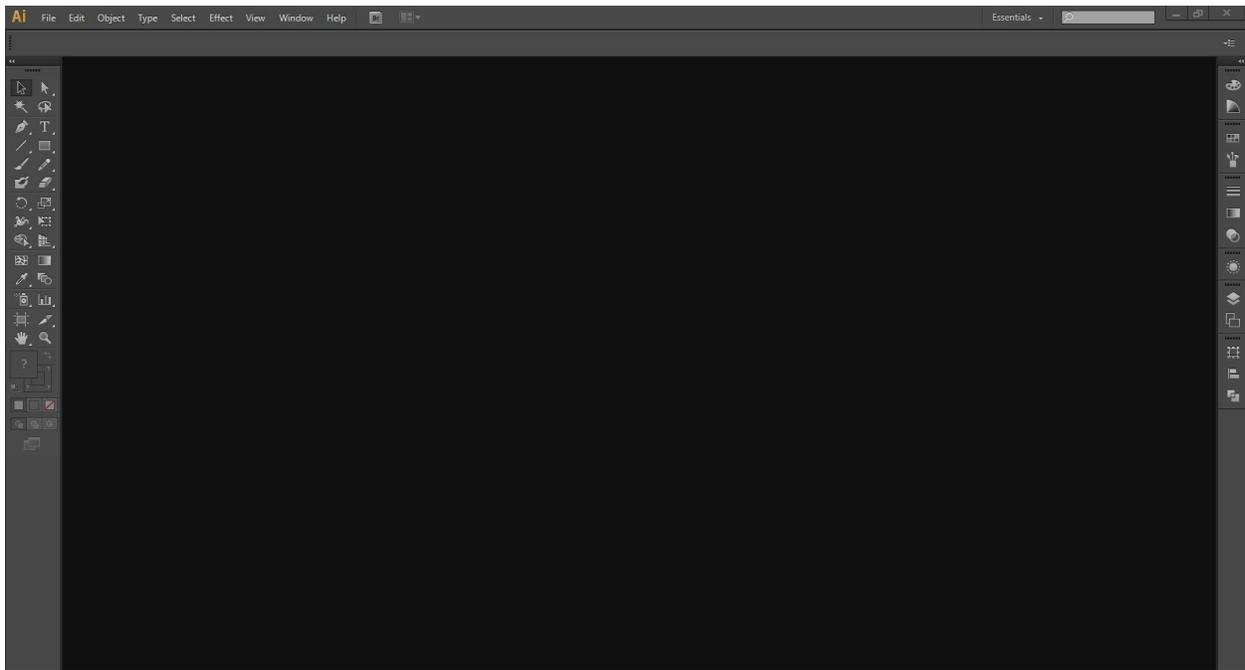# Getting Started in
Adobe Illustrator

Adobe Illustrator is an illustration and design program that is focused on creating vector-based works. The program is a foil to Adobe PhotoShop, which focuses on raster images.


This is your start screen-- it's a blank expanse. You can't just jump in and use tools or start drawing yet, because you don't have an "artboard" yet. You'll have to go to File>New and make a new document, or File>Open and open a previously existing work. For opening an existing file, this can include an image file (JPEG, PNG, GIF, etc.), an Adobe Portable Document File (PDF), Adobe Illustrator File (AI), or various vector filetypes (EPS, SVG, etc.).

If you're starting a new file, and hopefully you are, you'll be first presented with the following screen to help you choose some settings:
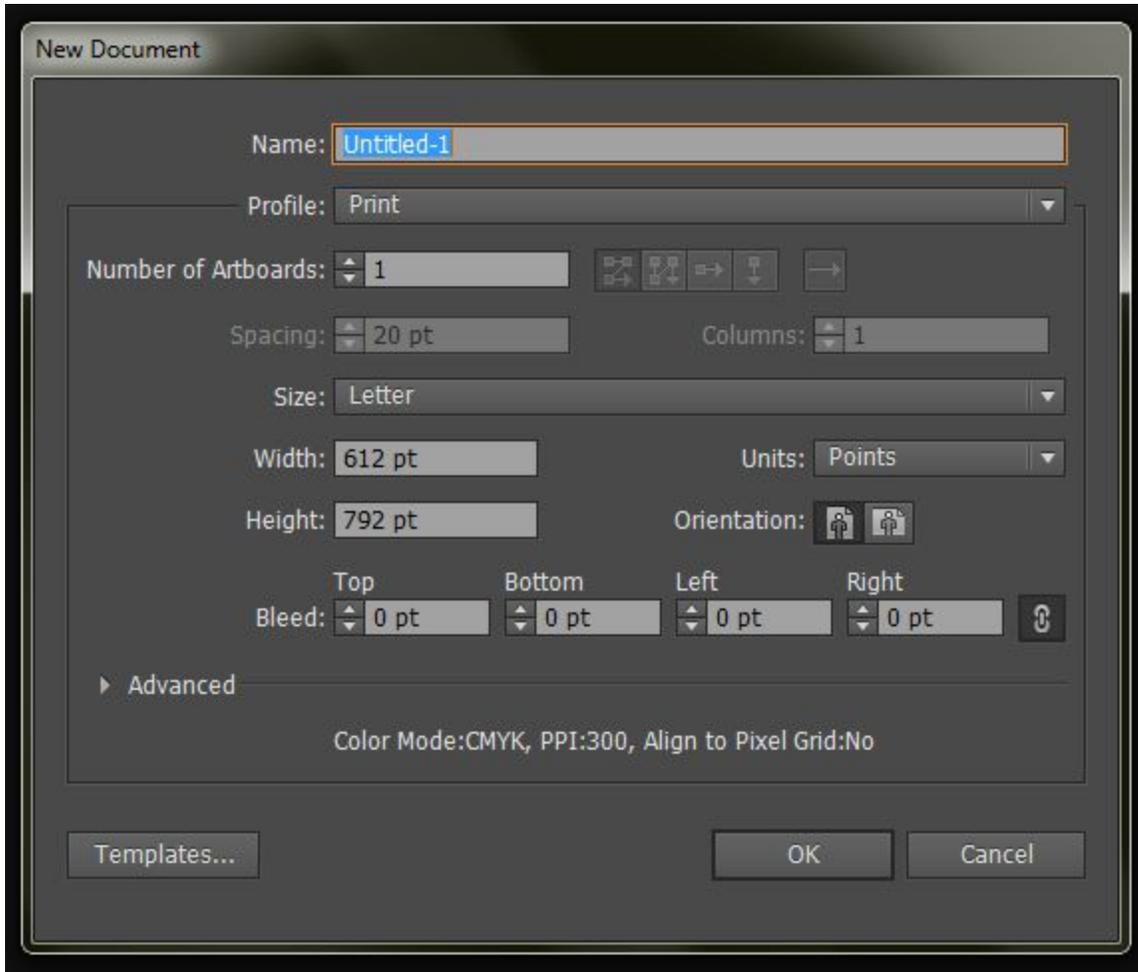
Start by naming your project in the first field. Assuming you're making one document, you can leave artboards at 1. If you know you're making multiple versions of something, or multiple pages, you may want to set artboards to that number. Each artboard with export to a separate image when you export to a PNG or JPEG. However, unless you separate them one-by-one, artboards will become sequential pages if exported as a PDF.

For size, Letter gives you a standard sheet of paper in terms of dimensions as your starting artboard. but before you get into sizes and shapes of artboards, let's convert the units into something a little more familiar:
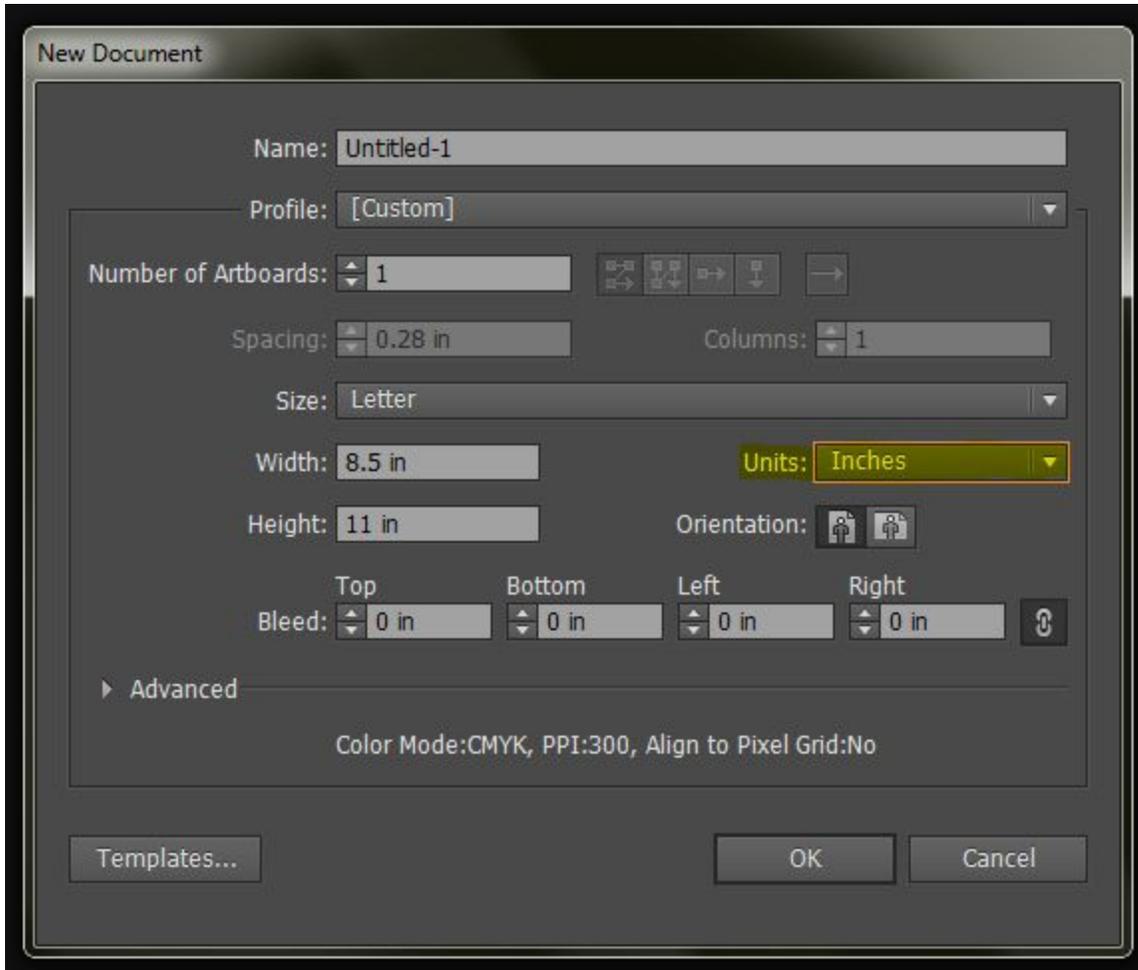
If you're working in print (posters, flyers, name tags, and other physical objects), you'll want to use inches for reference. If you're working digitally (banner ads, web icons, logos) you'll want to use pixels. If you're making a project for a client, get them to define the dimensions they need a project to be; knowing how large or small you can make your text is an important design consideration. Redesigning a project to be larger or smaller after the fact can be a real pain!

If working in print, "bleed" is important to know. Bleed defines the area that can be trimmed and still be "safe" when you send it to the printshop, or cut it yourself. Most printers leave white borders, and if you need to remove them (you should, it looks much better), you will invariably cut into some of your design. Most printshops demand at least 1/8" bleed that they can cut into.

When you've set the size, artboards, bleed, and named your project, click "OK," and we'll get to the main functions of Adobe Illustrator.

You'll start at on a blank canvas, your first artboard. It should be plain white, and your background will be separated by color (grey in most versions of Illustrator) as well as a black border (and maybe a red border if you have a bleed selected.)

From here, we'll end up with a blank artboard and our tools, so let's get right to the tools:

Selection tool: The black arrow, our first tool, allows you to select any whole object, path, or group. All the elements of those objects, paths, or groups will be selected together.

Direct Selection tool: The white arrow, next, can isolate an object, point, or path from a larger path or group.

Magic Wand & Lasso tool: Both of these tools are for specific ways of selecting objects. The magic wand (double click this tool to open a panel) allows you to select different objects across the artboard based on similarity to the original selection's color, blending mode, or even stroke. The lasso tool, on the other hand, will select a specific geographical area of objects or points, even if it excludes parts of a group.

Pen tool: This tool allows for the creation of complex objects by clicking to define each point on a shape until you either close the shape by returning to the first point or double click to connect your last drawn point and the first one. If you click and drag, each point from then on will become a curve inside of a straight line. Curves will carry over to the next one's trajectory, so using this method may require you to return to edit the shape later using Direct Selection tool.

Text tool: Like many other Adobe products, you can create editable text boxes by clicking (no boundaries), or dragging to draw a box (bound) in which text will appear.

Line tool: This tool can create only a single line by clicking and dragging from the beginning point to the end. Lines made in succession will not connect until you select them all and "join" them or "merge" the shapes together.

Shapes submenu: If you click and hold on the rectangle tool (appears by default) you will see rounded rectangle, ellipse, and polygon tools here as well. Each one of these can be clicked and dragged to create the corresponding shape at any shape or skew. Hold down shift while creating to make a perfect 1-to-1 version of that shape (eg, a square from the rectangle tool, or circle from the ellipse tool)

Paintbrush tool: This tool allows you to click and hold down, making a smooth line that is then converted to a series of points that resembles the pen tool's capabilities. This tool can never connect to a pre-existing shape or path.

Pencil tool: The Pencil tool is a smoothing path-drawing tool that allows you to edit and adjust a path you've drawn over multiple passes. Like sketching with a pencil, as long as you are in the vicinity of a previously drawn shape, you can select that shape, redraw it, and illustrator will look

to give a smooth redefinition of that path. You can do this multiple times to get the right curves, and works best with a tablet or similar drawing device.

Paintbrush Blob tool: This tool is just like the paintbrush tool, but instead of making a path (a line) it makes a closed shape where the points define the edges of the paint "blob" it draws. When you go in to edit this later, you can only change the edges because the line is not the backbone of this shape anymore.

Eraser tool: This tool allows you to click on an object, line, or point to remove it, but I honestly always just select my offending shapes directly and hit the "delete" key on my keyboard.

Rotate tool: This tool is pretty self-explanatory. Hold down "shift" to make a shape rotate in 45-degree increments.

Scale tool: This tool scales a selected area up or down. Hold down "shift" to keep the original aspect ratio.

Let's skip down to a couple more basic tools:

Eyedropper tool: This little tool is simple, but useful. While you have a shape or line selected, using the eyedropper tool allows you to copy the color and stroke of another object in your artboard. This way different shapes can have similar treatments.

Artboard tool: This tool is an easy way to click and drag the boundaries of your artboard. It's not precise, but it allows you to make swaths of space without thinking about numbers.

And last, the Zoom tool: This tool allows you to click on an area of your canvas to zoom in on that point, making that the center of your new focus as well.

Combining all these tools together, you can make complex shapes, change the colors of them, move them, rotate them, and individually select points for a more in-depth creative experience.

Experiment with using different shapes together and rotating or changing their shapes to arrange a larger object. When you've got something worth saving, you can save the project for later editing by going to "File>Save" and naming your project. To export an image version of your work, go to "File>Export" and make sure "Use Artboards" is checked, so that only the work on the artboards you set up is used. Other wise, any stray marks or what have you will also export, including any white space between it and the artboard(s).