

Adobe Illustrator CS4

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I was working on a poster the other night. I had created a background in *Photoshop* and I was laying in the text using *InDesign*. I knew what I wanted to do, but I just couldn't make it work. I grumbled and grouched. "I've done this a hundred times. Why can't I do it now?" Then, it dawned on me. Yes, I'd done it a hundred times, but not with *InDesign*. *Illustrator* was what I needed. The Adobe platform is a place where it is easy to forget where you are. The formats have been nicely dovetailed so you can build on what you learned in one application in an entirely new ap. I moved my project over to *Illustrator* my work proceeded quickly and I ended up with just what I wanted.

Adobe *Illustrator CS4* is a massively powerful and robust program. It boggles the mind to think of all the things you can do and create in *Illustrator*. You could spend a lifetime working with

Illustrator and there would always be something new to learn.

So, what does *CS4* bring to the table that we haven't seen before? The interface is much more flexible and offers useful options that allow you to display a number of documents simultaneously so you can easily grab something from one window and drag it to another document.

Your choices of Workspaces has been improved and you can switch to a Workspace, for instance, that looks like *Photoshop* or *InDesign*.



One of the frustrating things about *Illustrator* is that in the past, you could only have one page. You got around that with layers, but now you have the option of Multiple Artboards. What's sweet about this is that you can have various sized documents within a single project: for instance, stationary, an envelope, business cards and a brochure—they all use a common theme and colors—but they vary in size. Now, you specify all this in the Document Setup under the new "Number of Artboards" button. Also, in addition to your Trim Size, you can add a Bleed Size. Anyone who does print work knows how important this is.

Here's a fun, new feature with a great name: The Expressive Blob Brush. Basically it allows you to change what you draw into a single, editable object without going through all the processes that were necessary before with brush drawing. And, hallelujah, the eraser works like the Blob Brush to make it much easier and more intuitive to draw and erase.

The new Graphics Styles offers the ability (using the Alt key) to add one style on top of another style (previously, choosing a new style overwrote the style before it.) By now, everyone knows how handy it is to be able to save a particular style and add it to other objects and with this new feature, it's even more sensational. And don't get me started on the Additive flyout menu. I could spend hours playing with it. There are so many potential ways to enhance your creative use of text and objects with Graphics Styles.

The Appearance Panel has been beefed up. You can change the stroke, fill and numerous other features within the Appearance Panel in an environment that looks like layers. This is a real timesaver and a boon to your workflow. This was always an important and powerful feature, but in *CS4* the Appearance Panel has gone to a marvelous new level.

Bless you, Adobe for the Separations Preview Panel. I hate to even contemplate all the times I've struggled to get separations ready for a print job and the number of ways things can go awry. I haven't had a chance to send a job to press from *CS4*, but I certainly feel more confident about it.

The Filter Menu is gone and all the commands have been moved throughout the other menus. The Crop Marks menu is under the Effect menu, which means it's a live effect and the crop marks change with your artwork. Very handy.

Clipping Masks were an *Illustrator* bugaboo. No more. Clipping Masks are much easier to use in *CS4* through the Objects menu.

Gradients have been greatly enhanced within the Gradients Panel. Best of all, you can adjust the gradient within the gradient itself, so you can adjust it for the exact look you want for your artwork. And, at last, you can easily create a gradient that has an opacity setting.

In *CS4*, Smart Guides are turned on by default. Click Control+K and use the Smart Guides Preferences Menu to set things up in a way that will be the most useful to you. This is a great feature for quickly and easily sizing and moving objects.

Illustrator documents quickly become complex. In *CS3*, the Isolation Mode made it easier to isolate and work with one object. In *CS4* the Isolation Mode enhancements mean you can work on individual paths, whereas before, you were limited to groups. It is so wonderful to be able to quickly and easily isolate one object, work on it and easily move back to the overall composition. Before, if you weren't extremely careful, you could easily scramble your whole project when you tried to fix a small detail.

Alignment is something I use constantly in *Illustrator* and I'm so pleased with the improvements. You can easily designate a "key object" and align the other objects to that key object. I used to get so frustrated when things would jump around in ways I didn't intend. I finally figured out a "trick" that helped, but alignment is so much better and easier to use in *CS4*. In addition to aligning to a key object, you can align to an artboard or a selection.

Here's something I would never have thought of: a Colorblindness Proofing feature. You can preview your work as a colorblind person would see it. Actually, there are two types of color blindness, Deuteranopia and Protanopia, and it checks for both. By having multiple windows/artboards,

you can easily use the "Recolor Artwork" feature and preview your design to make sure it is easily visible.

In Pathfinder, the objects can be combined, separated and shaped. Not much has changed except that the Live Behavior of compound shapes has been switched as the default with Expanded Object/Shape.

There are lots of new templates in *CS4* and FlexSkins come with the program. With the multiple artboards, there are so many new possibilities. And there are so many Symbols with intriguing names like: Grime Vector Pack, Illuminate Ribbons, Logo Elements, Mad Science and many more.

The upgrades/improvements in *CS4* are practical and useful like the Blob Brush tool, intuitive vector drawing and multiple artboards (up to 100). All the previous features are still there. *Illustrator CS4* makes me want to do an Infomercial: "But wait, there's more!"

I feel as though *Illustrator* has gone from being a gigantic brooding hulk of a program and it has gradually morphed into a more sophisticated, confident creature. It's still huge, but much less hostile. The familiar interface makes you feel that it has finally been fully embraced by the Adobe family. Kudos to Adobe for *Illustrator CS4*.

About: *Adobe Illustrator CS4*

Vendor: Adobe

www.adobe.com

Price: \$599, \$519.95 @ Amazon, Upgrade price: \$199

Requires: see <http://www.adobe.com/products/illustrator/systemreqs/?promoid=DRHWY>