

[Bound Together: The Art of Bookbinding](#)

Imagine having to read a book that has 1000 pages long. That, in itself, may be a daunting task.

Now, imagine having to read it with all its pages falling off! Close to impossible!

Bookbinding is the art of assembling a book from separate sheets of paper. If a book does not go through bookbinding, it cannot be properly called a book.

Historical

The art of bookbinding goes back to the times of the ancient Romans. These Romans created simple books called codices (codex in the singular term). Each codex would be bound by sewing sheets of vellum together. This was a significant advancement from the times when rolled-up papyrus or vellum scrolls were used.

The Romans quickly found out that codices were easier to handle and write on, not to mention easier to read.

Later on, books were bound using hard covers that would sandwich the pages to be bound. However, stitching was still the method used to fasten the pages together. They were created by stitching folded sheets at the seam. During this period, there were no standards on creating books; so pretty every book that was bound was a unique creation that would vary from other books in size and style.

With the advent of modern printing presses, bookbinding began to evolve into a standardized industry somewhat. However, pages still varied considerably.

Nowadays, bookbinding is a highly standardized art. Today's technology allows for binding processes to be performed with similar quality.

Modern commercial binding

There are five major categories of bookbinding nowadays: the hardcover, the paperback, the cardboard article, and the sewn book, and the comb-bound book perfect bound.

Hardcovers or hardbound books have rigid covers that are stitched at the spine. Looking from the top of the spine, the book can be seen to consist of a number of signatures bound together. When the book is opened in the middle of a signature, the binding threads are all visible.

A paperback book consists of a number of signatures or individual leaves between covers of much heavier paper, glued together at the spine with a strong flexible glue. This is also known as perfect binding.

A cardboard article looks like a hardbound book at first sight, but in reality it is closer to the paperback in construction. Cardboard articles can be called paperbacks with harder covers. They are not as durable as hardbound books and usually fall apart after little use.

A sewn book is constructed in the same way as a hardbound book, except that it lacks the hard covers. The binding is as durable as a hardbound book.

A comb-bound book is made of individual sheets. These sheets each have a line of slits punched near the bound edge. A curled plastic "comb" is then inserted into the slits to hold the sheets together. Comb binding allows a book to be disassembled and reassembled by hand without damage.

Magazines are considered less permanent than books. Therefore, the binding methods for such are usually of lesser quality. Most magazines are bound together by staples that hold together its page spreads. Since magazines have fewer pages, stapling is sufficient to bind its pages together.

Even with the advent of e-books and electronic means for publishing written materials, books still remain the reading material of choice for the majority of the population. It remains to be seen how today's ever changing technology will change the ancient art and modern wonder of bookbinding.

About the Author

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