

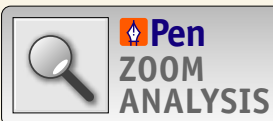


# Pen 10.06

the vector podcast

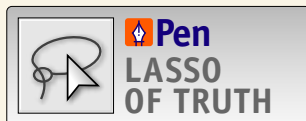
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## THE ART OF THE DASH



**Pen**  
ZOOM  
ANALYSIS

What makes a dashed stroke? Why don't the corners ever line up evenly when using Illustrator? InDesign seems to have no trouble... or does it? Learn what makes a dash tick.



**Pen**  
LASSO  
OF TRUTH

Use the all-powerful Pattern Brush to create dashed lines that are indeed perfect. And don't forget the appearance palette. Create Graphic Styles of dashed lines for use in just about any situation.



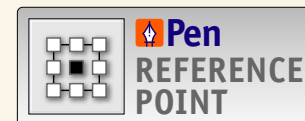
**Pen**  
DIRECT  
SELECTION

Rick Johnson's Nudge Palette proves invaluable for making small adjustments to dashes.



**Pen**  
FLARE TOOL  
AWARD

The Arc tool in Illustrator provides functionality that is cool, but totally useless in a real workflow.



**Pen**  
REFERENCE  
POINT

Sharon Steuer's Adobe Illustrator CS2 Wow! Book offers wonderful examples of how to use dashes to create wonderful art.



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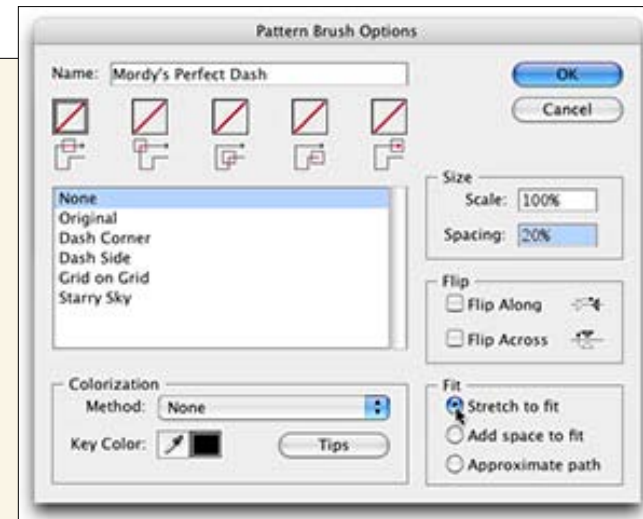
Presented by



Dashes are a stroke attribute, and specifying dashes can be done via the Stroke palette in Illustrator. By specifying a length for the dash — meaning, stroke is on — and a length for the gap — meaning, stroke is off — you can create a custom dash pattern. Illustrator even lets you specify up to 3 dash and gap settings. If you only specify a dash setting, Illustrator uses that same setting for the following gap, so for example, it wouldn't be necessary to specify a dash setting of 4 points and then a gap setting of 4 points. You can just leave the dash set to 4 and save a click or two. Applying a cap setting — butt, round, or projecting — will also affect the appearance of your dashes.

But you may have noticed, if you've tried using the dash settings before, that it's incredibly difficult—impossible, it seems—to get your dashes lined up so that they meet perfectly at the corners of rectangle. This isn't fun when designing, say, a coupon. Why is this so? Well, one thing that I talk about a lot is that Illustrator's biggest problem is that it's too perfect. In Illustrator, we use precise measurements, which is why corners rarely line up evenly. Because a dash and a gap use a specific value, Illustrator just applies the dashes and gaps as you specified, and the chances that the size or length of your rectangle is divisible perfectly by the lengths of your dashes and gaps are close to nil.

In contrast, let's take a look at InDesign, which doesn't have this problem... Or does it? In reality, it's just hidden from you, because InDesign sees its utter perfection and FIXES it for you. InDesign's stroke palette will automatically adjust the dashes, the gaps, or both (which is the default setting), to ensure that the corners line up evenly. Turning this feature off reveals that InDesign has the same problem. Too bad that Illustrator doesn't have this feature. If only there was a way around this.



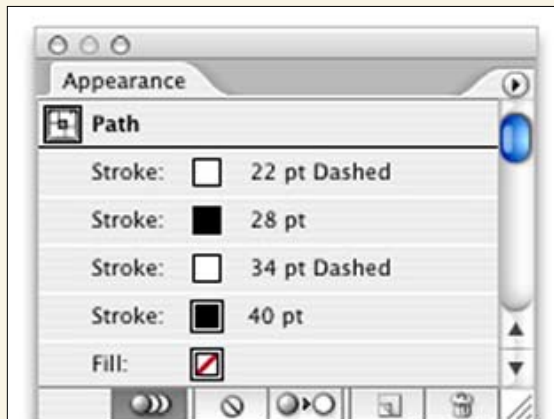
Well, while it might not be the most elegant solution, you can use Illustrator's powerful pattern brush to create perfect dash patterns. In fact, this is as good excuse as any to experiment with pattern brushes because they are indeed, a most treasured secret. Maybe one day, an entire podcast on patterns will be in order. But I digress...

First, create a dash and a corner point. It's easier if you set up no-fill no-stroke areas to help define consistent boundaries for your art. Then, define the art as patterns —remember to name the pattern swatches — and create a new pattern brush by clicking on the New Pattern icon in the Brushes palette. Choose the Stretch To Fit option and specify a Spacing setting as well. These two settings by the way, are what make Pattern brushes so incredibly useful. Think of the Adjust Pattern To Fit Path option as being similar to what InDesign does with its dashes in its Stroke palette. Then, specify the pattern swatches for the Side Tile and Outer Corner Tile and create the brush. You can now apply the new pattern brush to a rectangle and see that the corners align perfectly.



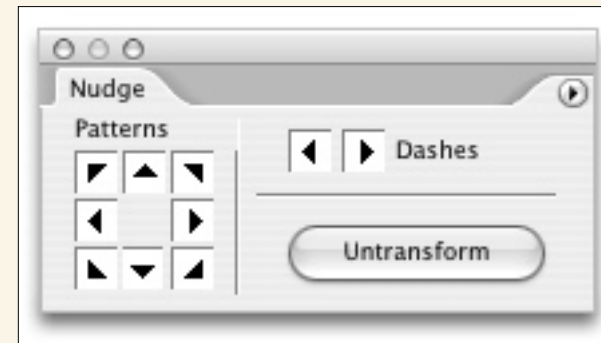
First of all, some people think that it's not possible to get perfectly round dots in Illustrator when defining a dash. For example, like when you're trying to create a dotted line. Not true. If you specify a cap setting of round, and a dash setting of zero, you get a perfect circle for a dash. Remember, a value setting left blank isn't the same as a value setting of zero.

Secondly, you can achieve totally cool dash patterns by overlapping multiple paths on top of each other — each with different dash settings. To be efficient, you can simply add multiple stroke attributes to a single path using the Appearance palette. This makes it simple to use one stroke to simulate movie filmstrips, or train tracks — all using a single path with multiple dashed stroke attributes. Some people fear the Appearance palette (or worse, avoid it altogether, thinking it is useless). Be brave and use it. The benefit is not only better efficiency in your designs, but you can then create time-saving Graphic Styles as well. There can be an entire episode just covering those alone...



Since this episode is all about dashes, it's a great opportunity to point out Rick Johnson's Nudge palette plugin.

This great plugin for Illustrator allows you to interactively shift or "nudge" dashes along a path to try to get the optimal appearance. While it won't necessarily align corners perfectly, it can certainly help when you need to make small adjustments. You can find the Nudge palette plugin — along with some of Rick's other useful plugins — at <http://rj-graffix.com>.





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# THE ART OF THE DASH



**Pen**  
FLARE TOOL  
AWARD

And now, for the moment I'm sure you've all been waiting for... Pen is proud to present this episode's Flare Tool Award! Yes, Pen recognizes the fact that technology can be so cool — yet at the same time, so useless. And to be honest, while the Flare Tool does some incredibly cool things in Illustrator, we have yet to find a good use for it. So in the name of wonderful technology, we're both honored to present the Pen Flare Tool Award to... the Arc Tool!



**Pen**  
REFERENCE  
POINT

Where can you learn more about dashes? Well, there are two awesome books that have some great examples in them that show of how dashes can be used. Sharon Steuer's Illustrator Wow Book offers some cool examples of how to utilize dash strokes. And also, Ron Chan has a new book that will be out shortly (if it isn't already out by now), called How to Wow with Illustrator. Both of these books are published by Peachpit Press and can be found at your local bookstore or at Amazon.com

