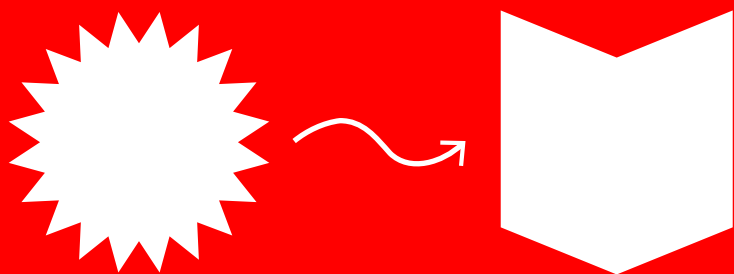


A Guide to Thesis Book Design



Marcus Peabody

GD MFA 2019



Center for Arts & Language

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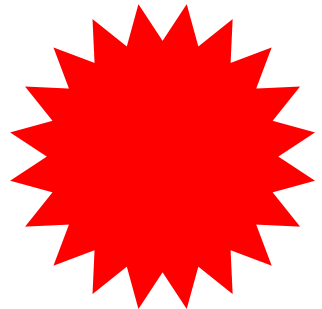
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Introduction



INTRODUCTION

THE CASE FOR A BOOK (NOT THAT YOU HAVE A CHOICE) . . .

It frames your work within a logical organization and structure.

It establishes a point of view.

It will go in the Library, and people will read it.

You will read it, and never forget where you once were.

It can be a whole new piece of work itself.

It has an end date.

SO YOU WANT TO DESIGN YOUR OWN? ARE YOU SURE? SHOULDN'T YOU BE PAINTING RIGHT NOW?¹

Some design and production options require little or no work from you. You can pay a professional graphic designer to do it all for you. Some grads trade studio work for thesis book design with current Graphic Design students. You could even not design your book at all. You could print it 12pt double-spaced Times New Roman and have it bound down the street.

But making it yourself is great. You'll learn some new skills, it will be entirely yours, and the form can reinforce the content. It's something to look forward to alongside the writing.

As artists and designers we are often asked to design things: portfolios, exhibition posters, presentations and pitch documents, wall text, resumes. The book is in many ways more complex than all of these, so the skills you develop while making the book will be widely transferable. Once you have designed a book, you can design anything.

¹ Or welding, laser-cutting, modelling, writing, sculpting, screening, drawing, carving, filming, etc.

You also more than likely already have what it takes to make it. Any grad student at RISD has the visual aptitude to make graphic design. You just need to translate those skills that may have been honed in clay or acrylic or fabric and get them to work in type and paper and white space.

One small warning: Please don't do it all at the last minute. Never good, but especially not in this case. The thesis book is an unusual project in that the content and design are being produced in parallel by the same person. In typical cases, a completed manuscript is handed over to a designer, who responds to it, and that's that. The thesis book, on the other hand, evolves through a process of squishy interplay between writing and design. It is an opportunity to let each influence the other organically and cyclically. Allowing the design to grow and develop alongside the writing will yield a more integrated and cohesive result. But it takes time.

We've also noticed that people who start designing late in the game start to realize the potential when it's too late. Every year people say that they are going to improve and reprint their book over the summer. They rarely do. So, now's the time.

A Guide to This Guide

This guide is more basic and specific than other design manuals. Used in isolation it should tell you all you need to produce your book, even without prior graphic design knowledge. It could also be a starting point for a deeper dive into book design: other manuals that deal more thoroughly with elements such as book binding or typography are mentioned along the way for further reference.

Part one is Groundwork: advice for thinking about your thesis (a studio practice, a body of work, a final project, research, exposition, etc.) and translating it meaningfully into your thesis book; a few fundamental design principles; and a quick, preliminary consideration of printing and binding options. It's good to get this lay of the land before you even start designing.

Part two, Design Choices, dives into detailed design decisions, how to make them, and the order to make them in.

Part three, Design Execution, comprises practical matters such as software and production (printing and binding and having it delivered on time).

Of course this and other manuals aren't your only resources. Plan on asking for help and feedback along the way. Show sketches, ideas, and options to classmates or advisors, and make an appointment with a tutor at the Center for Arts & Language. Tutors can give you general feedback on coherence and legibility or help you sketch out a structure, choose a typeface, or select images. Some tutors are in Graphic Design and can get deeper into the details. Some are grad students who are right there with you, thinking about their own thesis books, too.

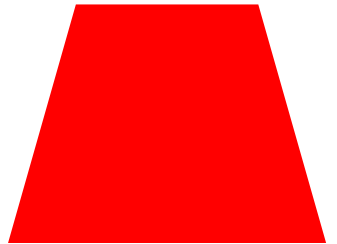
EXERCISES

This book contains exercises that allow you to start out by designing something simple, before committing to the whole book. Each is a sketching project that should generate a range of distinct options for say typefaces or image layout. Go broad with them and make a range of options—perhaps don't even think about your thesis while you're doing them. Then review with an eye toward which are most coherent with your work. If you do all of the exercises, you will have a box of practice scraps that together will inform the design of the whole book.

EXAMPLES

This book also contains references to graduate thesis books that exemplify various design qualities and features. Some are finished books on the Library shelves. Others are anecdotal recollections gathered in workshops and conversations.

Groundwork



1. GROUNDWORK

Thesis books come in various styles or types. *A&L's Book of Thesis Books* identifies five general categories:

Academic Thesis

A scholarly document emphasizing bibliographic research, arguing or staking a position, and contributing to the field's discourse

Monograph

A study of one subject or body of work and its context, focused more on product than process; leans toward art disciplines

Project Document

A study of one subject or body of work and its context, focused more on process than product; leans toward design disciplines

Mosaic Essay

A collection of short writings in multiple styles that cohere into a whole; some may reference the work only obliquely

Artist's Book

A work itself, plays with narrative or genre and emphasizes materiality

If you haven't yet, take some time to look at the examples of each type in the *Book of Thesis Books* and consider which you are interested in, which best suits your work and purpose. This will inform your sense of direction in your design.

Coherence

If there's one thing to remember and strive for in designing your thesis book, it's to align the form of the book—the sum total of a set of choices—with your work itself. The thesis book should extend, prop up, communicate, and advance the subject at its center: your studio practice. It should be coherent with the work.

If you allow your book to originate from your own practice, rather than some trendy thing you saw on Instagram, it will achieve coherence. Put another way, your thesis is not about graphic design. It is about painting, or architecture, or glass. You know a lot about that thing, and you probably have related opinions, interests, and aesthetics. You are now faced with a graphic design task. You can make this task simple and meaningful by borrowing from all that you know and think about your work and translating it into graphic design language. Don't reinvent your own aesthetic wheel. Take advantage of what you already have—studio work, sketchbooks, things you have collected and surrounded yourself with. What do they look and feel like?

Liat Berdugo (D+M 2013) made work about the relationship between our hands' gestures and our screen devices. She made a handheld-size book with a clean, smooth, opaque-white cover, not unlike a digital tablet. Another student made painfully slow videos that built tension, before violently releasing in a shower of broken glass. She imagined a book that is very uniform, that changes very slowly, before abruptly releasing a deluge of information.

Now, think hard about your thesis work. (Like you haven't done that already!) What does it feel and say and do? What is the experience of encountering it? For example, is your thesis

work rational and explanatory? Complex and chaotic? Playful? Modernist? All of those start to suggest a graphic design language. Make design choices that reinforce these moods or attitudes.

Sometimes the translation from work already made is minimal: architecture students will have made posters of project development for crit, and fine art students might have slide shows for artist talks. Even a sketchbook might mix text and images in a way that is unique to you. These are structured, 2D, linear containers for your work. Keep what is already good, and improve and embellish where needed.

You should also build coherence with the style of thesis writing: Have you written a long work of fiction? There are norms for the form of a fiction book (think Penguin paperbacks) that you could consider. The same is true of the traditional photo catalogue (large, hardcover, big images), or the architectural project document. In all these cases you could work with the accepted form (a 6 x 9 paperback screams fiction and takes advantage of norms and expectations) or against it (to subvert, reconsider, or reject expectations).² Don't be afraid to draw from strange reference points if they make conceptual sense. Is your thesis a repair manual? A high-end wallpaper catalogue?

Kate Logue (PR 2015) made work about illicit marijuana sales. The book resembled a set of police and government investigation reports. A student who made sculptures resembling body parts based her design on the model of anatomy books.

² In most cases you will want the work to be complementary, but it is conceivable that it could be appropriate to make some or all of the container contradictory to the subject matter. Absolutely valid, but the same rules apply. Work with intent, define an experience, and make sure it comes across.

Warning: beware the book version of the white cube gallery. While an easy catchall model for a book, the minimal, simple, and restrained aesthetic may not be coherent with your work. There is no such thing as a “neutral” design.

Make a list of adjectives describing your work—a single, central piece or all of it. Describe your work to a friend using these terms, without showing it to them. Ask whether the words conjure up the work and seem accurate, expressive. This list of words can help guide your visual design decisions.

Look at some graphic design that you like. Articulate why you like it. Notice that you already have taste and opinions relating to visual communication.

Do you keep a sketchbook? If you do then you already arrange text and images on a page. Do you already have interesting tendencies?

Make a mood board for your book using materials from your studio work.

Ask yourself all along the way: Does this design choice feel like a piece of my work? Does the design language match my painting/furniture/architecture language? Is the tone of this page consistent with the last page I designed?

Legibility

Legibility can be assessed with a single question: Can you read it? “Read” in this sense includes text and images. Is the font too fancy for a tiny caption? Are the images too small? Of poor quality? Does the background color wash out the text and impede our reading? Legibility is about both deciphering and understanding logic.

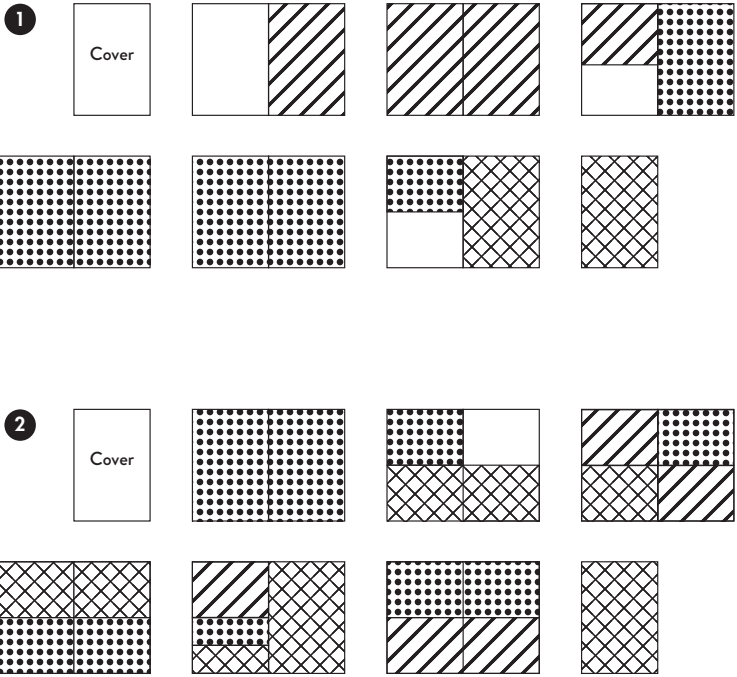
Readers want to be able to see the elements of the project and also comprehend their order, importance, and interaction. Legibility is often affected and improved by changes in type and typography, color, grid, and hierarchy. We'll discuss these tools further in the next section.

Structure

Knowing the overall structure of your book—its parts and their order—is helpful before diving into the details of design. Some of your choices will be designed to distinguish sections. For example you might have an introductory essay, a body of photographs, and an extensive appendix. Separating them visually helps the reader understand distinctions. Perhaps the intro essay could use a colored background, and in the appendix the type could get a few notches smaller. Alternatively, maybe your book has parallel or alternating narratives and respective “zones.” Some departments have fixed structure and content requirements—ask about them early on.

June Shin (GD 2017) structured her thesis as a curriculum for design school, integrating style conventions for a “syllabus,” lecture, and briefs. Jennifer Garza-Cuen (PH 2011) has three sections divided by distinctly colored frontispieces, with various kinds of content (essays, archival excerpts, etc.) set in varied column widths.

Make a flatplan: a structure sketch. What will go on each page, and in each section? Example one is simple: three distinct sections. We might expect some design variation, but the fact that each section is separated by chapter breaks might be division enough. Example two is more complex. Multiple voices and narratives are present on each page. Something (scale, type, color, etc.) will make these shifts clear to the reader.



Look at some magazines. How have they structured their varied parts—column, feature, review, etc.? Is each treated differently visually?

SOME STRUCTURAL SPECIFICS OF THESIS:

Some parts of the thesis book are required or very much expected, though you might not get to them until the final stages. There is more information about required pages on the Grad Experience website and in Anne West's thesis writing handbook, but here are the basics:

- Title and half-title pages
- Running heads
- Page numbers
 - Left-hand pages are even, right hand pages are odd.
 - Page numbering typically begins on the first substantial page of content. Preceding pages (for instance, title pages) are not numbered.
- Chapter introductions
- Table of contents
- The thesis signature page
- Index
- Bibliography
- Glossary
- Colophon
 - A paragraph at the front or back describing printing, binding, paper and typefaces

Printing

This is practically the last step of the process, but it should be one of the first things you decide. Your series of choices about design will be informed by your work, but ultimately guided and constrained by the fact that a physical book needs to be printed, bound, and delivered on time. (Actually, at least three books: one for your department, one for the Library, and one for you.) Certain printing options (particularly print on demand) only offer a limited number of formats and papers. If you commit to one of these services, you are also committing to a certain format. Knowing your constraints will help you avoid disappointment, extra work, or expense later on.

Self-Printed

Print on the printers at school and bind the pages yourself.

Cost: You will provide the labor, but paper and printing can still be expensive.

Time: It varies. Running out pages on the school printer and dropping them in a three-ring binder is quick. Printing, inserting hand drawings, silkscreening the cover, selectively cutting pages by hand, and then hand-stitching (three copies of) the whole thing will take days.

Possibilities: Endless. Limited only by your crafting skills. The RISD Store has a bookbinding section.

Pros: No delivery time, total creative control, more bespoke options.

Cons: You have to do the work yourself.

Anina Major (CER 2017) inserted photographs in a back pocket and bound her book in a leather folder tied with a raffia ribbon.

Print on Demand

You upload a printer-ready PDF and the company contracts with a printer to produce and deliver your book. See page 55 for a few printers that we recommend, and their specific constraints and costs.

COST: Potentially cheap.

TIME: As fast as a week, but expect to pay extra for expedited delivery.

POSSIBILITIES: Limited. You will have only a handful of specific page sizes to choose from and just a few levels of paper quality.

PROS: Can be cheap and cheerful, though high-end options are available.

CONS: Cheap options have erratic print quality, limited control.

Zoe Schein (TLAD 2017) lent her print-on-demand book some flair with fun marginalia and bands of color.

Professional Print and Bind

Contract directly with a printer, negotiate options and delivery of the files.

COST: A range. Meridien is a local printer specializing in very high end art books. They have printed thesis books for thousands of dollars. Allegra on Thayer Street will be considerably cheaper.

TIME: Allow a few weeks for rounds of proofing.

POSSIBILITIES: Endless. Limited only by your budget.

PROS: Professionals will help guide you through the process; the labor is off your hands; likely a higher quality result.

CONS: The most expensive, and possibly the slowest option.

{ Frances Denny (PH 2015) produced a beautiful cloth-bound book whose refinement mirrored her photographs' themes.

Hybrid

And of course you can always do some sort of hybrid. Print your own sheets and have them bound professionally. Or print on demand cheaply, then create a bespoke feel by modifying. Options might be tipping in (gluing in) images printed with alternative process (think high-quality photos, or a silkscreened plate) or signposting a section by trimming the fore-edge a few mm short on one section.

Binding

Hard or soft cover? Luxurious or utilitarian? Will the book lie flat? This is a UX choice, so think of the overall experience you have already defined. Some options:

Perfect binding

Glue is spread on the spine, holding the pages together. Cheap and unobtrusive, but can be delicate when done poorly, with pages falling out.

Sewn binding

Stronger, but more expensive option.

Case bound

A hard cover over a perfect-bound or sewn book.

Wiro, spiral, coil

Holes are punched into your pages, eating into your design area (remember to leave wider margins). These options lie flat, but are bulky and discouraged by the Library. They might lend your book an instruction manual aesthetic.

Velo binding

Available at some copy shops. Two low profile plastic strips on the front and the back at the spine clamp the pages together. Strong and cheap.

Thermo binding (sometimes called tape binding)

A copy-shop version of perfect binding. A cloth tape packed with hot-melt glue is wrapped onto the spine, and the whole thing is heated and pressed, fixing everything in place. The spine shows the cloth tape, but you can cover that with a printed dust jacket.

All of these varieties of bindings are easily perused on the Library shelves. Pull a few out, open and close to get a feel for the effects.

Go to special collections and ask to handle a load of books. What do they feel like? Write out all the different ways that a book can handle. Does one feel right for you? How was it bound?

A. Think about what you want to put into your book. Think about your budget. Think about what size and shape you want your book to be. **B.** Now look at the above examples in person in the library; look at print on demand pricing, handmade options, and professional options. Which option from **B** best satisfies the needs from **A**? Choose an option and get to know its constraints.

Further Reading: Esther Smith, *How to Make Books*

Materials

If you're making your own book or a hybrid, you'll have infinite material/paper choices. Papers are beautiful and it can be tempting to choose a bunch. But be a little practical—one interesting move is good. Seven is confusing.

Weight

Don't get too thick; heavy paper (say heavier than 100lb text weight) will make the book hard to open and pages hard to turn.

Texture

A heavily textured paper might be a bad decision for obvious printing restrictions. But if you have a good reason ...

Color

White? Bright or warm? Shifts from one color to another can signal a new section.

Translucency

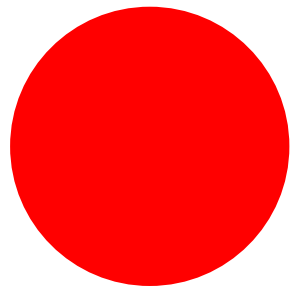
Some papers are very opaque; others have “show-through.”

Not Paper

Books are traditionally made of paper, but rules are made to be broken. You’re writing a textiles thesis? Why not a fabric or woven endleaf?

{ Mara Streberger (GL 2012) printed her book on delicate, folded translucent paper. The phenomenological subtlety mirrors that of her work.

Design Choices



2. DESIGN CHOICES

The form of a book is the result of a series of choices that create a set of rules that in turn govern how the book functions and looks. A book is a system, even when it is a loose or messy one. You are now beginning to define its rules.

Each choice will be made for a reason. Some will support conceptual coherence—what are you trying to say by choosing this typeface? How does it support the tone and experience you defined for yourself? Other choices will be practical—recall your chosen printing method, your budget, and your deadlines. Some will be made for you by your department.

Following are some choices to make, in a suggested order. This is not as linear a process as one might wish. Lots of choices affect other factors, so there will always be some compromise and back-and-forth. The system is dynamic: a change in X will force a change in Y.

As you start to build your book system, stress test your choices with real content—create one or two pages to see how everything really works. Print pages out at actual size and show them to friends and colleagues and teachers. There will inevitably be changes to make to your system: new content dictating new approaches. A new constraint. There will also be a time to break your system, for practical reasons or for visual variation and graphic excitement. But for now, start making choices you can stick to.

Format and Page Size

How big and what proportions will your book be? Is it going to be a handheld paperback or a coffee table book? Each offers a very different reading experience, and would suit different types of content or conceptual approaches. If you are using a print on demand service such as Lulu or Blurb, you will have discrete, set formats, and you will have to work with them. Check your options early.

If you have all the choices in the world, notice first that some formats have “default” associations. A small paperback book has mass-market, mass-distribution (even if only four copies are printed), and literary associations, and might appear familiar and accessible. A book in standard letter size (8.5 x 11) format could come with office-supply, Xerox-machine feelings—which would strengthen a thesis about corporate America, but might be at odds with a poetic exploration of water. An unfamiliar format (for instance very, very wide) will carry with it a one-off feel.

Convention is to make rectangular books bound along one edge, but other options are available, particularly if you are hand-making. Books can be bound with multiple page sizes, or even rounded pages. But variations get complex fast, and even just a few non-standard choices could make your life difficult, expensive, or both when it comes time to manufacture your book. Also the stranger the object you submit, the greater the chances that your book will be housed in the Library’s Special Collections, and not on the open shelves for all to access.

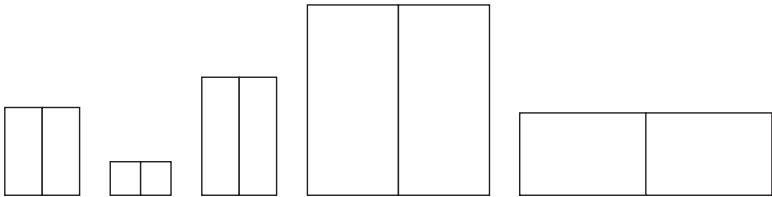
The chosen format has knock-on implications:

How thick do you want the book to be? Assuming a fixed amount of content, a small page size will run to lots of pages, leaving you with a thick and substantial book. A large page size will mean fewer pages—you might end up with something that feels more like a magazine. Which do you prefer?

What are your plans for text and image? Are you planning on large images or lots of white space? Give yourself enough room to work with.

Finally, remember *coherence*. Are you a photographer who only takes square pictures? Are you an architect who designs wide, sprawling landscapes? Either of those work formats could be translated into a book format.

Fold sheets of tabloid paper in half and cut them down to various sizes. Hold them. Look at them. What feels right? Make a paper dummy of your proposed structure: at least three pages, blank, and joined together. Do this at 100% scale (actual size).



Technical Advice: Page size is set in InDesign either when you start a new document, or under File > Document Setup.³

Magkasama by Christina Chen (ID 2017) takes on the large-scale format of a luxe lifestyle magazine, which suits her photographs and profiles of people wearing her clothes perfectly.

Further Reading Robert Bringhurst *The Elements of Typographic Style*, ch. 8 “Shaping the Page”

³ There are lots of places to go to get started with InDesign. Lynda.com has some InDesign basics tutorials, and there is a huge amount of information on YouTube. Additionally, some tutors at the Center for Arts & Language may have time and skills to share. Inquire about which tutors are InDesign-fluent.

Typography

Choosing Typefaces

As long as we can read what you have written, there are no inherently “bad” fonts. Despite what you might have heard, even typefaces like Comic Sans have their place. You need to choose one. Or two. Maybe three or four in exceptional circumstances. How to pick though?



Typeface sets the tone of voice for the writing. It tells your story. Choose one that is coherent with your thesis. Putting aesthetic labels to typefaces—industrial, robust, dainty, beautiful—can help. Or try thinking about a typeface as a character: it has a personality (assertive, elegant, playful), an appearance (wispy, chunky, geometric), and a nationality and history (born in the Italian Renaissance, a child of post-war England). Who do you want narrating your book? Think about your chosen personality, experience, or tone, and choose a typeface that supports it. Or try a backdoor approach: Look in the colophon of a book—the specs on design that sometimes appear in the front or back pages—to learn the names of typefaces you like.

Good reasons to choose a typeface:

- It looks beautiful.
- It looks ugly.
- It was made in an appropriate era.
- It was made in the country of your birth.
- It was designed by a RISD graduate.
- You have it already.
- It is free.
- It is used in your favorite book/magazine.
- You have never used it before.

Places to find quality type: ⁴

- Pre-installed on your computer
- Adobe typekit (free with Adobe CC)
- Google Fonts (all open source)
- A friendly Graphic Design student

Some good typefaces to start with:

- Sabon
- Univers
- Miller
- Garamond

Pairing Type

Having two typefaces in your system can be useful. It can create visual contrast, helping you set apart different pieces of content on the page. Think about choosing two that are not too similar, but not too different. Perhaps a complementary serif and sans serif.⁵

Type can also distinguish between multiple voices in your book: Is there a practical component and a personal, lyric component? A pair of contrasting, though complementary (not too similar, though perhaps sharing some features) typefaces could play off each other and help explain and signpost the two voices to the reader.

⁴ There is a lot of junk on the internet. Beware using anything from www.freeprofessionalfonts.com or www.101greatfonts.com or www.trendexplodertypeface.com or similar.

⁵ Serifs are the little flicks at the end of this C or T or h, and consequently this class of typeface is called a serif. This **C** and **T** and **h** are all sans serif. There are lots of ways of categorizing type, but serif and sans is probably the most fundamental, and probably the simplest, most obvious way of setting apart two chunks of text (well ... apart from color, size, and weight).

Sophia Brueckner (D+M 2012) employs two typographic voices in her thesis, *Enraptured and Encoded*. David Mortimer May (PR 2011) handwrote his entire thesis, interspersing text and drawn image.

There are different ways of distinguishing two chunks of text, and the chosen method will say something about the relationship of those chunks. Example one: You use the same typeface, but in three different sizes. That tells the reader that the blocks of information are similar, but one is more important, or should be read first. Example two: You use two clearly different typefaces (perhaps a serif and a sans serif) but in the same size. That tells the reader that the two blocks of information are of different types, but equally important.

Make as many contrasting “swatches” of type as you can in an hour. A swatch might contain a paragraph of dummy body copy, a headline, maybe a subhead, and some small type (a caption or a footnote). Filter out any that are hard to read. Then look at your work. Which set is most coherent? Choose that one!

LOREM IPSUM

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Hierarchy Progression

Equal Hierarchy, different types of content

Further Reading: Fonts in Use www.fontsinuse.com

Typography Details

How you set your type is the technical stuff that makes your reader's experience of your writing easy and enjoyable. Hard "rules" are most apparent here, because there are some given capacities around how a human reads. Good decisions here can give you buckets of legibility, which in turn will give you flexibility to make more adventurous composition decisions later in the process.

Letters

SIZE: Body copy is typically between 8 and 14 points. You might use a few sizes—one for body text, perhaps another for headings, introductions, or footnotes.

COLOR: Some colors can be hard to read. For instance don't use yellow on white paper.

CAPITALIZATION: All caps is hard to read. Use it very sparingly for emphasis. (Italics is usually a better choice.)

Tip on handling acronyms: If you have a sentence with the acronym NASA in the middle of it, chances are "NASA" jumps off the page. That is because the all-caps are larger than their surrounding letters. An advanced technique would be to adjust the size of "NASA" down one point, or use small caps.

Words

TRACKING: is how we spread letters horizontally, by adding space between all of the letters. The default is 0. Typically you will add some tracking to anything set in all-caps (perhaps +30) and perhaps remove some tracking from any words set very large. In general though, fonts come preloaded with an appropriate setting.

KERNING: is how we tweak the space between individual letters. You probably don't need to worry about it for body copy, but a big word (perhaps the title on your cover) might benefit from some fine-tuning. Look at the words in question. Do some of the gaps between letters look too big or small? Use kerning to dial them up or down to achieve a regular rhythm.

Lines

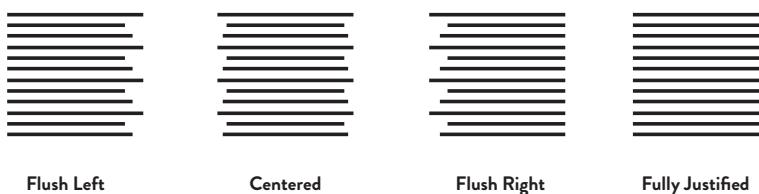
LEADING: refers to the vertical space between lines of type (when type was set with metal, actual lead strips would be added between lines of type, hence the name). Typesetting software will suggest an automatic value. Better here to make subtle adjustments for yourself rather than letting the computer make design choices for you. If the leading is too high, your paragraphs will appear full of white stripes. Too low and the lines of text will interfere with each other.

LINE LENGTH: is the number of characters per line, or the width of a paragraph. This varies: a magazine might have a short line length. A novel's might be longer. If the line length is too long the eye gets lost on its way back to the start of the line and skips up or down a line. If it is too short it is slow and hard to read. A good rule: your lines should be between 25 and 60 characters long. If your page is wide you might need to use columns.

Paragraphs

PARAGRAPH BREAKS: can be done in various ways: a line break, first line indent, first line outdent, whole paragraph indent, or symbols. Usually it is best to pick one, and use it consistently throughout. Using multiple modes (for instance a line break and an indent) is redundant and should be avoided.

JUSTIFICATION: is the alignment of the lines in a paragraph. It is strongly suggested that you use flush left, ragged right type, at least for your first book. Full justification (where words are spaced to make every line exactly the same length, with a flush left and flush right edge) is hard to do well: it requires a lot of finicky adjusting by the designer. Right-aligned type is hard to read in large quantities (i.e., body paragraphs) but can be used for emphasis. Center-aligned type belongs on the dessert menu at an Italian restaurant. Don't mix justifications.



Legibility and Function

You need to be able to read your type. Make sure:

- That your type is not too small to read (make an actual-size printout to check).
- If you are knocking white text out of a background color, that the text is not too small or thin—it will get eaten up by the colored ink.
- If you are using colored type, that the color has enough contrast with the background. Again, yellow type on white paper is trouble!
- When using “display” type (larger and possibly more ornate called out text), not to go overboard; use sparingly.

Break these rules...

There are always opportunities to break these typography rules, especially outside of body copy. A cover is a great example: there isn't much text, so speed of reading can be traded away for expressiveness. Section introductions or dividers are another place where you might use your system in a different, more expressive way.

Of course these “rules” also come from an English-language, American/Western perspective. Other languages and cultures deploy text differently, and their readers have different expectations. Arabic, for example, is written from right to left, so right-justified lines would feel natural. You might want to make a choice that breaks a rule we've described in order to bring your own linguistic or cultural voice into your design or to appeal to wider audiences within and outside RISD.

Further Reading: Hochuli, *Detail in Typography*; Emil Ruder, *Typography*

Once you have chosen your typefaces, experiment with their use: try different sizes and widths for your body paragraphs. Turn the leading up and down and see what you like. Do you want to make a dense, dark paragraph, or a light airy one? Then see what it looks like with a dummy chapter title. Bigger? Bolder? Different color or typeface altogether? You won't use all of your experiments ultimately, but keep these sample options on hand for inspiration along the way.

Images

Is your thesis book a catalogue of your work? If so, you will prioritize pictures of your work. If instead you are positioning your book as a form of process documentation or a piece itself, it might not have a single image of finished work, but might draw instead from another source: process shots, historical reference images, precedents, sketchbook excerpts. Or it might not have any images at all!

Distinguishing your images from others

Your images might fall into different categories—for instance, pictures of your own work and your research or source images. Consider treating each set differently to signpost this difference. For example, you could set images of your work full bleed and full color (in order to give them maximum status and impact) while leaving the research images small and black and white, perhaps in the margins.⁶

Details vs. whole view vs. installation view

Different images serve different purposes. Some might show the whole of a work, plus context or an installation view, while others might be tight crops of details. Think about developing a system with a few sizes and positions for different treatments. Perhaps some types of images bleed and others do not. You could decide that all of your installation views will fill the page, while detail shots will always be $\frac{1}{3}$ the width of the page. If your images fall into two genres, perhaps one set could always hang from the top of the page, while the other occupies the lower half.

⁶ An image that “bleeds” extends right up to (or past) the edge of the page. A full bleed image extends beyond all four edges.

Most Photo students have a plate section with full-page images of their photographic work, while the essay is illustrated with smaller, contextual images. A Sculpture student used full-bleed photos to show a whole performance scene, then small cropped details, printed smaller and low on the page, to zoom in. Julia Gartrell (SC 2015) pointedly treats all her images—from her work to found crafts—exactly the same, making an implicit commentary on how we value objects.

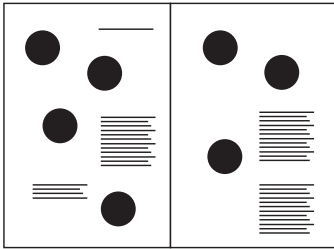
Black and white or color?

The whole book could be in one or the other, or you could separate sections by going from b&w to full color for dramatic effect.

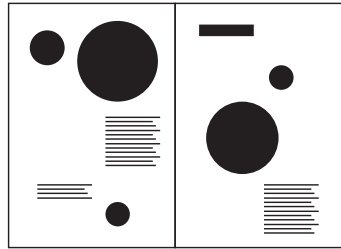
Technical tip: At printing size, an image's resolution should ideally be 300dpi. Check resolution (in Photoshop look in the menu bar for Image > Image size to check) so your images don't come out pixelated. Images should also be in the CMYK color space.

Pacing and Hierarchy

Hierarchy is an element of legibility. Some projects, or thoughts, or pictures, or pieces of writing will likely be more important than others. As you start to make design choices, you will convey relative importance, both at the level of the page, and throughout the book. Emphasis demonstrates your stance: you have thought about this idea a lot, make sure your reader knows it! It also makes for more interesting pages. Think about music: if the tone, volume, and pacing of a song is utterly invariant, is it an interesting song? Probably not! The same is true of the rhythms that run through a book.⁷

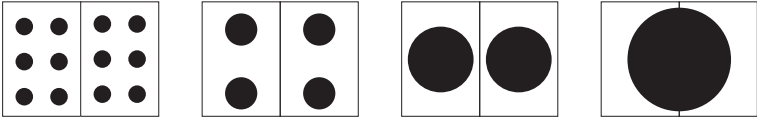


Little Hierarchy

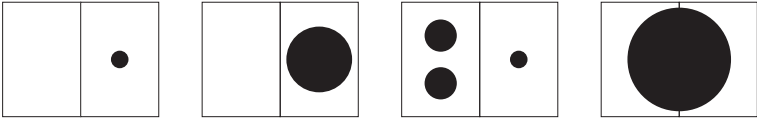


Clear Hierarchy

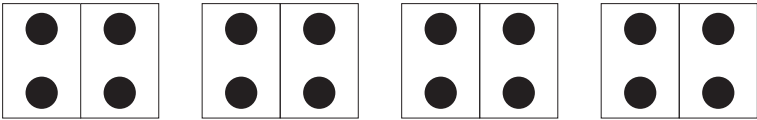
⁷ In almost every case, and particularly because of the varied nature of the thesis book at RISD, there are exceptions to the general ideas throughout this guide. In this example, a monotonous book could make a powerful statement that could be totally coherent with a body of work. So by all means make one, just do so with intent, and let that monotony infuse every aspect: the type, the paper, the cover, the images.



Systematic Progression



Varied Progression



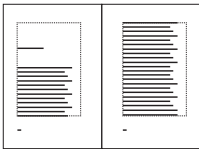
Dull Repeated Rhythm

Diana Wagner (ID 2014) alternates full-bleed images with small material samples floating on a white background, clearly distinguishing macro and micro views. Sameer Farooq (GD 2014) tips in full-bleed glossy images in one section and presents a grid of b&w images in another, creating a clear hierarchical contrast.

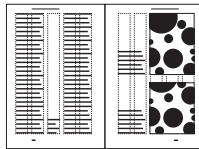
Grid

The grid is the most complex and interconnected design choice. A grid is a system for presenting content; it divides the page into smaller fields to either fill with content or keep clear. Columns are areas to fill with content; margins are areas to keep clear; gutters compensate for the part of the page that will be hidden or disrupted in the binding process. A grid defines all the possible layouts of content and imparts consistency, yet the number of grid divisions is unlimited, and placement of elements on the grid can vary.

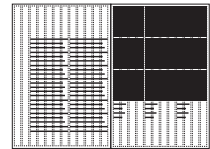
At its most basic, a grid defines margins around just one column, in which all your text and images take up the same set space on every page. At the other end of the spectrum, you might have something like 12 columns, making your layout very flexible and accommodating of a complex set of things. Somewhere in the middle, you might create five or seven columns, giving you potential for variety and making it easier to visually signal different content, like captions.



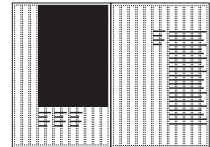
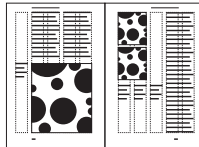
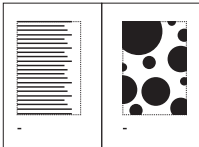
One Column



Five Column



Twelve Column



How to build one

Work out what you need your grid to do, and go from there. Think about margins first. Do you want content close to the edges of the pages, or generous white space? Not sure? Think about the list of words you came up with to describe your work. Should your book be airy? Serene and floaty? Crammed and urgent? Cramped and claustrophobic? Filled maximally but orderly? The grid can evoke your chosen tone, and even an era—classic vs. modern, for example.

Remember that your binding will eat up some of your inside margin (the gutter of the book) so allow some extra space there. Then look at text: How are you treating the body copy? Will you have multiple columns, or one?

What size images are you dealing with? Can you establish a grid that gives you four possible sizes of image for four levels of hierarchy? Do you have a lot of marginalia (footnotes, captions, asides, references, or supporting copy)? Then define a zone for that.

How to use it

The grid will establish the location of repeating elements (page numbers, running heads, text blocks) but it should also allow for rhythm, variation, and change. Don't make the same spread arrangement over and over again.

Should you have a grid at all?

Chaos and jumble are legitimate tones. Breaking the grid entirely, or somewhat, might be appropriate. But remember: a book is legible because it has some structure and order. A grid is one way to bring that legibility, so if you do away with it and allow your pieces to float free, you will need to consider other ways to support reading—perhaps particularly clear typographic hierarchy or thoughtful use of color.

Take tracing paper to the Library and trace the grids inside books. See how they are structured.

Print out things that are going into your book—some images, titles, and blocks of text. Arrange them on a piece of paper cut to your chosen size. Then repeat the tracing paper exercise, this time on your assemblage—does a grid suggest itself?

Further Reading: Josef Muller Brockmann, *The Grid System*

Technical Tip: InDesign prompts you to set the grid when you start a new document, or you can set it up under: File > Margins and Columns.

Composition

This is where the grid, the images, and the typography come together.

Chunks of type (which you have styled in a previous section) are not just plopped onto the page. They are texture that can be shaped and integrated. A text block can be tall and thin. Short and squat. It can be interesting shapes, and it can integrate with images. This is where you can embed a little character into your words, by composing the elements that you chose in the type section (body paragraphs, headlines, running heads, page numbers, etc.) into shapes.

The same is true of your images. Do they fill zones that mirror your type areas, or are they woven into the text?

How should you go about envisioning your overall composition? Perhaps in a few rounds. Make some sketches. Then make options for layouts (either by working in the computer, or by arranging printed pictures on blank paper). Then test those, with real copy. Refine those tests, then write up what you did as a set of rules. Use those rules to build your grid, establish zones, and create areas open for variation. Now try setting more pages; you may need to tweak things.

Along the way, always remember the tone you want to portray. Does this feel like *your* thesis?

Establish the (somewhat limitless) possibilities: Decide on a spectrum (e.g., minimalist to maximalist, ordered to messy, consistent to contrast-y) and work to make one spread/poster/cover/etc. for each end of the spectrum. Be extreme—don't be afraid to produce un-usable results. Then decide where on that sliding scale you want to position your work and make a third spread/poster/cover/etc. that occupies that chosen position.

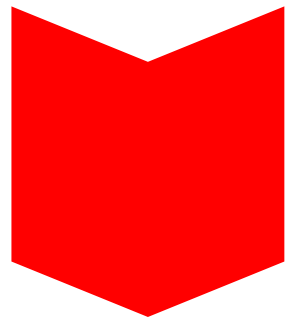
Cover collage: Using the different pieces of type that make up your cover (your name, your title, the year, maybe the date or a subtitle), make as many compositions as possible in 20 minutes using just one size of type. Then introduce complexity by adding a second size of type. Can you create different moods? Try adding an image. One of these could be your cover design.

Chop up and re-collage an old piece of work. Make more pleasing arrangements.

Draw 15 different layouts with pen and paper.

List all the elements on your page in words, in order of importance, to establish hierarchy.

Design Execution



3. DESIGN EXECUTION

If you completed the previous chapters you hopefully have:

A. An aesthetic, tone, and experience goal for your book, as discussed in the Groundwork section.

B. A set of rules. You now know what your type is going to look like, how it will be arranged on the page, and how images will interact. You have probably made one or two practice pages. And you hopefully have a printing method, and consequently a page size picked out.

Now you put it all together. The challenge is to hold to the nebulous expansive world of part A in relation with the practical constraints of part B—to follow your system and produce a book that is legible, coherent with your chosen tone, and delivered on time.

Software

The Adobe Creative Suite

Programs like Adobe Illustrator, Photoshop, and InDesign are powerful tools for drawing, image manipulation, and layout. Each one targets a specific task, and they are designed to integrate with each other fairly well.

Photoshop is primarily an image-manipulation tool, good for anything from slight crops to more advanced things, like altering a photograph's exposure, complex cutting, grafting, composting, and special effects. It is not good for dealing with text.

Illustrator is a vector drawing tool. If you are drawing an icon or logo (or something similar), or manipulating a small quantity of type, this is the program to use.

InDesign is a layout tool, and the professional standard for book design. Projects start with a defined page size, and the pages are then populated by linking in text and images from elsewhere on your computer. It has almost no image editing capability. It works by building pages, onto which you place containers, which you then fill with text and images. Both the containers and their contents can then be styled.

If you want total control over every element, then you should learn your way around these programs. Tools like Lynda.com are great for getting started.

InDesign Essentials

Designing your book in InDesign will give you the greatest flexibility and control, and once you master some basics, it will probably also be the easiest option. Here are a few features that you should be aware of. They will make your life so much easier! There are in-depth video tutorials for each online.

Master Pages

At the top of the page palette is an “A Master.” Any object that you add to this master will appear on any page in your document. This is especially useful for repeating elements like page numbers (which are added with “insert special character”) or running heads. You can make multiple masters, and apply them to different sets of pages.

Text Threading

All text lives in text boxes, but a chapter will run over many boxes on many pages. Text boxes can be “threaded” together so that text flows from one to the next. Need to delete a paragraph? The text will flow back across all the boxes.

Paragraph Styles

Styles in InDesign will save you so much time! They allow you to define styles (for instance one for headings, another for body copy, a third for quotes, etc.) and assign them to chunks of text from a palette. The really neat part is that if you decide later that you want your captions to be blue not orange, or Franklin not Helvetica, you can edit the style, and the changes will flow automatically through your document.

Color Swatches

Similar to paragraph styles, swatches let you define universal colors. Want to make all your blue pages red? Edit the swatch, and everything that had been assigned that blue swatch will adjust.

Text Frame Options

Select a text box and hitting Command-B (on a Mac) brings up a panel that lets you add inset space, ignore text wrap, and define columns.

Text Wrap

Any object can be given text wrap properties.

Find and Replace

InDesign lets you automate text edits. Want to remove all double spaces? Easy. Thesis supervisor asking you to change “colour” to “color” throughout? Takes 10 seconds.

Bleed

Images or blocks of color or pattern that you want to appear to run to the edge of the page need to extend past the edge of the page on your InDesign file, usually by 3mm or $\frac{1}{8}$ inch. When you export your file for print, you will include this extra area, and the printer will print it before trimming it off, ensuring that there is no white hairline around your images.

Image Frames & Fitting Options

Images live in frames. They are rectangular by default, but don't have to be. You can scale the images and adjust the edges of the frame independently, effectively allowing you to crop images within InDesign. Fitting options (accessed by right-clicking on a frame) give you options such as fitting to or filling a frame and maintaining an image's proportions.

Links

Images are not embedded in InDesign, they are "linked"—imported into one of your image frames. This keeps the INDD file small and your computer fast, but it also requires that you not move or rename your linked files (otherwise, InDesign will not know where to find them).

Saving Versions and Packaging

InDesign lets you create a "Package": a new folder containing a duplicate file, and a subfolder of duplicate links collected from around your computer. This is an excellent way of saving versions periodically, and it keeps your file structure tidy.

Other Options

Simple documents might not need such sophisticated software. Common “office” tools (Mac Pages, Microsoft Word, Google Docs) still allow you to do the basics: establish a hierarchy for your information, carve out some white space on the page for the eye to rest in, and put some thought into color. They allow you to produce communicative, attractive design within a more familiar set of tools.

Google Docs

Google docs might not allow the same degree of customization as a program like Adobe InDesign, but it makes up for this with ease of use. If you seize control of all of the customizable elements, you can still create visual work with a unique and specific visual tone (and avoid generic “default” design). Or maybe you just infuse a little more design into your Google doc draft, before you even design, making an easier read for your friends, thesis committee, and you. Here are a few things that you can—and should—control within Google Docs:

Typefaces

There is a default set, but click “Add More” at the bottom of the menu and you have hundreds to choose from.

Page Color

If you want to change this, choose a pale color. A light grey or pink or blue won’t make your text hard to read.

Margins

Documents default with edge-to-edge text. Adding white space to one side of the page will shorten the line length, making your text easier to read, and will provide some room for resting the eye (and for margin doodling).

Headers and Footers

A running head or foot can contain page numbers, your name, or the title of your book or essay.

Symbols and Icons

Navigate to “Insert Special Character” to access a huge selection of arrows, icons, and ornaments.

Lines and Rules

Navigate to “Insert Horizontal Line” to add a line—useful for breaking up sections in a paper.

No matter what software you choose, here’s the general plan:

- ① Set up a new document
- ② Build your grids and guides.
- ③ Bring in some type and set your chosen paragraph styles.
- ④ Make a links folder of high-res (300+dpi) CMYK images, and start linking them.
- ⑤ Start inserting your text and images onto your pages following the composition ideas you came up with. Most will follow a few repeating templates, but introduce variation where appropriate.
- ⑥ Accept that you will inevitably have to go back and adjust everything.
- ⑦ Prototype, test, and proof print.
- ⑧ Send your book to press.

Spine and Cover

People judge books by their cover, so this cannot be an afterthought. The cover should follow the same design system that you use internally: colors, typefaces, image treatments, and so on, but it can also be a place to be more dramatic or experimental. Collect your candidate images and text and quickly throw together lots of options, then refine from there. The spine design will depend on your printing and binding method, but consider it an extension of your cover, and don't leave it blank!

Example Timelines

Below are two approximate timelines for executing your design. The first is generous. The second is quick.

Eight weeks before the deadline:

Research printers and choose one. Work out what the contents of your book is going to be, and sketch some flat plans: options for structuring the whole book.

Seven weeks before the deadline:

Make some design decisions. Translate your thesis work into typefaces, colors, formats, papers, and so on.

Six weeks before the deadline:

Make some options for spreads with your chosen design elements. Make an A&L appointment or show your options to an advisor for some feedback.

Five weeks before the deadline:

Make an ugly first draft. This might include multiple design directions, and some text might still be dummy text.

Four weeks before the deadline:

All of your design decisions are made and your text and images are mostly finalized. Start laying out the final version.

Three weeks before the deadline:

Print a full version, trim it, bind it roughly yourself with glue, comb through it and make final adjustments.

Two weeks before the deadline:

Send the book to Lulu to print.



Four weeks before the deadline:

Research printers and choose one. Work out what the contents of your book is going to be, and sketch some flat plans: options for structuring the whole book.

Three weeks before the deadline:

Make some design decisions. Translate your thesis work into typefaces, colors, formats, papers and so on. Use them to make some options for spreads with your chosen design elements.

Two weeks before the deadline:

Make a functional full draft. Keep the design very simple, and get all the correct content in the correct places. There might still be some competing design options in your book. Make an A&L appointment or show your options to an advisor for some feedback.

One week before the deadline:

All of your design decisions are made and your text and images are mostly finalized. Start laying out the final version.

Three days before the deadline:

Final proofread and prototype of your book. Buy some nice paper at Paperworks.

Two days before the deadline:

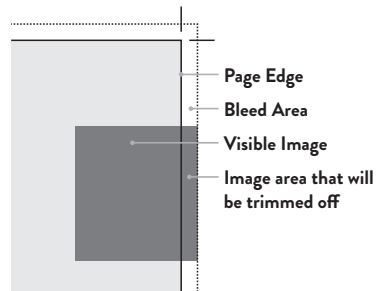
Print your flat sheets double sided in the Grad Lounge.

One day before the deadline:

Take your sheets to the Brown Bookstore and have them thermo-bound and trimmed.

Prototyping and Proofing

Each printer will want files prepared a slightly different way. You will need to liaise with them (if you are dealing with a person) or read their FAQs (if you are using an online service), but here are some general things to consider:



Bleed is the extending of images or color past the line that the book will eventually be cut along. This ensures that your “full bleed” images don’t end up with white lines around them if the cutting isn’t totally precise.

Each printer will want slightly different files. 3mm of bleed is a good place to start if you’re printing it yourself. If someone else is printing it, you will need to follow their rules. Lulu and Blurb will have instructions online, and you can ask a professional printer to advise you. Once you have exported a PDF, open it in Acrobat and double check that your size matches the size requested by the printer by using the “Inspect” tool.

Exporting a PDF

Printers usually work with PDFs, not the files/programs you use to build the document. Your final PDF might run into the 100s of megabytes, and be too big to email. Services like wetransfer.com allow easy emailing of large files. Alternatively, you can share a Google Doc or Dropbox link.

Technical tip: To export a PDF in InDesign, navigate to File > Adobe PDF Presets > High Quality Print. Select “All Pages,” probably “pages” and not “spreads” (depending on your printer), and select bleed and mark options in the tabs on the side.

Print on Demand Printers

Choosing a printer can feel as important as choosing a doctor! The main differences will be speed, quality, and price. Here are a few tried and tested printers and a few quick attributes of note.

Mixam

- High-end digital printing press
- Custom size options
- Many paper options
- Expensive for one copy, but economy of scale

Edition One

- Very high print quality
- Often used by Photography students

Lulu & Blurb

- Which is better is a source of debate
- Two price/quality points

Now What?

Sit back, relax, and wait for your books to arrive. Oh, and you have a thesis show to install! But really, now it's time to enjoy the fruits of your labor. That thing that seemed so remote, opaque, impossible just a few months ago will soon be in your hands, in the Library, and maybe even read far and wide. If you have distribution aspirations, here are a few final ideas:

SELF PUBLISH: put a Lulu link on your website

BOOK STORES: Draw Down Books, Printed Matter ...

BOOK FAIRS: RISD, Yale, Boston, NYABF ...

Congratulations!

Acknowledgments

I am incredibly grateful to all of the people who helped with this project along the way. I especially want to mention ...

All of the grad students who carved out time to come to workshops with ideas, shared their own work at A&L appointments, and test-drove drafts. Your contributions stretched the scope and complexity of this book.

The tutors at A&L. You made an environment full of care and enthusiasm, and it was a pleasure to work alongside you all for two years.

Everett Epstein for doing the hard work of turning a half-baked design into this book, and for your thoughtful conversations along the way.

Most of all Jen Liese and Meredith Barrett for your encouragement. You brought the whole thing to life by creating the time and space for it to develop, by championing the project in the institution, and by meeting at odd hours and reading endless drafts.

