How to vectorize your calligraphy using Adobe Illustrator & Photoshop

- Scan calligraphy at 600 dpi or greater. Bring scan into Photoshop (PS).

Because I have a bunch of other stuff on the paper I am scanning (other versions of the calligraphed item, I use the lasso tool to select the word I want and then drag it into a new document in PS).

When I create a new document in PS, I leave the background transparent but I don't think it matters if it is a white background.

I then make adjustments to this using the levels and brightness/contrast (I try to get the black areas really black, and when you are dealing with fine hairlines, I use the black eyedropper tool in the level adjustment to beef it up).

Once I am happy with how my scan looks in PS in I save this file. You can save it as a .tif or .psd, it doesn't matter.

I'm not sure if it matters at this point but when I save this file in PS, I make sure I am saving it at the ppi I want (300 ppi for print; 72 ppi for web).

- Open this PS file in Adobe Illustrator. It's okay to select the choice "Flatten Layers to a Single Image"

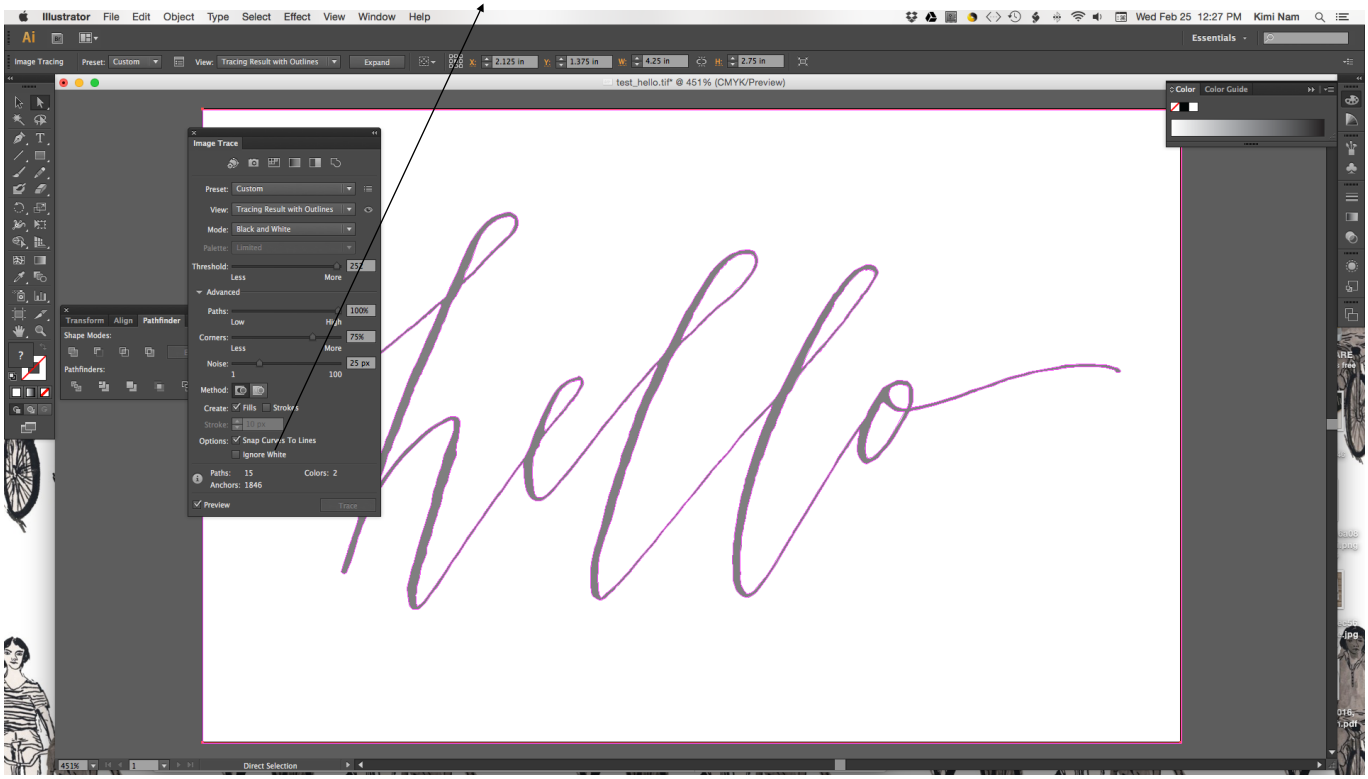
Now it's time for image trace.

With your document open with the calligraphy you want vectorized, select all (cmd + a for Mac). You will see a red box around your page.

- Using your menu go to: Object > Image Trace > Make

In your window panel make sure Image Trace is showing. Play with these sliders – I like to see the vectors being created so I select, "Tracing Results with Outlines." I play with Thresholds and Paths to make sure the fine hairlines are being traced.

In the advanced menu make sure "Ignore White" is checked under "Options:" (opps – of course it's not checked in the example below).



It is important that "Ignore White" is checked to ensure that your background will be transparent in PS. Double check that this box is still selected when you Expand your item or your background will not be transparent in PS.

- Once you are happy with the trace, **"Expand" it** (the "Expand" button is on the top of the page).

Fix any vectors that are funky/bumpy, using the direct selection tool (because there are so many anchor points, I don't like to move them, but if you are an illustrator wiz and like playing with vectors, you can make all the adjustments you want. I usually just delete anchor points and that seems to smooth areas out).

You must make any changes to any vectors now because you will not be able to do this once your document is in PS.

Using your direct selection tool, select the loopy areas of the letter (you are going to punch these out using the pathfinder tool, make sure your pathfinder menu is out).

- Use the flyout menu in the Pathfinder menu, select "Make Compound Shape."

Make sure you are just selecting that shape area (the squares will be white, and when they become a compound shape, the squares will turn red).

Once you are done with all the loopy areas of your word, save your file in Illustrator as an Illustrator file (.ai file).

- Now go to PS and open your Illustrator file. You should have a file with just your calligraphy on a transparent background (a background with a checkerboard). Your .ai file will become a .tif file in PS.

If your background is not transparent when you open your illustrator file, you probably forgot to make sure “Ignore White” was selected in Image Trace (before you “Expand” your image trace, make sure this is selected).

- Now to fill the hello with color. Go to the Layer menu.

Select Layer > Layer Style > Color Overlay. Click on the color box and select the color you would like the hello to be using the color slider.

- Using the shape tool (rectangle, circle, etc) create a shape that fills the area of the hello.

Or you can create a new document to the size that you want your calligraphy to fit, and drag this calligraphy into your new document, use cmd +t to adjust the size or angle of the calligraphed item.

- Move your solid shape layer under the calligraphy layer.

Color your shape by clicking on the shape in the layers panel, now you can see what the background looks like against the calligraphy.

Yay! You are done!