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This parameter specifies the maximum depth of the bottom box on a page. It is related to \boxmaxdepth (p. '\boxmaxdepth'). If the depth of the bottom box on a page exceeds \maxdepth, TEX moves the box's reference point down so that it's \maxdepth from the bottom of that box. Without this adjustment, the bottom box on a page could extend well into the bottom margin or even off the page entirely. Plain TEX sets \maxdepth to 4pt.