PREPRESS GUIDE
to Error-Free File Prep
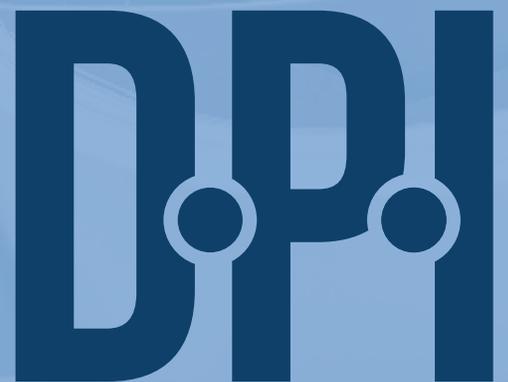
DPI

You've spent countless hours creating your latest design project, and it's finally off to the printer! But the finished product doesn't quite meet your expectations... but why?

At **DALLAS PRINTING**, we do our best to ensure this doesn't happen to you— our prepress staff will notify you of any potential problems before we print. But wouldn't it be nice to know what they know, to head-off potential issues during the layout process?

This handy guide will help you understand what we look for during the proofing process and how to ensure your files are properly prepped to avoid delays in receiving your printed project.

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PRELIMINARY GLOSSARY

Listed below are a few terms and phrases commonly used in the printing industry, some of which will be used in this guide. Understanding these will help you on your quest to creating an error-free, print-ready file!

BLEED
Extra ink area that goes beyond the trim line, used to allow for variations that occur when the piece is trimmed or die-cut.

DPI (Dots Per Inch)
The number of ink dots the printer can place in one square inch.

IMPOSITION
Arrangement of pages so that they print correctly on a press sheet, and the pages are in proper order when the sheets are folded.

LIVE AREA
The area where pertinent text and images should be placed to avoid being removed during the trimming process.

PIXELATED
When individual pixels of a low-resolution image can be seen rather than blending together to create a smooth, crisp image.

PREPRESS
A general term referring to the processes and procedures that occur between file layout and the final printing.

PRINTER SPREADS
Pages are arranged in signatures for printing so the document will fold and saddle-stitch correctly. Page numbers will appear out of order.

PROCESS INKS (CMYK)
Cyan, magenta, yellow, and black inks which are printed one over another to obtain a colored print with the desired hues, whites, blacks, and grays.

READER SPREADS
Pages of a document are arranged as if reading a book from cover to cover. The front cover and back cover stand alone, while the interior pages are shown side by side as facing pages.

RGB (Red, Green, Blue)
The three primary colors blended to create the spectrum of colors displayed on a color monitor. RGB is primarily for web use and should *NOT* used for file layout.

SPOT INKS
Standardized colors, such at the Pantone Matching System, that can be used individually or mixed to create a specific color for easier/better color matching.

TRIM
The final size of a printed piece after it is cut from the sheet of paper that it was printed on.

INITIAL DOCUMENT SETUP

DOCUMENT SIZE

When initially creating your file, the document size in your layout program should typically have the same dimensions as the final trimmed size. For instance, if your final piece should measure 8.5 in. x 11 in. (the size of a sheet of copy paper), your document should be created with a width of 8.5 inches and a height of 11 inches.

FACING PAGES

Using the "facing pages" setting depends on the type of document you are creating. If you're making a saddle-stitched booklet (bound using staples along the spine), then using facing pages is helpful. If the piece is bound using glue, folds, or doesn't bind at all, then "facing pages" should not be checked.
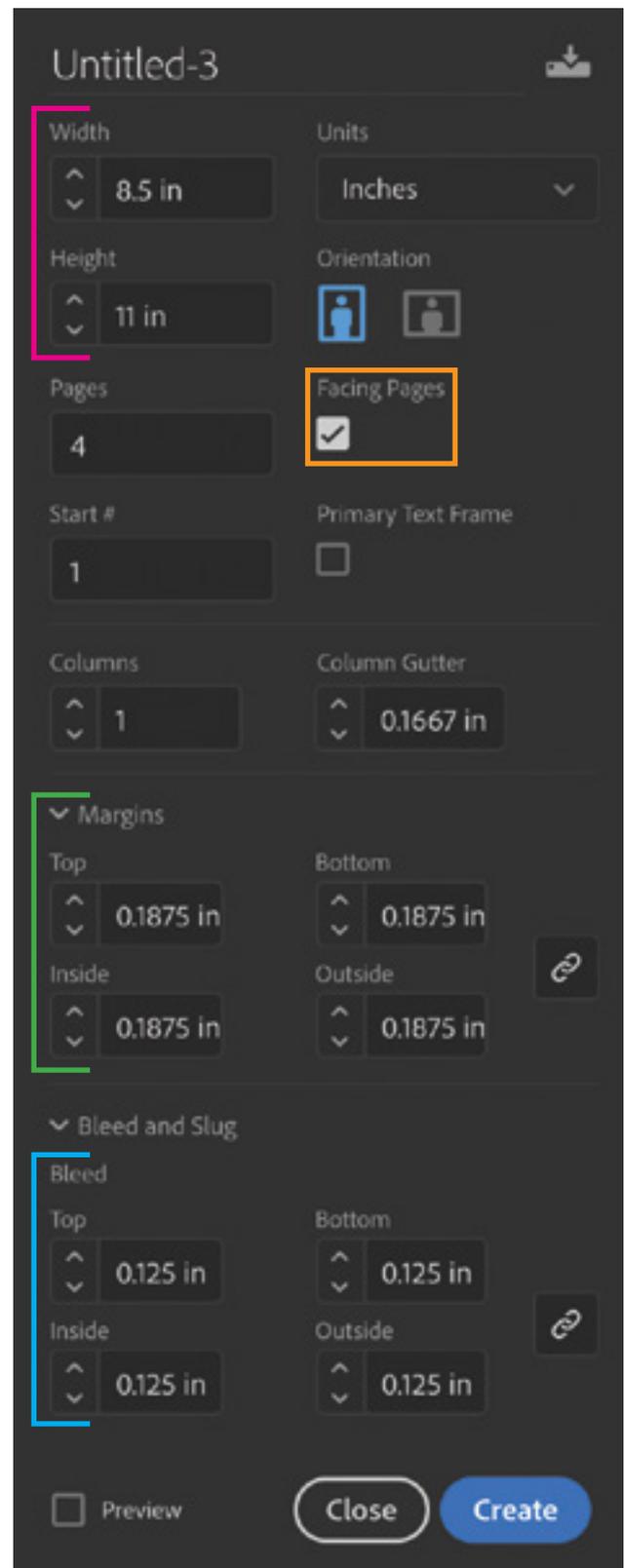
MARGINS

A minimum margin of 3/16-inch (.1875 in.) should always surround the live area. The larger your margin settings, the safer your content will be.
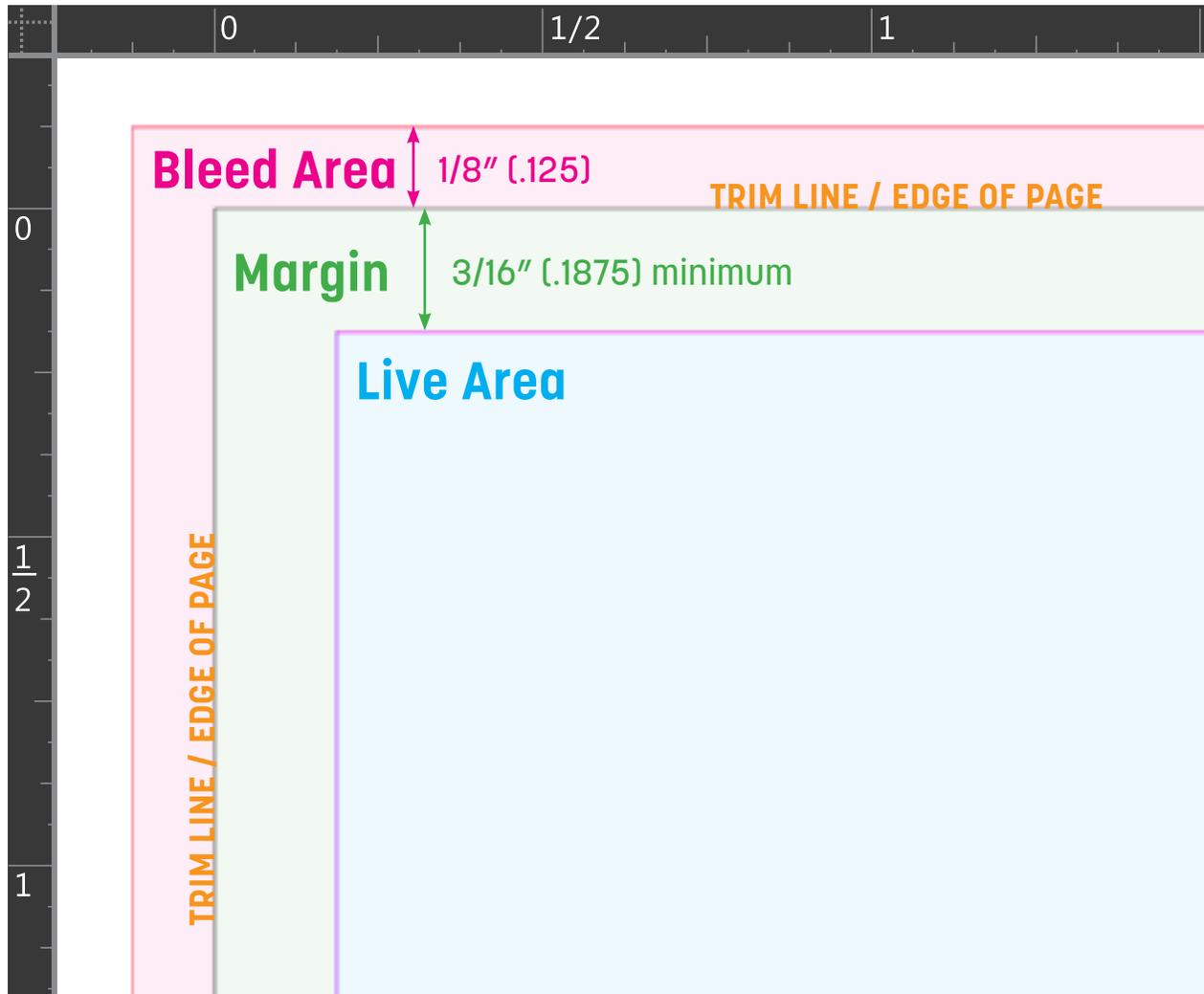
BLEED

If your artwork has a white border, then bleeds are not necessary and can be set to 0". If an image extends to the edge of the sheet, or "bleeds" off the page, an additional 1/8 inch (.125 in.) beyond the trim edge is required.

NOTE that all settings in Adobe InDesign can be changed later, but it is typically easier to set everything in the initial "new document" dialog box.

Adobe InDesign CC "New Document" dialog box

LIVE AREA, TRIM, & BLEEDS

Bleed Area 1/8" (.125)

TRIM LINE / EDGE OF PAGE

Margin 3/16" (.1875) minimum

Live Area

TRIM LINE / EDGE OF PAGE

Adobe InDesign page enlarged to show detail

LIVE AREA

It is important to keep all pertinent content inside the margins, or the "live area," to avoid being accidentally removed during the trimming process. A 3/16-inch margin is the required minimum, but the larger your margin, the safer your content will be!

MARGIN

Content placed outside of the margin runs the risk of getting removed during trimming. Printing is not a perfect process, and slight shifts are likely to happen. Keeping important content out of the margin will ensure shifting will not noticeably affect the appearance of the finished product.

BLEED AREA

If an image bleeds to the **edge of the page**, then that image should be extended an extra 1/8 inch beyond the **trim line** to fill the bleed area. This will ensure that unprinted paper doesn't show through where color or image should be.

COLOR MANAGEMENT

CMYK VS. RGB

When you are creating a document meant for printing purposes, it is important to remember that what you see on your screen is *NOT* an accurate representation of what will print. Commercial printers use CMYK (cyan, magenta, yellow, black) color mode, while computer monitors use RGB (red, green, blue) color mode. RGB is commonly used for web and digital design, but many RGB colors are not achievable using standard four-color process printing. Artwork supplied in RGB will be converted to CMYK, which can yield unexpected results. Create your document using CMYK to ensure you have a more accurate representation of how your colors will print.


CMYK vs. RGB
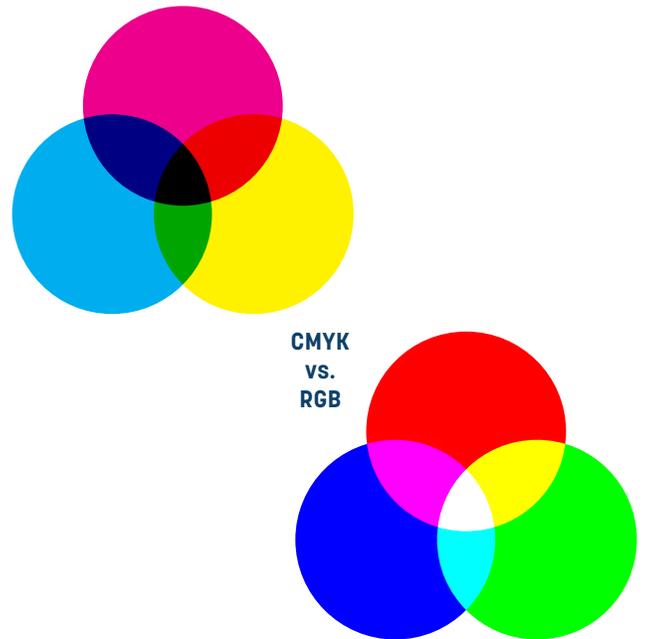
SPOT COLORS

A spot color is a premixed ink that is used instead of process inks when color accuracy is critical. There are different systems for spot colors available, but Dallas Printing uses the Pantone Matching System (PMS) for all spots. As previously mentioned, colors do not always display on-screen as they will print; if you are unsure of the color you would like, please come by our office to look at a PMS swatch book for an accurate representation of Pantone colors.


Sample of Pantone swatches

BLACK VS. RICH BLACK

When printing a document with black color solids, there are two types of black you can use: 100% process black and rich black. Process black (100% K) should be used for body text and small black images such as QR codes. To prevent blurry text, small type should always be a color value of 100% black. Rich black should be used when printing large blocks of black or large black headlines. Dallas Printing's preferred rich black is c30/m20/y20/k100.
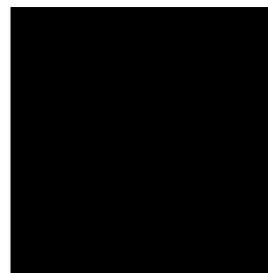
Process Black
c0 / m0 / y0 / k100
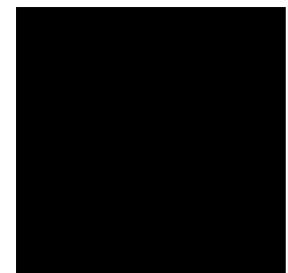
Rich Black
c30 / m20 / y20 / k100

IMAGES

There are two types of images used when creating a design project: raster and vector. Raster images are graphics or photos that have a specified resolution and can only be enlarged to a certain size without loss of clarity, while vector images are illustrations that can be reduced or enlarged to any size while retaining their clarity.
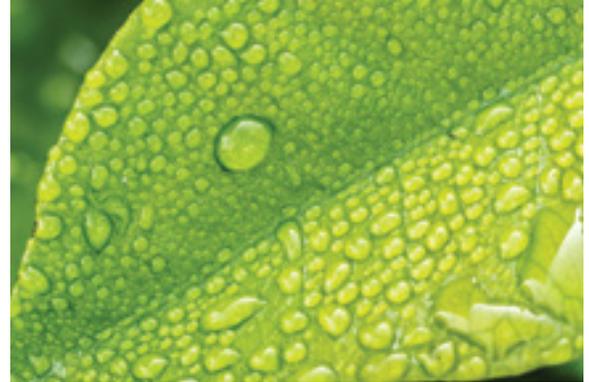
RASTER & RESOLUTION

Raster files (created in photo-editing software such as Adobe Photoshop) are made up of small squares that merge together to compose an image. Resolution is the number of pixels (referred to as "dots" when printing) found in a square inch of the image, or dots per inch (dpi). *Resolution is important*—the higher the dpi, the better the print quality.

All photos are not created equal! By taking images from websites, you are likely downloading a low-resolution image. It may look great on-screen, but the *preferred resolution for print is 300 dpi*, whereas the standard for web is only 72 dpi, which will yield a grainy, pixellated result when printed.
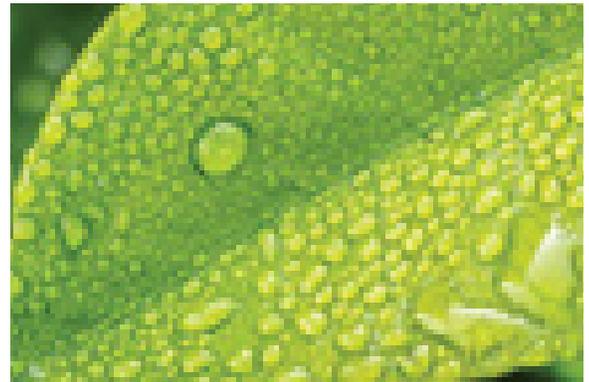
An image can be resized to change the number of pixels, but doing so also changes the resolution. As size is increased the resolution decreases and vice versa. Increasing the resolution of an image, independent of its size, will *NOT* increase the quality of the image. Once a raster image is reduced, it cannot be enlarged, therefore raster files should be created at 300 dpi and sized at 100% or larger in order to get the clearest image possible.

300 dpi image sized at 100% for print

72 dpi image enlarged to 300 dpi for print

VECTOR IMAGES

Vector images do not depend on resolution and are the preferred format for logos, icons, illustrations, and any other non-photo based imagery. Vector images are created in programs like Adobe Illustrator and are recognizable by their file extensions (eps, ai, svg, etc.). Vector logos and graphics are preferable to rasters (when available) in order achieve the highest print quality possible for those images.

Raster logo   **Vector logo**

PDF EXPORT

At Dallas Printing, we typically prefer a high-resolution pdf be submitted for print. We primarily use Adobe InDesign to create layout files, therefore the following instructions will be explained from an InDesign standpoint.

STEP 1: Open the InDesign file and check for preflighting errors to help eliminate potential issues. InDesign's preflight feature can be found by going to Window > Output > Preflight. There is also a **preflight panel shortcut** at the bottom of the window, as well as a **preflight error light**; a green light indicates no errors were found, while a red light indicates there are errors that should be resolved before exporting.

The default "basic" profile will suffice, but Dallas Printing offers a custom preflight profile that is more selective in what it considers to be an "error." You can download the DPI Preflight profile *here* then **load it into the Preflight Profiles** panel.

Once all preflight errors have been addressed/resolved, you may then export your pdf.

STEP 2: Go to File > Export (or ⌘E if using a Mac), choose "Adobe PDF (Print)" as your format, then "Save" in your desired location.

STEP 3: Select [Press Quality] from the Adobe PDF Preset drop-down menu. Make sure that **Export As Pages** is also selected. Please do not export as spreads.

STEP 4: Under the "Marks and Bleeds" section, check "Use Document Bleed Settings." All "printer's marks" boxes can remain unchecked.
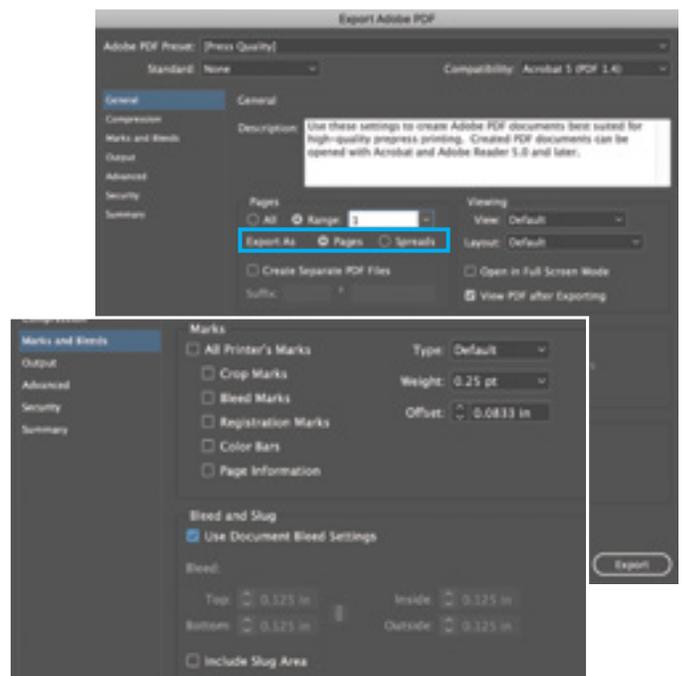
STEP 5: Click on "Export" to create your pdf.

Preflight panel shortcut | **Preflight error light**

Bottom of InDesign window
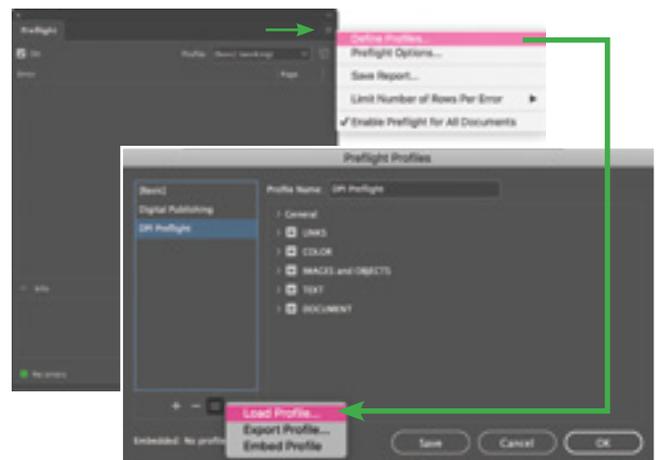
Preflight panel (top) & Prelight Profiles panel (bottom)


Export As Pages (top) & Use Document Bleed Settings (bottom)

NATIVE FILES

Occasionally we may request native files, or the layout files you used to create the pdf. Below is a quick guide to packaging an InDesign file so that all links and fonts are combined into a single, convenient folder.

STEP 1: Open the InDesign file and correct any preflighting errors as described on page 6.

STEP 2: Go to File > Package (or ⌥⇧⌘P if using a Mac) then click "Package...."
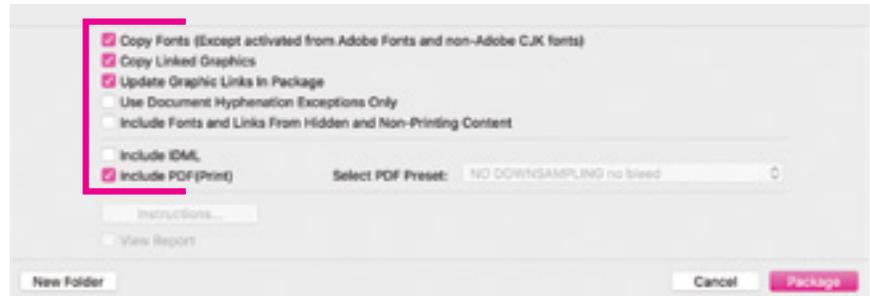
InDesign Package dialog box

STEP 3: Choose a location to save your packaged folder, making sure the **fonts, links, and pdf boxes** are all checked.

STEP 4: Compress the packaged folder to create a "zip" file. This will make it easier to submit the file.

FILE SUBMISSION

Files can be submitted two ways: by email or web upload.

If you have been in contact with a salesman or estimator, you may email the file to them.

If you do not have a direct contact at Dallas Printing or if the file is too large to email, you may visit dallasprintingms.com to Request An Estimate, Place An Order, or Send A File. All three options allow you to upload your artwork to our FTP. Plus, you will receive an email confirming a successful upload.