



USING OUR HANDS: What hand-setting type can teach design students about typography?

The letterpress printing process is one of the oldest typographic printing methods for putting words on paper. The process originated in about 1450 when Johann Gutenberg introduced movable type in Europe and has remained virtually unchanged to this day. Over the past two years, Assistant Professors Jessica Gerlach and Jeff Hanson have been incorporating the use of letterpress into our Typography I and Typography II courses at Southern Utah University.

The students are introduced to the process of hand-setting metal and wood type and hand-printing using a Vandercook Proofing Press No. 3 and two tabletop proofing presses. Through the process of hand-setting type, students gain a thorough understanding of the anatomy of type, scale, kerning, tracking, line spacing, and alignment as it is used in letters, words and paragraphs. They make connections between the terminologies of typography as it relates to the origins of movable type and typesetting.

Working with manual typesetting, students learn to use problem-solving skills that are often overlooked in digital publications. For example, using multiple type styles and sizes in the same line, or having letter ascending or descending above the baseline, both of which are difficult to achieve in metal type.

