

User guide: print finishings

Print finishing refers to the actions performed on your print once the ink has dried. From making your product more visually pleasing to simply wanting to give it that little bit of extra protection, there are plenty of print finishing techniques to ensure you get the effect you want.

The type of finish you select is all down to the look and feel you want to create as well as the paper type you choose, you should therefore recognise different types of print finishing and their strengths in getting your materials noticed. Below are some of the most popular techniques used.

Engaging with a piece of print is a multi-sensory experience, as one of the biggest advantages print has over digital media is that you can touch it and feel it, even smell it.

At Warwick Print we offer (click on the links or scroll down for more detailed information about the services):

- [**Folding**](#) – choose from several options, including single, double, and concertina folds
- [**Encapsulation**](#) – seal the document between two sheets of plastic, making the waterproof
- [**Lamination**](#) – add a matt or gloss finish to products like posters and brochure covers
- [**Varnishes**](#) – use paper varnish for pages of brochures and magazine to enhance the look
- [**Spot UV Varnish**](#) – highlight certain areas of your design
- [**Foil Stamping**](#) – add reflective properties to various elements of your design
- [**Embossing**](#) – make logos etc. literally stand out
- [**Letterpress \(debossing\)**](#) – relief printing for text
- [**Holographic Foils**](#) – add stylish reflective effects to print items such as greeting cards
- [**Metallic Inks**](#) – as a subtle finish to text or design elements
- [**Pearlescent & Iridescent Inks**](#) – display a variety of colour when viewed in different angles and lighting conditions
- [**Die-cutting**](#) – create simple shapes (for business cards with rounded corners or invitations with cut-outs to reveal the inner pages)
- [**Laser-cutting**](#) – for more complex cut-out shapes (pop-up cards for instance)
- [**Painted Edges**](#) – colour the sides of a piece of print
- [**Heat & Reveal**](#) – use thermochromic inks which allow an underlying image to be revealed when heat is applied
- [**Glow in the Dark**](#) – it does what it says on the tin, paint that glows in the dark
- [**Fragranced Ink**](#) – rub it to reveal the scent

Common finishes

Folding

Folding is arguably the easiest and most common finishing, with techniques that ensure your brochures, letters, cards don't split. Whether you need large volume folding or custom hand folding, marketing collateral can be folded in a number of ways including single, double, concertina and letter to name but a few.



Lamination vs Encapsulation

There's a lot of confusion surrounding this issue as the terms "*lamination*" and "*encapsulation*" are often used interchangeably - and incorrectly so, so let's set it clear for the record: lamination and encapsulation are two different ways of applying a plastic coating to paper or card.

Though it may sometimes be difficult to distinguish between encapsulated and laminated documents, there are clear differences between the two in both appearance and intention:

- at the most basic level, the key difference between lamination and encapsulation is lamination uses thin film and encapsulation uses thicker, high-grade film
- lamination tends to be applied to only one side of the printed material, encapsulation places the document between two sheets of plastic film, always covering both sides of the document
- lamination is an irreversible process as it employs adhesives and is intended for use on materials with a short life expectancy. In contrast, encapsulation, which is entirely reversible, does not use adhesives and is intended for long-term protection.

Encapsulation

Encapsulation is the process of applying a durable plastic film to the surface to completely enclosing documents between two clear sheets of uncoated polyester. The plastic film fully surrounds the front & back of the document and is trimmed between 3 - 10mm wider than the print (hence the entire sheet is encapsulated). And though often there is a lip around the end of the printed material, there doesn't have to be.



The polyester sheets are sealed without adhesives and can therefore be easily removed without adverse effects as the polyester sheets create an electrostatic charge that holds the document in place.

If there is a lip around the document, the edges of the polyester are joined together on all sides using a variety of methods, including cloth stitching, double-sided tape, and ultrasonic, thermal, or laser welding (the last of which is expensive yet ideal).

If used, double-sided tape should be approached with caution since adhesives can easily transfer to and damage enclosed documents that come into contact with the enclosure's edges. This is particularly bad for heavy and/or thick items.

Encapsulation can be waterproof (although it is not always, so make sure you check with your finishing house) and so is ideal for products that need to withstand the elements, such as posters, flyers and notices displayed outdoors.

The encapsulated covering also means that something like ID badges or a restaurant menus can easily be cleaned, without the risk of damaging the printing on the card or paper inside.

Though encapsulation of precious objects can be an expensive and time-consuming effort, this method of preservation is also suitable for fragile documents, some photographic prints, certificates, and small textiles.

Lamination

Lamination, on the other hand, is more suitable for products that need to look good but won't be subject to wear and tear or need to be archived.

The covers of glossy magazines, corporate brochures, and mail-order catalogues are all usually laminated rather than encapsulated. Wall maps and display signs used indoors as well as business cards are also often laminated, because it is relatively cheap and improves the appearance of the items.



Laminating a print is using a thin sheet of clear plastic on either one or both sides of the print material, usually done with a matt or gloss finish, to enhance their appearance and also help protect them against everyday wear and tear like smudging (most prints are dry ink but it keeps the issue at bay). The process uses heat and low-grade adhesives to bond the plastic sheet to the document.

Lamination is not watertight because moisture can get into the paper through the back of the page or unsealed edges if applied to both sides. However, because it is so thin it is used to give printing a high gloss on really matt finish, without making the paper thick to fold or score.

Indeed, the only way the untrained eye can recognise if a sheet of paper is laminated, is if they rip the corner of the sheet. Only that way can you see the layer of plastic.

It is worth mentioning that the lamination process can sometimes damage and affect the appearance of the item. Lamination will often make the item appear darker than originally designed and printed.

Though lamination was once considered a viable conservation method as it was thought to strengthen and protect fragile paper, unfortunately, it was discovered that lamination irreversibly damages the enclosed item.

The conventional lamination method is heat-seal lamination, in which documents are sealed using heat, pressure, and adhesives. Heat-seal lamination cannot be undone because the heat melts adhesive into the document.

In addition, laminate plastics will also "*off-gas*," causing a chemical reaction with materials sealed inside.

Furthermore, the adhesives used in lamination are typically acidic and can thus adversely affect inks, causing them to bleed beyond their edges ("halo" effect) in printed and written material. Each of these factors cause and/or accelerate the deterioration of paper documents.

Therefore, lamination is appropriate only for materials with a short term value, such as marketing material or display items - certainly not for any valued collection materials. Simply put, lamination should never be thought of as a preservation method.

The aforementioned confusion between encapsulation and lamination rises from the fact that what people call laminating, for example in schools and offices using pouch laminators, is based on the **principle of encapsulation**, as the printed material is put between two sheets of polyester that tend to be larger than the document.

However, as these pouch laminators use heat to bond the plastic to the document and seal the edges, it would be very difficult to remove the plastic film from the document without damaging it, thereby using the **technique of lamination**.

Varnishes

Varnish is often associated with wood. However, what you may not know is that varnishes are also used on paper.

A varnish is a liquid coating that is added to your paper and has two purposes. The first is to enhance a printed item by giving the page a smooth and consistent texture and to make it "*pop*", increasing the impact of when it's being looked at.



The second is to seal the printed material to help preserve it, thereby improving the durability of the piece.

The varnish can be glossy or matte and typically is applied to the entire printing surface when a page needs to be robust but without adding too much weight to the paper stock, making it suitable for high-quality books, magazines, and brochures.

Use this print finish for print items that aren't particularly colourful. Varnishing adds wonderful texture and interest to monochrome or single-color designs. Varnishing also adds

an extra tactile dimension to packaging designs, being particularly suited to items which will be held once picked off the shelves.

Spot UV Varnish

Spot UV varnish is similar to normal varnishing, however the main difference is that it is usually applied to specific areas (hence spot), rather than to an entire surface to highlight an image or detail. The contrast between the treated and untreated surface areas creates a dramatic visual and tactile feature.



The varnishes applied to the printing surface and is cured or hardened by UV light during the printing process.

Used creatively as part of the design process, spot UV produces some really stunning results.

Finishing business cards, brochures or flyers with Spot UV can help your print materials make a great first impression.

In other words, it's eye-catching, which is usually high up on the list of what a marketer wants.

Foil Stamping

Foil stamping or foil blocking adds reflective properties to various elements of your design by using malleable metallic material applied to the print surface with heat and pressure to add a bit of luxury to your project.



Typically, it is used on text and the logo on the page or when certain elements call for it.

The most common foil colours are gold and silver, but you can also use foiling to apply a particularly pigmented colour that might otherwise be difficult to produce effectively through CMYK printing alone—neons or pastels are examples that might benefit from foiling. Foil stamping works brilliantly in combination with embossing, creating a three-dimensional, gleaming piece of print.

Use this print finish for any print item to which you'd like to add a metallic or highly-pigmented touch like high quality book covers, text and logos on luxury invitations and business cards. Foiling often works best in small doses, so pick out a single or pair of elements that you'd like to highlight in foil.

Embossing

Generally, embossing refers to raising parts of the page by pushing out specific areas, adding physical depth to the embossed elements and thus, shadows and highlights are also produced in the design.



Embossing also adds a tactile dimension to your design. Your messages and images can literally be felt with your fingertips when you rub them over the surface.

Important considerations for embossing projects include the size, paper type, boldness and intricacy of the design.

This method is great if you want to develop 3D visuals to draw attention to a particular area including images, logo or text on the printed material such as business cards or book covers.

Letterpress (debossing)

Letterpress printing is one of the oldest printing techniques available with its first use dating back to 1439.



Some printers also call letterpress printing “debossing”. A letterpress is used to depress or indent certain portions of the page. It can be seen as the opposite of embossing.

Traditionally, the letterpress technique was used only for applying ink on a page as a form of relief printing and usually only for text. But it has evolved to also include pressing logos and other design elements directly into the paper substrate.

Use these print finishes for book covers for hardbacks or special-editions - debossing (and embossing) adds an old-fashioned dimension to books which is less “*look-at-me*” than foil or varnish. Vintage-style stationery will also be enhanced by a touch of embossing or debossing.

Specialised finishes

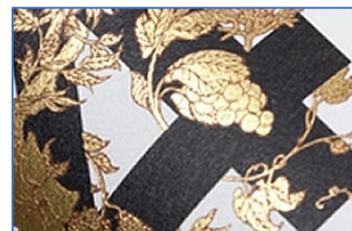
Holographic Foils

Often used as an anti-counterfeiting measure, Holographic Foils can also be used to add a stylish reflective effect to print items such as greeting cards.



Metallic Inks

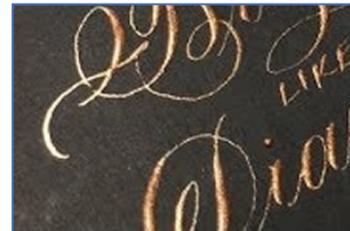
These inks contain metallic components that give them a reflective quality and bright finish. Metallic inks are less lustrous than foil stamping, so if you’re looking for a highly reflective and striking finish, foils are more appropriate, whereas metallic inks provide a more subtle finish.



The metallic or fluro finish helps makes logos and lettering sparkle on print pieces such as cards, invitations, and programs.

Pearlescent & Iridescent Inks

Pearlescent and Iridescent both refer to the variety of colour when viewed in different angles and lighting conditions. With a similar effect to the rainbow-like colours of an oil slick, Pearlescent inks can add style, texture and value to a piece of print. It is important to note that with all reflective finishes (foils, metallics, pearlescents) coated gloss paper works best, as it is less porous than uncoated.



Die-cutting

Die-cutting works in the same sort of way as a pastry cutter—the printer will create a custom steel-edged die (or use a standardized one for popular cutting shapes, such as for rounded corners) and attach this to a die-cutting machine. The printed item is placed in the machine, and the die is pressed onto the item, creating a cut-out shape.



A die-cut element breaks up the physical image the eye sees, and the human mind is designed by nature to look for irregularity as part of its fight or flight awareness, so any cut-out shapes or patterns naturally draw the eye.

Although die-cutting can produce some stunning and unique results, it's not for every print job. Some paper and card stocks are not suitable for its use but that's why, when it is used, it has such an impact.

Use this print finish for business cards which require rounded corners; invitations and greetings cards with cut-outs, perhaps to allow the inside of the card to be partly visible when closed. Die cutting is also used in packaging designs, brochures, folders.

Die-cutting should be used for jobs which involve a particular cut-out shape to be repeated across a large batch of items, as the cost of producing a custom die can be high. For more flexibility, you should check out laser cutting instead.

Laser-cutting

Laser cutting is another method of cutting out shapes and edges, but instead of metal blades uses laser technology to cut your printed item. The laser-cutting machine is hooked up to a computer, which directs the output of a high-power laser beam, cutting the material in the process.



Laser cutting is better suited to creating ornate, detailed shapes. Because the process is digital and does not use manual tools as with die cutting, the

margin for error is minimal. Your print materials can be cut into any shape to add a unique and delicate touch.

Use this print finish for: Wedding and event invitations which you want to look extra-special; stationery items that need a luxurious touch; postcards with panache; arts and crafts items such as pop-up cards; exclusive point of sale material and business cards with the ultimate edge.

Painted Edges

Painted edges refers to a finishing process where the sides of a piece of print are covered with a layer of ink or paint. Edge painting can work on most print items, such as invites, business cards and even thicker items like books. This effect is created using a sprayer or by hand using a brayer. When using a sprayer, multiple colours can be used to create stunning gradient effects.



Heat & Reveal

Heat and reveal printing uses thermochromic inks which allow an underlying image to be revealed when heat is applied. This is the same sort of process that you see on certain ceramic mugs where an image is revealed when they contain a hot beverage.



Glow in the Dark

Glow in the dark printing is similar to the heat and reveal technique but rather than the inks being sensitive to heat, these glow in the dark inks are sensitive to light. If the print is in a dark room it will start to glow.



Fragranced Ink

Fragranced inks can usually be found in magazines and brochures for beauty products; they will sometimes give you a tester of a new perfume which they've launched where you have to rub the page to reveal the scent.

As you can see, print materials engage the senses in a way that online media simply can't. Adding that special finishing touch makes print look amazing and speaks volumes about your business.