

Top 4 decisions to make before starting your family history book project

PRUDENCE

Have you ever tried to create a family history book? But it was more challenging than you originally anticipated. Maybe you opened a program and just started adding images and words, but you weren't really show where they should sit on the page. Or perhaps you bought a template that you liked the look of that wasn't quite the right size and didn't come with any instructions on how to use it.

Or maybe you just haven't even started yet because the whole thing is overwhelming and you don't have the confidence to believe that you can create a book. Let's turn all that around. As a graphic designer, I have created hundreds of multi-page books from 30 pages to 200 or more, and I've made a few mistakes in my time. So today, on episode 36 of The Art of Family History, I'm going to share with you the preplanning steps that I take to ensure that my project always works out as expected.

Keep watching to learn why you should start with the end result in mind and work backwards. And the four crucial decisions to make before you put your finger on the keyboard. Watch until the end to learn how making these critical decisions will help you become a more confident creator so you'll be able to produce legacy keepsakes you're proud of before you know it.

INTRODUCTION

Is this your first time watching one of my videos? If so, let me quickly introduce myself. Hello, I'm Prudence, The Creative Family Historian. I'm a graphic designer who helps genealogists — like you — bring their family history to life by converting research into stories and beautiful heritage keepsakes. On this channel, I provide tips on family history productivity, organisation, writing and design, as well as share my current journey as I undertake a genealogy reset.

And if you're a regular visitor to this channel, welcome back. Are you enjoying my family history content and want to hear more from me? Then hit subscribe and the notification bell so you get updated every time I upload a video. And please consider giving this video a thumbs up to let me know you enjoy the topic and would like to see more content like this.

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I talk a lot about the planning steps you must take before you actually create your family history book. These are necessary decisions to ensure your project turns out the way you expect it to. By that I mean that the final physical product looks like the designs that inspired you. Whether it's a photo you found on Pinterest or a physical book on your coffee table or shelf, that inspiration or idea is the outcome you're expecting.

It might be a specific element from several different sources, such as the binding, font choice, photo treatment, or the overall vibe of one entire book. Those are the things that will come to mind when visualizing how the book will look. So it's important to identify and document those decisions to set yourself up to successfully achieve that goal. Several years ago, a colleague created a book for his mother.

He was inspired by other family history books and planned to make one with a similar look and feel. He gathered all the content—stories, photos and memorabilia. Opened a blank Microsoft PowerPoint document and began to lay out the book. When it was done, he sent the file to print and discovered some crucial problems with the file. The dimensions didn't fit any standard paper size.

The images stopped at pages edge causing white strips when printed. Text and pictures went to the edge on all sides, so content was lost in the binding. The fix was a stressful re-size of the file, which required additional pages and significant adjustments. Things that could have been avoided if my colleague had made these four decisions before opening Microsoft PowerPoint.

Number one, starting with deciding the size of the book. So that's the measurement, the width and height of the page. However you may know it by either name or dimensions. For example, a name would be A4 or Letter and dimensions either 210 by 297 millimeters or eight and a half by 11 inches. I can't stress this enough.

Size matters. Especially when you intend to print the end result. You want to set out the artwork file to the exact dimensions as the final product. Companies like Shutterfly, Blurb and Lulu provide affordable options to print family history books. And if you plan to take advantage of the deals, you'll have a limited number of choices available. Therefore, your artwork will need to meet their requirements.

If it doesn't, they will need to be re-sized, which can be a lot of work. Also, depending on the size, it may not look exactly the same as the original version. Plus, if you're using a pre designed template, it may not be easy or possible to recycle the pages. You'll need to consider postage costs when choosing the final size. For example, will you be mailing these books to relatives? Larger, unusual sized books can be more expensive to ship. So determine the size you'll make the book and then create the artwork file. Do this by investigating your options for templates and printers so you can see what typical sizes are available. Then you can confidently choose a size that matches what you have in mind.

So before you start work on your family history book, invest time in investigating options for typical sizes, for templates and printed books. This will help you avoid fiddly and time consuming efforts to resize the artwork files and make it possible to keep production and postage costs down. Number two, the next decision is whether to use a pre-designed template or create your own.

A template is a pre formatted file that can be edited to produce other documents. A document is a single use file created for a specific purpose and populated with unique content. Templates can be used once or multiple times. They include place holders that indicate where to insert specific elements, standard text or images. So it becomes a guide you'll use for layout and formatting.

Working without a template means inconsistencies creep in so margins may wander, styles vary and image position changes from page to page. The template does the heavy lifting for you with set margins, guides and placeholders. So all that's left is to decide which layout to use and what copy to add. When formatting or laying out any book using a template makes the process more efficient, ensures consistency and saves time overall.

You can choose, however, whether to design it for yourself or purchase a pre-designed template from an online marketplace. Decide whether you'll design and develop your own base template or will buy one that's ready to use. Designing templates can be time consuming as it requires concepts and the setup of the final page grid layouts. Therefore, if you're a non designer and don't have much time, you'll probably want to buy a template.

I've got a video about conducting a pre-purchase review on templates, so you get the right one for your project. You'll see a link to that on screen now and in the description below. If you plan to make your own template, you'll want to create a list of printer specs before you start. So one of the crucial decisions you'll want to make before you begin the project is about the template you'll use for the project.

Will you make your own or buy one? And number three, how will the book be bound? So print binding is the term to describe the covering or method used to hold pages together. And there are several methods available to do this, such as gluing the pages to the spine, stitching them together with thread or staples, utilizing a spiral comb or wire coil to secure them, hole punching for a ring binder or screw posts.

When you think of bookbinding, it will typically also include the type of cover you expect to have such as soft or hard. A soft cover is usually cardstock heavier than the internal pages. While a hardcover is a case that's been constructed from an art board and other materials. These are also known as case bound books. And how a book is bound can impact your project in three ways.

Text margins, page count and budget. All things that can cause stress if they need to be altered. So while it's tempting to opt for narrow margins to squeeze a few extra words on the page, it's not always worth it. Narrow margins, especially on the binding edge, can cause issues with readability or content lost in the binding. The binding method can also dictate the page count.

So you want to know before creating your artwork file. For example, saddle Stitch books are budget friendly production method, however they have a strict page limit. Changing methods during the formatting and production stage can also impact your budget. Some ways are more expensive than others and require more time and also may mean that your artwork needs to be set up differently.

If you're not sure about different types of binding, then consider the purpose of your book and where you plan to print it. Then check some book production websites and see the different kinds of binding on offer. And if you're still in doubt, it can help to see examples in person, so pop into like an office supply store and ask the staff in the print section to show you the different types of binding they offer. To reduce stress and ensure that you're creating a family history book that you'll be proud to show off, determine how it will be bound before you begin. That way. You can set up the template file as required and keep to any specified page limits. And number four is does your book need bleed and crop marks? For non-designers, the terms "bleed" and "crop marks" may not mean much because it's terminology to describe two specific requirements of print-ready artwork files. Bleed describes extending backgrounds and images beyond the page boundaries.

So hence these elements go to the edge of the paper when printed. While "crop marks" are the lines added to the corners of the artwork file to show the printer where to trim the paper. When you're artwork has images or color to the edge it is printed on a larger sheet of paper. So for example, if you want your final page size to be an A4 page, then depending on the print method, it's going to be printed on SRA4 or A3 and then trimmed to size.

So adding bleed of 3 to 5 millimeters allows a buffer if the paper shifts. Without it, you can see strips of white paper instead of the image or background. While crop marks on your artwork make it clear where to make the cut. You can create a family history book without adding bleed or crop marks but the trick is to know when you need them versus when you don't.

After all, you don't want those unsightly white strips if they were acquired, but not added. With programs like Canva and InDesign there is a setting to show the bleed area —usually 3 to 5 millimeters— for your documents. These programs also have the option to include cut marks when exporting the file as a print ready PDF. You'll need to get a little more creative for software like Microsoft Word that doesn't have the functionality to print crop marks or bleed. For those programs, set a custom page size adding ten millimeters or 0.4 inch on all sides. Then create an image of the crop marks for the final page size and add it to the header. Then you'll have the space to add the bleed to the artwork.

If you aren't printing the images to the edge, just leave the five mm or 0.2 inch white border around the page. Therefore, before you start creating your book artwork, determine if you want to print images to the edge of the paper and where the crop marks are going to be required in the final files. Then make sure your template is set up appropriately as per your decision.

So when creating a family history book or multi-page keepsake, there are several critical decisions to make before you can begin work. These decisions can save you a lot of time and potentially money. So the first thing you want to do is always ask yourself what size will the book be? Now, this decision can impact that other choices you need to make. And next, determine where you'll get the base template from.

Will you buy a ready to use one from an online marketplace or invest time to design and develop your own? Then consider how the book will be bound so you know, any limitations that apply to this project, such as margins and page count. Lastly, determine whether the project requires bleed and crop marks to achieve the result that you're expecting. Now, I'd love it if we continued the conversation in the comments.

So tell me, did you usually make these vital decisions before you begin your family history projects? Or will you start doing it with the next one? Now, if you have a question you'd like to ask or genealogy organization, writing or design problem that you'd like me to look into, then please look for the link to the Ask the Creative Family Historian submission form in the description below. I look forward to seeing if I can help.

And if you'd like to learn more from me, check out the video on the screen now. But that's it for me for this video though, so I'll see you in the next one. Until then, happy storytelling.