

B: Researchers create new font designed to boost your memory

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A new font can help lodge information deeper in your brain, researchers say, but it's not magic — just the science of effort.

Psychology and design researchers at RMIT University in Melbourne created a font called Sans Forgetica, which was designed to boost information retention for readers. It's based on a theory called "desirable difficulty," which suggests that people remember things better when their brains have to overcome minor obstacles while processing information. Sans Forgetica is sleek and back-slanted with intermittent gaps in each letter, which serve as a "simple puzzle" for the reader, according to Stephen Banham, a designer and RMIT lecturer who helped create the font.

"It should be difficult to read but not too difficult," Banham said. "In demanding this additional act, memory is more likely to be triggered."

In designing Sans Forgetica, Banham said he had to override his instincts, ingrained from 25 years of studying typography. Clarity, the ease of processing and familiarity are usually guiding principles in the field. The back-slanting in Sans Forgetica would be foreign to most readers. The openings in the letters make the brain pause to identify the shapes.

The team tested the font's efficacy along with other intentionally complicated fonts on 400 students in lab and online experiments and found that "Sans Forgetica broke just enough design principles without becoming too illegible and aided memory retention."

Sans Forgetica is the first font created with retention in mind, the researchers at RMIT said. But Janneke Blijlevens, another researcher on the project, stressed that the font should be used sparingly for it to stay effective. If the reader's brain gets too comfortable, it will glaze over Sans Forgetica just as easily as if it were Arial or Times New Roman, some of the world's most ubiquitous fonts.

"We believe it is best used to emphasize key sections, like a definition, in texts rather than converting entire texts or books," Blijlevens told The Washington Post.

Read this and you will not forget it.
Difficulty can be desirable!