



Digital or Offset Printing?

Many authors ask whether they should consider digital or offset printing for their projects. As with anything, the shortest answer is, “It depends.” Here’s a comparison of the two methods that may make the decision a little easier. Some of the terminology is print industry jargon. Please ask about any terms you need clarified.

	Digital	Offset
Best for	Small quantities; variable text or images; fast turnaround (finishing not included); relatively inexpensive colour	Larger quantities; photos, line screens, narrow lines or small dots; accurate colour; one or two-colour printing
Print gets to paper via	Toner	Inks
Waste/overage	Limited	Up to 10%
Pages printed at one time	Usually one, limited by maximum/minimum sheet size	Printed pages may be “ganged” on press sheets to save money/time, and cut to size later
Paper size	Maximum 12 x 18”	No minimum; maximum based on press sheet or equipment size
Paper orientation (grain)	Generally long axis of sheet: printing two smaller pages per sheet results in crossgrain pages	Adjustable by changing press sheet orientation
Paper selection	Limited	Wide
Maximum resolution	600 dpi (300 dpi standard)	2400 dpi
Hard copy proofing	On actual paper stock, WYSIWYG	May be digital output from imagesetter: lower resolution or less accurate colour than final
Colour gamut	Infinite, but cannot produce spot colours	“Process” plus spot colours
Known colour issues	Colours may shift (especially blues); solid areas of colour may show mottled effect	Mid-blues (formulated using Process Blue) can streak or smear if not dried correctly before finishing
Most economical print run	1-300	300+ units (price breaks at 500 and 1000)
Quality of finished product	Varies with supplier	High
Known finishing issues	Feed “joggle” can produce misaligned printed sheets, especially on heavy stock; lamination sticks unevenly to sheets with full coverage (bleeds); colour on covers will crack at perfect bind edges unless laminated	See colour issues above.
Cost per page printed	Fixed throughout run	Decreases as quantity increases
Reprint cost	Same as original	May be lower than original