

How do I know if my image is the right resolution?

A quick reference. Print it, keep it by the desk, scribble on it.

Resolution is about how many pixels an image has. The more pixels, the sharper it looks — especially in print. If the resolution is too low it starts to look *pixelated*, meaning it doesn't have the pixels for the size required.

Resolution applies to **raster** images: anything made up of pixels. That's every file type except a vector file created in Adobe Illustrator (.eps, .ai). A vector can be scaled infinitely inside Illustrator, so it can be sized up or down before exporting low- or high-res files such as PNG.

See the companion sheet, Common file types from the Adobe Suite, for more on raster versus vector.

1. How to check an image's resolution

- Right-click the image → **Properties** (Windows) or **Get Info** (Mac).
- Look under Details. You'll see dimensions (e.g. 3000 × 2000 pixels), size (e.g. 1.2 MB), and sometimes resolution (72, 150 or 300 PPI).
- **PPI** means pixels per inch — the density of the pixels. 72 PPI is the industry standard for digital; 300 PPI is what print usually needs, particularly high-end print like magazine advertising.

2. Judging an image for print by its file size

- **Under 500 KB** — too small for print. Web and social only.
- **1–2 MB** — borderline. Small print only: a business card, a flyer image.
- **2–5 MB** — medium quality. Fine for brochures or small posters.
- **5 MB+** — high resolution, safe for most print jobs.
- **20 MB+** — very high res, usually straight off a professional camera. Great for large posters.

3. Rules of thumb

- **Web and social** — 72–150 PPI. A small file size is fine, under 1 MB.
- **Print** — aim for 300 PPI and at least 2 MB.
- **Billboards and large format** — you can get away with 150 PPI, because people view from a distance.
- **Vector files** (AI, SVG, PDF) — for logos and graphics. These supersede resolution entirely because they scale infinitely, but they only hold block colour or gradients, and can only be scaled or edited in Adobe, not Canva.

Two rules for resizing

Rule 1: you can downsize a high-res image. Taking a large, high-resolution image and making it smaller is fine — the pixel count simply reduces and the image stays sharp. A photo at 4000 × 3000 px downsizes to a website banner or Instagram post without any issue.

Rule 2: you cannot upsize a low-res image. Enlarging a small image forces the software to invent pixels, and the result is blurry, fuzzy and unprofessional. A photo that's only 500 × 400 px will look bad stretched onto a poster.

Downsizing works because you're removing pixels you don't need. Upsizing doesn't, because you can't create clean detail out of information that was never there.

One caveat: AI upscaling

Rule 2 has softened. Photoshop's Generative Upscale, the Firefly upscaler and tools like Topaz Gigapixel can now enlarge an image two to four times over with genuinely usable results.

Read carefully what they're doing, though: they don't *recover* detail that was never captured, they **invent** plausible detail. That's fine for a background, a texture, or a photo nobody will scrutinise. It's risky anywhere accuracy matters — a product shot, someone's face, small text, a logo. And for a logo, don't upscale at all. Go and get the vector.

Your notes
