

Gray or Faded Text

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate—we can not consecrate—we can not hallow—this ground. The brave

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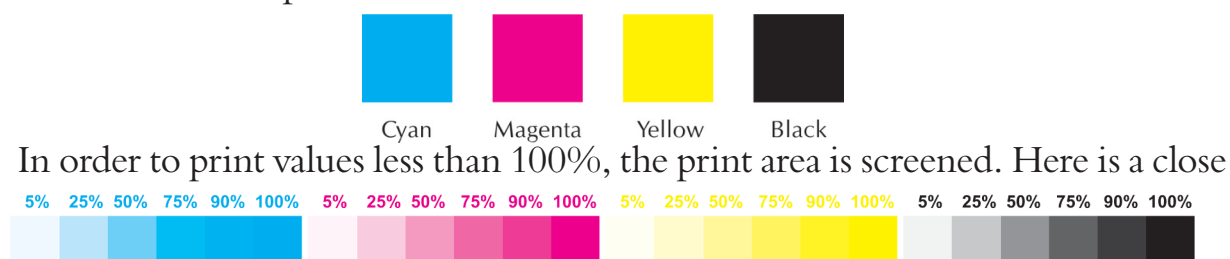
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Gray or “faded” text

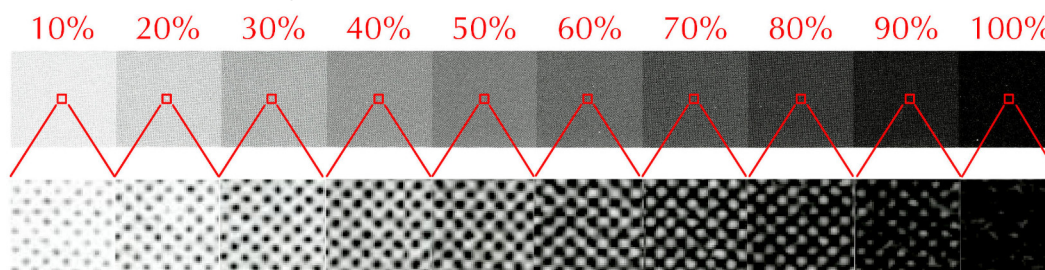
Gray or faded text may be as simple as insufficient ink or as complicated as halftone screening. It can be because the source file (Word, InDesign, Affinity Publisher, etc.) is using rich black, or some shade of gray.

Background

In most commercial printing, and, for example, your color inkjet printer, full-color uses using four colored ink or toners: Cyan, Magenta, Yellow, and Black, normally referred to as CMYK, where K stands for Black. These are called Process Colors. And each color can print in values of 0–100%:



up of black from 10–100%:



The lower line, shows the halftone screening.



Black can be blacker. Obviously 100% K-only, is as black as black in can get, but there are Rich Blacks made up of black plus other colors. A very common rich black is Photoshop black, C75 M68 C67 K90.

On our monitors 100% black is the absence of color, R00 G00 B00. So what I am showing is a simulation. But it is reasonably fair comparison, so you can see how much blacker a rich black can be.

Rich Black vs. 100% K-only Text

I have worked with few people who wrote their books unintentionally using a

rich black. They formatted their books. They saw the text every day as a rich deep black. But when they received their printed books, the text was “faded.”

This is 100% K-only

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This is Photoshop Black (C75 M68 Y67 K90)

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This is an approximation of how Photoshop Black prints in B&W books

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12 pt TNR volutpat $\pm 0.085''$

volutpat

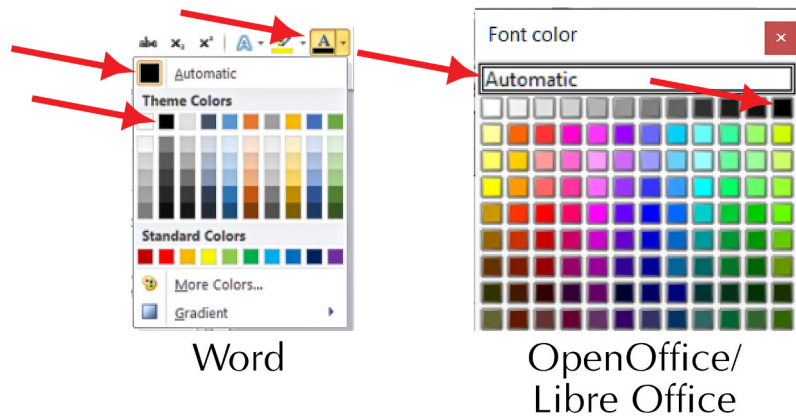
The reason for Photoshop Black printing lighter than 100% K-only is that the CMY component will be removed. Then to achieve 90% K, the text will be screened.

Sometimes, text will be screened if it is in proximity of an image. And sometimes, it gets screened for no reason—it is 100% K-only and it is on a page or in a book with no images. It happens.

If you suspect your text is screened, scan a small section at the highest possible resolution, then at it in a graphics program. Magnify as needed.

In Word, OpenOffice, Libre Office, Automatic or Black will produce 100% K-only in B&W books. Most people simply use the Automatic default, so most of this is never a problem.

I should add, recently I have had two books where there were a dozen charts using a rich black with 55%K and 22%K. These books were to print in grayscale, and the black text in the charts would have extremely faded.



Conclusion

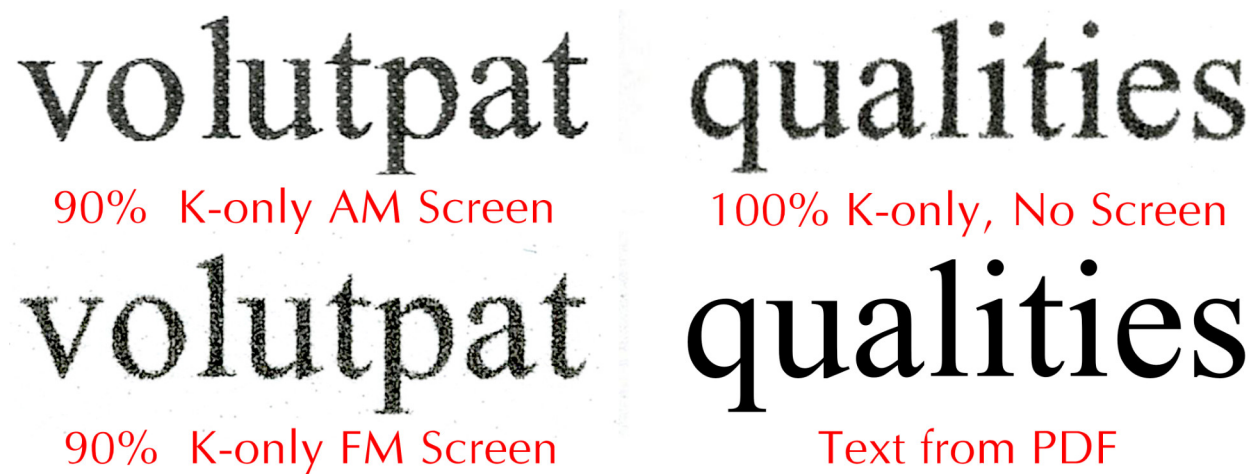
Some people's monitors show text darker, so the difference between what you see on the monitor and what is printed looks darker. If the text hasn't been screened, and the ink/toner flow is normal, there is no printing problem. This years alone, 2024, I have worked four author's who had complained about "faded" text. In each case, they were viewing text set in a rich black, and their printed proofs were, accordingly disappointing. One solution was to convert their PDFs to Grayscale (in Acrobat DC—not Reader—*Tools > Print Production > Preflight > Profiles > Convert colors > Convert to grayscale*). This has in those cases produced K-only text at 100%. In two cases, I had to rework the source file to set the text to Black. Converting to grayscale was a way of eliminating some possible variables when printing.

In many programs, you can sample the blacks in the source file and determine if the problem is the color itself. This is the simplest and quickest diagnostic.

Low ink/toner: With print-on-demand, you should order a few printed proofs. If there were problems with the amount of ink, you can often see differences between the copies. Also if you scan the text at a high resolution, 1200dpi is great if you have

it, then open it in a graphics program, if the ink is not screened, you can probably assume the problem is low ink/toner.

Screened Text: if you scan the text, enlarge it, and see halftone dots, you can assume the text was screened (these are enlargements of 12 pt text):



Unfortunately, it may be difficult to tell if the text was screened if the book was printed using FM screening. At least this is a place to start analyzing the problem.

Be aware of the problem and try to make sure you text is set to what will be 100% K-only. Without a program like Acrobat Pro, it hard to know what the print-ready PDF itself uses.

Again, this is not a frequent problem, but it can be frustrating. KDP Customer Support and, in fact, most forum members have not experienced this. Be aware of the issue, and you will be less likely to have problems.