STROKE STYLES REMIND ME of the old *Sesame Street* song “One of These Things Is Not Like the Others” because they’re the least like any other style in InDesign. In a way, stroke styles are the “hidden” InDesign style. They can only be created through the Stroke Styles dialog, access to which is buried within the panel menu of the Stroke panel. The interface for creating stroke styles is somewhat unintuitive as well. Stroke styles have as much in common with presets as they do with most other InDesign styles, but they’re not presets, and they do hold up well when viewed in the context of what styles are. In particular:

- Once defined, they can be saved and reused at a later time.
- When created in an open document, they belong to that document, but when created with no documents open, they are available to all new documents.
- They can be loaded into any documents and shared with other users.
It’s in this last way that stroke styles begin to break from the conventions of styles and behave more like presets. Styles can be loaded from any InDesign document, whereas presets must be saved to and loaded from a separate file format (.dcst for Document Presets and .prst for Print Presets, for example). Stroke styles are saved from and loaded to other InDesign documents the same way that presets are.

While InDesign ships with a number of different stroke types—including wavy, white diamonds, and slanted hash (FIGURE 12.1)—only three kinds of strokes can be defined as stroke styles: striped, dotted, and dashed.

With all these limitations and behavioral quirks, you might wonder why you should bother with stroke styles. Several striped, dotted, and dashed strokes are already available by default to all InDesign documents, so you might think Adobe has all the bases covered for you, right? Well, these styles may not exactly suit either your taste or your needs. For instance, you can’t create a single paragraph rule with a rounded end cap without a custom stroke style, and there are no perfectly square dashed strokes. To get precisely the striped, dotted, or dashed stroke you want, you need to create a custom stroke style. Once created, those styles can be modified, shared, or added to your defaults for all new documents.

### Creating New Stroke Styles

To create a stroke style, open the Stroke panel (Window > Stroke or F10) and choose Stroke Styles from the panel menu. The Stroke Styles dialog appears (FIGURE 12.2). From here, styles can be loaded, saved (to be shared with other users), modified, or deleted. To create a new stroke style, click the New button, which opens the New Stroke Style dialog (FIGURE 12.3).
New stroke styles are named New Stroke Style by default. If you add several stroke styles in this dialog without uniquely naming them, they’ll automatically be named New Stroke Style copy, New Stroke Style copy 2, and so on.

From the Type menu, choose Stripe, Dotted, or Dash. The dialog options will change with each stroke type selected. Dash has the most options of the three stroke types. It also happens to be the default choice, so let’s start with creating a dashed stroke style.

**DASH STROKE STYLES**

With Dash selected as the stroke style type, the dialog presents options for the start of each dash, its length, the length of the overall pattern of the stroke, the cap on the stroke, and how the corners are handled when the stroke is applied to a shape instead of a single line.

**Pattern Length ruler.** All stroke styles are created with a pattern of a certain length. Before you start customizing your stroke, the dash is set up as a simple 50/50 pattern spanning two picas, where one pica (1p0) is the dash and one pica is the gap. That pattern repeats across the length of the line or shape to which it’s applied. On a line that’s 20 picas long, a 2-pica pattern would repeat ten times. If you change the pattern length to one half pica (0p6) and the dash and gap to one quarter pica (0p3) each, that new pattern would repeat 40 times in that same length line (**FIGURE 12.4**).
To add a dash to a pattern, click in the pattern ruler or the white space below the ruler and drag the cursor left or right to extend the width of the dash. A new dash is added with triangular start and stop marks in the ruler. No more than five dashes can be included in a pattern regardless of the pattern’s length.

**Start.** The first dash in any dashed stroke must start at zero, so the Start field will be grayed for a simple, single-dash/single-gap pattern. Only the length of the dash can be changed. Both the Length and Start fields will be active for any additional dashes you add to the stroke style’s pattern.

**Length.** You can adjust the length of a stroke by either dragging the stroke across the pattern ruler to the desired position, which will be reflected in the Length field, or by typing a specific length in the Length field. The latter is best for greater accuracy.

**Pattern Length.** In this field you can set your pattern to span any length from a minimum of a quarter of a point (0p0.25) to 833 picas, 3 points (833p3).

**Corners.** When you apply dashed strokes to shapes, InDesign can make adjustments to the pattern to minimize awkward corners. Depending on the stroke, this adjustment will meet with varying levels of success. Despite its name, this option does not merely control how corners are adjusted; it also affects single lines (FIGURES 12.5 through 12.9).

The default setting is Adjust dashes and gaps, and it’s sort of the dash equivalent of justified text, which averages out word and letter spacing to fit text to the width of a column. Dashed strokes do something similar with this default setting. The width of the dash and gap are adjusted slightly but consistently to fully span the line drawn or create better corner joins (FIGURE 12.6).

When None is selected, the dash and gap lengths are honored regardless of the length of the line to which they’re applied, allowing lines to end on a partial dash or on a gap (FIGURE 12.7).
The Adjust dashes option expands the dashes as necessary but leaves the gap size precisely as it was set in the pattern ruler (FIGURE 12.8). The Adjust gaps option does the exact opposite (FIGURE 12.9).

Because of all the different variables in the mix for a stroke style—pattern length, number of dashes and gaps, length of dashes and gaps, and corner adjustment options—and the length of the line or nature and size of the shapes to which they’re applied, it’s nearly impossible to predict what will happen without some trial and error. The Preview at the bottom of the New Stroke Style dialog is helpful for previewing the stroke’s appearance on single lines in any weight from one quarter point to 20 points. Unfortunately, there’s no way to preview any of these settings on a shape when creating a new stroke style, and the amount of unpredictability in a custom stroke’s corner setting is greatest with stroke styles applied to shapes (FIGURES 12.10 through 12.13).

FIGURE 12.8 Only dash sizes change when Adjust dashes is chosen.

FIGURE 12.9 Only gap sizes change when Adjust gaps is chosen.

FIGURE 12.10 A custom stroke style applied to a circle at 6 points with Adjust dashes and gaps chosen (left) and with None chosen (right). Note the overlapping dashes at the bottom of the circle.

FIGURE 12.11 A custom dash stroke style applied to a circle at 20 points with the Corner option set to (from left to right) None, Adjust dashes and gaps, Adjust dashes, and Adjust gaps.
FIGURE 12.12 A custom stroke style applied to a square at 6 points with Adjust dashes and gaps chosen (left) and with None chosen (right). The beveled appearance of the corners on the left square may be undesirable, but at least they’re consistent, unlike the square on the right.

FIGURE 12.13 A custom stroke style applied to a square at 20 points with the Corner option set to (from left to right) None, Adjust dashes and gaps, Adjust dashes, and Adjust gaps.

**Cap.** The New Stroke Style dialog has the same three cap options found in the Stroke panel—Butt Cap, Round Cap, and Projecting Cap. Using those Stroke panel options on a dashed stroke will flatten, round off, or project out the dashes as well as the ends of the stroke. However, applying a cap to a custom stroke style here is very useful in other areas of the application where a stroke type can be selected but its cap type cannot—specifically, in the Paragraph Rules, Underline, and Strikethrough Options dialogs. Without a custom stroke style, rounded caps or rounded dashes on paragraph rules, underlines, and strikethroughs would be impossible.
If You Build Only One Stroke Style, Make It This One

To take advantage of rounded cap rules when setting paragraph rules, underlines, and strikethroughs, you’ll need to create a stroke style first.

1. From the Stroke panel menu, choose Stroke Styles, and then click the New button.
2. In the New Stroke Style dialog, choose Dash for the rule type.
3. Set the Length of the dash to be the same as the Pattern Length.
4. For the cap, click the middle icon (Round Cap).
5. Give the rule a name like Rounded Cap and click OK.

At the bottom of the Stroke Type menu—wherever it appears in InDesign—you’ll have a new option for your rounded cap stroke (FIGURE 12.14).

As mentioned in Chapter 1, “The Fundamentals: Paragraph and Character Styles,” there are some very creative things you can do when you combine rules above and below on single-line paragraphs. Throw underlines into the mix and you increase those options. In FIGURE 12.15, a rule below, a rule above, and an underline are all applied to a single line of type. The rule above (in green) is the backmost object in InDesign’s stacking order and is the thickest of the three that uses this rounded cap stroke style. The rule below (in yellow) draws over that, and an underline (in orange) draws on top of both paragraph rules and is the thinnest of the three. En spaces have been added at the beginning and end of the text to make the underline extend past the words. The three rules have been strategically sized and offset to create this effect, but the only way to get rounded caps is to create a stroke style so that a rounded cap rule is available in the Paragraph Rules and Underline Options dialogs.

FIGURE 12.14 User-defined stroke styles appear at the bottom of the Stroke Type menu everywhere it appears in InDesign.

FIGURE 12.15 A rounded cap stroke style makes this fully editable text effect possible.
**DOTTED STROKE STYLES**

Dotted strokes are quite similar to dashed strokes but have fewer options (Figure 12.16). Like dashed stroke styles, a dotted pattern can contain no more than five segments regardless of the pattern length.

A single click in the pattern ruler adds a full dot positioned on its horizontal center. All dots are perfect circles, not ovals or ellipses. Because of this restriction to perfectly circular dots, the dotted stroke Corner options do not include Adjust dots or Adjust dots and gaps options. The only corner options for dotted strokes are None and Adjust gaps.

You can entirely define a dotted stroke with just a single dot in the ruler. Increasing the pattern length puts more space between the dots in the stroke, and decreasing the length pulls the dots closer together.

Note that custom dotted strokes are entirely unlike the two default dotted strokes that ship with InDesign. Those two strokes—Dotted and Japanese Dots—behave quite differently. When using those prebuilt dotted strokes, additional dots are “dropped out” as the line weight to which they’re applied increases. Custom dotted stroke styles, on the other hand, make a different adjustment. As the line weight increases, the dots fill in the gaps, eventually creating a rule that looks something like a caterpillar (Figure 12.17). As a result, any dotted stroke styles you create will only be effective for a narrow range of line weights.
How to Create Better, Faster Text and Layouts

**STRIPE STROKE STYLES**

Stripe strokes are, in a way, dashed strokes turned on their side. The pattern ruler orientation switches to vertical when creating a Stripe stroke (FIGURE 12.18). Stripe strokes have even fewer options than dotted strokes. However, they have three significant differences from dashed and dotted strokes:

- There is no practical limit on the number of segments you can add to a stripe stroke style.
- All stripe strokes must have a minimum of two stripes.
- Stripe widths are based on percentages of the full height of the stroke, not on points and picas.

Clicking in the vertical pattern ruler adds a new stripe that can be extended to a specific percentage by either dragging the triangle in the pattern ruler or entering a numeric value in the Width field.

FIGURE 12.17 A 20-point stroke using InDesign’s “flexible” default Dotted stroke (top) and Japanese Dots (middle) compared with a custom dotted stroke (bottom) in which space between dots does not adjust with line weight increases.

FIGURE 12.18 Options for a striped stroke style.
For the most part, stripe stroke styles are variations on alternating thick and thin strokes in any combination you can think of. InDesign ships with seven default stripe strokes, and even though they appear in the Stroke Styles dialog (unlike the default dashed, dotted, and other stroke styles), they cannot be edited or deleted.

**Saving Stroke Styles**

After you've defined a stroke style, you can either click OK to exit the New Stroke Style dialog, and then click OK again to exit the Stroke Styles dialog or, if you want to continue defining more new stroke styles, click Add instead. Your defined style is added to the document, and you can start defining your new style without leaving the New Stroke Style dialog. New stroke styles, while immediately available in the document, are not truly “saved” until the document is saved.

**Modifying and Deleting Stroke Styles**

Editing a user-created stroke style is as simple as opening the Stroke Styles dialog from the Stroke panel menu, choosing the style you want to change, and clicking the Edit button. This opens the Edit Stroke Style dialog, which contains an option unavailable when creating a new style: a Preview check box (FIGURE 12.19). Selecting the Preview check box is the only way to preview the appearance of stroke style settings applied to live objects on the page. Any object that uses the style being edited will reflect the changes made in this dialog as they are made without having to click OK and close the dialog.

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**TIP**

To create a new stroke style using the settings and attributes of an existing stroke style as a starting point, open the Stroke Styles dialog and select the existing style before clicking the New button. The New Stroke Style dialog opens with the settings of the selected stroke style and names the stroke style [Your Stroke Style] copy.

**FIGURE 12.19** The Preview check box for stroke styles is only available in the Edit Stroke Style dialog.
To delete a stroke style, select the style name in the Stroke Styles dialog and click Delete. Whether the stroke is used in the document or not, a warning dialog pops up asking what other stroke style you want to replace the outgoing style with (FIGURE 12.20). None of the default stroke styles—even the striped, dashed, and dotted variety—can be deleted.

**Sharing Stroke Styles**

Copying any shape or stroke to which a custom stroke style is applied and pasting it into another document is one method for transferring styles from one file into another, but it’s not the most efficient route. Unlike text, table, or object styles, stroke styles can’t be loaded directly from one InDesign document to another. They must first be exported to an external .lnst file (FIGURE 12.21).

To export one or more stroke styles to this format, select the desired style name(s) in the Stroke Styles dialog and click the Save button. Choose any location for the .lnst file and name it.

To load exported styles into another document, open the destination document, go to the Stroke Styles dialog, click the Load button, select the .lnst file, and click OK. All stroke styles saved to that preset file are added to the document.

**Stroke Style Easter Eggs**

No discussion of stroke styles would be complete without mentioning the six playful stroke styles available as Easter eggs—undocumented, hidden features added by the Adobe engineers (FIGURE 12.22). Two are striped strokes, the others are dashed strokes. Revealing them is as simple as creating new styles with specific names.
If you create a new striped stroke style and name it Rainbow (FIGURE 12.23), it won’t matter what other options you assign to that stroke style because they will be completely disregarded. Instead, a seven-color ROYGBIV striped rainbow stroke is created. The other striped stroke style Easter egg is Rasta. Naming a new stripe stroke style Rasta creates a red, yellow, and green striped stroke (the colors of the Ethiopian flag).

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The other four Easter egg stroke styles are dashed strokes. Creating them also involves simply giving them the proper case-sensitive names: Feet, Happy, Lights, and Woof. None of the setting options matter. These stroke styles are made up of repeating patterns of human footprints, smiley faces, multicolored Christmas lights, and dog paw prints, respectively.

Once created, these styles will be available from the Stroke Type menu anywhere it appears in the application (FIGURE 12.24). None of the styles can be further customized in any way, but they will print without any difficulty.

How useful are these styles? Well, that’s up to you to decide, but at least you know you have the option of using them.

FIGURE 12.24 Easter egg stroke styles listed at the bottom of the Stroke Type menu along with any other custom stroke styles.