From ampersands to interrobangs

The ampersand is a corruption of "and (&) per se and," which literally means "(the character) & by itself (is the word) and." The symbol (or glyph) & is derived from the ligature of ET or et, which is the Latin (and French) word for "and." One of the first examples of an ampersand appears on a piece of papyrus from about 45 A.D. Written in an early Roman capital cursive (the handwriting of the time), it shows the ligature ET. A sample of Pompeian graffiti from 79 A.D. also shows a combination of the capitals E and T, and is again written in early Roman script. The ampersand is generally interchangeable with and. This is why "etc." can sometimes be seen written as "&c."

Depending on the writing speed or the calligrapher's handwriting style, from the 8th century on, the combination of the letters E and T was a ligature, which was first adopted with the invention of printing in the early 15th century. In writing and typography, a ligature occurs when two or more letterforms are written or printed as one unit. Generally, ligatures replace characters that occur next to each other when they overlap. One of the most common ligatures is "fi." Because the dot of the i interferes with the loop of the lowercase f, when they are printed next to each other, the two letters are combined into a single glyph with the dot absorbed into the f, or eliminated.

Ligatures were originally used by medieval scribes to increase writing speed. A 14th century manuscript included hundreds of ligatures and early typefaces used ligatures to emulate the appearance of hand-lettered manuscripts. Gutenberg's font had 292 glyphs—most of them 2- and 3-letter ligatures to fool Bible buyers into thinking it was handwritten. Most ligatures fell out of common use except for the five f-ligtures (fi, ff, fl, ffi, ffl), and the two dipthongs in upper- and lowercase (Æ and Œ). Only recently has computer-based typesetting had automated ligatures.

The Poetica typeface family, designed by Robert Slimbach of Adobe and based on Cancelleresca, has 58 ampersands (one more than Heinz catsup). Some typefaces have especially beautiful ampersands—the italic ampersands for Garamond, Minion, Janson, Meridien, Baskerville, and Caslon are gorgeous. With the appearance of slab serif and sans serif typefaces in the 19th century, typefounders preferred the roman version of the ampersand in italic as well as roman styles. Ampersand usage varies from language to language.

Emotional punctuation

An exclamation mark (or point) is a punctuation mark or a tone mark. It is a full stop, like a period, but used in exclamatory or emphatic sentences. In typesetting, the exclamation mark is called a screamer or bang. Some brands use it, such as "Yahoo!" The town of "Westward Ho!" in England, from the novel by Charles Kingsley, is the only place name in the world that officially contains an exclamation mark. The symbol is said to originate from the Latin word io, an exclamation of joy. It was formed either as a digraph of the letters i and o, or as the letter i (for io) above a period.

A question mark is also a punctuation mark or a tone mark. It is a full stop used in interrogatory sentences. It is also called a query. The symbol is said to originate from the Latin quæstio, meaning question. Over time, 'Qo' was simplified into the curlicue and underdot of today.

The interrobang combines the function and look of both question mark and exclamation point. The concept of the interrobang was introduced by Martin K. Speckter in 1962 in an article in *TYPEtalks* magazine. It was created to allow the punctuation of rhetorical statements, where neither the question nor exclamation marks alone served the purpose, and together

looked weird. Mr. Speckter called his mark an interrobang from the Latin for query and the proofreader's term for exclamation. In an April 1962 editorial, *The Wall Street Journal* endorsed its use with an example: "Who forgot to put gas in the car!?"

In 1966, Richard Isbell of American Type Founders designed Americana, the first typeface that included the interrobang as one of its glyphs. In 1968, an interrobang key was available on some Remington typewriters. The word interrobang started to appear in dictionaries, and the new punctuation mark was the subject of several news articles. You can find an interrobang in Microsoft Word's Wingdings 2. It is also present in Lucida Sans Unicode and Arial Unicode MS. Although the interrobang was in vogue for much of the 1960s, it never caught on. It has not faded away completely; some typefaces still feature an interrobang, and it is included in the Unicode character set. Why is it still around? Who knows!?

Frank Romano *is Professor Emeritus, Rochester Institute of Technology, and founder of this publication 28 years ago.*