

ULTIMATE GUIDE TO BOOK BINDING



You've done it! You've finished your book.

That sweet feeling of accomplishment rushes over your tired brain and you sit back and relax until you realize it's time to print it.

Perhaps it's an annual report for your association, or it's your personal memoir that the world needs to see. Regardless of what type of book you've completed, it's time to sniff the sweet smell of those words in ink on paper.

Your designer has laid out the pagination, and you've selected the printer to print your book, but now it's time to decide how the pages will bind together.

There are dozens of methods of binding books, and each has its unique pros and cons depending on the purpose of the book. Some bindings are more durable than others; some allow your book to lie flat when opened, and some have a more attractive appearance than the others.

Follow this easy-to-use, Book Binding Guide to determine the best binding method for your book project.

We've identified some of the most common binding techniques, complete with the pros and cons of each, to help you make a more informed decision about which type of book binding method is right for your project.

1 CASE BINDING



Also known as hardcover binding, this is by far [the most durable binding technique](#) you could pick. In fact, in the past, all major books were hard bound. Case binding lasts the test of time. Basically, the inside pages are glued together in sections. The sections are then glued to the end-papers which are finally glued to the cover's spine. When opened, case bound books do not lay flat on the table, which is something to consider.

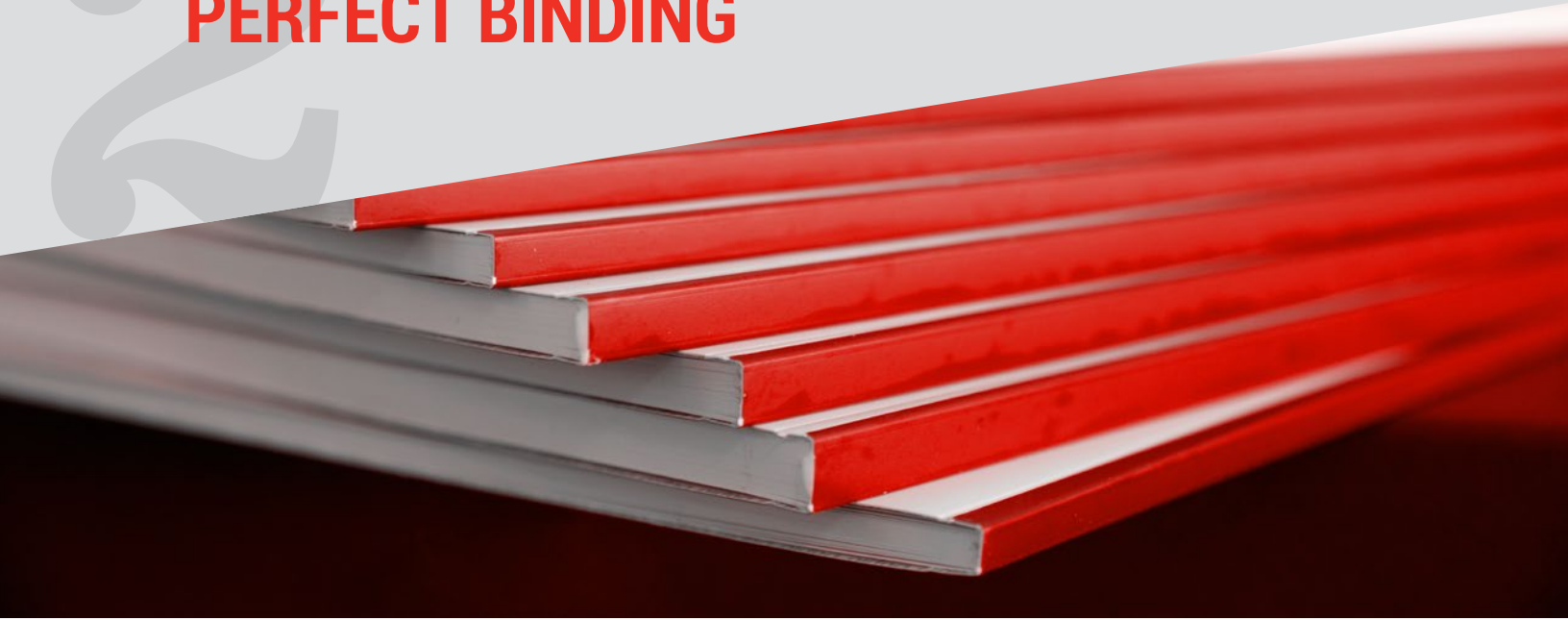
Pros

- Case bound books are an impressive presentation. They give your book a weighty feel and inspire an air of quality.
- Books bound in this manner are highly durable and attract high retail prices due to the finishes.

Cons

- Cost is the biggest drawback to the technique. The net cost of case binding can be several times the cost of perfect binding.
- Weight can be an issue. Case bound books are generally heavier compared to their counterparts, which can result in higher shipping costs.

2 PERFECT BINDING



Perfect binding (also known as soft cover binding) is similar to case binding, except for the lighter weight stock cover. A perfect binding cover is made from heavy weight cardstock paper that is often coated or laminated to protect the ink on the covers. With this type of binding, the cover and pages are glued together with a strong adhesive. Often the cover is longer than the pages, so in production the cover and text are cut simultaneously to create a perfect cut, giving it a perfect cut.

Pros

- It's an economical alternative to hardcover binding, both in terms of production and shipping.
- Presentation is still of high quality, allowing the books to fetch good prices at sale.

Cons

- Books don't lay flat on the table when opened due to gluing the cover to the spine of the book block.
- The inferior paper-based cover also means that perfect bound books are less durable than hardcover books.
- If the bulk of the book is too big the head and the foot of the book will chip off over time.

SADDLE STITCH BINDING



For books that might have short-term use (or those with a small number of pages), saddle stitch binding is an excellent alternative. Once pages are printed and organized, they are stacked and loaded onto a conveyor from where they are stitched together using metal staples. Stitching can be done with or without a book cover.

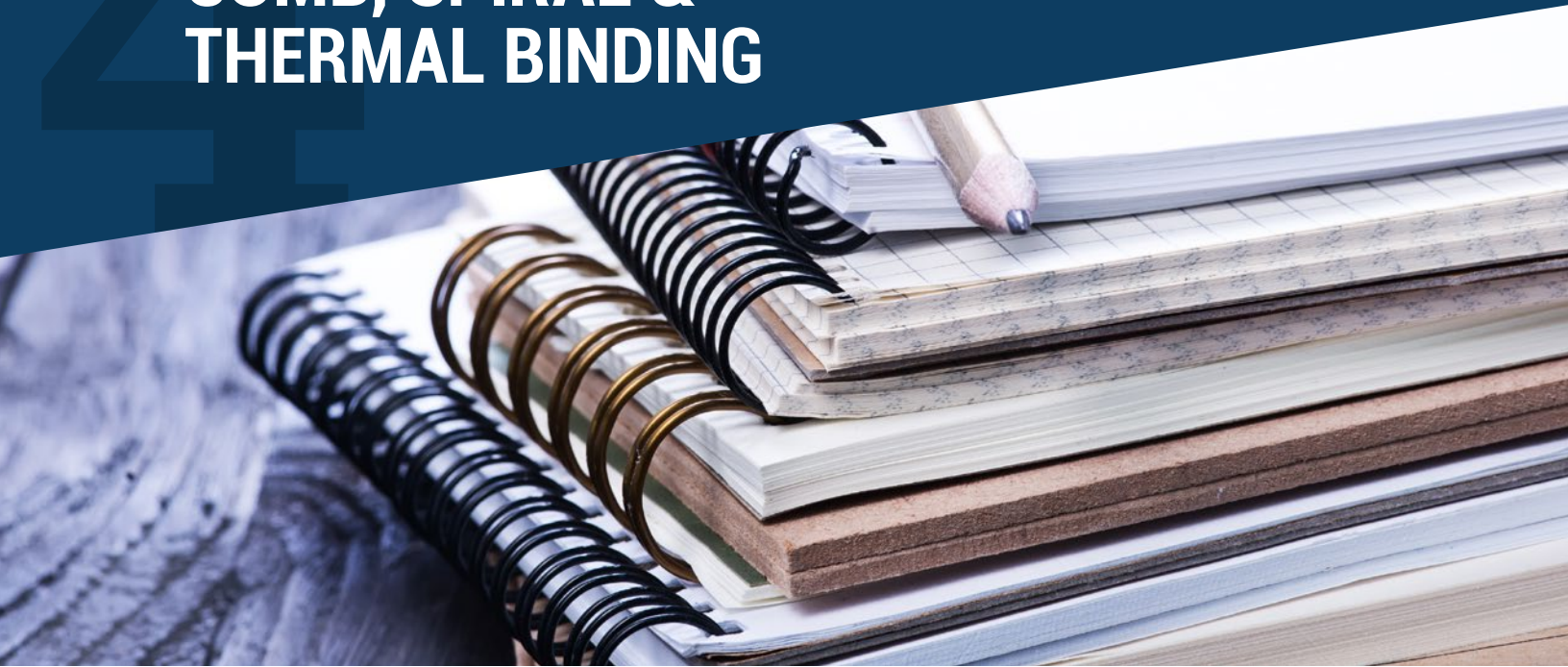
Pros

- This technique is highly economical, especially for small, short-term booklets.
- Saddle stitched books lay flat (for the most part) when opened.
- This binding method usually has a fairly quick turnaround, and can be done at most [commercial printers](#) in-house.

Cons

- When used for books with many pages, the nesting of pages within one another can cause creeping.
- Books are less durable; the cover and pages can be easily damaged.

4 COMB, SPIRAL & THERMAL BINDING



These are the three techniques commonly used when binding short-run books. [Comb binds](#) actually looks like a comb threading into a series of holes punched into the edge of the book. [Spiral binding](#) involves punching of similar holes but instead of the comb, a metal/plastic coil is threaded through the holes. Thermal binding is a bit different; the pages of the book are glued to the spine by heating the cover's spine.

Pros

- For short-run books, these one-off binding techniques are very effective.
- These techniques are also extremely low-cost due to low or no-minimum order quantity.

Cons

- All three options are generally not acceptable for standard distribution and retail channels.
- Saddle stitch books have a shorter shelf life compared to other types of books.

5 SEWN BINDING

When sewn binding a book, organize pages into groups of 16 to 24, called signatures, and then gathered. Stitch the pages together individually along the folds. Threads go through each page several times before being tied off. Once a book block is finished, it's sewn together with another book block using thread. This is called the Smyth Sew method. An adhesive is used along the edges to seal the spine tightly. The cover of the book is then attached to the book blocks, to protect the pages. Small strips of cloth, called headbands and footbands, are often used to hide the edges of the binding decoratively. Sewn binding is most often used for casebound books but is also used for perfect bound books.

Pros

- Sewn bound books lay flat on a table when opened, which makes them ideal for books with images that span across two pages.
- Extremely durable and high quality, the binding will stay together as long as the pages last.
- It is designed to withstand wear and tear, making it an excellent choice for books that will be well-used over periods of time, such as textbooks.
- Books that use sewn binding are tamperproof, as someone cannot remove a single page without damaging the entire book, making it popular for sensitive documents.
- Pages cannot fall out as they are sewn together in signatures.

Cons

- Sewn binding is more costly because it is more time consuming than other binding methods and requires specialized equipment.
- Custom sewn binding can add a significant amount of production time to a project's timeline.
- Using this book binding method, leaves you with a book that doesn't easily open or lie flat.

6 SCREW BINDING



Screw binding is one of the most popular binding methods for books that need frequent updating. A major benefit of screw binding is that it's easy to add or remove pages, making it an excellent choice for scrapbooks, menus, portfolios, or other books that have removable pages. Once the cover is created, you can add and remove pages quickly by undoing the screws. Screw binding looks professional but is also convenient and affordable.

Pros

- The screw posts give you the ability to add, remove, or rearrange pages anytime you want.
- You're able to insert a wide range of paper types into the bind, rather than just using one kind of paper.
- Screw binding allows you to add spacers inside the spine area for extra space to hold thicker pieces like tipped-in photos or pockets.

Cons

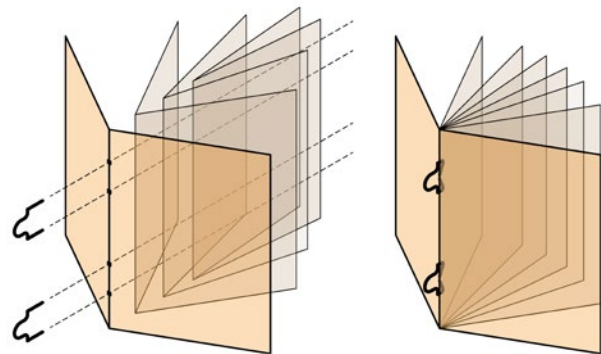
- You will find that your pages won't lay flat in a screw bind, causing your pages to bend slightly when opening the book.

LOOP STITCHING

Loop stitching is similar to saddle stitching, a method in which folded sheets are gathered together, one inside the other, and then stapled through the fold with wire staples. However, loop stitching has the added feature of the loop on the outside of the spine, which allows

the book to be inserted in a three-ring binder with no drilled holes. Smaller loops can be inserted into a binder with a ring size of up to 1", while larger loops can accommodate a ring binder of up to 4" in size.

This is a great binding method for documents like financial reports, company brand books and other assets that will see their time in three-ring binders on a shelf in your office. Read on to find out more about this innovative book binding method.



Pros

- The lack of drill holes allow for uninterrupted graphics and text, which provide a great, clean look.
- If mistakes are made in pre-press this binding method can easily be fixed without damaging the printed pages.

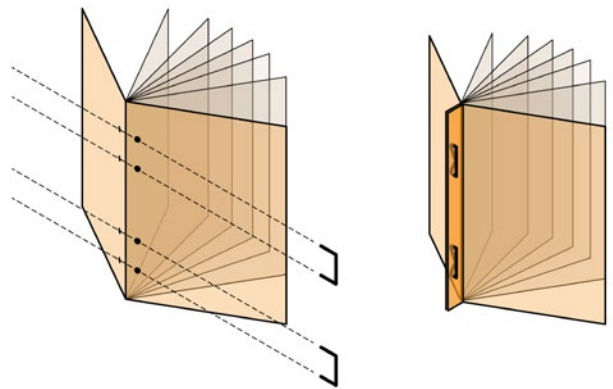
Cons

- Loop stitching is now considered to be a dated form of binding, which may make it difficult for you to find a printer who will do it for you.

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SIDE STITCHING

Now let's talk about the side stitching process. Side stitching also involves the use of metal staples that are stitched into the booklet at two or three places along the spine. However, in stab stitching, instead of the staples being inserted down the middle fold, they are stapled on the side of the cover. It's very similar to the way you would staple documents in the office with a handheld stapler, just on a much larger scale.



After the staples are in place, a cloth tape is applied to the spine and edges of the cover to hide the stitching, making for an attractive finish. Perforation is also a popular option for booklets of this nature. A perforated line down the side or top of the pages is useful when the user will need to rip out pages but leave the rest of the booklet intact. This feature can come in handy in booklets that are used for notepads, delivery slips and invoices.

Pros

- The binding can be untied to allow for additional pages to be added, removed, or for the sequence to be changed.

Cons

- With this type of binding, the book doesn't open easily or lie flat.
- Side stitching isn't ideal to use for a thicker book.

There are tons of ways to make your publications stand out.

Distribution needs should drive your binding decisions. We want to help you make your best book binding decision when printing your project.

Ironmark can talk you through your next print project, [contact us](#) to speak to one of our print experts.



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