

Quick Start Guide to Creating Whitebase Custom Fonts

Okay, so you have been following the other Quick Start guides and now you want to make your very own custom fonts. Well this is the Quick Start guide that you have been waiting for.

I have two plug-ins for creating custom whitebase fonts. One converts fonts into layers and another converts character shaped paths to layers.

Before you convert a font to Gimp layers, please check that the font is indeed free to use. I only use fonts that are 100% free and also those for which the author is not asking donations; I hasten to add that this is not for the sake of saving money but to make sure that money is not diverted from the author's revenue stream. It takes a lot of work to make a font and I salute the amazing people who give their work freely away.

The accompanying zipped resources folder contains the following items:

Custom_Font_Layers_With_Forced_Margins_V004 – plug-in for creating white base custom fonts

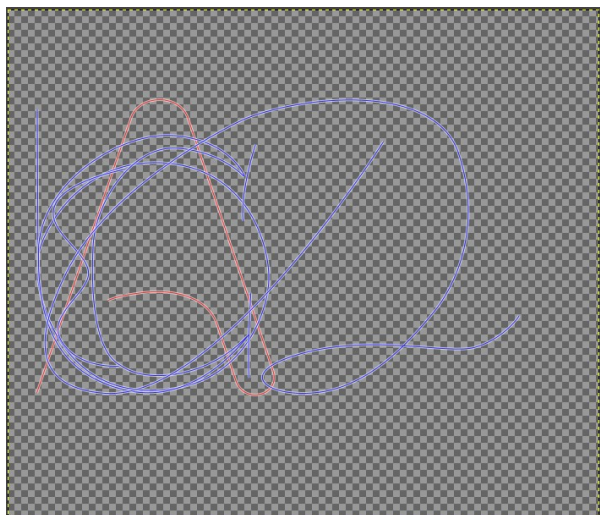
Custom_Font_Single_Path_Stroker_v_004 – plug-in for stroking paths with the path tool

Custom_Font_Layer_Uilities_v121 – a set of layer utilities

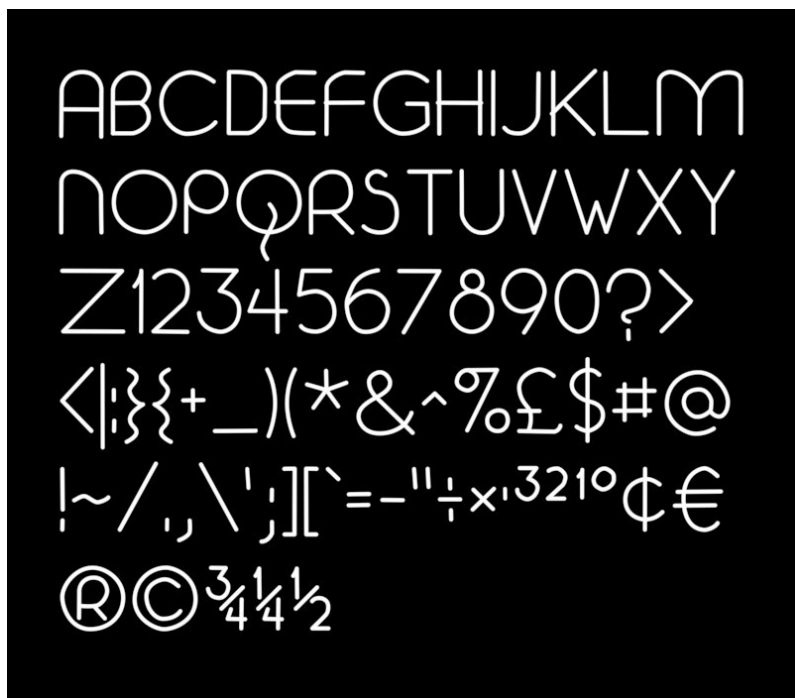
Bolonewt_Unkerned – a version of an uppercase white base font without kerning paths



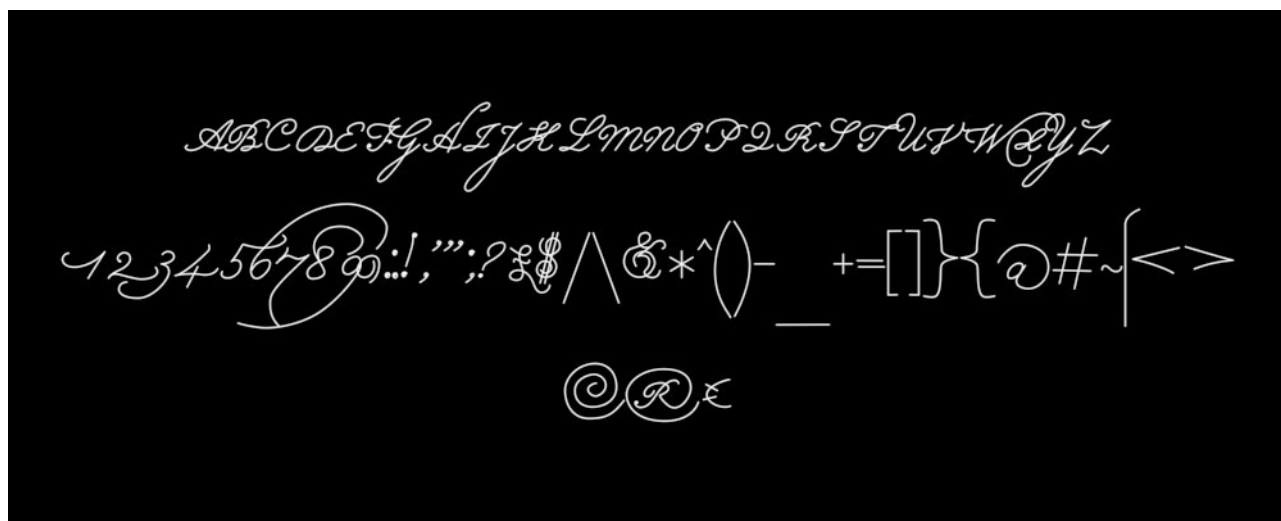
Test_Character_Paths_ABCD – a small set of character paths for testing out the Single Path Stroker



Bolonewt_Style – a set of upper-case character paths in the style of Bolonewt font



Champignon_Style_paths – a set of character paths in the style of Champignon font



Whitebase custom fonts

This is the name I use for the set of plain, white character layers.

Each layer is named with a single character followed by the '.png' extension (to signify that it has a transparent background). The space character is the only exception to this rule and, by convention, has the name 'space.png'. Once you have saved this white base file it can be used over and over again for creating decorative versions of the same custom fonts.

Creating a Custom Font White Base

Converting a font into a custom font is fairly straight-forward. The goal is to make a set of character layers that require as few kerning paths as possible to minimise the unpleasant gaps between letter combinations. Unless you stick to mono-spaced fonts, or intend to use the custom font for short captions, you will want to add some kerning paths. The trouble is, normally, that the most visually interesting fonts tend to require more kerning information to look as good as you intend.

Further problems can arise if the author of the original font has placed parts of characters at the very edge of the character boundary; it can lead to artifacts and edge distortion when applying filters. I find that it makes life a lot easier if you can set the amount of space between a character and its layer boundaries at the very start of the process.

Let's start by using this fonts to layers plug-in. I am assuming that you have downloaded the accompanying resources and extracted and installed the plug-ins to your user plug-in folder – and also added the other resources to a location on your machine.

Using Custom_Font_Layers_With_Forced_Margins_V004

Create a new image (the initial size doesn't matter):

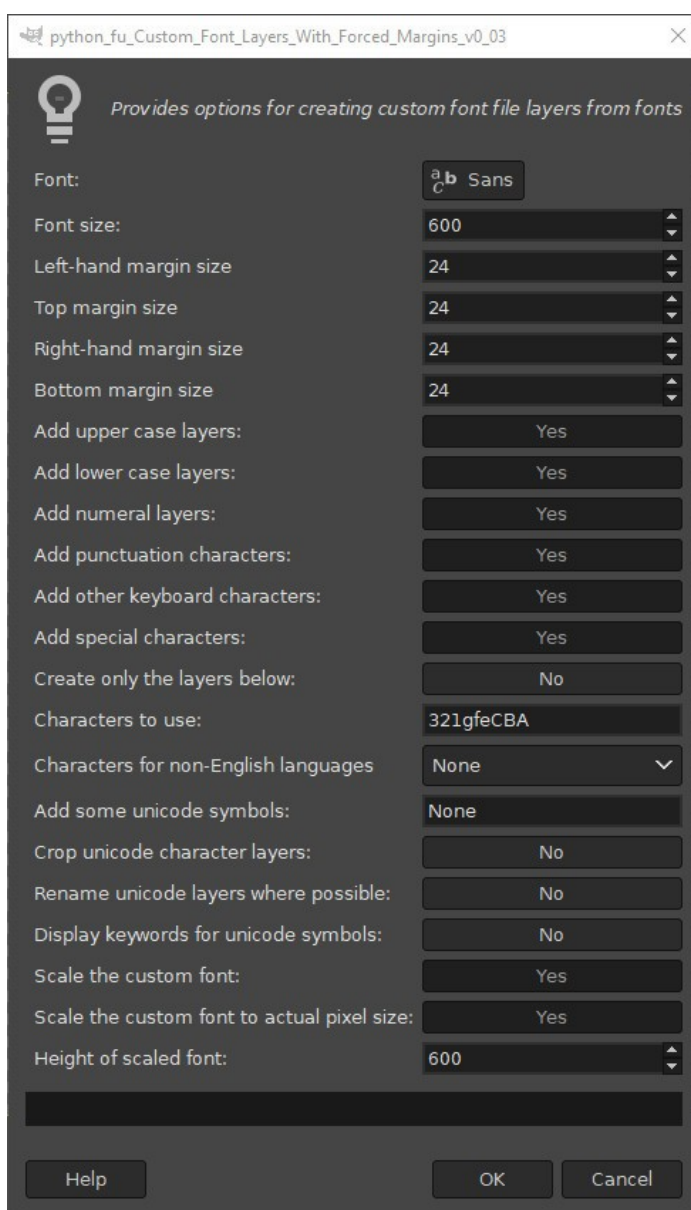
File>>New...

Make sure that you have white as the current foreground colour since this is the colour used by the filter for the characters.

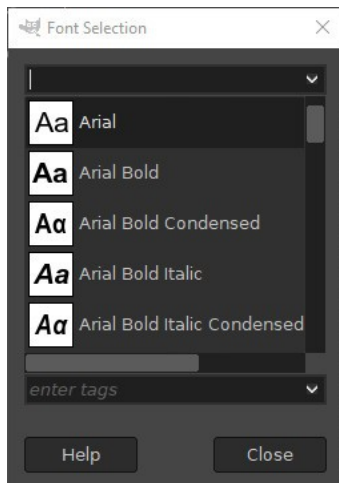
Run the filter:

Filters>>Custom Font Tools>>Custom_Font_Layers_With_Forced_Margins_V003...

This dialog should pop up.



Click on Font to open Gimp's own font selection tool.



Use the scroll bar to find the font you want to convert to layers and click on this to make it the currently active font. This will be reflected in the main filter dialog. Close this dialog.

Use the options to select the range of characters you want to use (there is an option for selecting non-English characters). If you decide to make a small set of characters for testing purposes, enter the characters to use (a space character will automatically be added to this set). When this option is set to 'Yes' it will over-ride other character selections.

I tend to use (character) margin sizes of 24 pixels with wide fonts and 16 pixels with narrower fonts. Please note that this is for the default output size of 600 pixels in height. Smaller font sizes will, obviously, require smaller margin sizes. If you change this value ensure that the same value is entered for both the 'Font Size' option and the 'Height of scaled font' option to avoid scaling issues. Nobody likes a fuzzy output.

Click on the filter dialog 'OK' button. Job done – save your work.

I used the same settings on a 100% free font called Bolonewt that I downloaded from Dafont.com and, without lower-case letters, the filter generated 86 character layers.

It is a good idea to scroll through the layers to check that they all contain characters from the actual font. Gimp has a helpful habit of inserting its own default unicode font characters if it cannot find a character in the font you want to convert to layers. This particularly applies to the non-keyboard characters; if no character can be generated, however, a message box will pop up to list the missing letters.

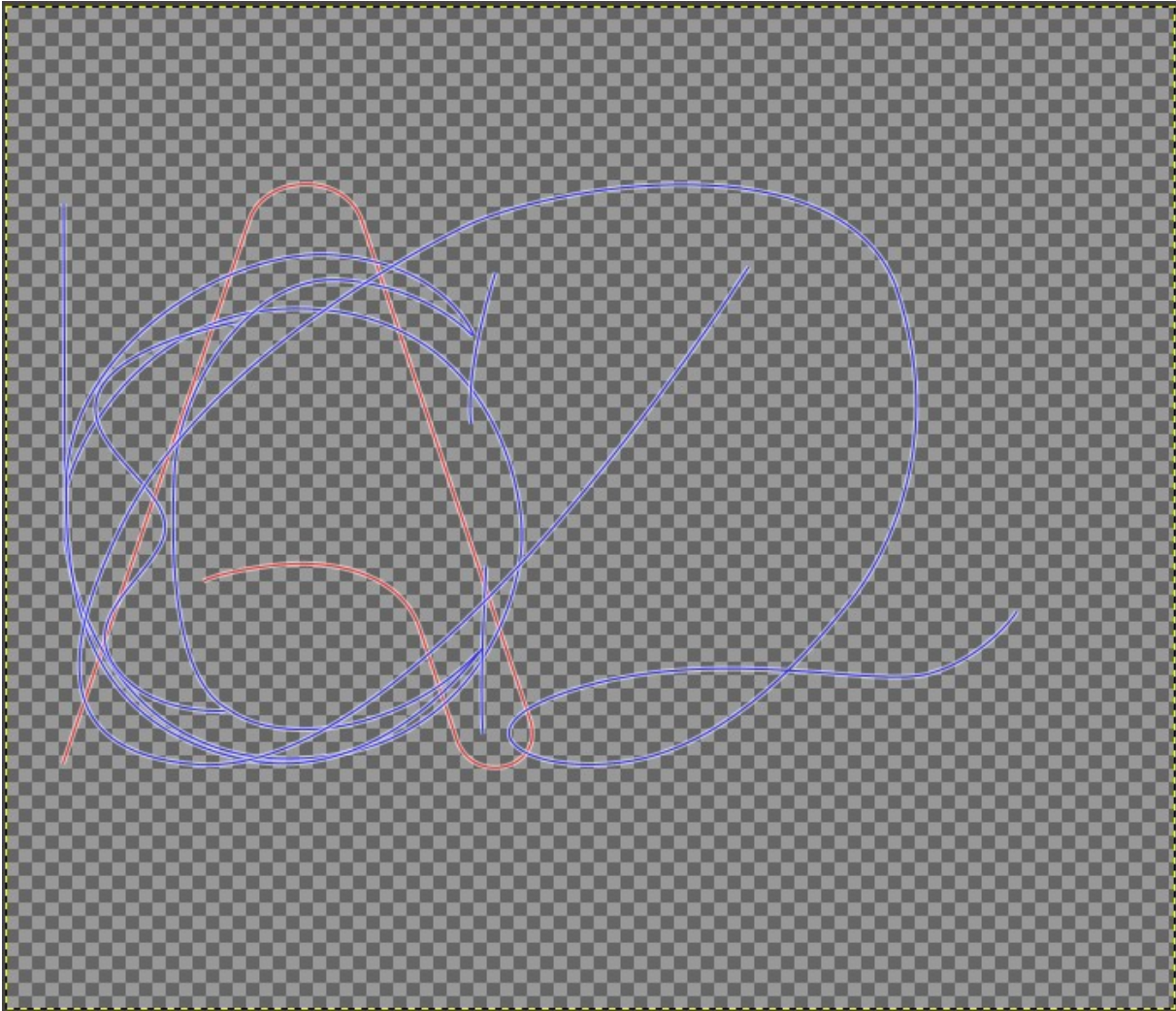
Custom_Font_Single_Path_Stroker_v_004

The aim of this filter is to generate a set of characters from a file containing skeleton, letter-shaped paths. It was initially intended to be used to create fairly narrow paths by stroking the path with the line tool, although there is an option to stroke with the currently selected brush.

Let's get started. With white as your foreground colour, open the character path test file...

File>>Open...

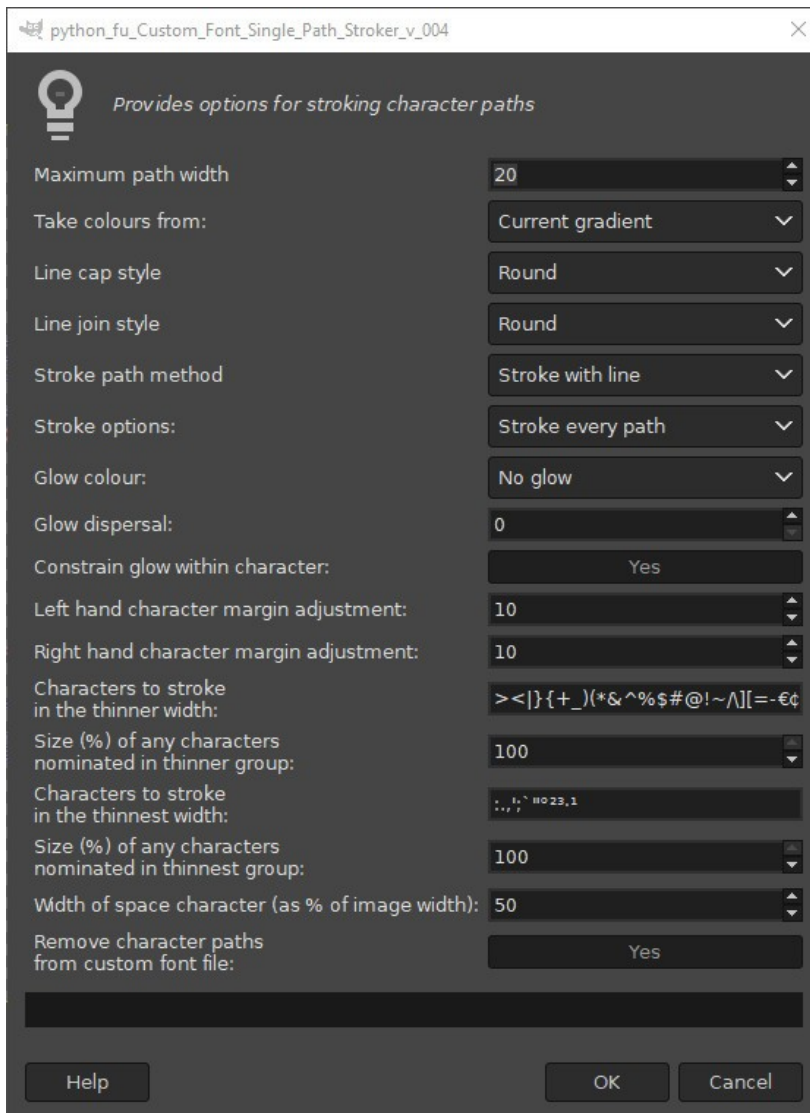
and navigate to the location to which you save the file.



When you open the file you should be able to see the paths, since they were made visible at the time of saving. If you have not set a dock for the path tool, add the appropriate tab so that you can see the path names.

Open the filter dialog:

Filters>>Custom Font Tools>>Custom_Font_Single_Path_Stroker_v_004

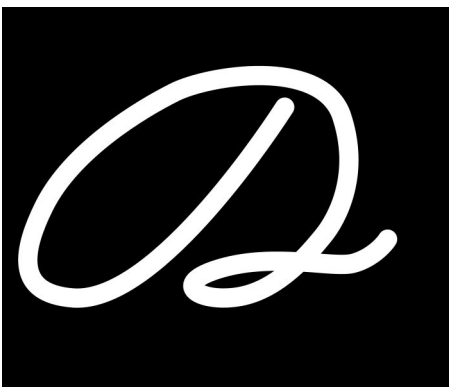


Set 'Take colours from:' to 'Foreground – Background'

Set 'Stroke options' to 'Stroke first path only'

Click on the filter dialog 'OK'.

You have created four potential white base custom font characters to play with.



Now let's make some characters with a variable stroke thickness, as in an italic font.

Use undo (or open the file again):

Edit>>Undo (Ctrl + Z)

to return the image to the original character paths

Double click on the paintbrush in the Gimp toolbox to open the brushes dock and look for a brush shaped at a 45 degree angle. I had two possible brush candidates and chose this one.



Open the filter dialog:

Filters>>Custom Font Tools>>Custom_Font_Single_Path_Stroker_v_004

Set 'Stroke path method' to 'Stroke with current brush'

Click on the filter dialog 'OK'.

If the result looks jagged or stepped, reduce the brush spacing and try again.



You can achieve some very interesting results using different brushes.

To give the filter a real test open the full set of character paths i.e. the Bolonewt style character paths from the downloaded resources folder and, using the same settings, re-run the filter.



A number of custom font paths for you to download can be found here on GimpLearn:

<https://gimplearn.net/viewtopic.php?f=8&t=2115>

There are a lot of other filter options for decorating custom fonts but they go beyond our immediate aim of creating font character layer files. Feel free to have a play.

