



Sylexiad: a typeface for the adult dyslexic reader

Estimates of the number of art and design students with dyslexia are as much as 11% higher than the national average of 4%. Rob Hillier, Senior Lecturer on the BA (Hons) Graphic Design course at NSAD questioned his own reading difficulties, and was diagnosed as dyslexic. It was to be the catalyst for a project that is still ongoing.

A recent exhibition NEVERODDOROVEN, held at the Serpentine Gallery in Kensington Gardens London, presented an art and research project that explores the relationship between creativity and dyslexia and examined the links between language, learning and ordering systems. The typeface used for the NEVERODDOROVEN palindrome card game devised for the exhibition was the new Sylexiad font, part of a continuing design investigation developed by Rob. The project involved the design and testing of new font families developed and informed from a dyslexic perspective against other fonts recommended by dyslexia organisations. For the majority of those adult dyslexic readers tested, the evidence indicated a clear preference for the Sylexiad fonts.

The cards form a series of games, created by artist Abigail Reynolds, working with a group of people with dyslexia and designed to reveal human thought processes and make new connections between the mind and the visual world. The selected group were given the option to chose Gill Sans or Sylexiad for their text typeface, and it provided a real buzz for Rob that they chose Sylexiad – not to mention his pleasure at being referenced in the same sentence as Eric Gill! The cards represent the first independent application of Sylexiad.

Research for the new typeface not only challenged received wisdom that fonts with maximum shape presented in lower case are the most legible, but also led to the development of a process which allows typefaces to be designed before and during the testing process. Previous research methods used by psychologists rather than typographers have always been conducted in retrospect, after the design is complete. Rob's investigations indicate that for subjects with reading difficulties such as dyslexia, it is the combination of spacing, weight and form that is often more important than individual letterform design.

This article is printed in Sylexiad Sans Medium.

Details of the NEVERODDOROVEN learning resource at the Serpentine Gallery can be found at www.serpentinegallery.org/whatson.html

Further information on Sylexiad and contact with Rob Hillier, at www.robsfonts.com

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Cards from the NEVERODDOROVEN game

