

Aaron Draplin: A Checklist for Handing Off Design Files

[Jessica Farris](#) March 9, 2017



If you're in the design world, you've heard of Aaron Draplin.

But in case you haven't: "Bred from the loins of the proud Midwest, this little fucker was squeezed out in Detroit, in the year 1973 to the proud parents of Jim and Lauren Draplin," asserts the Portland-based designer's [website](#). He's been working in design since age 19, starting with snowboard graphics and hitting everything from lettering signs to magazines, logos to advertising campaigns.

By the fall of 2004, Draplin started his own firm, [Draplin Design Co.](#), and over the past 12 years has racked up an insanely long client list. Among those DDC has worked for are Nike, Patagonia, the *New York Times*, *Wired*, the Obama Administration and Field Notes to name a few. His "Proud & Growing Roster of Slayed Speaking Engagements" mentions well over 100 events—and that's only from 2009-2014. In 2016 [HOW Design Live](#) was thrilled to

have Draplin as a speaker, where he shared stories about his life in the midwest, his summer as a carny, his love for his father and his recently released book. And that's what we're here to talk about.

PRINT has been given the opportunity to offer our readers an exclusive download from Draplin's book: [*Draplin Design Co.: Pretty Much Everything*](#)

[Draplin Checklist](#)

[Check it out on Amazon](#)

[2017 PRINT Regional Design Awards](#), for which Draplin has so kindly offered his input as a judge.

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It's a good feeling to get to the end of a project. I always feel accomplished and excited to make a living in design. Thankful. But before you go and celebrate, you have to make sure you are firing off that file as tight as possible. Here's our somewhat fail-safe way of readying files to ship,

01 "Save" yer file wherever it is at.

In the current version you own. Make triple sure you've got it in a logical place, and, backed up for 1,000 years.

02 "Save As" the file, saving it to the desktop.

This is the file you'll send off to the client/operator/vendor once everything checks out. I add a special extension to my files. I go with "_mech" as in "mechanical." So when you see that special file called,

"GARY_BREATH_mech.ai." you know that sucker is ready to hand off.

03 Unlock Everything.

Unlock Everything. Sometimes people will grab shit, missing the locked stuff. (Option-Command-2) unlocks everything on the page! Zoom out to check the art board.

04 Check yer colors.

If the file calls for spot colors, make sure everything is colored properly throughout the document. Be it PMS colors or CMYK global builds, make sure everything is consistent.

05 Check those blacks.

100% K or Rich Black? I do a mix of "C:35 M:35 Y:35 K:100" as my trusted "Rich Black" build.

06 Check overprinted colors.

Select everything, then check the "Attributes" palette. If the "Overprint Fill" box has a minus character in it, that means some of yer stuff is overprinting. That could complicate stuff down the line, and/or effect richness/colors when printing. Sometimes I'll drag stuff from another document that was "checked overprint" and it'll mess up the new document.

07 Clean out any unused color swatches.

Get 'em out of there. Better safe than sorry. In the upper right corner of the "Swatches" palette, click on the little drop down menu, and go to "Select All Unused" and then click on the trash icon in the palette window. Bye bye incorrigible color swatches.

08 Get rid of any logos/goodies you aren't using in yer "symbol" palette.

I keep mine loaded with DDC logos, client logos and shapes I hate having to redraw. Clean 'em out of there! Same deal as those unwanted colors. In the upper right corner of the "Symbol" palette, click on the little dropdown menu, and go to "Select All Unused" and then click on the trash icon in the palette window. Sayonara, suckers!

09 Check the spelling of everything.

I do it twice, just cuz I get all cocky and click through the dialogue boxes a little too fast.

10 Outline the fonts:

Might as well outline those fonts, too, unless the client needs to edit stuff. I always outline them, just to cut down on possible font problems after the hand-off. One less complication for some frustrated turd to invent when they start messing around with yer file.

11 "Expand" everything.

You know, all the rounded edges and shit that might be "United" in the "Pathfinder" palette, but still needing to become one shape. A compound shape is always safer than a grouped chunk of pieces, but that only applies to when you hand the stuff off. Otherwise, keep it all "live."

12 Extra layers can complicate shit.

Might as well just get it all on to one layer. Easier to deal with later on.

13 Check all placed images.

Placed or embedded? Make sure the shit you have linked as efficiently as possible too. Embedding stuff can make files giant, so weigh the options before leaving them in.

14 Flatten all linked images.

Just so people aren't messing up the Photoshop layers. Then, relink just to be triple sure.

15 Check the area surrounding the artboard.

There might be some embarrassing stuff in there, hidden from view or whatever. Zoom way out, go to "Outline Preview" (Command-Y) and see if there is any stray shit in the outlying regions. Get rid of all that shit.

16 And for the final step, "Save" the thing down a couple versions.

Nothing sucks more than having whatever "professional source" calling back crying about not having the latest version to open the file. And unclick "Create PDF Compatible File." That cuts down on file size something fierce. Also, just for extra protection, add the software version number to the file name.

17 Put the file in the original folder, alongside yer original file.

Then you have yer original file with all the fixins, and, the file you handed off.

[Draplin Checklist](#)

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