

The Printed Book

Carin Ruff, Spring 2026

Thursdays, 11:45 am-1:15 pm, in person at OLLI. March 5 through April 16

Contact: carinr@gmail.com Course website: <https://ruffnotes.org/printedbook/>

In this course we will explore aspects of the craft, business, and technologies of printing from Gutenberg to the mid-20th century. Note: This course substantially repeats the second half of my Fall 2024 course on the History of the Book.

Recommended supplementary reading: Adam Smyth, *The Book-Makers: A History of the Book in Eighteen Lives*. The audiobook, read by the author, is excellent, though seeing the illustrations, names, and terms in the printed or e-book versions will be helpful. No preparation is required for class meetings, but participants may enjoy this book as an adjunct to our lectures and discussions. The weekly schedule below includes suggestions about when to read which chapters in Smyth. I will also post videos and other readings at our course website as we go along.

Schedule of topics

NB: The schedule of topics below is subject to change and may ebb and flow as the group's interests reveal themselves.

Week 1 Gutenberg and his medieval context

☞ Suggested reading between weeks 1 & 2: *The Book-Makers*, Ch. 1, Printing: Wynkyn de Worde, and the first part of Ch. 6, on eastern papermaking.

Week 2 Paper in Asia, the Middle East, and Europe; printing in Asia; wood block printing in the west; alternative theories of Gutenberg's types

Week 3 Format; development of the printing trade 16th-18th c.; censorship and control of the press; printing and the Reformation

☞ Suggested reading before or after week 3: *The Book-Makers*, first half of Ch. 4, "Typography: John Baskerville"

Week 4 Printing in Colonial America

☞ Suggested reading before or after week 4: *The Book-Makers*, Ch. 5, "Non-Books: Benjamin Franklin"

Week 5 The Industrial Revolution

☞ Suggested reading before or after week 5: *The Book-Makers*, Ch. 6, "Paper: Nicolas-Louis Robert"

Week 6 Fine printing, the Arts & Crafts movement, 20th-century typographers

☞ Suggested reading before or after week 6: *The Book-Makers*, Chs. 9 & 10

Week 7 Hot metal: Monotype and Linotype