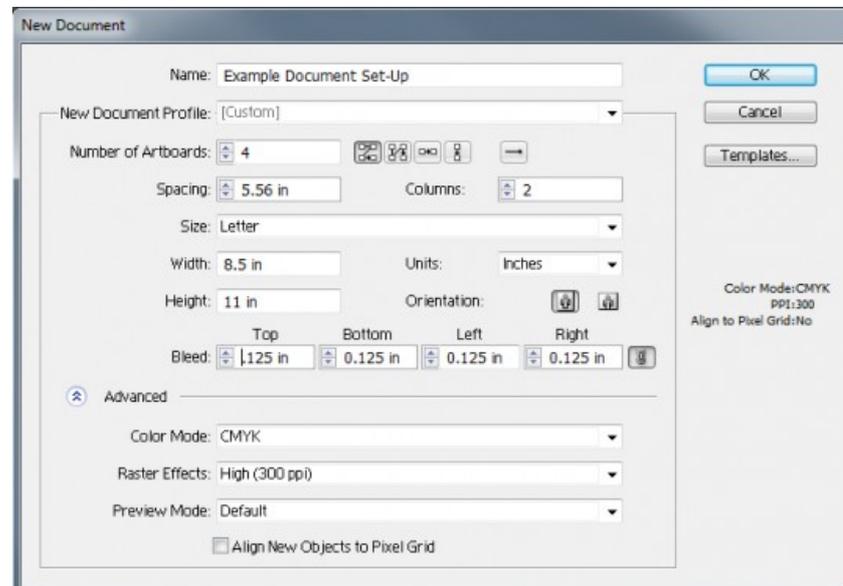


6 Essentials to Setting Up Your Illustrator Documents

1. When setting up your document specs, keep the end product in mind

When creating a new Illustrator document, the very first thing you'll be confronted by is the New Document (profile) window that asks you a bunch of questions. The important thing here is that you know what you're designing for. Are you designing a web page or a poster? Is your design going to be viewed mostly online or in printed form? Once you know the primary way that your design will be used, here are the recommendations:



New Document Profile

Adobe has been kind enough to create document spec cheat sheets. Instead of making all the following decisions on your own, you can simply select a common-use profile. But when none of these seem ideal to you - set settings as "custom."

Number of Art Boards

If you will need multiple art boards of the same size, go ahead and select how many you'll need. A common example of this would be a multi-page brochure, or multi-page website design. If you're planning on laying out anything over 12 pages you might seriously consider switching over to InDesign which is better suited for large documents. If you are setting up a document that will require multiple art boards of different sizes, I wouldn't worry too much about this here either. You'll need to set up those art boards once you're in the document.

Spacing

If you have multiple art boards Adobe wants to know how much space to put between them. Personally, I use lots of space around my art boards to put design elements I'm working with.

Columns

This is NOT column guides on your art boards, this is simply how Adobe arranges the art boards on your work area. This adjusts automatically based on the number of art boards.

Size

Obviously, this is the size of the art board. Here's what you need to know. If you're designing for print and require a bleed, you can either add the bleed dimensions directly to the art board or you can add a bleed dimension, and Illustrator will include the art in the bleed area when it

exports. However, if you “Save For Web,” then it will not include that bleed artwork. As with the New Document Profile, Adobe has kindly provided you with a list of common art board sizes.

Width and Height

Obviously, if you’re creating a custom art board size, this is where you put it in.

Units

Before I type in my custom art board size, I like to establish what units I’ll be working in. It’s just much easier for me to think of print dimensions in terms of inches and web dimensions in terms of pixels.

Orientation

The orientation is established by the width and height you enter in. But if you decide to flip it, this is an easy way to swap those dimensions.

Bleed

This is where you’ll enter in how much bleed you’ll need. For most printers this will be .125” (inches) on all four sides. Obviously, if you’re designing for the web you won’t need a bleed.

There is a little double-arrow to open the “Advanced” area, which I recommend.

Color Mode

This is probably one of the most important settings you’ll need to establish for your document. For print you’ll want CMYK. For web you’ll want RGB. If you’re doing something like branding where the design (a logo) will be used on both print and web, I would start with RGB.

Raster Effects

This is the resolution at which Illustrator will render its effects – things like drop shadows. Although technically you shouldn’t really need anything over 72dpi for the web, I always set this to 300dpi. I am just never sure when I might want to use part of a design for print or decide to blow-up a part of the design.

Preview Mode

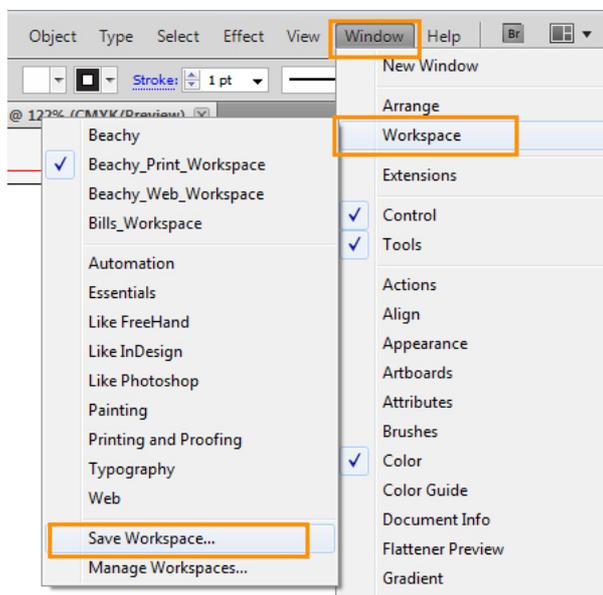
Most of the time you’ll want to be in the default Illustrator view, but if you’re designing for the web and want to have a more realistic view of how your design will look once rasterized, the Pixel Preview Mode can be useful. There is also an overprint preview mode which, quite frankly, I never use and have a very difficult time imagining a scenario where you might need.

Align New Objects to Pixel Grid

If you’re designing for the web checking this off will force your vectors to align to the pixel grid. This helps keep your vectors pixel-perfect when they rasterize. Though you’ll also notice your objects snapping into locations that are not necessarily where you’re putting them.

2. Set up and save your preferred Workspace

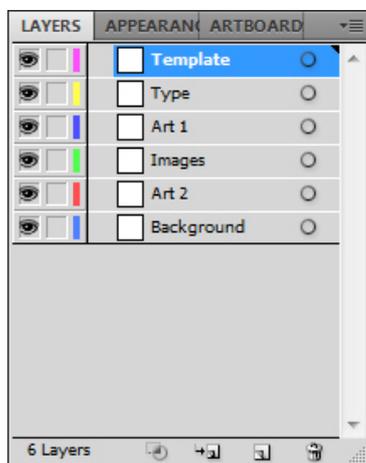
When you’re working in Illustrator there are tons of tool panels (known as Windows) all over your screen. You probably know that you can open, close and move your tool Windows around, but did you know you can also save the way you arrange them? This is critical to my work flow. I know which windows I use most frequently, so I’ve systematically arranged them in just the right order. When you have your work space set up just how you like it click Window/Workspace/Save Workspace.



Then name it something like “My_Print_Workspace.” You may find, as I did, that you’ll want to set up slightly different workspaces depending on the type of project you’re working on.

3. Set up and use Layers!

Layers are one of the most important tools for managing your Illustrator documents. Here is a typical layer stack that I will create while working on a project. Sometimes I’ll get even more specific by setting up layers with names like “Header Art,” “Navigation” or “Footer.” Basically, any design element that I might want to design as a distinct unit can be put on its own layer. Then, as I work, I’m constantly locking and unlocking the layers. This allows me to easily manipulate the elements on the layer I’m working on without disturbing the elements on the other layers. You should really get into the habit of building well-organized layers that have clear titles.



4. Create a template.

You’ll notice that the top layer of my document is labelled “Template.” I always start by designing a template and locking the layer. My templates for print projects look something like this: Solid black line for the exterior full-bleed area, then .125” inside of that I make a solid red line for the trimmed art area and finally, .25” inside of that I make a dashed black line for the “live area.”

If you don't check off this "Link" box, then Illustrator assumes you want to embed your image. When you embed an image it means that the photo's data becomes part of the Illustrator file. When you link your images Illustrator does not embed the photo data. Instead, it just refers back to the photo file that is saved on your hard drive. Here are the reasons I believe linking is the right way to go versus embedding. First, it will keep your Illustrator file sizes down. Second, when a photo is linked you can edit the photo outside of Illustrator and it will automatically update the image in Illustrator. Lastly, but most importantly, embedded images are known to corrupt Illustrator files. I've lost many Illustrator files because it had difficulty managing my embedded images. The only downside to linked images is that if you move your images on your hard drive, you'll need to re-link them when you open your Illustrator file. But re-linking files, in my opinion, is a small burden when you consider the advantages.

6. When saving, uncheck "Create PDF Compatible File"

One of the great advantages of Illustrator over raster based software like Photoshop is the ability to keep your file sizes very small. But for some reason Illustrator, by default, creates a PDF compatible file when you save it. This essentially bloats your file size to something similar to a raster file. While you may want to use this option when saving the final file that you give your client or send to a printer, you don't need it for day-to-day saving. So long as you're not done and don't plan on trying to open the file in some alternative software, uncheck the Create PDF Compatible File option when saving.

