Booklet Design Instructions

Working with Spreads

General Principles for Spread-Based Booklet Design

When designing booklets using spreads instead of individual pages, you're creating two-page layouts that will be printed on both sides of a sheet and then folded and assembled. Understanding how pages relate to each other physically is essential for proper layout.

Key Terminology

Spread: Two facing pages designed as a single unit

Sheet: One physical piece of paper that will be printed on both sides

Signature: A folded sheet containing multiple pages

Saddle-stitch: Binding method where folded sheets are stapled through the spine

Perfect binding: Binding method where pages are glued to a spine (recommended for booklets over 28 pages)

16-Page Booklet Instructions

Physical Structure

- Total sheets needed: 4 sheets
- Pages per sheet: 4 pages (2 per side)
- Binding: Saddle-stitched
- Final page count: 16 pages including covers

Spread Organization

Sheet 1 (Outermost)

- Outer side: Pages 16 (back cover) + 1 (front cover)
- Inner side: Pages 2-3 (first interior spread)

Sheet 2

- Outer side: Pages 14-15
- Inner side: Pages 4-5

Sheet 3

- Outer side: Pages 12-13
- Inner side: Pages 6-7

Sheet 4 (Innermost/Centerfold)

- Outer side: Pages 10-11
- Inner side: Pages 8-9 (center spread)

Design Considerations

The center spread (pages 8-9) lies completely flat and is ideal for panoramic images or graphics that cross the gutter. Pages 1 and 16 are your front and back covers, while pages 2-3 form your opening spread after the cover.

Consider creep: outer pages will be trimmed more than inner pages, so keep critical elements away from trim edges with a minimum 0.25-inch safety margin.

20-Page Booklet Instructions

Physical Structure

- Total sheets needed: 5 sheets
- Pages per sheet: 4 pages (2 per side)
- Binding: Saddle-stitched
- Final page count: 20 pages including covers

Spread Organization

Sheet 1 (Outermost)

- Outer side: Pages 20 (back cover) + 1 (front cover)
- Inner side: Pages 2-3

Sheet 2

- Outer side: Pages 18-19
- Inner side: Pages 4-5

Sheet 3 (Middle sheet)

- Outer side: Pages 16-17
- Inner side: Pages 6-7

Sheet 4

- Outer side: Pages 14-15
- Inner side: Pages 8-9

Sheet 5 (Innermost/Centerfold)

- Outer side: Pages 12-13
- Inner side: Pages 10-11 (center spread)

Design Considerations

The center spread (pages 10-11) is your flattest opening, best for critical cross-gutter designs. With 20 pages, you have more interior real estate for content development.

Creep becomes more noticeable—outer sheets need larger safety margins (0.25-0.375 inches). Plan content flow carefully: readers move from pages 2-3, then 4-5, continuing sequentially.

24-Page Booklet Instructions

Physical Structure

- Total sheets needed: 6 sheets
- Pages per sheet: 4 pages (2 per side)
- Binding: Saddle-stitched
- Final page count: 24 pages including covers

Spread Organization

Sheet 1 (Outermost)

- Outer side: Pages 24 (back cover) + 1 (front cover)
- Inner side: Pages 2-3

Sheet 2

- Outer side: Pages 22-23
- Inner side: Pages 4-5

Sheet 3

- Outer side: Pages 20-21
- Inner side: Pages 6-7

Sheet 4

- Outer side: Pages 18-19
- Inner side: Pages 8-9

Sheet 5

- Outer side: Pages 16-17
- Inner side: Pages 10-11

Sheet 6 (Innermost/Centerfold)

- Outer side: Pages 14-15
- Inner side: Pages 12-13 (center spread)

Design Considerations

Center spread is pages 12-13—ideal for feature content, infographics, or impactful photography. This is a common booklet size for programs, small catalogs, and promotional materials.

Creep compensation is important: allow 0.375-0.5 inch safety margin on outer sheets. The booklet has good structural balance with substantial content space. Consider pacing: with 24 pages, you can create distinct sections or chapters.

28-Page Booklet Instructions

Physical Structure

- Total sheets needed: 7 sheets
- Pages per sheet: 4 pages (2 per side)
- Binding: Saddle-stitched
- Final page count: 28 pages including covers

Spread Organization

Sheet 1 (Outermost)

- Outer side: Pages 28 (back cover) + 1 (front cover)
- Inner side: Pages 2-3

Sheet 2

- Outer side: Pages 26-27
- Inner side: Pages 4-5

Sheet 3

- Outer side: Pages 24-25
- Inner side: Pages 6-7

Sheet 4 (Middle sheet)

- Outer side: Pages 22-23
- Inner side: Pages 8-9

Sheet 5

- Outer side: Pages 20-21
- Inner side: Pages 10-11

Sheet 6

- Outer side: Pages 18-19
- Inner side: Pages 12-13

Sheet 7 (Innermost/Centerfold)

- Outer side: Pages 16-17
- Inner side: Pages 14-15 (center spread)

Design Considerations

Center spread is pages 14-15. This is approaching the maximum practical size for saddle-stitch binding. Creep is most pronounced here—outer sheets may need 0.5 inch or more safety margin.

Consider whether perfect binding might be more appropriate at this page count. Spine bulge will be noticeable; account for this in cover design. Excellent for longer-form content like annual reports, extended catalogs, or comprehensive guides.

32-Page Booklet Instructions

Physical Structure

- Total sheets needed: 8 sheets
- Pages per sheet: 4 pages (2 per side)
- Binding: Saddle-stitched or perfect binding recommended
- Final page count: 32 pages including covers

Spread Organization

Sheet 1 (Outermost)

- Outer side: Pages 32 (back cover) + 1 (front cover)
- Inner side: Pages 2-3

Sheet 2

- Outer side: Pages 30-31
- Inner side: Pages 4-5

Sheet 3

- Outer side: Pages 28-29
- Inner side: Pages 6-7

Sheet 4

- Outer side: Pages 26-27
- Inner side: Pages 8-9

Sheet 5 (Middle sheet)

- Outer side: Pages 24-25
- Inner side: Pages 10-11

Sheet 6

- Outer side: Pages 22-23
- Inner side: Pages 12-13

Sheet 7

- Outer side: Pages 20-21
- Inner side: Pages 14-15

Sheet 8 (Innermost/Centerfold)

- Outer side: Pages 18-19
- Inner side: Pages 16-17 (center spread)

Design Considerations

Center spread is pages 16-17. At 32 pages, this booklet is at the upper limit for saddle-stitch binding. Seriously consider perfect binding for better durability and professional appearance.

Creep is significant—outer sheets require 0.5-0.625 inch safety margins. Spine width becomes a factor: calculate spine thickness based on paper weight and number of sheets. This is commonly used for magazines, catalogs, annual reports, and product brochures.

If using saddle-stitch, ensure your printer can handle this thickness. Perfect binding eliminates creep concerns but requires different file setup with separate cover and interior files.

36-Page Booklet Instructions

Physical Structure

- Total sheets needed: 9 sheets
- Pages per sheet: 4 pages (2 per side)
- Binding: Perfect binding strongly recommended
- Final page count: 36 pages including covers

Spread Organization

Sheet 1 (Outermost)

- Outer side: Pages 36 (back cover) + 1 (front cover)
- Inner side: Pages 2-3

Sheet 2

- Outer side: Pages 34-35
- Inner side: Pages 4-5

Sheet 3

- Outer side: Pages 32-33
- Inner side: Pages 6-7

Sheet 4

- Outer side: Pages 30-31
- Inner side: Pages 8-9

Sheet 5 (Middle sheet)

- Outer side: Pages 28-29
- Inner side: Pages 10-11

Sheet 6

- Outer side: Pages 26-27
- Inner side: Pages 12-13

Sheet 7

- Outer side: Pages 24-25
- Inner side: Pages 14-15

Sheet 8

- Outer side: Pages 22-23
- Inner side: Pages 16-17

Sheet 9 (Innermost/Centerfold)

- Outer side: Pages 20-21
- Inner side: Pages 18-19 (center spread)

Design Considerations

Center spread is pages 18-19. At 36 pages, saddle-stitch binding becomes impractical for most applications. Perfect binding is the professional standard at this page count.

If saddle-stitching is attempted, extreme creep compensation is required—outermost sheets may need 0.75 inch or more safety margins. The spine will be thick enough that it becomes a design element itself.

For perfect binding: design the cover as a separate wraparound file with calculated spine width. Interior pages are treated as individual spreads with consistent gutter margins throughout. This format works well for substantial catalogs, booklets, reports, and small publications.

40-Page Booklet Instructions

Physical Structure

- Total sheets needed: 10 sheets
- Pages per sheet: 4 pages (2 per side)
- Binding: Perfect binding required
- Final page count: 40 pages including covers

Spread Organization

Sheet 1 (Outermost)

- Outer side: Pages 40 (back cover) + 1 (front cover)
- Inner side: Pages 2-3

Sheet 2

- Outer side: Pages 38-39
- Inner side: Pages 4-5

Sheet 3

- Outer side: Pages 36-37
- Inner side: Pages 6-7

Sheet 4

- Outer side: Pages 34-35
- Inner side: Pages 8-9

Sheet 5

- Outer side: Pages 32-33
- Inner side: Pages 10-11

Sheet 6 (Middle sheet)

- Outer side: Pages 30-31
- Inner side: Pages 12-13

Sheet 7

- Outer side: Pages 28-29
- Inner side: Pages 14-15

Sheet 8

- Outer side: Pages 26-27
- Inner side: Pages 16-17

Sheet 9

- Outer side: Pages 24-25
- Inner side: Pages 18-19

Sheet 10 (Innermost/Centerfold)

- Outer side: Pages 22-23
- Inner side: Pages 20-21 (center spread)

Design Considerations

Center spread is pages 20-21. At 40 pages, this is definitively a perfect-bound publication. Saddle-stitching is not recommended due to excessive bulk, creep, and structural instability.

Perfect binding advantages at this size: uniform gutter margins throughout the book, no creep compensation needed, professional spine for branding and titling, pages lay relatively flat when opened, and superior durability for handling.

Cover design requires calculating spine width: multiply the number of interior sheets by paper caliper, add cover stock thickness. Typical spine width ranges from 0.125-0.25 inches depending on paper weight. Include spine text and graphics in your cover design.

This page count is ideal for catalogs, lookbooks, annual reports, corporate brochures, and small magazines. Consider signature-based printing for cost efficiency if print run is substantial.

Universal Design Guidelines for All Booklet Sizes

Margins and Safety Zones

Outer margin: Minimum 0.5 inch from trim edge

Inner margin (gutter): Minimum 0.625-0.75 inch to account for binding and curvature

Creep allowance (saddle-stitch only): Increase outer margins by 0.0625 inch for each sheet from center (outermost sheets need widest margins)

Perfect binding margins: Consistent gutter margins throughout (0.75-1 inch recommended for optimal readability)

Bleed Requirements

Extend all background colors, images, and design elements 0.125 inch beyond trim marks on all sides. Never place critical text or design elements within 0.25 inch of trim.

Cross-Gutter Design

Images or text spanning the center spread work best when the booklet lies flat. Avoid critical details directly in the gutter (0.125 inch either side). Test by printing and folding a mockup to see how the gutter affects your design.

Note: Perfect-bound booklets don't open completely flat, so cross-gutter designs should be avoided or carefully tested for this binding method.

Binding Method Selection Guide

Saddle-stitch (recommended for 4-28 pages): Economical, pages lie flat, simple imposition, best for shorter booklets, newsletters, programs, and magazines under 28 pages.

Saddle-stitch (acceptable for 32 pages): Maximum recommended page count, requires significant creep compensation, test with your specific paper stock before production.

Perfect binding (recommended for 32+ pages): Professional appearance, allows spine printing, no creep issues, better durability, ideal for catalogs, reports, and substantial publications.

File Setup

- Create your design files as spreads, not individual pages
- Include crop marks and bleed in your final production files
- Clearly label each spread with its page numbers
- Provide a flat plan (imposition diagram) to your printer showing page arrangement

- For perfect binding: create separate files for cover (wraparound with spine) and interior
- Calculate and specify spine width for perfect-bound covers

Typography Considerations

- Keep body text at least 0.375 inch from gutter to ensure readability
- Avoid running sentences across the gutter unless unavoidable
- Align text blocks consistently across facing pages for visual harmony
- For perfect binding: increase gutter margins to 0.75-1 inch as pages don't open flat

Paper Selection Considerations

- Lighter weight paper (60-80 lb text) reduces bulk for saddle-stitched booklets
- Heavier paper (80-100 lb text) provides better opacity and feel for perfect-bound publications
- Cover stock: typically 80-100 lb cover weight for saddle-stitch, 10-12 pt C1S or C2S for perfect binding
- Calculate total bulk: multiply sheets by paper caliper to determine spine width and feasibility

Proofing Process

1. Print a dummy on your office printer using the same paper weight
2. Fold and assemble to check page flow and gutter issues
3. Review all spreads for proper alignment and spacing
4. Verify page numbers progress correctly
5. Check that no critical elements are too close to trim or gutter
6. For perfect binding: verify spine width calculations with actual paper bulk
7. Test bind a physical dummy if possible before final production

Quick Reference: Page Count to Binding Method

Page Count	Recommended Binding	Notes
16-24 pages	Saddle-stitch	Ideal range for saddle-stitch
28 pages	Saddle-stitch	Upper comfortable limit
32 pages	Either method	Transition point - test first

36-40 pages	Perfect binding	Saddle-stitch not recommended
40+ pages	Perfect binding	Perfect binding required

These instructions should ensure your spread-based booklet designs are production-ready and professional, regardless of page count or binding method.