

InDesign How-To: Six Small Things, Six Big Results

The big, flashy features of InDesign seem to get all the attention. But for long work sessions, it's the little things that make InDesign a pleasure to use. Here are six favorites.

By Keith Gilbert
Friday, March 9, 2007

You can use these six techniques in InDesign CS and CS2.

1. Single-click on field labels

Many InDesign users know that you can double-click on a value in a palette field to highlight the value. But you can do the same thing with half the effort by simply clicking once on the icon or text to the left of any numeric or text field in any palette or dialog box (Figure 1). The entire field value will highlight, so you can easily type the new replacement value.

Figure 1. InDesign, click once on the "W" to highlight the entire field value to the right. Same goes for any numeric or text field in any palette or dialog box. To see a larger version of this screenshot, click on the image.



2. Do the nudge...the power nudge!

No, this isn't a new dance step. The little up and down arrow buttons to the left of all numeric fields are called "nudge buttons" (Figure 2). Clicking these buttons lets you quickly move the numeric value up or down in small increments. Add the Shift key when you click and you do the "power nudge," increasing or decreasing the value in larger increments.



Figure 2. My cursor is pointing at the down arrow, which I can turn into a power nudge by Shift-clicking on it.

You can also nudge with the cursor (arrow) keys on the keyboard. Just highlight the field value (see the above tip), then use the up and down arrow keys to nudge, or Shift+up and down arrow keys to power nudge the field value.

3. Sneaky access to options

Many of the icons in the Control Palette have a hidden back door that will display preferences or options related to that icon. To open the door, just Option- or Alt-click an icon. For example, Option/Alt-click on the superscript button to display the Preferences panel for superscript and subscript size. Option/Alt-click on the number of columns icon to display the Text Frame Options dialog box, where you can designate column width, gutter, and text inset for the frame. Option/Alt-click on the rotate field to display the rotation options dialog box, where you can rotate the content of a box independent of the frame. Spend some time Option/Alt-clicking in the Control palette, and you'll discover many ways to speed up your work (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Option/Alt-click any of the icons highlighted above to display options related to that icon. To see a larger version of this screenshot, click on the image.

4. "i" is for inches

Do you prefer to work in inches, but the default measurement system is in picas or millimeters? Sure, you can change the measurement system in Edit> Preferences> Units & Increments, but the nudge buttons function with more precision when you leave the measurement system in picas or millimeters. Here's how to maintain that precision while still entering a measurement in inches: Just enter an "i" after the value. As soon as you hit the Tab key to move out of the value field, InDesign automatically converts the measurement from inches to the default measurement system.

5. Let InDesign do your math

Did you know that InDesign can "do math" in any numeric field in palettes and dialog boxes? To see for yourself, type one of the following symbols and the appropriate numbers, just like your elementary school math homework:

- + (addition)
- (subtraction)
- * (multiplication)
- / (division)

This ability is particularly useful when you're mixing measurement systems. Need an image to be one-third the existing size? Enter 100%/3 in the scale field of the measurements palette. Need to subtract two and a half picas from a 5.125" margin? Enter 5.125" - 2p6. Need to make a 39p6

frame three times larger? Enter 39p6*3 in the width field of the measurements palette.

6. Keyboard shortcuts for palettes

In InDesign, "focus" refers to where text will appear when you begin to type. To move the focus to the first field of the Control palette, press Command-6 (Mac) or Ctrl-6 (Windows). If the first field is the typeface field, you can then type the first few characters of the typeface you want to quickly select it. Once the focus is on the Control palette, you can also tab from field to field.

To move the focus from the current page to the last-used palette field, press Command-Option-` (Mac) or Ctrl-Alt-` (Windows). To toggle between the paragraph and character modes in the Control palette, press Command-Option-7 (Mac) or Ctrl-Alt-7 (Windows).

As an Adobe Certified Instructor and an Adobe Print Specialist, Keith Gilbert has taught classes and seminars throughout the US, as well as Bridgetown, Barbados, and Nairobi, Kenya. Keith is one of a select group of individuals nationwide to be certified for on-site training in InDesign, InCopy, Illustrator, Photoshop and Acrobat. He has been consulting and training for 22 years and still loves his job.

For more info, please visit www.gilbertconsulting.com