Black on Black:

A designer's perspective on how to achieve the 'version' of black you're looking for

Front Range Vital Signs

How many times have you spent hours on a project only to find that it is ruined because your black color comes out looking more like gray? Or worse yet; two objects that look 'black' on screen have two different shades when printed. Here are a few tips to help keep your black consistent as you work.

If your project is destined for printing on paper then what you may have heard is true; create your project in a CMYK (Cyan, Magenta, Yellow and Black) color space. This will ensure that your colors will come out as close as possible on the printer to what you see on the screen, when calibrated properly, although black can still be an exception to this.

Fig. 1

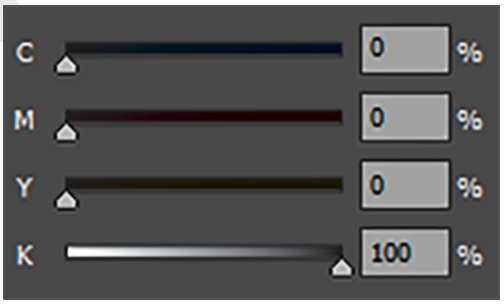
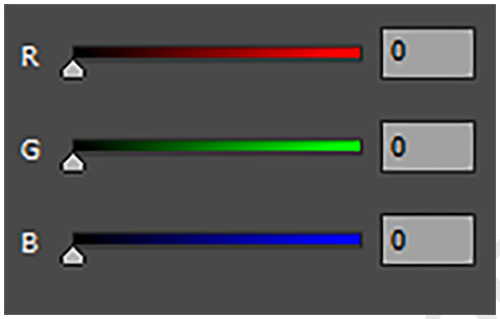


Fig. 2

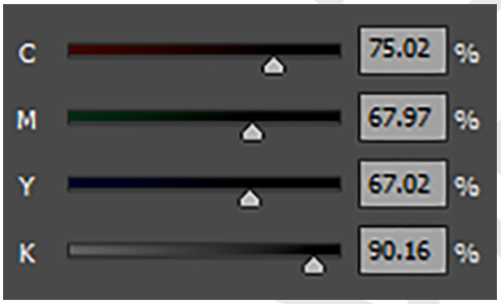
The reason for this discrepancy is black is its own ink color. Using 100% K (black ink) in theory should give you a nice rich black, but more times than not it will give you a faded or dark gray look. (Fig. 1) To remedy this problem you need to have all colors (Cyan, Magenta, Yellow and Black) at 100% (Fig.2), this ensures that the printer will utilize all the colors to give you that deep black you so desire.

Fig. 3



If you are provided with a file in a RGB (Red, Green and Blue) color space, black is used differently but will closely resemble what you see on screen and in print. RGB black gives you a better saturation than 100% K alone due to how printers interpret a 0 in the sliders. (Fig. 3) The conversion from a digital file in RGB sent to a CMYK printer tells the machine to use all four colors as it prints. (Fig. 4)

Fig. 4



Understanding the subtle differences in the 'color' of black will help your projects stay consistent. Knowing how printers interpret the mixing of colors will keep your prints matching your expectations from what you see on your monitor. Remember to create in CMYK when you will be printing and keep you blacks the same shade by using either 100% K or 100% saturation.