

Rare Book School

Introduction to the Principles of Bibliographical Description

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Sample bibliographical descriptions of the sort students will be asked to prepare during homework and laboratory sessions are offered on the following pages. (The bibliographical citations and explanatory notes have been added to provide more context.)

Once you have done the advance reading, and if you have the time (and access to a few hand-press period books), you might try your hand at writing sample descriptions. Even if you are not sure of the correct answers, the experience of collecting bibliographical evidence and fashioning it into a concise description will help to prepare you for the homework and laboratory sessions.

Examples of Folio Format

Cortiada, Michael de. *Decisiones cancellarii & sacri regii senatus Cathaloniae*. Editio novissima. Venice: Ex typographia Balleoniana, 1727.

2°: a⁴ A-Z⁸, ²a-b⁸ c⁶ [\$4(-a3,4, ²c4) signed]; 210 leaves, pp. [8] 1-368, ²1-44 (misprinting 348 as 48)

On the treatment of duplicated series, see Bowers pp. 207-10 (signatures) and 280 (pagination). It might make more sense to treat the preliminary gathering in this book as 'a⁴'; but since the pagination of the index could only be expressed as ²1-44, it seemed neater to treat the corresponding signatures as ²a-b⁸ c⁶.

The misprinting of p. 348 (with a space for the "3") may be a feature of some copies only, the "3" having been pulled out of the form in inking, and then perhaps later replaced: a "press accident".

du Pin, Lewis Ellis. *A new history of ecclesiastical writers*. Vol. 6. London: Printed for Abel Swall and Tim. Child, 1698.

2°: [A]² B-Y⁴ [\$2 signed]; 86 leaves, pp. [4] 1-32 35-154 [=152] [16] [misprinting 6 as 8, 133 as 136, and 136 as 132]

For Bowers's general rule on inferring numbers in pagination statements, see middle of p. 277; while he counsels inferring final unnumbered pages, his examples all involve only a few pages; inferential sequences longer than about 10 pages do nothing to facilitate reference, which is the purpose of inference.

Barrow, Isaac. *The works of the learned Isaac Barrow*. 5th edn. Vol. II. London: A. Millar, 1741 [vol. II bound with vol. III].

2°: [A]²(±A1) B-3B⁴ 3C-3E² [\$2(-3CDE2) signed]; 196 leaves, pp. [4] 1-381 [382-388]

vol. 3: A⁴(±A1) B-3D⁴ 3E² [\$2(-3E2) signed]; 202 leaves, pp. [8] 1-377 [378] 379-390 [391-396]

See Bowers pp. 269 and 467 for examples of compressed reference notation in the statement of signing.

Examples of Quarto Format

Michaelis, Johann David. *Übersetzung des Alten Testaments*. Vol. I. Göttingen: 1789.

4°: a-e⁴ A-4Q⁴ 4R² 4S-6A⁴ [\$3(-a2, c3) signed]; 482 leaves, pp. ^π[1-5] 6-20 [21] 22-39 [40], [1] 2-72 [73] 74-692 691-922 [=924]

The fact that the 4th-6th alphabet signatures are printed '(4)A', etc., and that \$2,3 are printed '\$2', '\$3' is the sort of information best given in a note, rather than in the sort of signing statement we use; but if we were using the "paragraph" format, the information could be included there. See Bowers, p. 271.

On the use of superscript π for the preliminary pagination, see Bowers p. 281, n7.

Feijoó y Montenegro, Benito Gerónimo. *Theatro crítico universal*. Nueva impresion. Volume IV. Madrid: Imprenta Real, 1773.

4°: a-b⁸ c⁴ A-2G⁸ [\$4(-c3,4) signed]; 260 leaves, pp. [I-II] III-XL, 1-478 [479-480] [misnumbering 155 as 551, 176 as 276, 272 as 172, and 394 as 294]

Bowers (pp. 267n., 270n.) requires that unsigned leaves in half-sheets, &c., be accounted for when signing is stated (e.g. "\$4 signed"); here, unsigned c3 and c4 must be noted as exceptions to the pattern.

For the use of inferred numbers in the pagination statement, see Bowers p. 277 (middle three lines) and (for unpaginated final pages) p. 282.

Porter, Thomas. *The villain*. London: T. Warren for H. Herringman, 1694.

4°: A-K⁴ L1 [\$2(+A3) signed]; 41 leaves, pp. [1-4] 5-82

This edition of *The villain* is used as an example by Bowers, p. 230 (bottom 6 lines). He notes that describing the final leaf as L1 in the collational formula is acceptable, provided examination reveals that L1 has no conjugate leaf intended for use in this book. In fact, it would be proper to write the formula as ...L²(-L2), since it is known from examining other copies that the printer used leaf L2 to print the single-leaf general title-page for Volume 1 of the 1694 collection of John Dryden's plays. A note would be necessary to explain what has happened to L2.

Examples of Octavo Format

Goldsmith, Oliver. *The history of England*. 6th edition. Vol. I. London: L. Davis et al., 1790.

8°: π^2 a⁴ B-2E⁸ 2F⁶ [\$4(-a3,a4,2F4) signed]; 228 leaves, pp. [4] [i] ii-viii, [1] 2-411 [33] [misprinting 126 as 162, 373 as 307] or ... 2-48 [49] 50-103 [104] 105-126 [127] 128-138 [139] 140-152 [153] 154-166 [167] 168-208 [209] 210-228 [229] 230-261 [262] 263-293 [294] 295-331 [332] 333-350 [351] 352-387 [388] 389-411
....

Bowers (p. 267n, 270n) requires that unsigned leaves in half-sheets, &c., be accounted for when signing is stated (e.g. "\$4 signed"); here, unsigned a3, a4, and 2F4 must be noted.

Bowers allows, and seems to encourage, compression of pagination statements in a long book where there are many normally unnumbered pages; see Bowers p. 274, footnote 2.

Strong, Nathan. *Sermons on various subjects, doctrinal, experimental and practical*. Vol. II. Hartford: Printed by John Babcock for Oliver D. & I. Cooke, 1800.

8°: [A]⁴ B-3E⁴ [\$1 signed]; 204 leaves, pp. [i-iii] iv-viii [9] 10-408

Bowers, curiously, does not give any examples of, nor even refer to this common C19 approach to the numbering of text pages as a continuation of a roman-numeral preliminary sequence. Since it is obviously the printer's intention to number text pages with arabic numerals, the first page of text is inferred as [9], not left uninferred as [I]; of course it cannot be [ix].

Plutarch. *Plutarch's Morals*. 3rd edn. Vol. II. London 1694.

8°: A-2L⁸ [\$4 signed]; 272 leaves, pp. [16] 1-527 [528] [misprinting 170-171, 174-175 (in inner M) as 180-181, 184-185; 181 as 191; 254 as 154]

The engraved frontispiece is printed on integral A1^v, and is treated as part of the normal gatherings.

For Bowers's general rule on inferring numbers in pagination statements, see middle of p. 277.

Examples of Duodecimo Format

Rowe, Nicholas. *The fair penitent*. London: John Bell, 1776.

12°: A-E⁶ [\$3 signed]; 30 leaves, pp. [1-2] 3-5 [6] 7-60

A very straightforward book.

Smith, Horace. *Tales of the early ages*. Vol. I. New York: 1832.

12°: π² A-I¹² K² [\$1,2,5 (-K2) signed; \$5 signed '\$3']; 112 leaves, pp. [4] [1] 2-103 [104-105] 106-172 [173] 174-218 [219-220]

The book is on untrimmed handmade wove paper. The advertisements on π1 and K2 are integral.

This manner of signing duodecimos, standard for the period, is briefly discussed by Bowers (p. 434), with some suggestions concerning the signing statement. We have given the statement according to the usual Rare Book School practice.

La Bretonne, Rétif de. *Les nuits de Paris*. Pts 3/4 (in Vol. II). A Londres [*i.e.* Paris?]: s.n., 1789.

12°: pt. 3. A-O^{8/4} P⁴ [\$4/2 signed]; 88 leaves, pp. [1-3] 4-176; pt. 4. A⁸ B-P^{8/4} [\$4/2 signed; missigning B3,4 as A3,4, D4 as D3, N2 as 'N1']; 92 leaves, pp. [1-3] 4-183 [184] [misprinting 63 as 27, 82 as 83, 99 as 69]

The missigning of pt. 4, B3,4 may reflect a compositor's instinct that the 8-leaf portion of a sheet in 8/4s near the beginning of the text must be gathering A.

Bowers's examples are almost exclusively English: thus, he provides no examples of duodecimo in 8s and 4s, though he does address the matter on p. 205, commending the use of superscript 8/4, a device which he attributes to Alfred Pollard. The Rare Book School notation in the signing statement ('\$4/2') is a homemade but perfectly logical extension of the 8/4 formula.