The Print Quality & Handoff Sheet

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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- [ ] **Built on the supplied die.** Art sits on the exact production dieline, locked — not one rebuilt by eye or a superseded version.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.

2 / Proof sign-off

Approving a proof is a decision, not a rubber stamp. Work the list in order every time, before you sign.

- [ ] **Dieline & cut/crease correct.** Finished size right, folds and panels where they should be, art built to the current dieline — not a superseded one.
- [ ] **Bleed & safety hold.** Background runs past every cut; nothing important sits in the safety margin.
- [ ] **Copy proofread.** Read every word against the approved source — ingredients, claims, dosing, directions. Proofs are for checking the file, not writing new copy.
- [ ] **Color on target, within tolerance.** Judge against the agreed target and a numeric tolerance (often expressed as ΔE) on a suitable proof — never by eye on a screen.
- [ ] **Spot vs process is right.** Brand colors specified as spot inks kept as spots — not silently converted to a CMYK build that will drift between runs.
- [ ] **Barcode scans.** Number correct, it actually scans, quiet zone intact on both sides. Cheap to check; a failed scan can reject a whole run at retail.
- [ ] **White ink / underprint shown.** On clear film or foil: the white layer present where it should be, knocked out where it shouldn't. A flat proof can hide this entirely.
- [ ] **Finishes placed.** Spot gloss, matte, foil, emboss, soft-touch where intended. Many don't render on a standard proof — confirm on a separate layer or written description.
- [ ] **Right version & language.** One SKU, one language, one regulatory market. Approving last revision's file is one of the most common, avoidable errors.
- [ ] **Legal & net-quantity copy final.** Net weight and required statements are the exact approved wording, verified against the relevant authority for your market — never a placeholder to "fix later."

Once you sign, you own it: anything visible on the proof generally becomes yours to fix. What doesn't transfer is production quality you couldn't see — color outside the agreed tolerance, misregistration beyond spec, seal or material defects stay the supplier's.

WHAT EACH PROOF TYPE ACTUALLY PROMISES

SOFT PROOF	CONTRACT PROOF	3D / RENDER	PRESS PROOF
On-screen PDF. Approve **content**: layout, copy, dieline registration. Never approve color on a screen.	Calibrated hard proof. Approve **color** to a named standard within an agreed tolerance — not the real substrate's texture or finish.	Approve **structure**: folds, panel orientation, how art wraps the form — not exact press color or tactile feel.	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 _____

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