Adobe InDesign

Path Type tips and tricks
*Software needed: Adobe InDesign 1.5 or later*

by Tim Cole

InDesign 1.5 added the ability to flow text on a path. There is a lot to this feature that isn't immediately obvious, so this document is intended to give you a more in-depth look at just how you can take full advantage of this powerful feature.

Path Type basics: The Path Type tool lives under the Type tool in InDesign's tool palette. Click and hold on the Type tool icon to make the Path Type tool

When you select the Path Type tool and then mouse over a path, a small '+' sign appears in the Path Type cursor. That visual indicator tells you that if you were to click or click + drag at that point you would create a Path Type text frame.
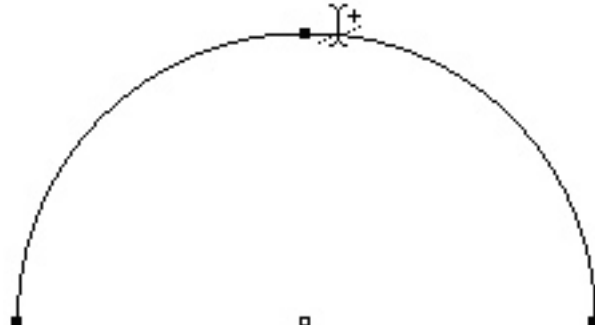
If you just click on the path, you will create a Path Type text frame that runs the entire length of the path. If you click and drag along the path, you can control the size of the Path Type text frame.
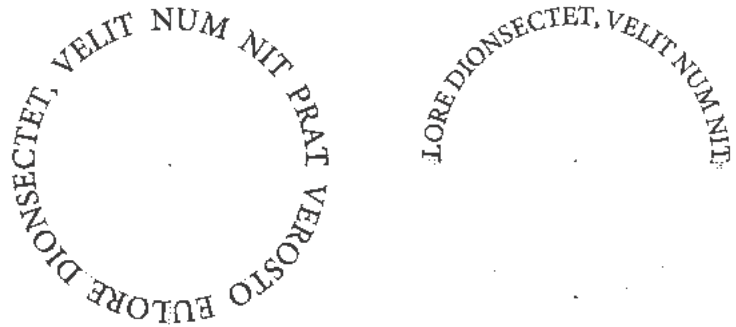
The handle at each end of the text frame can be used to resize the frame. The handle in the middle of the frame can be used to push the frame along the path so that you can position the frame exactly where you want it.

sizing handles
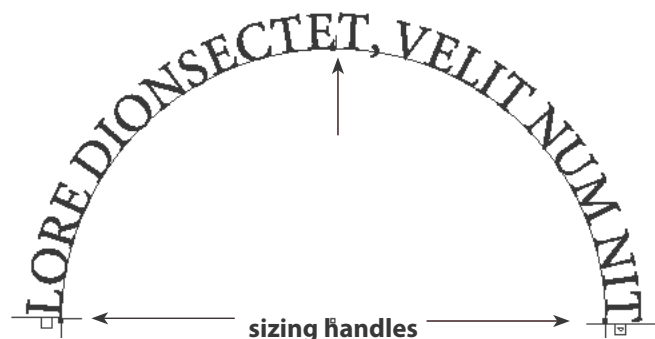
Path Type effects: Once you have flowed your text on a path, you have several options regarding how the text is drawn on that path. These different drawing options are called Effects in the Path Type Options dialog box.

You can get to the Path Type options dialog box three different ways. One is to click an insertion point in your type with the Path Type tool and then double-click on the tool in the tool palette. A second way is to click an insertion point in the type or select the path, and then use the Object > Path Type > Options menu command. The third way is to click an insertion point in your type or to select the path, and then use the contextual menu (Ctrl on the Macintosh, right mouse button on Windows) to get to the Path Type > Options command.
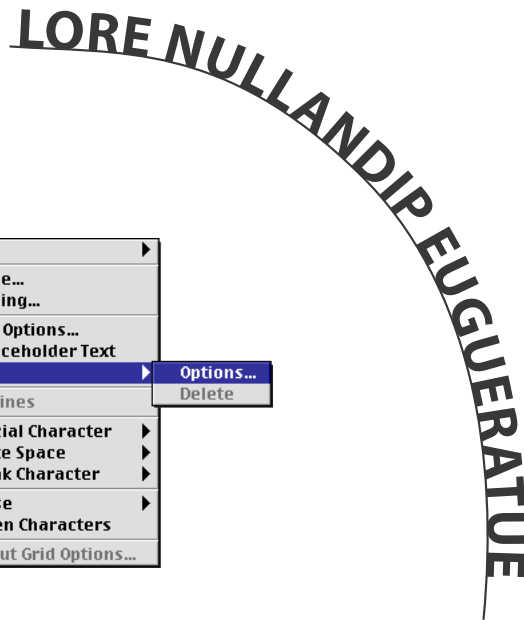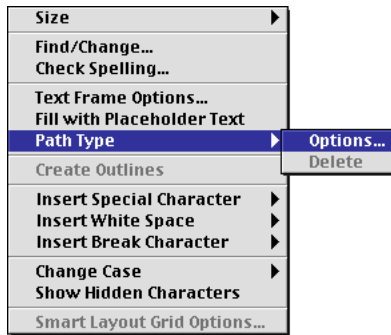
The Path Type Options dialog box contains a menu of effects for your Path Type. The default, pictured above, is Rainbow. The other effects are pictured in the examples below.
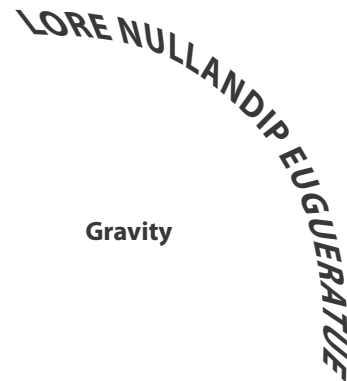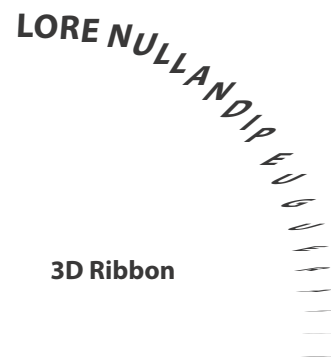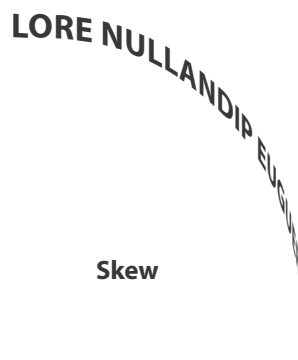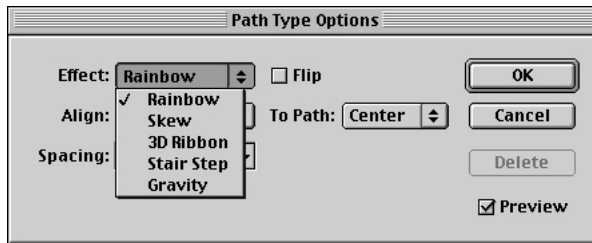
Flipping Path Type: The Path Type Options dialog box has a check box that enables you to flip the type you've set on a path.

There is another way to do this, however. The center handle in the Path Type text frame can also be used to flip your type. Just click on the handle and drag it up or down to flip the handle.

**You can also pull the center handle to flip**
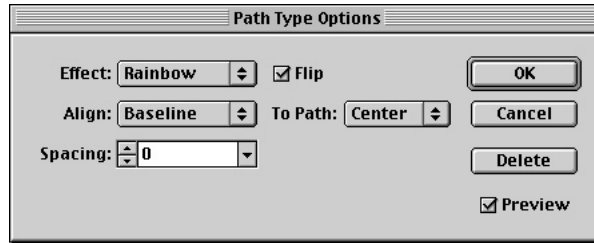
The example to the right, I use the center positioning handle in the Path Type frame to flip it on the path. Then I use that same center handle to drag the Path Type. If I want the text to sit outside the circle rather than inside the circle, I've got a couple different ways I can achieve that.
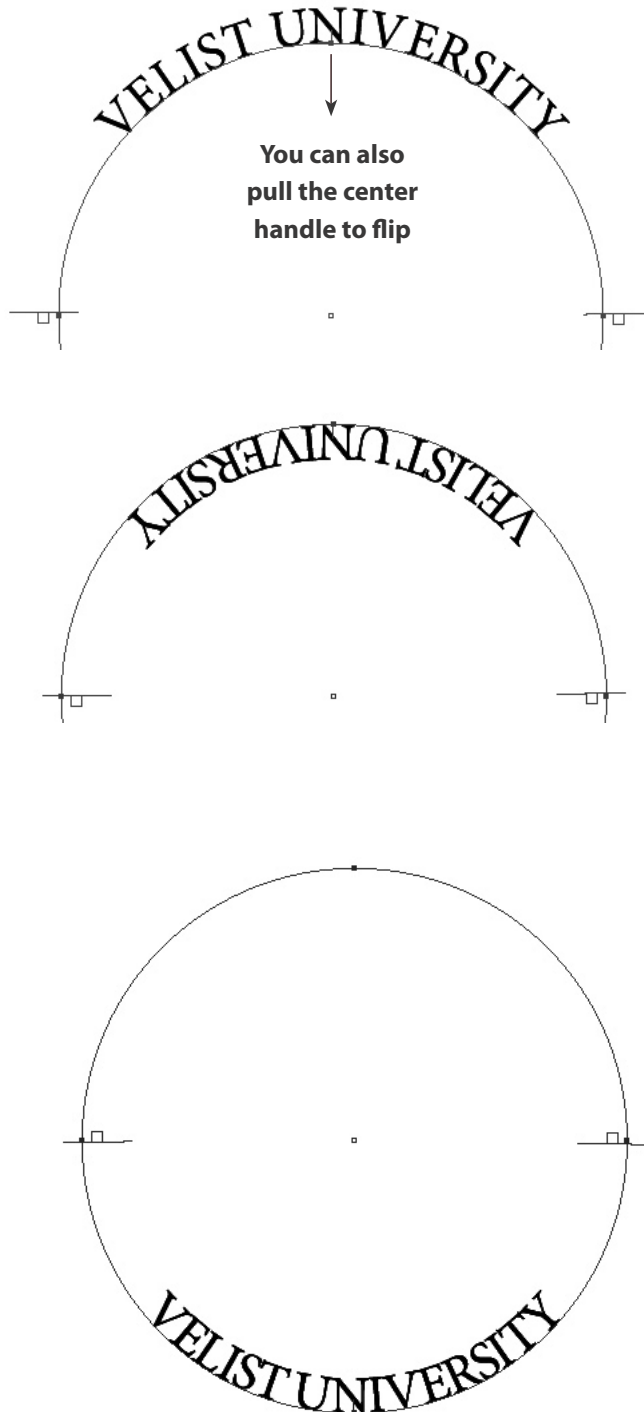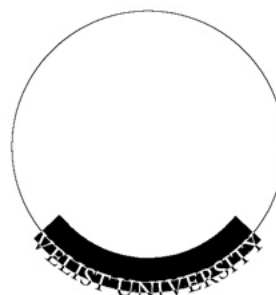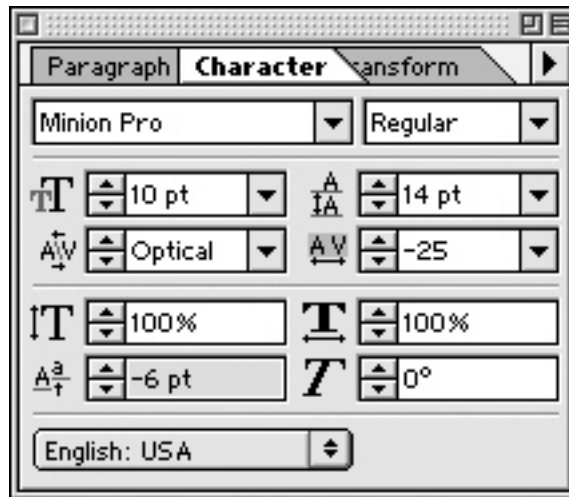
Path Type alignment: The Align and To Path commands enable you to set the relationship between the type and the path. You can align the ascender, descender, center, or baseline of the run of type to the top, bottom, or center of the path.

At this point you can also use InDesign's baseline shift setting in the Character palette to further tweak the position of the text relative to the path.
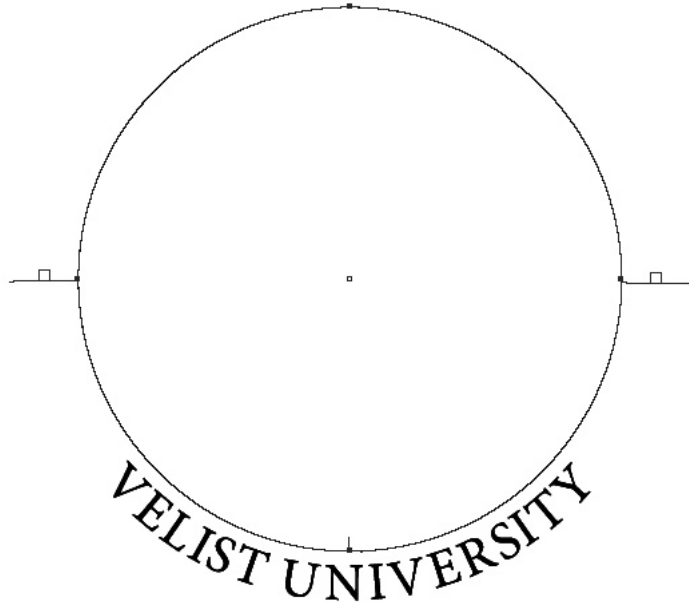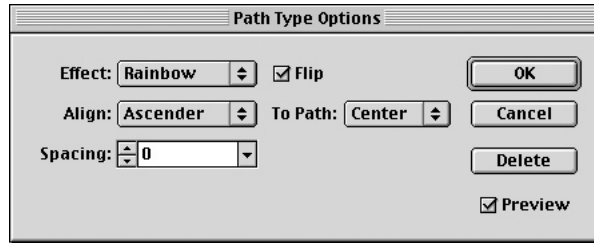
Baseline shift: You can apply character and paragraph level formatting to Path Type in InDesign. So, in addition to the Align options in the Path Type Options dialog box, I can also select a range of type and use the Baseline shift feature in the Character palette to make the type rest exactly where you want it to relative to the path.

Reversed Type: The Align and To Path commands also enable you to set reversed type on a path easily.
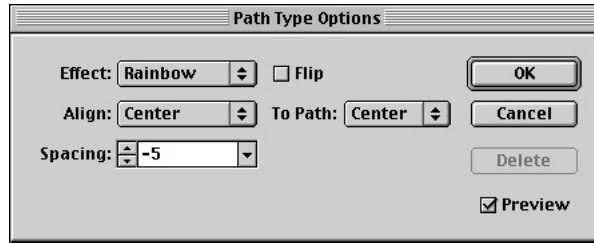
**Setting tabs:** One of InDesign's best features when it comes to setting type is the way it draws a vertical hairline in a paragraph to show you exactly where a tab or indent is going to be positioned. What a lot of users don't know is that this hairline indicator will draw around a path so that you can use it, as in this example, to set a center tab in the center of each side of a rectangle for an ad.

hairline indicator
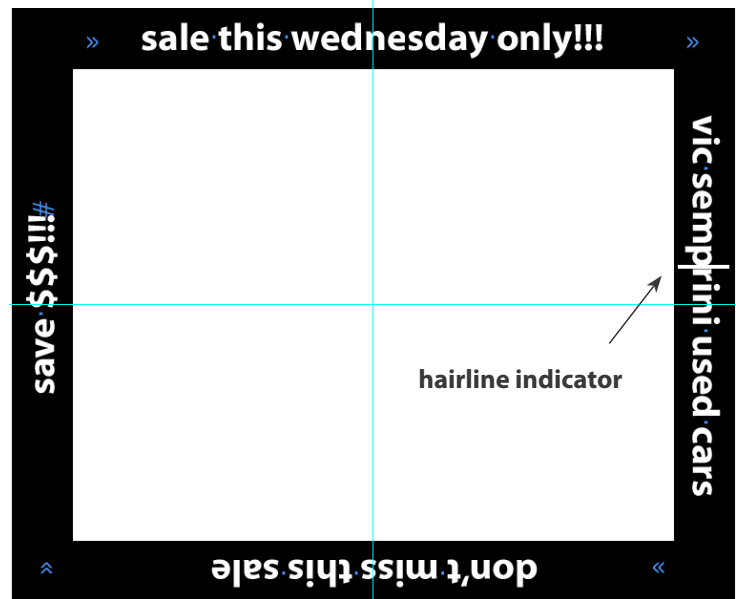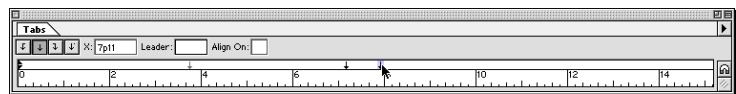
Flowing Path type: InDesign's Path Type feature enables you to flow text from one path to another, in and out of frames and paths, and around frames already full of text. Here are some examples.

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Path graphics: Another way you can push the envelope with InDesign's Path Type feature is to use it with inline graphics. Yes, you can copy and paste objects into the Path Type text frame. Those objects can graphic frames, other text frames, or even groups of text and/or graphic frames.

Once you've dropped those objects inline, they can still be edited and transformed. In this case I've rotated and skewed one of the inline text frames.
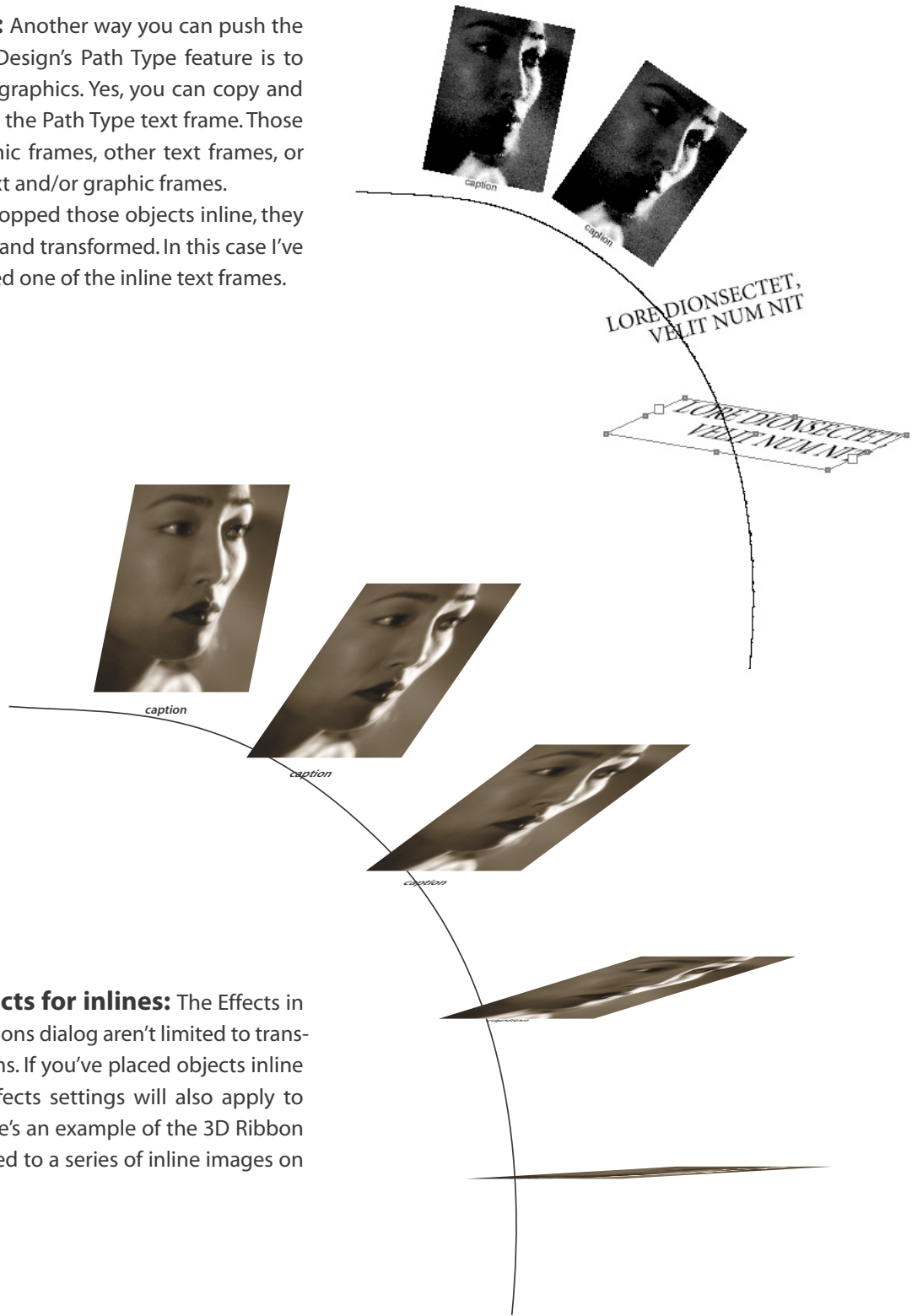
Path Type Effects for inlines: The Effects in the Path Type Options dialog aren't limited to transforming letterforms. If you've placed objects inline on a path, the Effects settings will also apply to those objects. Here's an example of the 3D Ribbon effect being applied to a series of inline images on a path.

The bottom line is that InDesign's Path Type feature is very powerful and flexible and gives you a host of creative opportunities to explore. Have fun!