

# **Project 1 - Letterform Construction, Classification and Use**

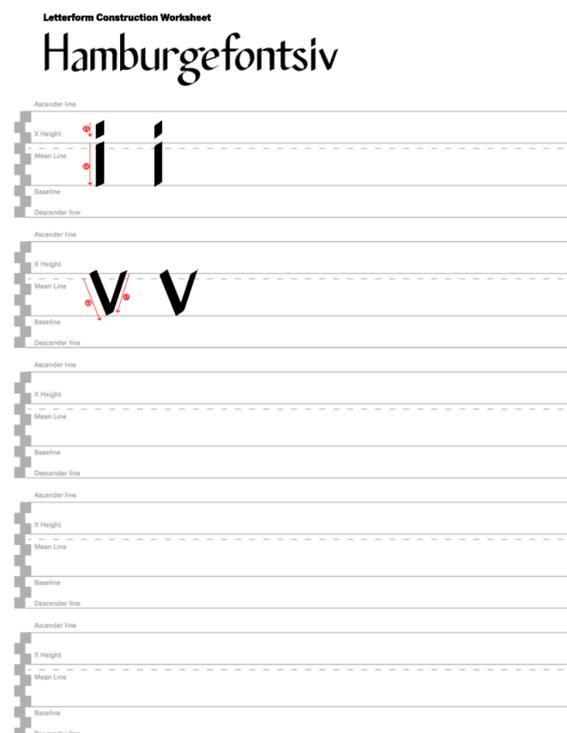
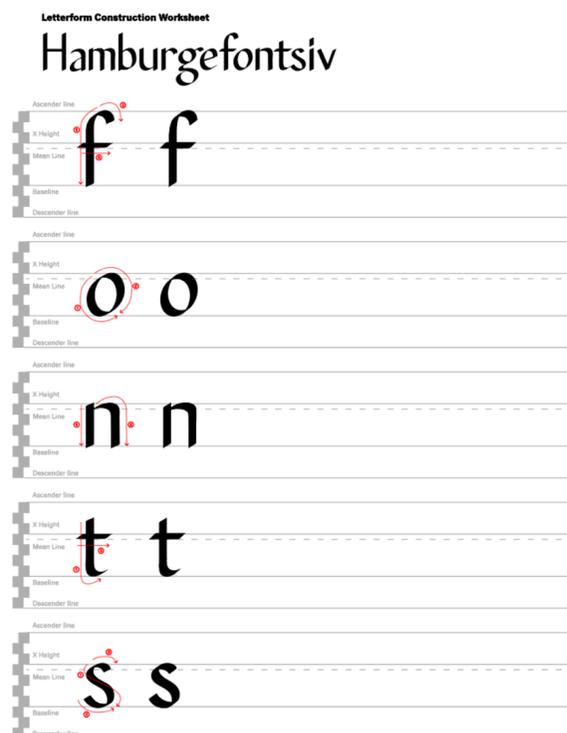
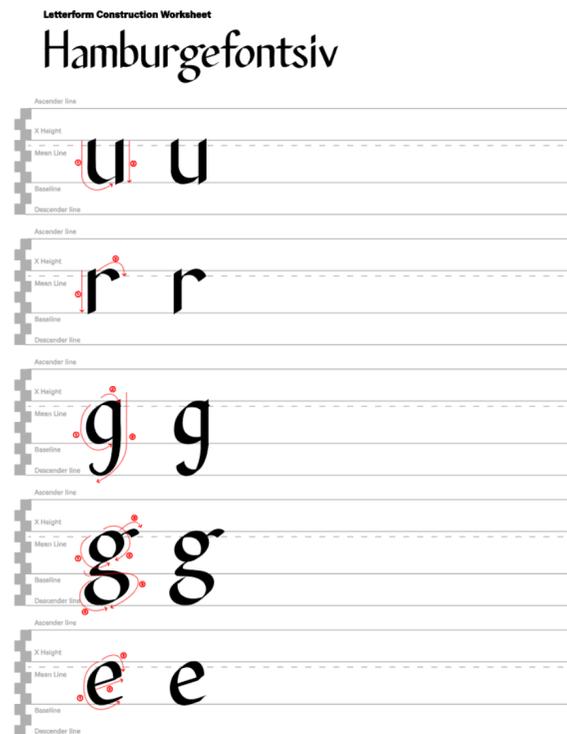
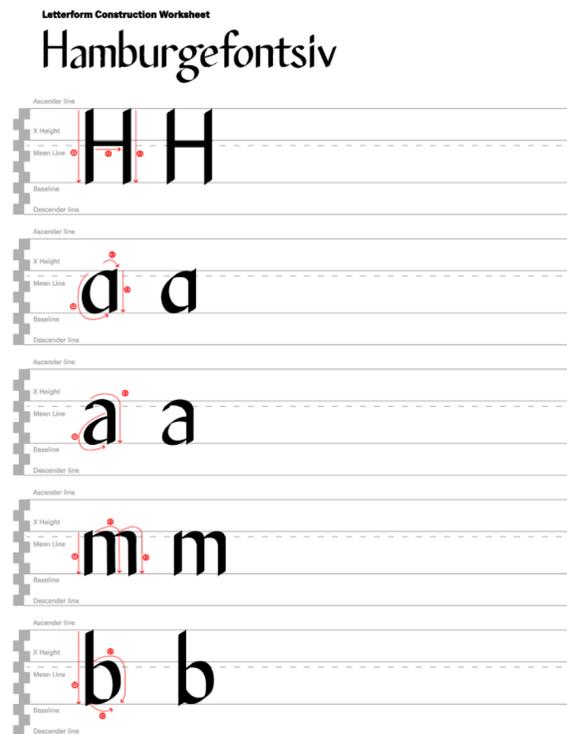
VDES 15738 Design and Typography

Professor: Ed Naus

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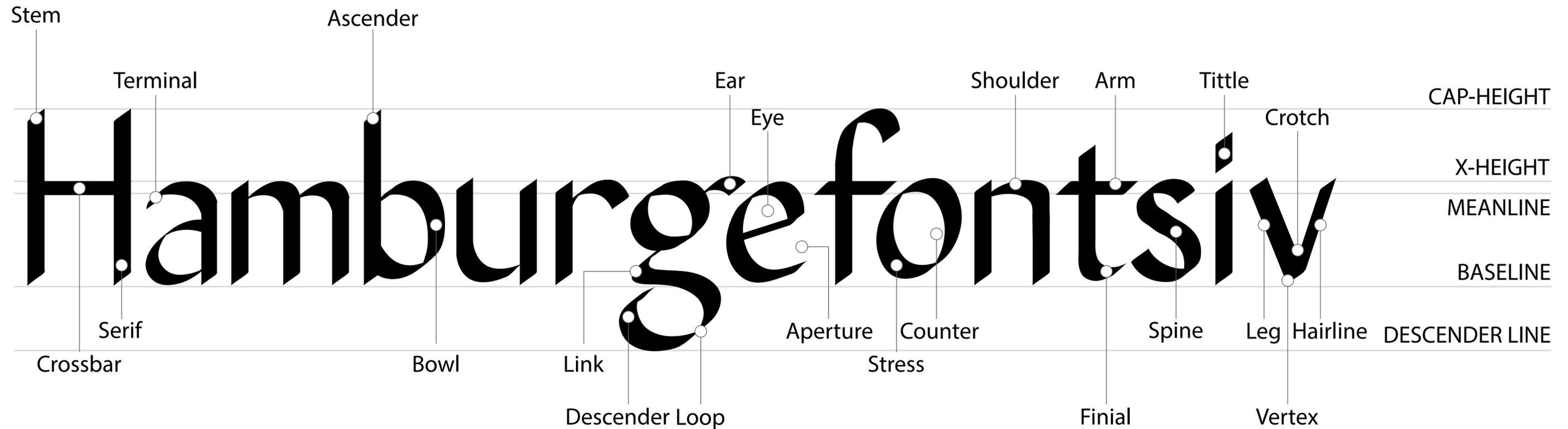
Feb 10, 2026

# Part 1: Letter Construction



During this exercise, I used Illustrator’s brush/pen tools to manually construct the letterforms. This process helped me better understand how each letter is built from individual strokes and structural components. At the beginning, I found it quite difficult to control the mouse accurately — especially maintaining consistent size, direction, and smooth curves. The letter “g” was particularly challenging because of its complex curves and multiple turning points.

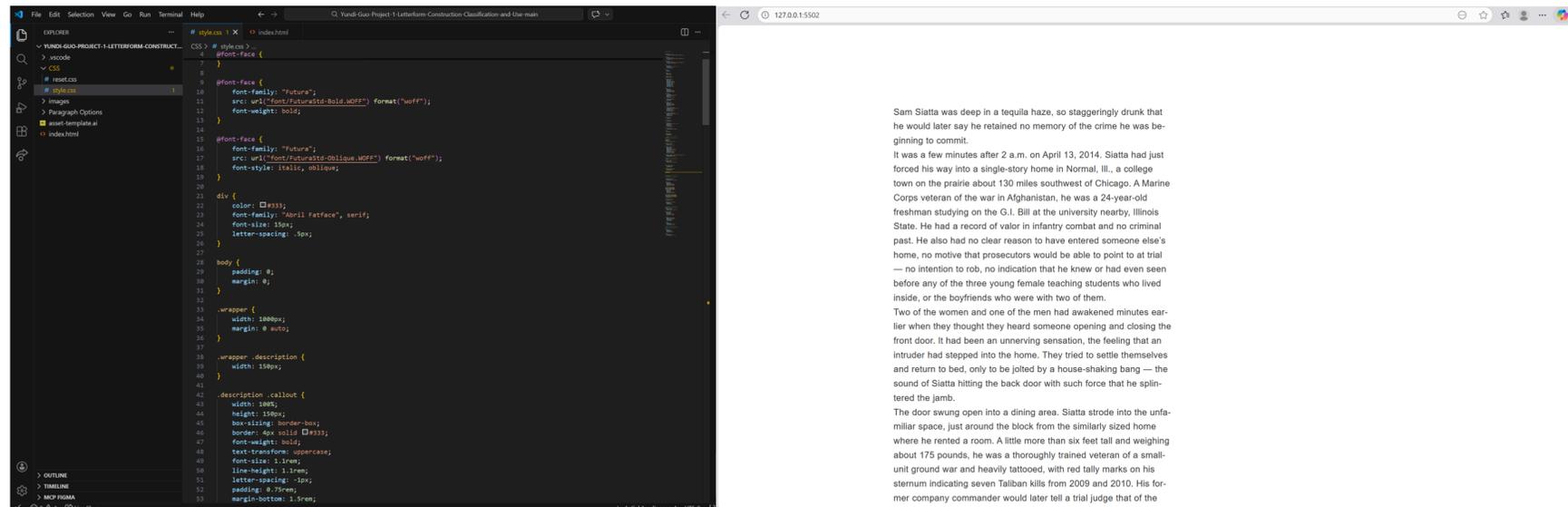
Through practice and in-class guidance, I gradually learned small techniques that made the process easier and more precise. For example, using the Shift key to maintain straight lines and breaking a complex stroke into smaller parts helped me achieve cleaner and more confident shapes. This exercise allowed me to slow down and really observe how letterforms are constructed, which gave me a deeper understanding of stroke structure, movement, and visual balance in typography.



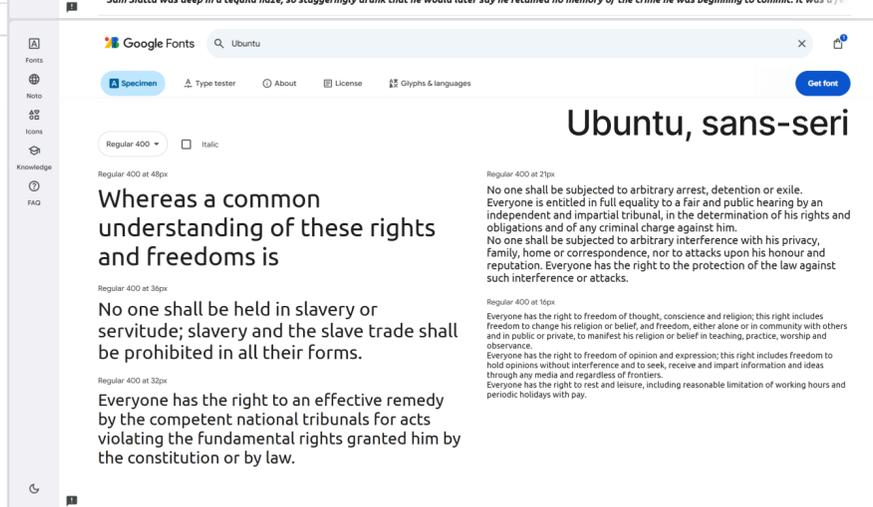
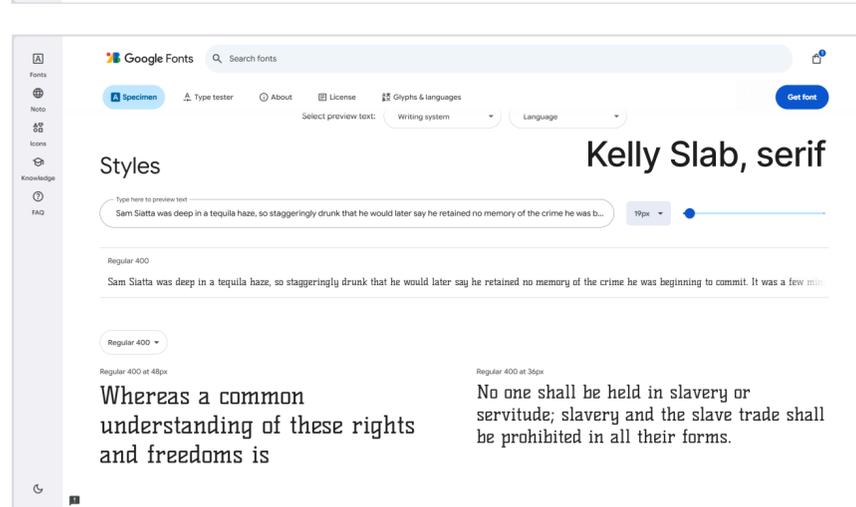
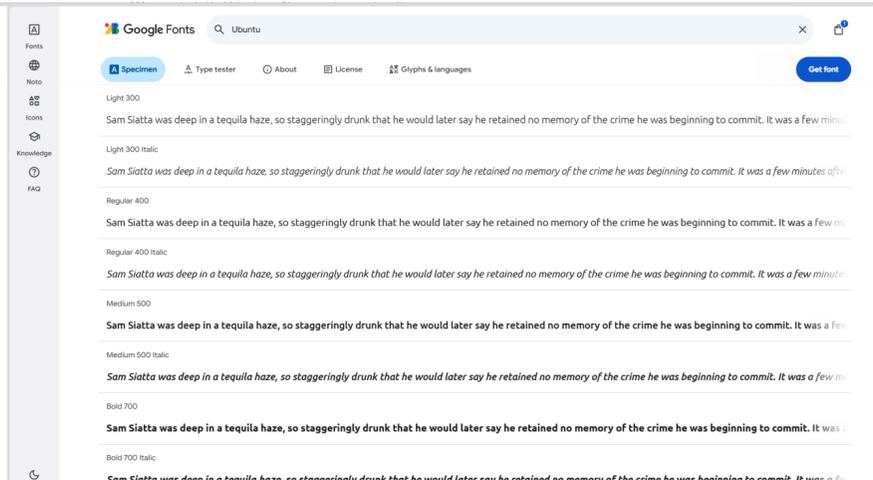
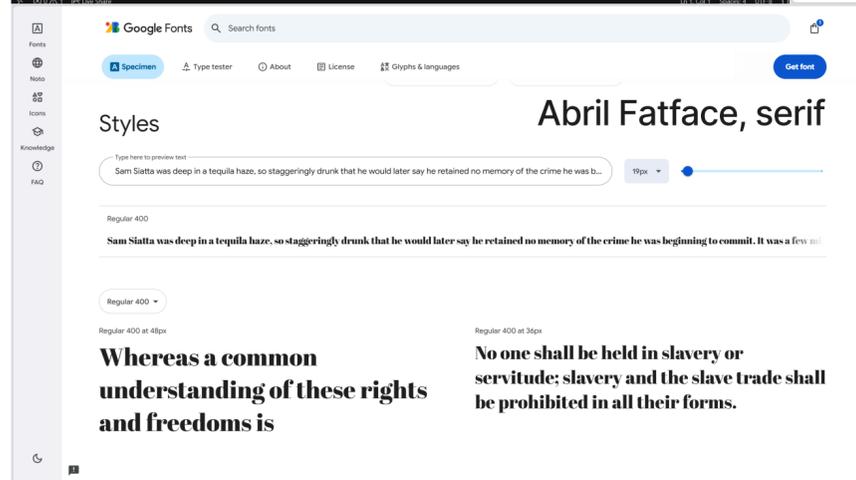
In this stage, I combined all the individual letters together to form a complete word and experimented with spacing and alignment. Adjusting the kerning and overall spacing helped me understand how the distance between letters affects readability and visual comfort. I tested multiple variations and refined the layout until I found the version that felt the most balanced and harmonious.

After finalizing the composition, I applied anatomical labels to each part of the letterforms based on the terminology learned in class, such as stem, ascender, counter, and baseline. This step strengthened my understanding of typographic anatomy and made me realize how many details contribute to successful typography. Before this project, I did not realize how much precision and decision-making goes into letterform design. This experience helped me appreciate typography as a structured system rather than just visual decoration.

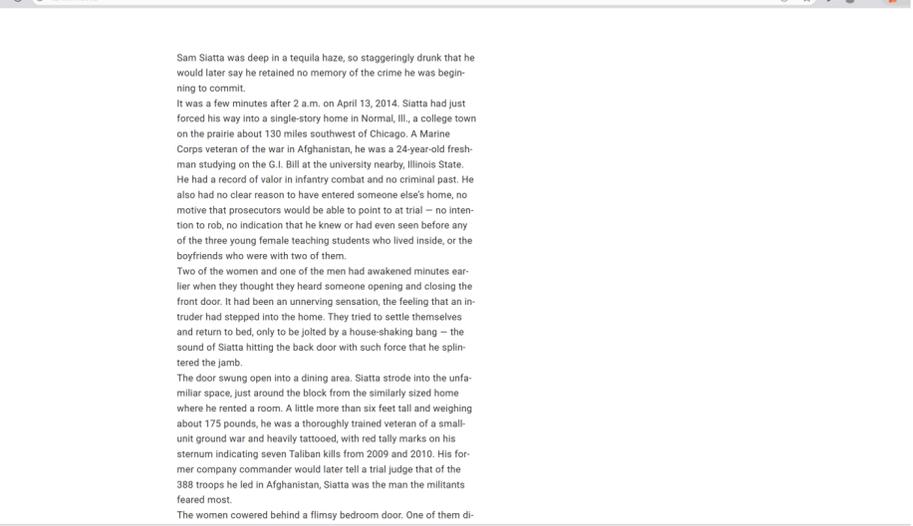
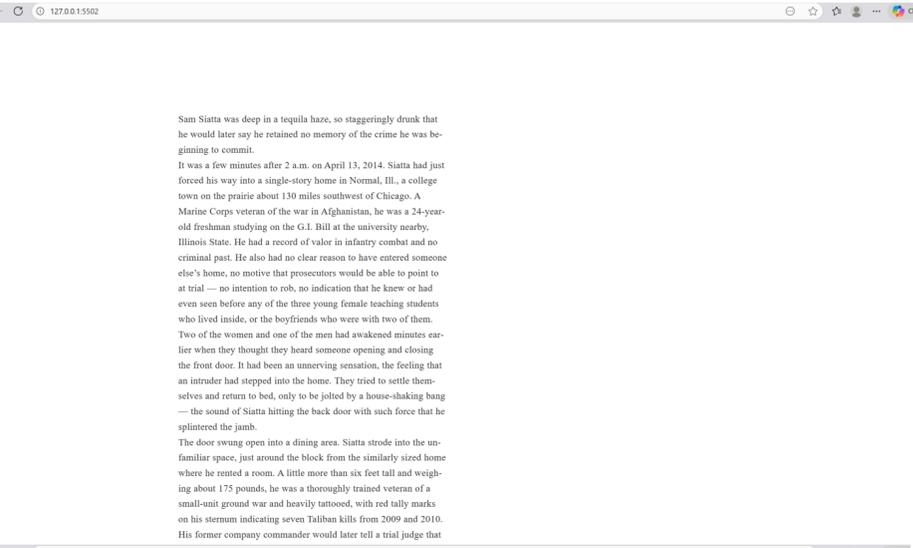
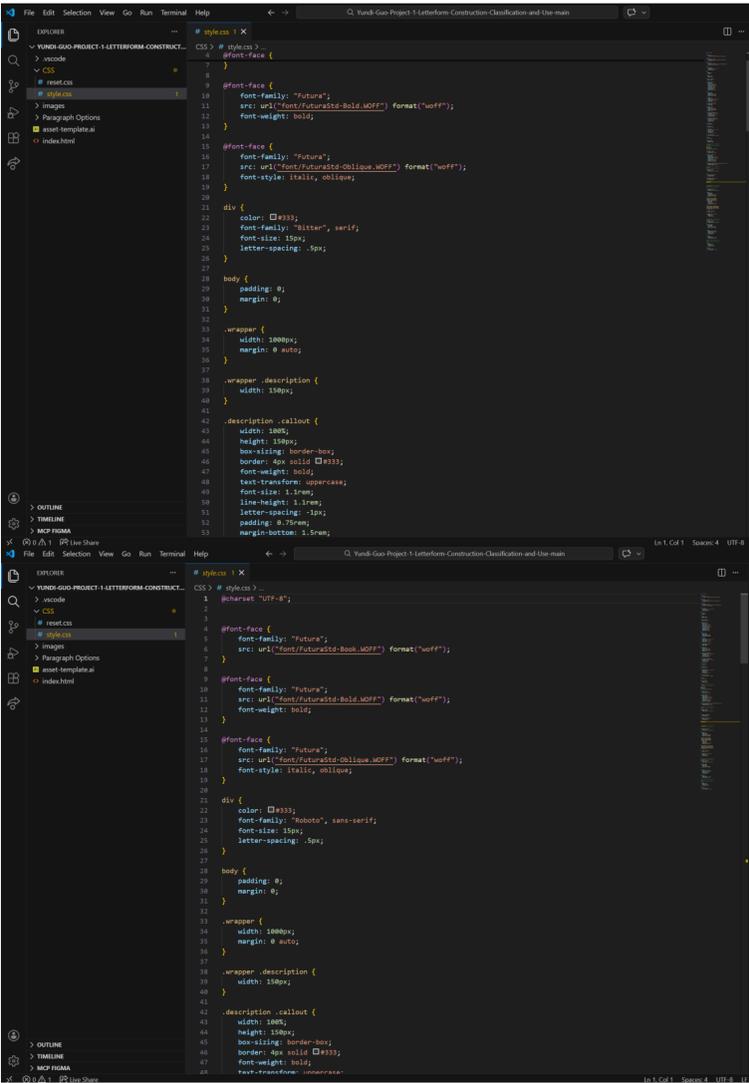
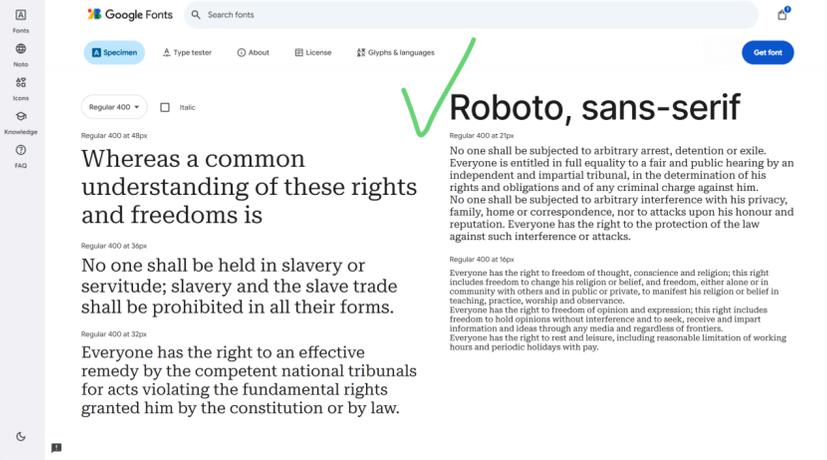
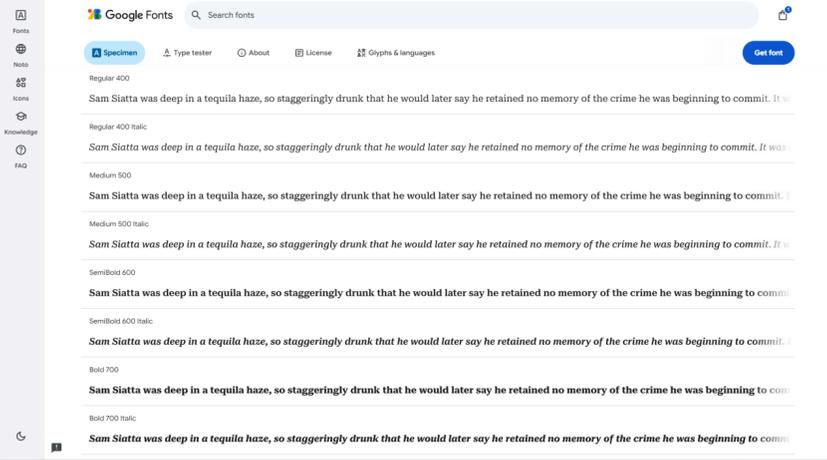
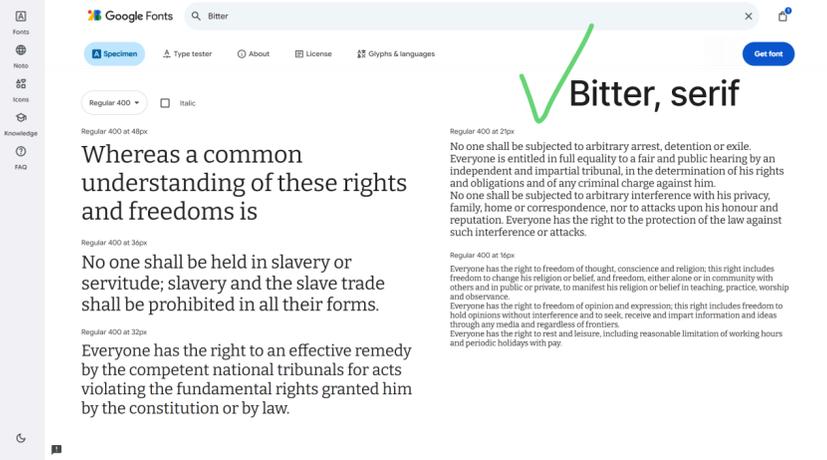
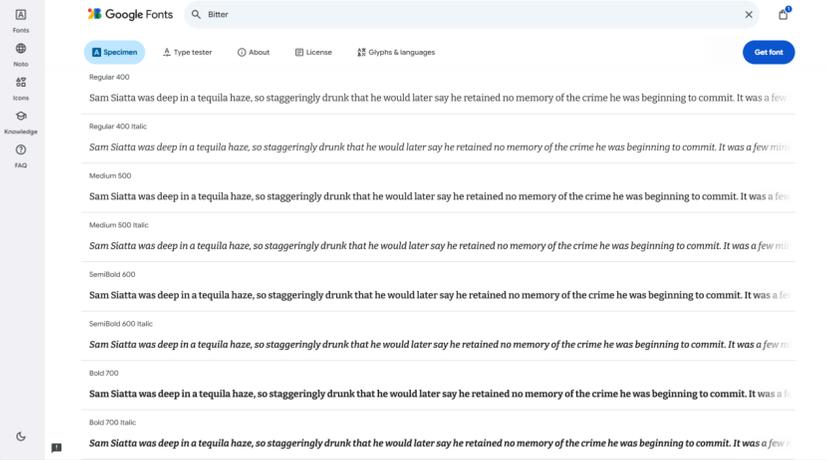
# Part 2.1: Typeface Selection



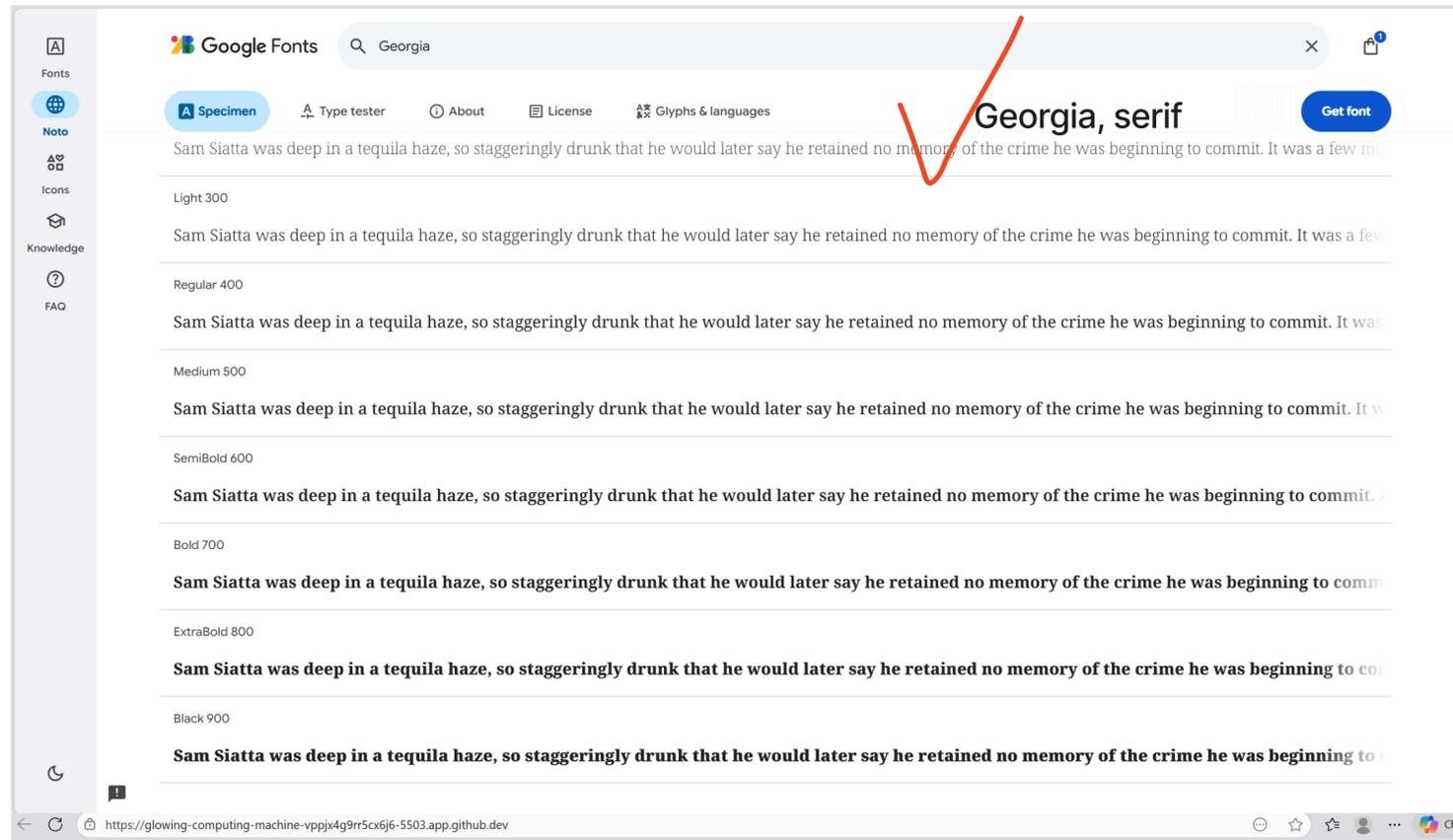
Sam Siatta was deep in a tequila haze, so staggeringly drunk that he would later say he retained no memory of the crime he was beginning to commit. It was a few minutes after 2 a.m. on April 13, 2014. Siatta had just forced his way into a single-story home in Normal, Ill., a college town on the prairie about 130 miles southwest of Chicago. A Marine Corps veteran of the war in Afghanistan, he was a 24-year-old freshman studying on the G.I. Bill at the university nearby, Illinois State. He had a record of valor in infantry combat and no criminal past. He also had no clear reason to have entered someone else's home, no motive that prosecutors would be able to point to at trial — no intention to rob, no indication that he knew or had even seen before any of the three young female teaching students who lived inside, or the boyfriends who were with two of them. Two of the women and one of the men had awakened minutes earlier when they thought they heard someone opening and closing the front door. It had been an unnerving sensation, the feeling that an intruder had stepped into the home. They tried to settle themselves and return to bed, only to be jolted by a house-shaking bang — the sound of Siatta hitting the back door with such force that he splintered the jamb. The door swung open into a dining area. Siatta strode into the unfamiliar space, just around the block from the similarly sized home where he rented a room. A little more than six feet tall and weighing about 175 pounds, he was a thoroughly trained veteran of a small-unit ground war and heavily tattooed, with red tally marks on his sternum indicating seven Taliban kills from 2009 and 2010. His former company commander would later tell a trial judge that of the



During my initial exploration, I tested all the provided typefaces using Google Fonts and applied them directly into my HTML template by modifying the CSS font-family values. Through this process, I quickly identified some options that were less suitable for on-screen reading. Abril Fatface, Kelly Slab, and Ubuntu were the first typefaces I decided to eliminate. Although they each have strong visual personalities, I found that Abril Fatface felt too decorative and display-oriented, which reduced readability in longer paragraphs. Kelly Slab has distinctive slab-serif features that created a heavier visual rhythm, making continuous reading feel slightly dense. Ubuntu, as a sans-serif, appeared clean but lacked the clarity and reading comfort I was aiming for in this specific layout. This early filtering helped me narrow my focus and better understand how stylistic character can impact usability and reading flow.



After narrowing down my choices, I continued testing Bitter and Roboto by comparing different paragraph settings directly in the browser. I adjusted parameters such as width, font size, line-height, and letter-spacing to evaluate how each typeface performed under real reading conditions. Bitter, as a serif font designed for digital reading, offered a balanced structure and maintained a traditional feel while remaining relatively readable. Roboto, on the other hand, provided a modern sans-serif appearance with clean forms and strong legibility, especially on screens. While both fonts worked reasonably well and were visually appealing, I felt they still lacked the specific reading comfort and typographic tone I was looking for. This stage helped me refine my decision-making process by comparing readability, personality, and overall paragraph texture rather than just visual style.



Through continuous testing and iteration, I ultimately selected Georgia as my final typeface. By implementing it into my coded layout and reviewing the results in the browser, I found that Georgia provided the best balance between readability and aesthetic quality. Its classic serif structure, generous spacing, and well-defined letterforms made long passages easier to read without visual strain. Compared to the other fonts, Georgia created a smoother reading rhythm and clearer paragraph structure, which aligned well with the project goal of optimizing on-screen reading. This process also deepened my understanding of how small typographic details — such as serif shapes, contrast, and spacing — influence user experience. Choosing Georgia was not only a visual preference but also a decision supported by testing, comparison, and practical readability evaluation.

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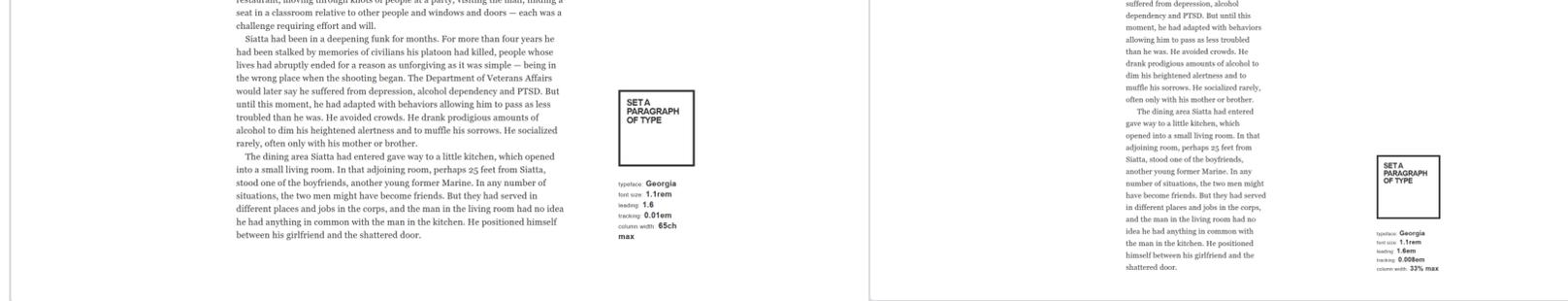
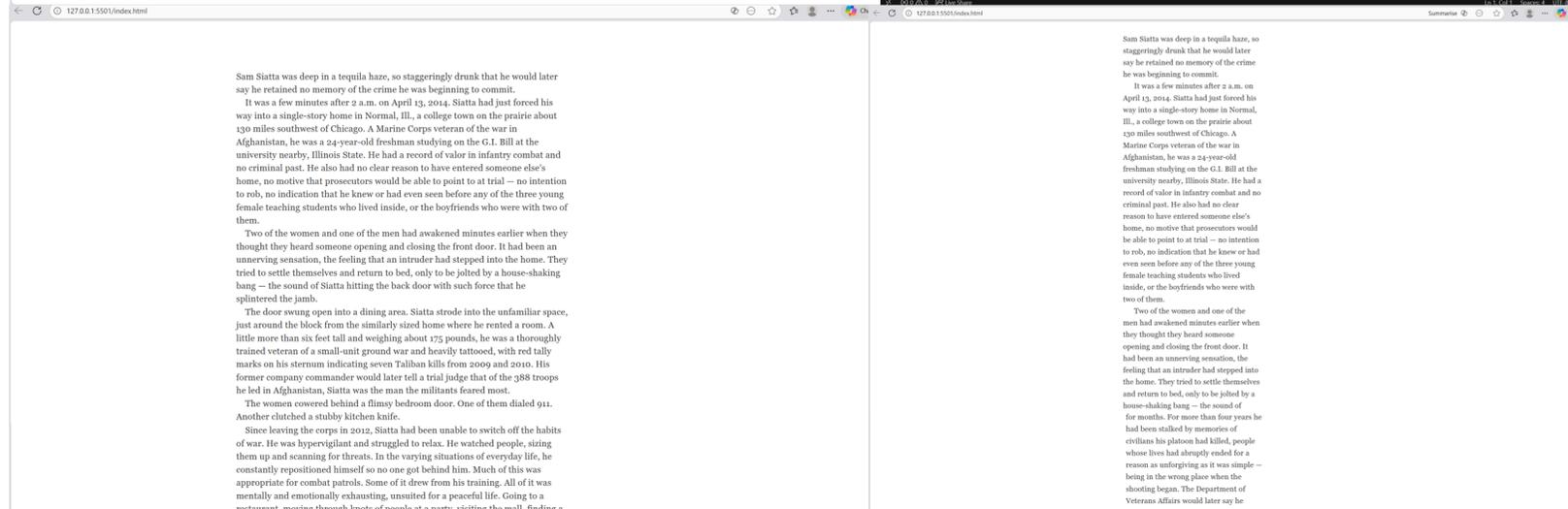
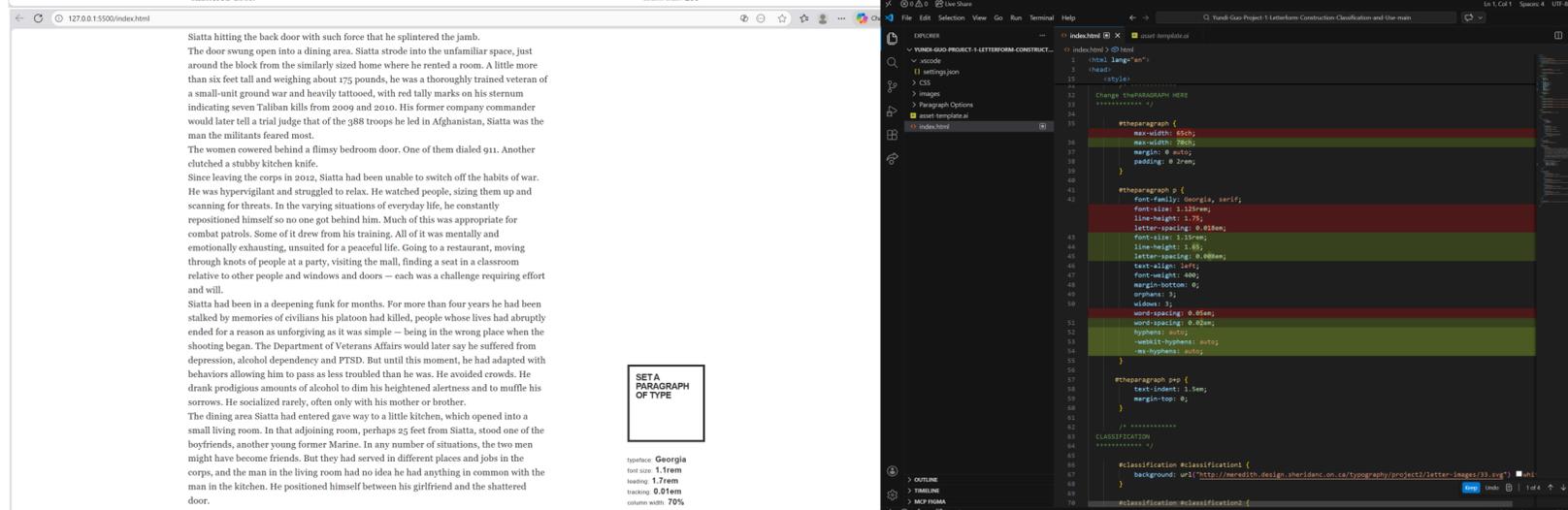
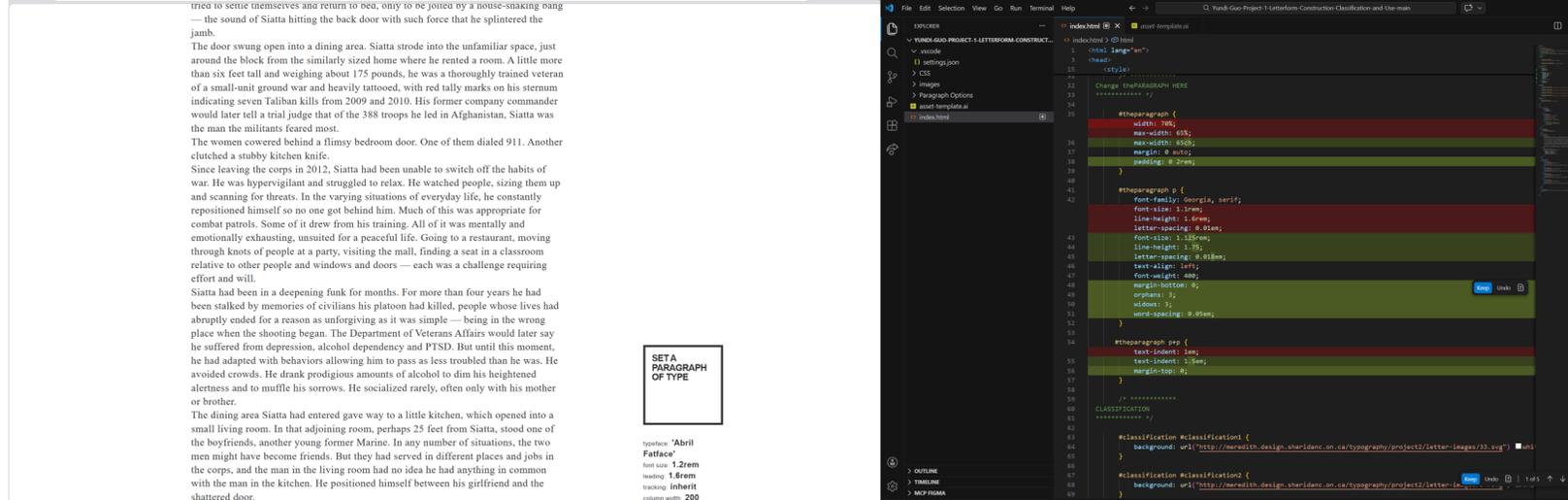
The women cowered behind a flimsy bedroom door. One of them dialed 911. Another clutched a stubby kitchen knife.

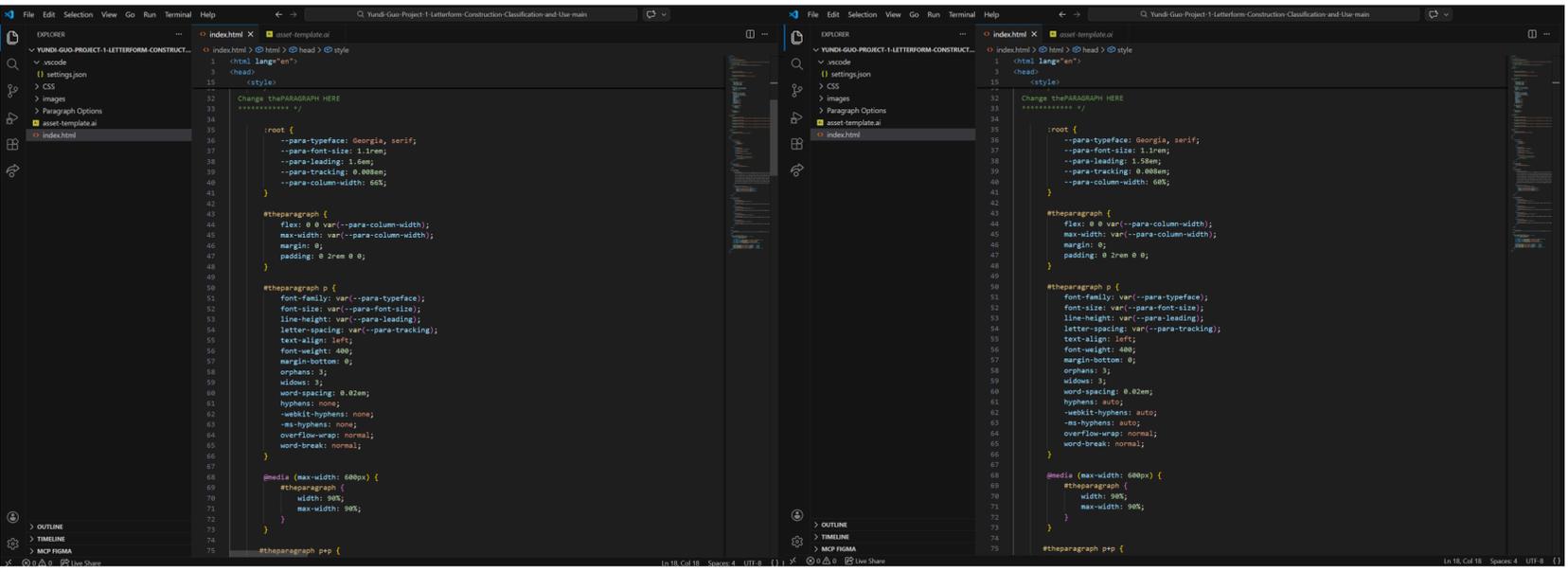
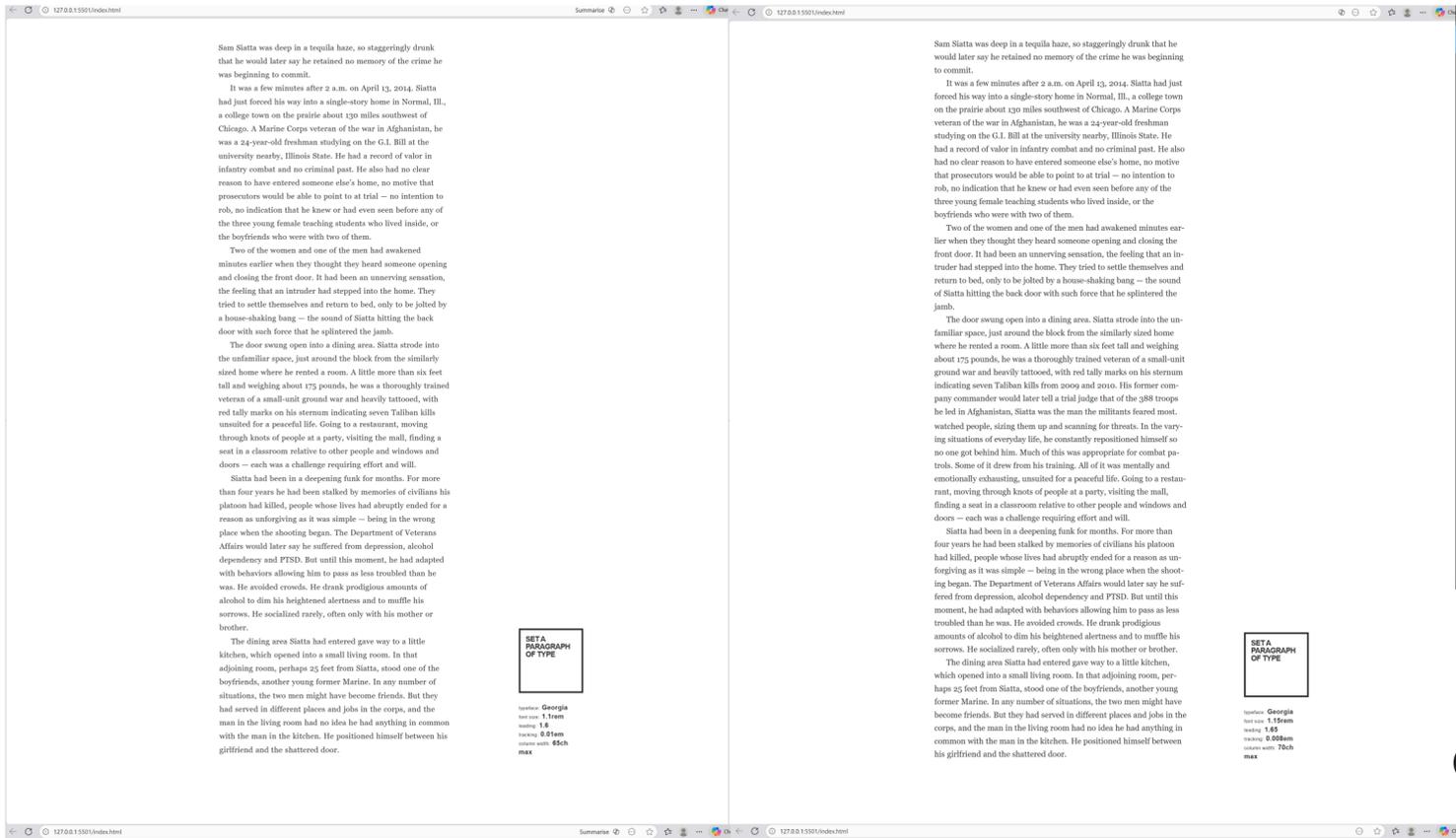
Since leaving the corps in 2012, Siatta had been unable to switch off the habits of war. He was hypervigilant and struggled to relax. He watched people, sizing them up and scanning for threats. In the varying situations

# Part 2.2: Paragraph Setting

## Initial experimentation and early challenges

At the beginning of the paragraph setting process, I started by testing different values for typeface, font size, leading (line height), tracking (letter spacing), and column width. I explored these adjustments directly in my code editor, repeatedly modifying CSS values and observing the results on the webpage. The early outcomes were visually messy and sometimes difficult to read. For example, some paragraphs had a single word isolated on its own line, creating awkward spacing. In other cases, the text column felt either too narrow, which made reading feel cramped, or too wide, which reduced readability. The right edge of the paragraph also appeared uneven and inconsistent. This stage helped me understand how sensitive typography is to small changes and how each parameter influences overall readability.





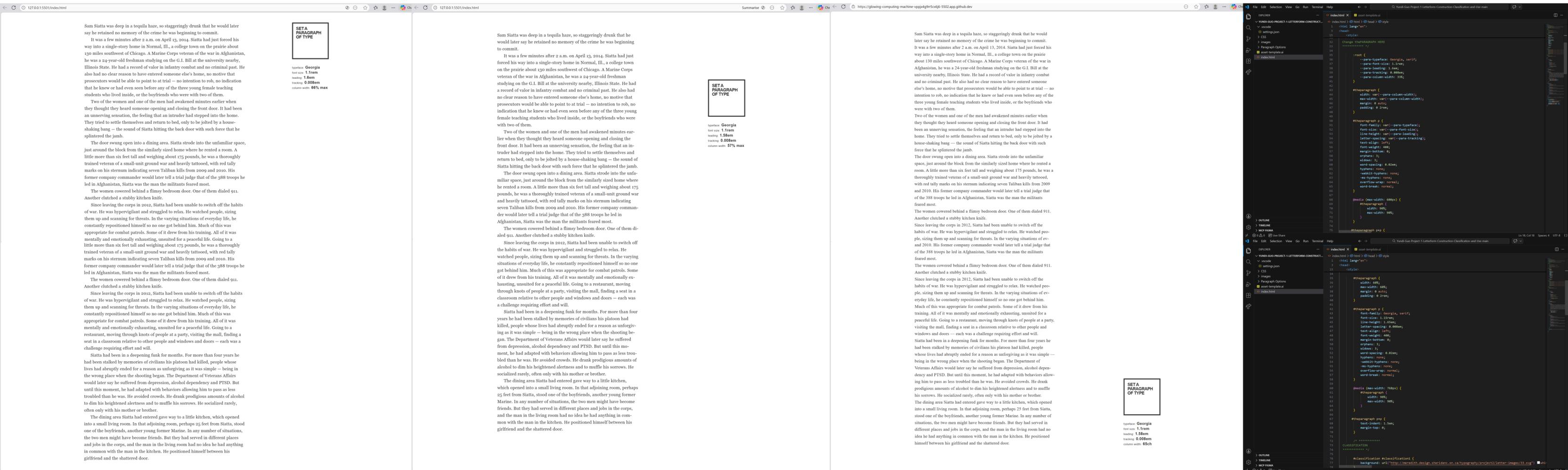
# Gradual refinement and improving visual comfort

As I continued experimenting, I began to develop a clearer sense of visual balance. I adjusted spacing more intentionally and evaluated how the paragraph felt when reading continuously. One improvement I focused on was avoiding situations where the last line contained only one word. To solve this, I sometimes introduced small spacing adjustments in the code, such as subtle changes in spacing or line breaks, to improve visual harmony. Through this process, I realized that paragraph setting is not only technical but also visual and emotional — the goal is to make reading feel smooth and comfortable rather than distracting.



# Controlling the right edge and overall rhythm

In the next stage, I focused specifically on the right edge of the paragraph. I wanted the text block to appear visually balanced rather than irregular or jagged. By refining column width, tracking, and leading together, I aimed to create a more consistent rhythm across lines. Instead of having lines that suddenly pushed inward or extended outward too far, I worked toward a cleaner and more controlled edge that supported readability. This step deepened my understanding of how typography works as a system, where multiple parameters must be adjusted together rather than individually.



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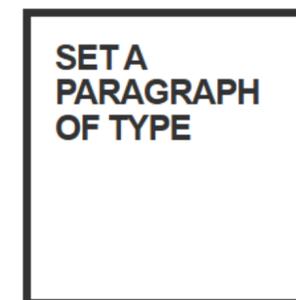
Since leaving the corps in 2012, Siatta had been unable to switch off the habits of war. He was hypervigilant and struggled to relax. He watched people, sizing them up and scanning for threats. In the varying situations of everyday life, he constantly repositioned himself so no one got behind him. Much of this was appropriate for combat patrols. Some of it drew from his training. All of it was mentally and emotionally exhausting, unsuited for a peaceful life. Going to a restaurant, moving through knots of people at a party, visiting the mall, finding a seat in a classroom relative to other people and windows and doors — each was a challenge requiring effort and will.

Siatta had been in a deepening funk for months. For more than four years he had been stalked by memories of civilians his platoon had killed, people whose lives had abruptly ended for a reason as unforgiving as it was simple — being in the wrong place when the shooting began. The Department of Veterans Affairs would later say he suffered from depression, alcohol dependency and PTSD. But until this moment, he had adapted with behaviors allowing him to pass as less troubled than he was. He avoided crowds. He drank prodigious amounts of alcohol to dim his heightened alertness and to muffle his sorrows. He socialized rarely, often only with his mother or brother.

The dining area Siatta had entered gave way to a little kitchen, which opened into a small living room. In that adjoining room, perhaps 25 feet from Siatta, stood one of the boyfriends, another young former Marine. In any number of situations, the two men might have become friends. But they had served in different places and jobs in the corps, and the man in the living room had no idea he had anything in common with the man in the kitchen. He positioned himself between his girlfriend and the shattered door.

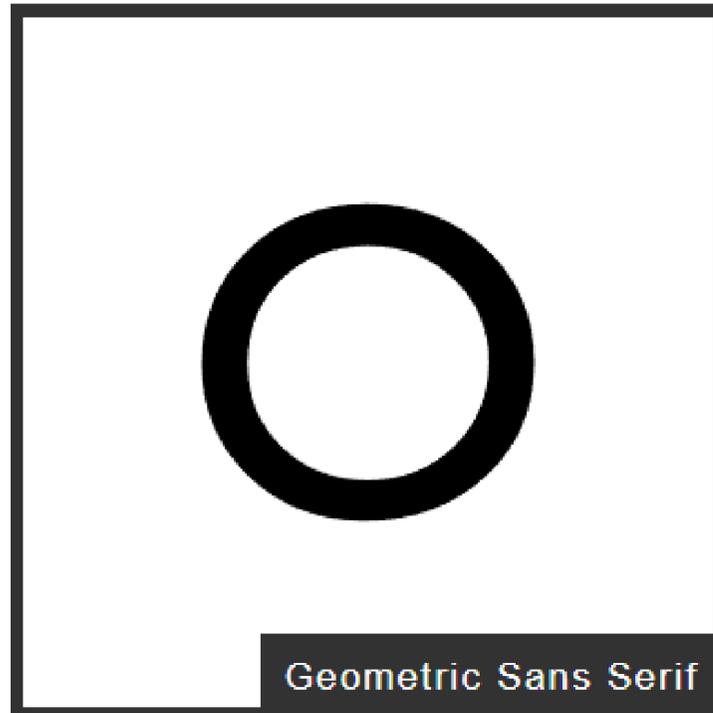
## Final layout and design intention

In my final version, I achieved a layout that feels clear, balanced, and visually calm. I refined spacing between the paragraph and the “Set a Paragraph of Type” module so that the page breathes more naturally and avoids visual crowding. The chosen settings — including column width, leading, tracking, and font size — create a comfortable reading experience that aligns with the project goal of optimizing typography for on-screen reading. This process taught me that good paragraph setting is not about dramatic changes but about careful micro-adjustments that gradually build clarity and readability.



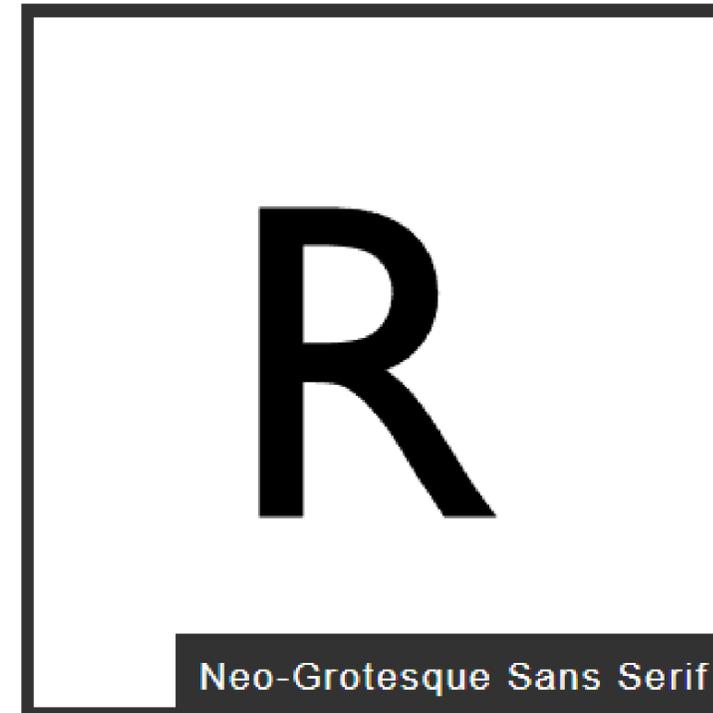
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leading: **1.58em**  
tracking: **0.008em**  
column width: **65ch**

## Part 3: Typeface Classifications



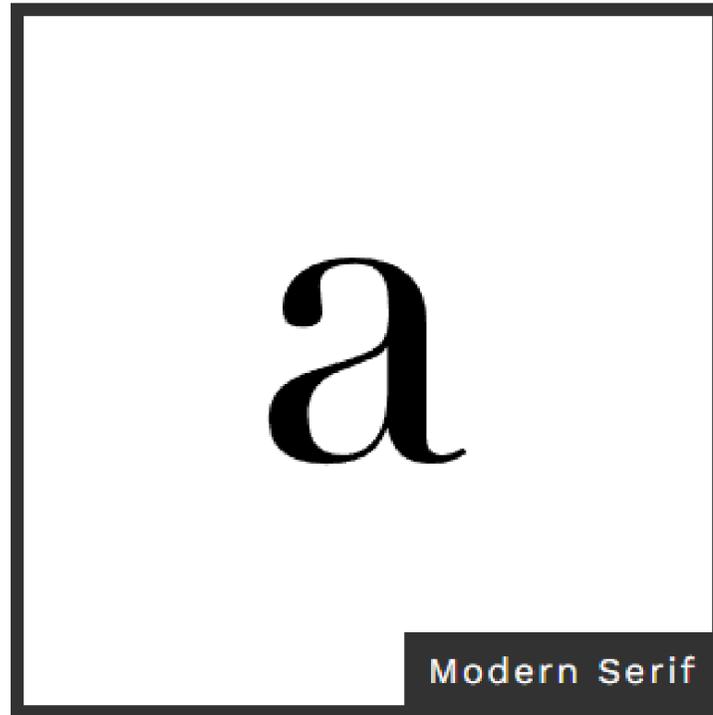
### Geometric Sans Serif

This letter is classified as Geometric Sans Serif because it shows a very clean circular structure and even stroke weight. The shape feels constructed from simple geometric forms rather than handwriting influence. There are no serifs or decorative endings, and the overall appearance is precise, minimal, and highly controlled. These characteristics make the letter look modern, structured, and visually balanced.



### Neo-Grotesque Sans Serif

This letter fits into the Neo-Grotesque Sans Serif category due to its neutral and functional design. The strokes maintain consistent weight with little contrast, and the form avoids expressive or decorative details. Compared to geometric designs, it feels more practical and readable, designed for clarity and usability. The structure appears rational and balanced, supporting legibility in modern typography systems.



## Modern Serif

This letter is identified as a Modern Serif because it shows strong contrast between thick and thin strokes and a clear vertical stress. The structure appears more controlled and symmetrical, and the serifs are thin and sharply defined rather than softly bracketed. These features create a refined and precise appearance commonly associated with modern serif design.



## Transitional Serif

This letter is identified as Transitional Serif because it balances classical and modern characteristics. The stroke contrast is noticeable but not extreme, and the serifs show subtle bracketing with smoother transitions. The structure feels more stable and balanced, combining a more vertical stress with some calligraphic influence visible in the tail.

# Reflection

Throughout this project, I gained a much deeper understanding of typography by moving step by step from observing individual letterforms to designing full paragraph layouts and implementing them on the web. Instead of only learning theory, I was able to see how small adjustments — such as spacing, alignment, and font choice — can completely change the visual rhythm and readability of text.

One important learning moment was realizing that typography is not only about choosing a “nice-looking” font, but about understanding structure and classification. By analyzing different typefaces, I learned how features like stroke contrast, serif style, geometric construction, and overall proportions help define categories such as Geometric Sans, Neo-Grotesque Sans, Modern Serif, and Transitional Serif. This helped me make more intentional design decisions instead of relying only on intuition.

Another valuable part of the process was experimenting through coding and testing different layouts directly in the browser. Seeing immediate visual feedback allowed me to understand how technical settings — like spacing, line height, and responsive layout — influence readability and user experience. The hands-on process made typography feel more dynamic and interactive rather than static.

Overall, this course changed the way I look at text. I now pay more attention to details like letter shapes, spacing relationships, and visual hierarchy. Instead of just placing text on a page, I learned how to shape reading experiences through typography. This project helped me connect design thinking with technical implementation, and I feel more confident making thoughtful typographic decisions moving forward.