YOUR QUICK GUIDE TO SETTING UP PRINT READY ARTWORK

Artwork:

Terminology, How to prepare, setup, and supply for print

Print isn't just about ink on paper. We know you're entrusting us to produce materials that reflect positively on your organisation and brand. Our aim is to work with you and act as your guide through the print process from start to finish, drawing on our expertise, experience, and knowledge to help you achieve the printed products you require.

This short guide has been prepared by the Studio at Hickling & Squires. It covers some common terminology used within the print industry and provides helpful pointers on how to create and supply your artwork ready for print, making the process from screen to print smoother and more efficient.

We aim to cover some of the most **important parts** in this guide, unfortunately we can't cover everything, so if you do need any further help, or if something doesn't quite make sense, please get in touch with us by calling **01773 536 400**, or email us at **hi@hickling-squires.co.uk**.

Contents

Here's what you can expect to find throughout this guide, refer to the page numbers for specific sections.

Overview

When designing artwork, it's common for files to be created with digital use in mind, approved on screen, and then sent straight to print when required. In many cases, this can lead to the printer requesting amendments - such as changes to colour, size, or resolution - often accompanied by a list of technical adjustments that can sometimes feel unfamiliar or confusing.

Designing for print is *quite different* from designing for digital use, and the way files are prepared can vary significantly between the two. For example, colours viewed on screen can appear as vibrant as your monitor allows. In print, however, colours are produced using a four-colour (**CMYK**- Cyan, Magenta, Yellow and Black) process to build a mixture of inks. While this process can still deliver excellent results, the achievable colour range is more limited than what can be displayed on screen.

The material an artwork is printed on can also affect the final appearance, as colours may reproduce differently depending on the type of paper or substrate used.

Some of the most common issues we encounter when reviewing artwork for print include colours being supplied in **RGB** (Red, Green and Blue) rather than **CMYK**, images set at a low resolution for web use and then enlarged for print- resulting in pixelation - and artwork being provided without sufficient bleed.

These and other key considerations will be explained in detail throughout this guide to help ensure your artwork is print-ready from the outset, along with some handy methods that are more up-to-date with modern methods of creating artwork that we are more frequently seeing, such as ***Canva***, alongside industry standard software, such as the ***Adobe Suite***.

A handy check-sheet has been placed at the end of this document for you to print and refer to when creating your print jobs, if you ever are in need of something to follow for quick reference.

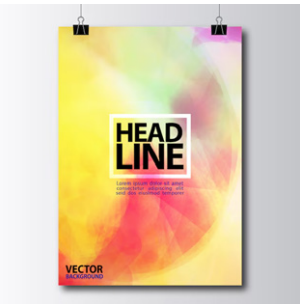
Initial Setup - Sizing

One of the first things we suggest doing, before opening up your software and starting your design, is making sure you know what size you're wanting your final product to be, so you can then set up your document at this size. This is commonly referred to as the printed products '**Finished Size**'.

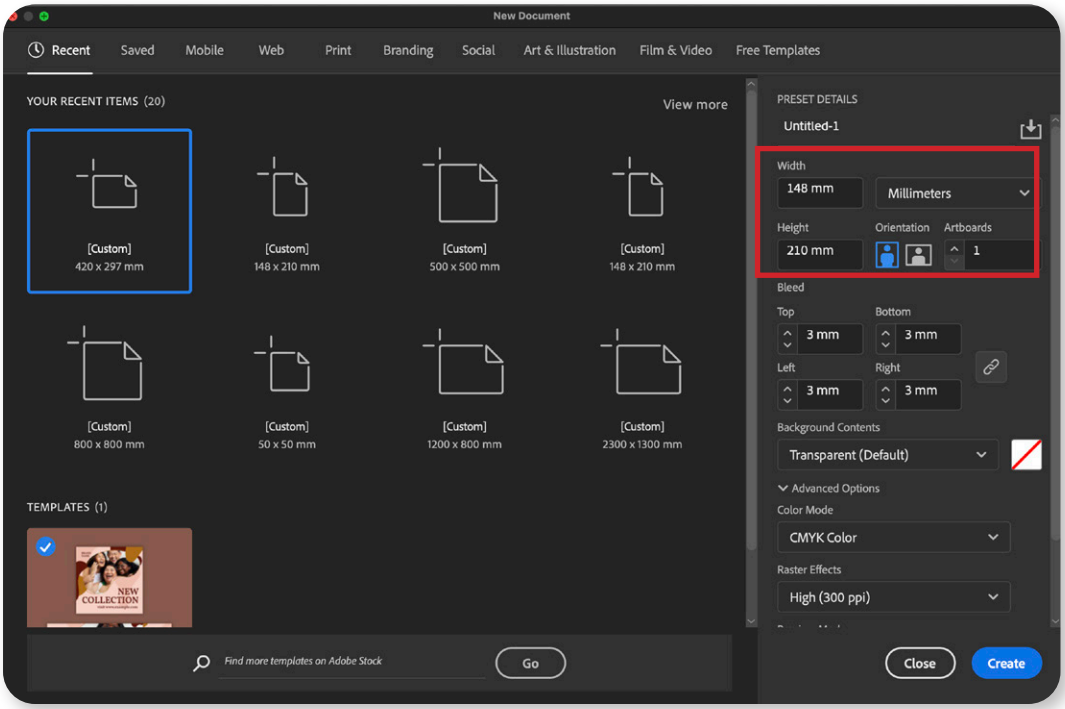
For example, if you're designing a leaflet to be printed at a finished size of A5, you would set your document up to be **148 x 210mm**. We generally use millimetres as a standard measurement throughout print.

Some common sizes for print are as follows:

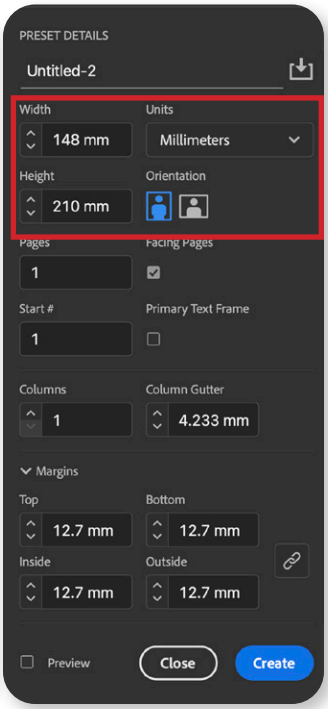
Size Name	Size in mm
A0	1189mm x 841mm
A1	841mm x 594mm
A2	594mm x 420mm
A3	420mm x 297mm
A4	297mm x 210mm
A5	210mm x 148mm
A6	148mm x 105mm
A7	105mm x 74mm
SRA0	1280mm x 900mm
SRA1	900mm x 640mm
SRA2	640mm x 450mm
SRA3	450mm x 320mm
SRA4	320mm x 225mm
C4 (Envelope size)	324mm x 229mm
C5 (Envelope size)	229mm x 162mm
C6 (Envelope size)	162mm x 114mm
DL (Envelope size)	110mm x 210mm
DL (Paper Size)	99mm x 210mm
Standard Business Cards	85mm x 55mm
Standard Pullup Banner	800/850mm x 2000mm



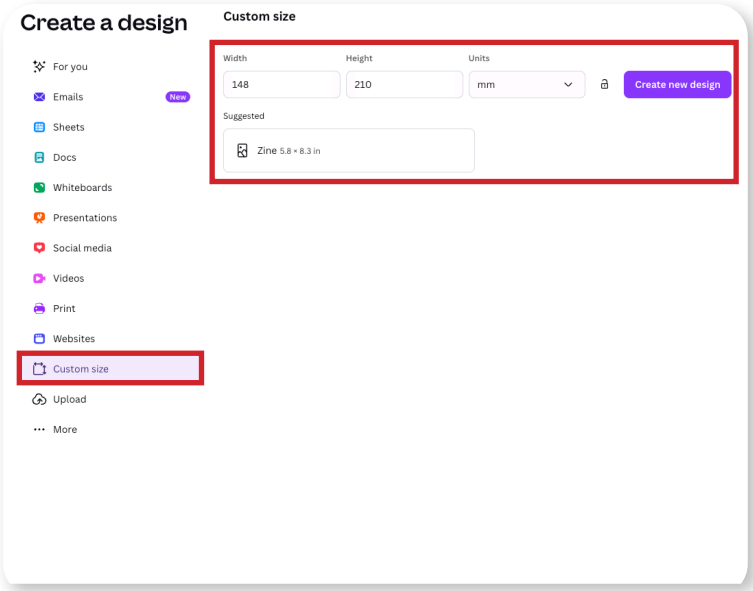
When setting up your document, create a new document and under your preset details, enter your finished size, and select your orientation, highlighted in the image below:



Adobe Illustrator



Adobe InDesign



Canva

If using Canva, create a new design, and select **Custom size**. This allows you to input your finished size. You will have to manually enter the dimensions in the correct orientation however.

Note: If you're designing for multiple sizes, let's say you want a poster printed in *A1*, *A3* and *A4* - it's best practice to design at the biggest size, and then it can be scaled down to the other sizes (*assuming it's proportional scaling, e.g. A-size to A-size, A1 to A4 for example*). If it can't be scaled, you'd need to set up artwork manually for other sizes.

If you design at the smallest size, then scale upwards - you add risk that any raster images on the artwork will look nice and sharp at A4, but pixelate and look awful once scaled up to a bigger size.

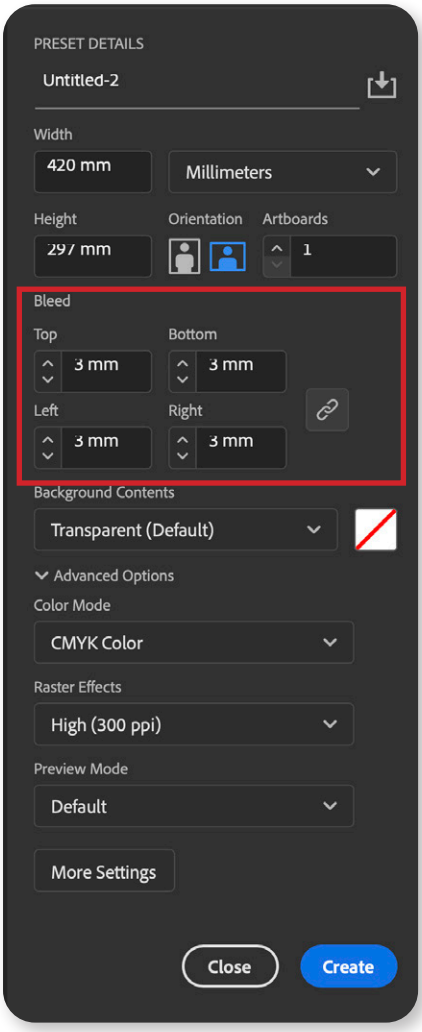
Document Bleed, Trim, Safe Areas

When creating a document, an important thing to remember in print, is setting up the document with **bleed.** Bleed is the process of extending the artwork past it's finished size, which allows for slight movement when on press/trimming to finished size.

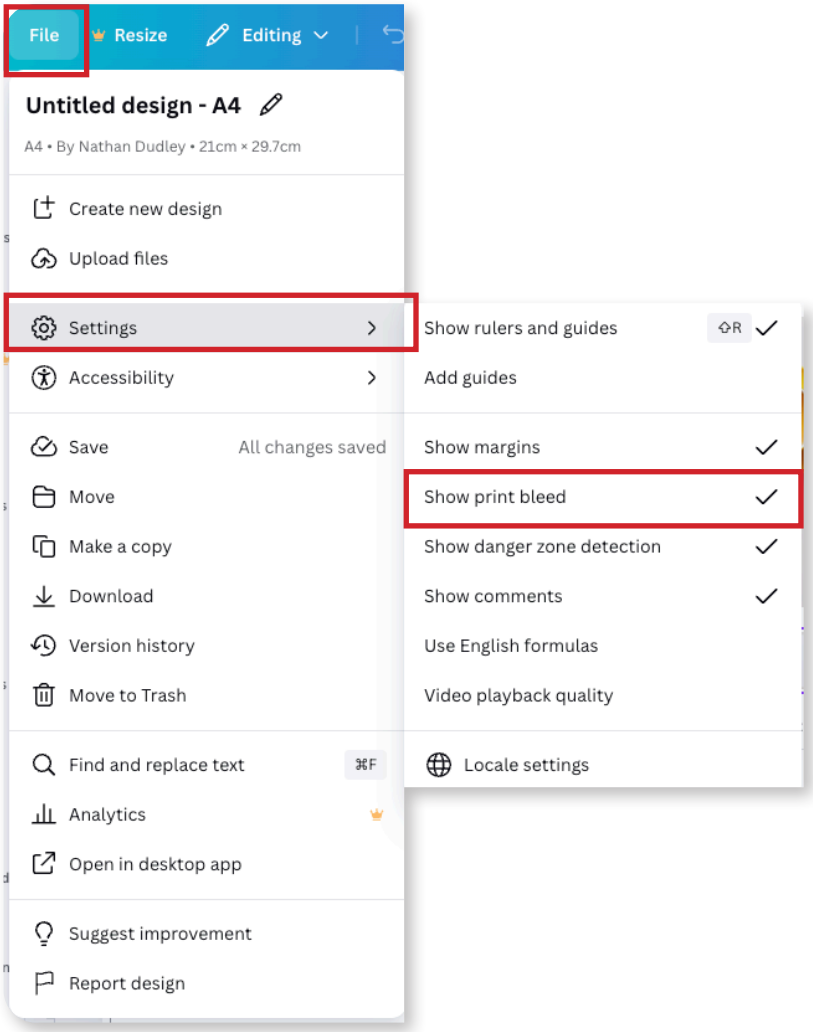
As much as the equipment these days is accurate, there are occasions in which trim on the artwork could be 1-3mm out, and with bleed set up, there is still artwork within the finished size. Without bleed, when the artwork is trimmed, it would just show the material colour, and this could lead to a harsh white edge, especially on dark artworks.

The standard bleed for print is **3mm** around all edges.

When setting up bleed within Adobe applications, this is defined when you create the document:



Illustrator/InDesign has the option on creating a new document

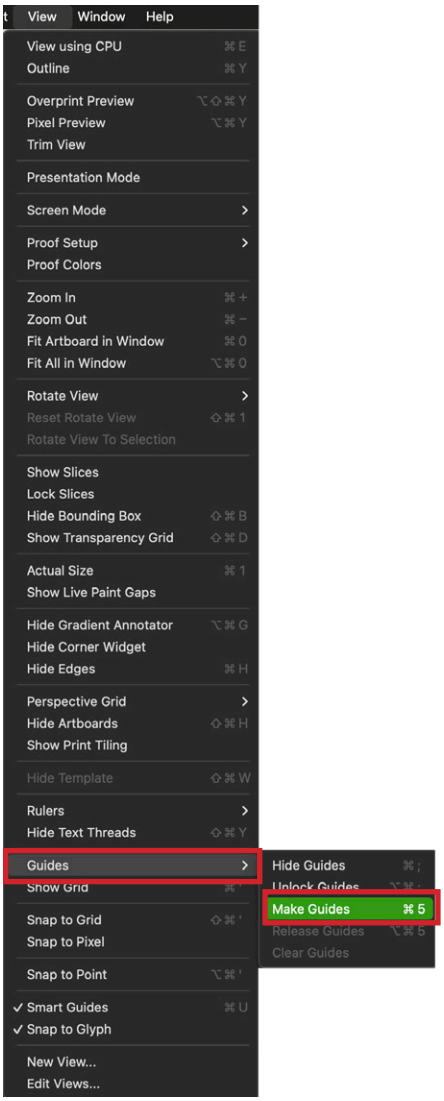


In Canva, go to File > Settings > Show print bleed. This will be 3mm as standard and show around the edge of the artwork - ensure your design goes to the edges where applicable.

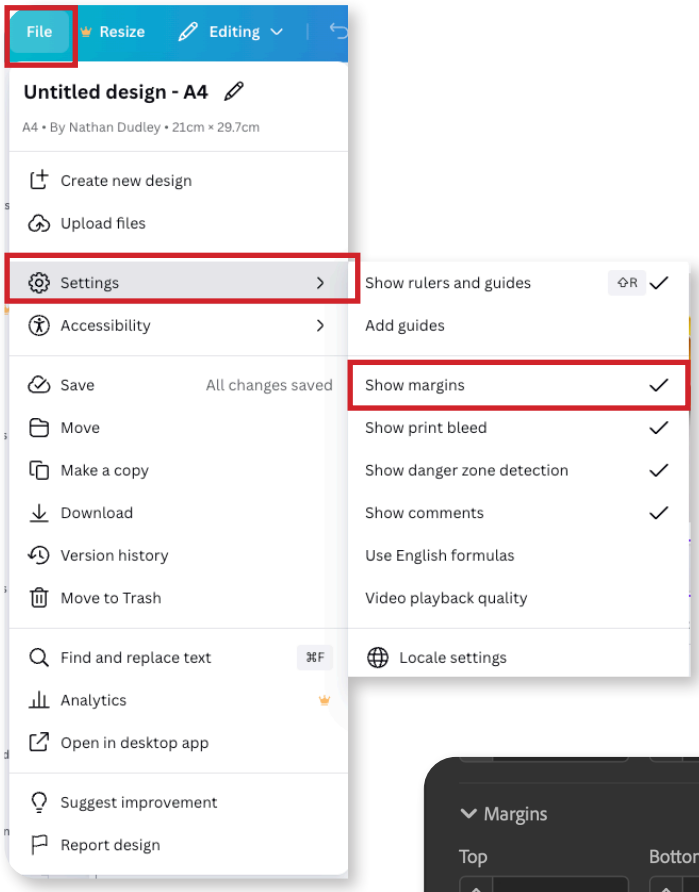
The **trim** refers to where the artwork is cut to (trimmed) when finished. If you have an A5 leaflet, 148 x 210mm, with 3mm bleed around all edges- the actual document size will be 154 x 216mm, however the trim will be set at 148 x 210mm.

Safe area is a term used to ensure that all important elements of a design are far enough inside of the trim, to make sure that nothing will get cut off when trimming down to size. We generally recommend that all text and important elements are at least **10mm** away from the trim on all sides.

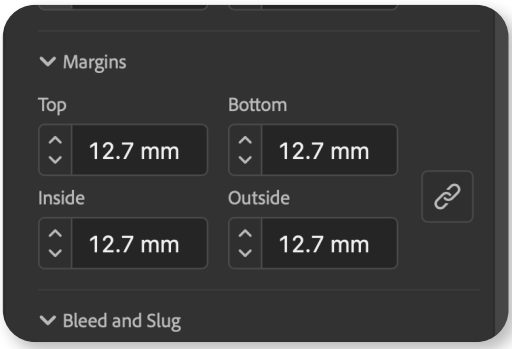
InDesign allows you to select margins upon creating a document, and Canva gives you a setting to enable these guidelines. Within Illustrator, you can set up a rectangle 10mm smaller than your finished size, and convert it to a guide, by selecting the box, then going to **View > Guides > Make Guides.**



Illustrator making guides



Canva - Settings and Show margins.



InDesign - Margins - default is set at 12.7mm on creating a new document

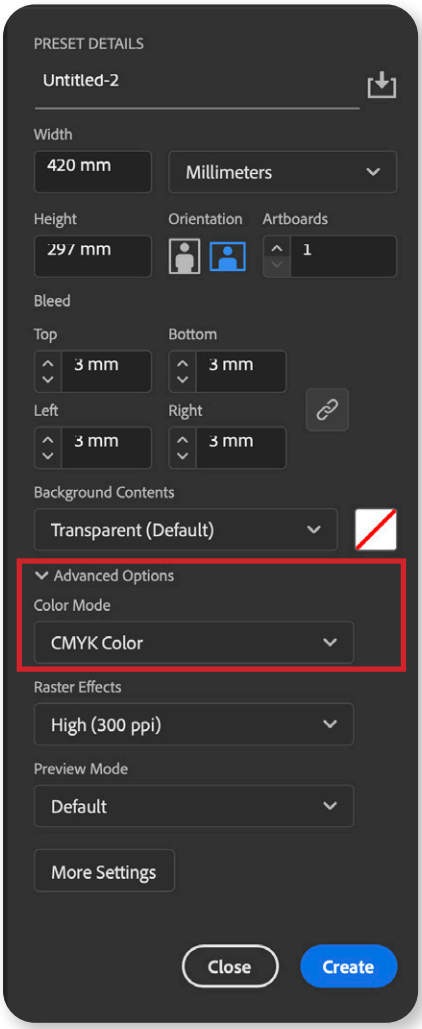
Colour Modes

When designing artwork, if your intended use is for web or on screen only, you would use **RGB** - Red, Green and Blue colour mode. However, if you're designing with print in mind - then you should set up your artwork in **CMYK** - Cyan, Magenta, Yellow and Black.

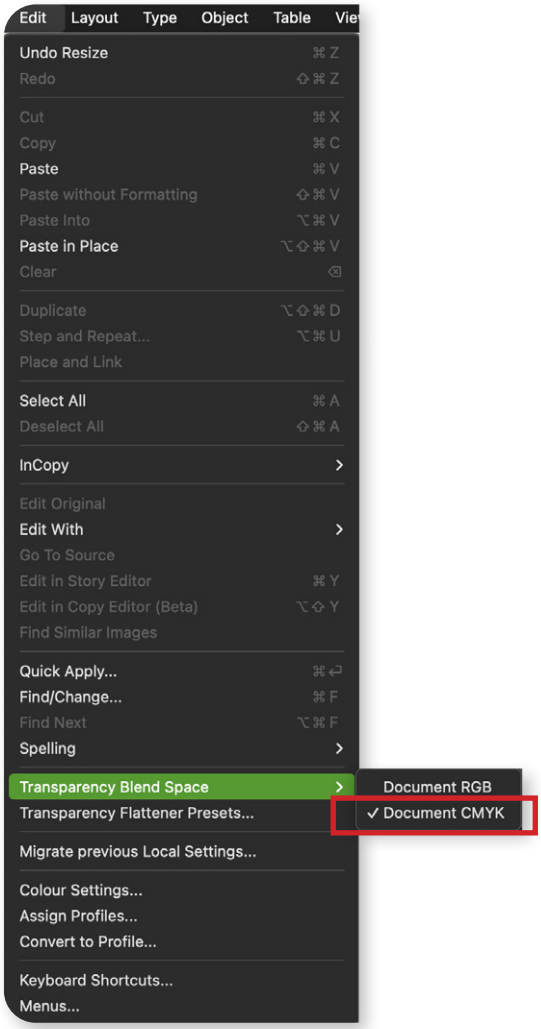
Artwork on press is printed using a mixture of these inks, known as a **four-colour process**, and different elements are built using a **breakdown** (mix) of these colours.

Any images that are used on your artwork, will need to be set in **CMYK** too. A lot of the time, this gets missed, as customers will set up their design in CMYK, but images are pasted from the web and these are set in RGB. Images can be converted upon exporting of your file, or converted prior to exporting, using image-editing software, such as *Adobe Photoshop*. This is known as **colour retouching**.

When setting up your file, ensure that the document colour mode is set to CMYK:



Illustrator has the option on creating a new document



InDesign - Checking through the menu settings

When creating a document in InDesign, it will not ask you which colour mode to use, this is controlled from within the document.

If you go to **Edit** > **Transparency Blend Space**, make sure that ***Document CMYK*** is highlighted.

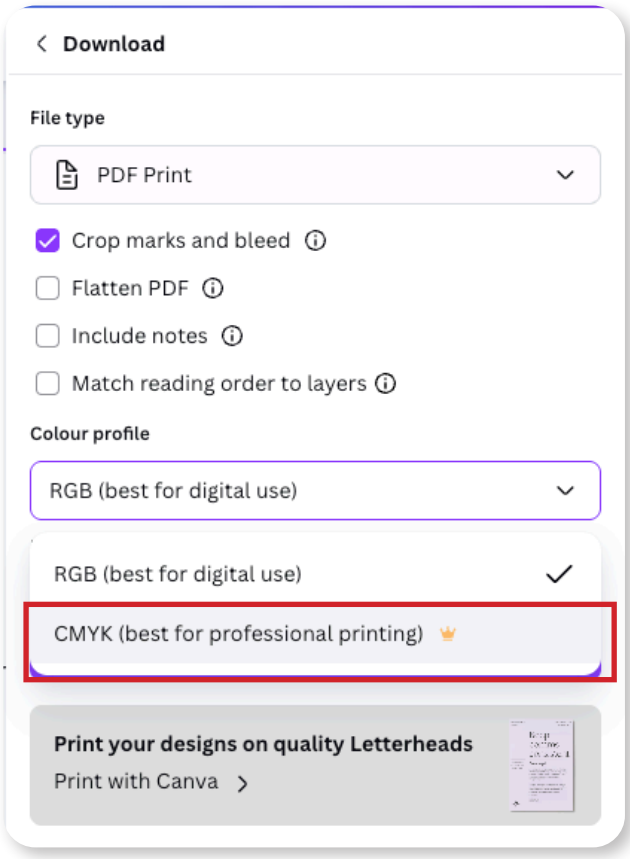
When using Canva, it doesn't allow you the option to 'work' in **CMYK**, but does allow you to export in **CMYK** (assuming you use Canva's paid version).

This is because Canva, inherently, is a web-based design solution, meaning it is on screen and most elements are set up to be viewed on screen.

If outputting in **CMYK**, it will convert the colours of the elements in your document upon exporting.

To export in **CMYK**, within Canva, go to **File** > **Download**, choose file type as '**PDF Print**', and select CMYK under '**Colour profile**'.

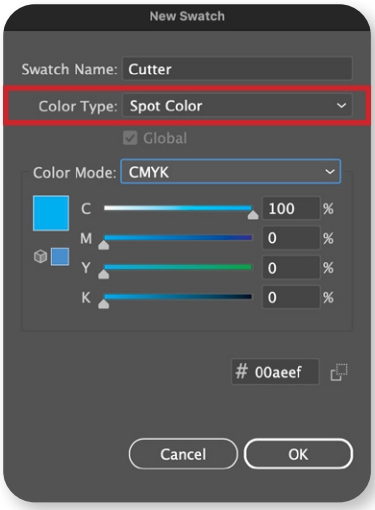
If you only have Canva *free version*, if you send us your PDF in RGB, we can convert it here to **CMYK**, but note that this may have a slight affect on the colour output when printed.



Download settings in Canva

Spot Colours

If you're setting up artwork with special colours such as *Pantone* colours for print, or varnishes, cutters and creases, - these would need to be set in a '**Spot colour**'. Canva doesn't give this option, but within Adobe, in your swatches, you can add spot colours.



Within your swatch panel, you can add a new swatch and select spot colour.

From within your **Swatches** (Window > Colour > Swatches) panel on InDesign / Illustrator (Window > Swatches), select **New Swatch**, give it a name and make sure it is set to a **Spot Color** under **Color Type**.

The colour mixture of CMYK values doesn't really matter for spot colours such as varnishes, cutters, creases and debosses etc., as these generally aren't printed and are just used to show positions of these special features.

Pages

When preparing artwork for print, it is generally best practice to design and export documents as **single pages** rather than spreads. This means that each page of the document should be supplied individually in the final collective PDF. Once the file is received, the printer will then impose the pages into the correct layout for production. **Imposition** is the process of arranging pages in the correct order and position so that they print, fold, and trim correctly to create the finished product.

When setting up documents in Illustrator or Canva, the page size should match the final trim size of the artwork, as mentioned earlier. If the document contains multiple pages, each page should be created as a separate artboard. This ensures that when the file is exported, each page can be supplied individually in the final collective PDF.

If you are working with InDesign, you have the option to set up documents as either facing pages (spreads) or **single pages** while designing. However, when exporting the final PDF, the pages should still typically be exported as single pages rather than spreads.

Because of its built-in tools for page management, InDesign is generally the preferred software for multi-page documents such as brochures or booklets, whereas Illustrator is better suited to single-page or double-sided items, such as posters, business cards, and leaflets.

There are some situations where artwork may need to be supplied as spreads instead of single pages, but this will usually be specified when the job is requested. Examples include A3 folded leaflets, certain bound booklets, roll-folded leaflets, or other products where the panel layout needs to be designed as a full spread. In these cases, guidance will normally be provided to ensure the artwork is supplied in the correct format.

Typography and Font Sizes

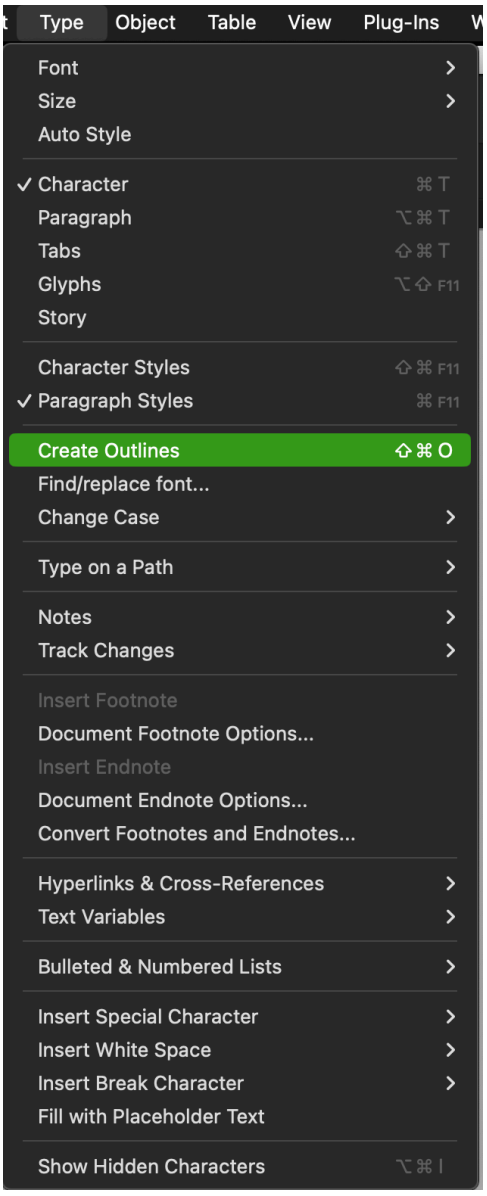
When working with fonts in artwork for print, it's important to ensure that text remains clear, legible, and properly prepared for production. As a general rule, body text should not be set too small, as very fine type can become difficult to read once printed. For most printed materials, a minimum body text size of around **6–7pt** is recommended, although **8–10pt** is typically more comfortable for longer passages of text.

If text is being reversed out of a dark background (white text on a dark colour), it is advisable to increase the size slightly to maintain readability, as fine reversed text can appear thinner once printed.

Another consideration is the weight of the font. Very thin or light typefaces may not

reproduce well at small sizes, particularly on certain materials or printing methods. Using slightly **heavier font weights** for smaller text can help maintain clarity and avoid characters breaking up or appearing faint in print. This is important when text is placed over coloured backgrounds or images, where contrast plays a key role in readability.

Common practice is to make sure fonts are **outlined** once PDFs are exported, as this turns the characters into vector shapes, meaning the appearance of the type will remain consistent regardless of the system it is opened. Sometimes people may not have fonts installed that have been used within your artwork. This ensures the final printed piece appears exactly as intended.



InDesign & Illustrator

When using **InDesign** or **Illustrator**, if you want to convert your text to outlines, you just need to select your text, go to **Type > Create Outlines**, and this will convert your text to vector shapes.

One thing to be careful of however - I always recommend creating the outlined print file from a separate saved artwork file, or make sure you **DO NOT SAVE** the artwork once text is outlined, as when type is converted to outlines, the text is no longer editable, and will need to be re-typed re-set in order to then edit the type.

This can cause issues in the long run, as you may not know which font was used in the original design and if you ever need to go back to edit parts of text, you may have to use alternative similar looking texts, which then may look incorrect.

In Canva, you can't explicitly outline text, however this isn't a problem. If you can't outline your type, or even forget to do it before sending to a printer, it isn't considered that much of an issue these days - as we have software that allows us to outline fonts from within the PDFs, and only causes issues if we need to make text amends.

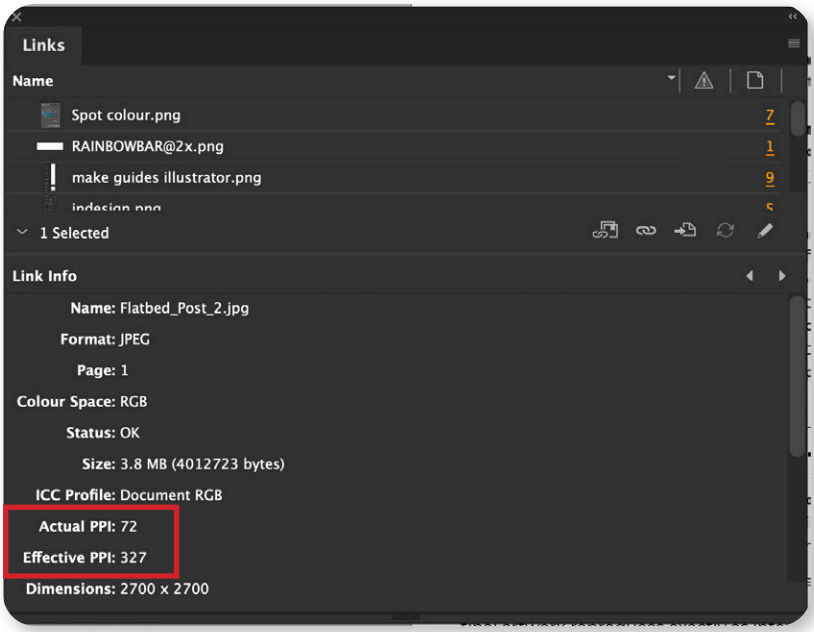
Images

Images within print artwork. It's always best practice to work with **vector** graphics wherever possible. **Vector images** are made up of mathematical paths rather than pixels, which means they can be scaled to any size without losing quality. This makes them ideal for elements such as logos, icons, line artwork and typography. As vectors remain perfectly sharp regardless of size, they ensure the final printed result appears clean and professional, particularly on larger formats where **raster** graphics may begin to show pixelation.

There will, however, be occasions where **raster** images are required. **Raster** images are pixel-based, meaning they are made up of tiny coloured squares that form the overall picture - think of things like photographs and photo based images. Because of this, resolution becomes extremely important when preparing artwork for print. Any **raster** images should be supplied at **300dpi (dots per inch)** at the final print size. This ensures that the image contains enough detail to reproduce clearly when printed (or as close to as possible). If the resolution is too low, the image may appear soft, blurry or pixelated once printed, which can significantly reduce the overall quality of the finished piece.

It's also important to avoid scaling **raster** images up beyond their original size within the design document. Increasing the size of a low-resolution image does not add extra detail like **vector** graphics; instead it simply enlarges the existing pixels, which can result in visible pixelation. As a general rule, images should be placed at **100% scale** wherever possible, or reduced slightly if necessary. If a larger image is required, it's always best to source a higher resolution version rather than enlarging the existing file.

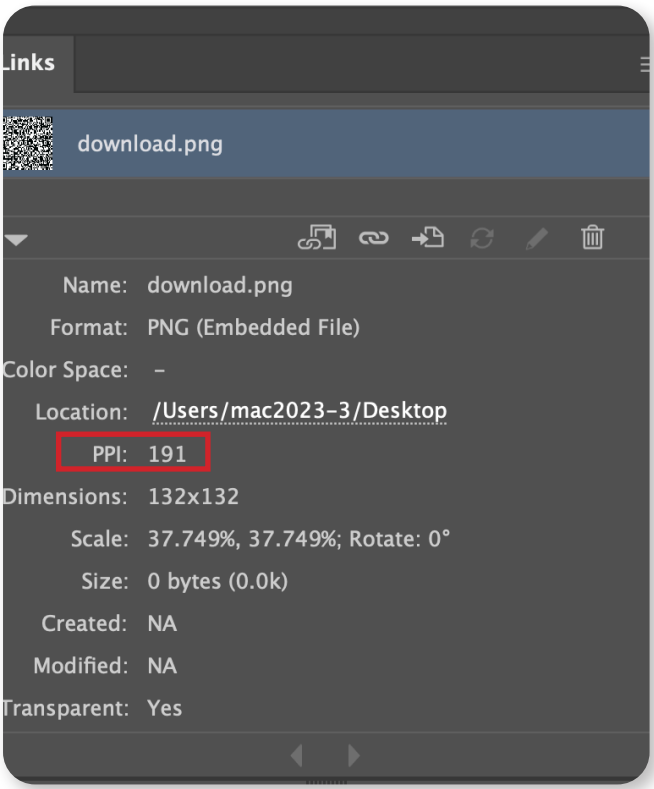
By using **vector** graphics where available and ensuring that all raster images are **300dpi** at final size, you can help maintain consistent print quality and ensure that the final artwork reproduces exactly as intended when it goes to press.



InDesign

When using InDesign, if you go to **Window > Links**, this displays all your linked and embedded images in your file, if you click on one, you can see an **Actual PPI**, and **Effective PPI**.

The **Actual PPI** is the PPI of the original image at full size. The **Effective PPI** is the PPI of the image when scaling is applied. You'd want to have **300+ Effective PPI** where possible.



Adobe Illustrator

Illustrator is very similar to InDesign, in which you can go to **Window > Links**, and select an image, and it will show you a PPI measurement.

Canva does not directly display DPI/PPI properties of images within it's editor. Typically they default to 96dpi for on-screen display.

The best thing to do when using Canva is to make sure your images look as best as they possible on screen, and when exported as a PDF, we can check it on our end and let you know whether any images are not quite up to spec. Generally though, if images look pixelated on-screen, then they will print as they look.

Exporting Print Files

When exporting artwork for print, files should generally be supplied as a **print-ready PDF**, as this format preserves the layout, fonts, images, and vector graphics exactly as they were designed.

When exporting the PDF, ensure that the page size matches the final **trim** size of the document and that the **bleed** settings are included (typically 3mm on all sides).

If the artwork contains **bleed**, this must be enabled in the export settings so that any backgrounds or images extending beyond the edge of the page are retained in the final file.

It is also good practice to include **crop marks**, as these indicate where the document will be trimmed to its final size.

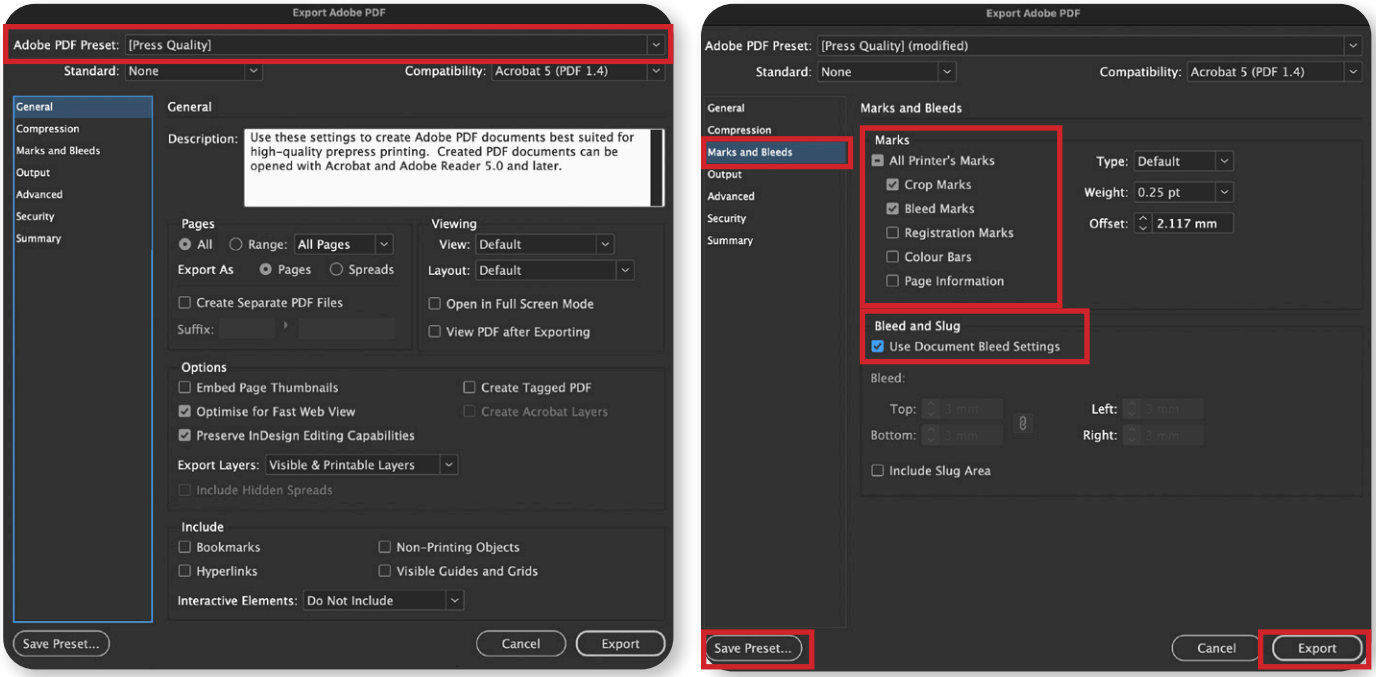
Pages should normally be exported as **single pages** rather than spreads, allowing the printer to impose the pages correctly for production.

In addition, fonts should be **outlined** or embedded, and images should remain at high resolution (around **300dpi** at final size) to ensure they reproduce clearly in print.

Before sending the file to print, the exported PDF should always be opened and carefully checked to confirm that all pages appear correctly, bleed is present, and no elements have shifted or changed during export.

It's also good practice to give your file a name that is easily readable and identifiable, e.g '***HS_Print Guide_A4.pdf***', so it is easy to trace if needed.

For **InDesign,** once you're ready to export - go to **File > Export,** choose your file name, and **Adobe PDF (Print)** as the file type.



Adobe InDesign

The easiest thing to do is select **[Press Quality]** as your preset, as this pretty much ensures everything is okay for print. The only other thing to check, is under the **Marks and Bleeds** tab, that **Crop Marks** and **Bleed Marks** are selected, and **Use Document Bleed Settings** is selected (making sure there is bleed set within your document, as mentioned previously).

Once these settings are selected, you can **Save Preset** using the button in the bottom left, then give it a name such as '**PDF Export for Print**', and then going forward you can just select this preset at the top, then press **Export**.

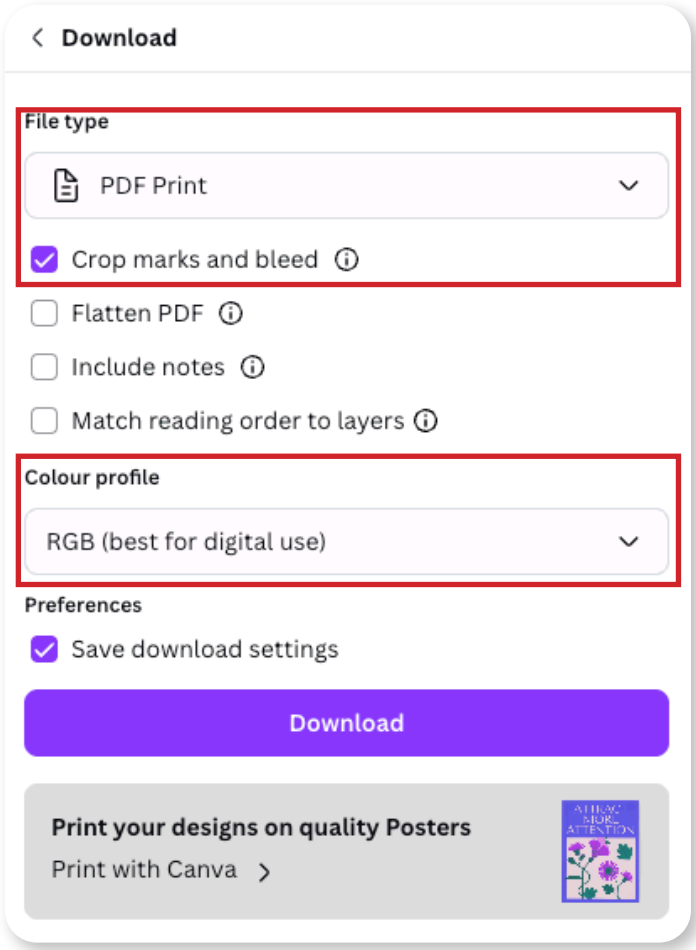
The export process from *Adobe Illustrator* is exactly the same as shown above, however instead of going to **File > Export**, you should use **File > Save as**, and select *Adobe PDF* from this menu, the export process is the same as above.

If using Canva, the export options are very limited, and also depend on whether you are using the Free version or Premium version.

When you're ready for export, go to **File > Download**, and this window shown to the right will pop up.

Select **PDF Print**, make sure **Crop marks and bleed** is selected, and if you pay for the Premium Version, under *Colour Profile*, select **CMYK**, otherwise, leave it as **RGB**.

If you supply an **RGB** file to a printer, we would usually convert it to **CMYK** on our side anyway, and when we proof the print ready file back to you to check, we'd let you know that the colour profile has been converted. However, it's good to note that this may mean there are slight changes to colour throughout the document, as **RGB** colours can't always be replicated in **CMYK** perfectly, especially the vibrant ones.



Canva Export

There you have it, a comprehensive guide to the basics of creating artwork for print. We hope that this serves as a help to you, or to someone you know, when it comes to creating artwork for print, and if you have any feedback, questions or suggestions, please feel free to email us at **hi@hickling-squires.co.uk.**

As previously mentioned, we've tried to cover all of the important parts of designing for print, but there may be things we have missed or haven't been able to cover, so if there is anything that doesn't quite make sense, or you think we may have missed, we're always making room for improvement - so please do let us know.

One final thing, please find our handy checklist over the page that you can use when creating artwork for print, as a guide-on-the-side for your peace of mind, to ensure you've not forgotten anything when setting up your print file.

Use this checklist before exporting and supplying your artwork to ensure it is correctly prepared for print production.

Preflight Checklist	Complete?
Document Setup	
Document size matches final trim size of printed piece	
Pages set up as single pages (not spreads) unless otherwise requested	
Correct page orientation (portrait or landscape)	
Pages are in the correct order	
Bleed and Safe Areas	
3mm bleed added on all edges (unless specified otherwise)	
Background colours and images extend fully into the bleed	
Important content (text, logos, graphics) kept within safe area for print	
No critical content placed too close to folds or edges	
Colour Setup	
Document set in CMYK colour mode	
Spot colours used only if specifically required (e.g cutters / creases / varnishes / foils)	
Images and Graphics	
All images are high resolution (300dpi or close to at final size)	
Images are embedded or properly linked	
Graphics and logos supplied as vector where possible	
Images checked for pixelation of scaling issues	
Fonts	
Body text is no smaller than 6-7pt (8-10 recommended minimum)	
Reversed text (white on dark background) is large enough to remain legible	
Fonts outlined or embedded in final PDF where possible	
No missing fonts or substituted typefaces	
Layout and Content	
Spelling and grammar have been fully proof read	
Contact details, URLs, and important information checked for accuracy	
Text spacing and alignment consistent throughout	
No hidden or unused elements left on the page	
Exporting	
File exported as PDF for print	
Bleed included in final PDF	
Crop marks included if required	
Pages exported as single pages (not spreads) unless otherwise required	
Fonts outlined where possible	
Image compression does not reduce quality of images below 300dpi	
Final Checks	
PDF opened and visually checked before sending	
All pages appear correct and in order	
Bleed and trim areas appear correct	
File name is clearly labelled (e.g “Project_Print_V1.pdf”)	