

## CHECKLIST FOR PRINTING SPECIFICATIONS

Success in printing requires scrupulous attention to detail.

Organize all information related to your printing job on a "spec sheet" so you and your printer know exactly what you want. Spec sheets are important for filling out Request for Quotation forms and purchase orders.

- **CLIENT NAME, DATE, JOB TITLE, JOB DESCRIPTION.**
- **ITEM**  
For example, a 16-page self-cover brochure, catalog, etc. Note that one sheet equals two pages. Use pages when specifying a bound piece. All others use sheets and indicate if one-sided or two-sided.
- **QUANTITY**  
Include number of samples as well as percentage of overs you'll accept.
- **SIZE**  
Include both trim and folded sizes.
- **STOCK**  
Brand name, color, finish, weight. Text cover, bristol, bond, laser compatible, etc.?
- **INK**  
Include Pantone numbers, varnishes, or inline coating (spot or overall) for front and back. Indicate if the ink needs to be heat compatible. Does the printed piece have to go through a laser printer or photocopier?

- **DESIGN FEATURES – DESCRIBE ART**  
Line art, tints (how many colors per tint), bleeds, reverses, solids, crossover, butt fits or traps, special-built tint colors. Note if keylines print.
- **HALFTONES**  
Number of halftones and/or duotones plus line screen. If duotone, indicate which color will be dominant. Indicate if photos are to be resized and cropped, straightedge crop, silhouette-outline halftones. Note if they butt to keylines and if keylines print.
- **SEPARATIONS**  
Specify number of seps and if using transparencies or reflective art. Show sizes of originals and final images. Indicate line screens and whether emulsion side up or down. Indicate if images butt to keylines or if they are outlines. Any crossover concerns? Retouching or color correcting needed? Include type of color proof preferred, grade of color preferred (e.g., product match, commercial color, etc.). Also, if you are supplying the seps, check to see if your printer should be given two sets of crossovers.
- **PROOFS**  
Indicate what type of color proofing will be supplied or required from the provider for color and/or position. Include a folding dummy if applicable. Indicate if stock samples are required from the provider and whether a press check is required.

- **BINDERY**  
Trim, fold (type of fold), diecut, score/perf (lithoperf/score or letterpress perf), collate, number, drill (number of holes and hole diameters), stitch, shrinkwrap.
- **FINISHING SPECIALTIES**  
Embossing, foil stamping, UV coating, laminating, etc.
- **PACKAGING**  
Piece wrapping counts for shrink wrap or banding, maximum carton weight, padding, palleting, & labeling.
- **DUE DATE AND DELIVERY INSTRUCTIONS**  
Indicate single location and quantity for each drop shipment. Include address(es) and phone number(s) for shipment verification.
- **RETURN-ARTWORK INSTRUCTIONS**  
Specify number of boards and/or disks and photos/transparencies to be returned along with number of samples.
- **FILM CUSTODIANSHIP/OWNERSHIP**  
Indicate whether changes made to the file by the service provider are to be included in the return of the original digital file to the creator after the completion of the job. If film is used, specify whether storage is to be at provider's site or returned to customer.
- **QUOTED PRICE**  
Be sure to understand the terms.

## APPROVING ELECTRONIC OR CONVENTIONAL MECHANICALS

After signing your approval on the camera-ready art or a hardcopy proof from an electronic mechanical, any changes or corrections are expensive! Use these checklists to add confidence to your signature.

- Is all digital information complete and noted as covered on the Electronic Preflight Checklist found in this Guide?

- On hardcopy proofs (or on traditional boards), verify overall dimensions, margins, column widths, and gutters. Indicate corner and center marks outside of the printed area. Indicate areas of overall screens on hardcopy, even if included in digital file, as a double check for printer or prepress provider.
- Double check correctness of text, headlines, legal lines, credit lines, logos, addresses, contact numbers, and names. Remember, the prepress house or your printer cannot be held responsible for errors you make in supplied material.
- Be sure swatches of special matched colors are available with the file or the mechanical boards.
- Furnish a complete dummy showing diecuts, trimming, and other special instructions.
- Include all transparencies, photos, or reflective copy with the electronic file or mechanical boards.

Also see "Preflight Checklist" for "Electronic File Originators" on page 21.

**WHAT TO LOOK FOR ON A PREPRESS PROOF**

*The prepress proof gives an approximation of what the final image will look like, especially important in four-color printing. This is your last chance to catch prepress errors.*

*Analog and digital proofs are examples of prepress proofs for indicating desired colors, position of elements, or both.*

- Go through the proof counting page numbers. Check how pages back up to each other.
- Check borders and rules for alignment and crossovers.
- Re-examine headlines and other display type for typos and placement.
- Study areas for critical register. Look carefully at each page to be sure no elements have been mistakenly masked out or trimmed off.
- Check every photo to be sure it is positioned, scaled, and cropped correctly.
- Clearly circle every blemish, flaw, broken letter, and anything else that seems wrong.
- Are all corrections made from previous proofs?
- When proofing multicolor jobs, know what copy prints in each color. Are color breaks clearly indicated?
- For process color proofs, are those involved in judging the color looking at the proofs under the same lighting conditions? (Industry standard is 5000°K.)
- Are neutral colors in proper balance? Look at whites, grays, and blacks (gray balance.) If they show a significant color cast, the color is probably out of balance in general.
- How is the overall reproduction of color? Focus on “memory” colors such as blue skies, green grass, and red tomatoes – they are the toughest to match. How does the rest of the color look?
- If spot varnish or coating is being applied, is it indicated?
- Are screen percentages correctly indicated? Are the margins consistent?
- Have you confirmed: Paper stock? Quantity? Type of binding?
- Are place, date and time, contact name, and phone number included in delivery instructions?
- Is the job trimmed to the correct size and properly folded?
- Are all perfs, scores, glue spots, etc. correctly indicated?
- Any last minute corrections to the copy?

**EFFECTIVE PRESS CHECKS**

*Here is where your job comes to life! This is your last chance to affect the final product.*

*Press checks can be demanding because they are at the mercy of production schedules. Often you will have only a few hours notice of when your job will be on press. Making changes at this stage can cost hundreds, even thousands of dollars.*

- Press checks are optional and depend on the complexity of your job. Always discuss a printer's policy on press checks at the time of quotation (cost per hour for press time, time limits, delay charges, etc.)
- Have available: Printed samples if rerun, printed samples of companion pieces (your printer should have these in advance), printed samples of same Pantone colors and photo/illustrations, purchase order, original illustrations, photos, transparencies, proofs, mechanicals, and comps. Bring reading material and phone numbers for calls while waiting.
- Scan the entire sheet first. Match against prepress proof. Verify all copy and photos are in place, and that all corrections from previous proofs have made.
- Verify register. Examine the copy; check crossovers and backups.
- Are there any mechanical errors? Is the size correct? Verify paper stock.
- Check register by looking for dots that may be hanging at the edge of a four-color photo.
- Are screen tints the right color?
- For process color, check overall color; neutral colors, memory colors, and contrast range against color (prepress) proof. Remember to use the correct lighting conditions.
- Are varnishes in register? Matte or gloss?
- Look for hickies, ghosting, scumming, roller marks, broken type/rules, pinholes, other flaws.
- Check rule-up for correct fold, trim, and alignment of die cuts.
- Are the seps, halftones, duotones sharp and clean? Evaluate the fine details.
- Number each check sheet. Sign, date, and note time on the final ok'd sheet. Confirm shipping instructions and delivery dates. Discuss binding and finishing to anticipate problems or delays. Bring several ok'd sheets back with you.