.



Step 2: Fold, bend, cut, and join 1/2" strips of chipboard to resemble the sketched type and tape to the base.



Step 3: Cover the letters and base with strips of plaster cloth.

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National Core Arts Standards - Visual Arts

Creating

Anchor Standard 1: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

Anchor Standard 2: Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.

Presenting

Anchor Standard 6: Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.

Responding

Anchor Standard 7: Perceive and analyze artistic work.

Anchor Standard 8: Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.