

QUICK START *Guide*

TO PRINT-READY FILES

A hand is shown from the bottom left, reaching upwards with fingers spread. The background behind the hand is a vertical strip of watercolor, transitioning from a deep purple at the top to a bright blue at the bottom. The rest of the page is white.

Hello

Welcome to the Digiprint guide to print-ready files!

The print industry can sometimes be confusing, but it doesn't have to be. In this guide, we'll demystify all the strange terms, teach you how to get killer results every time, and by the end of it, have you saying, *"Oh wow, it makes so much sense now!"*

With this guide and just a few short minutes, you'll soon be able to add "Print-Ready Rockstar" to your résumé.

Sincerely,
The Digiprint Team



In a Nutshell

If you're in a rush, here's a quicker-start guide with fewer words and more numbers.

Resolution

At least 300dpi for printing.

Bleed

An additional 0.125" on each edge of the design.

Crops

Add crop marks to your artwork using Adobe's automated crop mark tool during the PDF export process.

Safe Zone

Keep all the important information such as text and people's faces at least 0.125" from each edge of the design.

Click on any of the terms above to jump to their full descriptions.

[Click here for templates that already have safe zone guides and bleed settings for some of the more common sizes of printing.](#)

Good vs. Bad



Look at that sweet business card. Lordy, it's a fine looking stunner. Everything about it screams, *"I'm professional, yo!"* The printing is crisp and clear, the text is legible, and the design goes right to the edge of the card. Beautiful.



By contrast, look at this business card. Yikes. If it were handed to you, you'd probably lose confidence in this person. Everything about it screams, *"That other guy is professional, yo!"* The photo is pixelated, the text is cut off, and there's an unintentional slim, white line on one side of the card. Ouch.



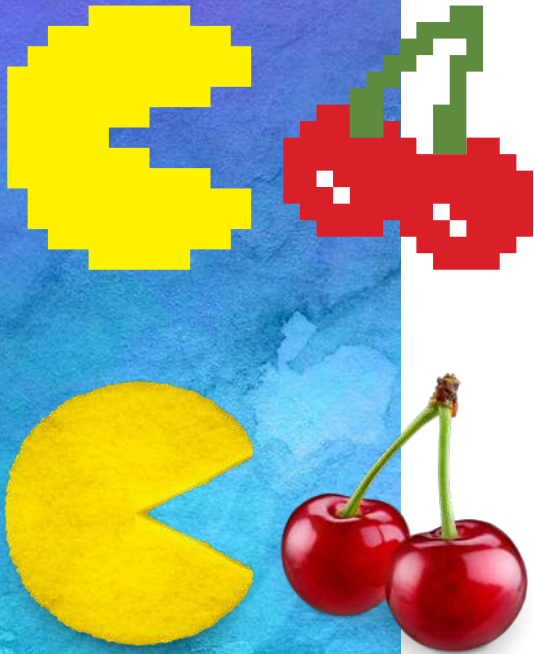
Which of these two cards would you rather have representing you? Luckily, getting clean, gorgeous printing is easy to do and can be as simple as changing how you set your files up. This setup includes resolution, bleed, crops, and the safe zone. It's remarkably easy to do and this guide will walk you through the steps, explaining just how they'll make your printing shine!


Join us.

Resolution

You'll probably see the term "DPI" thrown around when talking about the resolution of images and designs. This stands for "dots per inch". It simply refers to how many tiny dots of color make up your image. That's it! So a higher DPI means there are more dots crammed into every square inch, resulting in a clearer, crisper image. Think back to video games from the '70s and '80s. The art is described as "pixelated" because there were so few dots per inch that you could actually see each square dot with your naked eye. That was fine for chomping pellets and chasing ghosts, but not so good for printing your marketing materials. You want colors and curves so smooth that the dots are invisible.

How do we get that? With a proper printing resolution. You'll often come across figures like 72dpi, 96dpi, 150dpi, 300dpi, 600dpi, etc., and those numbers can seem complicated at first blush. Even though you now know what DPI means, it's still easy to get confused about which one you'll need for your project. Part of that confusion stems from the fact that all DPIs can be good. There's no such thing as a "bad" DPI. There's only such thing as an *appropriate DPI for what your design will be used for*. For example, if your final placement will be on a computer screen or a far-away billboard, then some of the lower DPIs will be perfect. But for printing purposes, you'll want a higher DPI. The minimum resolution you'll want to work with is 300dpi. Anything below that resolution is too low for printing. That's why it's a bad idea trying to print photos you find online—their DPI is typically far too low and they print out poorly. 300dpi a good baseline to ensure clear, beautiful





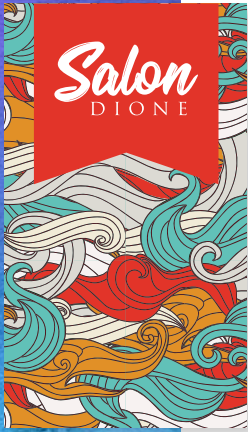
images that pop every time. But as good as 300dpi is, please don't feel the need to limit yourself to that number. That's only the *minimum* we recommend, and not necessarily a guideline that you have to aim for. Here at Digiprint, we can print all the way up to 2400dpi!

Caution

Viewing images on a screen can be deceptive. Lower-resolution artwork can still manage to look good on your computer monitor or phone, yet turn out blurry or pixelated when printed. That's why it's important to check your file's settings to ensure your document has an appropriate resolution for printing.

[Click here to learn how to check and change your file's resolution.](#)

Bleed




No need to call an ambulance. In the print industry, this seemingly-gruesome term has a much more benign meaning. Bleed simply refers to designs that go all the way to the edge of the paper. There's no border or even the slightest sliver of blank paper peeking out. The artwork "bleeds" off the page.

To explain how we print edge-to-edge, we must reveal a dark secret: we don't print edge-to-edge. Professional printing works quite differently than your home inkjet or laser printer. At home, you put in the full-sized sheet of paper that you want to end up with. If you want to print a letter, you put in a letter-sized sheet. Professional printing is different. We print on larger sheets of paper, and then cut them down from there to the final size of your project. Naturally, there are tiny variances where the blade cuts the sheet. These variances create problems when the artwork was only designed to be the exact size of the final product. For example, with a 3.5" x 2" business card, the artwork is designed at precisely 3.5" x 2". With no room for error, if the blade isn't absolutely, positively perfect with its alignment, thin sections of blank, white paper can creep into the final product. That's not good. You always want an amazing looking final product, from one perfect edge to the other.



Let's look at how to turn your bleed from a B- to an A+. (That was a blood-type pun, and no I am not sorry.) The key to getting your bleed perfect is to embrace the imperfect. Instead of setting up your artwork at its final size with no room for error, set your artwork up *larger* than the final size. Using a business card as an example, the standard final size is 3.5" x 2", but the artwork should be set up



at 3.75" x 2.25". This additional 0.125" on all four sides creates the extra space needed for the cutter's buffer zone. When printers ask you to "add bleed", they are referring to this buffer zone. Different products require different amounts of bleed, but for the majority of uses, adding 0.125" to each side will be perfect. Artwork set up in this way will guarantee a gorgeous edge-to-edge finished product every time.

[Click here to learn how to set your file up for bleed.](#)

Crops

I have been told that I am not allowed to put a farm pun in this crops section. I know; I'm bummed too. The non-farming types of crops we use in printing go hand-in-hand with bleeds. You'll typically hear them in the same breath, "*Does your file have crops and bleeds?*" This is because bleeds extend the artwork out farther than it needs to go, and we printers need to have some way of knowing where to cut the sheets down to ensure your artwork is framed precisely how you envisioned it. That's where crops come in. The term "crops" is shorthand for "crop marks", and that's all they are—little notches that mark where the blades should make their cuts. The good news is that they're incredibly easy to make. You don't have to create them by hand in your design program. You simply have to check a box when exporting your design as a print-ready PDF. If you already have the bleeds set up, adding crops is almost automatic.

[Click here to learn how to add crop marks to your file.](#)



Safe Zone



Finally, a descriptive title! The safe zone is exactly what it sounds like. It's the zone in which your important elements are safe. Safe from what, you ask? Safe from getting cut off. As discussed in the [Bleed section](#), the cutting blades have a small variance for where they cut the sheet. And while they can cut the sheet a tad on the outside (which is where the bleed settings come in handy), they can also cut a smidgen on the inside. This means that if any of your important elements are too close to the edge of the sheet, they run the risk of getting cut off by the blade. This would be bad. So to prevent this, keep all the important elements of your design at least 0.125" away from the edge of the card.

There aren't any specific settings that create a safe zone when starting a new file, but if you know how to create guides in your design program, it's an easy matter to set them 0.125" from each edge of the page.

[Click here for templates that already have safe zone guides and bleed settings created for some of the more common sizes of printing.](#)

Resolution Tutorial

If you're working with vector artwork, then you don't have to worry about resolution. Everything will already come out perfectly smooth. But for pixel-based (a.k.a. raster) artwork, resolution becomes vitally important to the quality of your print. If you don't know whether you're working with vector or raster, then you're probably working with raster and should follow these guidelines.

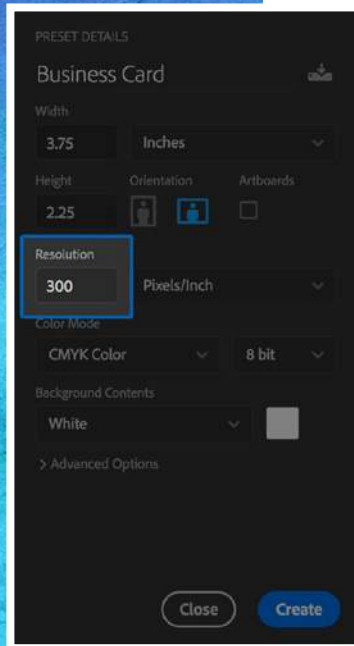
Adobe Photoshop

With very little exception, Adobe Photoshop is the only design program where you need to be concerned about your resolution *before* starting. While the resolution can be changed later in the process, it's best to start out at your desired resolution. Here's how to do it:

Open Adobe Photoshop

- Press `ctrl + n` (`cmd + n` on a Mac) to start a new file
- Set your desired height and width (don't forget to include your [bleeds!](#))
- In the box titled "Resolution", enter your desired DPI
- Click the "Create" button

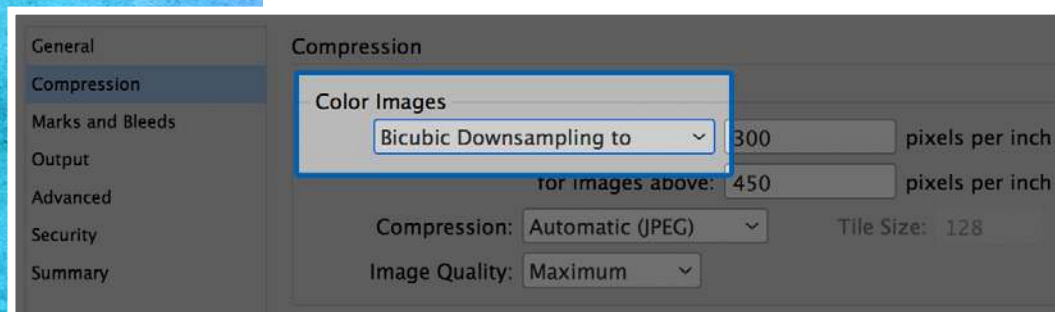
If you already have a file open and want to check or change its existing resolution, press `ctrl + alt + i` (`cmd + opt + i` on a Mac) to open the image size dialog box. In the box titled "Resolution", enter your desired DPI.



Other Design Programs

Regardless of which design program you're using and what resolution settings you've created for the file, it's important to prevent the program from lowering that resolution when exporting the file as a print-ready PDF. These settings are found during the exporting process. Fortunately, most Adobe software has similar looking dialog boxes during the exportation process, making the procedure consistent regardless of what program you find yourself in. If you're not using Adobe software, your design program will have similar settings although the dialog box will look different. Here's how to take control of your resolution settings so everything will look as stunning as you do (did you do something different with your hair? It looks divine!):

In the Export Adobe PDF dialog box, you will see a menu on the left side. Click on "Compression". This brings up how much—if at all—the software will compress your images down to a smaller resolution. The main box you need to concern yourself with is the one that says, "Bicubic Downsampling to". That's some fancy talk to basically say, "What resolution should we shrink your images down to?"



If you've already followed our advice for setting your files up properly from scratch, then you don't need the program to shrink your images at all. Click the "Bicubic Downsampling to" box and select, "Do Not Downsample". You're done!

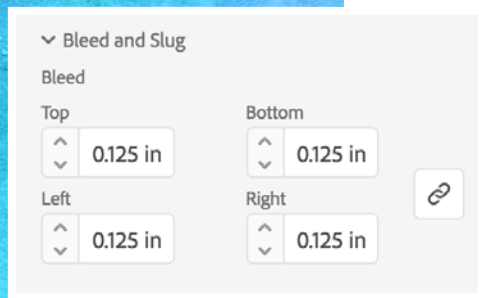
Bleed Tutorial

Getting the proper bleed settings requires a touch of care at both the beginning and end of the file's lifecycle. To begin, here's how the bleeds should be added during the file's creation:

Most Design Programs

With the exception of Adobe Photoshop, most design programs will allow you to create bleed settings when starting a new file. To do this, press ctrl + n (cmd + n on a Mac) to open up the New Document dialog box.

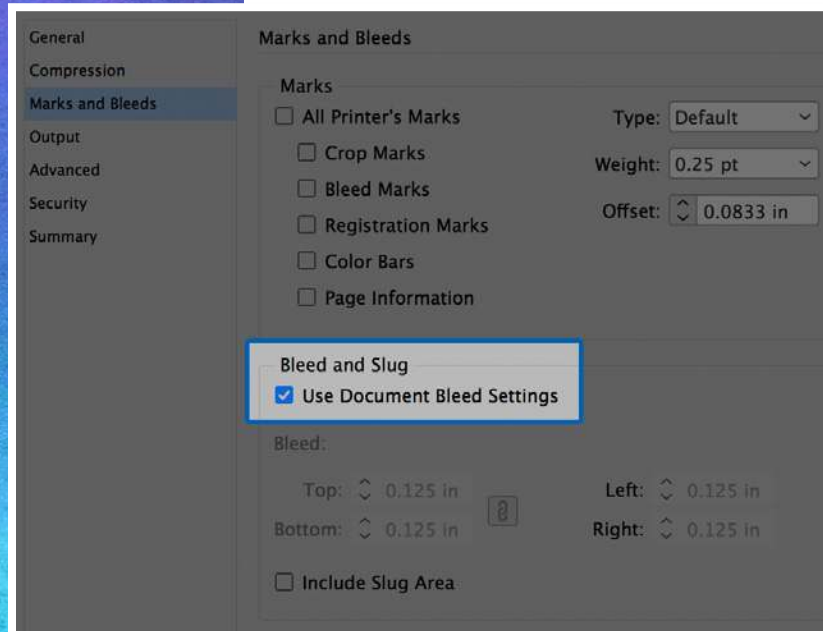
On the right side, you'll see several settings and options. The first thing you'll want to do is change the units of measurement, which can be found in the upper right corner. Click the box and select "inches" from the drop-down menu. Next, find the section labeled Bleed (you may need to scroll down a bit).



Click the up arrow next to all four boxes (these boxes are normally linked to each other, which means that adding bleed to any box will add bleed to all four boxes at once). One click of the up arrow will get you to our desired amount, 0.125" on each edge. Click "Create" and design your heart out!

But it's not quite enough to set the bleeds up at the beginning. You also need to ensure that the bleeds stick around when you export the file. To do this, export the file as a PDF. In the PDF dialog box, click "Marks and Bleeds" on the left menu. You will now see a bleed subsection in the main window. Click the "Use Document Bleed Settings" box. That's it! The final PDF will have the same bleed

settings that you created at the outset. (If, by chance, you didn't set up the proper bleeds at the beginning, not to worry. Just don't click the "Use Document Bleed Settings" box, and instead manually enter how much bleed you want in the boxes below it.)



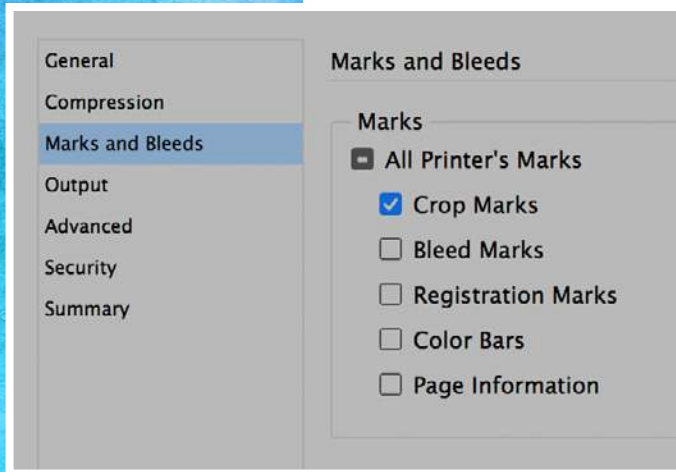
[Click here for templates that already have safe zone guides and bleed settings for some of the more common sizes of printing.](#)

Crop Tutorial

Once you've got your bleeds set up, the only thing left is to set the crop marks. And it's literally as simple as pressing a button. Not figuratively... literally!

Most Design Programs

With the exception of Adobe Photoshop, most design programs will have an option to automatically add crop marks as the file is being exported to a PDF. To do this, export your file as a PDF. A PDF dialog box will open up. On the left menu, click "Marks and Bleeds". You'll now see a section down the center called "Marks". In it, click the box titled, "Crop Marks". That's it! Now when you click save, the resulting PDF will have crop marks already embedded into the file. Everyone will love you for it, even that cutie down in accounting.



Cheat Sheets

New File

Target Resolution: At least 300dpi
Bleeds: 0.125" outward on each side
Safe Zone: 0.125" inward on each side

PDF Export

Select "Do Not Downsample" in the compression section.
Click the "Trim Marks" box in the marks section.
Set the bleeds at 0.125" on all sides in the bleeds section.

[Click here for templates that already have safe zone guides and bleed settings for some of the more common sizes of printing.](#)



300DPI
0.125" BLEED
THE SAFE ZONE IS OUR FRIEND
ADD CROP MARKS
DIGIPRINT



digiprint

4865 Longley Lane, Suite C, Reno, NV 89502 | 775-786-4464 | digiprintcorporation.com