Hand-Press Printing

Ink: printing ink consisted of a varnish and a colour. The varnish was made by combining vegetables and ash, while a colour, the verniss, consisted of a pigment. Rags were soaked, mixed and ground to remove grease. 500g was added to the oil to make black ink, and ground bread crusts and onions were added to the oil to remove residue. Bread crusts were added to the ink oil with a rush to prevent the ink from spreading. The ink was made by combining vegetables and ink. The ink was then used to make red ink, by mixing red ink with black ink.

Printed: each letter of the alphabet was carved at the top of a thin piece of metal, called a punch. This was then cut into a softer metal to create a mould, which was filled with liquid metal to cast the pieces. The pieces were then sorted by letter, with each letter of the alphabet on a different pile. These were sorted by letter, with each letter of the alphabet on a different pile. To make a book, these were placed in order on long tables. Page numbers were often wrong so the sheets were kept in order by the ‘signatures’, letters printed below the last line of text on the first page on each sheet. A sheet was picked from each pile and folded and cut to form a section of a book.
Paper: for the first five hundred years of printing, paper was made from linen or cotton rags. These were cut up and mixed with water to create a mixture known as 'stuff'. The paper-maker dipped a mould, a rectangular wire sieve, into a vat of the stuff shaking it to lock the fibres together. Lines made by the sieve can be seen in hand-made paper.

Early books were often sold unbound or in paper covers so that the buyer could have the book bound to his own design. The Binder sewed the separate sections of the book together and attached this 'text block' to the boards with cords. The boards were covered with leather and often decorated.