

The Lay of the Case

This is a Double case, the most common, and includes all the characters from one fount.

ffl		æ	œ	k	j		thins	1	2	3	4	5	6	'	?	!	;	()	&	_
ffi												7	8	'	£	\$		[]		
fl	b	c	d	e								9	0							
fi																				
ff	l	m	n	h	o	y	p	,	w			thick spaces	en spaces	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
z				mid spaces										P	Q	R	S	T	V	W
x	v	u	t		a	r	.	-				quads		X	Y	Z	Æ	Œ	U	J

These are the LOWERCASE characters; in a large fount of type they would be laid out the same way but in a case of their own.

These are the UPPERCASE characters



Type for setting by hand is stored in compartmentalised typecases, and these seem to have been used from the early days of Gutenberg, and even the layout of the letters has stayed fairly constant. There have been many variations, some intended to suit particular uses (for example where printers use a large variety of types, but smaller amounts of each), and some in attempts to improve efficiency by reducing hand movement in assembling the letters. However, certainly since the nineteenth century, there have been a number of fairly standard sizes and layouts.

The layouts for the most-used letters can vary slightly, but most were set out as above. (These comments are of course written with English setting in mind.) There were many variations in the minor characters. Note that some letters have more room than others, and that in many typefaces there are *ligatures* (joined-up characters) such as fi and ff* both to improve appearance and to avoid damage when overhanging letters meet. Spare boxes were used for special characters as necessary—different printers would have special needs for their work, such as monetary signs, or reference marks, or mathematical signs. The main variation found was in the placing of the numbers, which were often in the uppercase section second & third rows, with other minor characters using the boxes used by them in the layout shown above. U and J were added to the alphabet after the case-lay became established, hence their odd positions. The case-lay was slightly alphabetic, but modified to put the most-used letters together in the centre to speed up setting.

The sizes of the boxes of course reflected the relative amount of each character that occurred in normal text (in the language in use), and type was supplied in founts that also did this. A typefounders catalogue would specify exactly how many of each character would be supplied for each size of fount.

Lower- and *upper-case* refer to the use of two cases when setting large amounts of type (eg. for

books), when the two cases are set out on special brackets with one just above the other. (As shown in the small illustration.) Small amounts of type are usually kept in *double cases* (as shown above) which combine the two into one.

Most cases in use in recent times were either English (32.5"x 14") as above, or Californian size (32.5"x16") with two rows of smaller boxes above four rows of taller ones in the uppercase section. The depths varied from 1 1/4" to 2". Cases were stored in either racks about a metre high (known as *cabinets* or *frames*) where the top was used as a worktop, or if sloping, used to rest the cases while in use; or in two-metre high racks known as *tallboys*. However, the Stanhope case, effectively two-thirds of the width of a normal case, was also used for small founts, where space was at a premium.

There were also special variations on the boxes within the standard cases for special purposes: cases were made to store brass rule lengths, spacing material, and border units. Again to store small founts of type (especially where they were capitals only), *triple cases* with three sets of the uppercase layout only were used.

All this reference to small founts is because of course a printer had to have a fount of type for each and every size of each and every type design he used. When printing books, a printer might use dozens of cases of one size of one typeface (indeed before the mid-nineteenth century, that might be almost all he had). However, for other work an increasing number of styles and sizes were expected over the years, though possibly only to set an advertisement headline, or a few lines of *display work*. (Words designed to catch attention, rather than routine text.) This meant a need for dozens, possibly hundreds, of much smaller founts than for long text work.

Typecases were originally all wooden, but in mid-twentieth century metal frames and plastic moulded bodies were introduced (rounding off the awkward dirt-collecting corners of the boxes).