



LITERARY INSPIRED · A FREE FIELD GUIDE

The Paperback Sizing Field Guide

Trim size, spine, and the cover templates your artist actually needs.

Because one cover file does not fit every printer.

literaryinspired.com

LONG BOOK? READ THE TRIM NOTE ON 03.

◆ START HERE

What's Inside

01

Why templates differ

The reason one cover file gets rejected at the next printer.

02

The workflow

The order that saves you a re-do.

03

Trim sizes

The standard adult-fiction sizes, and what each costs you.

04

Spine, bleed, margins

The specs your cover artist will ask for.

05

The calculators

The exact tools that generate your template.

06

The glossary

Trim, bleed, wrap, spine. Decoded.

Long book? Read the trim note on 03.

One file does not fit every printer

Each printer wraps the spine and bleed a little differently, so each one gives you its own cover template, built from your trim size, paper, and final page count.

Get the template right and your artist designs to it once. Reuse the wrong one and the printer rejects the cover for a mismatched spine or bleed, a very common print-cover problem. So you generate a template per printer, and you send the matching one to your artist.

THE ONE-LINE RULE

One template per printer. Never reuse a cover file across IngramSpark, Book Vault, and KDP.

The order that matters

1 Pick trim size and paper

This drives everything after it. See the trim guide on 03.

3 Generate a template per printer

IngramSpark, Book Vault, and KDP each output a different one.

5 Never reuse across printers

A mismatched spine or bleed is a common rejection.

2 Get the final page count

From the formatted interior, not a guess. Spine width is calculated from it.

4 Send the right template to your artist

They design the full wrap, back, spine, and front, to that exact file.

6 Check the print cost before you commit

Run the trim through the royalty calculator so the cover price still works.

Choosing your trim

Trim	Reads like	For a long novel (120k+)
5 x 8	Classic mass-market feel.	Inflates the page count and print cost. A very thick spine.
5.25 x 8	Standard trade fiction. A safe middle.	A good balance of feel and page count.
6 x 9	Larger, trade or genre size.	Fewer pages, thinner spine, lower unit cost. Reads a touch less literary.

THE TRADE-OFF FOR LONG BOOKS

A big word count runs to a high page count no matter what, and a smaller trim drives it higher still, which raises print cost and your minimum cover price. For a long book, 6 x 9 or 5.25 x 8 keeps the spine and the price sensible.

What your artist needs

Spec	The rule
Spine width	Page count multiplied by the paper's thickness factor (white paper is about 0.00225 in per page, cream a little more). Each printer uses its own factor, which is why templates differ.
Bleed	0.125 in (3 mm) on every outer edge for KDP and Ingram; Book Vault wraps more. Art that runs to the edge must extend into the bleed.
Safe margin	Keep text and key art at least 0.125 to 0.25 in inside the trim line, so nothing important gets cut.
Spine text	Center the title and author within the calculated spine. Thin spines cannot carry text at all.

The tools that build your template

IngramSpark cover template generator

myaccount.ingramspark.com › Tools › Cover Template Generator

Enter ISBN, trim, binding, paper, and page count. Emails a print-ready template. Your bookstore and library route.

Book Vault template & quote tool

quote.bookvault.app

Enter your specs; download cover and interior templates matched to Book Vault's paper. A UK printer, so its bleed differs.

KDP cover calculator & template

kdp.amazon.com › Tools › Cover Calculator

Generates the KDP full-wrap template by trim, page count, and paper.

KDP printing cost & royalty calculator

kdp.amazon.com/en_US/royalty-calculator

Shows print cost, minimum list price, and royalty. Sanity-check the price before you pick a trim.

The shorthand, decoded

Trim size

The finished width and height of the printed book, like 5.25 x 8.

Bleed

Extra art past the trim line so nothing shows white after cutting.

Safe margin

The inside buffer that keeps text and key art clear of the cut.

Spine

The bound edge. Its width is set by your page count and paper.

Wrap

The full cover as one piece: back, spine, and front together.

Template

The printer's exact layout guide your artist designs onto.



Size it once, print it anywhere.

Pick the trim, pull the templates, and hand your artist the exact file each printer expects. If you want the print setup done with you, from trim to price, that is what I do.

Want the print setup done with you? Let's talk.