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Book Design 101

How to turn your manuscript
into a retail-ready printed book.

Joel Friedlander
TheBookDesigner.com

It's pretty easy to turn a printed book into files that can be converted into an eBook.

But how do you turn your ebook into a print book? It's not quite so simple. With a little planning and careful execution, though, you can produce a beautiful print book.

If you want to sell books at events or give them away to reviewers, friends and family, you'll want to print physical books. Many people prefer reading print books as well; even people who own eReaders, tablets and smartphones.

As a new self-publisher, you may not be familiar with how to get your book ready for printing. Although print books haven't changed much in 500 years, and ebooks have only been popular for about five years, printed books are far more complex when it comes to preparing your book for press.
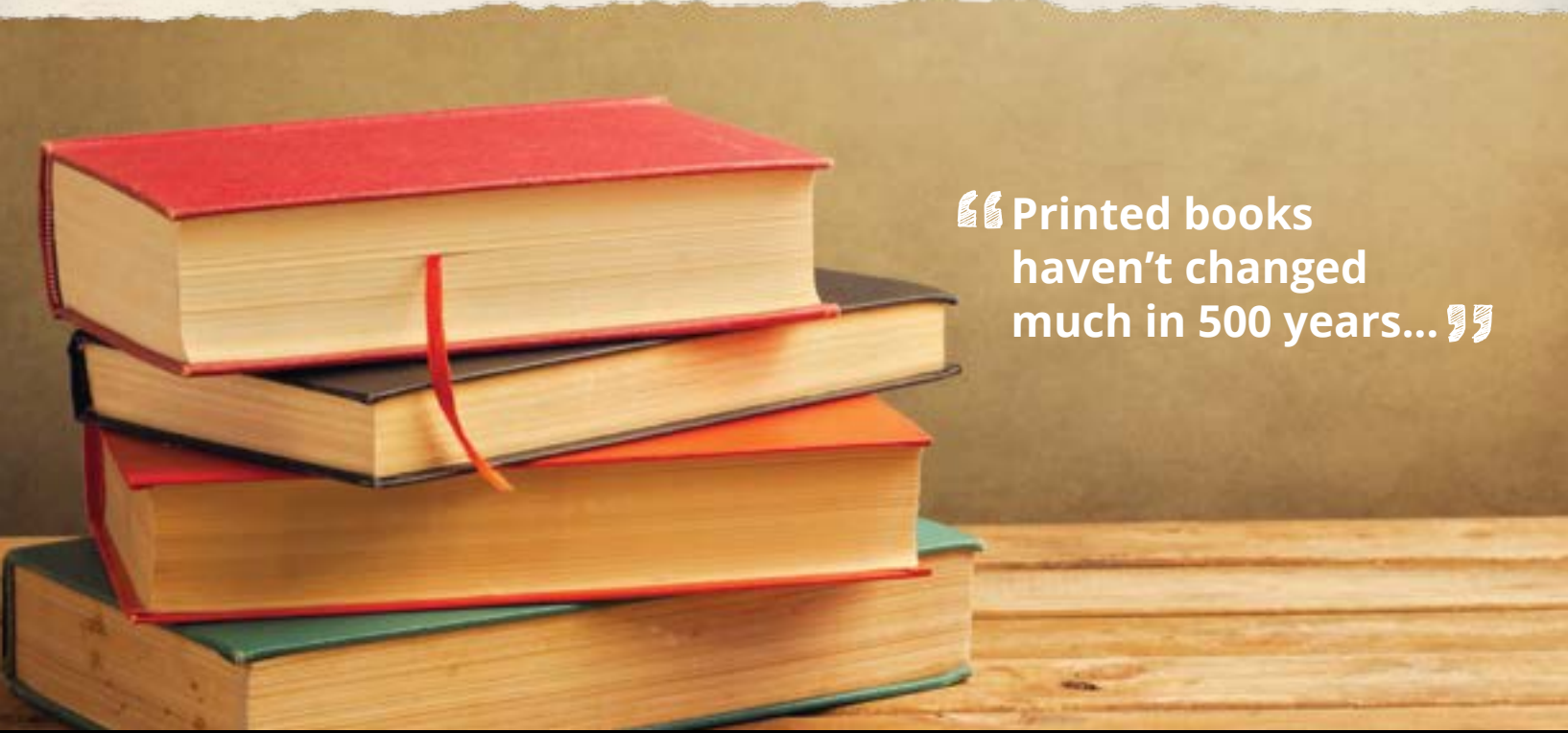
With ebooks, almost all you have to worry about is converting a file from one format to another and adding cover art. But with print books you have to know something about how they will be printed and the printer's requirements

before you can prepare a book that will end up looking good. If you're thinking about marketing your printed books, they will need to look even better. After all, they'll be competing with books from big publishing houses, where professionals handle the book design and production.

Now I'm not going to pretend that I can give you a full education in book design and printing in this guide. What I can do is give you a big head-start on your journey to creating a good-looking, reader-friendly, market-oriented print book.

I can also let you know what to avoid so you don't look like a complete newbie. That would be good, right?

Okay, let's dive in and start at the beginning.

"Printed books haven't changed much in 500 years..."

Newbie mistakes to avoid

One thing you probably don't want is for your book to "look" self-published. Honestly, it doesn't cost any more to print a book that's properly put together and thoughtfully designed than it does to print a book that ignores book publishing conventions. No matter what you plan to do with your books, they will be more likely to succeed if they avoid the most common mistakes new self-publishers commonly make.

Here are some things to watch out for:

Getting your pages switched around — Remember that all the right-hand pages in your book, starting with page 1, are odd numbers. All the left-hand pages are even numbers.

Don't put "by" on your cover or title page — Anyone can tell by looking at the page that the person there, under the title, is the author. Even if you have co-authors, you don't need "by," so just don't use it.

Make sure your blank pages are blank — A blank page doesn't need a running head, a page number, or "this page intentionally left blank" on it. In printed books, blank pages are just that — blank.

No blanks on the right — Your book should never have a blank page on a right-hand page.

Forgetting the front matter — You want to include at least a title page and a copyright page, and probably a contents page before you start the body of the book.

Tiny page margins — Trying to save money by printing fewer pages rarely produces a book people actually want to read. Leave enough space on the outside for the reader to hold the book, and on the inside (or "gutter") so that it doesn't swallow your text.

Not capitalizing properly — Titles, subtitles, chapter titles and subheads should all be title case, not sentence case. In other words, all words except short prepositions are capitalized.

Make it justified — You don't really want your book to have "rag right" typesetting, where the right margin is ragged. You want your book to be fully justified, which means that your page of type is a rectangle where all the lines (except the last line in a paragraph) extend from the left margin all the way to the right margin.

If you're curious about any of these tips, just walk over to your own bookshelf and start pulling books out and take a look. You'll discover that these are the rules or conventions of book publishing. Virtually all books produced by professionals will follow these standards unless the designer has a good reason not to. By watching out for these common mistakes, you'll make your book look a lot better, and your readers will thank you for it.

Picking fonts for your book

One of the big decisions you'll need to make when it comes time to get your book ready for printing is: What fonts will you use? What fonts (or typefaces) you have available might depend on the software you've installed on your computer, and what fonts came along with the program. You might have also purchased or downloaded fonts from one of the many font sites online.

In any case, here are some guidelines that will help you choose typefaces for your book:

Readability — This is the single most important thing to consider for your text font, the one that most or all of your book will be set in. Many designers feel that the most reliably readable are fonts based on old style typefaces like Garamond, Bembo or Caslon. More modern versions include Minion, Adobe Garamond and Sabon.

Contrast — You'll want a different typeface to use for chapter or part titles, and for subheads in nonfiction books. Combining a text typeface with a sans-serif display face can add drama and subtle allusions to a specific era or style.

Legality — Fonts are intellectual property, just like your book manuscript. Make sure you have the rights to use the fonts in a book by checking out the licensing agreement, if possible. Most fonts that ship with software are licensed for commercial use, and there are reliable sites where you can download free, commercial-use fonts online.

Appropriateness — You'll want a text font for your text, and a display font for your title and perhaps for interior display use. You wouldn't want your chapter titles in Comic Sans for an academic treatise, would you? That's a case where the typeface is not appropriate for the content. If you can't decide, have a look at other books similar to yours and try to use a comparable font.

Interior design tips

As many other authors have discovered, there are great guides to how your book should look within arm's reach.

Start taking a critical look at some of the books on your own bookshelf:

- How do they treat the various elements of book design, like the chapter opening pages, the running heads (or running feet, if they appear at the bottom of the pages), the page numbers?

- What do you notice about the typefaces these books use to convey the author's ideas? Is a separate font used for the chapter titles or part titles?

- How are titles, epigraphs (quotations often found at the beginning of a chapter) and subheads aligned?

- How are they spaced compared to other elements on the page?

- What are the margins like; are they symmetrical? Are the outside margins larger than the inside margins? How close does the type come to the edge of the page?

- If there are illustrations, charts, tables, graphs, figures or other graphics, do they have captions or explanations of some kind? Are they numbered or referenced to the text somehow?

This is one of the fastest ways to educate yourself about how books are put together and what might work for your own book.

Concentrate on books that have been successful in your own genre or category. That will help keep you focused on finding a style that will work for you. A few hours absorbing these seemingly minute details will give you grounding in book design as it affects your kind of books. Make notes on the elements you like the best, you'll use them later on.

Although your ebook might omit many of the pages that usually occur at the front of a book, readers expect to see them in your printed copies. It's very important to make sure your book is put together properly. Influential people you may be relying on for your book's success — like bookstore buyers, reviewers, award committees, agents and others — are going to notice whether it conforms to the standard book trade practices.

"Make notes on the elements you like the best, you'll use them later…"

A cheat sheet for self-published authors making print books

For quick reference, here's a "cheat sheet" of common components used in book design. Remember, most books don't have all of these, so just use it to get the parts you do have in the right place.

Half title — This page contains only the title of the book and is typically the first page you see when opening the cover.

Frontispiece — An illustration on the page facing the title page.

Title page — Announces the title, subtitle, author and publisher of the book.

Copyright page — Usually the back of the title page, this page carries the copyright notice, edition information, publication information, printing history, cataloging data, legal notices and the books ISBN or identification number.

Dedication — Not every book carries a dedication but, for those that do, it follows the copyright page.

Epigraph — An author may wish to include an epigraph — a quotation — near the front of the book.

Table of Contents — Also known as the Contents page, this page lists all the major divisions of the book including parts, if used, and chapters.

List of Figures — In books with numerous figures (or illustrations) it can be helpful to include a list of all figures, their titles and the page numbers on which they occur.

List of Tables — Similar to the List of Figures, a list of tables occurring in the book may be helpful for readers.

Foreword — Usually a short piece written by someone other than the author. Remember that the Foreword is always signed, usually with the author's name, place and date.

Preface — Written by the author, the Preface often tells how the book came into being, and is often signed with the name, place and date, although this is not always the case.

Acknowledgments — The author expresses their gratitude for help in the creation of the book.

Introduction — The author explains the purposes and the goals of the work, and may also place the work in a context, as well as spell out the organization and scope of the book.

Prologue — In a work of fiction, the prologue sets the scene for the story and is told in the voice of a character from the book, not the author's voice.

Second Half Title — If the front matter is particularly extensive, a second half title (identical to the first) can be added before the beginning of the text.

Body — This is the main portion of the book.

Epilogue — An ending piece, either in the voice of the author or as a continuation of the main narrative, meant to bring closure of some kind to the work.

Afterword — May be written by the author or another, and might deal with the origin of the book or seek to situate the work in some wider context.

Conclusion — A brief summary of the salient arguments of the main work that attempts to give a sense of completeness to the work.

Postscript — From the Latin post scriptum, "after the writing" meaning anything added as an addition or afterthought to the main body of the work.

Appendix or Addendum — A supplement, of some sort, to the main work. An appendix might include source documents cited in the text, material that arose too late to be included in the main body of the work, or any of a number of other insertions.

Chronology — In some works, particularly histories, a chronological list of events may be helpful for the reader. It may appear as an appendix, but can also appear in the front matter if the author considers it critical to the reader's understanding of the work.

Notes — Endnotes come after any appendices and before the bibliography or list of references.

Glossary — An alphabetical list of terms and their definitions, usually restricted to some specific area.

Bibliography — A systematic list of books or other works such as articles in periodicals, usually used as a list of works that have been cited in the main body of the work, although not necessarily limited to those works.

List of Contributors — A work by many authors may demand a list of contributors, which should appear immediately before the index, although it is sometimes moved to the front matter.

Index — An alphabetical listing of people, places, events, concepts and works cited along with page numbers indicating where they can be found within the main body of the work.

Errata — A notice from the publisher of an error in the book, usually caused in the production process.
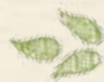
Colophon — A brief notice at the end of a book usually describing the text typography and identifying the typeface by name along with a brief history. It may also credit the book's designer and other persons or companies involved in its physical production.

Whew, that's quite a list! Just remember, you only need to be concerned with the parts that actually occur in your book.

Book cover design

When it comes to your book cover, it's even harder to compete with professional artists who have spent their whole career producing book covers for active publishers. That being said, some authors who understand how important their cover is to the future sales of their books have done a great job creating their own covers.

First, it's really important to understand just what the cover is trying to do.

1 **Position your book.** This is the first and most critical task of any book cover. You position your book by creating a design that's intended to place the book in a specific relation to other books in the same category, genre or niche. For instance, historical romance novels almost always feature a full-bleed illustration of a young woman in period dress, often in front of a dramatic landscape of some kind.

Readers of historical romance know this and instinctively recognize books that maybe of interest to them by the signals the cover is sending. You want to make sure you're sending the right signals.

2 **Give some idea of the book's tone** (for fiction or literary nonfiction) or scope (for general nonfiction). A good cover for a novel or memoir will communicate something about the tone of the book or the author's style. Nonfiction books need to indicate the extent of the subject being covered, and this is often achieved with subtitles and other copy on the cover.

3 **Create excitement with a "hook."** A book cover needs to make a case for picking up the book, or clicking through to get more information if it's online. If there's nothing exciting about the graphics, the title, the premise of the book, you haven't given browsers any reason to want to "know more." What's unique about your book or the way you've treated the subject matter? What is it that people don't know about the book that might surprise them?

Give readers something that reaches out and grabs them, either in the graphics, a provocative title or the subject matter itself, and more people will want to find out what it's all about. That's when you know you've got a book cover that's doing its job.

Cover design tips for self-publishers

We've all seen them. The train wrecks, art class projects, and cringe-inducing artwork. It's the world of do-it-yourself book cover design.

Somewhere between the quirky "cover design generators" on author-service company websites, and the All-American view that everyone should get a ribbon because, after all, they participated, the cover design is suffering at the hands of many self-publishers. No, I'm not saying that self-published books aren't getting better — there are a lot of great-looking indie books out there. But I am saying that you don't have to go far to find the ones that went wrong.

Book cover design, at its height, is an amazing commercial art. The best book designers continue to amaze and surprise us with their artistic ingenuity. But anyone who can write and publish a book ought to be able to avoid at least the worst mistakes in cover design. To help you out, I've assembled my top tips for authors who want to try doing their own cover design.

Top 8 cover design tips for self-publishers

One element that takes control, that commands the overwhelming majority of attention, of space, of emphasis on the cover.

Don't fall into the trap of loading your cover up with too many elements, three or four photos, illustrations, maps, "floating" ticket stubs. You could think of your book cover like a billboard, trying to catch the attention of browsers as they speed by. Billboards usually have 6 words or less. You have to "get it" at 60 miles per hour, in 3 to 5 seconds.

A book cover ought to do the same thing. At a glance your prospect should know;
• The genre of your book,
• The general subject matter or focus
• Some idea of the tone or "ambiance" of the book.

Establish a principal focus for the cover — Nothing is more important. Your book is about something, and the cover should reflect that one idea clearly.

Make everything count — If you are going to introduce a graphic element, make sure it helps you communicate with the reader.

Use the background — Avoid white backgrounds, which will disappear on retailer's white screens. Use a color, a texture, or a background illustration instead.

Make your title large — Reduce your cover design on screen to the size of a thumbnail on Amazon and see if you can read it. Can you make out what it's about? If not, simplify.

Use a font that's easy to read — There's no sense using a font that's unreadable when it's radically reduced. Particularly watch out for script typefaces.

Find images that clarify — Try not to be too literal. Look for something that expresses the mood, historical period, or overall tone of the book; provide a context.

Stay with a few colors — If you don't feel comfortable picking colors, look at some of the color palettes available online to get a selection of colors that will work well together.

Look at lots of great book covers — You may not be able to mimic all their techniques, but the best book covers are tremendous sources of inspiration and fresh ideas.

Taking a little care with a book cover you're designing yourself can produce big results. Look at lots of book covers for inspiration.

Using professionals

Lots of authors who decide to publish their own books also decide not to do all the design, layout and production work. After all, self-publishing doesn't mean you have to do everything yourself. It does mean that you are in charge of figuring out the best way to get the book you want and to achieve the goals you've set for yourself.

For lots of books, that means hiring a professional designer. Some book designers will do both the interior and cover as a complete project, while others specialize in one or the other.

Here are some things to keep in mind if you decide to go this route.

Use book design professionals — Books are something of a specialty and although a general graphic designer might assure you they can do the job, if they've never done a book before, you might find that you'll be happier with someone who has a lot of experience putting print books together. Package design is a specialty and your book cover is a "package."

Communicate clearly — Let your designer know exactly what you expect from the book, who your ideal readers are, name some "competing" or similar books and submit samples of books or covers that you think are good examples of what you want your book to look like.

Get referrals and samples — Asking other authors about their own experience with freelancers is a great way to find a designer. Also, make sure you get to see samples of their work that are similar to what you're trying to do.

Put it in writing — Make sure you have a clear agreement with the designer and put it in writing. Your agreement should also include how either side can cancel the agreement, how much the project will cost, what happens if there are corrections, and who owns the final files used to create the book. These include copies of the application files, like those produced by Adobe InDesign. Savvy authors will make sure they get these files at the conclusion of the project, and that they have the rights to continue to print their books without further payments to the designer.

Wrapping it up

Whether you decide to create your own book interior and cover or to hire professionals for part or all of the project, the best way to make sure your book will turn out the way you want it is to educate yourself.

You've already taken the first step by reading through this resource guide. Remember that there are lots of other resources and trusted sources of information available and ready to help you get over any obstacles you run across. Publishing your own books is easier than it ever has been, and that's why we say this is the best time ever to be an author.

Happy publishing!

About the author...

Joel Friedlander is the founder of the Self-Publishing Roadmap, a video-based training program for authors. He has won the AIGA "50 Books of the Year Award" for his work at Aperture Publishing, and the Printing Industries of America Gold Award for his book design and production. He is also the owner of Marin Bookworks of San Rafael, California.

In 2011 Joel published A Self-Publisher's Companion, Expert Advice for Authors Who Want to Publish. Drawn from his blog posts on **TheBookDesigner.com,** this book has been widely praised as an introduction to the new world of indie publishing. Joel's articles are also published on **Publetariat.com, SelfPublishingReview.com,** and The RIT Open Publishing Lab.

For more information on Joel, please see his blog at
www.TheBookDesigner.com.