

Illustrator CS3

Create a custom type illustration

Whether you're designing lettering for a print headline or a t-shirt logo, **Jeremy Pettis** shares some essential techniques for creating a striking ornamental type illustration

When asked to create an ornamental type illustration, I had a vision of horrid cheap club flyers and MySpace graphics. So, my first advice is to put away your ornamental dingbats and EPS libraries and start your custom type from scratch.

In this project, I'll show you how, with preparation and planning, a word can be manipulated to interact within itself ornamentally. Here you can see the finished design, and over the page I'll walk you through the process. These ideas will help and inspire you to start creating your own type illustration, without the use of Photoshop filters to twist your words and add flourishes.

Inspiration and patience are the main ingredients needed. So, before you begin, get down to the library and read some design annuals from 1960-1984. Also check out some typography pools on Flickr to see what other designers have been creating.

**Designer**

Jeremy Pettis was born and raised in the Midwest of the USA. As senior designer at DesignScout, Pettis designs everything from apparel lines to coffee shop collateral. Inspired as a kid by graffiti under bridges, and

comics by Robert Crumb, Pettis has been experimenting with type for most of his life. See more of his work at www.jeremypettis.com. If you'd like help or feedback on your own custom type, send a screenshot to mrpettis@gmail.com.

Skills

- Sketching and tracing
- Offset Path and Pathfinder
- Smooth transitioning
- 3D effects and gradients

01 First, some general advice. Think of your word as a puzzle and each letter as a piece. You must find the right combination of letter styles and kerning to make your puzzle fit together. Everything should appear in a particular place that makes sense with the rest of the letters.

02 The pieces of your puzzle must relate to each other but not be exact duplicates. Try to set up standards for the various pieces of your letters. For instance, my capital 'A' has a descender on the first stem with a barbed hook at the end. I also applied this styling to the arm of the 'R'.





03

What you're making is a vector graphic that can be scaled to virtually any size. Subtle details can make or break your piece, so try not to let any misaligned paths or jagged edges remain in your final piece. Use the Outline view (Ctrl+Y or Cmd+Y) to see only the shapes of your work. Errors will usually appear a little darker.

04

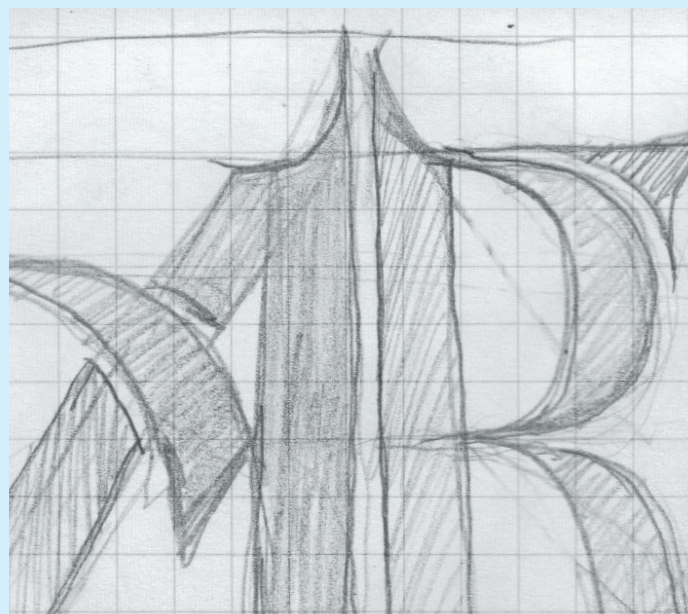
My college professor, Dale Shidler, taught me that using one contrasting element grabs the viewer's attention and produces intrigue. In this piece, I used a flourish that visually crops pieces off all of the letters (particularly the 'A' and 'R'). This was a good way to break out of the tightly knit group of characters.

05

I have always stood by the saying 'less is more'. This definitely applies to flourishes. Generally the flourish is an attention-grabbing feature that really defines the piece as being 'ornamental'. Think about how many flourishes you need, and what their purpose or function is. Here, I used the flourishes to unify the beginning and end of the word.



01



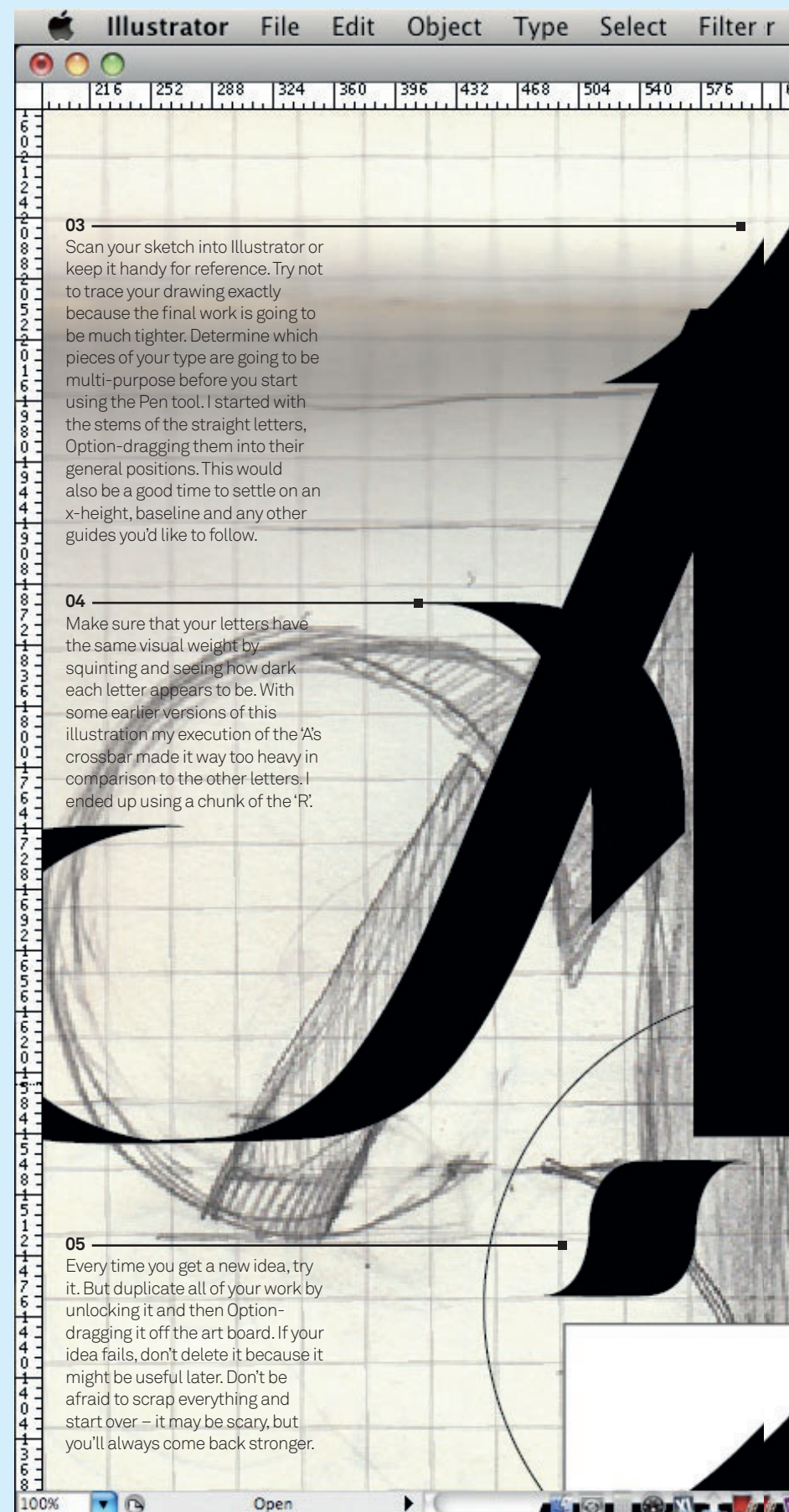
02

01

Always start working on paper unless you're basing your design on an existing font. In that case you can set the type in Illustrator, print it, then trace the base letters. But remember, the results are always more interesting when you start from scratch.

02

Don't bother thinking about which colours you'll be using at this stage. Your work must function in black-and-white perfectly before any colour can be applied.

**03**

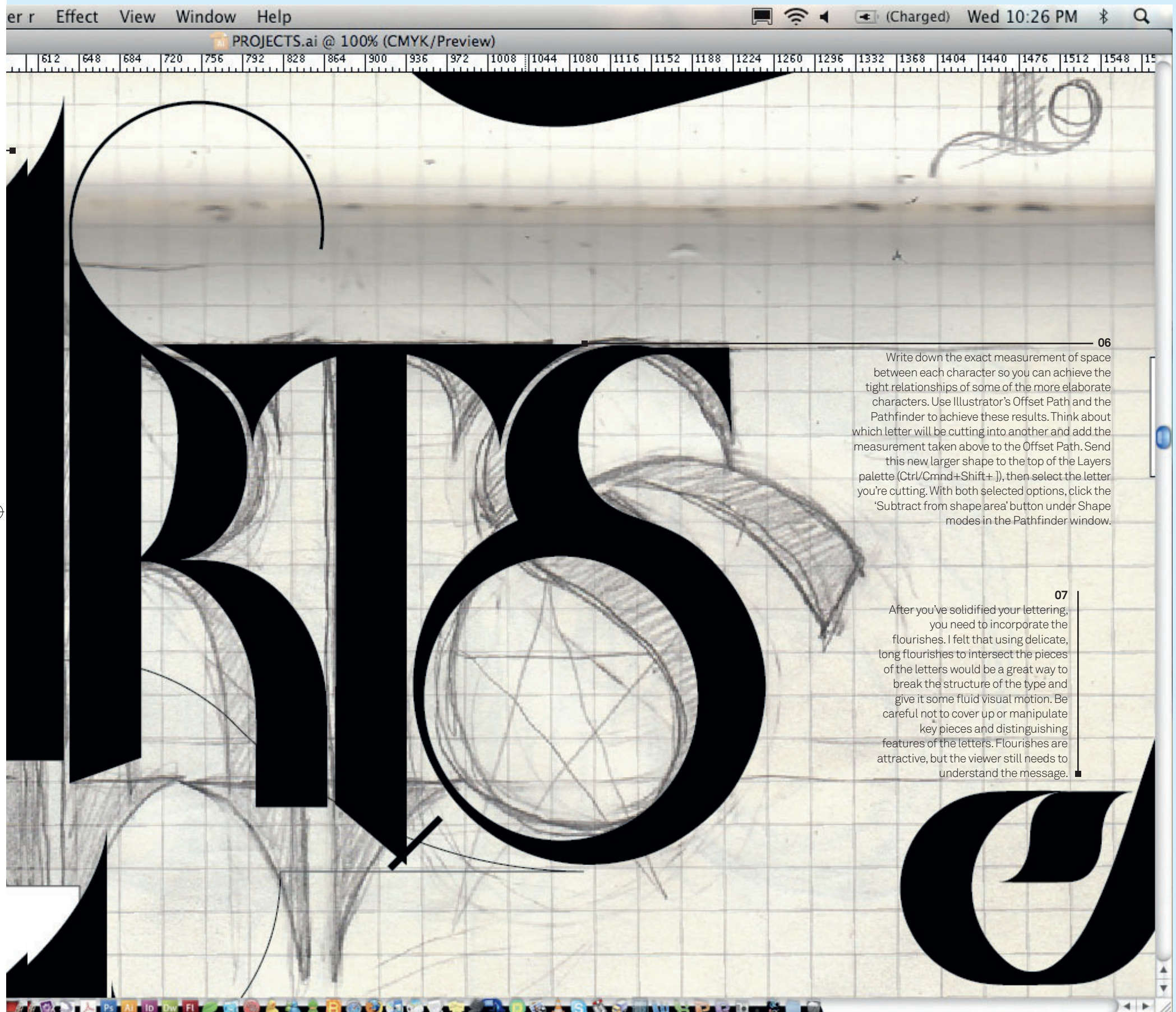
Scan your sketch into Illustrator or keep it handy for reference. Try not to trace your drawing exactly because the final work is going to be much tighter. Determine which pieces of your type are going to be multi-purpose before you start using the Pen tool. I started with the stems of the straight letters, Option-dragging them into their general positions. This would also be a good time to settle on an x-height, baseline and any other guides you'd like to follow.

04

Make sure that your letters have the same visual weight by squinting and seeing how dark each letter appears to be. With some earlier versions of this illustration my execution of the 'A's crossbar made it way too heavy in comparison to the other letters. I ended up using a chunk of the 'R'.

05

Every time you get a new idea, try it. But duplicate all of your work by unlocking it and then Option-dragging it off the art board. If your idea fails, don't delete it because it might be useful later. Don't be afraid to scrap everything and start over – it may be scary, but you'll always come back stronger.

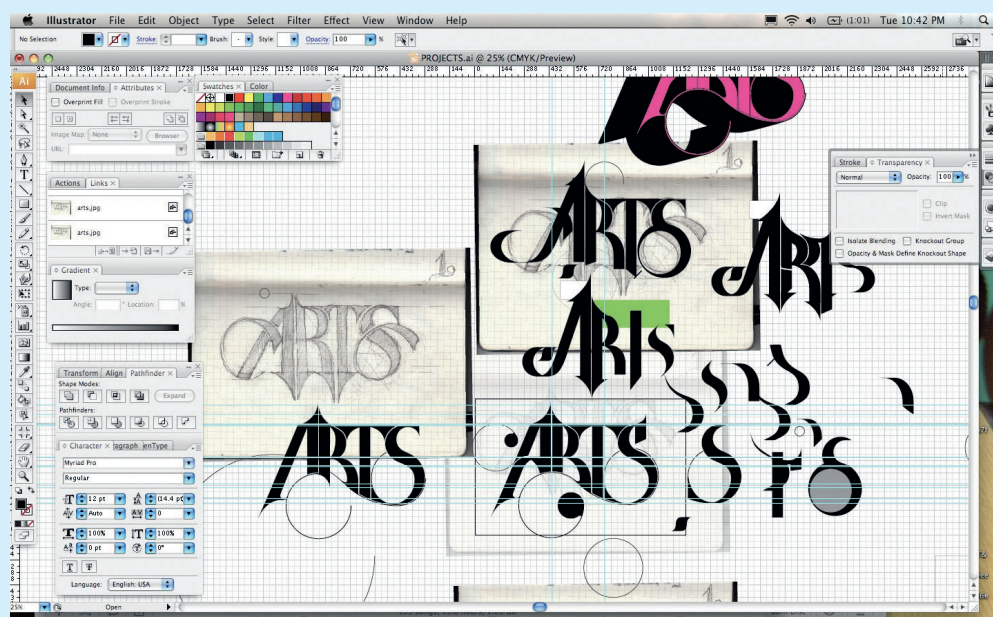


06

Write down the exact measurement of space between each character so you can achieve the tight relationships of some of the more elaborate characters. Use Illustrator's Offset Path and the Pathfinder to achieve these results. Think about which letter will be cutting into another and add the measurement taken above to the Offset Path. Send this new larger shape to the top of the Layers palette (Ctrl/Cmd+Shift+ J), then select the letter you're cutting. With both selected options, click the 'Subtract from shape area' button under Shape modes in the Pathfinder window.

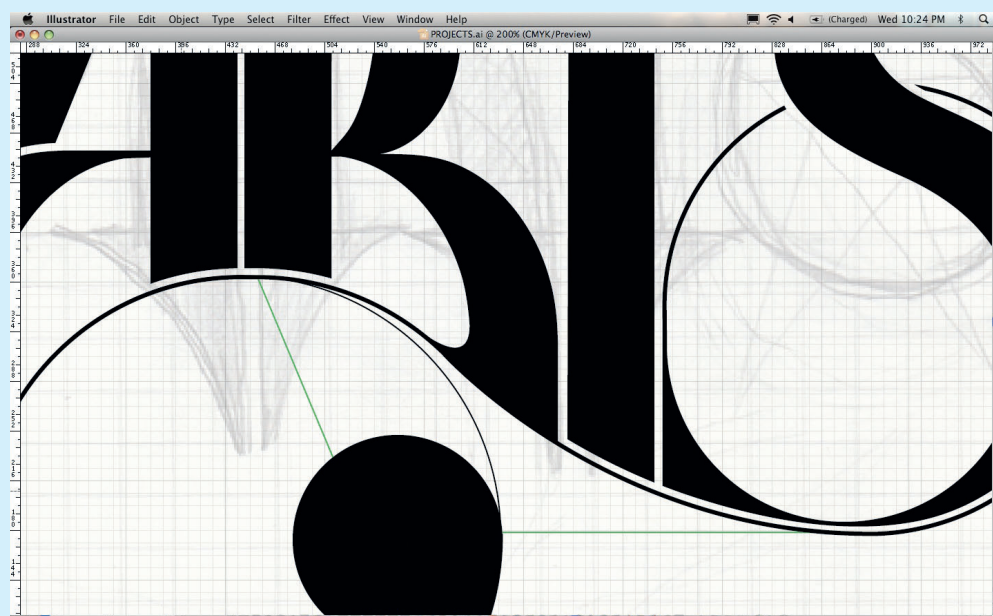
07

After you've solidified your lettering, you need to incorporate the flourishes. I felt that using delicate, long flourishes to intersect the pieces of the letters would be a great way to break the structure of the type and give it some fluid visual motion. Be careful not to cover up or manipulate key pieces and distinguishing features of the letters. Flourishes are attractive, but the viewer still needs to understand the message.



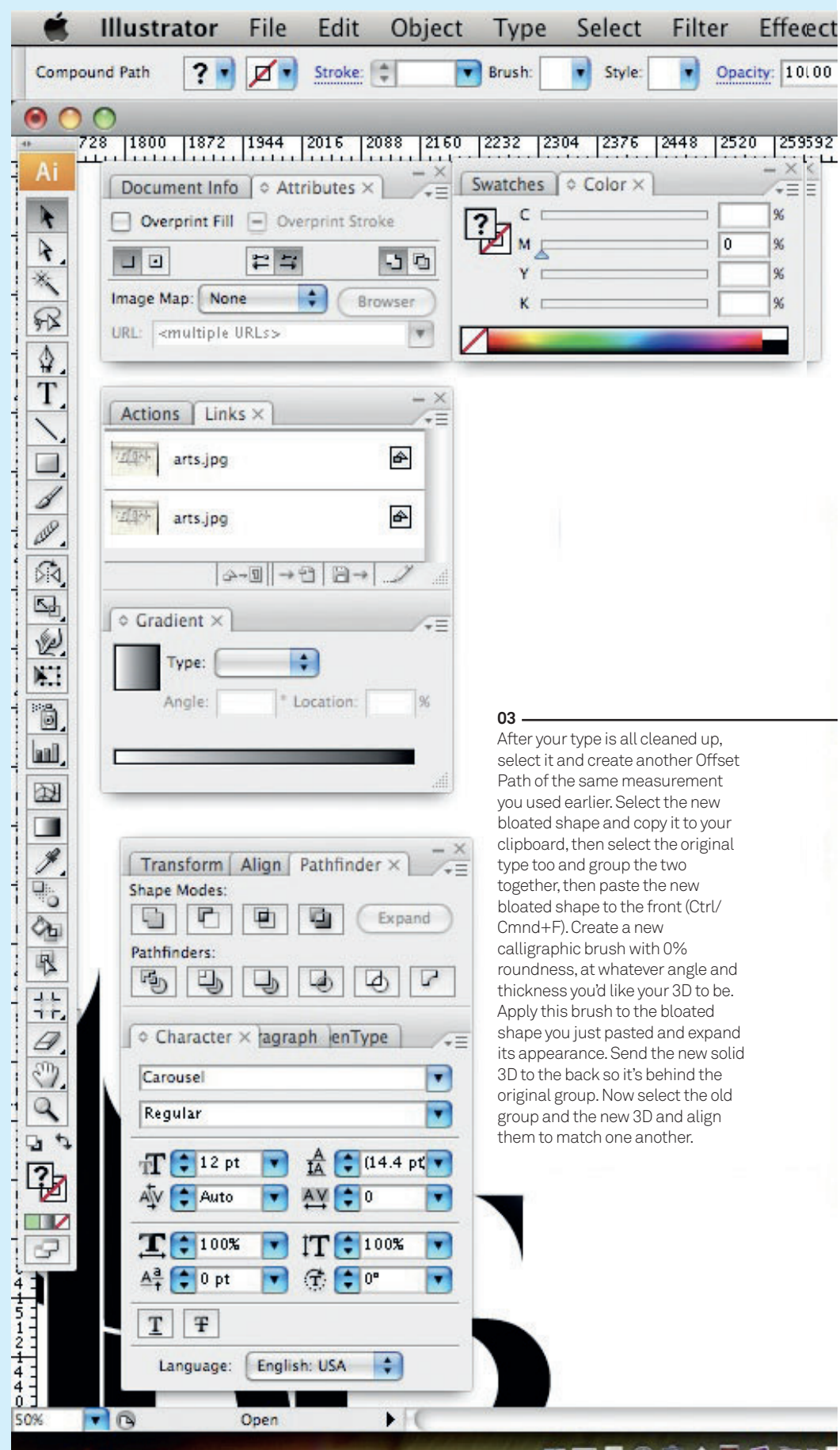
01

Once you've got something that resembles your original sketch but better, it's time to skim it over and look for the tiny rough connections. You need to create smooth transitions for these.



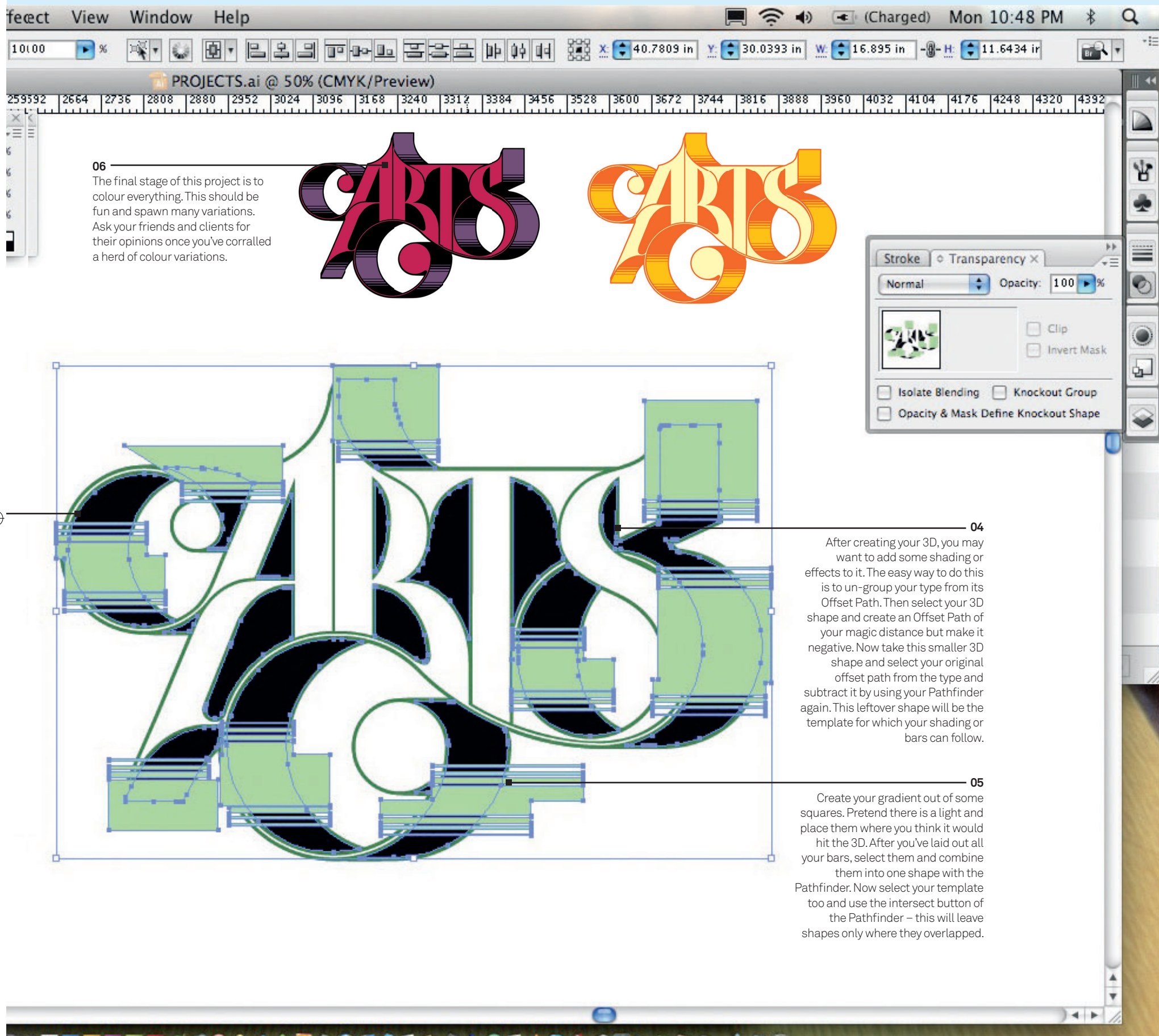
02

Once you're done with your overall construction of the type, Option-drag it and prepare for touch-ups. With your new clone selected, Option-click the 'Add to shape area' button under Shape modes on the Pathfinder window. Switch your view to Outline (Ctrl/Cmnd+Y). Look for wonky curves and crooked or misaligned paths. To fix curves, run the Smooth tool (located under the Pencil tool) over the weird curve a few times in the general shape you'd like the curve to be. You can also redo curves with the Pen tool if necessary.

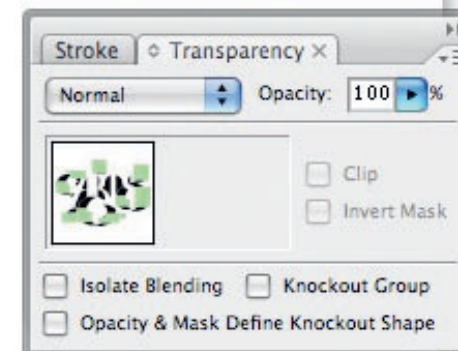


03

After your type is all cleaned up, select it and create another Offset Path of the same measurement you used earlier. Select the new bloated shape and copy it to your clipboard, then select the original type too and group the two together, then paste the new bloated shape to the front (Ctrl/Cmnd+F). Create a new calligraphic brush with 0% roundness, at whatever angle and thickness you'd like your 3D to be. Apply this brush to the bloated shape you just pasted and expand its appearance. Send the new solid 3D to the back so it's behind the original group. Now select the old group and the new 3D and align them to match one another.



06
The final stage of this project is to colour everything. This should be fun and spawn many variations. Ask your friends and clients for their opinions once you've corralled a herd of colour variations.



04
After creating your 3D, you may want to add some shading or effects to it. The easy way to do this is to un-group your type from its Offset Path. Then select your 3D shape and create an Offset Path of your magic distance but make it negative. Now take this smaller 3D shape and select your original offset path from the type and subtract it by using your Pathfinder again. This leftover shape will be the template for which your shading or bars can follow.

05
Create your gradient out of some squares. Pretend there is a light and place them where you think it would hit the 3D. After you've laid out all your bars, select them and combine them into one shape with the Pathfinder. Now select your template too and use the intersect button of the Pathfinder – this will leave shapes only where they overlapped.