Tips for InDesign I Learned the Hard Way

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In the summer, I was hired as the AEF's Communications Intern. My main task was to create study guides for the Emerald Youth Grants program, so the team set me up with an InDesign course on Lynda and I was on my way!

InDesign and I had a love/hate relationship. It's a tool used by graphic designers and beginners alike that's as complex or simple that you make of it. I learned a few lessons the hard way, so I wanted to write out some tips to set you up for success in your own InDesign journey. For each tip, I've linked relevant articles from Adobe's InDesign User Guide for further reading.

*Keep in mind that I was using a MacBook, so keyboard shortcuts may differ on alternate operating systems.

1. You can keep the proportions of an image when resizing it.

Once you place a photo, you'll notice that when you try and change the size of it, it's very difficult to keep the proportions of the image the same. If you want to keep the proportions of the image the same, hold down the "command" and "shift" keys while you drag the corner box. This shows you the proper dimensions to maintain the proportionality of the picture.

Learn how to work with frames and objects on Adobe's InDesign User Guide.

2. Don't delete images from your computer after you've placed them in your document.

After you place images into InDesign, it's very tempting to then go delete them from your computer. However, InDesign needs the original link to maintain the quality of the photo. If you delete the original image from your computer, InDesign will show a little red question mark where the image is. It's a good practice to keep a folder of all the images in one spot so you don't lose them later.

Learn about links and embedded graphics on Adobe's InDesign User Guide.
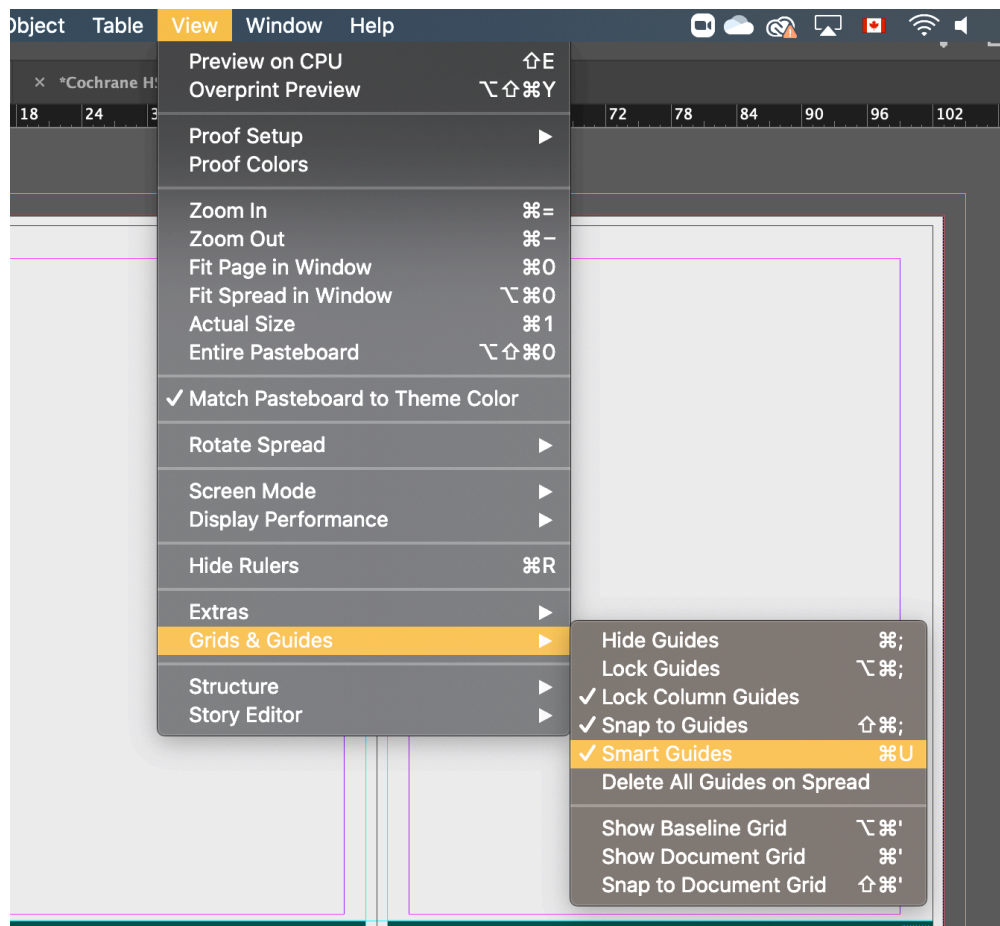
3. Create grids to outline your document.

If you place your cursor on the margin where the ruler is and drag outwards towards your document, you can make your own grids.

Learn how to use grids on Adobe's InDesign User Guide.

4. Turn smart guides on.

Smart guides are usually on. When you drag items in your document, lines will pop up showing when things are in line, in the centre of the document, etc. This is very helpful, but sometimes gets turned off unexpectedly. To turn it back on, choose View > Grids & Guides > Smart Guides.

Learn how to create ruler guides and use smart guides on Adobe's InDesign User Guide.

5. You can copy-paste swatches into a new document.

If you're following a certain colour palette, you can add it to the document using its hex code or RGB numbers in the Swatches panel. However, if you start a new document, you have to re-enter the colours that you need. This gets tedious after a while. A simple trick is to copy-paste something of that colour from your old document onto your new document. When you do this, it automatically adds the colour to your palette again.

Learn about the swatches panel on Adobe's InDesign User Guide.

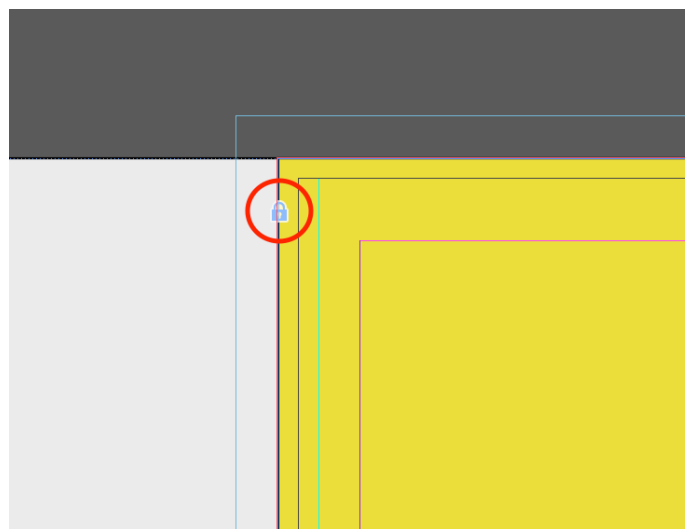## 6. InDesign doesn't automatically spell check.

Use a separate document to type and check for spelling or grammar errors. InDesign does not have an automatic spell check that will underline something that is spelt wrong.

Learn how to edit text on Adobe's InDesign User Guide.

7. Use the lock function, especially for backgrounds.

If you want something to stop moving while you're working on a document, you can lock it in place. Just right click on the item and click lock. A little lock symbol will show up, and this item will not be able to move when you click or drag it. It's beneficial for backgrounds. Just click the lock symbol again to unlock it.

Learn how to group, lock, and duplicate objects on Adobe's InDesign User Guide.
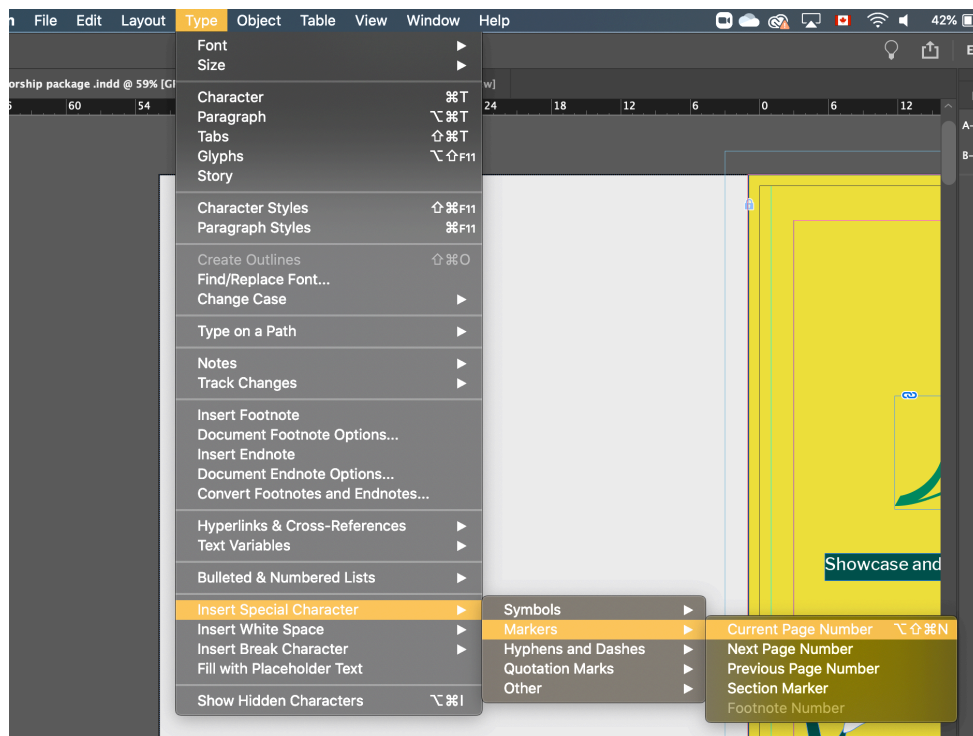
8. Make use of the master pages.

When you're making multiple pages, make use of the master pages. Whatever you do on the master pages will show up on the rest of the document. This is useful for things like page numbers or images you want to appear on every page.

Learn about master pages on Adobe's InDesign User Guide.

9. It's easy to add page numbers.

If you want to add page numbers, there is an easy way to get it done. On the master page, create a text box and then choose Type > Insert Special Character > Markers > Current Page Number.

Learn how to add basic page numbering on Adobe's InDesign User Guide.

Leslie is a student from Calgary studying pharmacy at the University of British Columbia. She discovered the Alberta Emerald Foundation through volunteering with Future Energy Systems and was hired as their summer student in 2020.