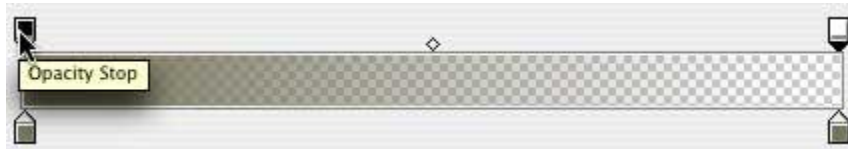
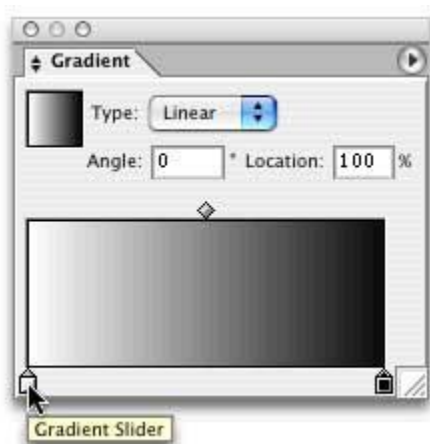


Transparent Gradients in Adobe Illustrator Creating gradients with opacity masks

In most graphics and motion graphics programs, gradients have two different kinds of stops--color and opacity. That is, you're able to use the stops to indicate which color should appear in which position, and separate stops to indicate which opacity level should appear in which position. This is seen in the image below, which is a screen shot of the gradient editor in Adobe Photoshop, where the opacity stops appear on the top and the color stops appear on the bottom.



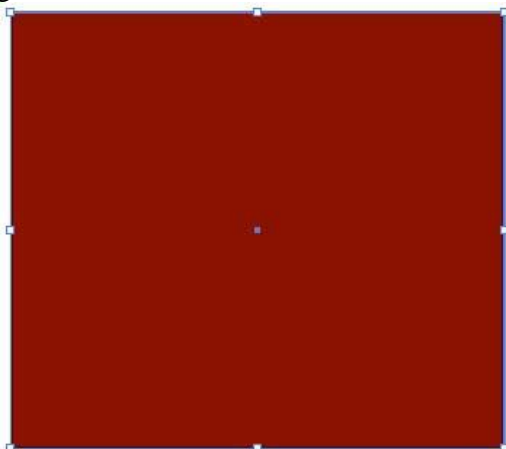
In Illustrator, gradients have one kind of stop: color, seen at the bottom of the Gradient palette from Illustrator CS below.



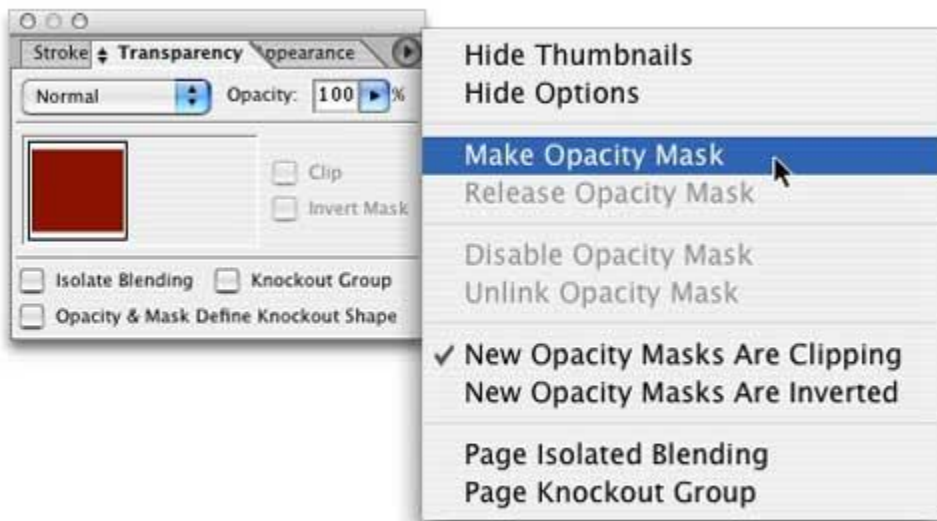
So how do you incorporate transparency into your gradients? It works like this.

Single-color gradient with transparency

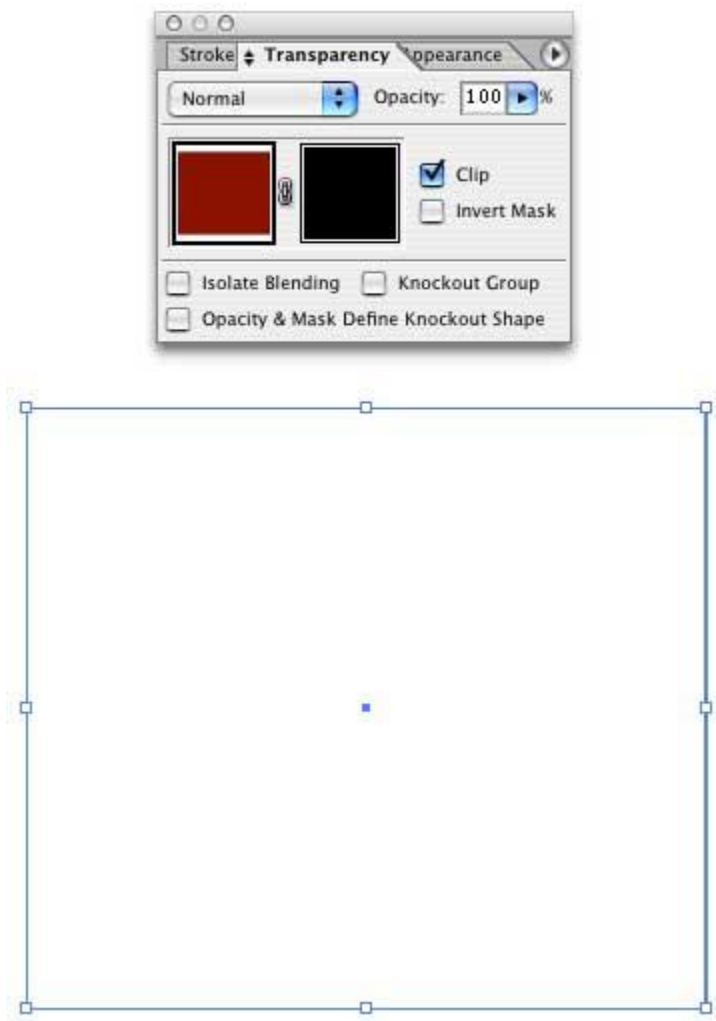
We'll start with a simple, single-color gradient that transitions from solid to transparent. Begin by creating a new object with a solid fill, and make the solid the color that you want to use in your gradient. I'll use a dark red.



No go to the Transparency palette (Window > Transparency). In the flyaway menu on the top right, choose the "Make Opacity Mask" option.

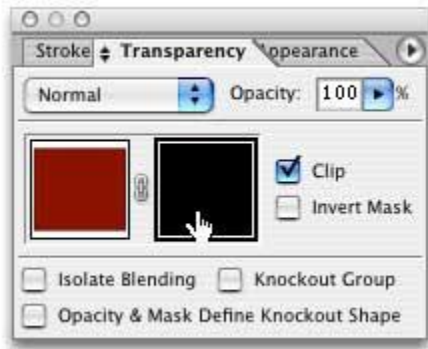


This will cause your object to turn invisible.

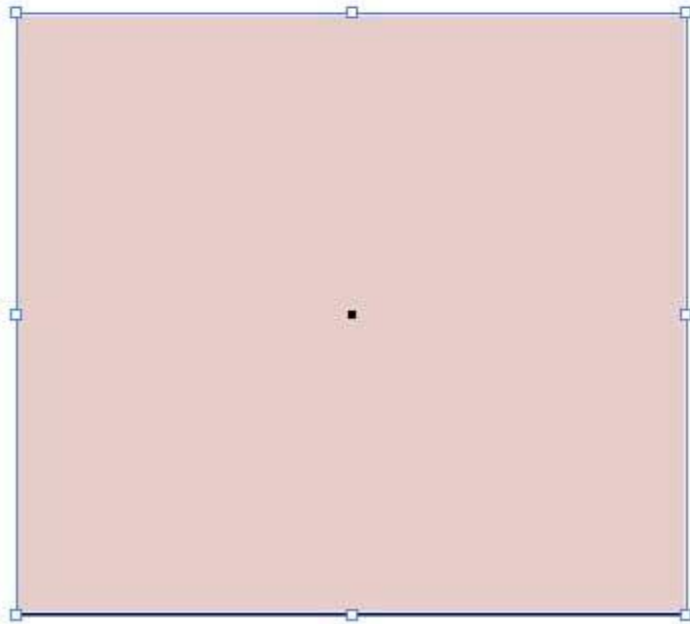
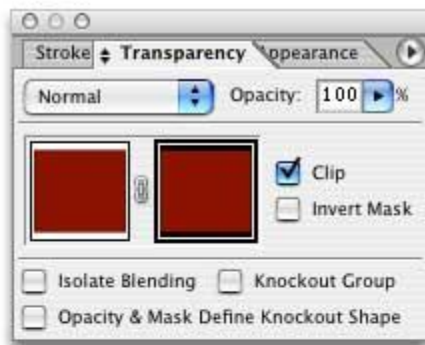


Now we're going to create the actual mask for this object. You can do this a few ways, but I

think this way is the easiest because it's just two steps. First, click on the mask in the Transparency palette.

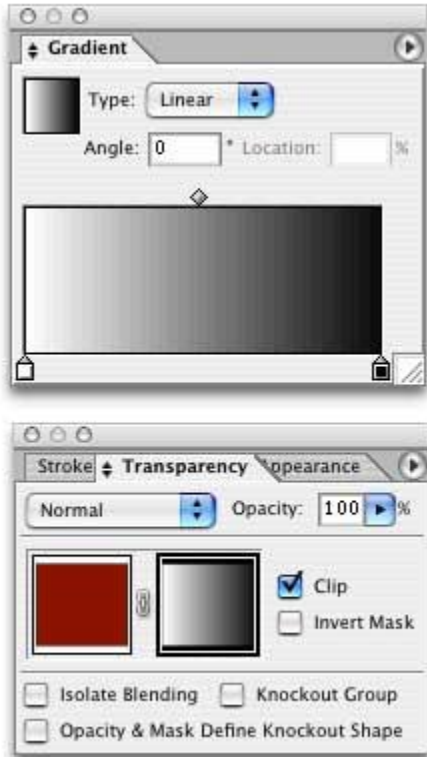


Second, draw a new object over the old. Note that in the example below, my object has become partially transparent. This is owing to the fact that Opacity Masks use the lightness of the colors of the mask object to determine the opacity of the primary object. My current color is a dark red, so the object is mostly transparent. We'll change this in the next step.

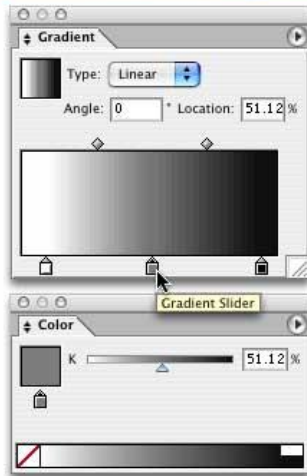
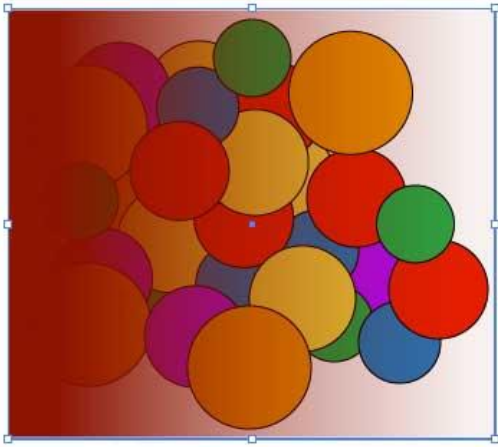


Transparent Gradients in Adobe Illustrator Creating gradients with opacity masks

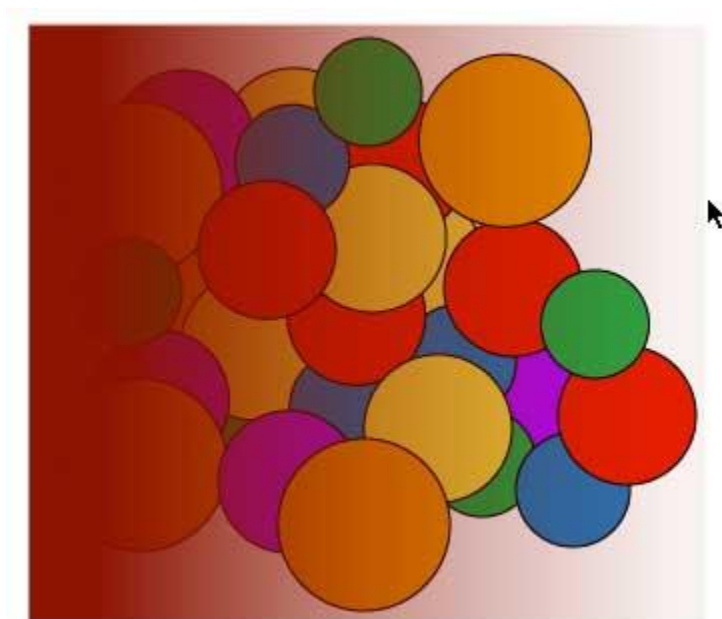
Now we want to create our gradient proper. To do this, we're not going to apply a gradient to our primary object, but rather to our mask object. So, with the mask still selected in the Transparency palette, go to the Gradient palette (Window > Gradient), and select the gradient type that you want to work with (linear or radial). When you do this, you'll see your mask change as well in the Transparency palette.



And, of course, you'll see the transparency of your object change. If this isn't the exact transparency you want, you can adjust it by moving the stops in the Gradient palette left or right; by changing the values in the stops; or by adding new stops. To change the value in a stop, click the stop, and then, in the Color palette, choose a new value. To add a stop, click at the bottom of the Gradient palette where you want the new stop to appear. In the example below, I'm showing my object on top of other objects to demonstrate the transparency.

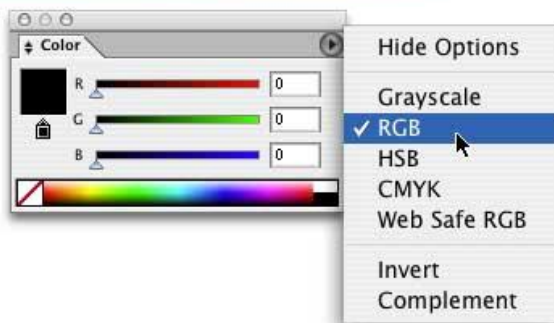
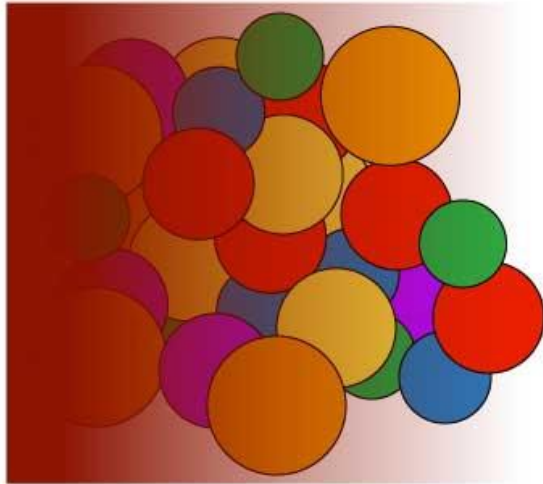


But also note that there's a little problem with the transparency itself. If I deselect the object, I can see clearly that the opacity of the gradient doesn't go all the way to 0. The reason for this is that, by default, black and white gradients use grayscale values.



But I can overcome this by simply selecting the black stop (fully transparent) and switching the color model in the Color palette from grayscale to RGB (or CMYK or HSB). AND that will give

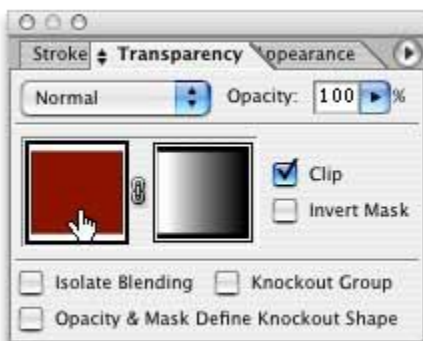
me a nice, smooth transition from fully opaque to fully transparent.



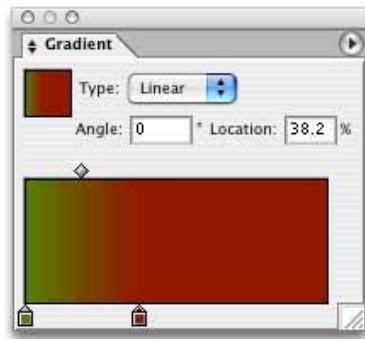
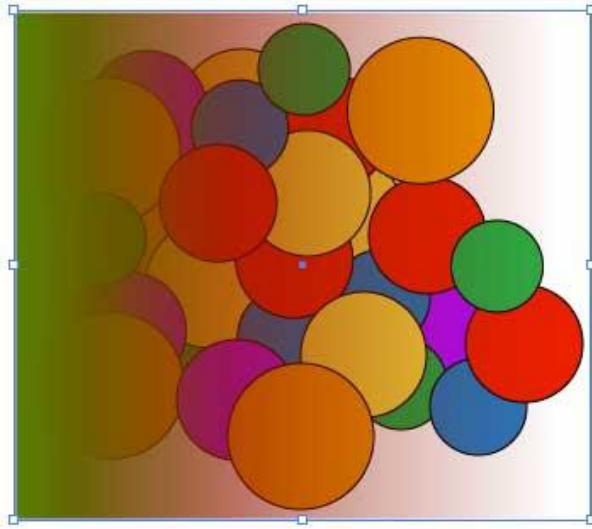
Multi-color gradient with transparency

In addition to this, it's also possible to create multi-color gradients in Illustrator with transparency. For this example, I'll use my existing object, simply converting the primary object from a solid to a gradient.

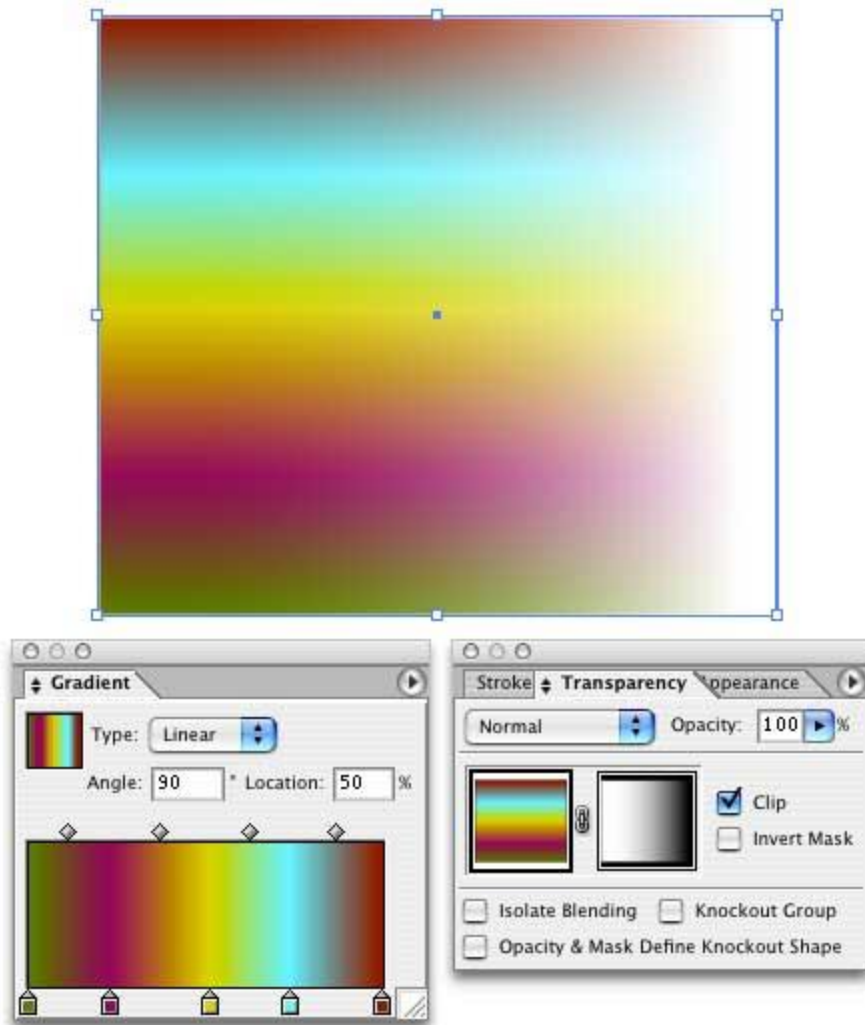
To begin this, select the object proper in the Transparency palette to exit mask editing mode.



Then apply the gradient to the object. And voila! You now have multiple colors in your gradient, along with transparency.



And, if you wish, you can even set the color gradient to a different angle so that your color gradient will be perpendicular to your opacity gradient. To do this, with your object still selected, simply change the angle to 90 degrees in the Gradient palette. (Of course, you can set the angle to any value you wish.)



And that's all there is to it.