alphagraphics®

ALPHAGRAPHICS GUIDE

What is a bleed in printing?

A simple guide to help you prepare artwork that prints clean, edge to edge, every time.

Contents

What Is a Bleed? 3

Why Is Bleed Important? 3

When Should You Use Bleed? 4

How Much Bleed Should You Add? 4

Don't Forget the Safe Area 5

Bleed vs. Trim vs. Safe Area 5

What Are Crop Marks? 6

How to Add Bleed in Adobe Illustrator 7

Export a Print-Ready PDF from Illustrator 9

How to Add Bleed in Canva 10

Common Bleed Mistakes to Avoid 12

Print-Ready Design Checklist 13

Final Print-Ready Checklist 14

How AlphaGraphics Can Help 14

What is a bleed?

Whether you're printing business cards, brochures, postcards, invitations, menus, flyers, or booklets, you've probably heard your printer ask, "Does your file include bleed?" If you're not a designer, that question can sound intimidating. Fortunately, bleed is one of the simplest — and most important — concepts in commercial printing.

A bleed is the portion of your artwork that extends beyond the final trim size of your printed piece. Your project is printed slightly larger than its finished dimensions and then trimmed to size. The extra artwork outside the trim line ensures colors, photos, and background graphics extend cleanly to the edge after trimming.

WHY IS BLEED IMPORTANT?

Commercial printing equipment is extremely accurate, but even small variations during trimming can leave thin white borders if artwork stops at the trim line. Adding bleed helps eliminate unwanted white edges and creates a polished, professional finish.

When should you use bleed?

USE BLEED WHEN

- Background colors extend to the edge.
- Photos or graphics touch the edge.
- You're printing cards, brochures, postcards, invitations, flyers, menus, or booklets.
- You want edge-to-edge color.

BLEED MAY NOT BE NECESSARY

- Your design intentionally includes white margins.
- All artwork stays well inside the page.
- You're printing simple text documents.

HOW MUCH BLEED SHOULD YOU ADD?

1/8"

For most commercial print projects, a standard bleed of 1/8 inch (0.125 inches) on each side is recommended. Large-format graphics may require different specifications, so confirm requirements with your AlphaGraphics center before exporting your files.

Don't forget the safe area.

While bleed protects your background artwork, the safe area protects your important content. Keep logos, phone numbers, headlines, dates, QR codes, and other critical information safely inside the trim line so nothing important is accidentally cut off. As a general guide, keep important content at least 1/8 inch inside the finished edge unless your AlphaGraphics team provides different specifications for the project.

Bleed vs. trim vs. safe area

TERM	DEFINITION
Bleed	Extra artwork extending beyond the finished size.
Trim Line	Where the printed piece is cut to its final dimensions.
Safe Area	The area inside the trim where important content should remain.

What are crop marks?

Crop marks (sometimes called trim marks) are small lines that indicate exactly where the finished piece should be cut. If your project includes folds, your proof may also include fold marks to guide finishing. Crop-mark requirements can vary by production workflow, so confirm whether they should be included before submitting your final file.

How to add bleed in Adobe Illustrator

OPTION A — SET UP BLEED IN A **NEW DOCUMENT**

01 **Open the New Document window.** Launch Illustrator and select File > New.

02 **Enter the finished document size.** Set the Width and Height to the final trimmed size of the piece.

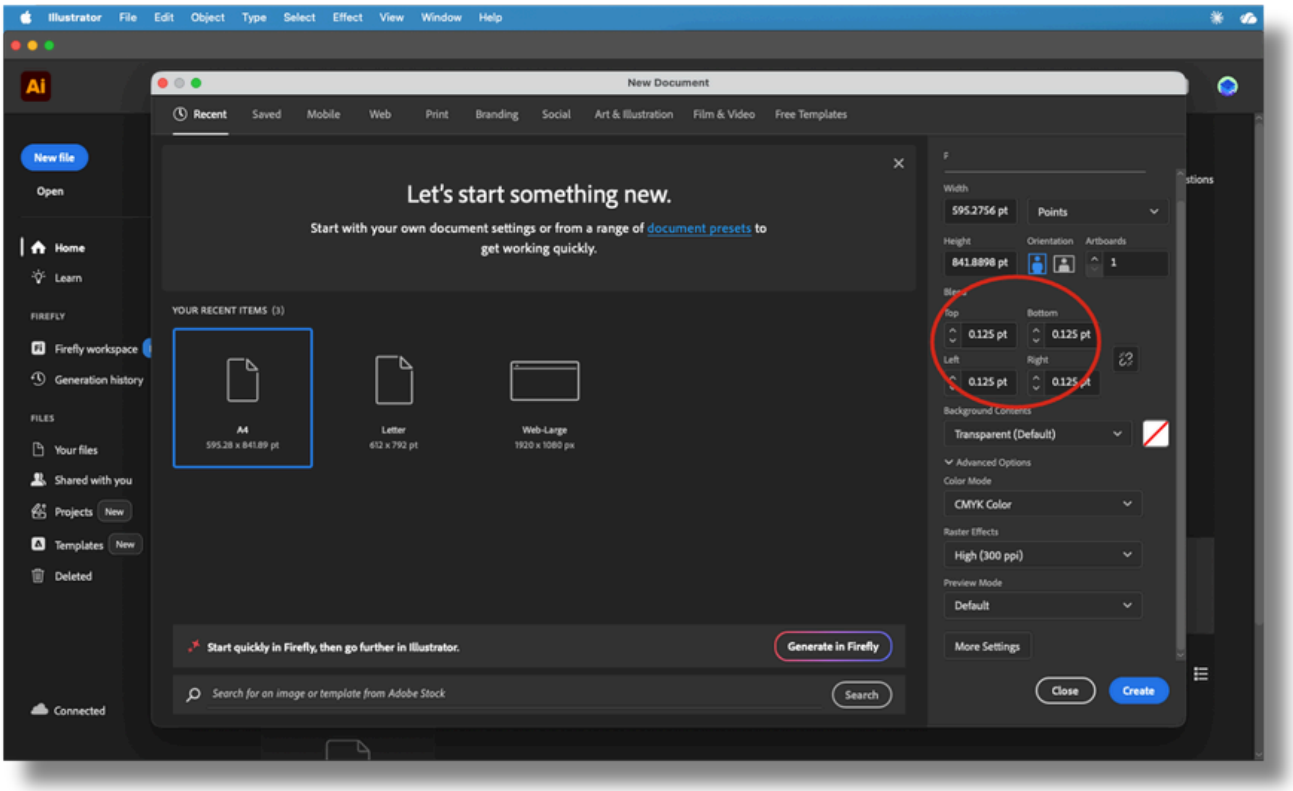
03 **Find the Bleed fields.** Open the advanced or additional options if the Bleed fields are not already visible.

04 **Enter the bleed amount.** Enter 0.125 inches for Top, Bottom, Left, and Right. Use the link icon so all four values stay the same.

05 **Create the document.** Illustrator displays the artboard edge and a red guide outside it — the artboard is the finished trim size; the red line is the bleed boundary.

06 **Build the design correctly.** Extend every background color, photo, texture, or shape that should print to the edge all the way to the red bleed guide.

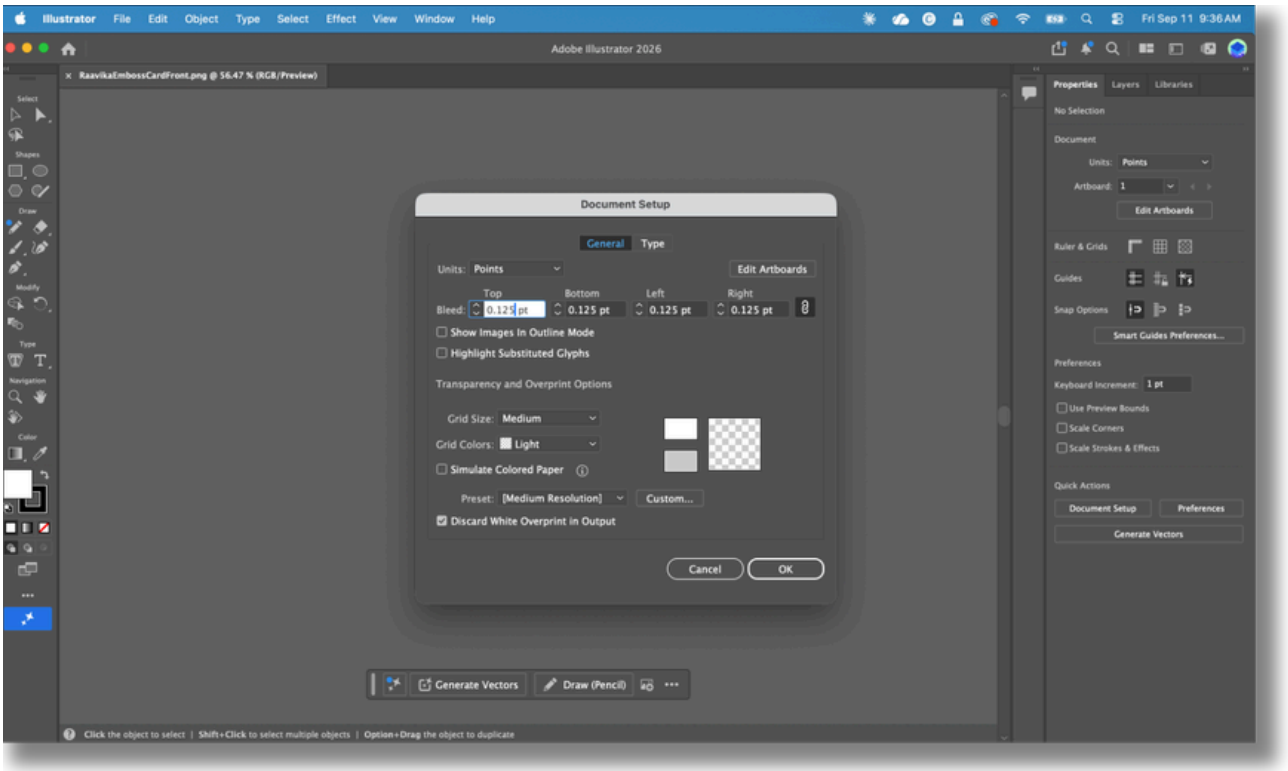
07 **Protect important content.** Keep text, logos, contact information, dates, and QR codes comfortably inside the artboard edge.



How to add bleed in Adobe Illustrator

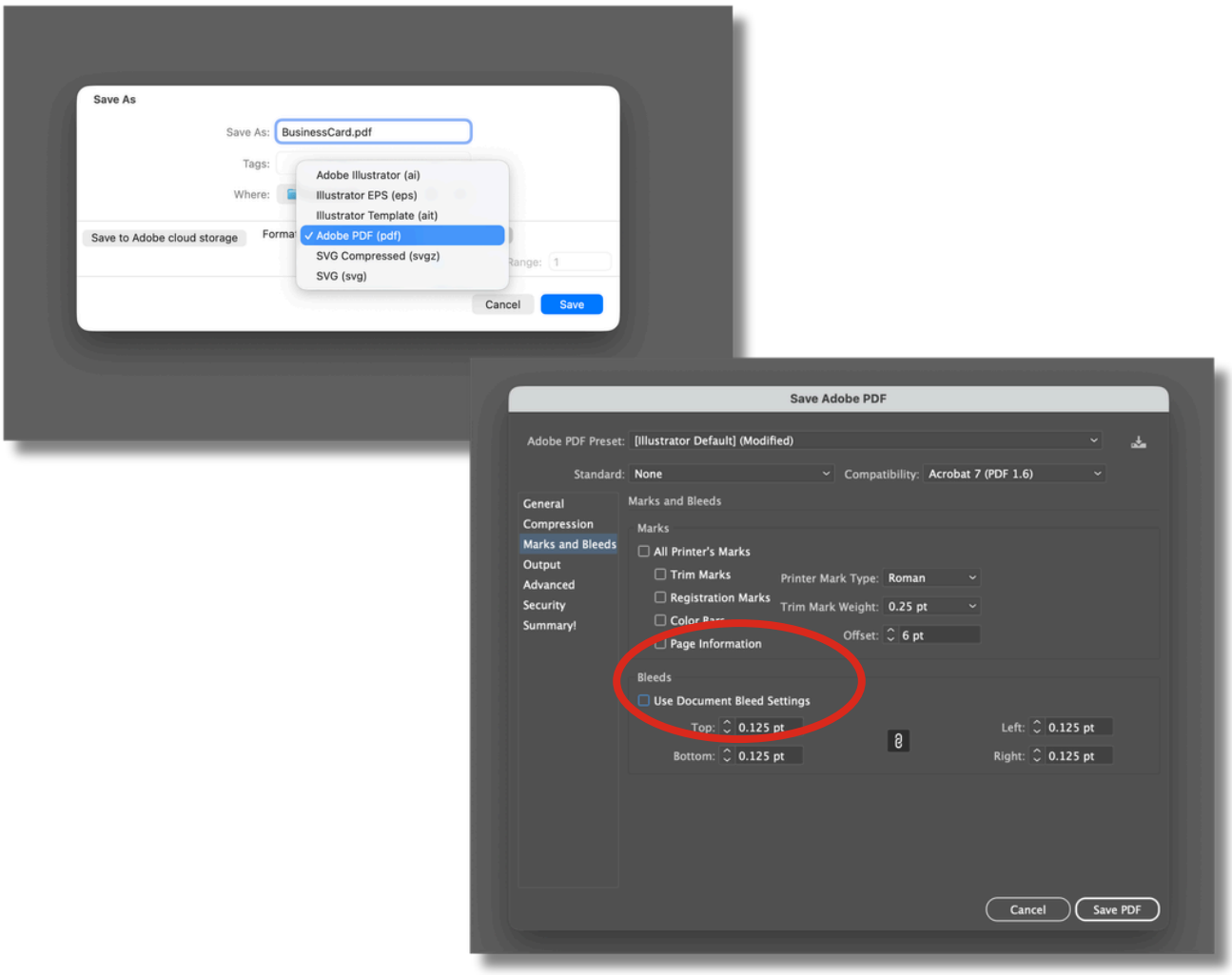
OPTION B — ADD BLEED TO AN **EXISTING DOCUMENT**

1. **Open the existing file.** Open the Illustrator document you plan to print.
2. **Open Document Setup.** Select File > Document Setup.
3. **Enter the bleed values.** In the Bleed section, enter 0.125 inches for all four sides and confirm the values are linked.
4. **Select OK.** The red bleed guide will appear outside the artboard.
5. **Extend the artwork.** Resize or reposition edge-to-edge backgrounds and images so they reach the red guide. Adding the bleed setting alone does not extend existing artwork.
6. **Recheck the safe area.** Move any important content away from the trim edge if it appears too close.



Export a print-ready PDF from Illustrator

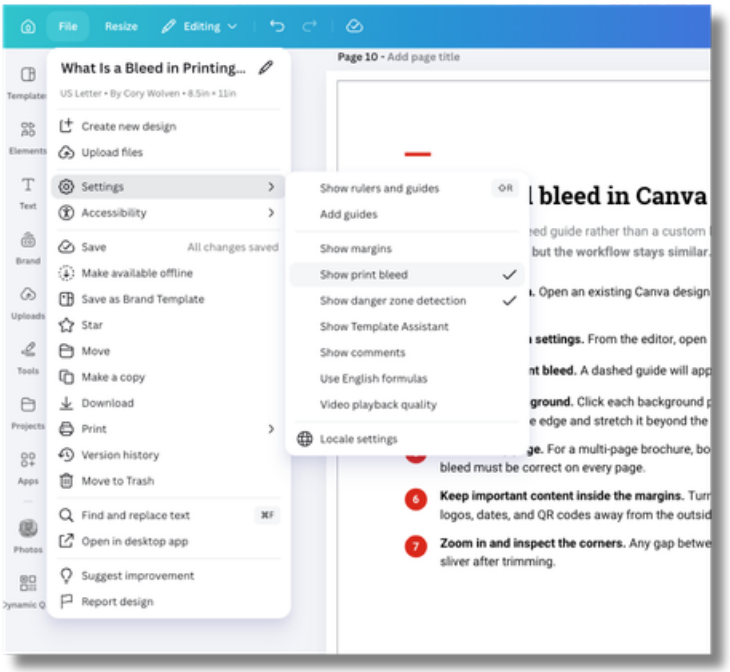
1. **Choose the PDF format.** Select File > Save As, choose Adobe PDF (.pdf), select a location, and select Save.
2. **Choose a print-quality preset.** In the Save Adobe PDF window, choose a print-appropriate preset or the preset specified by your AlphaGraphics team.
3. **Open Marks and Bleeds.** Select Marks and Bleeds in the left panel.
4. **Use the document bleed.** Check Use Document Bleed Settings so Illustrator includes the bleed area in the PDF. If the document bleed settings were not previously implemented, don't select Use Doncument Bleed Settings, and instead add 0.125" for top, bottom, left, and right.
5. **Add trim marks only when requested.** Select Trim Marks only when they are required for the project.
6. **Save the PDF.** Select Save PDF.
7. **Inspect the exported file.** Open the PDF and confirm artwork extends beyond the trim area and no essential content sits too close to the cut edge.

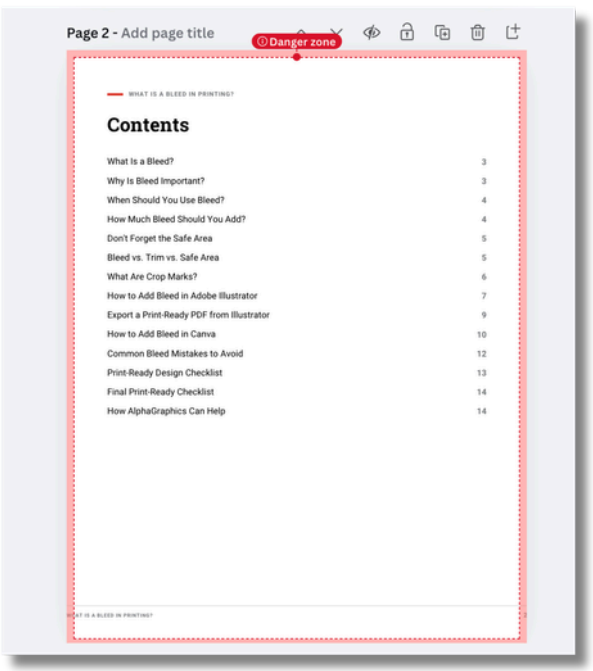


How to add bleed in Canva

Canva uses a print-bleed guide rather than a custom bleed measurement. **Menu labels can shift as Canva updates its interface, but the workflow stays similar.**

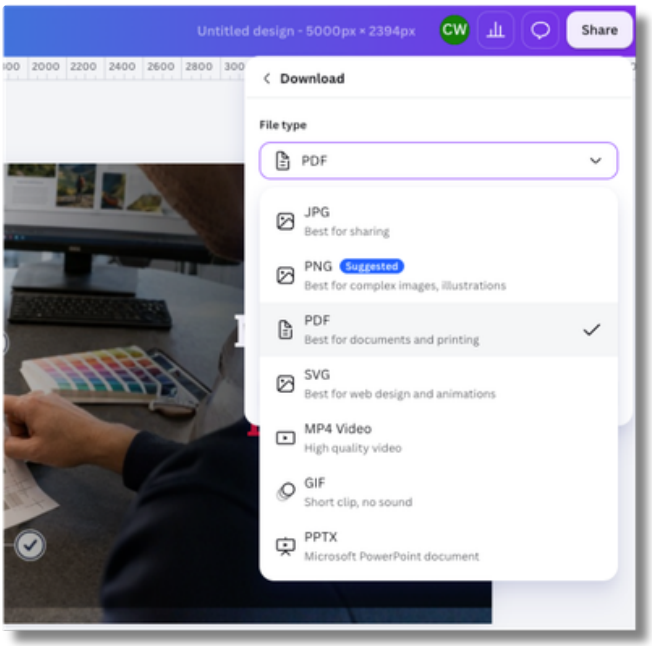
1. **Open the design.** Open an existing Canva design or create a new design at the final finished size of the piece.
2. **Open the design settings.** From the editor, open File or Settings, depending on your version of Canva.
3. **Select Show print bleed.** A dashed guide will appear near the edge of the design. We also recommend turning on Show danger zone detection.
4. **Extend the background.** Click each background photo, color block, texture, or decorative element that reaches the page edge and stretch it beyond the dashed bleed guide.
5. **Check every page.** For a multi-page brochure, booklet, card, or invitation, review each page individually — bleed must be correct on every page.
6. **Keep important content inside the margins.** Turn on margins or safe-zone guides if available. Keep text, logos, dates, and QR codes away from the outside edge.
7. **Zoom in and inspect the corners.** Any gap between the artwork and bleed guide may create a white sliver after trimming.

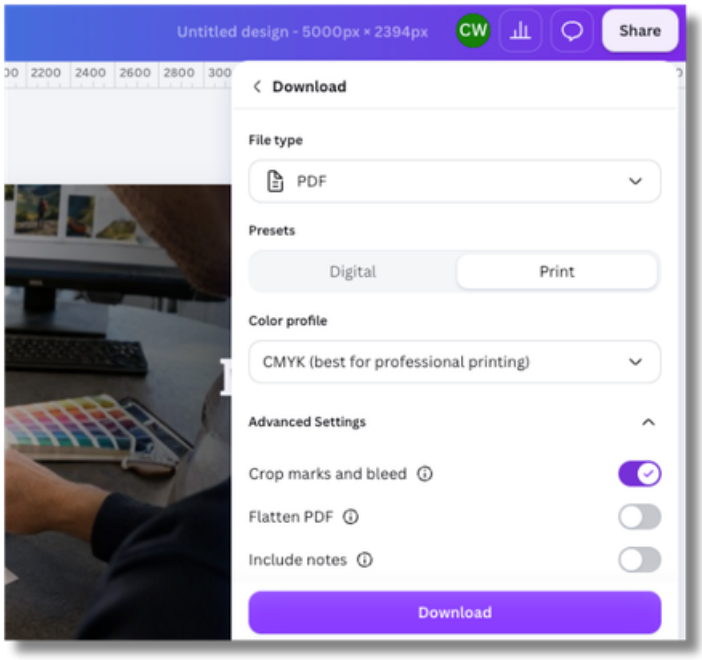




Download a print-ready PDF from Canva

1. **Select Share, then Download.** Open the download options from the Canva editor.
2. **Choose PDF.** In the File type drop-down menu, select PDF.
3. **Select Print.** After you select PDF, two options will appear — select Print.
4. **Select CMYK.** In the Color profile drop-down menu, select CMYK (best for professional printing).
5. **Enable crop marks and bleed.** Turn on Crop marks and bleed to ensure your file is print-ready.
6. **Download the file.** Select Download and save the PDF.
7. **Review the PDF.** Confirm the document includes the expected bleed area, backgrounds reach past the trim edge, and no important content is too close to the edge.





Common bleed mistakes to avoid

- **Adding a bleed setting without extending the artwork.** The bleed area must contain actual background artwork — an empty bleed area will not prevent white edges.
- **Stretching text or logos into the bleed.** Only backgrounds and nonessential edge elements should enter the bleed area.
- **Using the wrong document size.** Build the document at the finished trim size, then add bleed around it.
- **Exporting the wrong Canva file type.** Use PDF Print for professional printing.
- **Adding crop marks automatically.** Some print workflows do not need customer-supplied crop marks — confirm before including them.
- **Skipping the final PDF review.** Always inspect the exported PDF, not just the editable design file.

Print-ready design checklist

Bleed is only one part of preparing artwork for print. Consider how type, images, contrast, and other choices will reproduce once printed.

CHECK	RECOMMENDATION	WHY IT MATTERS
Body text	10–12 pt minimum	Easier to read on most printed materials.
Business card text	8–9 pt minimum	Smaller text can become difficult to read.
Safe area	1/8" minimum from the trim edge	Prevents text or logos from being trimmed.
Bleed	1/8" on all sides that touch the edge	Prevents unwanted white borders after trimming.
Image resolution	300 DPI at final size	Helps produce sharp, clear images.
File format	Export as a PDF for print	Preserves layout, fonts, and print settings.
Color mode	Use CMYK when available	Helps printed colors match your expectations.
QR codes	Print and scan a test copy first	Confirms the code works and is easy to scan.
Contrast	Dark text on light backgrounds	Improves readability in print.
Proofreading	Review names, phone numbers, URLs, dates	Small errors are easier to fix before printing.

Final print-ready checklist

- [ ] Finished page size matches the ordered product.
- [ ] Correct bleed setting or Canva print-bleed guide is enabled.
- [ ] All edge-to-edge backgrounds extend fully into the bleed.
- [ ] Text, logos, dates, and QR codes remain inside the safe area.
- [ ] Images are high enough resolution for the finished size.
- [ ] File is exported as a print-ready PDF.
- [ ] Crop marks are included only when required.
- [ ] Every page of the final PDF has been reviewed.

HOW ALPHAGRAPHICS CAN HELP

Whether you're creating business cards, brochures, postcards, invitations, signs, menus, or marketing materials, your local AlphaGraphics team can help ensure your files are ready for production. If you're unsure about bleed, safe areas, resolution, color setup, or PDF export settings, contact your local center before submitting the final artwork.

Contact AlphaGraphics to learn about our custom print and marketing solutions.