



First fold

Early modern paper was made of pulped linen, cotton, or hemp fibers, mixed into a large vat of water. A 'vat man' produced one sheet at a time by catching up the pulp in a sieve-like mold. Chain lines and watermarks were impressions left in the paper from the wire mesh of the mold. The thinning out of the pulp left uneven, or 'deckle,' edges. These features are pictured here on the left (from Folger ms. L.f.4, photographed with transmitted light).

Standard sizes of sheets of paper were much larger than today's. Different formats for writing or printing were shaped by a series of folds. One fold of the sheet made a folio, two folds a quarto, and three folds an octavo. A broadsheet had no folds. The format also determined the text's orientation and page layout for printing.

To fold this sheet, position the selected A1 'signature' mark at the bottom right, facing up. Follow the folding sequence indicated, keeping the signature A1 centered at the bottom of the first page for each layout. A spine fold remains on the left, the foundation for any stitching, binding, or even sometimes pinning. Folds on other edges have to be cut, or 'opened,' for inner pages to be read.

Second fold

Third fold

This is not a sheet of handmade paper, but it could help you understand some features and uses of early modern paper.

A1 folio

A1 quarto

A1 octavo

Coming to terms

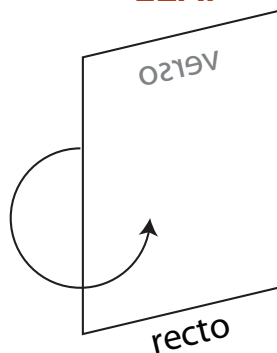
When a sheet of paper is folded, leaves are created. A **leaf** has two sides: a front (**recto**) and a back (**verso**). A **page** is one side of a leaf.

In a way, sheet, leaf, and page are all units of measurement. Writers probably thought of the number of sheets it would take to write something in the same way we think of page length for classroom assignments. Printers calculated the cost of a job by the number of sheets it would take. Today, bibliographers might describe the length of a book in sheets or leaves. Page numbers might not even have been included in an early modern text, and, if they were, they might not have been correct.

Many written and printed texts were short enough to be completed within one sheet of paper. But longer texts required multiple sheets of paper. Those sheets had to be printed one at a time and then assembled in the correct order for folding, cutting, and stitching. Terms like **gatherings** and **signatures** come into play then.

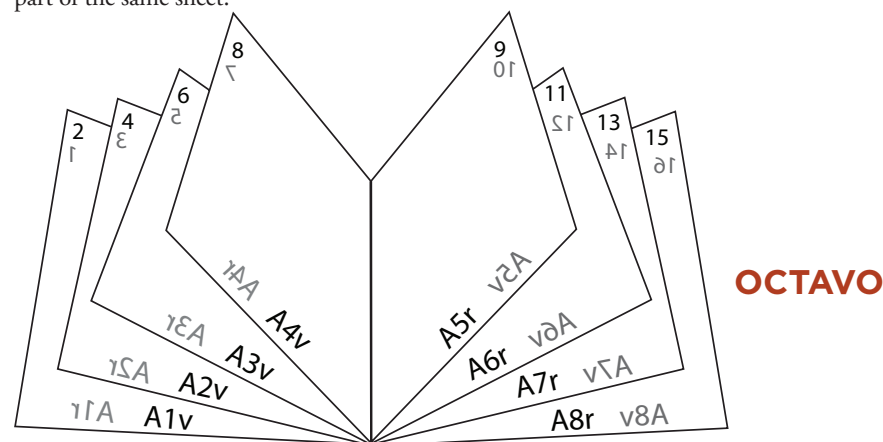
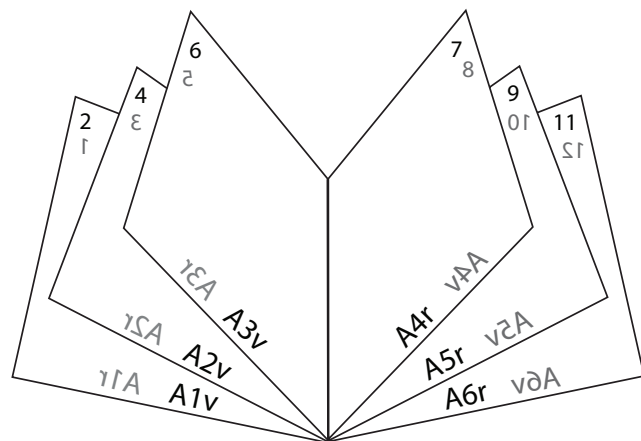
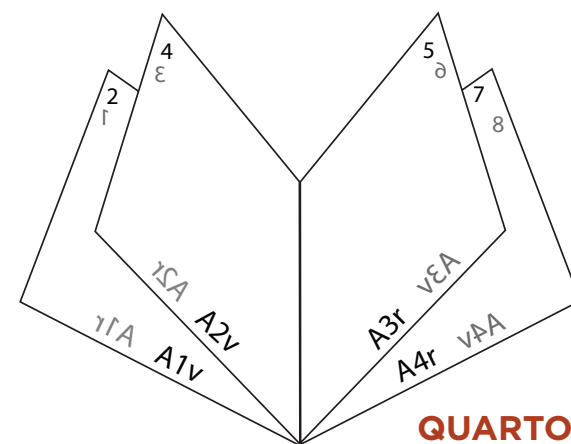
A **gathering** is one section of a handmade book, labeled for placement in a larger sequence. In the case of a quarto or octavo, a gathering is contained within the pages printed on one sheet (eight and sixteen, respectively). For folios, a gathering usually took up several sheets of paper. The First Folio gatherings are of three sheets each, for instance, making it a “gathering in sixes,” if you count by leaves.

LEAF



Gatherings are sometimes also called **signatures**. The term **signature mark** refers specifically to the letters (or sometimes symbols) and numbers added to the recto of leaves to help ensure printers and binders assembled the sheets in the correct order. The **A**'s on the front of this sheet indicate the first leaf in the gathering. **B** would be the signature mark of the second gathering, if there were one. C, D, and E would follow in order, if necessary.

Full signature statements are marked in the diagrams here. But in early modern books, the versos are not labeled, and the second half of the gathering is also not labeled. The backside of a recto, the verso, doesn't need its own signature because it is always connected to its frontside, just as the second half of the gathering is normally part of the same sheet.



Learn more about the working knowledge of printers and enter the virtual printing house at DIY First Folio. www.folger.edu/diyFF