

Tabletop Publishing

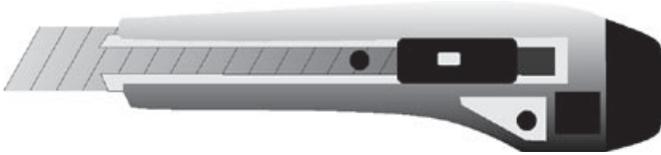
Bound & Lettered
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HOW TO MAKE YOUR OWN TRADE PAPERBACK ON YOUR KITCHEN TABLE

BY JULES SIEGEL

Typography and illustrations by the author

HEAVY-DUTY CUTTER—*with sturdy blade that will remain rigid when extended*



SINCE childhood, I've been fascinated with the book as an object, and the printed word in general. I learned to admire books before I knew how to read, because my parents loved books so much. Reading was their main entertainment. My father was born in Russia, his first language Yiddish. He came to the United States when he was only five years old, and barely graduated from eighth grade. He read slowly, but he boasted that once he was finished with a book he knew it almost by heart. My mother, a high school graduate, born in the United States, was much quicker, but her tastes were not as profound as his. He liked heavy 19th Century novels by Doestevsky, Dreiser and Victor Hugo. She favored historical romances by writers such as Frank Yerby. I fondly recall evenings of the two of them each with a nose buried in a book.

I also remember with a bit of a pang how they ignored my paintings and drawings, and their joy when

my hundred word essay on photography appeared in print in my junior high school newspaper. Since then, my name has appeared in magazines and anthologies such as *Playboy*, *Esquire*, *Best American Short Stories* and many others, I have earned my living over the years mainly as a graphic designer. This has given me the freedom to write and publish only what I wish. It also has enabled me to develop my publishing skills to the point where I am dissatisfied with the way mainstream publishers interpret my work. I am the author of several books, but I have come to understand during a lifetime of searching that I am an artist and my medium is the printing press.

Now comes a new technology that enables individual authors to bypass the production process and design and print their own books. Mmmm. A. J. Liebling famously wrote, "Freedom of the press is guaranteed only to those who own one." A desktop laser printer is a miniature printing press.

Because graphic design is my profession, I can produce a book on my laser printer that will be so close to a conventional trade book that most people will be fooled. The tip-off will be that it looks a bit too good. The type is

STATIONERY CLIPS
—*come in different sizes, useful for quick, temporary operations.*



crisper and the pictures are richer.

It's a function of the distribution system. The book has to fit a slot, and the slot must be instantly recognizable by the cover alone. Since the title of my latest book, *Mad Laughter*, mentions laughter, the cover must be wild and wacky, even though my humor is so dry it makes Death Valley Melba toast look squishy.

I don't want my book to be wild and wacky. I want it to be *Mad Laughter*. That's one of the reasons why I am publishing it myself. But I don't want it to look like some typical iUniverse production either. That is not a trivial task, believe me.

One of my passions has been to produce a book at home that looks exactly like a trade paperback. I don't have a workshop and I don't have professional tools. Yet

I've managed to come up with a technique that produces a surprisingly machine-made look.

For those who share my obsession, but don't want to spend the rest of their lives learning bookbinding (and no less than a lifetime suffices, believe me), here are step by step instructions for making a trade paperback book on your kitchen table.

[1] *Design and print the text block*

Design your book in a program such as InDesign CS that comes with a utility for imposing the pages two-up on a letter-sized sheet. Choose saddle-stitch option, just as if you were printing a pamphlet, even though your book has a lot more pages. Print the odd pages first. Then turn over the stack and print the even pages.

This will actually be the most demanding part of the process. Unless you have a duplexing printer that prints both sides of the page automatically, you are going to have to watch every single sheet go through the second run. Practice stopping printing before you start this. You have to be quick to stop printing if the printer should

grab two pages at a time. You will always spoil a few pages before stopping the printing. Then you have to go back and reprint where you left off. Don't do this when children are present unless you want to educate them in the art of cursing and foot-stamping and other expressions of intense frustration.

When finished printing, the pages will be in the correct order for stapling down the middle and folding, but instead, we are going to cut the book down the center.

[2] Cutting

This is considerably easier than printing, but it does have its frustrating moments. Never drink alcoholic beverages or use mind-altering substances when cutting. Even if you don't remove a fingertip, you will surely nick yourself and get blood on the pages. If so, go back to step one when sober, unless you are a performance artist, in which case the blood will be part of the work of art.

In the illustration, I've made a jig for holding the text block while you work on it. I used a cardboard box that I cut down to size. I also cut two half-letter sheets of old binders board for protective guards, but you can also use any sturdy cardboard of the right thickness.

Prepare the book for cutting by carefully jogging the stack so that it squares up all around. Then slide the book into the jig so that the narrow end of the stack fits snugly against the cardboard back. It's a good idea to use a simple fastener such as a

plastic clothes pin or a wing style paper clip to fix the stack in place. Use cardboard strips as guards to avoid marking the paper.

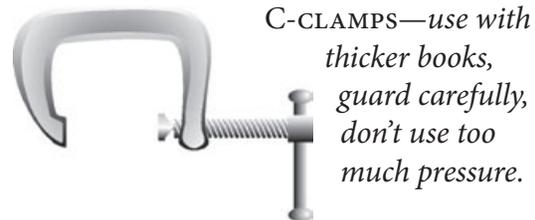
Put one piece of cardboard under the stack to keep it level. Put the steel rule in the correct position on top of the stack. Put the other sheet of cardboard on top of the ruler. With your non-cutting hand, firmly press down on the cardboard, and cut the stack in half, using a heavy-duty matte knife with the blade extended.

This will result in two stacks. Lay them side by side with the center pages up. Turn one on top of the other. Voila! A text block.

[3] Gluing the text block

Place one sheet of the cardboard into the jig. Slide the text block in on top of it with the binding side toward the back. This may seem counter-intuitive, but that's the way you have to do it. No matter how carefully you've cut the book, one side is going to be a little ragged. You want that side to be the outside. The binding side must be as square and smooth as possible. Using the jig, square up the pages.

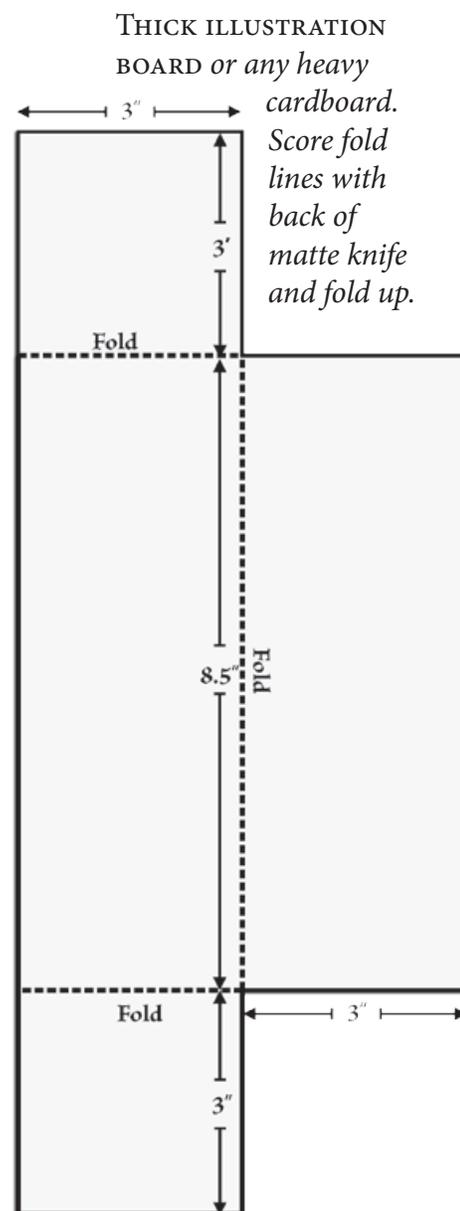
When you have this arranged satisfactorily, put the other cardboard on top of the stack. Carefully pull both cardboards back about a 1/16-inch from the binding side without disrupting the pages. Use clamps or fasteners to hold the stack tight. This is kind of tricky, as the pages will move a little, but you must try to get it right.



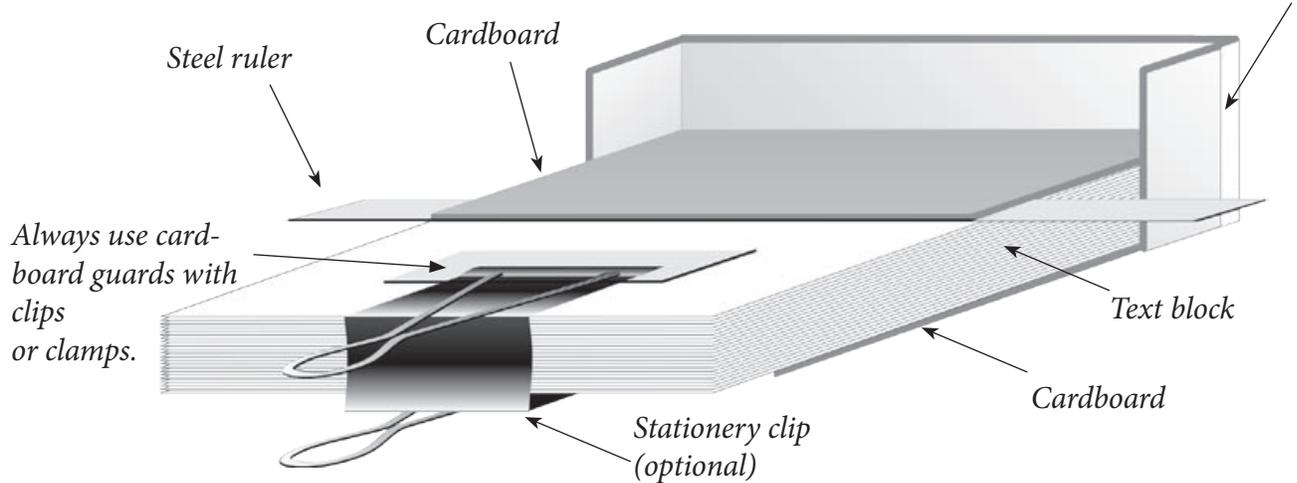
C-CLAMPS—use with thicker books, guard carefully, don't use too much pressure.



ALLIGATOR CLIPS—for thin to medium books. Take special care to use thick guards.



Corners of jig are taped, not glued. Don't worry about appearances. It's just a disposable tool.



Now turn the stack over, so that the binding side is facing out. Use a clamp to fix it into the jig. With the matte knife, cut diagonal slashes across the binding side at about 3/8-inch intervals. Go back and do it again at the opposite angle. They don't have to be very neat, but they should not be too deep.

Apply the glue. Let it dry at least an hour and repeat. You can strengthen the binding by cutting five shallow grooves across the spine with a back saw (or a serrated kitchen knife) and embedding cords in them and then adding a final coat of adhesive. For maximum strength, use a strip of gauze cut to the fit the width of the spine.

[4] *The cover*

Remove all clamps and measure the thickness of the text block. Adjust the cover layout so that the width of spine equals the thickness of the text block plus barely enough extra to accommodate the thickness of the cover stock. Add crop marks to indicate the folds and where to cut the cover. You can print

the cover on legal size stock on almost any printer. If so, the fold marks can go inside the printing area. If you use 1/2-point rules, they will tend to disappear when you fold the cover. If this bothers you, go to a copy shop and have them print the cover on larger stock, so that you can put all crop marks where they belong.

Spray the cover with a protective coating or have the copy shop laminate the outside with the thinnest material they have. Do not let them laminate both sides. They can use a piece of paper to keep the inside from adhering to the inside. Trim the cover to the outside dimensions of the crop marks and the inside laminate will come off.

If you do not have a light box, tape the cover to a window printed side facing the glass. Copy the crop marks for the spine. Take the cover down and rule lines to indicate the width of the spine on the inside of the cover. It's a good idea to use a T-square and triangle to do this, but it can be done with just a straight edge if you are the meticulous type. Using the back of the matte knife,

gently and very precisely score along the lines. Trim the cover horizontally to the crop lines. When trimming the verticals, leave about an 1/8th inch extra.

Place the cover on the text block. Fold the cover to fit around the text block. Remove the text block. Very carefully apply glue to the inside of the spine. Try not to go outside the scored lines. This usually results in the glue spreading just enough to help support the cover to the edges of the text block. Apply a light coat of glue to the spine of the text block. Insert the text block in the cover, making sure that the spine fits tightly. Use your finger to press the cover to the spine.

Place the book between the cardboard sheets and put it in the jig with the spine against the inside back of the jig. Apply pressure with the clamps or fasteners. Allow to dry overnight with the spine down. When fully dry, remove from

jig. If the fore edge of the book has come out square (very unlikely) you can trim the excess at home. With the book flat on your cutting surface, place the straight edge between the text block and the bottom cover and trim the excess edges. Turn over and repeat.

In the more usual event that the fore edge is ragged, take it to a print shop and have them trim it for you on their guillotine.

That's it. You now have a book! Your friends will be amazed. There will be errors that you will see, but they won't. It will be easier next time around.

