

Guide to InDesign Card Templates

This guide presents a workflow for designing and printing customized card layouts using Adobe InDesign. By following this workflow, you can easily iterate and refine your card designs.

Outline of workflow

1. Design Card Layouts in InDesign



2. Create a spreadsheet with all customizable card elements

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
	Card Name	@Image	Flavour Text	@Tag1	@Tag2	@Tag3	@Tag4	@Tag5
1	Pizza	Pizza.ai	No matter how you slice it, pizza is a true masterpiece of culinary creativity.		Grain.ai	Spicy.ai	Sweet.ai	Salty.ai
2	Beach ball	Beachball.ai	In the hands of the skillful, the beach ball becomes a weapon of fun and laughter.					Spicy.ai
3	Popcorn	Popcorn.ai	It's scent wafted through the air, drawing hungry patrons to the concession stand like moths to a flame.				Salty.ai	Salty.ai
4	Golf Clubs	Golf-Clubs.ai	A true golfer never blames their clubs, only their own lack of skill.					Salty.ai
5	Rubber Tire	Rubber-Tire.ai	As the rubber tire lay discarded and forgotten, it couldn't help but reflect on its former glory days.			Grain.ai	Fish.ai	Meat.ai
6	Office Chair	Office-Chair.ai	Whether you're drafting reports or battling monsters, this chair has got your back.				Salty.ai	Meat.ai
7								

3. Generate all cards using Data Merge



4. Place generated cards into a print layout. Print and cut cards.

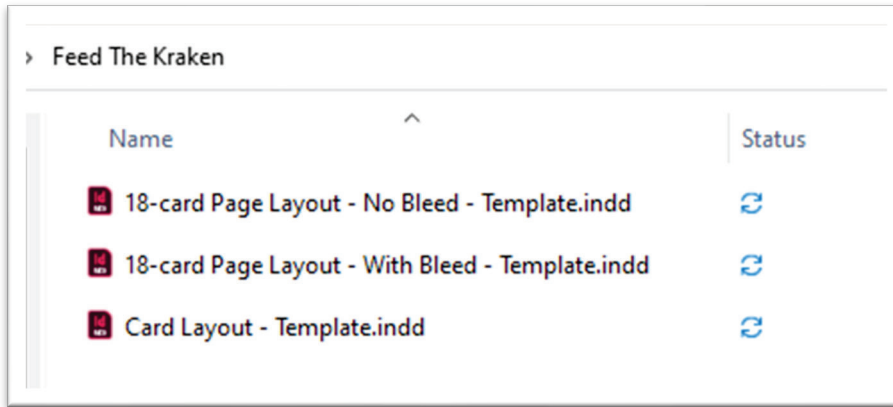


5. Iterate on the design and repeat Steps 1-4.

PHASE ONE - PREPARE CARD LAYOUTS

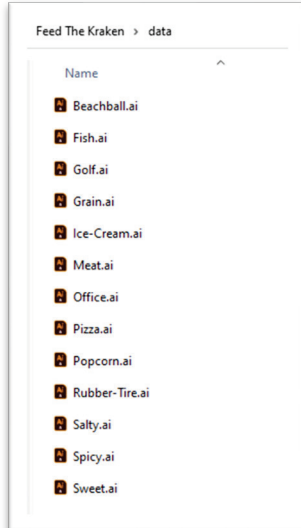
Step 1 - Create a Project Folder

1. Create a folder for the project.
2. Copy the 3 InDesign templates to the project folder.



Step 2 - Gather Images

1. Create a subfolder to store the image files used in your card designs.
2. Move all images to that folder.

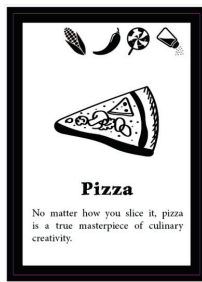


*In this example, I've placed all images I will use for the cards in a subfolder named **data**.*

Step 3 - Design Card Layouts

1. Create a copy of **Card Layout - Template.indd** for each card layout required by your game.

2. Modify each layout by adding images, text, and shapes in InDesign:



Card-Front.indd

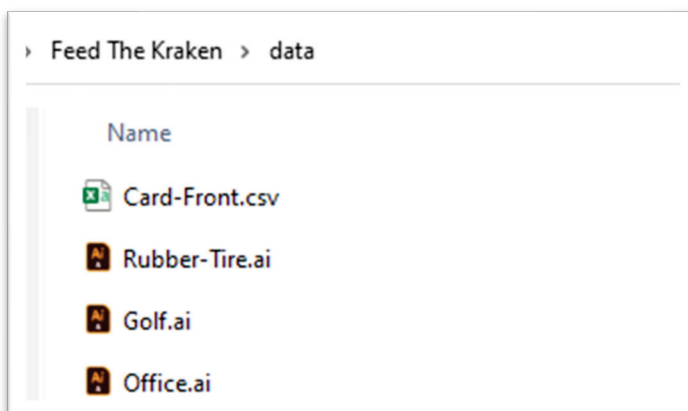
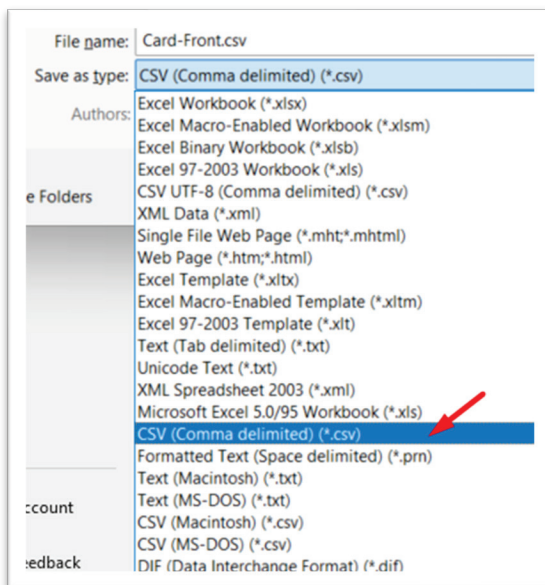


Card-Back.indd

Step 4 - Create a CSV file for each card layout

In this example, **Card-Front.indd** is the only layout used by multiple cards with customized data and images. **Card-Back.indd** is the standard back for all cards in this game, and so it does not require a spreadsheet.

1. Open Microsoft Excel and save the file in CSV format in the **data** folder, alongside your images. (**Card-Front.csv**)



It's best to save the CSV file in the same folder as the images it will refer to.

2. In the top row of the spreadsheet, add headings for each dynamic element in the card layout.

If the element is an image, add the @ symbol in front of the element name.

In Excel, you must add an apostrophe before the @ symbol for it to be accepted.

Example: '@Image

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1	Card Name	@Image	Flavour Text	@Tag1	@Tag2	@Tag3	@Tag4	@Tag5

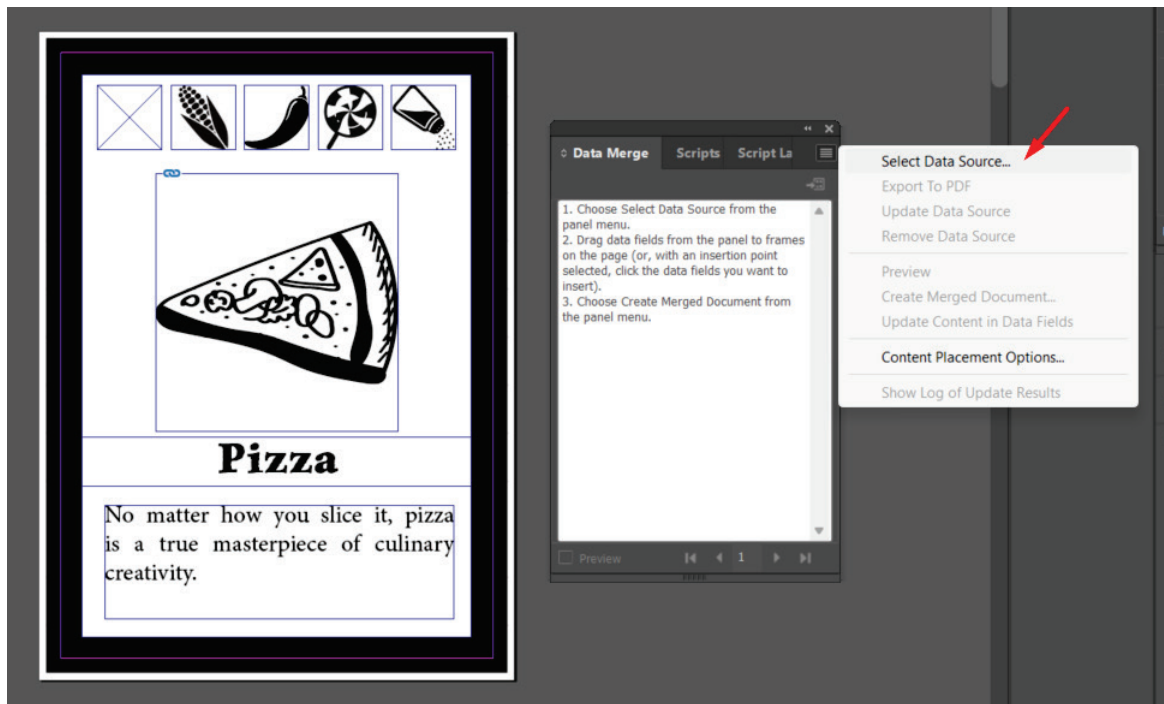
3. Populate the spreadsheet:
 - a. **Text** for text elements
 - b. **Filenames** for each image

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
	Card Name	@Image	Flavour Text	@Tag1	@Tag2	@Tag3	@Tag4	@Tag5
1	Pizza	Pizza.ai	No matter how you slice it, pizza is a true masterpiece of culinary creativity.		Grain.ai	Spicy.ai	Sweet.ai	Salty.ai
2	Beach ball	Beachball.ai	In the hands of the skillful, the beach ball becomes a weapon of fun and laughter.					Spicy.ai
3	Popcorn	Popcorn.ai	It's scent wafted through the air, drawing hungry patrons to the concession stand like moths to a flame.				Salty.ai	Salty.ai
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6	Office Chair	Office-Chair.ai	Whether you're drafting reports or battling monsters, this chair has got your back.				Salty.ai	Meat.ai

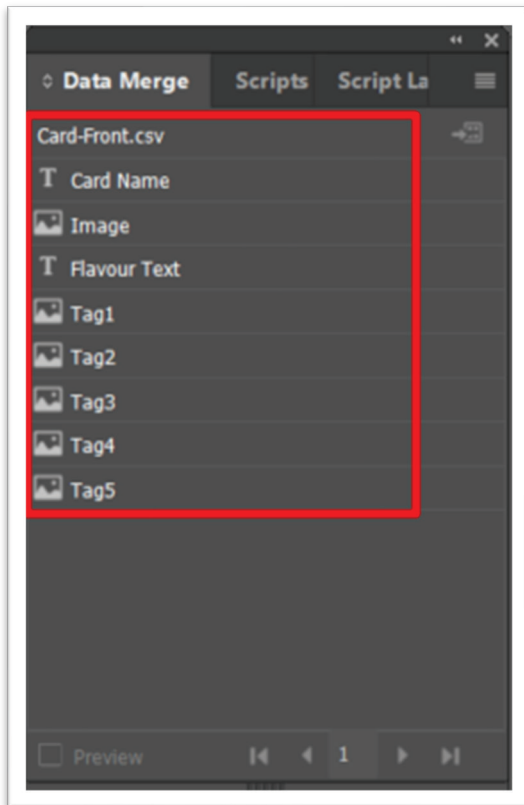
4. Save the file and close Microsoft Excel.
InDesign will not allow a Data Merge while the file is open in another program.

Step 5 – Prepare the Data Merge

1. In InDesign, open the Data Merge window: **Window → Utilities → Data Merge**
2. Select **Select Data Source...** in the Data Merge menu and choose the appropriate CSV file.



3. Once the CSV file has been loaded, the Data Merge panel will show the fields from the CSV file.



4. Connect each field to the appropriate frame, one at a time:
- Select a Frame in the layout
 - If it's a Text Frame, delete all text
 - Click on the associated field in the Data Merge panel
 - Repeat this process for all fields



Example: Here, I deleted the text that was previously in the card name frame. Then, I clicked on the frame, and then clicked on the Card Name field in the Data Merge panel.

Step 6 – Preview the results

1. Preview the results of the Data Merge by clicking on the **Preview** checkbox in the Data Merge panel and stepping forward through each entry.

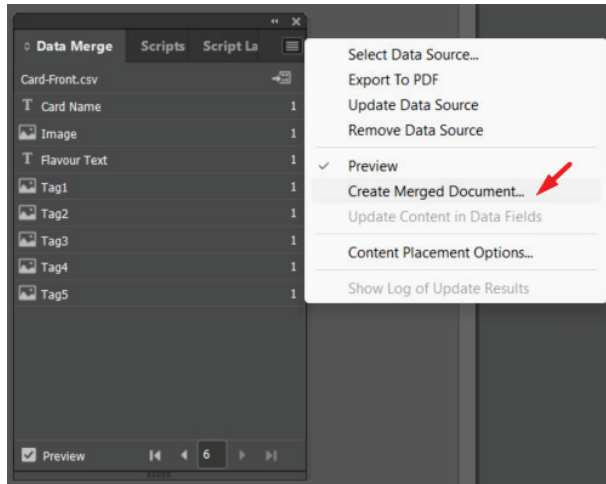


PHASE TWO – PREPARE TO PRINT

Step 1 – Create a Merged Document

A merged document will generate all cards by merging the data from the spreadsheet with the InDesign layout – one card per entry.

1. In the Data Merge menu, select **Create Merged Document...**



2. InDesign will create a new merged document. Save the merged document in your project folder with “Merged” as a suffix in the filename. E.g.: **Card-Front-Merged.indd**

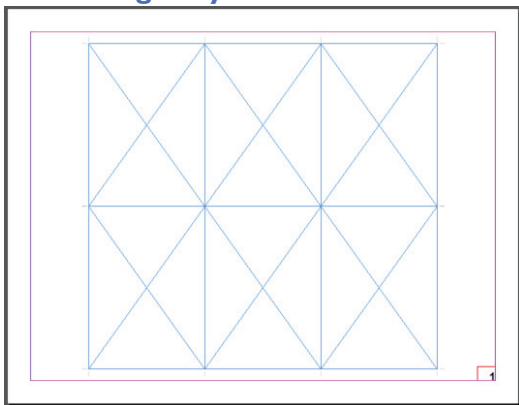
Step 2 – Place Cards into a Print Layout

1. Choose an InDesign Template for print layout:
 - For Design Refinement: 18-card Page Layout - **No Bleed** - Template.indd
 - For Production/Polish: 18-card Page Layout - **With Bleed** - Template.indd

2. Make a copy of the template file and rename it:

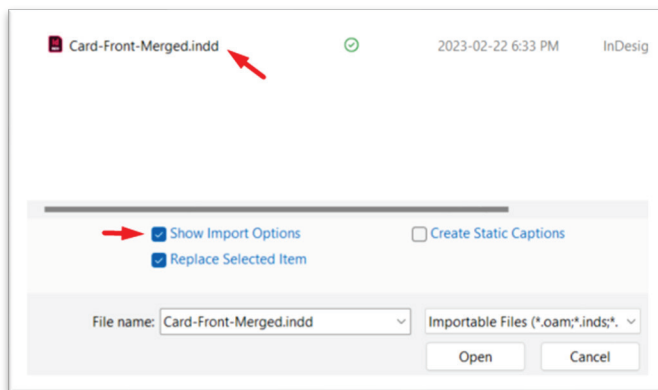
In this example, I'll choose the “No Bleed” layout:

18-card Page Layout - No Bleed.indd

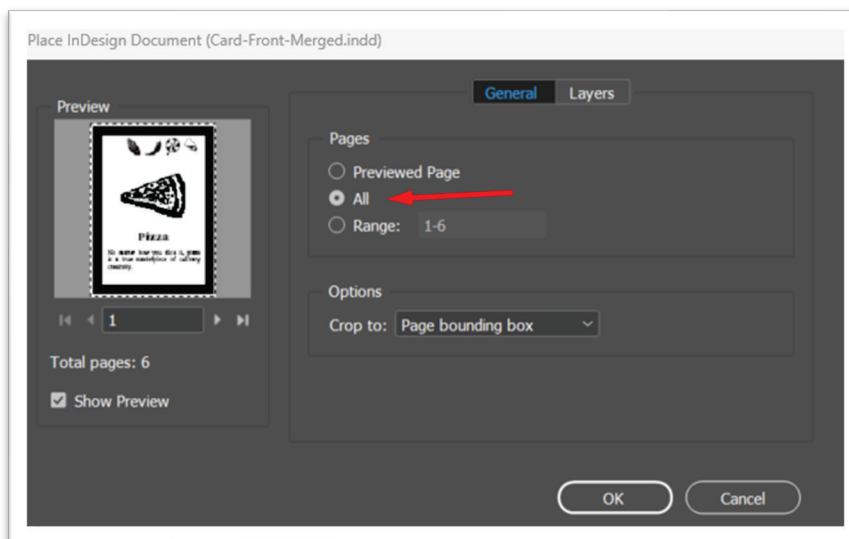


3. Go to **File → Place...**

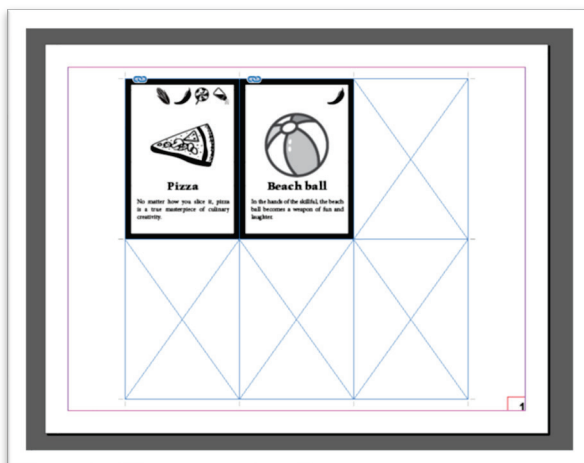
In the Place window, enable Show Import Options and open the merged document file.



In the Place Options window, select All (Pages)

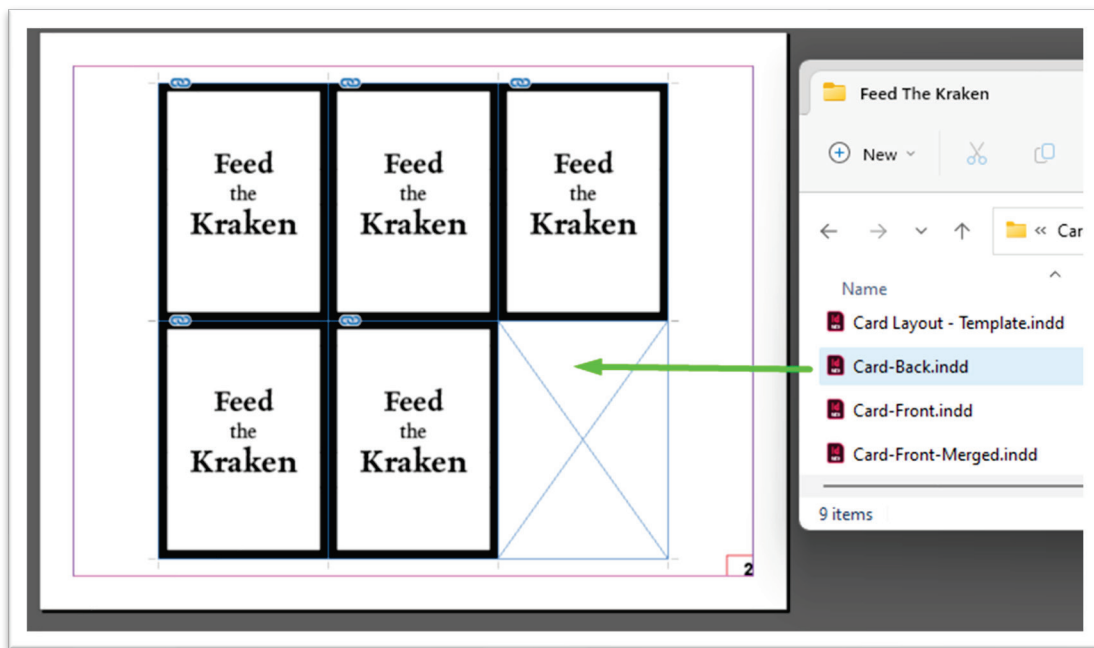


4. Click on a frame to place each page in the merged document into print layout.



5. When placing a single-page document, drag and drop the file from Windows Explorer to place it directly into a frame in InDesign.

For my example, I've dragged and dropped **Card-Back.indd** several times into the layout.



Step 3 – Print and Cut

1. Go to **File...Print...**
2. Enable 2-Sided (Double-Sided)
3. Enable Flip on the Short Edge
4. Use a metal ruler, cutting mat and utility knife to cut the cards.
Use the crop marks to guide each cut.

PHASE THREE – ITERATE

1. Review and play test. Take note of required changes.
2. Make changes to the original card layout files or CSV files as needed.
3. Re-run the Data Merge and print the updated cards.
4. Repeat this process as necessary until the desired result is achieved.

Troubleshooting & Support

InDesign is a complex tool, and it can be tricky to work with.

If you have any questions about this guide or InDesign, please post your questions in the #general channel for the MS Team for this class.