

# Serif and Sans Serif In Digital

## Typography Research

Research and Design by Lisa Castore

### Objective

To see if there is a clearly reigning preference among college students for serif over sans serif, or vice versa, when reading rich body copy on mobile devices

This study also aimed to distinguish which aspect of typography this demographic valued more highly, legibility or aesthetic, by comparing each subject's first impression picks to their legibility and aesthetic picks.

### Methodology

Subjects were exposed to four pairs of text samples, each pair containing one serif and one sans serif, and asked to pick which one they preferred based off of first impression, legibility, and aesthetic.

The first two pairs of text samples (shown below) were set with a standard amount of leading (20% greater than the point size), while the last two pairs of text samples (20% greater than the point size), while the last two pairs were set with a greater amount of leading.

Grasses generally have the following characteristics (the image gallery can be used for reference): The stems of grasses, called culms are usually cylindrical (more rarely flattened, but not 3-angled) and are hollow, plugged at the nodes, where the leaves are attached. Grass leaves are nearly always alternate and distichous (in one plane), and have parallel veins. Each leaf is differentiated into a lower sheath hugging the stem and a blade with entire (i.e., smooth) margins. The leaf blades of many grasses are hardened with silica phytoliths, which discourage grazing animals; some, such as sword grass,

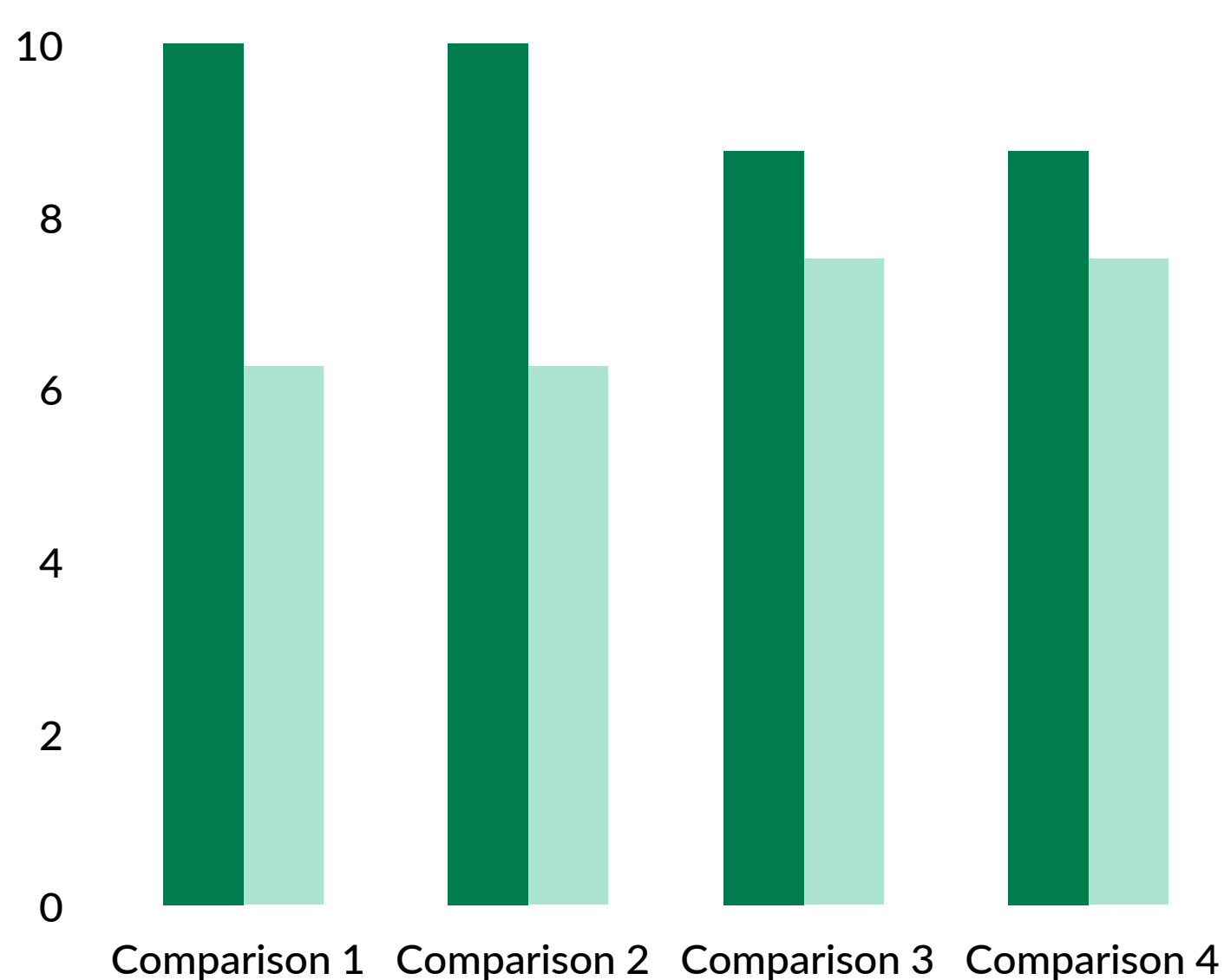
Comparison 1, Set 1

Grasses generally have the following characteristics (the image gallery can be used for reference): The stems of grasses, called culms are usually cylindrical (more rarely flattened, but not 3-angled) and are hollow, plugged at the nodes, where the leaves are attached. Grass leaves are nearly always alternate and distichous (in one plane), and have parallel veins. Each leaf is differentiated into a lower sheath hugging the stem and a blade with entire (i.e., smooth) margins. The leaf blades of many grasses are hardened with silica phytoliths, which discourage grazing animals; some, such as sword grass, are sharp

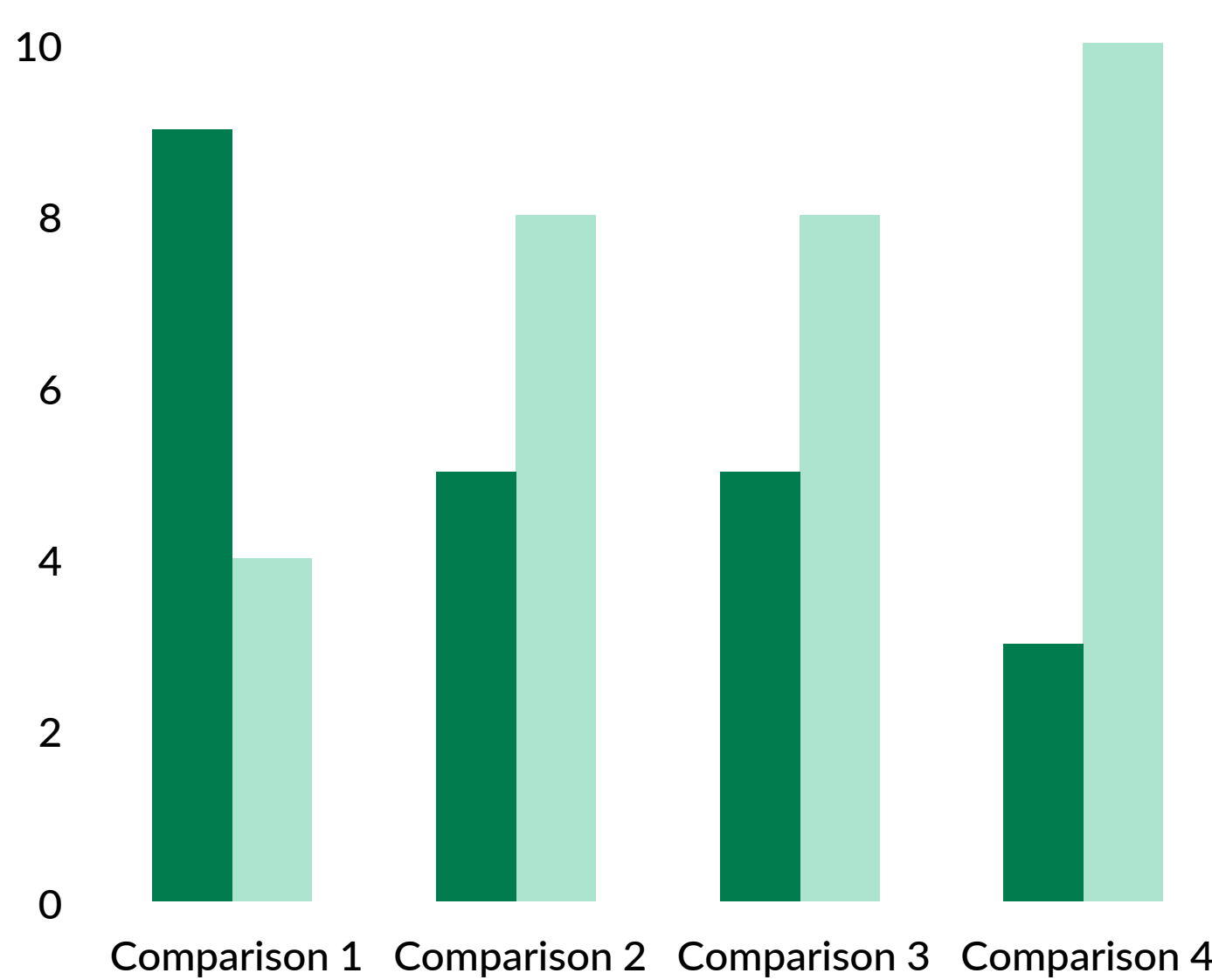
Comparison 1, Set 2

### Results

The first phase focused on first impressions and showed a slight preference toward serif fonts. However, in the second two samples, in which the leading was increased, the amount of people that preferred sans serif fonts increased.



The second phase focused on legibility and showed a pretty strong connection between leading and legibility. Nine out of thirteen people felt that the serif text samples in the first two pairs were more legible, while ten out of thirteen people felt that the sans serif text samples with greater leading more legible.



### Discussion

While the preference of serif over sans serif is still slight and mostly unclear, the results of the first two phases reveal that sans serif type faces are more preferable when they are set with a greater amount of leading. This is worth noting, especially for designers setting type for mobile devices, and offers itself to further exploration.

Is there a certain ratio of point size to leading at which sans serif typefaces are most legible and aesthetically pleasing? Is there a certain point in leading at which sans serif becomes distinctively more legible than serif type? *Future exploration might include gathering a larger focus group, testing a greater amount of text samples, and displaying these samples on two identical devices.*