

The Print Quality & Handoff Sheet

Two checklists that catch what bounces packaging files and wastes runs: the artwork handoff (before the file leaves your desk) and the proof sign-off (before you approve). Condensed from the PackOS print-quality guides at packos.ai/blog/.

JOB / SKU

CONVERTER / PRINTER

DATE

1 / Artwork handoff

A clean handoff passes the converter's preflight on the first try — nothing left for a coordinator to chase.

- ☐ **Dieline on its own layer.** Cut, crease, and bleed paths as live vectors on a named layer or spot separation, set to overprint — never merged or rasterized into the art. Toggle layers: the die must isolate cleanly.
- ☐ **Built on the supplied die.** Art sits on the exact production dieline, locked — not one rebuilt by eye or a superseded version. Confirm each panel reads the right way up once folded.
- ☐ **Bleed.** Background art extends past every trim and cut line — typically ~3 mm (0.125 in); some flexible and label processes want more.
- ☐ **Safety margin.** Text, logos, and barcodes pulled ~3 mm inside every cut and fold, so trimming or a crease can't catch them.
- ☐ **Fonts embedded or outlined.** No live, un-embedded fonts — they substitute and reflow on the next machine. If you outline, keep a live editable copy for revisions.
- ☐ **Images at resolution.** Effective ~300 ppi at final placed size is the common target — confirm for your process. Keep logos, type, and the die as vector.
- ☐ **Color intent set; spots as spots.** Build and export in CMYK; name real spot inks exactly and convert strays to process. The separations preview should match the ink plan — art + white + varnish + die.
- ☐ **Total ink within limit.** Total area coverage in the heaviest shadow stays within your converter's process limit — their profile or output intent sets the exact ceiling.
- ☐ **Export as PDF/X-4** — or the exact spec your converter requests. Output intent embedded for the real printing condition (e.g. GRACoL for US coated offset); transparency live unless X-1a is requested; **TrimBox** at finished size, **BleedBox** beyond. Preflight the exported PDF, not the dialog.
- ☐ **Filled spec + named contact.** Dimensions, material, quantities, decoration and finishes, compliance needs — no "TBD" — plus one person who can answer proof questions and approve.

WHAT EACH PROOF TYPE ACTUALLY PROMISES

SOFT PROOF
On-screen PDF. Approve **content**: layout, copy, dieline registration. Never approve color on a screen.

CONTRACT PROOF
Calibrated hard proof. Approve **color** to a named standard within an agreed tolerance — not the real substrate's texture or finish.

3D / RENDER
Approve **structure**: folds, panel orientation, how art wraps the form — not exact press color or tactile feel.

PRESS PROOF
Real ink, real substrate, real press — the closest thing to production. Costs press time, so it's reserved for critical jobs.

BEFORE YOU APPROVE, PUT IT IN WRITING

- The proof type you're approving — so it's clear whether you committed color or only content.
- The color target and its tolerance — a named standard and a number, not an argument.
- The substrate and finish — the same file prints differently on different stocks.
- A retained, signed sample — both sides keep the physical reference for the run.

PROOF TYPE APPROVED

APPROVED BY

DATE