

Working with Blocks: Part 1, Introduction

Like AutoCAD® software and other CAD programs, Autodesk® Impression software uses blocks for objects such as people and landscape features that need to be used repeatedly, edited globally, and stored in libraries.

Blocks in Impression are also called Entourage because they are usually added to illustrations as detail to give a sense of scale to the image.

Impression frequently parallels AutoCAD in terminology and workflow, and you will find that the use of blocks is similar in the two programs.

Locating Blocks

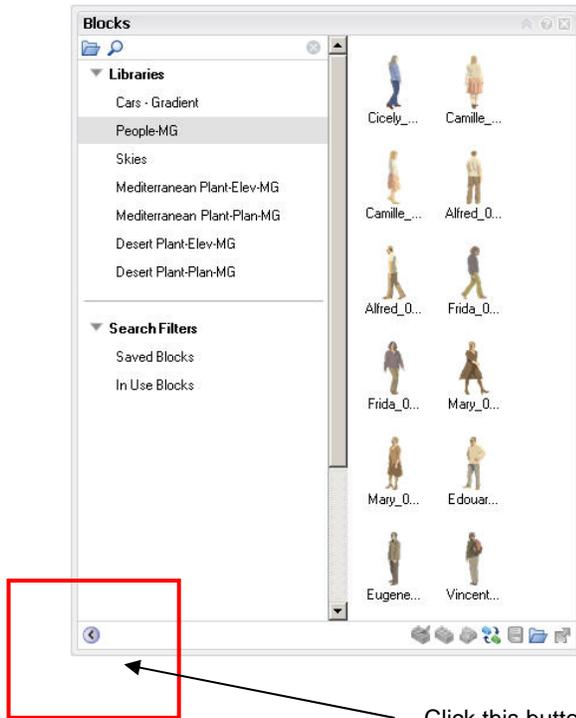
Blocks are accessed through the Blocks palette, which can be found on the Palettes menu or by hitting the F4 key.

The blocks palette has two viewing modes: the thumbnail mode, and the navigation mode.

The thumbnail mode uses the whole palette to show preview images of blocks. The block libraries are accessed from a drop-down list at the top.



Fig. 1: Blocks Palette, Thumbnail View



The navigation mode splits the palette into a list on the left and the thumbnails on the right. In this view, you can more easily navigate the list of block libraries while viewing the thumbnail swatches. When you toggle the “expand arrow” in the lower left corner of the palette, the view turns to the Navigation mode.

Fig. 2: Blocks Palette, Navigation Mode

Click this button to toggle between thumbnail and navigation mode.

In the figure above, notice the two sections in the navigation list: the Libraries list and the Search Filter list.

The Libraries section displays default block libraries. You can open additional libraries, and designate some to be displayed automatically whenever you open a new Impression drawing.

The Search Filter section displays Saved Blocks and In Use Blocks. Because no blocks have been inserted in this Impression file, the Saved Blocks and In-Use Blocks lists are blank.

Adding a Block Library

Libraries are actually externally referenced files whose blocks are available for insertion. These files are normal Impression (IRF) files that contain one or more blocks. You can add as many external libraries as you want by browsing to and selecting the Impression file that contains the blocks you want to have available as a library.

Now let’s try adding a library of existing blocks to your library list.

1. In the Blocks palette, click the Link to Libraries button (the blue folder) in the lower-right corner of the Blocks palette.
2. Browse to the following folder in the Impression install directory:
Libraries\Blocks\Plants.
3. Notice the list of IRF files. *(Note: Where applicable, the library file names indicate whether the block image should appear in the background, middle*



Fig. 3: Link to block library

ground, or foreground when placed your Impression illustration, as denoted by the BG, MG, or FG on the end of the filename. Blocks for the background are low in detail, and blocks in the foreground are higher in detail. You can use a similar naming convention for block libraries that you create.)

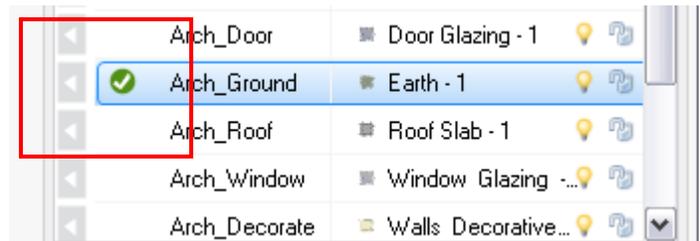
4. Click each of the IRF files and preview their block images in the preview pane on the right.
5. Select the file you want to use and click the Open File as External Library button. The blocks it contains are added to the list of libraries in the Blocks palette of your current illustration.

Now you have a new library link which will remain in the list until you remove it!

Inserting a Block onto the Canvas

Now that you have some new blocks available, let's insert a block into your illustration:

1. First, decide where you want your entourage element to live. Click the check mark in front of the layer name that you want your block to be associated with to make that layer current.



2. Drag the thumbnail of the desired block from the palette onto the canvas.
3. The Block Properties Summary will appear with information about the size of your block when printed, based on the scale of the current sketch (default canvas). Although you can edit the block's size and scale, this dialog box is mostly informational. As you gain experience, you may elect not to display it by clicking the Don't Show Me This Again checkbox in the lower-left corner.
4. Notice that the inserted block is now listed in both the Saved Blocks and In Use Blocks search filters on the Blocks palette.

Fig. 4: Select the layer for your Blocks.

Note: Another way to insert a block into an Impression drawing, is to substitute a stylized Impression block for a DWG block which came in when you opened your DWG file in Impression. Simply drag a stylized block from the Blocks palette onto any block on the canvas and all of the blocks with the same name are updated. This is known as block substitution. We'll cover more details about Block Substitution in a subsequent document.

Search Filters List

Now we can go back to discussing the Search Filters lists mentioned above. The Saved Blocks filter shows all of the blocks that have been inserted in the current illustration. Remember how you dragged your block in from an externally referenced library? Now that it has been inserted, a copy is stored with the IRF file and will show up in the Saved Blocks list.

The In Use Blocks filter lists all of the blocks that are currently inserted in the illustration. If you delete a block from the canvas, it no longer appears in the In Use Blocks filter, but it will remain stored in the file and will continue to be listed in the Saved Blocks list.

Adjusting Block Scale and Size

Although Impression is designed to open and illustrate CAD files, the accuracy that CAD platforms offer is secondary when placing entourage in your Impression illustration. A block's relative print size in relation to the image is of more concern. However, accuracy is achievable in Impression. The block libraries that come with Impression are created with the generic scale of 1/8" = 1'- 0".

If you open a CAD layout that is at a scale other than 1/8" = 1'- 0", when you drag a block onto the canvas, it may appear a little too large or a little too small. You can adjust the size in various ways.

The simplest way is to select the block on the canvas and use the grips on the bounding box and drag the block to an appropriate size. You can maintain the aspect ratio of the block by holding the Shift key while dragging a grip. Holding the Shift while dragging will make sure your people entourage won't get squished while dragging, however, you may want to freely drag planted or natural objects like trees and shrubs without the Shift key in order to make them appear random in size and shape.

If you want more accuracy, you can adjust a selected block's size and scale by pressing the F2 key to open the Properties palette. Any adjustments you make will affect only the selected block.

You can also adjust all insertions of a block at once by right-clicking the thumbnail of the block you want to edit in the Saved Blocks list and choosing Properties. Any changes you make affect all block insertions with the same name.

Note: The Properties palette is not just for blocks! It is context sensitive and displays the editable properties of whatever object is selected on the canvas. It will stay visible until it is toggled off with the F2 key.

Blocks and Layers

So where do inserted blocks end up? Your block was inserted onto whichever layer was designated as the current layer. You can move it to another layer by changing the setting on the Properties palette or by right-clicking the block and selecting Send to Layer.

Ready to start creating your own custom blocks? Check out the next document in this series "Creating Custom Blocks."

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