

# Gill Sans

Eric Gill

“

The first notable attempt to work out the norm for plain letters was made by Mr Edward Johnston when he designed the sans-serif letter for the London Underground Railways. Some of these letters are not entirely satisfactory, especially when it is remembered that, for such a purpose, an alphabet should be as near as possible 'fool-proof'... as the philosophers would say—nothing should be left to the imagination of the sign-writer or enamel-plate maker.”

-Eric Gill, *Essay on Typography*, published 1931

## How it came to life?

Drawing heavily on Johnston's work, Gill first experimented with his 'improvements' in 1926 when he hand-painted lettering for a bookshop sign in his hometown, Bristol.

The alphabet, which at the time only contained uppercase letters, was noticed by Stanley Morison for its commercial potential. A Monotype advisor, Morison commissioned Gill to develop a complete font family to compete with the sans-serif designs released by German foundries fueled by the overwhelming success of Futura. The font was released commercially by Monotype in 1928 as Gill Sans.



## Anatomical Features

Gill's lettering is based on classic roman proportions, which give the sans-serif a less mechanical feel than its geometric contemporaries.



**YES I AM  
HUMANIST  
TYPEFACE!**

Originally released as metal type, over 36 derivatives emerged between 1929 and 1932—many of which were created by the Monotype drawing office (with input by Gill). The typeface is renowned for its inconsistencies between weights, as they were not mechanically produced from a single design (opposed to others like Helvetica).

## I AM EASY TO RECOGNIZE

Q R a g t

bdpq  
bdpq

Gill Sans Light (above) and Gill Sans Regular (below); flattening of the bowls and subsequent loss of terminal stroke details in lowercase 'd', 'p' and 'q'.

Variation of the directional stress from weight to weight of Gill Sans in the lower bowl of the 'eyeglass g' – no longer 'eyeglass' or double storey by the time it becomes Ultra Bold.

g x g x g x g x g x

## Popularity

Gill Sans rose to popularity in 1929 when it became the standard typeface for the London and North Eastern Railway (LNER), appearing on everything from locomotive nameplates to time tables.

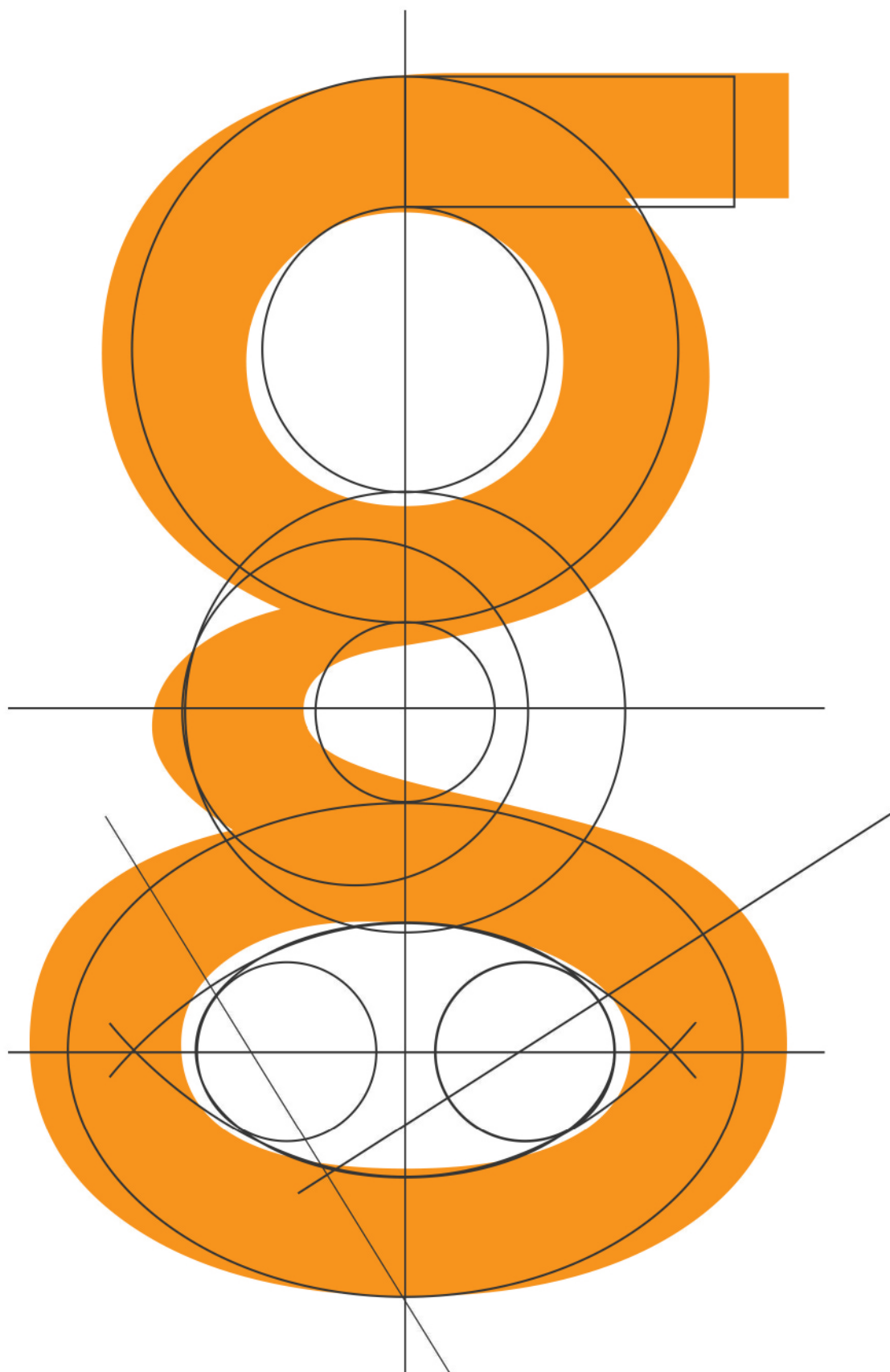
The typeface was used in 1935 by designer Edward Young on the now iconic Penguin Books jacket design, putting Gill Sans on bookshelves around the world. It has been used in some most famous logos of the century.

BBC TOMMY HILFIGER

TOY  
STORY

Monotype Imaging

UNITED COLORS  
OF BENETTON.



Comparison of Drawing by Eric Gill, 1933 with the glyph present in Gill Sans typeface

## Gill Sans

Category	Sans-serif
Classification	Humanist
Designer(s)	Eric Gill
Foundry	Monotype
Date created	1926
Date released	1928 (Monotype)
Re-issuing foundries	Monotype, Adobe Systems, ITC
Design based on	Johnston

Regular (10 pt)  
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ  
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz  
0123456789

Bold Condensed (10 pt)  
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ  
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz  
0123456789

Bold Italic (10 pt)  
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ  
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz  
0123456789

Italic (10 pt)  
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ  
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz  
0123456789

Bold (10 pt)  
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ  
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz  
0123456789

Ultra Bold (9 pt)  
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ  
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz  
0123456789