Adobe InDesign

Using OpenType Pro fonts in InDesign 1.x
*Software needed: Adobe InDesign 1.0 or later*

by Tim Cole

This document is intended to serve as a brief introduction to both the new OpenType font file format, as well as the ways you take advantage of the advanced features of OpenType Pro fonts within InDesign.

OpenType is a new cross-platform font file format developed by Adobe and Microsoft. Based on the TrueType sfnt file format, OpenType is an extension of this sfnt format that can now support PostScript® font data and new typographic features.

OpenType fonts may include an expanded character set and layout features to provide richer linguistic support and advanced typographic control. Feature-rich Adobe OpenType fonts can be distinguished by the word "Pro," which is part of the font name and appears in application font menus. OpenType fonts can also be installed and used alongside PostScript Type 1 and TrueType fonts.

Cross-platform font files. OpenType fonts use a single font file for all of their outline, metric, and bitmap data, making file management simpler. In addition, the same font file works on Macintosh and Windows computers. As a result, OpenType lets you move font files back and forth between platforms with noticeable improvement in cross-platform portability for any documents that use type. A major benefit of using OpenType fonts is that the font metrics are the same on both platforms. This means that your text won't reflow when you move documents and fonts from one platform to another.
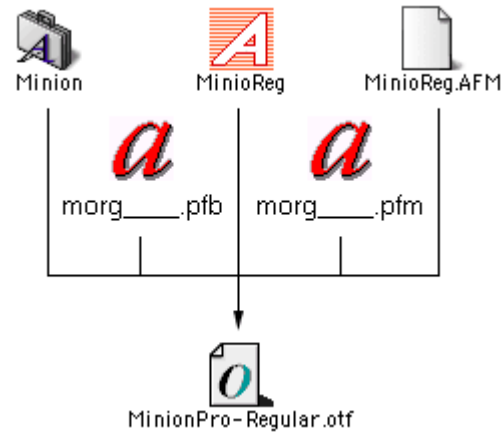
Better Language Support. Open Type fonts are based on Unicode, an international two-byte character encoding that covers virtually all of the world's languages. These fonts can make multilingual typography much easier by including multiple language character sets in one font. All Adobe OpenType fonts include the standard range of Latin characters used in the Western world, and several international characters, including the "estimated," litre, and euro currency symbols. Adobe's OpenType Pro fonts add a full range of accented characters to support central and eastern European languages, such as Turkish and Polish. Many of the Pro fonts also contain Cyrillic and Greek character extensions

Advanced Typography. OpenType fonts may also contain more than 65,000 glyphs, unleashing exciting typographic capabilities. Many non-standard glyphs, such as oldstyle figures, true small capitals, fractions, swashes, superiors, inferiors, titling letters, contextual and stylistic alternates, beginning and ending letterforms and a full range of ligatures may also be included in a single font. In the past, a typical Western PostScript font was limited to 256 glyphs, forcing you to install and manage two or more stylerelated fonts in order to access "expert set" characters. OpenType significantly simplifies font management and the publishing workflow by ensuring that all of the required glyphs for a document are contained in one cross-platform font file throughout the workflow.
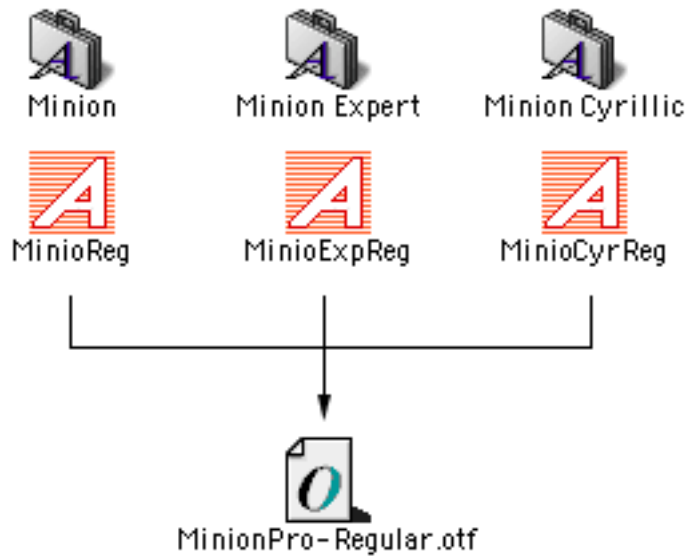

Opticals. Historically, some of the highest-quality typefaces have had different designs for different print sizes. Called "opticals," these variations have been optimized for use at specific point sizes. Several of Adobe's OpenType fonts include four optical size variations: caption, regular, subhead and display. Although the exact intended sizes vary by family, the general size ranges include: caption (6-8 point), regular (9-13 point), subhead (14-24 point) and display (25-72 point).

Unbelievable — *Caption*

Unbelievable — *Regular (Text)*

Unbelievable — *Subhead*

Unbelievable — *Display*

Characters vs. glyphs. Characters are the code points assigned by the Unicode standard, which represent the smallest semantic units of language, such as letters. Glyphs are the specific forms that those characters can take. A key to understanding OpenType Pro fonts is that one character may correspond to several glyphs; lowercase "a," small cap "a" and an alternate swash lowercase "a" are all the same character, but they are three separate glyphs. One glyph can also represent multiple characters, as in the case of the "ffi " ligature, which corresponds to a sequence of three char-acters: f, f and i.

a → A → a

InDesign's Character palette. InDesign supports several different OpenType features through the Character palette, including: standard ligatures (on by default), small capitals, and proportional oldstyle figures. Selecting one of these formatting commands in InDesign will result in the automatic subsitution of the appropriate specialized glyphs in the Open-Type Pro font.
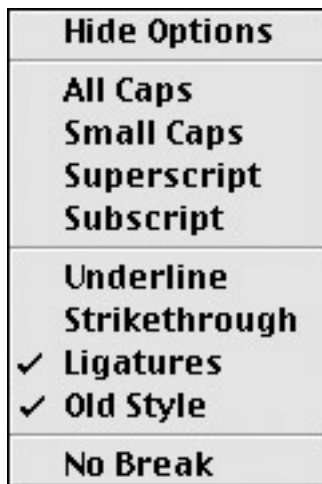

123 regular

123 Old Style

Automatic ligatures. If you're using non-OpenType fonts, InDesign will intelligently substitute the f-ligatures (all five if they are present in the fonts) if you've got the automatic ligature setting selected. For OpenType fonts, InDesign will automatically substitute anything that's defined in the font as a standard ligature. For example, Minion Pro has a "Th" ligature that is defined within the font as a standard ligature. Standard ligatures are ligatures that are considered basic and non-discretionary. Discretionary ligatures may also be built into an OpenType font. Ligatures of that type are considered to be optional and are used only in special situations.

the five standard f-ligatures
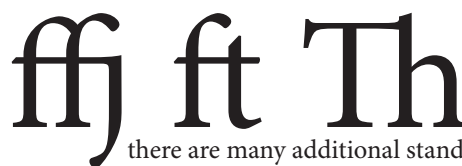
there are many additional standard ligatures in Minion Pro

this 'st' ligature is an example of a discretionary ligature

Glyph shifting. In addition to different types of glyph substitution, InDesign's OpenType support also extends to automatic adjustments to glyph positioning. For example, formatting text as All Caps invokes another OpenType feature that shifts punctuation to a better fit in an all-caps setting. This can be seen when hyphens, dashes, parentheses, braces and brackets shift vertically in an all caps setting.

Manual glyph insertion and substitution.
In addition to the automatic glyph subtitutions you can effect using character formatting options, InDesign also enables easy access to all the specialized glyphs in an OpenType font for manual insertion or substitution. Depending on whether you have an insertion point in text or a range of text selected, there is a command in InDesign's Type menu that will read either Insert Character or Replace Characters. Choosing that command will open a dialog box that enables you to view and insert all of the glyphs contained in the font you select in the dialog box. To insert a glyph, double click on one of the visible glyphs in the dialog. If there is a flyout arrow, click-hold and select the desired alternate glyph. The glyph will then be inserted in your document wherever your text cursor was positioned.
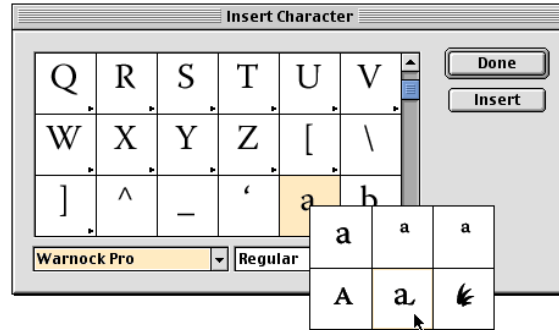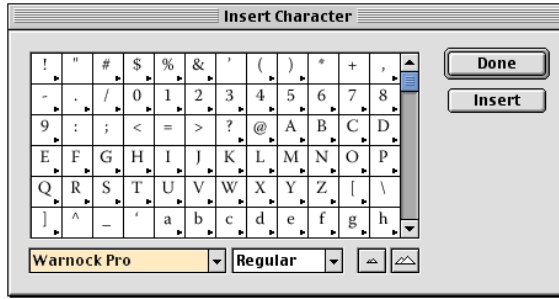
Unicode and language support. InDesign currently supports only direct input of western European languages when using OpenType Pro fonts. However, both the Windows and Macintosh versions of InDesign support import of Unicode text files and Microsoft Word for Windows files containing Unicode. This makes it possible to import, for example, a file with Romanian, Russian and Greek text into InDesign, even if editing and direct input in these languages is difficult within the current version of InDesign. However, InDesign's "Insert Character" function allows access to any glyph in the font, like the Windows Character Map.
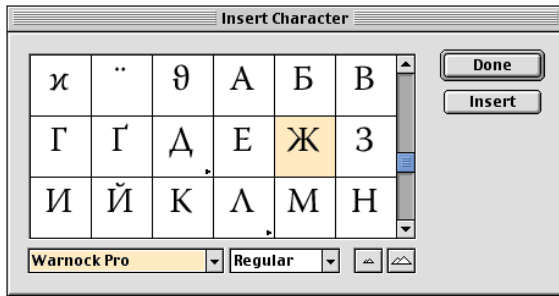
Most of the information in this document was taken directly from the OpenType User Guide available on the Adobe web site:

OpenType home page: http://www.adobe.com/type/opentype
OpenType User Guide: http://www.adobe.com/type/browser/pdfs/OTGuide.pdf
OpenType Readme: http://www.adobe.com/type/browser/OTReadMe.html