Courier Fonts

Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Courier . . . And Then Some

What Is Courier?

The font that we commonly associate with the typewriter is Courier, a monospaced, lightly serifed ("bearded") font that presents a clean appearance on the page.

Courier was designed by Howard Kettler and introduced by IBM in 1955. The name that Kettler originally intended for the font was "Messenger," but—for whatever reason—he called it "Courier" instead. It became one of the most commonly used fonts on typewriters. It is similar in appearance to other typewriter fonts in use before and after 1955, but its bearded features are slightly less frilly than those of some similar fonts (for example, see Remington, later).

For many years now, especially since the introduction of the personal computer, people have identified "Courier" with any typewriter font. However, anyone old enough to have used typewriters from the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s knows that different brands of typewriters had their own recognizable typewriter fonts. Even so, until the introduction of the IBM Selectric interchangeable ball, all typewriter fonts were fairly similar. All of them looked basically the same, and all of them were "monospaced" (which meant that each character, thin or fat, resided on the same amount of space on the line). Specifications for manuscripts usually contained a request to type neatly on a certain weight of white paper, but almost never had made any reference to the font unless it was a statement that "either pica or elite" size was acceptable. Very rarely a style sheet requested pica in preference to the smaller elite.

Pitch

The distinguishing feature of a typewriter font was not its typeface, but its pitch, which is the number of characters it makes per inch. Pitch is a descriptor that only applies to monospaced fonts (such as typewriter fonts), not to proportionally spaced fonts (like the Charter font of this essay, in which an *i* takes up much less space than a *w*).

Two pitches were available: standard 12-point pica, which measured out to 10 characters per inch; and 10-point elite, which measured out to 12 characters per inch. Overall, pica was preferred, though elite was in common use, especially in business settings where excessive length of correspondence and other documents could be a major consideration for paper use, mailing costs, and storage space.

The following words, in a Courier font, show the difference between pica and elite:

```
Pica:       Individual
Elite:      Individually
```

The word *individual* has ten letters. In pica it is one inch long on the line, because pica gives ten characters per inch (10 CPI).

Although the word *individually* has twelve letters, it is still only one inch long on the line, because the smaller elite squeezes in twelve characters per inch (12 CPI).

In a monospaced font every character (including the spacebar blank character) has the same amount of space available for it on the line. Consequently a thin letter like *f* or *t* gets a little plot of space the same size as that which a fat *M* gets. If you look at certain words in Courier, you will see that some letters have a lot of white space between them, while others do not.

NOTE: For those of you who might get out a ruler and measure characters per inch, you should know the following: The PDF file might not print out at exactly 100-percent size. Also, a program may not handle a 12-point font at exactly 12 point. My experience with FinalDraft has been that it reduces the font size to around 11.6 point on my computer and printer.

Courier and Screenplays

Because screenplay format developed in the typewriter era and has become loosely codified on the basis of that heritage, the writer has to do things similar to how they were done on a typewriter. If computers had preceded the development of screenplay format, Courier would not be the font in use for screenplays today. However, Courier is now the standard, and that is not likely to change.

Courier by Any Name Is Courier

People frequently ask whether the screenplay has to be in Courier or whether Courier New is all right. The answer is simple: If it says Courier anywhere in the name, it is still Courier. Moreover, some fonts do not say Courier, but they are still acceptable in screenplays if they have a Courier look, because it is not being Courier that is really the essential feature, but being part of the "typewriter font" species. For example, several fonts sold for screenwriting are imitations of typewriter fonts, and their names are taken from specific typewriters (see the VT fonts below).

The real criterion is not the name of the font, but its look. Is it a bearded, monospaced font that you can print at 12 points? Does it have the same general look as Courier fonts? Does it look crisp and neat? If the answer is yes to these questions, then you can use it.

Of course, you have to keep in mind that some of the imitation-typewriter fonts have too much of a "retro" look, and might not be appropriate for a manuscript. You have to make the final decision about that on an aesthetic basis.

Advantages and Limitations of Courier Fonts

Courier is a very readable typeface. It is uncluttered without having the sparse appearance of a sans serif font like Arial or Verdana. Because it is a monospaced font, its use in a standard screenplay format allows a fairly accurate estimate of the time that one page will equal out to on screen. Also, the imposition of a common font like Courier eliminates the chaos that would ensue if people had freedom of choice in a font.

The only disadvantage of a Courier font, which is a small one, is that some specialized characters may not be available. This depends on the particular Courier font.

For example, a very useful character in screenwriting is the em-dash, which is used in printing to show a sudden interruption of thought or dialogue, as in: "I gave the matter some thought—for a week, at least—and decided to accept the job." Typewriter policy was to show an em-dash with two hyphens in succession. That is where the two hyphens in a screenplay Scene Heading come from, as in:

```
INT. BEDROOM -- NIGHT
```

Most Courier fonts have an em-dash, which the writer can insert by typing the em-dash ANSI code 0151 like this: Left ALT key plus 0151 on the Numeric Keypad.

```
INT. BEDROOM — NIGHT
```

So should you use the em-dash in a screenplay? Why not? If it is available in the font, then use it.

★ **Comment**

The em-dash is the subject of some controversy. People debate whether it should have any space before and after it. Consider these examples, in which the spacebar was used before and after the dash:

"Look out, Papa — it's falling!" or "Look out, Papa—it's falling!"

With a desktop publishing program, you can insert a thin space before and after the dash. With a regular word processor, like Microsoft Word, the only easy option is to use the spacebar. Be aware that some publishers do not want the spaces. You just have to know the policy of the company you are working with.

In screenplays you should use the spaces. Besides the fact that this format makes the script look neater, it may help the software separate NIGHT from DAY in Scene Headings when you generate reports for production purposes. Having the spaces around the dash also lets the screenwriting program break dialogue lines at the dash instead of wrapping *word+dash+word* to the next line.

Another special character is the en-dash, which is supposed to be longer than a hyphen but shorter than an em-dash. In Courier fonts the en-dash and the em-dash are often the same in appearance: slightly longer than a hyphen. This does not create a problem in screenwriting, because you can get along with the hyphen in place of the en-dash. In fact, most people have no idea what the en-dash is and never use it. The usual function of the en-dash (ANSI character 0150) is to separate numbers in a range as in: "See pages 50–65." Most people simply use a hyphen in that circumstance, as in: "See pages

50-65." The en-dash never has a space before or after it, except in sophisticated typesetting when a thin space is aesthetically helpful.

★ **Tip** | In screenplays you should use the spaces. Besides the fact that this format makes the script look neater, it may help the software separate NIGHT from DAY in Scene Headings when you generate reports for production purposes. Having the spaces around the dash also lets the screenwriting program break dialogue lines at the dash instead of wrapping *word+dash+word* to the next line.

Problems That Arise With Page Count

If you switch from one Courier to another, you may inadvertently change the total page count of the manuscript. The difference can be significant. The reason for this is that every font has a default line spacing in points. Courier Final Draft is set to a line spacing that is very close to 12 points; therefore you get six lines per inch. (Remember that 12 points equals 1/6 of an inch; therefore six lines would be 1 inch.) By contrast, Courier New seems to be set at around 13.5 points per line; you get about 5.3 lines per inch, as well as I have been able to measure it. Consequently, if you have a 100-page manuscript done in Courier Final Draft, and you then substitute Courier New, the difference is:

```
6/5.3 = 1.13
```

which means that your 100-page manuscript will probably increase by at least 13 pages (and possibly more, because as you add pages you encounter more and more of those situations that make a premature page break—a situation that causes the page count to snowball).

"What happened?" is the usual cry of desperation at this point from the bewildered writer who is not familiar with these issues of fonts and line spacing.

Courier New puts a little too much space between lines. Fortunately, the more sophisticated word processors and screenwriting programs allow an adjustment of the line spacing. If you can set it in fractions of points, I suggest 12.5 points. This very closely approximates six lines per inch without scrunching the lines up so much on screen that the tails of letters like *y* and *g* are lost.

If you insist on the "classical typewriter standard" of precisely six lines per inch, you will need to set your line spacing at 12.0 or maybe 12.1 points. (You may have to experiment a little.) FinalDraft does not let you set line spacing by points. You have to use settings like Tight or Very Tight. Use the one that works best.

💣 **Warning** | Do not use Tight or Very Tight with a font that already prints at six lines per inch in the Normal setting (Courier Final Draft is one). The tighter settings scrunch your lines closer together than you want.

How to Count Lines per Inch

This is not as easy as you might think! You do not just count off six lines. You have to measure the lines properly. Consider the seven (7) lines below, which have a line spacing of exactly 12.1 points, which corresponds closely to classical typewriter spacing with Pica type:

```
Look at my example line 1
Look at my example line 2
Look at my example line 3
Look at my example line 4
Look at my example line 5
Look at my example line 6
Look at my example line 7
```

To determine how many lines per inch you are getting, you have to measure exactly from the *baseline* of one line to the *baseline* of another line. Measure from the bottom of the *m* in *my* in line 1 to the bottom of the *m* in line 7. If the distance from the baseline of line 1 to the baseline of line 7 is exactly one inch, then you have six lines per inch, because you have exactly six lines between the two baselines that are a full six lines apart. Always use a baseline for measurements, not the bottom of an extender like the tail on *y* in *my*.

(Please note that the examples of Courier, below, are intended to show what the fonts look like; they have not been set to a line spacing that will correspond to six lines per inch.)

Examples of Courier / Typewriter Fonts

The following Courier and other typewriter fonts show that all of these fonts are similar, though some differences are apparent, especially with the old "imitation typewriter" fonts offered as *VT+typewriter name* fonts. Some of the fonts are not desirable choices from an aesthetic standpoint, because they are fuzzy or too light.

Fonts are rated, completely subjectively, on a standard of four-stars as the best.

Courier10 BT

FEATURES: It is dark without being a true bold (you can, in fact, make it bold). It is crisp on the page, and it displays well in Windows XP. The curly quotes are diagonal in the same direction but have different shapes (fat at bottom on the opening quotes, fat at top on the closing quotes). The en-dash (0150) and em-dash (0151) are the same length; however, they are longer than the hyphen.

RATING: * * * *. In my opinion, this is the best of the Courier fonts.

```
                MAJOR
     Do not worry, Lieutenant, soon there
     will be plenty of cigarettes for you and
     me ... American cigarettes.
```

```
`1234567890- — — =~!@#$%^&*()_+''""<>/
```

Courier New

FEATURES: This is the standard Courier that comes with the Windows operating system. It prints out too thin, in my opinion, but it is still very readable and exceptionally clear. It displays well on screen. It comes as Normal, Italic, Bold, and Bold Italic. The hyphen and the en-dash are the same length; the em-dash is longer. The opening and closing curly quotes point in different directions—a feature that I do not like. PDF makers convert Courier New to Courier Type 1, which looks the same but may be just a tad darker; consequently, the representation here may look better than the real font does.

RATING: * *. A good font, just too anemic. It is still very serviceable if you have nothing else.

```
                    MAJOR
          Do not worry, Lieutenant, soon there
          will be plenty of cigarettes for you
          and me ... American cigarettes.

`1234567890- – — =~!@#$%^&*()_+''""<>/
```

Courier Final Draft

FEATURES: A good Courier supplied with the FinalDraft screenwriting program. It is still a little thinner than I like, but it is definitely better than Courier New in that respect. It has curly quotes of the diagonal type in the same direction, which I prefer over the style of Courier New. The greatest disappointment of the FinalDraft font is that the hyphen, the en-dash, and the em-dash are all the same length, with the practical consequence that you only have a hyphen. Fortunately, it is a fairly long hyphen, which makes the lack of dashes a little more tolerable.

RATING: * *. It looks better than Courier New, though the weights of a few letters seem slightly heavier than others. A respectable font except for the hyphen/dash problem. I had previously rated this font with three stars, but the hyphen/dash issue makes me downgrade it to a two. Most people who have FinalDraft use this font.

```
                    MAJOR
          Do not worry, Lieutenant, soon there
          will be plenty of cigarettes for you and
          me ... American cigarettes.

          `1234567890- – — =~!@#$%^&*()_+''""<>/
```

Courier MM Screenwriter

FEATURES: Excellent Courier supplied with Movie Magic Screenwriter 6. I do not see any difference between it and Courier10 BT, except that Courier MM has a few minor display issues on my computer screen, in that some of the characters seem farther apart than

they should be. The printout is fine. Curly quotes are diagonal as with Courier10 BT and Courier Final Draft. The weight of the characters is not significantly different from Courier10 BT. The hyphen and the dashes are the same as in Courier10 BT.

RATING: ***. If you have MMS 6, you should definitely use this font. You can also use it with other programs. However, until I see that the display issues have been resolved, I will still recommend Courier10 BT in preference to the Courier MM clone.

```
                    MAJOR
        Do not worry, Lieutenant, soon there
        will be plenty of cigarettes for you and
        me ... American cigarettes.

   `1234567890- — — =~!@#$%^&*()_+'’""<>/
```

Courier Std

FEATURES: It prints out very similar to Courier New. It does not display well on screen. Remarkably, the hyphen, the en-dash, and the em-dash are all different lengths, a distinctly sophisticated feature in a font that otherwise has nothing to recommend itself.

RATING: *. Use it only if you do not have Courier New.

```
                    MAJOR
        Do not worry, Lieutenant, soon there
        will be plenty of cigarettes for you and
        me ... American cigarettes.

   `1234567890- – — =~!@#$%^&*()_+'’""<>/
```

Dark Courier

FEATURES: This little-known font, which can perhaps still be downloaded for free from Hewlett-Packard, is very good. It displays well and prints out well. It is not quite as dark as Courier10 BT. The hyphen, en-dash, and em-dash are all different lengths. It has a little bit of a squared-off look, similar to the appearance of some of the IBM Selectric typewriter fonts (as I recall them, anyway, from that bygone era). The comma and the period are a little thinner than I would prefer, but they are acceptable.

The font is widely available on the internet; you can Google the filename *lj611en.exe*. You can also download the font from my website. I have placed the four font files (Normal, Italic, Bold, and Bold Italic) in a zip file available at:

http://www.rolandstroud.com/downloads/

RATING: ***.

```
                     MAJOR
          Do not worry, Lieutenant, soon there
          will be plenty of cigarettes for you and
          me ... American cigarettes.

       `1234567890- - — =~!@#$%^&*()_+‘’“”<>/
```

VT Fonts

These are "typewriter-like" fonts. They are fun to play around with, but unfortunately they are not scaled to measure out to exactly ten characters per inch. If you take a ruler and measure a full line, you see that the characters creep to the left, which indicates that the pitch is a hair greater than 10 (in other words, more than 10 characters per inch). In practicality this makes no difference, but it is still bothersome, in view of the fact that these are supposed to be imitations of typewriter fonts.

VTScreenplayOliverB

FEATURES: Commercial typewriter-like font designed for screenplays. The hyphen, the en-dash, and the em-dash are all the same length.

RATING: **.

```
                     MAJOR
          Do not worry, Lieutenant, soon there will
          be plenty of cigarettes for you and me
          ... American cigarettes.

       `1234567890- - - =~!@#$%^&*()_+''""<>/
```

VTScreenplayRemingtonB

FEATURES: Commercial typewriter-like font designed for screenplays. The hyphen, the en-dash, and the em-dash are all the same length.

RATING: * *. I think the "Remington" is the best-looking of these four VT fonts.

```
                     MAJOR
          Do not worry, Lieutenant, soon there will
          be plenty of cigarettes for you and me
          ... American cigarettes.

       `1234567890- - - =~!@#$%^&*()_+''""<>/
```

VTScreenplayUnderwoodB

FEATURES: Commercial typewriter-like font designed for screenplays. The hyphen, the en-dash, and the em-dash are all the same length. Note the small "less than" and "greater than" symbols.

RATING: **.

```
                    MAJOR
      Do not worry, Lieutenant, soon there will
      be plenty of cigarettes for you and me
      ... American cigarettes.

  `1234567890- - - =~!@#$%^&*()_+''""‹›/
```

VTScreenplaySmithB

FEATURES: Commercial typewriter-like font designed for screenplays. The hyphen, the en-dash, and the em-dash are all the same length.

RATING: **.

```
                    MAJOR
      Do not worry, Lieutenant, soon there will
      be plenty of cigarettes for you and me
      ... American cigarettes.

  `1234567890- - - =~!@#$%^&*()_+''""<>/
```

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