

# Working with Blocks: Part 2, Creating Custom Blocks

In this tutorial we will talk about creating custom blocks. Autodesk® Impression software ships with a large library of blocks to get you started. If these blocks don't suit the style of your illustration, or if a particular type of block does not exist, you can easily create your own blocks in Impression and store them in IRF files that can be saved as libraries to be referenced and used repeatedly.

## Drawing Blocks in Impression

You can use the geometry creation tools in Impression to create custom blocks. This way, you can apply styles similar to the ones you are using to create your illustration. For example, in a colored pencil rendering, you might want the entourage to be styled in colored pencil using a similar color palette.

Before you create the geometry that will become a block, consider the layers and styles you will use. You can set up your layers in a variety of ways, depending on how you will organize the visibility of your block components.

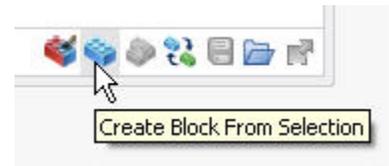
One way to approach this is to use a method that will help you **avoid style overrides**. To do this, you will have to create a different layer for every part of the block that needs a different style. For example, suppose you are making a tree block. The tree geometry consists of two parts, the branches and the leaves. For the branches, you will use a thick brown pencil stroke style. For the leaves, you will use a green stroked fill style. For this block, you will need to create two new layers.

Here's a breakdown of the process:

1. First create two layers, one called Branches and the other called Leaves.
2. Drag the brown pencil stroke style from the Styles palette to the Branches layer. Drag the green fill style to the Leaves layer.
3. Draw your tree elements using the geometry creating tools in Impression. *Note: As you create the tree geometry, make sure you are on the proper current layer for each element in the block!*

After you have created your tree, making this a block is easy.

1. Open the Blocks palette.
2. On the canvas, select all of the tree geometry for the block.
3. Click the Create Block From Selection button at the bottom of the Blocks palette.



Your block is automatically added to the Saved Blocks list. A thumbnail is created and the name field is flashing, prompting you to name it. If you don't name it at the time of creation, an incremental default name is assigned to the block. You can rename the block at any time.

*Note: The base point of the block is always at the center of the bounding box that is displayed when you select the block.*

## Redefining Blocks

You can redefine any block by selecting the new geometry or image that will replace the old block, and clicking the Redefine Block button at the bottom of the Blocks palette. The Redefine Block dialog box displays a dropdown list of all of the blocks in the file. From this list, select the block you want to redefine.

You can also select a new base point for the block. Be aware that if you change the base point when redefining a block, all existing block insertions with that name will move from their current insertion point.



## Creating Blocks from Raster Images

You may have existing libraries of entourage from other graphics applications that you want to incorporate into Impression libraries.

Let's assume you want to create a custom library of blocks from raster files. It is best to start off with a blank canvas. Start by creating a descriptive layer or set of layers for your blocks:

1. Click a layer to make it current. The new block will be placed on this layer.
2. On the File menu, click Import (or press Ctrl+I).
3. Browse to the raster file you wish to import.
4. Click OK.
5. Your raster image is imported to the canvas at its original pixel resolution. In most cases it will need to be resized to an appropriate scale. You can resize the image by holding the Shift key while you drag the grip handles on the bounding box. This helps you achieve an approximate, visually correct, size. You can also adjust the raster image's height and width in scaled units with the Properties palette by selecting the image and pressing the F2 key. This unit value is based on the scale of the current sketch or canvas.
6. Once the image is the proper size, click the Make Block From Selection button in the Blocks palette (see above), and give your new block a name.

To continue making a library of raster images, simply repeat the procedure!

*Note: You might want to organize the images on the canvas in rows and columns for better visual management. However, since this library will be used as an externally referenced library, all that matters is that the blocks exist in the Saved Blocks search filter.*

## My Bitmaps are Blocking my Background!

Here's a tip for making blocks with a transparent background.

PNG raster files work best for Impression blocks because they don't mask background color from your Impression illustration. Below is an example of the steps used in converting a JPG image of a tree to a PNG file with an alpha channel background (which will appear as transparent) using Adobe® Photoshop® software.

1. Open the JPG file in Photoshop.
2. On the Select menu, click Color Range.
3. Click inside the black preview area. (Avoid clicking on the tree itself.)
4. Adjust the Fuzziness value until most of the tree is black. (This value could change for different images, but a value 50-80 usually works well.)
5. Click OK. The white background is now selected.
6. On the Select menu, click Inverse. The tree itself is selected. (The selection might also include some white background, depending on the color range selection.)
7. Remove any obvious white background from the selection (that is, the background away from the tree).
8. On the Edit menu, click Copy.
9. Open a new Photoshop file. Be sure to set the Background Content to be transparent.
10. Paste the tree.
11. Save the file in PNG format.

## Conclusion

While it may seem a bit daunting at first, creating blocks in Impression is a pretty straightforward task. Once you have invested some time, and some creativity, you can quickly have libraries of custom blocks that you can re-use again and again.

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