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Corrupt or Too Complex to Print

In recent years, books have been blocked because the file "is corrupt or too complex to print." Previously, CS would try to fix files that were corrupt or to complex, however that changed about four years ago.

Converting text to outlines will fix the problem in most cases.

Bad or missing glyphs (corrupt) show up as blank spaces, boxes, □, in place glyphs, or some other strange symbol. These should be located and changed because otherwise they will print. Or, the reason for the book being blocked may simply be the complexity; as in too many fonts in. If everything looks good:

14/26 Times Justified

Convert your file to a PDF—At a minimum, use a preset that embeds fonts: PDF/X-1a, PDF/X-3, etc.

Apply a watermark—In Acrobat, a single period will do, set at 0% opacity or tint. Apply this to the file, it will place a transparent period on every page. (*Adobe Acrobat > Tools > Pages > Watermark > Add Watermark >*)

Convert text to outline—This can be applied to select pages or the entire book. Unless size is an issue, I'd suggest applying it to the entire book. (*Adobe Acrobat > Tools > Print Production > Flattener Preview > Convert All Text to Outlines*)

Although I'm sure there are other programs that will do this, I have Acrobat (not Reader) and I've tested this conversion in Acrobat. I have also tried other methods, e.g. in InDesign. This works the most consistently, and is quick.

Through extensive dealings with CS TechnicalSupport over this issue with regard to printing a type specimen book—which has over 5,000 fonts in it, they had fixed early drafts but then said they could not—research, including communications with Adobe, and testing, I have worked out the following:

Around 2012, CS had problems with their RIP, it is also when some of us think CS upgraded many of its presses. This is the software that prepares each page for printing, a process that involves converting multi-layers into a single layer and then mapping every addressable dot of ink for that page.

10/12 Times Justified

When a printing system has problems printing fonts, something that was fairly common years ago, converting text to images, "converting text to outlines," was the usual fix: e.g. text can be converted to outline (image) in Acrobat, InDesign, etc. It cannot be edited, however it is no longer text, and font printing problems disappear.

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Just converting text to outline in Acrobat will fail if the process encounters a bad glyph (corrupt). In this scenario, a large part of the time in trying to fix a PDF that won't print correctly is finding corrupt glyphs.

Two sorts of books seemed to get blocked often: books with lots of fonts in them (possibly containing some corrupt glyphs) and books that contained mathematical formulas.

Converting text to outline is the fix; however, if the process fails with even a single bad glyph, it's easy to see why CS would stop trying to fix these issues. Until I tried the process listed above, it was a crap shoot as to whether the book would convert or not. The solution: add a transparent image to the pages (the watermark at 0% opacity—non-printing), then convert to outlines. What you see on the PDF pages, is what gets converted.
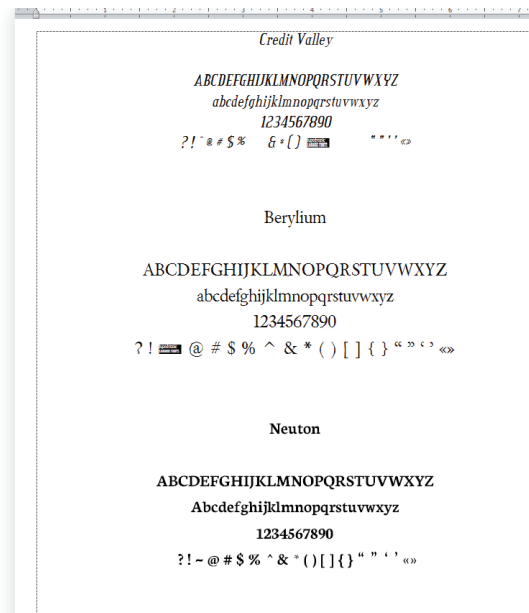
I have tested this on Word, OpenOffice, and InDesign files, using fonts with corrupt or missing glyphs. Until I added the transparency, Word and OpenOffice files were nearly impossible to convert to outlines, and I could find no pattern that worked. InDesign files needed the corrupt glyphs removed.

Converting text to outlines is dismissed on a number of sites because it "degrades" the text—and example given often is the loss of text effects like underlining, strikethroughs, etc., when converting inside InDesign. Converting the PDF keeps those effects. I think that it does very slightly thicken some strokes, but if it does, it is negligible.

As an aside, using the convert to outline process, without the addition of transparency, is one way of locating internal corruptions in a file. As the conversion takes place, the page numbers are listed. Where the conversion fails is where the file is corrupted.
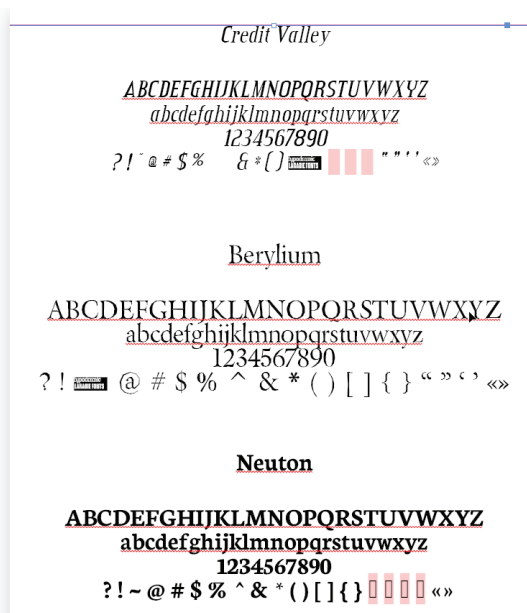
InDesign—corrupt glyphs

Word—corrupt glyphs