

Business Card Design — Workbook

This workbook turns the course into a finished, press-ready business card. You will lock a format and stock, prioritise the content, set up an artboard with correct bleed and a safe zone, build a legible grid and type hierarchy, convert colour to CMYK with a proper rich black, design any premium finish on its own spot layer, and export a PDF the printer accepts. Work through one section per module and finish with a card you could order from MOO, Vistaprint, or a local press today.

What a Business Card Actually Is

Choose the right format, stock, and content priority for a real card before any pixels are drawn.

Exercise: Format and Stock Decision Drill

Take three different card briefs (for example a corporate consultant, a tattoo artist, and a coffee shop loyalty card) and decide the right format, size, and stock for each, justifying every call against how the card will be used and printed.

- For each brief, choose a trim size (85x55mm, 3.5x2in, square, or folded) and explain why in one sentence.
- Pick a stock weight in gsm or points and a coating (gloss, silk, matte, uncoated, cotton), and note what it signals.
- Decide which, if any, justifies a premium finish or die-cut, and which should stay a standard rectangle.
- Identify any brief that needs the back of the card used (loyalty grid, map, appointment slots) and say why.

Worksheet: Card Spec Sheet

Lock the production spec for one card before you design it, so every later decision traces back to a real format, size, and stock.

Client / card name

Audience region (drives standard size)

Format (standard / square / folded / die-cut)

Trim size (mm or in)

Document size with 3mm bleed (mm or in)

Stock weight (gsm or pt)

Coating (gloss / silk / matte / uncoated / cotton)

Finish planned? (spot UV / foil / letterpress / none)

Back of card used? (yes/no, and for what)

Exercise: Content Prioritisation Pass

Take the full list of information a client wants on a card and rank it so the front carries only what matters most and the back carries the rest.

- List every item the client requested, then mark each as essential, supporting, or droppable.
 - Choose the single primary contact method the reader is most likely to use.
 - Move all supporting items to the back of the card rather than crowding the front.
 - If there is a QR code, confirm where it points and that the destination is mobile-friendly.
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Checklist: Pre-Design Readiness

- I have set a trim size and noted it in the brief and file name
- I know the stock weight and coating before designing colour and contrast
- I have ranked the content into essential, supporting, and droppable
- I have chosen one primary contact method to feature
- I have decided what goes on the back of the card
- I have confirmed any QR code resolves to a working, mobile-friendly page

Setting Up a Press-Ready Document

Build the artboard with correct bleed, trim, and safe zone, then lay out a clean grid and legible type.

Worksheet: Bleed and Safe-Zone Plan

Record the three boundaries for your card so the cut is forgiving and nothing important is sliced. Fill the measured values for your specific trim size.

Trim size (finished, mm or in)

Bleed amount per side (target 3mm / 0.125in)

Document size including bleed (mm or in)

Safe-zone inset from trim (target 3 to 5mm)

Edge-touching elements extended to bleed? (yes/no)

Crop marks required by printer? (yes/no)

Exercise: Grid and Alignment Drill

Take one card layout and impose a real structure on it, then prove every element is intentionally placed and aligned.

- Set an internal margin of 4 to 5mm inside the safe zone and a simple two or three column grid.

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- Pick one alignment edge (usually left) and align name, role, and contact details to it.
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- Identify the single clearly empty area you have left so the card breathes.
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- Find any element sitting even 0.5mm off its neighbour and snap it to an exact coordinate.
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Worksheet: Typography Spec

Record the type decisions for one card so legibility at true print size is guaranteed before export.
Name typeface and size (target 10 to 14pt)

Body / contact typeface and size (minimum 7 to 8pt)

Number of typefaces used (target 1 to 2)

Stock adjustment (uncoated/textured: nudge body size up?)

Tested at 100% on a printed proof? (yes/no)

Fonts to be outlined or embedded on export? (yes/no)

Checklist: Document Setup Readiness

- My document is at the exact trim size in mm or inches, not pixels
- I have set 3mm bleed on all four sides
- I have a safe-zone guide 3 to 5mm inside the trim
- All edge-touching backgrounds extend to the bleed line, not the trim
- All text and logos sit inside the safe zone
- My grid has one consistent alignment edge and at least one empty area
- My smallest text is no smaller than 7 to 8pt and reads at true size

Colour, Black, and Print Accuracy

Convert colour to CMYK without ugly shifts, build a correct rich black, and proof so the print matches intent.

Exercise: CMYK Conversion and Black Drill

Take one finished card and audit its colour for the press: convert to CMYK, check for shifts, and fix every black so it uses the right build.

- Set the document to CMYK and note any bright colour that shifted noticeably on conversion.
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- Source each brand colour from its official CMYK or Pantone value, not a screen-picked RGB.
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- Set all small text and fine lines to 100% K only and confirm they stay crisp.
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- Rebuild any large solid black as a rich black and confirm total ink stays under about 300%.
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Worksheet: Colour and Black Audit

Record the colour build for one card so the press reproduces it accurately. Fill the converted and corrected values yourself.

Brand colour 1 (Pantone or CMYK build)

Brand colour 2 (Pantone or CMYK build)

Any spot ink used? (yes/no, which)

Small text black value (target 100% K only)

Large solid black build (rich black recipe used)

Total ink coverage of richest colour (target under 300%)

Any element on registration black? (must be no)

Exercise: Proofing Ladder Walkthrough

Run one card up the proofing ladder so you trust the print, not the screen, before you order.

- Soft proof in CMYK preview and note any colour that needs correcting.
 - Print at 100% on plain paper and confirm size, margins, and legibility.
 - For brand-critical work, decide whether to order a physical proof on the real stock and say why.
 - View the printed proof in daylight against your brand reference and record any drift.
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Checklist: Colour Accuracy Readiness

- My whole document is CMYK with no stray RGB elements
- Brand colours come from official CMYK or Pantone values
- All small text and fine lines are 100% K only
- Large solid blacks use a rich black build, not flat K
- Total ink coverage of my richest colour is under about 300%
- Nothing is set to registration black
- I have judged a proof in daylight before signing off colour

Premium Finishes, Files, and Ordering

Design any finish or die-cut on its own spot layer, export a press-ready PDF, and order correctly from a real printer.

Exercise: Finish and Die-Cut Layer Drill

Take one card and add a premium finish or custom shape the correct way, as a separate spot-colour instruction layer rather than a faked effect.

- Choose the single element that earns a finish and explain why restraint makes it feel special.
 - Create a named layer (Spot_UV, Foil, or Die_Cut) and draw the area as a solid 100% spot colour set to overprint.
 - Confirm any foil or letterpress shape is bold and simple, with no fine gradients or hairline detail.
 - For a die-cut, confirm the cut path is one closed shape and the bleed follows the custom outline.
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Worksheet: Finish and Cut Spec

Record the finish and cut instructions for one card exactly as the printer will need them.
Finish type (spot UV / foil colour / letterpress / emboss / none)

Element receiving the finish

Finish layer name (e.g. Spot_UV, Foil)

Spot colour used for the layer (e.g. 100% magenta, overprint)

Custom shape or rounded corners? (radius / die outline)

Bleed follows custom shape? (yes/no)

Printer's minimum radius / feature size confirmed? (yes/no)

Worksheet: Export and Order Brief

Capture the export settings and printer requirements so the file is accepted on the first upload.
Printer (MOO / Vistaprint / local press)

Printer template downloaded and matched? (yes/no)

Export format (PDF/X-1a or printer preset)

Bleed included (3mm) and crop marks if required? (yes/no)

Colour mode (CMYK, plus any spot inks)

Image resolution at final size (target 300 DPI)

Fonts embedded or outlined? (yes/no)

Proof ordered before full run? (yes/no)

Checklist: Press-Ready and Order Readiness

- Any finish or die is on its own named spot layer, not faked in the artwork
- Finish and foil shapes are bold and simple, with no hairline detail
- A custom cut path is one closed shape and the bleed follows it
- I downloaded and designed inside the printer's template
- My export is a PDF (PDF/X-1a or the printer preset) with 3mm bleed

[] Colour is CMYK, images are 300 DPI, and fonts are embedded or outlined

[] I read every preflight warning and ordered a proof where available

Your Action Plan

1. Pick the trim size and format for your card and set up the document at that exact size in mm or inches
2. Choose the stock weight and coating, and note both in the brief before designing colour
3. Rank the content into essential, supporting, and droppable, and decide what goes on the back
4. Set 3mm bleed, a 3 to 5mm safe zone, and crop marks, extending edge backgrounds to the bleed
5. Build a grid with one alignment edge and a legible type hierarchy, smallest text no under 7 to 8pt
6. Convert everything to CMYK, source brand colours from official values, and fix every black build
7. Keep total ink under about 300% and confirm nothing uses registration black
8. Design any finish or die-cut on its own named spot layer set to overprint
9. Proof up the ladder: soft proof, paper proof, and a physical sample in daylight for brand work
10. Download the printer's template, export to PDF/X-1a with bleed, read preflight, order a proof, then the run

