

Photoshop How-To: Adding Bleeds and Crop Marks

What is bleed?

A bleed will allow objects, such as pictures, to go beyond the defined borders of a printed page. You can use it when you want to avoid white margins for certain objects in your publication.



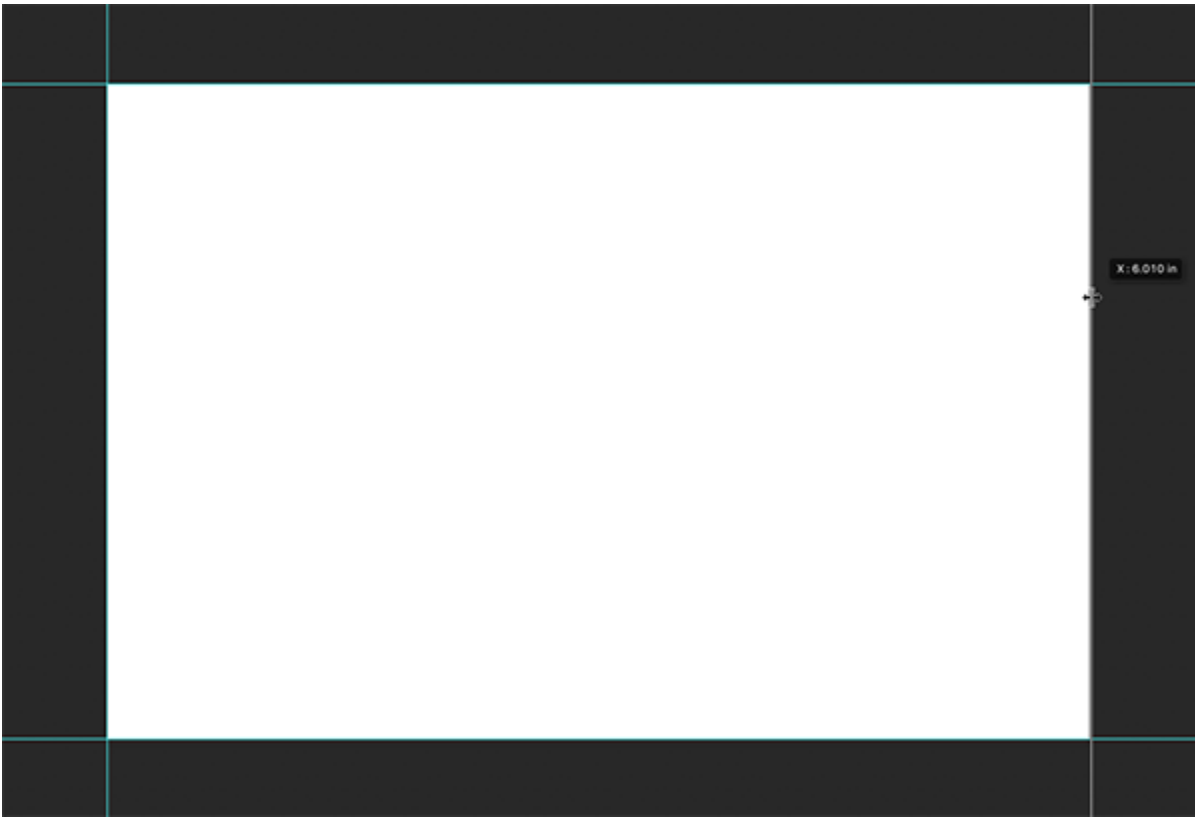
Planning

Regardless of the application you use, one of the first things you need to determine is the finished size of the printed piece. Preferably you'll do this at the very beginning of the project instead of at the end, because sometimes at the end of your project, you've already removed valuable image information that you would need to create the bleed. Standard bleed in the printing industry is 1/8".

Create the document

Begin by creating a new document in Photoshop to the trim size (final size) and resolution that you need. You can also begin with an existing project and implement the techniques that I describe here, but I find that it's easiest to understand if you start with a new document.

Make sure that rulers are displayed by choosing View > Rulers, and also make sure that snapping is enabled by choosing View > Snap. Click on the ruler and drag a guide to the edge of the document. The guide should snap to the edge of the document automatically. Do this for all four sides of the document.



Create space for the bleed

Now increase the image size (document size) to the size of the project including the bleed. Using some basic math, you can determine that if your desired bleed amount is 1/8" on all four sides, simply add 1/8" to each dimension.

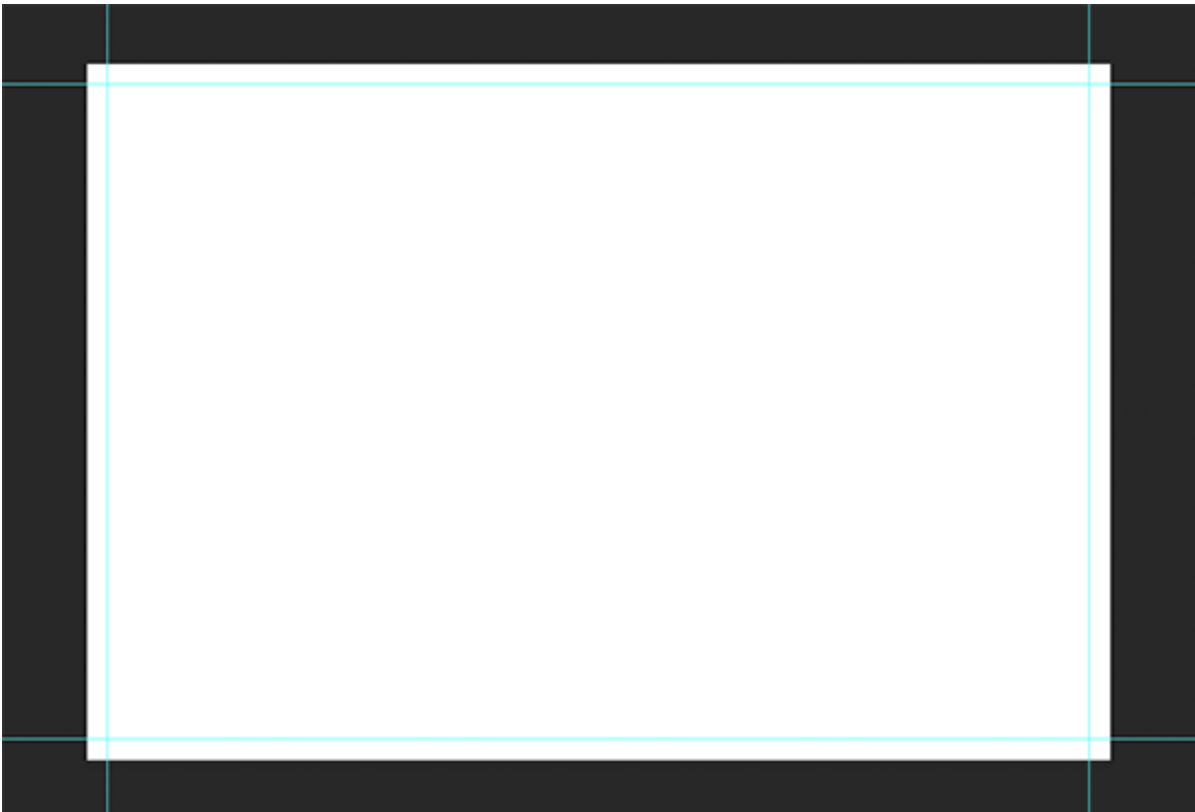
In this example, we're working with a 6" x 4" document so we'll add the 1/8" amount to all four sides to come up with 4 1/4" x 6 1/4".

If your project requires more than 1/8" bleed, simply add that amount. To achieve this, choose Image > Canvas Size and change the dimensions to the correct amount. Make sure that the anchor at the bottom of the dialog box is set to the center to force the document to add pixels from the middle out.

Another option is to choose the relative checkbox and enter the amount that you want to increase your document by. In this case, it's 1/4". Your canvas extension color can remain the background color unless you want the added amount to be a different color.



When you're finished, you should end up with a document that is to the bleed size of your final project and guides indicating where the document will trim.



Building the project

Now that you have the foundation for the document created, simply build the document as desired using the guides as a reference point. Keep in mind that the final printed piece will be trimmed at the location of the guides in the Photoshop document. Anything that bleeds will need to extend past the guides (the trim edge) to the bleed edge.

Feel free to use layers, shapes, and anything else that you normally use to produce the final product in Photoshop. I find Smart Objects to be particularly useful as they retain the original size of the content so you can adjust things later on.



How to create trim marks

Choose Image > Canvas Size and enable the relative button. Enter 1" in the Width and Height dimensions and click OK. This will expand the canvas by an additional 1" in both dimensions. Create a new layer for your marks and create a selection in the corner areas of the image using the Rectangular Marquee tool. You can do all four corners at the same time.



With the selections active, choose Edit > Stroke and apply a 2px stroke to the active selections. Deselect the active selections and hide your guides to view the crop marks applied to the project.

In the figure below, I shortened the crop marks as my preference but you now have a project built in Photoshop that contains the correct amount of bleed and trim marks indicating where the final piece should be trimmed.

