

Design for 3D Printing

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Outline

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Introduction

A number of items need to be considered when designing an object for 3D printing. Some of them are generic while others may depend on the 3D printing technology used.

Measurements (units)

A good question is, “What does one unit in the CAD program translate to when printed out?”. Depending on your application, the answer may range from mildly interesting to vitally important. If you are creating a stand alone decorative object, you may not care much as long as the result is a reasonable size. If, however, you are designing a part to physically interface with some existing items, the answer is vitally important.

Measurements (accuracy)

There are three different items that impact the detail and accuracy of the print.

- ▶ What is the resolution for printing bits of material? (note that x and y resolution may be different)
- ▶ What is the smallest bit of material that can be printed?
- ▶ What is the layer height?

Some or all of these may be adjustable on your printer. In general, reducing the resolution makes the print go faster.

Measurements (Resolution)

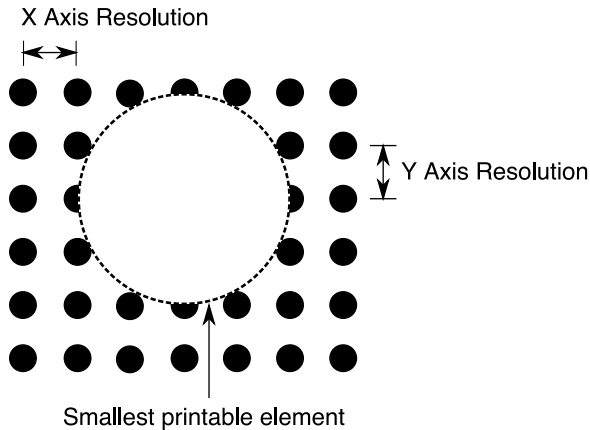


Figure: Measurements and Resolution

First Layer

Depending on the type of printer and its settings, the first layer printed may be thinner or thicker than the subsequent layers. This is usually accompanied with the material extending beyond or within the subsequent layers. This effect is sometimes called “elephant foot”. The slicer program often has a setting for “elephant foot compensation”.

First Layer

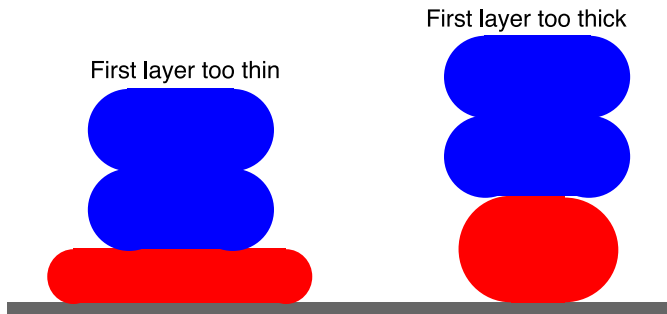


Figure: First Layer Problems

Holes and Voids

The size of holes in a 3D printed object are generally less than specified because holes are printed as polygons. The effect is more pronounced when the polygon has a small number of sides.

Holes and Voids

— Desired hole

- - - Actual hole

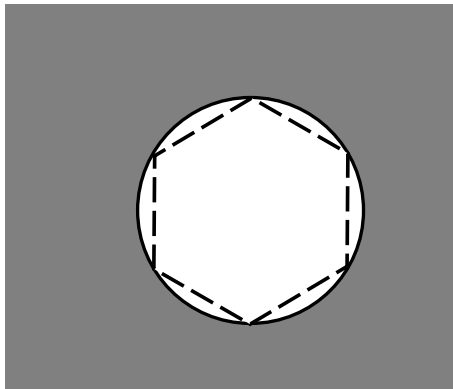


Figure: Desired Hole vs Actual Hole

Overhangs

For some types of printers (typically those that fuse a powder), overhangs and unsupported sections are not a problem. For the rest, something may need to be done.