

The Story of Emoji

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Munich · London · New York



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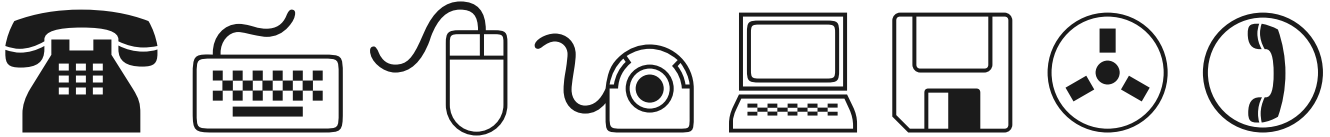
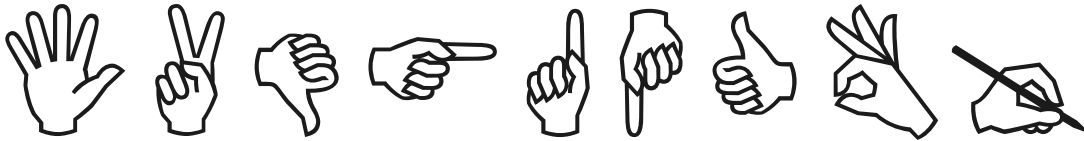


SPEAKING IN PICTURES

Mankind's earliest and most ancient writing systems were based on pictures. Now, it seems we've come full circle and are again embracing imagery and symbols in our written (now typed) messages.



846 Apple emoji from Apple's iOS 8.



THE EVOLUTION OF THE DINGBAT

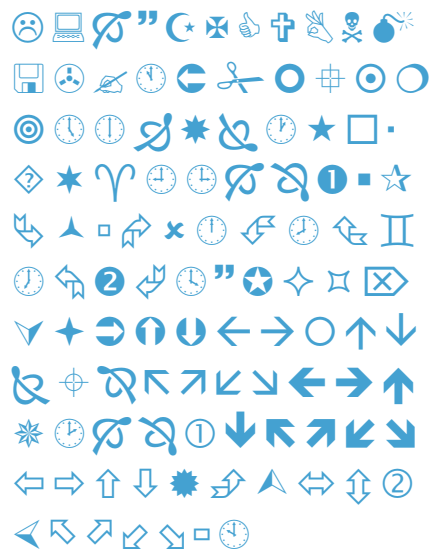
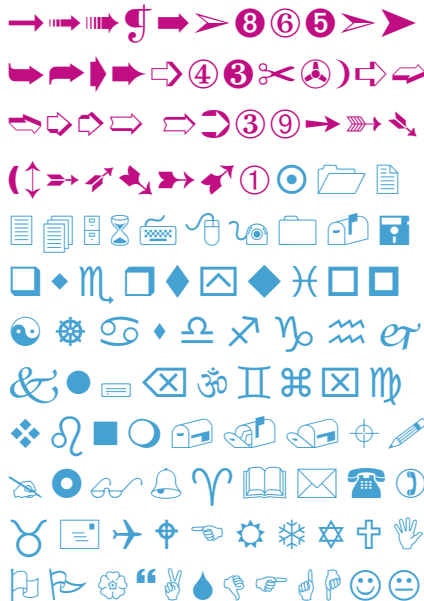
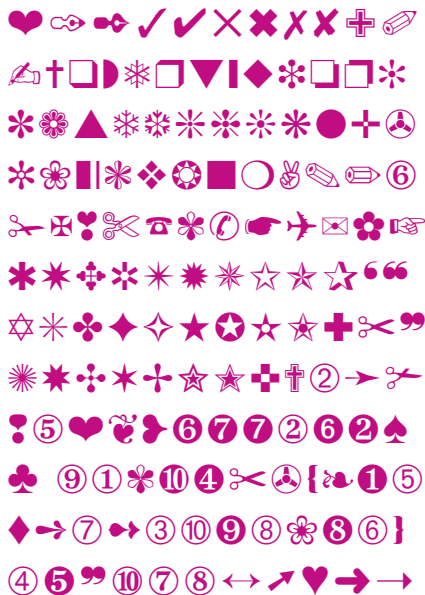
Long before written language was developed, humans drew pictures and created symbols to communicate and record narratives. From crude paintings in caves to carved and painted hieroglyphics and rebuses (picture puzzles) on ancient monuments and artefacts, drawn imagery – both figurative and symbolic – has long played a vital role in the development of human civilization. The very first writing systems were built around characters and glyphs designed to visually reference what they represented. It was the ancient Greeks who first successfully abandoned visual cues altogether as they developed an abstract form of writing that favoured

phonetics, focusing on the sounds of the spoken word rather than referencing physical objects to communicate ideas.

Now, some 40,000 years since the earliest known cave paintings, we exchange information using different languages and alphabets, aided by home computers and mobile phones. We can talk to or send text messages to anyone anywhere on the planet. However, despite the sophistication of our written language systems, millions of us are still harnessing the potency of symbols, pictograms (images or icons, such as the heart symbol ❤️, that convey meaning through pictorial resemblance to the physical objects they represent) and ideograms (written characters that symbolize ideas without indicating

particular words or speech sounds, such as the universal symbol for recycling ♻️ in our everyday communications – thanks largely to a set of internationally recognized symbols called emoji.

If you use Twitter or send text messages, it's highly likely that you've used, or been sent, emoji. You might even have received and sent messages composed entirely of emoji – they're the characters such as heart symbols ❤️❤️ or smiley faces 😊 that denote a whole range of emotions (from happy 😊, confused 😕, sad 😞, fearful 😨 and anxious 😬 through to angry 😡 and *really* angry 😡). They also come in the form of icons depicting foodstuffs 🍔, animals 🐶, office equipment 🖨️, rain clouds ☁️, flowers 🌻 and hundreds more.



You can access emoji characters through the keyboard on your smartphone and intersperse your typed communications with tiny images.

The word 'emoji' comes from the Japanese words for 'picture' (e) and 'character' (moji). The core set of emoji characters that has found its way into the digital communication devices of millions of people around the world in recent years was first conceived of specifically for a mobile-phone provider in Japan in the late 1990s. However, when 722 emoji characters were included in version 6.0 of Unicode (the computer industry standard for encoding and displaying most of the world's writing systems) in 2010, and Apple subsequently incorporated an easily accessed emoji keyboard in its iOS5 iPhone operating

system the following year, emoji became a global phenomenon.

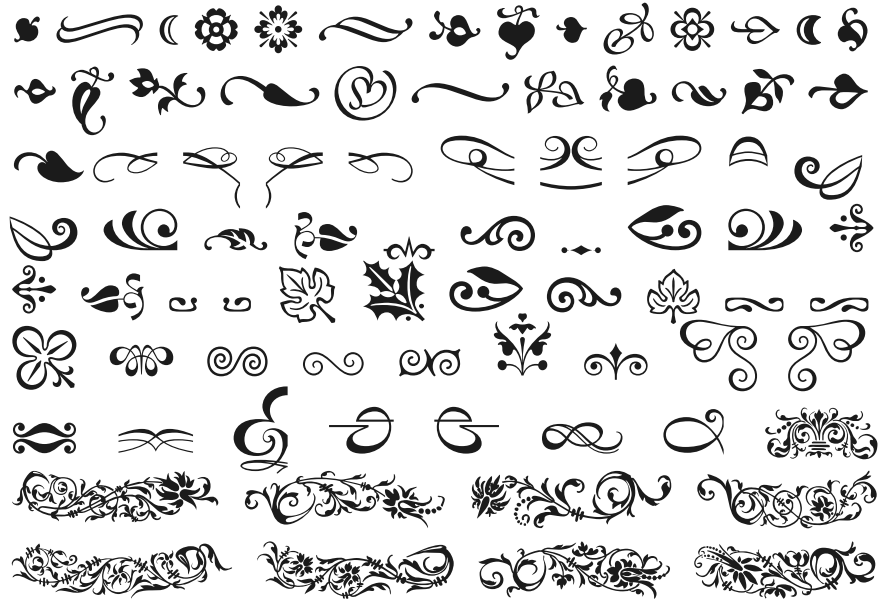
That said, the idea of special, non-letter characters that can be interspersed with type was nothing new when emoji emerged. Anyone who has used a home computer in the last 20 years will probably have come across typefaces Zapf Dingbats or Wingdings and realized that they can integrate symbols and pictograms into bodies of text by accessing these specialist 'dingbat' fonts using their keyboard. Emoji are themselves a kind of dingbat – non-alphabetical characters or glyphs that can be typed. However, emoji aren't restricted to single-colour icons in the same way that dingbat characters are. It's as if emoji fuse the concept of clip art


(crude rights-free illustrations that used to come packaged with word-processing programmes such as Microsoft Word) with that of the dingbat. Emoji were the first collection of symbols and icons to be widely usable using the keyboards of mobile communication devices.

Just as there are thousands of digital typefaces in use around the world today, so there are a huge variety of non-letter (often called 'symbol' or 'pi') fonts, which roughly fall into two distinct categories: those which allow the user to create patterns and ornament, and those which provide handy symbols, illustrations and graphic tools for use in specific circumstances. Long before emoji arrived on our smartphones, if you needed a picture of a party balloon

Various characters from Zapf Dingbats and Wingdings.

Fleurons, or 'printers' flowers'.



or the symbol for Mastercard , well, you could find a dedicated symbol font for that. There's even a dingbat font that features dozens of record-label logos. Handy.

While the notion of gathering such marks and devices into typefaces has gained popularity in the digital age, the use of typeset ornaments (also known as 'fleurons' or 'printers' flowers') is as old as printing itself. As retired professor of Old and Middle English and author Peter J. Lucas explains: 'At the beginning of the era of printed books in Europe at the end of the 15th and beginning of the 16th century, books followed manuscript tradition and had a colophon at the end which stated the name of the printer and usually the date and place of publication. This was not very

commercially useful, so printers and publishers (usually the same person) started to use title pages at the front of the book to display this information. These needed to look attractive to customers visiting their shop, so a decorative woodcut with a frame in which to print the title, author's name and printer/publisher was introduced. It was attractive to look at as well, giving the essential information about the book. Some printers used a bar with a geometric design so that several pieces could be set together to create a frame.'

For as long as typesetting was done by hand, ornamentation in typesetting was hugely popular and served to help identify publications as being by particular publishers. But with the advent of machine typesetting in the

20th century, says Paul Barnes of type foundry Commercial Type, the production of ornamental type characters went into decline. 'For foundries selling type for hand composition, [ornament] was of huge importance for the jobbing printers they sold to,' he explains, 'whereas with machine composition primarily for books, magazines, et cetera, it wasn't so important. Ornament was increasingly out of fashion in the 20th century and the skills of using ornament were dying out. It wasn't just a design skill but a composition skill and, with less and less hand-setting, there was less and less time for ornament.'

This didn't mean the end of non-alphabetical or numerical characters. Instead, the emphasis