Getting Started on
**Adobe Express**

**Gera Robredo** (he/him)
"HEH-rah  roh-BREH-doh"
Senior Graphic Designer
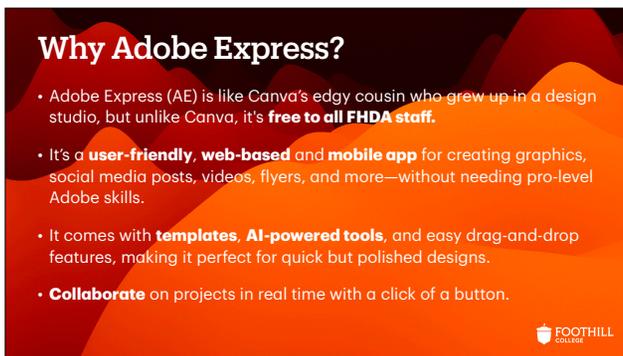Marketing & Communications Department

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Welcome to this Getting Started Guide for Adobe Express (AE), a versatile tool for creative design and graphics. Who is it for? If you're looking to create materials for a class, a one-time event, or social media, AE is a powerful and user-friendly resource to bring your ideas to life. You do not need to be a design expert since AE offers plenty of templates to help you get started. Like all software, there is a learning curve, and because AE is an evolving platform, updates and new features are introduced regularly. This can sometimes be frustrating, but it is also a valuable opportunity for professional growth.



**Why Adobe Express?**

• Adobe Express (AE) is like Canva's edgy cousin who grew up in a design studio, but unlike Canva, it's **free to all FHDA staff.**

• It's a **user-friendly**, **web-based** and **mobile app** for creating graphics, social media posts, videos, flyers, and more—without needing pro-level Adobe skills.

• It comes with **templates**, **AI-powered tools**, and easy drag-and-drop features, making it perfect for quick but polished designs.

• **Collaborate** on projects in real time with a click of a button.

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• Adobe Express (AE) rivals platforms like Canva, offering seamless integration with Adobe's ecosystem, built-in AI tools, robust photo and minimal video editing (so far), and some animation features. It's a top priority for Adobe and continues to improve rapidly.

• Adobe Express is a web-based app, so a reliable internet connection is required. Free mobile and tablet apps are also available for on-the-go access.

• Our district holds a global Adobe Creative Cloud license for all staff, which includes free access to Adobe Express. Adobe recommends using AE in Google Chrome for optimal performance.
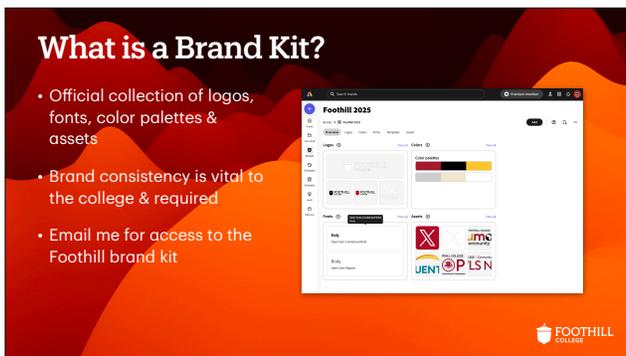
Find it here: https://new.express.adobe.com
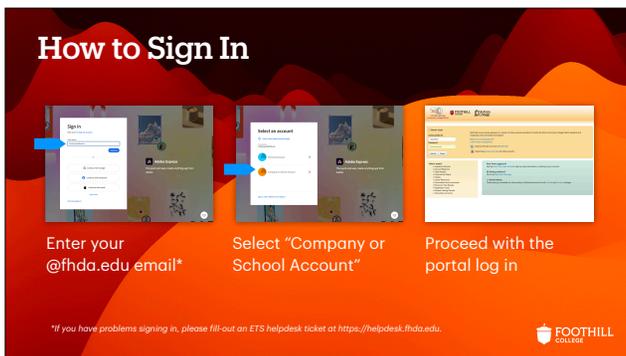


- According to the ETS site: "The District supplies all full-time employees with a Creative Cloud account." If you can't log in, fill out a Helpdesk ticket at https://helpdesk.fhda.edu and have your email added.
- With access to the full Creative Cloud suite (which includes Photoshop, Illustrator, Premiere, and more) you also get access to Adobe Express, AND access to Adobe Stock Photos and Adobe Fonts – FOR FREE.
- AE tutorials are available on Adobe.com and much more common now on YouTube. So far, I have not found a dedicated AE class.
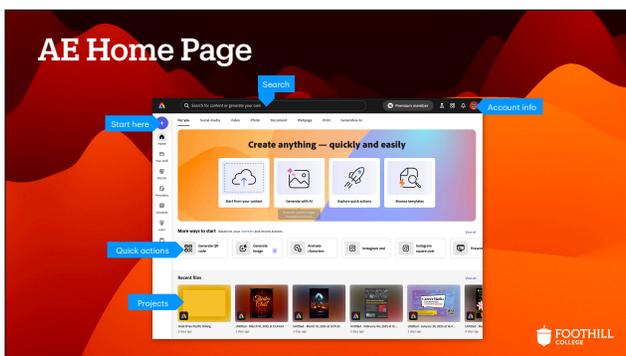


- This is the AE home page and there are various ways to start a project: blue + start button on upper left, search bar, recent files, or quick actions (which includes a link to QR code generator).
- Account info is where to find how many Generative AI credits you have left (currently 1000 per month).
- If you get lost in AE, click the colorful "A" logo on the upper left to get back to this start/home page.

**AE Work Space**

- Once you start a project, this is the workspace. Please note the tools along the top, left and right sides. Tool bars are based on contextual menus, a menu that shows up when you interact with a specific item.
- The "Brands" button on the left is where you will find our logo, colors, & fonts.
- The "Share" blue button on the upper right is where you can invite collaborators to join the project.
- Ignore the "print" button which is associated with Zazzle for ordering. To print your designs, click the download arrow and save the file first, then print.



**What is a Brand Kit?**

- Official collection of logos, fonts, color palettes & assets
- Brand consistency is vital to the college & required
- Email me for access to the Foothill brand kit

- Everyone's favorite topic: branding! While creative expression is important, materials for the college need to remain consistent, recognizable to students, and reflective of the pride and value of our institution. Think of it as creativity with a compass.
- To access our brand kit, please email me and I will add it to your account.

## Using the Brand Kit

- Access from any project
- *Magic button* will instantly apply - multiple clicks give you different options
- You are not limited to these fonts or colors but they must be prioritized
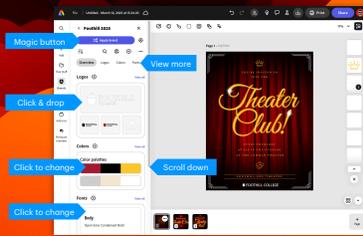


- The kit contains logos, colors, and wordmarks. Don't see yours? Let me know and I will drop it in.
- When creating materials put yourself in the students role. When they see consistency in branding, they associate it with the college and trust it more readily on a deeper psychological level. We live in the age of misinformation and trust is hard to come by.
- Contact me with any questions about applying branding, do's and don'ts, and to review files. Just click that "Share" button.

## Social Media Images

- Resize using "Duplicate & Resize" button or lose original layout
- Not automatic but you won't have to start from scratch
- Use the recommended sizes
- Connect to social media for posting directly from AE
- Use minimal text for social media graphics & tag graphics
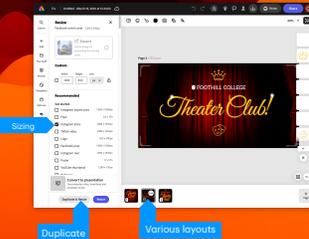


- Create the largest project first (like a flyer or poster), then "Duplicate & Resize" to create additional supporting materials like social media posts, banners for the website, etc.
- Don't try to cram everything from the poster or flyer into a tiny social media post. Select key points (title of event and date) and some of the art.
- You are required to add alt-tags to images on social media and ensure that documents shared by email are accessible. State laws require us to meet accessibility standards, including content posted on social media.

## Share

- Allows others access to your file to collaborate, edit, or provide comments
- Collaborators must have an account to edit
- "View only" link available for those who don't have accounts
- Version history lets you restore a previous draft if unwanted changes occur
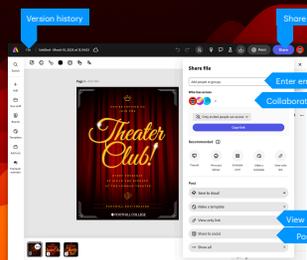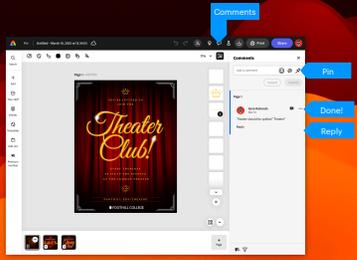


- You can invite others who have signed up for Adobe Express to collaborate on projects in real time.
- Changes are saved instantly in real time so no need to save your file. I recommend downloading occasional PDFs to keep track of your progress.
- The Version History option under the 'File' menu lets you roll back edits made by collaborators during a session. A session is defined as the time between opening and closing a file. While working in an active session, you can use the undo and redo buttons to fix mistakes—for

example, if your cat walks across your keyboard and deletes something, just hit undo. However, if your cat deletes content and then closes the session, you may need to rely on Version History to restore your work.



## Comments

- Provide feedback or discussion
- Pin comment to area on layout
- Check box to show collaborators it's "done"
- Be kind & constructive with feedback: what is successful, what goals are not fully met
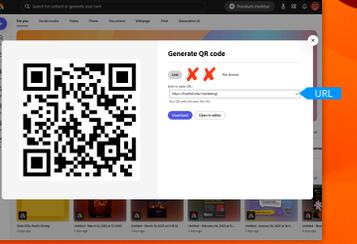- Comments should not be personal, i.e. "I don't like…"

- You can request comments to your design rather than invite a colleague as an active collaborator.
- Many people struggle with giving feedback because they focus on the 'art' rather than the *content* or message. Often, I hear what someone personally likes or dislikes instead of whether the information is accurate or free of typos. Feedback should never be personal. The real question is whether the graphic communicates the specific details clearly. When discussing feedback, guide the conversation back to the content.

## QR Codes

- Adobe says they do not harvest info from users
- Copy & paste the full URL with the "https://"
- Use basic B&W square format for compatibility with older phones
- Show URLs next to QR codes to be equitable
- Link back to a page on our site

- Many 'free' QR code generators embed hidden code that collects data from anyone who scans them, including location, phone details, age, and other unsecured information. Pretty nefarious, right?
- To be equitable, always display the link used in the QR Code next to the QR code: some people don't know how to use or trust QR codes, have older phones that can't scan them, or don't have phones at all.
- Always link back to a page on our Foothill site first, then add a link your form, event, Smartsheet form on that page. How safe would you feel clicking on a QR code that leads you to some random site that asks you

to fill in personal info?
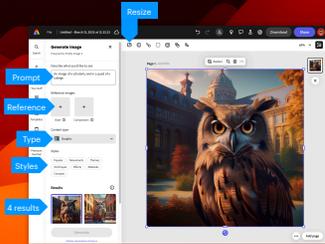


- Users receive 1,000 Generative AI credits each month, which reset at the start of every new cycle. Each time you hit 'Submit,' one credit is used, and it may take several attempts to get your image just right. You can check your remaining credits under 'Account' on the home page.
- Experiment and research how to build effective prompts. AI can only generate what you ask for—it cannot read your mind. For example, if you request a 'college owl,' it will create its own interpretation of a college owl, including the background it thinks fits best.
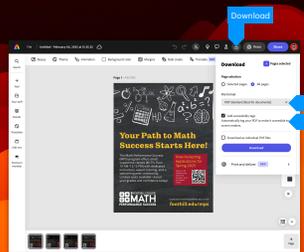


- Accessibility, including meeting ADA standards, is everyone's responsibility. Any material created for our website, social media, or email must be checked to ensure it is accessible.
- AE has built-in tools to make accessible PDFs so always choose this option if distributing something you create digitally.
- There are no official college resources to help us with accessibility standards but we are liable nonetheless.

I am available in person, on the phone, Zoom, or through the "Share" button on AE to offer assistance.

**When in doubt, don't stress out, just give a shout.**

Gera Robredo
robredogera@fhda.edu
650.949.7395

Download this presentation:

On AE click: **Share**

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Bonus

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Graphic design is a complete and ever-growing field, and no short session can cover it all. Think of today's overview as a springboard, and use these best practices and tips as tools to spark your creativity and keep learning.

**How to Design:**
A 10-Minute Master Class

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**Graphic Design Best Practices**

- **Design is communication**, not art. The work is never personal.
- **Start with a purpose.** Every design must solve a problem or convey a clear message.
- **Seek feedback** to refine your perspective & embrace collaboration.
- **Research** what's been done before—refine, repurpose, don't reinvent the wheel.
- **Consistent branding** builds recognition, trust, and perceived value.
- **Average attention span** is 8–12 seconds—just 1.7 seconds on social media. Be concise, use bullet points & avoid overwhelming the reader.

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- This is the advice that I give to Design Center students on a daily basis.
- The most important point is that design is a communication tool and not an art project. Many people get lost in trying to be original, cool, eye-catching, jazzy, or different and lose the message. Then can take it personally if someone doesn't their design. There should be separation between the work and
- Don't try to be a designer. Be a communicator first. What is the ONE most important message and why?

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**How to Create a Flyer**

- Start with a **template**, then refine.
- Use a **structured hierarchy** that answers: Who, What, When, Where, Why (it matters), and How
- **Use less words** & eliminate useless words
- **Use ChatGPT** for clarity and accuracy (note that in general A.I. is only about 85% accurate so you still have to fact-check... for now)
- Include a **clear call to action**, incentives, and a **Foothill.edu** URL—no third-party links (Eventbrite, Google, etc.).

What / Who / When / Where / URL / Colors / Logo

Theater Club!

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- Start with the template and modify it to suite your needs. Type almost anything into the search bar for a specific theme or idea.
- Hierarchy in graphic design is the way you organize and style elements —like text, images, and shapes—so that the viewer knows what to look at first, second, and so on. It guides the eye through the design in the right order.
- However many words you have, cut the number in half! Less words is better.
- Always have a call to action: Download, Join, Get, Call, Start, Explore, Discover, Watch, Visit, Learn, Register, and Sign Up…

**Content is Key**

• **Less is more**: Can you read it out loud in one breath?

• Answer the questions "**why should I care**" and "**what's in it for me**"

• Have **one striking focal point** in your design – NO COLLAGES!!

• **Limit elements in design -** just like jewelry how much is too much?

• **Learn by looking** – research, clip, and search for like examples

• **Find tutorials** (YouTube or cccco.edu) to learn more about graphic design principles, or hey, take a class and get PGA!

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• The California Community College's website (cccco.edu) gives all staff free access to the Vision Resource Center with short online tutorials that teach "Design for Non-Designers" and more.
• Search "learn graphic design for beginners" on YouTube for a plethora of comprehensive videos.
• Look at online and print ads, billboards, magazines, etc for inspiration and to see how other designers work around messaging and calls to action.



**Checklist**

**CONTENT:**

☐ Clear and concise message

☐ Strong hierarchy of information

☐ Effective call to action

☐ Contact details included

☐ Grammar and spelling checked

**DESIGN:**

☐ Consistent with brand identity

☐ High legibility & strong contrast

☐ Balanced use of white space

☐ Functional URL and QR code

☐ Accessibility verified

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Here is a general checklist for your design of flyers or posters. I recommend that you always refer to this before finalizing a design.