

Avoiding the Horror of Font Substitution

Font substitution (**FS**) is one of the most common and most destructive problems encountered in the digital realm of desktop publishing and graphics. It is the number one problem at printshops and service bureaus (like Kinko's) when you take something in to be printed, but it can also happen when you go open files (any file containing text, including Word files) on computers other than your own.

What's the problem??? Basically **FS** happens when you use type characters (or type fonts) that are installed on your computer but not present on other machines. The scariest part is that the type characters may "display" properly on a monitor, but when you print, you get something else entirely, often a common "generic" font like Arial, Times, Helvetica, Palatino. In other words, if another computer doesn't have the typeface you're using, it will "substitute" another for it. In general, the more exotic or non-standard the typeface you use, the greater the risk of **FS** taking place. This is almost sure to happen with so-called unique or hand-made typefaces, many of which are available to download free online.

Example: **THIS IS WHAT YOU WANT** (Agent Orange font)
THIS IS WHAT YOU GET (Arial)

Note: This is not a Mac vs PC thing; it can happen Mac to Mac or PC to PC, even in your own home.

What can you do??? Aside from the most obvious, non-creative strategy of only using so-called standard typefaces like Times, Arial (yawwwwn, boring!!!!) all the time (and even that routine is not 100% foolproof since there are many brands of arial, etc)., here are some workarounds.

1. Save a version of your file as a .pdf, since this format will try to "embed" your font into the document file itself. This works in many situations, but only if the font is "registered" and "legal.", so it's not 100% reliable. Since Adobe Illustrator and Photoshop actually use the .pdf language as part of their structure, they will try to embed the font if they can do so. Also you can "save as" .pdf in these apps.
2. Copy your fonts to another machine or provide them along with your file to the service bureau. This is a bit of a hassle at times, but can work very well. But, this strategy will **not** work cross-platforms (Mac fonts won't install on a PC or vice-versa).
3. The best way I know so far is to convert your fonts to basic objects that will print under any conditions on any machine and any printer. This means that in Illustrator you must convert all your type to "outlines" [using the "create outlines" command] which will convert all selected editable type to simple, but non-editable vector objects. In Photoshop you can "rasterize" your type layer [using the

“rasterize type layer” command] which will convert editable vector type to standard but non-editable pixels.

This method is almost 100% guaranteed to prevent **FS** issues, but at a cost – you lose type editability. Solution? Save two versions of your file, one master version with fully editable type, and one with the type converted to easy-to-print but non-editable pixels or outlines. In fact, if /when you know to use layers as part of your work routine, you can even accomplish everything in one file by duplicating type layers, keeping one editable and one converted (and using the eyeball icon on the layer to turn visibility on and off as you need)