

Glossary of Book Terms

Backing

The process that flares the spine of a book block, forming a hinge area along the binding edge of the sheets and leaving a ridge that will accommodate the thickness of the cover.

Board

Special cardboard or thin wood cover cores around which paper, cloth or leather is wrapped to make a case (cover) for a book.

Book block (also called a **text block**)

Pages of a book that have been sewn or glued together into a single unit, then trimmed around three edges to remove signature folds, but not yet cased into a cover.

Buckram

Traditional usage: A coarse fabric saturated with stiff sizing that is used for binding books and adding strength and stiffness to leather goods. Common usage: Any non-leather fabric manufactured specifically for binding books. Modern buckrams are usually attractively colored and textured plastic attached to a strong fabric under-layer for strength. From old French boquerant, linen.

Case

An assembly consisting of front and back covers attached to the spine. The operation of attaching the covers of a book to the book block is called "casing in."

Cover

An outer surface nearly the size of the pages and attached to the spine by a hinge mechanism. Front and back covers are usually the same material as the spine, forming a one piece protective "case" around the book. Many years ago, covers were carved from wood and attached to the spine with cloth or metal hinges. Modern covers are made of many materials—paper, plastic, or fabric—though most are a cardboard core covered with paper, leather, or book cloth (buckram).

Deckle

A rough face edge on all pages. Originally this was due to not making a final trim on this edge, leaving the uneven edge of the handmade paper. Modern deckle edge paper is made by tearing or roughly chopping the paper and is only for appearance. Deckle edged paper is used when a book bound in modern fashion is supposed to look older, as if published in the period when sections were not trimmed prior to being cased into a cover. The folds left on the sections were sliced open by the book purchaser. Some collectors prefer antique books that have not been sliced and still have folds on the page edges.

Dummy

Blank sheets folded and numbered as a test of the page imposition of a book prior to printing. Bookbinders often supply a dummy to the printer to aid in layout and stripping during the prep process.

Dust jacket

A paper "wrapper" around a bound book intended to attract a purchaser through illustrations, descriptions, or other information. Dust jackets are not intended to last as long as the bound volume, but many collectors prefer books with the original dust jacket intact.

Edition

All of the copies of a book manufactured by a single printing and binding run. "First Edition" always designates the original publication, and are more popular with collectors.

End sheet

A piece of stiff paper folded once in half and attached to the inside of the covers and to the spine of the book block. End sheets are usually plain, white stock, but can be more ornate in Holy Bibles and high-quality books. Their purpose is mainly for appearance, to conceal the edges of buckram or leather attached to the cover core, and conceal the thread and glue on the spine edge of the book block. Heavier weight end sheets also contribute to the strength of the binding and extend the life of the book.

Face

The edge of book pages opposite the spine. This is the edge that is normally grasped when turning the pages.

Flyleaf

The half of an end sheet that is loose and not glued down to the book cover.

Folio

Traditional usage: A sheet of paper folded once in the middle, making four pages of a book. Also may be called a signature.

Common usage: A numbered page of a book or the actual number printed on the page. "Low folio" refers to the half of the folio in the front part of the book, or the half of the folio with the lowest numbers. "High folio" refers to the half of the folio in the back part of the book, or the half of the folio with the highest numbers. Occasionally used to describe a large book, 15 or more inches high, made with folded pages. From Latin folio, a leaf.

Foot

The bottom page edges or the bottom of the spine.

Frontpiece

A page prior to the title page containing an illustration.

Gilt

Gold edging on pages of bibles and other books. Originally applied as a dust and rubbed into the paper fibers, gilt is now applied to the edges of book blocks with heat and adhesive. Similar decorations included red and green edging, done with ink, and marble edging, an obscure method of swirling several ink colors on top of a vat of hot liquid and carefully touching the book block edges to the mixture.

Glassine

Thin, nearly transparent paper most often used to provide protection between illustrations and text pages.

Guards

Fan-folded light canvas or other strong cloth attached to a single paper strip. Each of the folds of the guard is sewn to a signature of the book, then the paper strips of the guards are sewn together to form the book block spine. This process is usually referred to as “sewing on guards.”

Gutter

The inside fold of a cover hinge where it meets the book block spine. Also the “valley” between two pages when a book is open that forms the inside page margins.

Half-bound book

Hard bound books covered in paper or buckram, then reinforced with leather down the spine and on the corners. Most typical of courthouse record books.

Head

The top page edges or the top of the spine.

Headband

A fabric band, often decoratively colored, that is attached to the head and foot of the spine. Headbands add strength to these points of stress and also conceal any glue and thread that might have been visible after binding.

Hinge

The thin areas of the case that fold back allowing the book to be opened and closed.

Hubs

Raised horizontal bands on the spine made with built-up layers of cardboard under leather. Hubs were very popular more than fifty years ago, but now are only found on very fancy art bound books.

Imposition

The arrangement of multiple printed pages on a large sheet of paper so that when folded, the pages will fall in numerical order. An eight-page signature imposition will have four pages on each side of the sheet with the heads of the pages meeting in the center.

Jacket

see dust jacket

Joint

see gutter

Kraft

Coarse tan or gray paper glued to the spine of a book block after sewing to add strength and limit the stretch of the thread, helping the book block spine maintain its curved shape and flexibility. Usually kraft has a “crinkled” finish similar to crepe paper.

Layout

see dummy

Oversewing

Sewing sections or groups of pages rather than sewing through all pages at one time to allow more flexibility in the spine

Page

One side of a sheet of paper. Sheets x 2 = # pages in a book.

Perfect binding (also called **adhesive binding**)

A pamphlet binding process using only adhesive, usually a hot-melt, to secure the pages into a wrap-around cover. Telephone books and paperbacks are typical of Perfect binding.

Quarter-bound

Hard bound books cased in paper or buckram, then reinforced with leather down the spine and extending a couple of inches onto the covers.

Recto

A right-hand page of a book or the front side of a leaf, on the other side of the *verso*.

Rounding

A process that gives curvature to a book's spine

Section

see signature

Section sewn (also called Smythe sewing)

Thread is sewn through the folded centers of each section of pages. Section sewn books open easily and lie a bit flatter than side sewn books.

Side sewn

Thread is sewn through all of a book's pages about 1/8 inch from the binding edge of the pages. Side sewing is very secure, but books sewn in this fashion seldom lie flat when open.

Signature (often abbreviated sig and also called a section)

A sheet of paper printed with four or more pages and folded one or more times to the approximate size of one page and in a manner which puts the pages in proper numbered order. The more common signature impositions are 4, 8, 16, 32, and 64 pages, which are formed by folding the sheet in half one or more times. Less common are 12, 20, 24, and 36 page signatures, which require more complicated folding patterns.

In some regions, signatures are identified by their lowest page number, so the second signature in a two section, 16 page book might be called "sig 5," because it begins with page 5. In recent years, and in most regions, signatures are identified by their position in the book, so the example might also be called "sig 2." The cover of the book is not considered a signature in any numbering scheme. From Latin *signum*, sign.

Spine

The bound edge of a book where the pages are sewn, glued, or otherwise fastened together. Spines are usually thin and flexible, allowing the book to be easily opened. Highly decorated books have spines that have been "built up" into hubs and ornamentation. Also see rounding and backing.

Spread

When you open the book, what you see is two pages side by side, or what we call a *spread*. When we design books, we can use lots of design elements to help readers navigate them, and many of these elements are based on the two-page spread.

Super

An open weave gauze cloth with stiff sizing similar to cheesecloth. Super is sometimes applied to the spine of sewn or glued book blocks to add strength to the binding, especially on very heavy, thick volumes or books with large pages.

Verso

A left-hand page of a book or the reverse side of a leaf, as opposed to the *recto*.

Volume

One individual book. Sometimes used to identify an individual book belonging to a set, such as volume one of four. In periodical literature, volume refers to all of the issues in a series of time, such as a year or a quarter. When periodicals are consolidated into a hard-bound book, typically all issues of the same volume number are bound together.

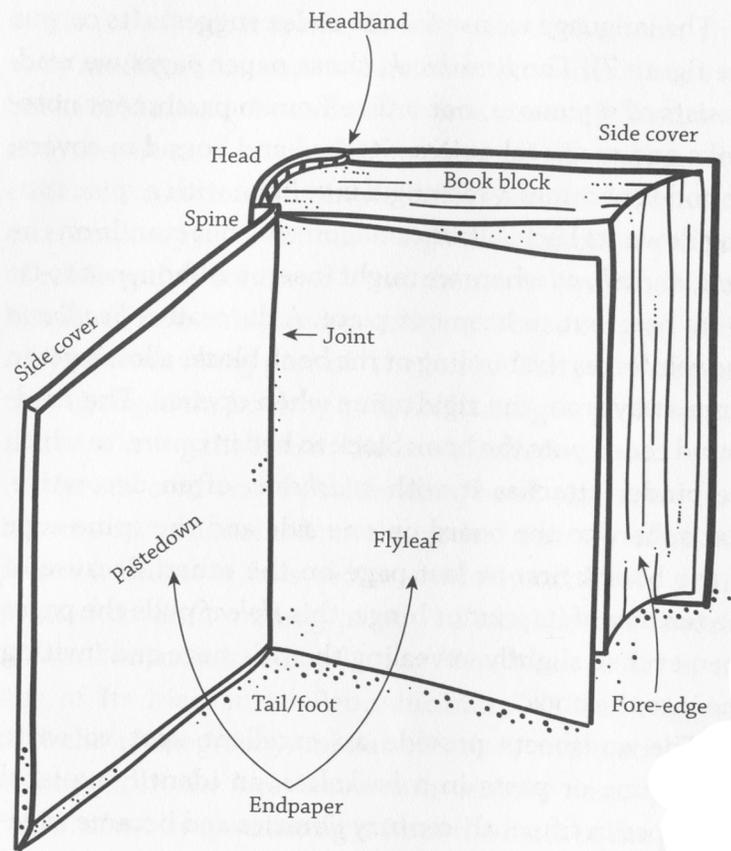


Figure 7 The body of the book. Illustration by Mike Force for Lightboard.

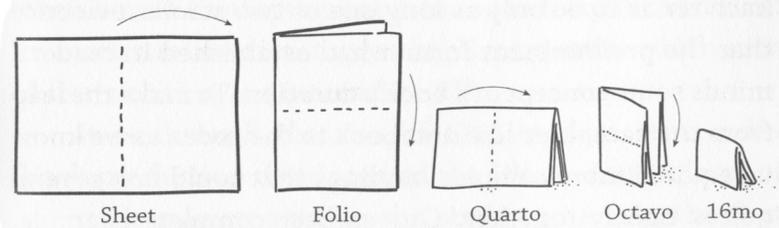
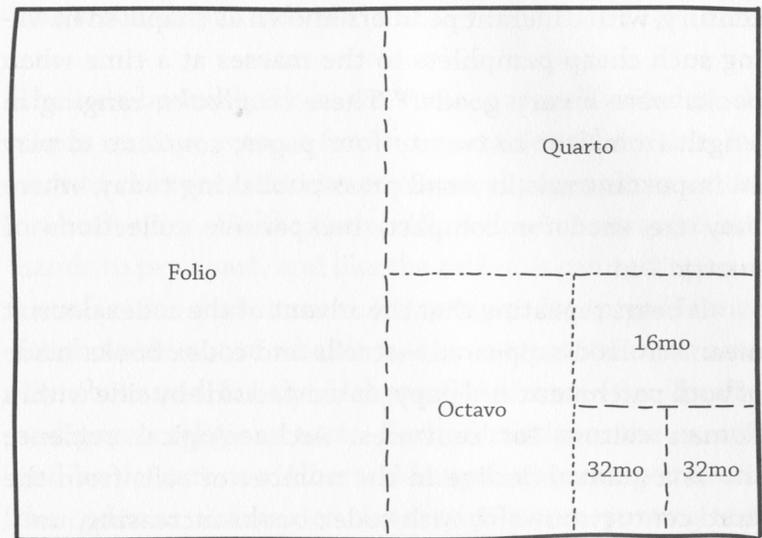


Figure 3 Single sheet folding and resulting book sizes. Illustration by Mike Force for Lightboard based on A. W. Lewis, *Basic Bookbinding* (New York: Dover, 1957), 9.