Vector Pen Tool Technique
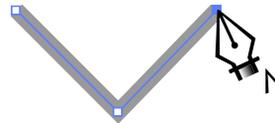
Illustrator CC 2015 • InDesign CC 2015 • Photoshop CC 2015
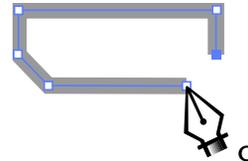
This is the Pen tool with an ✴ beside it, showing that it is ready to draw. In Illustrator only, you should take care to first click on the Direct Selection tool and then click the Pen tool. This allows the Cmd/Ctrl key to show the direct selection tool.
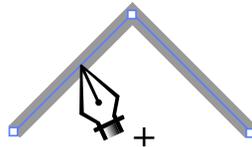
Click to create anchor points. Each next click creates a straight line segment or sub-path. While drawing, the pen shows a *delta shape*.
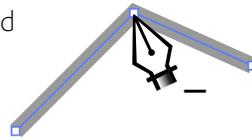
Hover the Pen tool over the first anchor point and it shows the *close path* symbol. Click or drag to close. An example of a closed path is a rectangle, ellipse, polygon, triangle, or other shape.
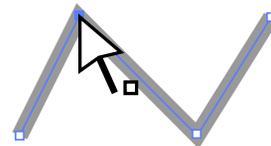
Hover the Pen tool over an existing sub-path or line segment, and the Pen tool will change to the *Add Anchor Point* tool. See the plus + sign. Click to add a new anchor point.
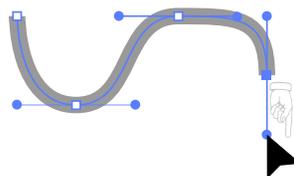
Hover the Pen tool over an existing anchor point and it changes to the *Delete Anchor Point* tool. See the minus sign. Click to delete an anchor from a path.
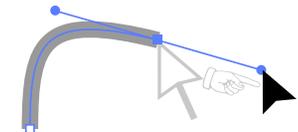
To move an anchor point, press the Cmd/Ctrl key, and the Pen changes temporarily to the white *Direct Selection* tool. In Illustrator, click the Direct Selection tool before using the Pen tool.
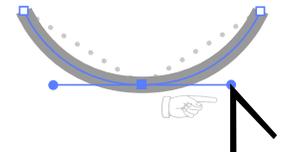
Drag the mouse to create anchor points with Bézier direction points that control curves. This sets the anchor where you begin the drag and the direction point where you release the drag.
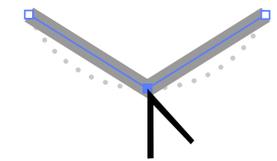
To adjust a direction point, press the Cmd/Ctrl key and the Pen tool changes to the *Direct Selection* tool. Drag the handle to adjust the symmetrical curve. Notice the *arrowhead icon* as you drag.
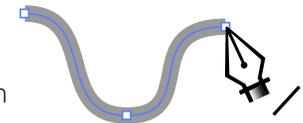
To convert a sharp corner to a curve, hold the Opt/Alt key to get the *(Convert) Anchor Point* tool; then drag, pulling direction points out of the anchor.
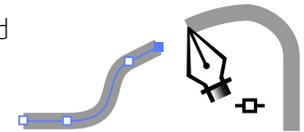
To convert a curve to a sharp corner, hold down the Opt/Alt key and click the curve anchor point. The direction points retract; and the formerly curved anchor point becomes a sharp corner.
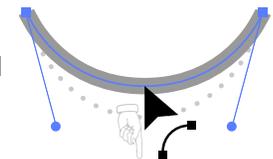
To join onto an open path, hover the Pen tool over an end anchor point. The tool shows a *forward slash*. Click (for straight) or drag (for curves) to rejoin the path and continue the pen drawing.

To join two separate open paths, hover over the end anchor point of the first path and click; then hover over the other path's end anchor point; see the *join path icon*; and click to join the paths.

New since Illustrator CC 2014 is the *path segment reshape function*, giving you the ability to drag a curved path segment using the Anchor Point tool, the Direct Selection tool, or hold Opt/Alt in the Pen tool.

New since Illustrator CC 2014 is the *rubber band preview* which displays a preview of the path that will be drawn from the previous anchor point to the current pointer position.