Pen Tool Guide

The Convert Anchor Point Tool
This is the real power tool. With this tool, corner points can be converted to smooth points and vice-versa (click on an anchor point to make a corner pt.; click-and-drag to create a smooth pt.). Smooth points can be converted to corner-curve points by "bending" one of the handles with this tool. Once the handles are disconnected this way, they can be manipulated independently with the Direct Selection Tool. This tool can be accessed from the pen tool by holding down the Option key.

Pen Tool Indicators
- Appears when you are about to start a new path.
- Appears when you place your cursor over the anchor point of an open path. Click on the point to make the path active. Click and drag to draw out a handle.
- Appears when you place the cursor over the last (active) point created. Allows you to delete the leading handle or drag out a new one.
- Appears when you place the cursor over the first anchor point drawn. Clicking will close the path.
- Appears when you place the cursor over an existing open end point while drawing a path. Clicking will join two open paths together.

Pen Tool Tips
- Drag handles approximately one-third the length of the curve being created. Handles that are too long can throw off the next handle and make the curve look awful. One third the distance between anchor points is a good rule of thumb.
- Don’t try to control a curve with only one handle. It’s best to have two short handles on either side of a curve than one long one. Two handles give you much more control.
- Handles should always be tangent to the curves they control. Or to put it another way, the handles should go in the direction of the curve, and should always be on the outside of the curve. Handles pull the curves towards themselves like magnets.
- Drag out handles in the direction you want the curve to travel. So, if you want a curve that starts by heading south-west, drag the handle south-west. If it ends heading north-west, drag the next handle north-west, etc.
- Place anchor points at the beginning and end of each curve. Anchor points should be used as transitional points, where a curve changes direction or size dramatically. Don’t place points randomly along the curve.
- Use as few anchor points as possible. The fewer the points, the smoother and more refined your art will look (of course, sometimes ragged lines are called for). Learn to use handles to create curves.