How to Create an Abstract Topographical Map Icon

Transform a simple geometric shape and wavy lines into an abstract topographical **map icon** in minutes!

Tutorial Details: How to Create an Abstract Topographical Map Icon

- **Program**: Adobe Illustrator CS6 – CC
- **Difficulty**: Intermediate
- **Topics Covered**: Design Theory, Shape Building, Rendering
- **Estimated Completion Time**: 20 Minutes

Final Image: Abstract Topographical Map Icon

Step 1

Let’s start with a simple geometric shape. I’ve drawn a hexagon with the **Polygon Tool (P)**. Round out the shape by pulling its **Live Corners** toward the center. **Rotate (R)** the shape to its side if you with to match mine below.

Step 2

Using the drawing tool of choice, draw some wavy stroked paths across your geometric shape. I opted to use the **Pencil Tool (N)** with its **Fidelity** set to **Smooth**. Select all of your lines and frame shape and hit **Divide** in the **Pathfinder** panel. Now your geometric shape will be separated into sections.

Step 3

Decide on your color palette. Since this is like a map, you may want to consider different colors found within terrain. I decided to go for grass, sand, and water which translated to greens, oranges, and blues. Each shape will be a **Linear Gradient** shape, so choose light and dark colors for each.

Step 4

Once you've set your shapes to gradients, it's time to make them pop from the rest of the design. Select a shape and in the **Appearance** panel go to **Effects > Stylize > Inner Glow** to add aglow with the following attributes:

- **Mode:** Multiply
- **Color:** Orange (or yellow)
- **Opacity:** 75%
- **Blur:** 5 pt
- **Edge**

Play around with inner and outer glows on these shapes. Add multiple instances to one shape or simply add one. Here's another **Inner Glow** alternative:

- **Mode:** Multiply
- **Color:** Orange (or yellow)
- **Opacity:** 50%
- **Blur:** 2pt
- **Edge**

Step 5

After you've added inner glows to each shape, you may want to add more dimension to the map. I **Copied (Control-C)** and **Pasted (Control-V)** each shape, set their **Blending Modes** to **Overlay** and reduced their transparency in the **Transparency** panel. I then offset each shape so it looks like each shape has a

second plane and it slightly 3D.

Step 6

You may want to simply draw gradient shapes to add a cast shadow onto each map shape. I used black and white **Linear Gradients** whose B**lending Modes** were set to **Overlay**, **Soft Light**, or **Color Burn** depending on how it looked. Play around with these **Blending Modes** to created the rendered icon that looks best to you!

Group (Control-G) these rendering shapes together. Redraw the original hexagon created in **Step 1** of this tutorial. Select the group and the hexagon and create a **Clipping Mask (Control-7)**.

Step 7

Finally, select your icon group and add a **Drop Shadow** (**Effect > Stylize > Drop Shadow**) with the following attributes:

- **Mode:** Multiply
- **Opacity:** 3%
- **X Offset:** -5 pt
- **Y Offset:** 6 pt
- **Blur:** 1 pt
- **Color:** Black

I created three instances of this **Drop Shadow** within the **Appearance** panel. Doing so created a multi-level drop shadow that mimics the look and feel of the icon design itself.

Conclusion

Great job, you’re done! Share your completed icon in the comment section below. Consider creating different kinds of terrain for your icons: deserts, oceans, forests, mountains, and more!

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Mary works under the brand Acrylicana® and has illustrated and designed for companies like Disney, Jakks Pacific, Jada Toys, Envato, and more. Check out Acrylicana.com for artwork, tutorials, and more. Follow Acrylicana on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter!

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