

*Stab Binding*

‘Stab-bound’ (aka ‘side-bound’, or ‘blockbook’) publications present particular characteristics that could be exploited in the development of ‘new’ design. Among these:

1. The publication is pressed flat, from the outside. This is a reason the front covers are either flexible or ‘hinged’ (or the book would not open; the back cover can remain stiff). Thus the exterior/ cover aesthetic is affected either through materiality (only certain materials are strong yet flexible enough to be employed) or sub-structure (‘hinging’ provides the cover with a very particular look). How to address this, through design?
2. The binding skeleton/ structure is exposed (string, bolts, staples, sticks, rubber bands, etc.). Primarily, this affects the design because the structure becomes a decorative and very visible element. How could you push this further, as a designer, to either emphasize or distill this effect? (as an example, the pattern/shape of the binding structure could be represented/ repeated in the background of each page graphic). An entire exercise in creativity can be derived simply from considering the various ways in which string can be interwoven to both decorate and bind (traditional, hemp-leaf, tortoise-shell,
3. Beyond the published/ designed area that is typically ‘eaten away’ by the binding proper, this particular type of binding also limits the legibility/ appreciation of another 1–2 inches of page design, next to the binding. In other words, within the binding area itself, of course, no artwork can be appreciated/ displayed. But also, because the pages cannot open completely, there is a folding/ warping/ stiffness that occurs next to the binding, and limits legibility as well. This affects the overall design in 2 primary ways: first, pages are oriented in landscape format, so as to stretch further away from the binding and avoid the binding area; second, images and text tend to be laid out further away from the binding than in other binding formats. Can this be played with and made a part of the active design concept? One could think, for example, of a ‘stab-bound’ book with very vertical and close-to-the-binding pages; what sort of book would this be? (perhaps an ideal flip-book, perfect for displaying a rapid sequence of tall, narrow images).
4. Another traditional aspect of these kinds of publications is that their pages are folded over in order to ‘thicken’ each page, thus preventing ink from soaking through (these types of books are typically associated with journals into which one would draw/ write, as opposed to pre-printed publications). Also, a particular ‘thickening’ occurs at the fold (the outside/ fore edge of each page); thus the overall



page stiffens, counteracting the warping that tends to occur at the binding edge (see item #3).

Consider, also, how the shapes and folds of the pages could be developed, in a creative exploration of the limitations of Japanese binding. Also, what else, beyond pages and ink, could be contained within? A compact disk, perhaps? What does the structure point towards, regarding the incorporation of such accessory elements?

