



PRINTtips



**Graphics
Printing
Mailing
Under One Roof**

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Helping You Help Us... ...a Guide to Print Specifications

Consistency. This is our aim as we work on each order you place with us. The same paper, the same colors, the same fold, the same binding, each order matching all previous ones. We think you'll agree that we're pretty good at it. So how do we achieve this consistency from order to order? By following the same set of specifications each time we do the job.

Specifications are a way to describe unambiguously how the finished order should appear and can include the smallest detail (such as how the order is to be packaged and shipped). As printers, specifications are as important to us as a set of plans is to a building contractor. In fact, at TechneGraphics, our production manager reviews the specifications on every order to be sure they are clear, understandable, and unambiguous. If anything is missing or in question, the order is not placed into production until the specifications are perfect.

It is the responsibility of us, our customer service representatives, to write the production specifications. Like all manufacturing trades, the printing industry uses its own words or *jargon* to accurately and precisely write specifications. If you regularly order printing, you may even have learned a few - PMS or Pantone Matching System; CMYK or cyan, magenta, yellow and black (the colors of four-color process printing); PDF or portable document format; FPO or for position only; bleed; screen; RIP or raster image processing. You may even have learned them from reading the vocabulary section of Printtips.

A distinct benefit of the vocabulary of printing



specifications is precision and simplicity. To illustrate, think of the last time you wanted to order a multi-page document such as a 16-page booklet. When you were describing the job to have it quoted, how did you refer to the cover of the booklet? Did you include the cover as part of the page count, or think of the cover as being additional to the inside pages? To accurately quote the job, we must know which you meant. Likely the CSR you were talking to asked a few qualifying questions, and then wrote the specifications as either *16-page booklet plus cover* or *16-page booklet including cover*.

To relieve you from the burden of having to learn the complete vocabulary of printing, we have been trained to translate your requirements in whatever way you describe into the more precise vocabulary of print specifications. But here is an important point - the greater the difference between the way you describe the job and its precise specification, the greater the opportunity for an error to occur. That's why we ask you to learn the basics of print specification, and include the vocabulary section in this newsletter.

Helping You Help Us (continued)

Elements of print specification

We need lots of specifications to quote a job or enter an order. Here are the basic elements:

- *Overall*: what is being printed? What quantity?
- *Artwork*: what will you be providing as artwork? Hard copy? A file? If a file, what format and what computer platform? Will the file be ready for raster image processing, or will additional work be needed?
- *Printing*: is the printing on one side or both sides? How many ink colors are on each side? What paper? If a multi-page document, is the same paper used throughout or does the cover require something different than the interior pages? What is the final size? Does the image bleed and if so, on how many sides? Do you want a coating applied after printing?
- *Special processes*: does the piece require special processes such as die cutting, foil stamping, or embossing?
- *Finishing and binding*: What post-press processes are required (such as folding, drilling, numbering)? What binding is needed (such as stitching, spiral or perfect binding)?
- *Packaging*: how should the job be packaged?
- *Delivery*: will you pick up or shall we deliver?

Here is an example of a well-written specification:

- *Overall*: Trifold brochure, quantity = 2500
- *Artwork*: Print-ready PDF created on a PC.
- *Printing*: prints in two ink colors (PMS 185 red and reflex blue) on 80# coated cover with bleeds on two sides. Trim size after printing = 8 1/2 x 11; finished size after folding = 8 1/2 x 3 5/8.
- *Finishing*: letter fold to 8 1/2 x 3 5/8.
- *Packaging*: shrink wrap
- *Delivery*: you deliver

Note that in order to write the specifications, you need to understand the terminology *PDF, PMS 185, reflex blue, 80# coated cover, bleed, trim size, finished size, letter fold* and *shrink wrap*. Your CSR may add to these specifications (by, for example, naming a specific paper rather using the generic *80# coated cover*) but this is sufficient for you to receive an accurate quote and a job that looks the way you intended.

In contrast, here is an incomplete specification:

- 2500 brochures printed on glossy paper.

Your CSR will lead you through a series of questions to get to the complete specifications, but the conversation is subject to possible misinterpretation on both sides. For example, to a printer, the term *gloss* does not mean *shiny*. In fact, *gloss* describes the amount of light that a sheet reflects back and is a property of the *coating* applied to the sheet. So a better term to use when you mean a shiny sheet is *coated*.

Learning printing terms can be easy

We're not asking that you learn as much as us, only that you learn a few terms that will allow you to communicate more precisely when you are describing the job to be printed. We include many of those words in the vocabulary section of our newsletter, and our CSRs will help you with a brief explanation. Listen for the phrase "*the printing term for that is . . .*" and you'll know you are about to hear something useful.

Another way to learn how to write good specifications is to carefully read the wording on our quotations when you have requested one. It is our practice to state the specifications and also include any conditions upon which the quotation is based. So if you requested a quotation for 2500 brochures printed on glossy paper, you might receive this wording back on the quotation form:

Description:

Brochure: using customer-provided print-ready file, print in two PMS colors on both sides of 80# coated cover; trim to bleed to 8.5 x 11; letter fold to finished size of 3.625 x 11.

"... to a printer, the term *gloss* does not mean *shiny*."

"Another way to learn how to write good specifications is to carefully read the wording on our quotations..."

Helping You Help Us (continued)

Assumptions:

This quotation assumes you provide a print-ready file including appropriate allowance for bleed. We reserve the right to review our quotation if the order is not placed within 60 days.

By repeating the specifications back to you, we are doing our part to be sure no miscommunication

has occurred. Since a quotation is binding (that is, we agree to sell the job to you at the price quoted as long as the specifications match what is written in the quotation), we want you to know that we have fully understood what you want to order.

“This quotation assumes you provide a print-ready file including appropriate allowance for bleed.”

Providing a Mockup is Very Helpful

In addition to issuing clear specifications for your print job, it is a good idea to provide a PDF file or a mockup of the piece to be printed, even if it is not yet in final form. Having something to review in comparison to the specifications allows us to check the specifications for accuracy and perhaps to develop alternative specifications that will produce the same outcome. For example, we may have a house sheet that is the equivalent to what you have specified but is more economical because we buy it in high volume.

Providing us with a PDF file or mockup is also a good idea when you are developing a budget for a printing project. Although written specifications alone do provide a basis for an accurate quotation, it is very useful to have the file so we can check for technical issues or a level of difficulty that may not be apparent from the specifications alone.



“Having something to review allows us to check the specifications for accuracy...”

Aqueous coating: a water-based coating applied by a printing press over the printing ink. Used to protect and enhance the printing.

Bleed: printing that extends to the edge of a sheet or page after trimming.

Coated stock: paper that has a coating of clay and other substances applied during the manufacturing process. Coating improves ink holdout and light reflectivity.

Equivalent: stock (paper) that is not the brand specified, but has the same characteristics and specifications as the brand specified.

Estimate: a price stating what a job is likely to cost; not considered binding. Estimates are provided when specifications are not firm.

Finishing: post-press operations required to complete the printed piece such as trimming, folding and binding.

Flood: to print the entire surface of the sheet with ink or a coating.

House sheet: paper kept in stock by the printer.

Ink holdout: a characteristic of paper that prevents it from absorbing ink and allows the ink to dry on the surface of the paper.

Page: one side of a leaf in a publication.

Perfect bind: a method of book binding that uses glue to bind the leaves of the publication to the spine.

Quotation: price offered to produce the job; considered to be binding provided specifications don't change.

Uncoated stock: paper that has not been coated with clay.

UV coating: a coating applied after a sheet has been printed, then bonded and cured with ultraviolet light.



“paper that has a coating of clay and other substances applied during the manufacturing process.”



“...terms and conditions of sale, including quotations, orders, delivery and production...”

Q. *Does the printing industry have trade customs I should know about?*

A. The printing industry of North America’s trade customs are a set of common business practices prevalent in the industry but adopted by each individual business owner. The industry’s first trade customs were originally announced at the annual convention of the United Typothetae of America in 1922 and were updated five times through 2002. At that time, two industry

organizations (NAPL and PIA) released a three-part report entitled *Best Business Practices for the Printing Industry* to take the place of the trade customs. The best practices report includes guidelines for digital-asset-management issues; terms and conditions of sale, including quotations, orders, delivery and production schedules; and a glossary of the industry’s most common workflow terms.

Like trade customs, the purpose of the best practices is to act as a framework so that printers and their customers can discuss and develop a clear understanding of how they will do business. When printed on the back of an invoice (as ours are), they become our Terms and Conditions of Sale.

Knowing What to Expect



“A great part of any job turning out right is both of us knowing what to expect.”

It is very important to us to deliver your printing order exactly as you expect it – on time, as ordered, and at the price agreed upon. While we will never knowingly deliver a substandard product, there are times when you may be disappointed with the job, for whatever reason.

When this happens, please let us know! We both want and need to know when you are unhappy with our work. If we print a job that isn’t satisfactory, it could be because the

communication between us wasn’t clear. For example, we understand an order for 1000 2-part carbonless forms to be 1000 sets (meaning it will take 2000 sheets to fill the order), not as 1000 sheets of paper (which would yield 500 sets).

A great part of any job turning out right is both of us knowing what to expect.