How to insert Braille in Illustrator CS4

Deborah Law
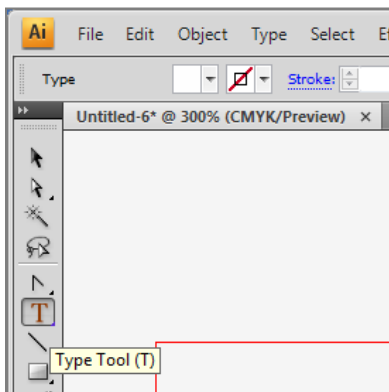July 2011

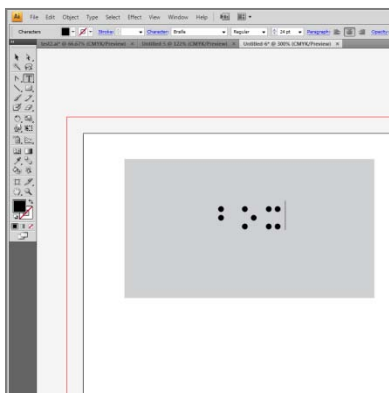**Question:** Why is the Type tool not sufficient for inserting Braille onto tactile graphics in Illustrator?

Problem: The default background for any text in Illustrator is transparent. That means when a Braille label is typed on top of any graphics, especially filled objects, the Braille text will blend in with the graphics and therefore difficult to comprehend by touch. According to the Braille Authority North America (BANA), a standard Braille label has a white background, and is separated from the graphics by 1/8 inches (or 9 points).

The following are steps to creating Braille labels following the BANA standard within Illustrator CS4.
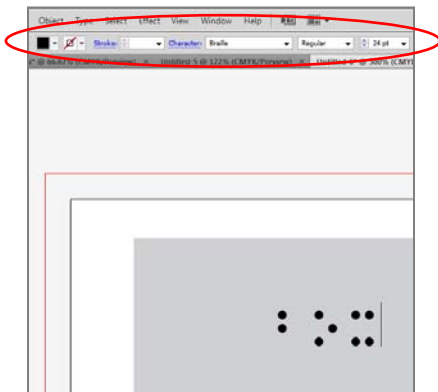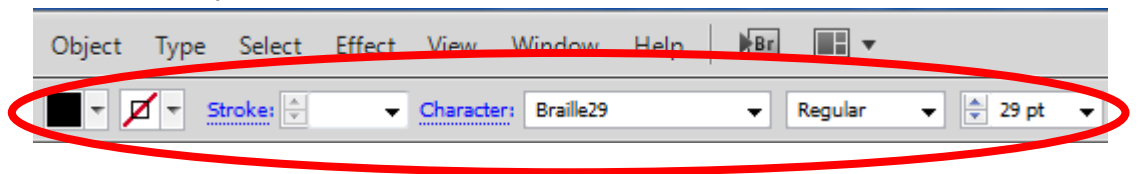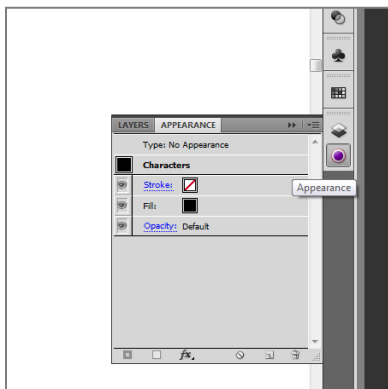
1. Select the Type tool from the toolbar on the left.

2. Click the cursor on the artboard where you want your text to appear, and start typing. (Here I have centered the text inside a filled rectangle.)
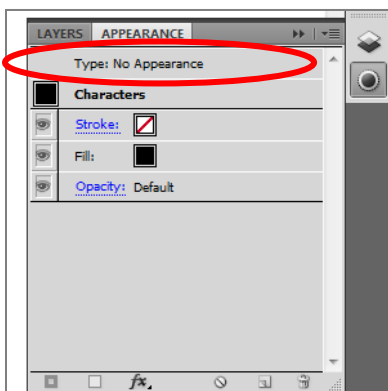
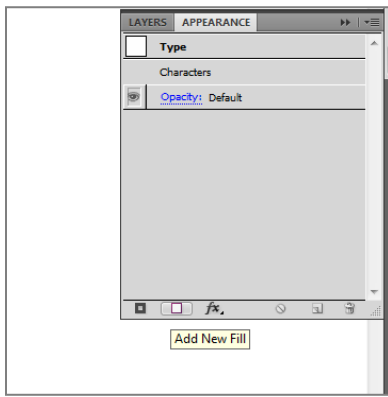3. Change the font to Braille29 29 pt, with a black fill, if that has not been set.

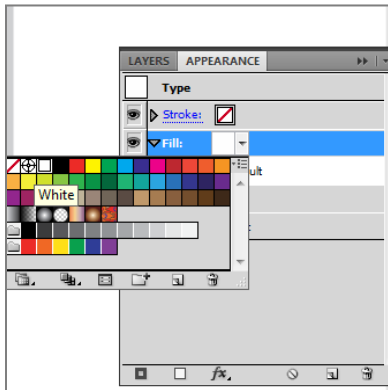4. Click on the Appearance panel on the right panel bar.
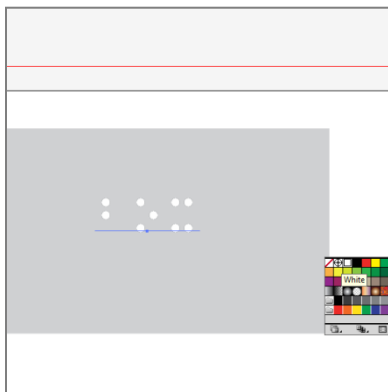
5. Click on Type: No Appearance.
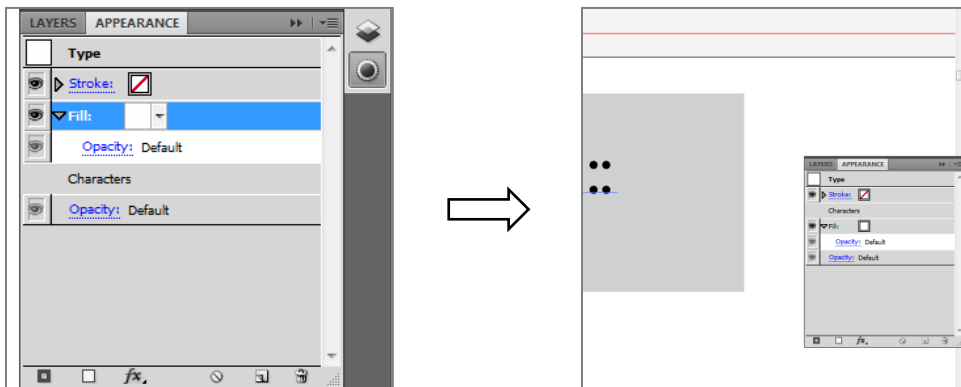
6. Click on Add New Fill.
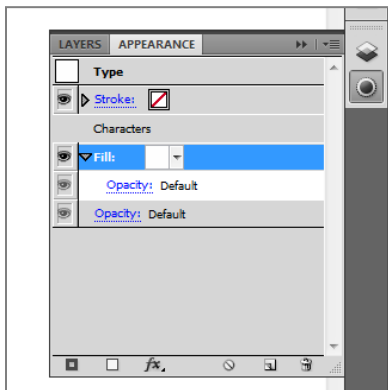

7. Change the Fill to white.

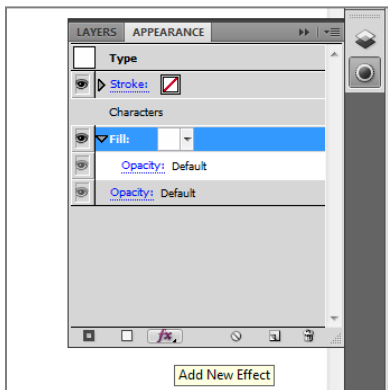8. You may notice that the text color changed to white.

9. Drag the Fill to under the Characters. Notice that the text color changed back to black.
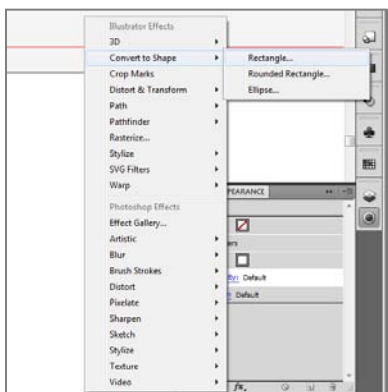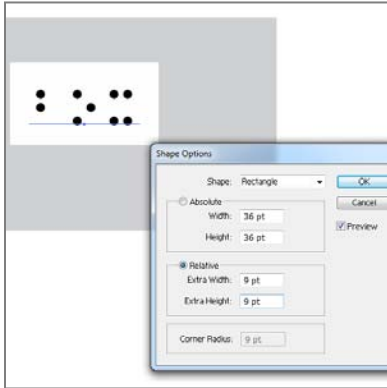
10. Click on the Fill so it is highlighted.

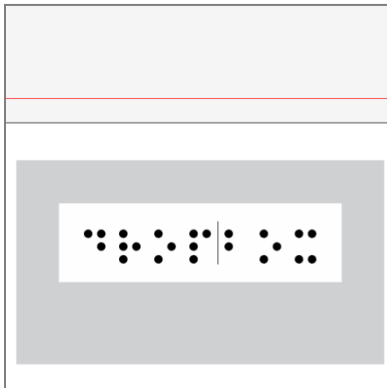11. Click on Add New Effect, the 3rd icon on the bottom left of the Appearance panel.

12. Select Convert to Shape, and select Rectangle.

13. A popup box will show up. Apply the following settings: Relative Extra Width and Height, both 9 pt (= 1/8"), which creates the standard spacing between Braille text and any graphics.
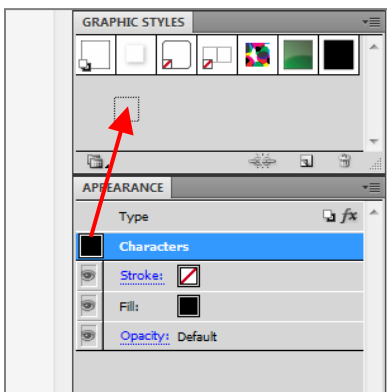
14. Double check if you have done everything correctly by typing additional letters. The white background should increase in length along with the text.
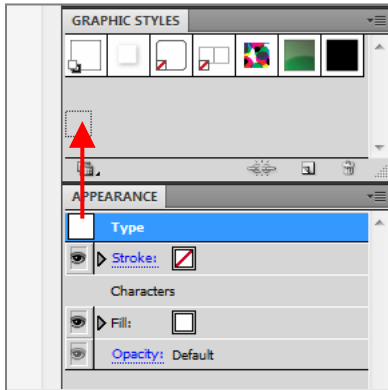
15. To make it more convenient for the future, you can actually save all these steps into one Graphic Style in Illustrator.
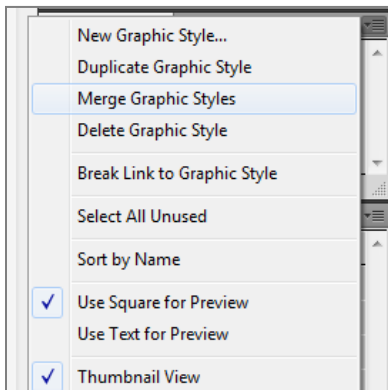
    a. With the text you created highlighted, drag the Characters thumbnail from the Appearance panel into the Graphic Style panel.
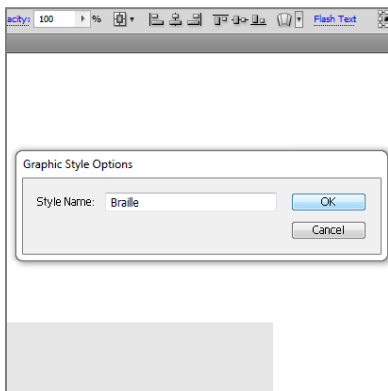
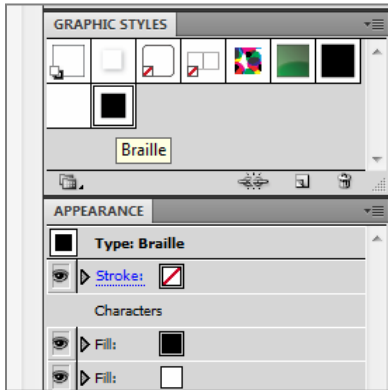b. Next, double click on Type in the Appearance panel, and drag the Type thumbnail into the Graphic Style panel.

c. Crtl-click to select the two graphic styles you just created, and choose Merge Graphic Styles from the panel menu.
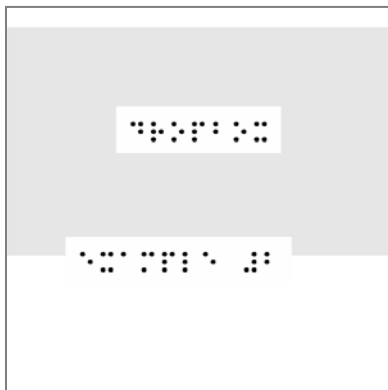

d. Name this style as "Braille", or something easy to remember.

e. The new Braille Graphic Style is created and can be accessed easily on the Graphic Style panel.
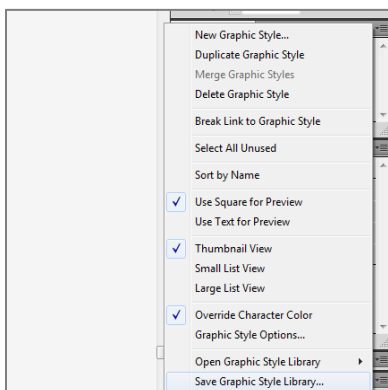

f. To create a new Braille label, simply type the text in the desired location, click on Type: No Appearance in the Appearance panel, then click on Braille in the Graphic Style panel.
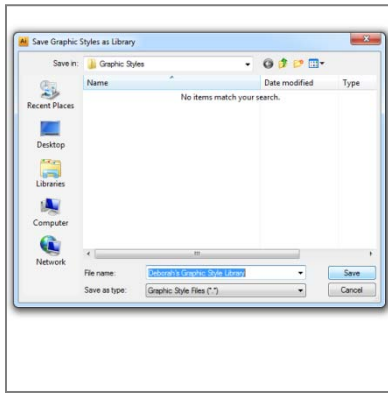

16. The graphic style that you have created is only available in this document. In order to save it for future use, the entire Graphic Style Library should be saved.
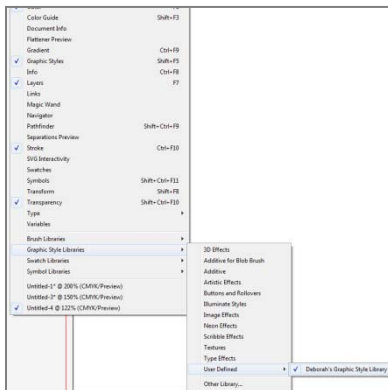
a. Choose Save Graphic Style Library from the panel menu.

b. Name it as "(Your Name) Graphic Style Library" or something easy to remember.

c. To import the graphic styles in a new document, choose Window > Graphic Style Libraries > User Defined > (Your Name) Graphic Style Library. This option is also available on the Graphic Style panel menu.

d. Notice that the graphic styles appear in a separate graphic style library panel (not the new document's Graphic Styles panel).