LESSON 6: ALIGNING OBJECTS

Find out how to align and arrange objects to keep them tidy and neatly-arranged!

CENTRING OBJECTS

Let’s say you’re trying to draw a template for a CD design. The diameter of a CD is approximately 11.8 cm, and the center hole is approximately 3.8 cm. You need to draw two circles – an 11.8 cm circle, and a smaller 3.8 cm circle – in order to create a template for a disc design.

You don’t want the hole in your template to be off-center though. How can you be sure it’s perfectly aligned and centered, vertically and horizontally? Well, Inkscape has an alignment tool that can help!

Draw two circles, one larger and one bigger. Open up the Inkscape ‘Align and Distribute’ dialog by selecting the Object > Align and Distribute menu item or by hitting Shift + Ctrl + A. The dialog will dock to the right of your screen.

Select the two circles, then click the 'Center Vertically' button highlighted in the screenshot to the right. Next, keeping the two circles still selected, click on the 'Center Horizontally' button. The two circles should now be perfectly centered within each other.
Well, now your two circles are centered with each other, but they are not centered within the canvas on your screen! What's going on? Well, take a look at the drop down box marked 'Relative to:' in the 'Align and Distribute' dialog. By default it will say, 'Relative to: Selection' which means any alignment you make will only apply within the area the objects you've selected take up. If you click on the 'Relative to:' drop down box, you'll find that you can align objects relative to other areas, such as 'Relative to: Page' which will allow you to center your CD template in the middle of your canvas!

**ALIGNING OBJECTS ALONG ONE SIDE & DISTRIBUTING THEM EVENLY**

Now let's say you're trying to create a simple city scene. You've drawn a few city buildings, but you'd like to align them along their bottoms. Simply select them all, then click the 'Align bottom edges' button in the 'Align and Distribute' dialog, and they will be perfectly aligned along their bottom edges!

Similarly, you can also align objects along their left, right, and top edges.
Look at the spaces between the buildings in the example pictures above. See how the spaces between the buildings are uneven? What if you'd like to have an even amount of space between each pair of buildings – let's say 20 pixels? The 'Align and Distribute' tool will let us do this too!

In the 'Remove Overlaps' section of the 'Align and Distribute' dialog, enter in '20' in the 'H' field ('H' is for horizontal, 'V' is for vertical.) We want 20 pixels of space between each building horizontally. It doesn't matter what value you have in the 'V' field right now. Later on, though, if you'd like to space out objects aligned vertically you can enter a value in there too.

Select your buildings and press the icon to the right of the 'Remove overlaps' dialog (it has blue rectangles on it.) You'll notice your buildings are now evenly spaced out, 20 pixels apart!

**RANDOMIZING OBJECT POSITIONS**

There's a lot more to explore in the 'Align and Distribute' dialog – we're going to go over one more tip and let you explore the rest on your own.

If we continue to work on our cityscape, one thing that stands out as an area for improvement is the position of the 'lights' on the buildings. They look very regular and not at all realistic. We can randomize them using the randomize tool in the 'Align and Distribute' dialog.

Simply select the building lights of one of the buildings, and click the randomize button. You can click it as many times as you like until you're happy with the resulting position of the lights. You can also use the 'Remove overlaps' tool to adjust the spacing of the lights after randomization. Repeat this process for each of the buildings, selecting the lights and hitting the randomize button, until you've got a more random set of city lights!