

Forum:[Hack Forums](#)

Thread: [Vector Tracing and Coloring Tutorial](#)

Vector Master - July 23, 2013, 12:40 am

VECTOR TRACING & COLORING TUTORIAL

Prereq:

Please refer to [baghead's tutorial](#) to understand what Vector Graphics is and how the pen tool behaves. This is mostly an insight about my workflow and style of vectoring.

1. Sketching

How can you begin if you have nothing to start with? It is important, sometimes vital, that you start with a sketch. Sketch a few iteration. And, do process of elimination until you find which is best. Of course, this mostly applies to any type of design/creative work. Just get in this habit.

2. Tracing

Vectoring is tracing for the most part. So now that you've got a rough sketch, you can trace it. But before you can trace, you need to know how the pen tool behave. Tame the beast, make it your best friend. It is also important to know that you don't have to trace your sketch with 100% accuracy, but this does not give you excuse to be sloppy.

Place your sketch in illustrator. Double click this layer, name it, and check Template. This will dim the image, which helps when tracing. You may also lower the opacity if you're planning on using the grid. (Window > Appearance [Shift+F6]) I use the grid when working with something symmetrical. It's a rough sketch after all, you can't trust it that much.

2a. "Click Now, Drag Later"

This technique is easier if you're new to pen tool. What you do is click along the curve or line of your sketch. Then, Alt+Click and Drag to "smooth out" the point. But, this technique takes a little more time.

2b. "Click and Drag"

This is when you're comfortable with the pen tool. You'll trace things like it's nothing. Your paths will be cleaner this way. Not only it's fast, you'll also save more memory if there is less points.

As you click 2 drag to 3 to make the curve.

2c. Inspect your lines closely.

Make sure lines are touching if they are intended to. By using the Direct Selection Tool aka the white arrow (A), you can move a point. (It will snap into place, you'll know because Illustrator will tell you by those guides) When using the Pen Tool, you can quickly access Direct Selection by holding CTRL. The Selection Tool aka the black arrow (V) can move paths or groups of paths as a whole, not individual points.

3. Giving your line art some life

3a. I like setting my strokes from 5px to 10px. But, it depends on the illustration and your taste.

3b. Have varying widths, especially when working with more complex pieces. For example, an outer stroke may be 10px, but a circle inside of it has 5px, etc.

3c. If something looks plain, add some random lines to give it some detail. Just be careful not to over-do it.

3d. Expand your strokes and edit. Select all of your stroke paths. Object > Expand.. This will convert your lines into shapes, meaning the strokes will be fills. (Be

careful with this. Always duplicate before expanding so that you can change the lines later if you decided to.)

3e. When you have expanded your lines, you can have more controlled widths. This gives more life into your piece. You can achieve this by selecting a path and deleting a point with the pen tool. The pen tool will have a minus sign if you hover over a point. It doesn't always come out nice after deleting a point so again, manually correct the paths with Direct Selection Tool. Once you're happy with your line art, lock it. And, Make a new layer right underneath. This will be your colors layer.

4. Coloring.

When working with vectors, I found it effective to start with a maximum of 6 colors in my palette. This will not only set up a good challenge, but will also improve the overall look of your piece. Of course, you can have more than 6. Again, this is personal preference and dependent of your illustration. Just make sure it's nothing too outrageous. Check [BME's tutorial](#) about colors. You may also go to [kuler](#) for numerous color palettes premade for you. For this tut, i'll just have something random.

Tip: Have one layer for each color. It's just easier to work with when you can lock the paths that you're done with.

5. Tints and shades

I usually use 1-3 tints and/or shades for each color i have in my palette. But then again, depends on your illustration and liking. I like to start with the shades then add the tint. But before that, I need to decide where my source of light is. 10 o'clock, 12 o'clock, 2 o'clock? It's up to you. But once you decide on the direction of your light source, it has to stay consistent. 12 is usually the easiest one to do.

5a. In addition, you don't want to just lay down a

shadow. Give it some distinct shape or form. You need to give hints or suggestions that what you're creating is not flat. Notice how shadow curves, while some are geometric.

5b. Continue to edit and/or add details until satisfied. I also like putting random lines to give the piece some texture. I also add a very strong highlight. It gives the piece more pop; it looks less flat. Just don't over-do it. And, you're done.

Epilogue:

The better the sketch, the better the outcome will be. I did the sketch in Photoshop because I was too lazy to scan a paper. But if you have the time, you can even ink your sketch. Then, you can scan the line art, clean it up with Photoshop, and live trace it with Illustrator. Some can get away with it and skip to coloring/shading. If you're new with the pen tool, don't get frustrated. I, too, struggled when I started. It takes time. I started using the pen tool to render out focal points for my sigs I used to make.

Also, I see some people saying "only if I had a tablet." Don't let this bring you down and stop from doing whatever. You can achieve those varying strokes in the Appearance panel > Stroke > Profile. and select through your choices. These are my personal favorites. You can always expand your strokes to have more control.

Familiarize yourself with vectors. There's many styles out there. This is just one. You have to find what works best for your illustrations and what works for YOU.

Spoiler ([Click to View](#))

There may be some typos and grammatical errors. I apologize.

Bad Meets Evil - July 23, 2013, 1:14 am

Well done tutorial bud. I'll add it to my compilation.

Baghead - July 23, 2013, 2:04 am

Damn, nice tutorial. I really love your style.

Invisus - July 23, 2013, 7:17 am

Best vector tutorial on HF. Look at that. Beautiful.

Ne?ro? - July 23, 2013, 7:20 am

That's nothing less than amazing. Great tutorial, extremely detailed making it understandable to all of your audience.

??????Sa???i - July 23, 2013, 10:16 am

Best tutorial I've seen on HF.

Great work.

Vector Master - July 23, 2013, 10:17 am

Thank you everyone for the feed back. I highly appreciate it. ?

Studio Intramural - July 23, 2013, 10:24 am

Very detailed and useful tutorial! If you are looking to get into vectoring, this tutorial is a must read.

FIZY - July 23, 2013, 10:59 am

Very Good tutorial i might help me . :D

?ades - July 23, 2013, 11:09 am

When it comes to lines, the brushes I make never gets saved :s No idea why..

Awesome tutorial, I like the outcome alot.

Vector Master - July 23, 2013, 7:33 pm

(Jul 23, 2013 11:09 AM)artifex Wrote: [\[CITE\]](#) When it comes to lines, the brushes I make never gets saved :s No idea why..

Awesome tutorial, I like the outcome alot.

Make sure you actually save it. Illustrator does this funny thing: you create a new brush, it stays there until you close the program. unlike photoshop..

Spoiler [\(Click to View\)](#)

It would also be nice to see people post their work following this tutorial. ;)

Anal Voyage. - July 24, 2013, 7:43 pm

Damn, this tut is hella dope.

Learned a shit ton from this!

Nice job.

lenaos - July 24, 2013, 8:20 pm

This tutorial is pure gold, thanks for this mjaj!

Vector Master - July 24, 2013, 9:02 pm

AV, You keep using "hella" are you from the bay?

if there are any questions, or parts of this tutorial you don't get, feel free to tell me. :P
i'll go more in depth about 'shadin' in my next tutorial.

Anal Voyage. - July 24, 2013, 9:23 pm

(Jul 24, 2013 09:02 PM)mjaj13 Wrote: [\[CITE\]](#) AV, You keep using "hella" are you from the bay?

if there are any questions, or parts of this tutorial you don't get, feel free to tell me. :P
i'll go more in depth about 'shadin' in my next tutorial.
Naw, I've been running my mouth a lot recently.
Guess it's being reflected in my writing. 8D

+Awesome - July 24, 2013, 11:01 pm

This must be included in the HF News! Never seen such a tutorial on HF lol. Great work!

Dialga - July 24, 2013, 11:26 pm

Sweet tutorial. Tip, center your thread for a cleaner look.

Baghead - July 25, 2013, 12:02 am

(Jul 24, 2013 09:23 PM)Anal Voyage. Wrote: [\[CITE\]](#) Naw, I've been running my mouth a lot recently.
Guess it's being reflected in my writing. 8D
Seriously, you sound like you've lived in socal your whole life haha

?A.J? - July 25, 2013, 7:21 am

Epic tutorial. Gonna bookmark this.
Thank you.

Vector Master - July 25, 2013, 6:35 pm

(Jul 25, 2013 12:02 AM)BagHead Wrote: [\[CITE\]](#) Seriously, you sound like you've lived in socal your whole life haha
'hella' is not even a socal thing :P

(Jul 24, 2013 11:26 PM)Dialga Wrote: [\[CITE\]](#) Sweet tutorial. Tip, center your thread for a cleaner look.

I was going to, but too late fo dat lol
isn't easier to read if it's straight on the left margin?

Baghead - July 25, 2013, 7:13 pm

(Jul 25, 2013 06:35 PM)mjaj13 Wrote: [\[CITE\]](#) 'hella' is not even a socal thing :P
shit I meant norcal
for some reason I reversed it

Anal Voyage. - July 25, 2013, 7:38 pm

I'ma Canadian, nikka.
#YOLOSWAGALLDAY

Bad Meets Evil - July 26, 2013, 12:16 am

(Jul 25, 2013 07:38 PM)Anal Voyage. Wrote: [\[CITE\]](#) I'ma Canadian, nikka.
#YOLOSWAGALLDAY
swaggin canada all day with the biebs.

Dopeman - July 26, 2013, 7:30 am

Great vectoring here, didn't really help me like that, but it's some useful tips to keep in mind (I am a beginner at vectoring, so I don't know a whole bunch about the techniques). Thanks for it!

SoldierX - July 26, 2013, 11:03 am

As said in the posts above " THE BEST TUTORIAL ON HF ", Really great and I loved the outcome too.

Kyousogiga - July 26, 2013, 4:26 pm

Damn good tutorial, I doubt I will be able to produce something this HQ but thank you.

Bad Meets Evil - July 26, 2013, 4:30 pm

(Jul 26, 2013 04:26 PM)Kyousogiga Wrote: [\[CITE\]](#) Damn good tutorial, I doubt I will be able to produce something this HQ but thank you.

Instead of doubting yourself, just practice until making something this HQ is a reality. The only barrier is a mental one.

Quantize - July 27, 2013, 12:21 am

great, well detailed tutorial! I will be sure to bookmark this for later!

Dexter Corporation - July 27, 2013, 9:17 am

Great tutorial man you have there keep it up.

Thanks for it.

Great tutorial man you have there keep it up.

Thanks for it.

Adorable - July 31, 2013, 3:45 pm

Hey, this is a fantastic thread. Thank you op for this!

Anal Voyage. - July 31, 2013, 4:58 pm

Haha, that's dope.

It made it into the HF News!

Vector Master - August 1, 2013, 12:24 pm

(Jul 31, 2013 04:58 PM)Anal Voyage. Wrote: [\[CITE\]](#) Haha, that's dope.

It made it into the HF News!

that's cool! i didn't even know ?

Triestri - August 2, 2013, 9:22 am

Well this tutorial is amazing, Thanks helped me alot

.VISIONARY - August 2, 2013, 12:06 pm

Now that's a good tutorial, can't wait to put this in practice.

S????S??? - August 2, 2013, 11:10 pm

Damn Its amazing man !! Awesome MAte !!

Vector Master - August 3, 2013, 10:55 am

you're welcome folks. ? check the '[part 2](#)' of this tutorial if you haven't already, i go more in depth about shading and texture.

moonglare - August 3, 2013, 12:39 pm

Very well constructed tutorial, might use this sometime.

??¥I?? - August 4, 2013, 10:15 pm

that is a really nice tutorial i just skimmed though it will read it properly in a bit :)

Bad Meets Evil - August 7, 2013, 1:09 pm

I have written a more in-depth colour tutorial if you can replace the links in both your tutorials to this new one: <https://hackforums.net/showthread.php?tid=3676307>

FTL Mouse - November 24, 2013, 1:58 pm

Thanks man, really helped me out since im new to Illustrator! :P

kessix - November 25, 2013, 11:51 am

wow thank u for this tutorial, its amazing!

SomeCream - January 24, 2014, 10:44 am

Really cool tut, trying to learn how to make vectors and this helps a lot.

Nemuri - January 24, 2014, 1:29 pm

Wow, this is the best vector tutorial I've ever seen it covers pretty much everything you need to know to make a nice vector image. Good job.

Versace Kid - January 24, 2014, 4:49 pm

This looks really really fancy

thumbs up

Antalya - January 30, 2014, 5:54 pm

Thank for this tutorial, it works perfectly!

pebsi - January 31, 2014, 7:21 pm

Thats pretty fucking cool.

Thanks for the tutorial OP.

QcOwn - February 2, 2014, 6:27 am

I like the result ! Nice tutorial thanks Complete one ! Thanks

Slinger - February 2, 2014, 2:24 pm

Nice bud, appreciate the time you spent making this tutorial you beast

etafo - February 11, 2014, 5:16 pm

This is absolutely fantastic Tutorial, it is going to me a lot on coloring

phybe? Jr. - February 27, 2014, 9:19 am

This is probably my favorite tutorial by far, Thanks!

HIGH PAID FELLA - February 27, 2014, 10:56 am

Best vectoring TUT, I'll try this out soon.

ShadowExE - March 1, 2014, 8:55 am

Hello, im new to the graphix scene and i was wondering if you could give me a little information.

Is it easier to draw/trace into photoshop/Ai with a graphics tablet or the way you have described. its just im having some trouble with the way you have showed mainly because my stroke is all pixleated and i wold have no clue into how to make it smoth

Vector Master - March 1, 2014, 9:22 am

(Mar 1, 2014 09:55 AM)ShadowExE Wrote: [\[CITE\]](#) Hello, im new to the graphix scene and i was wondering if you could give me a little information.

Is it easier to draw/trace into photoshop/Ai with a graphics tablet or the way you have described. its just im having some trouble with the way you have showed mainly because my stroke is all pixleated and i wold have no clue into how to make it smoth

It all depends on you. I've seen a few people here that has a graphics tablet, yet their skill is not up to par for owning one. Can you show what you mean by your stroke is all pixelated? I do my strokes with the pen tool as smooth as possible.

???Senpai - March 1, 2014, 9:36 am

This turned out really cool, i like your work.
Keep up the hard work, mate.

Best regards,

Senpai

Fabric - March 2, 2014, 9:55 am

i bet thats hard to learn how to do that

BITW - March 5, 2014, 12:53 am

thanks for the wonderful tutorials buddy

deeprybka2020 - April 26, 2014, 3:58 am

thanks for this great tutorial much appreciated :)

Abstractionz - April 30, 2014, 2:38 pm

awesome tutorial - if only I could sketch anything that looks decent (I don't have a tablet either :p)

NoNamed777 - May 19, 2014, 11:18 am

I'm impressed. Useful knowledge. Certainly useful in practice

Catalysm - May 19, 2014, 12:49 pm

that looks really neat. thank you for sharing this

RUNFORRESTRUN - May 19, 2014, 1:07 pm

thank you for the tutorial great share for the graphics section

DidntDolt - October 17, 2014, 9:08 pm

Thanks! for the tut, really helpful

K!ngGFX - November 5, 2015, 9:04 pm

COMMENTING TO SOME BACK!!!!!!!!!!!! <<<<3333333

Waqar Rasheed - November 17, 2015, 11:31 am

Great Work Man! Love you :)

Montane - December 2, 2015, 5:43 am

This is a brilliant tutorial. Thanks. I enjoy this sort of thing and am currently learning.

Salieri - December 7, 2015, 2:11 pm

Best most interesting tutorial I've seen here. Much apreciated!

SIM-1538688 - December 7, 2015, 2:12 pm

This is a really good tutorial, thanks for spending the time making it fam.

Best Buy - December 20, 2015, 7:34 pm

Wow, very nice tut. Keep making more

ZOD1AC - February 22, 2017, 12:02 pm

Excellent tutorial! I was really struggling with this. Lovin the detailed explanation :D
Thanks

SIM-3395440 - February 23, 2017, 10:08 am

very useful tutorial maybe I learn that one day anyway thanks

Futurefreak - April 13, 2017, 8:32 am

This is an amazing and well detailed tutorial. Will probably try it out !

?????s? - April 13, 2017, 8:39 am

Old tut but very well written.

I learned a bit. Never knew how to use the damn pen tool.

Going to practice with this.

SIM-3534567 - April 16, 2017, 4:55 am

nice tutorial dude i try it out later :)

douglasadams - May 30, 2017, 5:43 pm

This is immensely useful, thank you!

editine - June 2, 2017, 8:30 pm

Good tutorial, been trying to learn Illustrator for a while. I always get tripped up on line curves.

smokierobot - June 10, 2017, 7:04 am

Very Good tutorial i might help me

rudel777 - June 13, 2017, 12:28 am

nice thread i learn a lot thanks

Moruq - January 10, 2022, 7:01 am

Straight to the point man, thanks for this awesome tutorial!

PlutoFx - June 6, 2022, 6:06 pm

Really great tutorial, looking to get into using illustrator more. Appreciate it