BOOKBINDING PAPER GUIDE & SHOPPING LIST

TEXT & WRITING WEIGHT PAPER GUIDE FOR HANDMADE BOOKS

A helpful guide to buying paper for beginner-friendly bookbinding projects.

Paper shouldn't be complicated

In all my years making books, no questions come up more often than those about paper.

"What type of paper is best for making books?"

"What's the difference between text and writing weights?"

"What size should I buy if I'm just starting out?"

These questions are valid. Paper has more than two dozen properties to consider when making a purchase. As book makers, which ones should we pay attention to?

This is where my years of experience can be helpful. I've done all the work (and spent the money - *yikes*) to figure this out so you don't have to.

This guide provides a versatile paper recommendation that will yield many different types of books without breaking the bank. The information in this guide is entirely my opinion, but I hope you, like my students, will find it helpful.

ALL my best,
Misty

How to use this guide

This guide is full of helpful information, including:

Important Paper Properties, pages 4-5
First, I'll introduce you to the most important paper properties along with a definition of each and which ones matter when starting out.

Paper Mill Labels & Packaging, pages 6-8
Paper is a worldwide commodity, so there are many different types of labels and packaging to confuse and disorient you.

Bookbinders usually work with fine papers, which carry slightly different labels than the ones you've probably seen on big box retailer packaging. This section will help you understand the difference and how to reach each.

Paper Purchase Checklist, page 9
To make the paper buying process as easy as possible, I've included a checklist with a "preferred" and "good" list of features you should look for to get the most bang for your buck. These are based on the two most popular book sizes: A5 and A6.

If you can't find what you need in the preferred size, then go with the "good" size. I recommend a sheet color of "96 white", but please choose a brightness that works for you.

Enjoy!

Important paper properties for handmade books

The **purpose** of your book will largely define the type of paper used. For example, a watercolor art book may want to use a thick cotton rag paper, as the pages will need to absorb and hold water without curling. A journal will require a text or writing weight paper capable of handling the ink used.

This guide will focus on text and writing weight paper only, as they can be used in many beginner-friendly books.

Some beginner-friendly books include: single and multiple signature books (journals, wine tasting books, etc.), slot and tab, chain stitch, pamphlet stitch, accordion albums, side bound books, photo albums, pocket books and many more.

Regardless of binding type, all paper should have as many of the following properties as possible in order to avoid yellowing, warping or other forms of deterioration over time:

- acid-free
- lignin-free
- permanent
- durable
- lightfast

In addition to this, there are (8) specific properties you'll want to pay attention to when buying paper for bookbinding purposes:

PAPER TYPE

Paper type helps us decide how the book will be used. **Text**/**writing** for journals, Bristol for sketchbooks, etc.

PAPER WEIGHT

Paper weight is listed in pounds (#) with a corresponding value in g/sm and defines the thickness of each sheet, where numbers run small (thin) to large (thick).

SHEET SIZE

11x17" and 12x18" sheets can be folded down into the most popular A5 and A6 book sizes while maximizing the sheet.

GRAIN DIRECTION

Grain direction should always run parallel to the spine, so think about the fold when deciding on a sheet size.

FINISH/TEXTURE

Finish refers to the feel of the paper on your fingertips. **Smooth finish** is a great all-purpose finish.

SURFACE COATING

Some paper has a coated surface. These coatings create a slippery feel (like a magazine), so uncoated is best for all-purpose use.

BRIGHTNESS/COLOR

Brightness value defines the intensity of color on a scale from 1 to 100. A white paper with a value of 98 is brighter than a white paper with value 96.

PRINTER COMPATIBILITY

Consider printer compatibility if you plan to print at home or at a big-box office supply store.

Paper Mill Labels & Packaging

When buying paper, be sure to check the product description or specifications to confirm your needs.

FINE PAPER LABELS

Every package of paper will have a label, but not every label will have the same information.

Fine paper by mills like Mohawk or Neenah will usually (but not always) include the (8) properties discussed. Sometimes, these can be hard to see. This particular package is missing the "surface coating" property, so it is assumed to be uncoated.

Finish/Texture

Paper Weight

Sheet Size

Pure White
Smooth
70 text
11 x 17 L
27.56M
500 Sheets

Color

Paper Type

Grain Direction

Printer Compatability

mohawk VIA

Pure White
Smooth
70 text
11 x 17 L
27.56M
500 Sheets

279 x 432 mm
104gsm

148000

8 08604 04263 7

Acid Free
mohawkconnects.com
Made in USA

Electronic Printing Guarantee

BIG BOX OFFICE SUPPLY STORE PACKAGE LABELS

General use paper, like those found in big box office supply stores, usually have labels with much less information.

The examples below only include the weight (20lb), color (Whiter - 92 Brightness), sheet size (8-1/2x11) and (most times) printer compatibility.

Paper type, grain direction, finish/texture and surface coating are missing. In these cases, a quick check on the product website can help.

ONLINE PRODUCT SPECIFICATIONS & DESCRIPTIONS

Most paper mills with an online presence will have a Product Specifications or Product Descriptions tab with detailed info.

This example from PaperMillStore.com has everything we need + much more.

Specs

Mill	Mohawk Fine Papers
Brand	Color Copy 98
Product Type	Paper
Size	12 x 18
Printer Compatibility	Color Copy • Copiers (B&W) • Copiers (Color) • DI Printers • Digital Press • Laser Printers • Offset Printing
Finish	Smooth
Coating	Uncoated
Grain Direction	Grain Long
Eco Features	Elemental Chlorine Free • Green-e Certification • Lignin Free • Made Using Wind Power
Paper Weight	24 lb Writing • 90 G/M2 • Caliper 3.7 • 540 PPI
Brightness	98
Paperator™ Color Value	CMYK C = 10, M = 3, Y = 2, K = 2 RGB R = 244, G = 244, B = 239

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

Now that you know the basics, it's time to bring everything together under the lense of bookbinding.

PAPER PROPERTIES FOR BOOKBINDING

For signature folding, lined paper should be wide enough for common journal sizes while also respecting the most important rule in bookbinding (grain direction) so the pages will not buckle over time.

Paper manufacturers offer several common starting sheet sizes* (in inches):

- 8-1/2 x 11
- 11 x 17
- 12 x 12
- 12 x 18
- 13 x 19

* There are many more sizes, but these five have the most options available.

The trick is to find the right size and grain to produce two of the most common book and journal sizes: A5 and A6.

I created the following table to recommend paper size and grain direction based on 1) desired book size (A5 or A6), 2) number of signatures yielded per page for maximum value.

RECOMMENDED PAPER SIZE TO PURCHASE BASED ON DESIRED BOOK SIZE

BOOK SIZE	FOLDED SIZE	MIN. SHEET SIZE FOR SIGNATURES
A5	5.8 x 8.3 (14.8 x 21.0cm)	**12" x 18"** Grain Direction: Long Yields: 2 signatures/page *OR* **8-1/2" x 14** Grain Direction: Short Yields: 1 signature/page
A6	4.1 x 5.8 (10.5 x 14.8cm)	**8-1/2" x 11** Grain Direction: Long Yields: 1 signature/page *OR* **8-1/2" x 14** Grain Direction: Long Yields: 2 signatures/page *OR* **12" x 18** Grain Direction: Long Yields: 3 signatures/page

PAPER SHOPPING LIST: **A5**

	PREFERRED	GOOD
PAPER TYPE	Text	Writing
PAPER WEIGHT	28# Writing = 70# Text	32# Writing = 80# Text
SHEET SIZE	12x18	8.5x14
GRAIN DIRECTION	Long	Short
FINISH/TEXTURE	Smooth	Smooth
SURFACE COATING	Uncoated	Uncoated
BRIGHTNESS/COLOR	96 White	96 White
PRINTER COMPATIBILITY	Inket/Laser	Inket/Laser

PAPER SHOPPING LIST: **A6**

	PREFERRED	GOOD
PAPER TYPE	Text	Writing
PAPER WEIGHT	28# Writing = 70# Text	32# Writing = 80# Text
SHEET SIZE	8.5x14	12x18
GRAIN DIRECTION	Long	Long
FINISH/TEXTURE	Smooth	Smooth
SURFACE COATING	Uncoated	Uncoated
BRIGHTNESS/COLOR	96 White	96 White
PRINTER COMPATIBILITY	Inket/Laser	Inket/Laser