



*Design Guide:
Paper and Printing
Characteristics of
Fine Stationery*



When selecting personal or business stationery, it is important to consider the characteristics of the paper and printing process options. Ideally, personalized stationery reflects the style and purpose of the sender. Different characteristics come together to help create a unique product and a lasting impression on the recipient.

Paper

In the course of its history, paper has been created from wood pulp and cotton, among other materials. Cotton papers are an exquisite and environmentally friendly choice for fine stationery. Made from recovered cotton fibers, cotton paper is inherently tree-free, and its production results in less waste compared to other materials. Cotton papers are an excellent choice not only for elegant invitations and personal stationery suites, but also for business purposes. They are durable and accept print from a variety of processes in a way that produces a rich, timeless effect. Like its source, cotton paper is soft to the touch, and its fibers create a unique, crisp look upon which print stands out.

Another paper choice for fine stationery is paper made from wood fibers. Like their cotton counterparts, such papers can vary greatly in weight and are suitable for various personal and business stationery needs. Quality wood fiber papers are made from a combination of soft and hard wood fibers blended to create a soft feel. Aside from cotton and wood fiber papers, some stationery purveyors are offering a variety of other materials, including plastics and other synthetics. These choices are truly avant-garde and may be suitable for a modern wedding or party.

Printing Processes

Depending upon the paper choice, there are a variety of printing processes to choose from including engraving, embossing, letterpress, digital, thermography, foil, and flat printing.

The finest choice for printing is engraving. Engraved stationery is truly timeless and an exquisite choice for invitations, personal stationery, and business stationery. Engraved stationery is made using a copper plate, called a die. A unique die is created for each custom design, and for each color of the design. The design is etched into a die, creating cavities where ink is deposited. Pressure is applied to the paper so that paper in the design area is pressed up into the cavity. The design area then takes on the ink and the impression of the design. Engraved stationery can be identified by this raised appearance and feel of the design, as well as the underside of the paper, where the design areas have been indented. Engraving dies are sent to the customer and can be reused to re-order stationery of the same design.

Like engraving, embossing involves a die pressing onto paper creating a raised impression of the design or text. Embossing involves no ink, so the resulting impression maintains the color of the paper. Embossing has a simple, elegant, and timeless look, which is often used for monograms on personal stationery and for emblems and logos on business stationery. Due to its understated appearance, embossing is also a suitable choice for return addressing.

Another fine choice for stationery is letterpress stationery. Whereas engraved and embossed stationery is characterized by the raised impression of the text or design, letterpress stationery is characterized by the indented impression of the text or design into the paper. The letterpress die presses ink into the impression creating a beautiful, classic effect. Though it dates to the 14th century, letterpress is having a resurgence in popularity, especially in the printing of wedding invitations.

Digital printing is a flat printing process that involves printing by spraying ink onto the paper rather than creating an impression. Quality digital printing results in bold, rich colors, and is therefore an excellent choice for stationery with photographs or full-color images, such as Save-the-Date announcements with a photograph, holiday photo cards, and business materials that call for crisp, full-color printing.

Thermography involves printing with ink combined with a powdered resin; heat is applied to the design, and once the ink has dried, it takes on a smooth, raised feel. Though it may mimic the raised look of engraving, thermography differs in that no impression is created on the paper. As such, it is a faster, less expensive printing process.

Foil printing involves the stamping of foils onto paper. Foils may be made from metal and may be produced in a variety of colors. Foil printing has a characteristic metallic look, and the printed area has a unique, standout shine.

Flat printing, also called lithography, is a process in which ink is transferred to paper using a flat plate. Like thermography, flat printing is not as labor or time-intensive as engraving, embossing, or letterpress. However, flat printing does not have the same timeless elegance as other printing processes.

Selecting Your Stationery

When designing your personal or business stationery, it is very important to see and feel samples of papers and printing processes. With each choice of material also comes choice of size, weight and shape, each creating a unique impression. Colors appear differently on different papers when using different printing processes. Be aware that online renderings may not accurately reflect such subtleties. Making an appointment to select and design your personal or business stationery allows you to interact with the different printing materials and processes to ultimately select the combination most suited for your style and personal and business stationery needs.



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