Five things a font knows about its own letters

A font file carries more than one glyph per character. It says which letters are drawn joined, which figures hang below the line, which letters have a small capital of their own, which letters take another form in one language, and how far apart each pair of glyphs should stand.
None of it is used unless it is asked for, so a document written before these settings existed comes out byte for byte as it did. Each sample below is set twice, and only the setting differs.

Ligatures

Letters that meet are drawn as one glyph the font designer cut for them.

off office filing affidavit

on office filing affidavit

Small capitals

Lowercase letters drawn as capitals no taller than an x.

off reprinted quarterly

on REPRINTED QUARTERLY

Old-style figures

Figures that rise and fall around the x-height instead of standing at cap height.

off 1 234 567 890

on 1 234 567 890

Local forms

The same Cyrillic letters, in the forms the font draws for Serbian.

off пут, град, беседа

on пут, град, беседа

Kerning

Each pair of glyphs moved as far apart as the font asks.

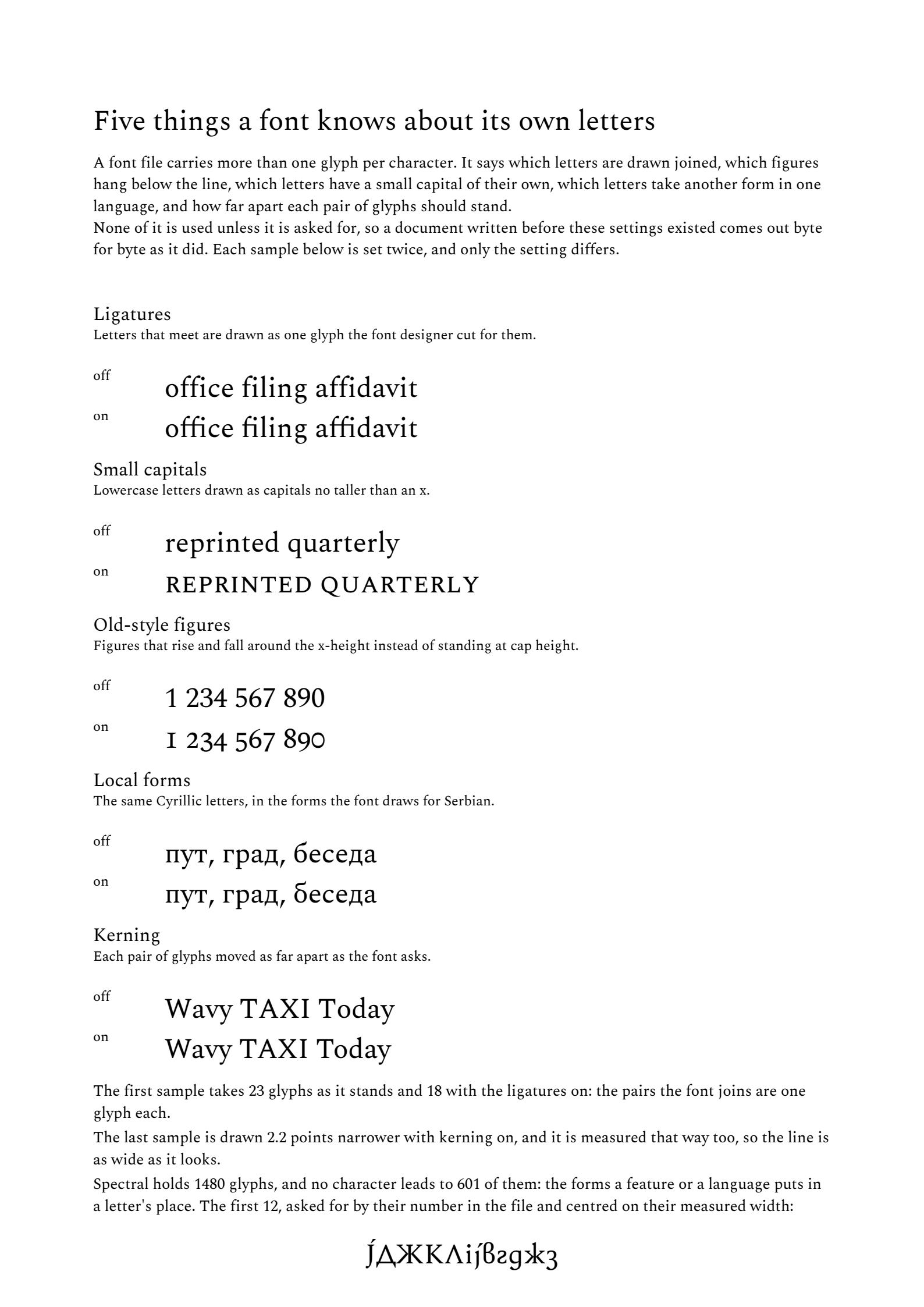
off Wavy TAXI Today

on Wavy TAXI Today

The first sample takes 23 glyphs as it stands and 18 with the ligatures on: the pairs the font joins are one glyph each.

The last sample is drawn 2.2 points narrower with kerning on, and it is measured that way too, so the line is as wide as it looks.

Spectral holds 1480 glyphs, and no character leads to 601 of them: the forms a feature or a language puts in a letter's place. The first 12, asked for by their number in the file and centred on their measured width:



One feature turned back off, one glyph by its number

Ligatures and kerning are turned on together, then ligatures alone are turned back off: the letters come apart again, and the pairs stay kerned.

both office filing affidavit

no liga office filing affidavit

The glyph the face names fi, asked for by its number and stated to stand for the two letters it joins, so that the text copies out as those two letters:

fi

Fractions

Figures on either side of a slash, set as a numerator and a denominator around a fraction bar.

off 1/2 3/4 15/16

on ½ ¾ ¹⁵⁄₁₆

Accents placed by the font

Separately typed accents, set over or under the previous letter, where the font places them.

off H´ K˘ R° G̣ L˜

on Ḥ Ǩ Ṛ Ḡ L̃

Strokes joined by the font

Each sign of HqfJoined starts exactly where the previous one ends, at points the font defines.

off

on

An accent inside a ligature

A fatha typed between lam and alef: the font joins the two letters across it and sets it over the lam.

off ﵋ـ

on ﵋

Emoji typed as several characters

A family, a flag, a thumb in a skin tone, a keycap: several characters each, one glyph without being asked.