Adobe℠ Customer Services

Compound Paths

A compound path is a group of two or more paths that are painted so that any overlapping portions of the paths appear transparent. This allows you to see through overlapping objects.

CREATING COMPOUND PATHS

Typically you create compound paths from overlapping paths. You can also create compound paths from nonoverlapping paths; doing so enables you to use multiple shapes as a single mask. For example, you can create a mask from an entire word by first creating outlines from the type, then defining the type as a compound path, and then creating the mask.

To create a compound path:

1 Select the objects to include in the compound path.

2 Choose Compound Paths/Make from the Object menu.

3 Preview the illustration to see which parts of the compound path appear filled and which parts appear transparent. If the inner path, called the *counter*, does not appear transparent, you must reverse the direction of the path, as described in the next section.

REVERSING COMPOUND PATHS

Usually, the direction of a compound path does not matter. However, some artwork, such as that converted by Adobe Streamline™ and hand-drawn shapes with multiple overlapping areas, may not appear transparent. In such cases, you need to reverse a path's direction.

Because compound paths act like a grouped object, you must use the group selection tool (called the direct-up selection tool in Adobe Illustrator versions prior to 5.0) to select only part of a compound path. The group selection tool selects a complete path that is a part of a compound path.

To reverse the direction of a path:

1 Use the group selection tool (the hollow arrow with the plus sign) to select just that part of the compound path you want to reverse (usually the inner path). Do not select the entire compound path.

2 Choose Attributes from the Object menu. The Attributes dialog box appears.

3 Click the Reverse Path Direction option to change the option from unchecked to checked, or vice versa. Click OK.

RELEASING COMPOUND PATHS

All objects in a compound path adopt the paint attributes of the backmost object. When you release a compound path, the objects are ungrouped; however, the paint attributes are not restored.

To release a compound path

1 Select the entire compound path.

2 Choose Compound Paths/Release from the Object menu.

PRINTING COMPOUND PATHS

When printing very complex compound paths, such as a compound path used as a mask, your file may fail to print or you may receive a limitcheck error. Printing problems may occur because PostScript™ printers treat multiple paths that make up the compound path as a single path. If you experience such printing problems, you may need to simplify the compound path. You should use fewer objects in the compound path, and break any complicated compound paths or masks into several separate paths or masks. For more information on printing compound paths, see Tech Note No. 4006, "Printing Tips and Error Messages."