

tracing portrait

 Intermediate level.

This project is designed to practice the pen tool. This tool is the most anti-intuitive approach to drawing imaginable. However, the pen tool once mastered will be an invaluable skill for both Illustrator or Photoshop. There are some subtle differences between the way the tool works in these programs but the principle is identical. This exercise will also help you understand how to work with layers to organize your work.

Find an image of a person that you want to trace it could be a famous musician, an actor or just a friend. The image needs to be digital. You could take an image from the web or you could scan an image from a magazine or book. For best results it helps if you have a clear image that contains detail. However because we are tracing the image the quality doesn't have to be great.

When you scan an image I would suggest for the purposes of this exercise that you scan an image at 150 PPI.

1 Create a new Illustrator document; the standard 8.5" x 11" CMYK vertical or horizontal layout will do just fine depending on your image format.

2 Go to File > Place, you will then browse for the image that you have found to use for this tracing exercise.

3 Once you have located the image select it. At the bottom of this dialog box you will see three check boxes; Link, Template and Replace. I want you to make sure Link is off, template should be on and Replace will be unavailable (grayed out) because nothing is selected. Now click Place.

By having Link turned off we embed the image into the Illustrator document, meaning that if I take this file to another computer to print or work on some more I don't need to also bring

along the source file. By checking Template we place the image on to a special layer called a Template layer that has some unique characteristics. A template layer is designed for images that you wish to trace. You then use the layer above the template layer to trace. A template is non-printing and you will be able to see your image placed on the template layer when in



The layers should look like this.

4 Take a look at the Layers Palette. If the layers Palette isn't open go to Window > Layers. You should have one layer named template and another named layer1. The Template layer will be locked. Double click on layer 1 and name it background. On this layer draw a rectangle using the Rectangle Tool for the background color. If you want to add detail into the background you can do that later.

It's best to start out by drawing the large areas first. Take a look at the image you placed and see how you can break it down into large areas. In the image of Bowie that I am working on for this demonstration the jacket, the hair and the face are the three main areas in the design. To help organize your work you will create separate layers for each of the main areas of the illustration.

5 In the Layers Palette make sure that the layer you named background is active by clicking on it. Click on the new layer icon at the bottom of the palette. The new layer icon is next to the delete selection icon (trash can). On my new layer I named it Jacket, depending on your image you may name yours shirt or dress or whatever is appropriate.

When using the Pen Tool there are some things that you should be aware of. To achieve a smooth consistent path use as few points as possible to define the shape. You can anchor point whenever there is a change in direction. If you are creating a curve you click and drag, this pulls out handles called directional lines. These



directional lines should follow the flow of the path. If you want to change direction you can click back on the last anchor point this will remove the directional line that is preceeding the anchor point you are about to make. To choose the last selection tool temporarily while on the Pen Tool hold down the command key. If you use the Direct Selection Tool before you begin to draw this will then be the selection tool that is accessed when command is held down. This trick allows you to stay on the Pen Tool yet adjust the line as you go by using the Direct Selection Tool when you need it.

6 On the layer that I named Jacket I will start drawing around the outside of the jacket with the Pen Tool. I am only drawing the main area not any of the detail. I draw using the Pen Tool all the way around until I get to the place I started, when I get back to the beginning I will get a small o next to the Pen Tool cursor that shows me that I have a completed path.

Keep making layers for all the major shapes such as the face and the hair. In my finished version of the Bowie illustration my Layers Palatte looks like this screen capture below.



I have the template layer, the background layer, the face, the hair, the jacket as well as, a layer for type and a layer I refer to as a bleed mask. The structure of your layers may vary depending on the illustration. The bleed mask layer covers up bits of artwork that stray from the edge and keeps the outside edge of the illustration nice and clean. To create the bleed mask, I create a layer that goes above all the other layers an draw a rectangle large enough to cover all the stray elements in the illustra-

tion. I then create another rectangle the size of the outside edge of the finished illustration select both of these and then go to Object > Compound Path > Make. This makes a hole in the large rectangle from the smaller rectangle. Color this frame white and then lock that layer.

When you are drawing you will find that you cover up parts of your image taht you need to see to trace later. As an example once I create a layer for the face and I draw the shape of the face I have covered up the eyes and the nose and the mouth as well as any tonal changes. However, when you have an image on a template layer and you swap to Outline mode, View > Outline Mode (command Y) you can still see the image.

Once you have all the main areas drawn out on their separate layers you can lock the layers you are not working on. Swap to outline mode and now draw in the details. each area of color needs to be a separate vector shape.

