PAGINATION

MASTERING THE FINE PRINT OF PAGE NUMBERS

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Picture book pagination is one of those things
that sound simple... until you actually have to do it.

Suddenly, you're asking questions like:

Why does my 32-page book does not have 32 pages?

Why does paperback work differently than hardback?

Why does print-on-demand have different rules from offset printing?

And the classic: Wait—where did my story even go?!

That's why I created this free resource—to help you map out your pages, avoid common mistakes, and make sure your picture book is print-ready, no matter how you're publishing.

WHY 24/32/40?

It's all about the printers!

Ever wondered why picture books often come in **specific page counts like 24, 32, or 40 pages**? It might seem like a random choice, but there's a practical reason behind it—printers. These numbers are not just a publisher's preference; they're deeply **linked to how books are physically made**. In the printing world, books are created using large sheets of paper that are printed on both sides, then folded and cut to form the individual pages. These sheets are most efficiently used when the book's total page count can be evenly divided into these larger sheets, typically in multiples of 8 or 16. This process minimizes waste and cost, making certain page counts more favorable for mass production.

By designing books to fit this printing puzzle, publishers can produce beautiful picture books economically!

Print on demand works a little differently but we'll get to that soon.

SOME TERMS YOU MIGHT HEAR

ENDPAPERS/ENDSHEETS

These are the sheets of paper that are pasted onto the inside covers of hardback books. They can be decorative and sometimes carry part of the story or thematic elements.

FLYLEAF

The blank page or pages following the endpapers.

SELF ENDED HARDBACK

Self-ended books do not have additional paper glued to the cover. Instead, the endpapers are actually the first and last pages of the printed book block. This approach can save costs because it reduces the amount of material used and simplifies the binding process.

HARD BACK WITH END SHEETS

Books with separate endsheets have distinct sheets of paper that are not part of the printed book block. These endsheets are glued to the inside covers of the book.

OFFSET PRINTING

Offset printing is typically used to describe bulk printing through specialized printers, as opposed to print-on-demand services, which produce books one at a time as orders come in.

PRINT ON DEMAND

Just like traditional printing, POD services often prefer books to have page counts in multiples of 4 or 8, aligning with their printing setups. This ensures that no blank pages are needed to fill out the signatures (groups of pages bound together), which is crucial since POD aims to minimize waste and cost.

On KDP or Ingram Spark guides you'll find that you only need an even number of pages, but for children's books the truth is that **if your book isn't exactly 23, 31 or 39 pages long** (+ 1 blank page they add at the end to place their barcode), **you'll end up with a random number of blank pages** at the end or (it has happened to me once) at the beginning of your book. **This will make your book look unprofessional.**
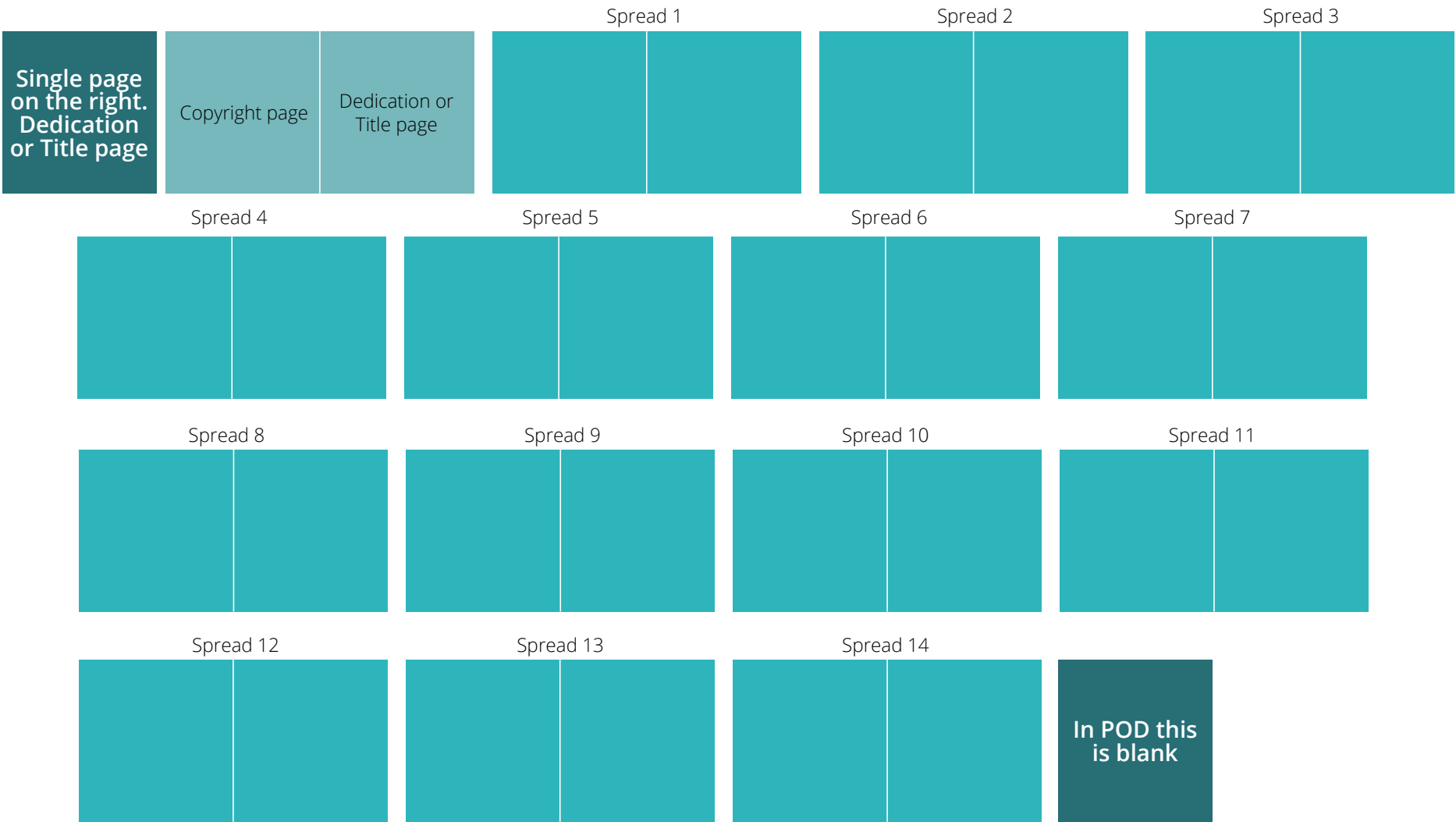
PAGINATION IN PAPERBACKS

When planning the layout and pagination for a book, I find it more intuitive and effective to **count spreads** rather than individual pages (and that's how I will send out the storyboard: you'll see spreads, not pages).

This approach aligns closely with **how readers actually experience the book**.

A spread consists of two facing pages when the book is open. This perspective encourages considering the flow of content, images, and text across a broader canvas, ensuring that transitions are smooth and that the narrative and visual elements work together.

By focusing on spreads, we can **enhance the reader's engagement** and ensure that each turn of the page delivers a satisfying and seamless continuation of the story.

Pagination for offset printing and for POD won't be too different. Here you can see a **typical 32 page book:**

		Spread 1	Spread 2	Spread 3

Single page on the right. Dedication or Title page | Copyright page | Dedication or Title page

Spread 4	Spread 5	Spread 6	Spread 7

Spread 8	Spread 9	Spread 10	Spread 11

Spread 12	Spread 13	Spread 14	

In POD this is blank

You think you have 32 pages for your text,
but you don't!
You have 28 usable pages for a 32 page book (max 14 spreads), 20 for a 24 page book (max 10 spreads) and 36 for (max 16 spreads).

Did you know?
You can print on the inside of a paperback cover, too. It's called **duplex printing** (Ingram Spark and other POD services offer it, but only for few trimsizes)

In some rare cases I've saved some space moving the copyright to the very last right page (or it could be on the last left page if you're not using POD).

Random curio:
the first book known to have been produced via movable type printing was the Gutenberg Bible in the mid-15th century. This revolutionized the production of books in Europe and is a key event in the history of printing.
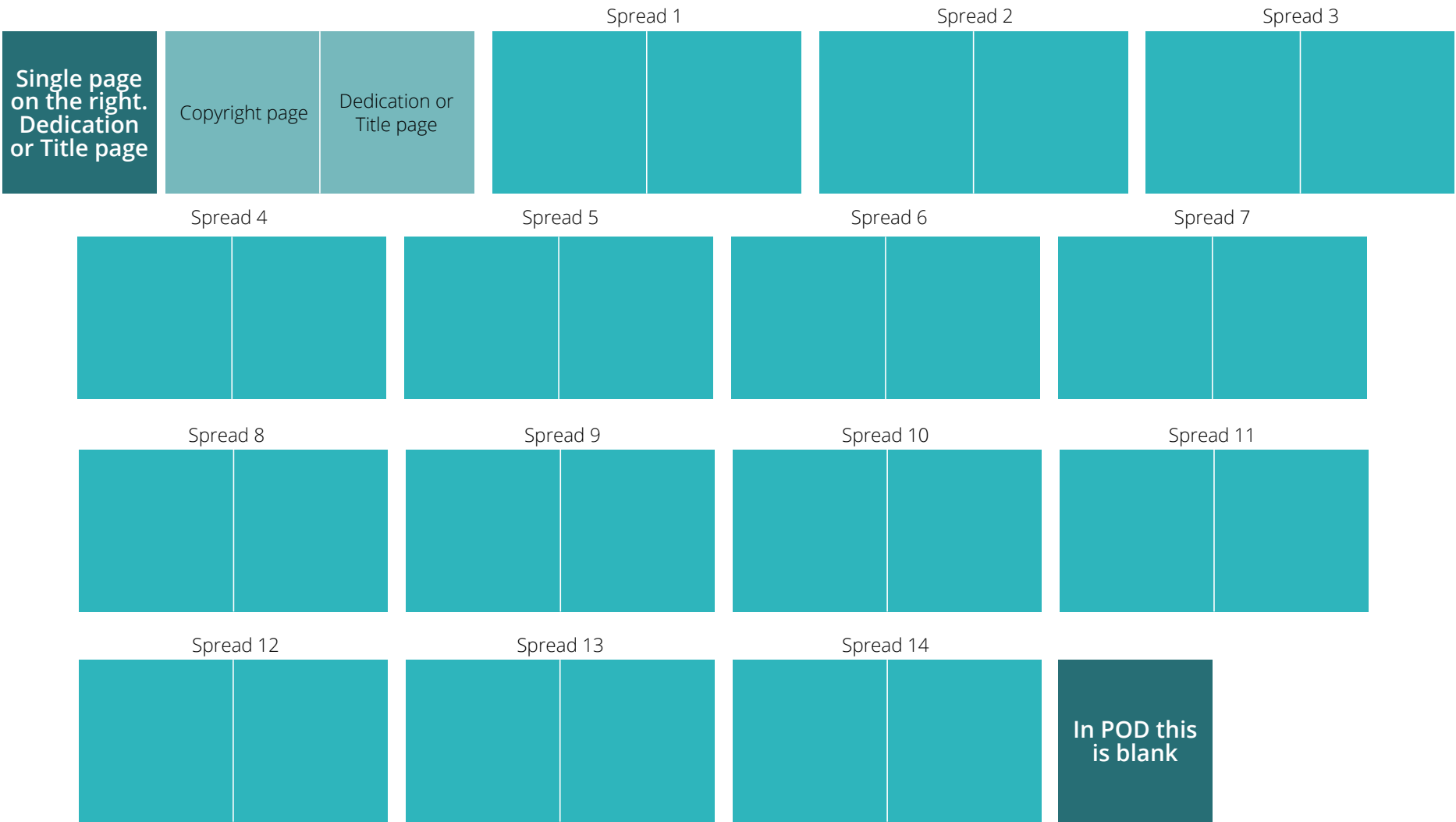
PAGINATION IN HARDBACKS

When it comes to pagination, paperback books maintain more or less the same format whether they are produced through offset printing or print-on-demand (POD); however, the situation is markedly different for hardbacks.
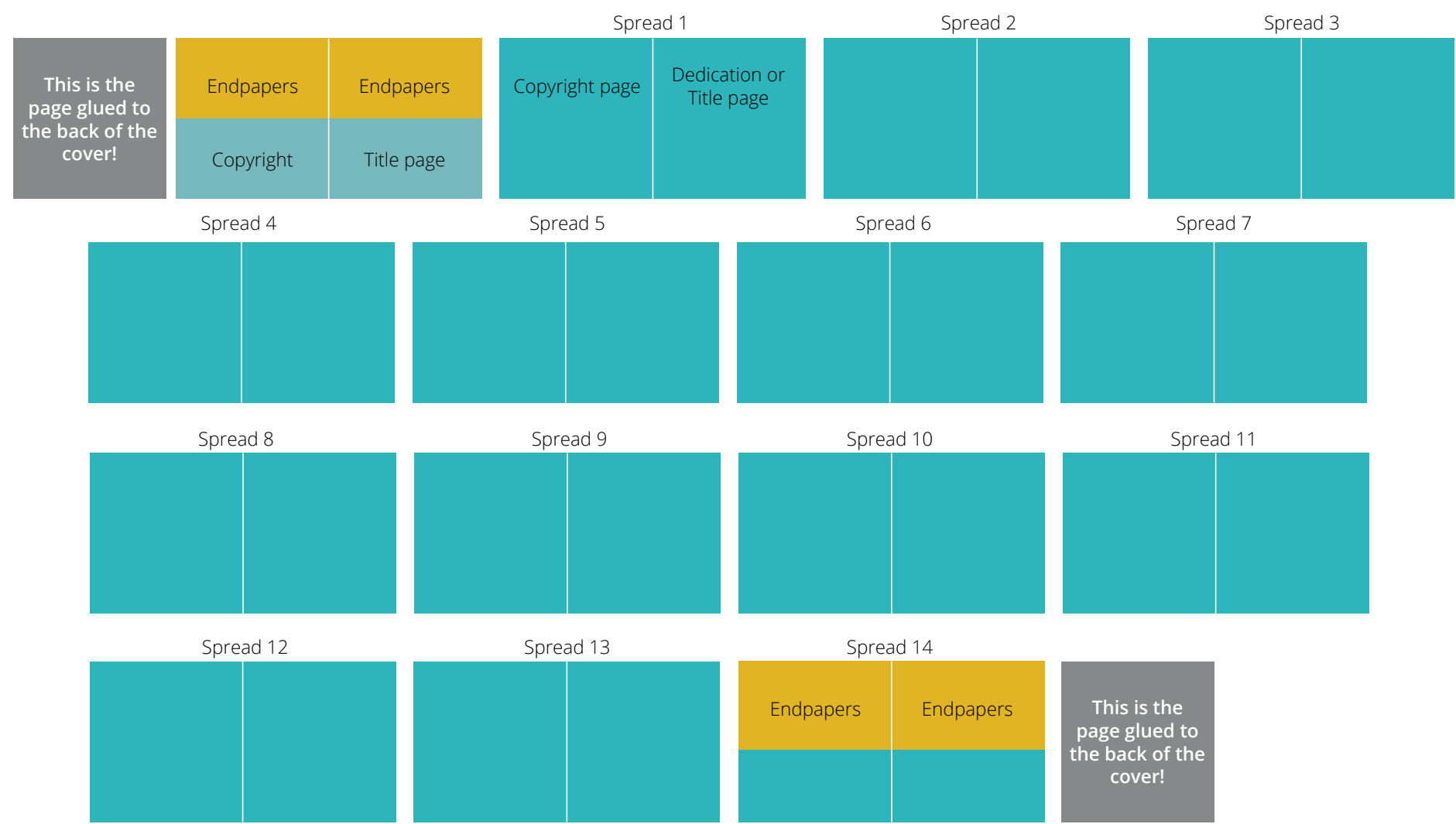
POD HARDBACKS

Pagination is the same as POD paperbacks. You can actually use the very same file most of the times.

You can't customize endpapers (only with Book Vault you can) and you can't decide between self-ended or endsheets.

Single page on the right. Dedication or Title page	Copyright page	Dedication or Title page	Spread 1	Spread 2	Spread 3

Spread 4	Spread 5	Spread 6	Spread 7

Spread 8	Spread 9	Spread 10	Spread 11

Spread 12	Spread 13	Spread 14	In POD this is blank

SELF-ENDED HARDBACKS

In book printing, printers count pages in a way that includes not only the pages you read but also the **pages glued to the cover**.

These pages, essential for binding hardcover books, are counted in the total page number, even though they're not part of the visible content. Understanding this helps ensure that the layout and design of a book match its physical structure perfectly.

This is the page glued to the back of the cover!	Endpapers	Endpapers	Spread 1 Copyright page / Dedication or Title page	Spread 2	Spread 3
	Copyright	Title page			

When designing a book, particularly one with self-ended construction where the endpapers are part of the same paper used for the book's interior pages, you have a choice: include dedicated endpapers or not. Opting to integrate endpapers as part of the main content can affect the number of spreads available for your text and illustrations. If you decide not to have decorated endpapers, you have the same number of spreads as in the paperback. Otherwise you have two fewers spreads (so 12 for a 32 page book, 8 for a 24 page book, 14 for a 40 page book). Typically, the total number of pages in a book, including those that are glued to the cover as endpapers, should be a multiple of 4.

HARDBACKS WITH ENDSHEETS

Pagination in hardback books with separate endsheets differs from other binding styles. These endsheets are added as additional pages that aren't part of the main content's page count, requiring careful consideration to ensure the total number of pages aligns with printing requirements.

These will be on a separate file

This is the page glued to the back of the cover!	Endpapers	Endpapers	Flyleaf (can be customized, can contain Copyright)

Spread 1

Title page		

Spread 2	Spread 3	Spread 4	Spread 5

Spread 6	Spread 7	Spread 8	Spread 9

Spread 10	Spread 11	Spread 12	Spread 13

Spread 14	Spread 15	These will be on a separate file

	This is the page glued to the back of the cover!	Endpapers	Endpapers	Flyleaf (can be customized, can contain Copyright)

Typically, the total number of the pages you see in blue (both lighter and darker), should be a multiple of 4.

OTHER THINGS TO CONSIDER

When dividing text into pages for picture books, there are several crucial elements to consider to ensure the final product is engaging and accessible for young readers. Your editor and illustrator can help you with this!

STORY PACE

Pages should turn at crucial moments in the story, ideally enhancing suspense or surprise. This can help keep young readers interested and eager to see what happens next.

YOUR AGE TARGET

Break the text into manageable chunks that align with the developmental stages of your intended readers.

READ-ALOUD FLOW

Since picture books are often read aloud, page turns can serve as a natural pause or breathing point for the reader.

EMOTIONAL BEATS

A new spread can signal a change in mood or setting, helping to visually cue children into the story's dynamics.

I hope you found this guide helpful!
If you need a bit of extra insight or
assistance with your book design and
publication, don't hesitate to reach out.
I'm here to help!

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