

18th Century Ligatures and Fonts

by David Manthey

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On Ligatures

When using an 18th century font, there are several special characters. There is the long f that occurs in the middle of words, plus there are ligatures, which are combinations of two or more characters. Proper use of ligatures is essential to make an authentic looking document.

Generally, whatever 18th century font you use will have the following 12 ligature characters.

c t	ct	f f	ff	f f i	ffi
f f l	ffl	f i	fi	f l	fl
long s	f	s h	fh	s i	fi
s l	fl	s s	ff	s t	ft

Depending on the font, these special characters may appear in different places. If you are using Windows, you can use the Character Map accessory to see the available ligatures. Additionally, for foreign or Latin words, the ligatures

a e æ o e œ

may be necessary.

The standard ligatures are only used on lower case letters; never on uppercase. Some of the foreign ligatures may be used in both an upper- and lowercase version, however.

Rules for using ligatures:

- The long s (f) is used in place of a lower case s, *however*
 - never use the long s at the end of a word or immediately before an apostrophe
 - never use the long s immediately after an f (e.g., offset).
 - never use the long s immediately before an f (e.g., transfer).
 - never use the long s immediately before a b (e.g., husbandry).
 - never use the long s immediately before a k (e.g., task).¹
- Use a ligature where ever possible.

¹ This rule is not followed in some books I have examined. For example, *Geodesia* by John Love (1768) uses the long s before k, whilst *The Practical Surveyor* by Samuel Wyld (both the 1725 and 1760 editions) does not use the long s before k.

3. Use the longest possible ligature (e.g., use ffi in sufficient, not ff followed by the letter i).
4. If two ligatures would be of the same length, use the one that comes earlier in the word (e.g., use ff followed by i in possible, not f followed by fi).
5. Only use a ligature containing the long s if a long s belongs in that location (e.g., use ff in necessary, but not in recess).

Examples:

Here are some example words showing each of the 12 ligature characters. Each line lists six words which use the same ligature.

ct	practical	exact	objection	sections	directions	subtract
ff	offended	offset	different	staff	effect	affabrous
ffi	sufficient	difficult	officers	affiance	chaffing	muffin
ffl	afflict	offlet	ruffle	afflation	afflower	snaffle
fi	finding	beneficial	field	deficient	superficies	confine
fl	chiefly	reflect	flower	flat	defly	rifling
f	easy	survey	present	inspects	also	uses
fh	shewing	shilling	publish	crush	lordship	wash
fi	curiosity	since	besides	business	design	confider
fl	asleep	slope	fluice	translate	flight	isle
ff	necessary	grossly	assign	passing	possess	lesser
ft	first	stretch	instrument	most	waste	distance

On Fonts

Practically all American and English printing from 1735 to 1800 was done using the *Caflon* font. This font was created by William Caflon (1692-1766), sometime around 1722². Around 1754, the *Baskerville* font was introduced by John Baskerville³ (1706-1775). This font was used for some fancier documents and bibles, but many printers didn't care for it and claimed that it was hard to read and bad for the eyes. As a reference, Benjamin Franklin used both of

² Sources claim any date between 1716 and 1734, but there is at least one book from 1725 that I have personally inspected that uses Caflon. William Caflon started in the engraving business around 1716, and seems to have offered a sample type sheet of his font in 1722. Based on my limited research, I suspect that the true date lies between 1720 and 1722.

³ There is another font called *Baskerville Old Face*, which was introduced by Isaac Moore in 1768. In addition to a new font, John Baskerville also invented many improvements to the printing process, including woven paper (to replace laid paper).

these fonts in his print shop.

The Caslon font has three styles: roman, italic, and swash. The italic form of Caslon does not include italic numerals. Numerals were written in one of two ways: 0123456789 in standard text, and 0123456789 for figure captions and drawings. The swash form is a fancier version of italic that is used only in principal titles. The swash form was not in general use in the early 1700s. Caslon should not be used bolded; rather, a larger point size should be used.

Computer Fonts

There are many versions of Caslon that are available for the computer. These range from free fonts to ones that cost a significant amount of money. Of the various fonts that are available, very few completely match period text. In general, although some of the shapes of individual characters are different, the biggest variation is in line spacing and character size. Characters should appear about the same height as the equivalent character in the Times font, and the line spacing should be slightly tighter than Times.

I have created a Caslon which is intended to exactly match the typeface found in *The Practical Surveyor*, by Samuel Wyld, published in London in 1725. I have called this font *Wyld*. This is used in my reprint of the aforementioned book. It can be found at <http://www.orbitals.com/programs/wyld.zip>, and includes a roman and italic form of Caslon. It does not include a swash form, as the swash form was not in use in 1725. This font is very close to the exact letter and line spacing of the original. The font may be adjusted slightly in the future. The Wyld font may be used freely, but it may not be distributed without written permission.

I have also written a pair of MS Word macros which will automatically add or remove ligatures from a document written using the Wyld font. These are also included in the wyld.zip file.

After unzipping the wyld.zip file, install the two font files from the control panel. To install the Word macros, copy the WyldMacros.dot file to the Microsoft Word startup directory. By default this directory is located at:

For Word95: C:\MSOffice\Winword\Startup\

For Word97: C:\Program Files\MS Office\Office\Startup\

For Word2000: C:\Program Files\Microsoft Office\Office\Startup\

The startup directory may be in a different location. After copying this file to the startup directory, the next time Word is started, there will be an additional toolbar containing a **ct** and a **ct** tool. The **ct** tool adds ligatures, while the **ct** tool removes them.