



Use InDesign's grids to enhance and speed up your page layouts

Spending a little extra time to build in a grid to your templates could easily reap time-saving rewards later on when deadlines are looming.

Grids are a vital to designing a page layout, as we explained last issue (see *MacUser*, 30 July 2010, p36), but many designers just rely on the basics of a grid system, such as column guides and margins, for their designs. However, spending a little extra time at the start of the template creation process can save you more in the long term as layouts are quicker to design.

Grids aid the placement of page furniture, enforcing the design and bringing consistency to different editions of a project. By using a grid system, you won't have to consider the exact placement of images and text on the page, as you'll know that the finished layout will look correct merely by following the grid.

You could use InDesign's built-in grids, but this is still a basic feature and doesn't

take into consideration gutters or non-uniform grids. By building your own grid system, you'll have complete control and greater flexibility.

How you go about designing your layouts is up to you: you may prefer to have the finished design, then base the grids on that, or you may prefer to start with a blank document and build the grid before you design the template. Here, we're starting with a blank document, with InDesign's default settings. We've used InDesign CS3, although this technique should work in other versions of the application with only a few minor adjustments. The theory can also be used in other page layout tools, such as QuarkXPress, which has a Grid Styles feature. However you do it, using grids should allow you speedily lay out pages yet retain cohesiveness over many editions.

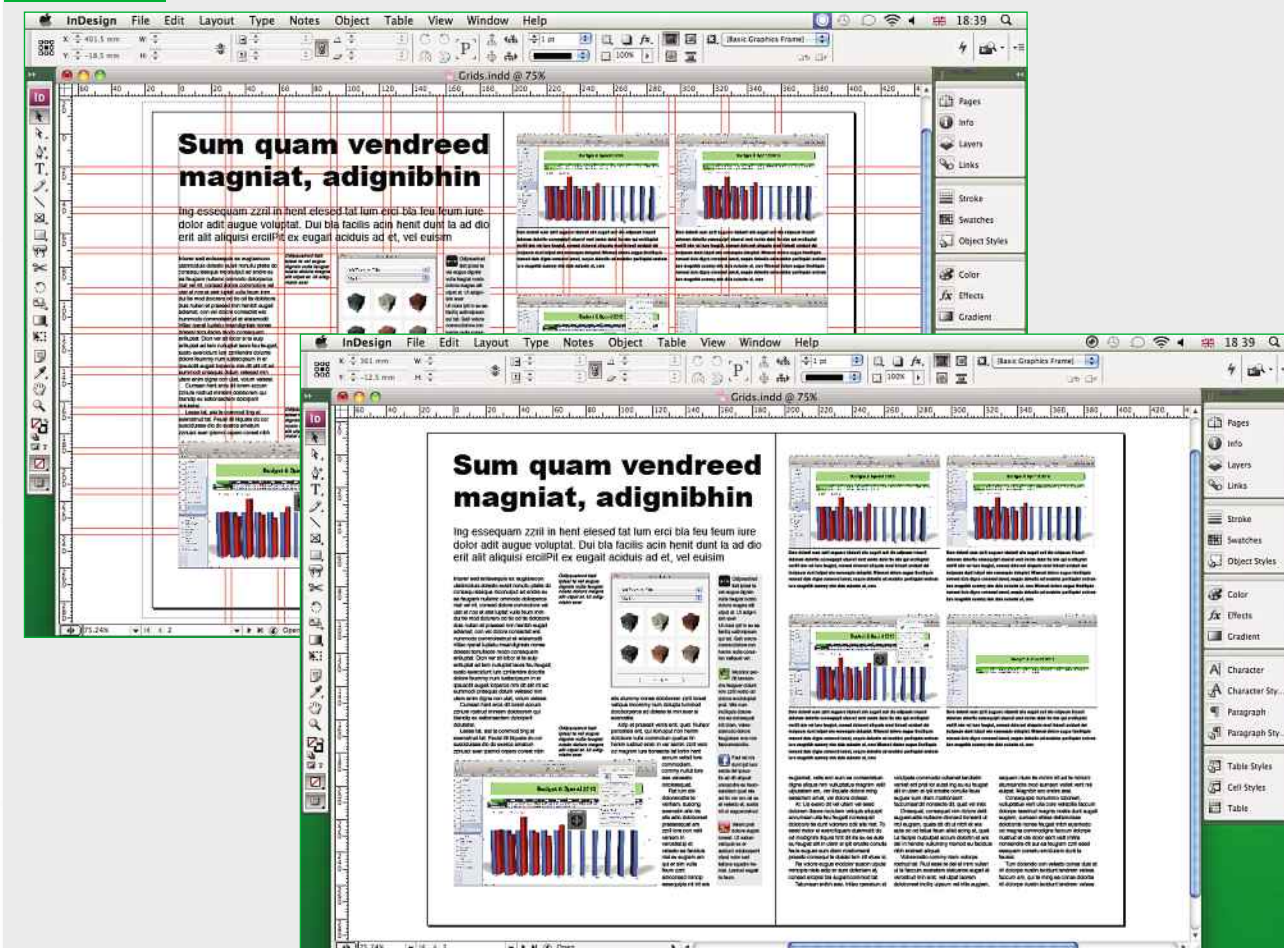


Jon Lyons is *MacUser*'s production editor and has been using Macs since 1993. He uses a Mac Pro, MacBook and a Mac mini, although not all at once.

Kit required InDesign



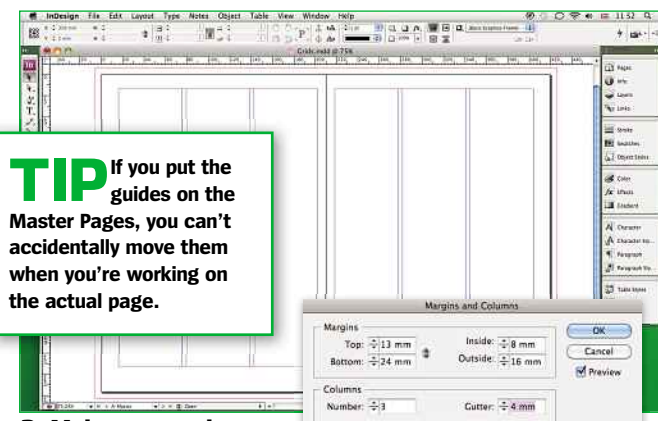
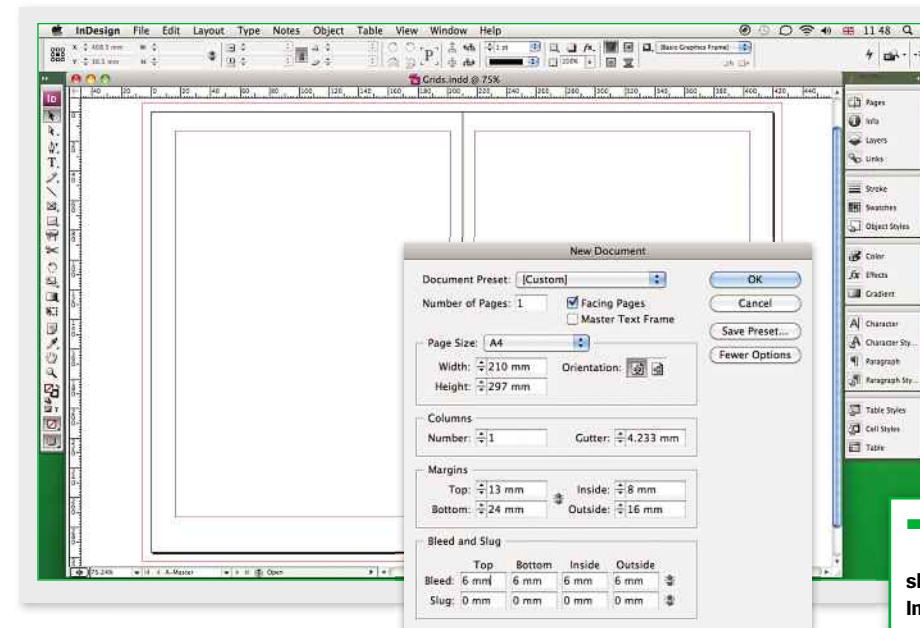
Final result



1. Create a new document

Open InDesign and create a new document by going to File > New > Document or using the shortcut Cmd-N. Change the Page Size to A4. By default, all the margins are the same. First, click on the link button to unlink the margin measurements, then enter your figures. Here, we've set the Inside to 8mm, Top to 13mm, Outside to 16mm and Bottom to 22mm. Next, add a 6mm bleed; for this tutorial, you can ignore the Slug (this creates an area outside the page for adding notes that can be printed with Marks and Bleeds, but is trimmed off in the finished print).

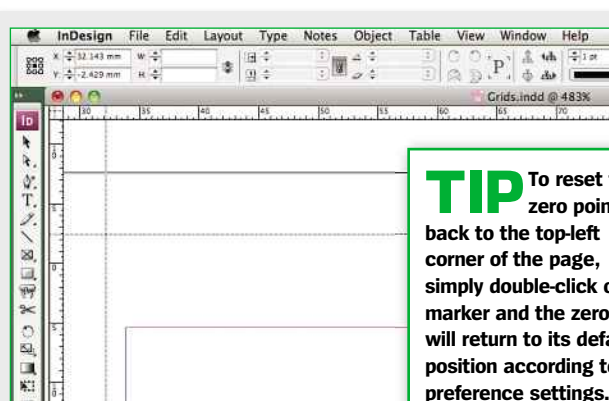
TIP A rule of thumb for margins is that they should increase in size in this order: Inside, Top, Outside, Bottom.



TIP If you put the guides on the Master Pages, you can't accidentally move them when you're working on the actual page.

2. Make some columns

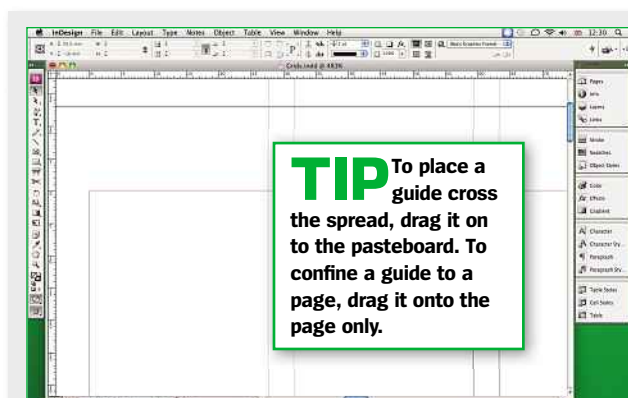
You can add in your columns when you create your new document, but it's easier to set them when you're in Master Pages, as you can preview how they appear on the page. Open the Pages palette and click on the Master Pages. To add columns, go to Layout > Margins and Columns. We've created three columns with a gutter of 4mm, but with the use of guides we'll build a six column grid. To make sure your guides are visible go to View > Grids and Guides > Show Guides (or hit Cmd-;).



TIP To reset the zero point back to the top-left corner of the page, simply double-click on the marker and the zero point will return to its default position according to your preference settings.

3. Moving the zero point

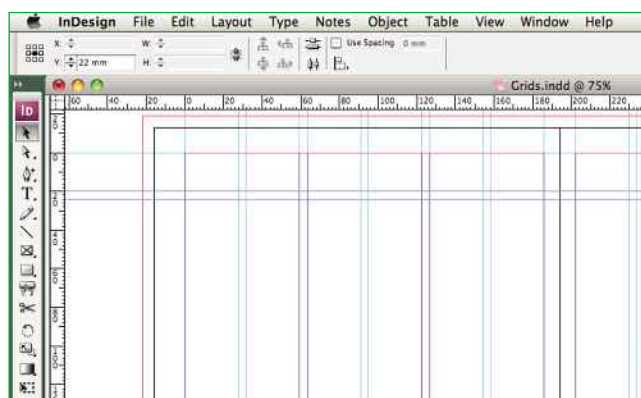
You could build a simple grid on just the number of text columns, but the grid will be more flexible if you sub-divide them two or more times. First, set a zero point by clicking on the crosshairs by the rulers in the top-left of your document. Drag these to a suitable place on the page – say, the top-left corner of your column. The unit increments in the rulers will adjust accordingly.



TIP To place a guide cross the spread, drag it on to the pasteboard. To confine a guide to a page, drag it onto the page only.

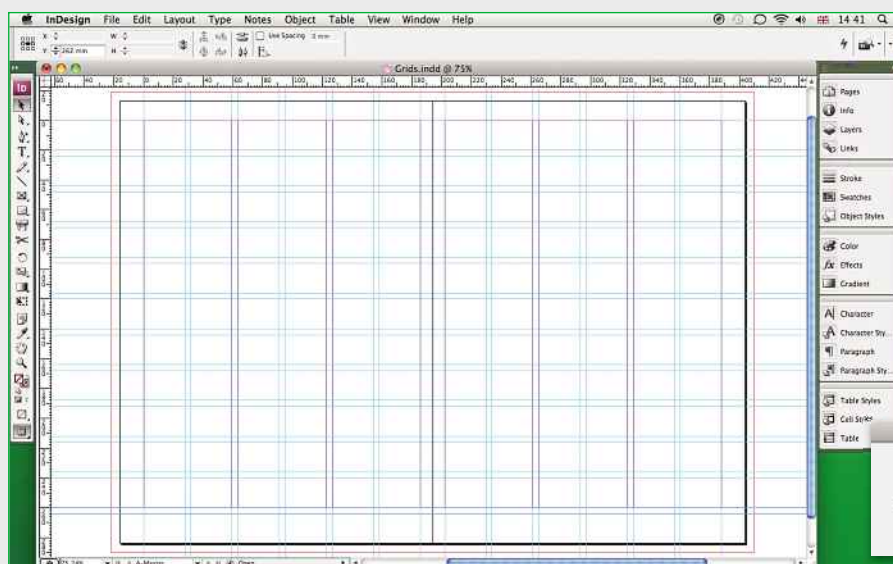
4. Add your first guides

Our column width is 59.33mm. To make the first of two guides that will split the column with a 4mm gutter, divide this figure by 2 and subtract 2mm for the gutter. Drag a guide to the page and in the Measurements palette type 27.66mm in the x-axis box. Drag another guide and type in 31.66mm. Repeat for the other columns.



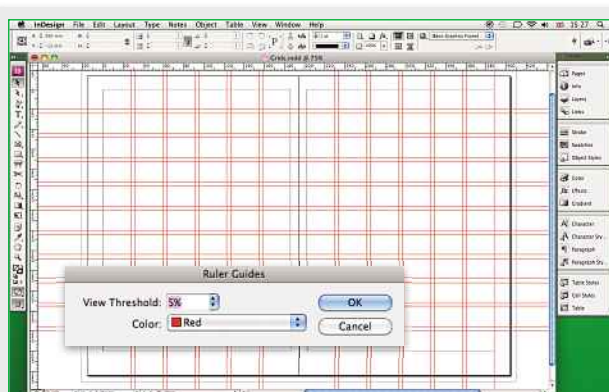
5. Horizontal guides

Reposition the zero point to the top-left corner of the first column and drag down a guide from the horizontal ruler onto the pasteboard. Next, drag a horizontal rule onto the pasteboard. In the Measurements palette, type 20mm in the y-axis box. Do the same again, but this time type in 24mm in the y-axis box. You should now have the first line of your grid running across the top of the spread.



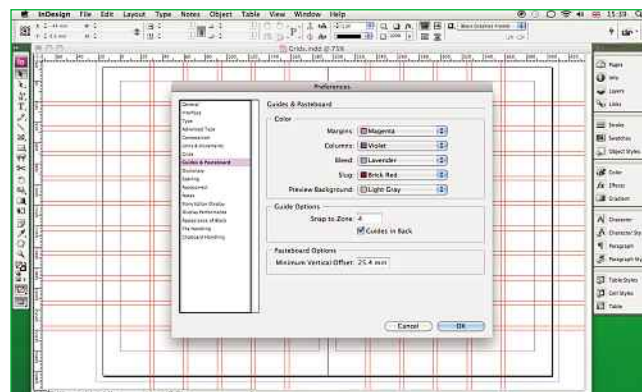
6. Use Step and Repeat

You could repeat step 5 for each guide in your grid. However, a much quicker way is to use InDesign's Step and Repeat function. Select the two guides you've already made and go to Edit > Step and Repeat... (or use the shortcut Cmd-Alt-U). In the vertical offset, type in 24mm, and check the Preview box. Increase the Repeat Count so that the guides fill the rest of the page. Your grid is now complete.



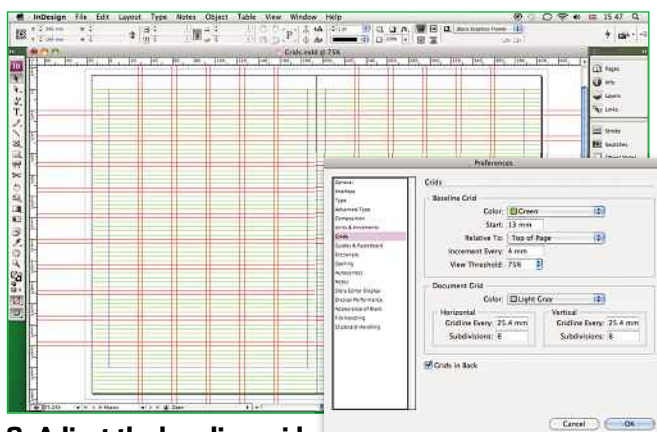
7. Change the colour of grids

By default, InDesign's guides are a light blue. To change them, select all the guides by clicking on the pasteboard and dragging, then go to Layout > Ruler Guides... and choose a suitable colour. Here, we've chosen red. To ensure you correctly position your elements on the page, go to View > Snap to Guides. Objects will then snap to the nearest margin, column and ruler guides.



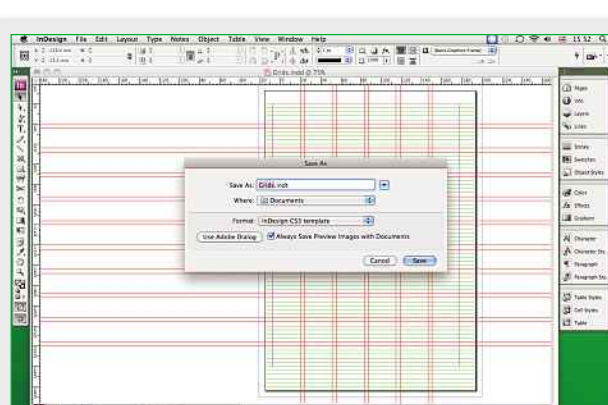
8. Setting grid level

If you intend to place page furniture on the Master Pages, you could find yourself inadvertently dragging the guides. To avoid this, go to File > Preferences > General > Guides and check the Guides in Back box. This will put guides at the bottom of the stacking order so they don't interfere with object selection. Guides are set not to print by default, but can be toggled by selecting Print Visible Guides and Baseline Grids in the General Panel of the Print dialog.



9. Adjust the baseline grid

If you like, you can adjust the baseline grid so it fits in with your grid, go to InDesign > Preferences > Grids. Select the start position of your baseline grid and its increment. Alternatively, before creating your grid, you might prefer to set your baseline grid then adjust your grid to fit that. Grids don't have to be regimented: you can create an asymmetric grid with unequal columns and gutter widths.



10. Save as a template

Once your grid is done, it's time to save it as a template. Go to File > Save As... or use the shortcut Cmd-Shift-S. Give your document a name and then under format, select InDesign template. You can also create different grids on different Master Pages, so you only need one template that will cover all the grids you're likely to need.