Make a Greetings Card

Steve Wells

Introduction

While there are many pre-made greetings cards available on the market, ultimately they are general purpose and don't really express your ideas. The alternative is to make your own. This is easy enough if you have a printer which can print on plain card. Unfortunately many printers cannot handle even thin card. The alternative is to use A4 paper and fold it into four. Of course, this means that when you print the card, some of the images and lettering will be up-side down. No problem… this is how to do it.

I have described it using Photoshop because that is what I have. The same principles should apply to any image editing software.

Create an A4 sheet

Make the Background

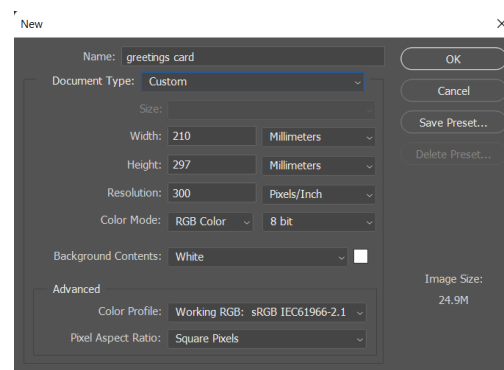In Photoshop create an A4 document. The standard dimensions of an A4 sheet are:

210 mm x 297 mm

In this example I am going to create a card in portrait format. So, make the height 297mm and the width 210mm. When you create the A4 sheet set the resolution to 300 pixels per inch.

If you want to work in metric throughout, use 120 pixels per centimetre… it amounts to the same thing.

Image Size

Next we need to create some fold lines vertically and horizontally. This will divide the sheet into four quarters. These will become the front and back of the card and the right and left inside pages.

Photoshop prefers to work in pixels so, go to the image menu and choose image size. Select pixels for the size. Take a look at the image size in pixels. This should be 2480px wide and 3508px high.
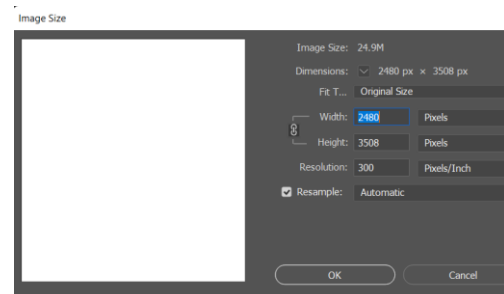

Create a Quarter Sheet
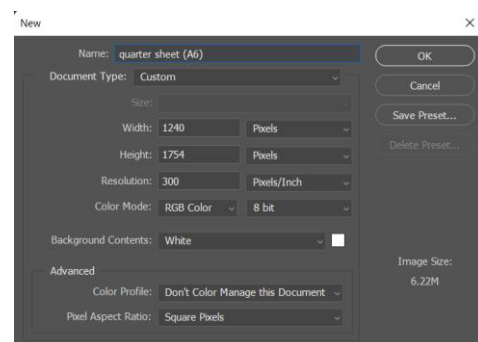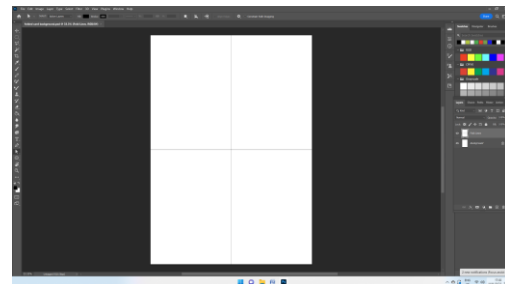
Now, take these figures and create a new document with dimensions exactly half this in each direction (1240px wide and 1754px high) and 300 pixels per inch. This new document will be a quarter of the size of the original.

Now use the stroke command to put a one pixel black line round the new, small, sheet.
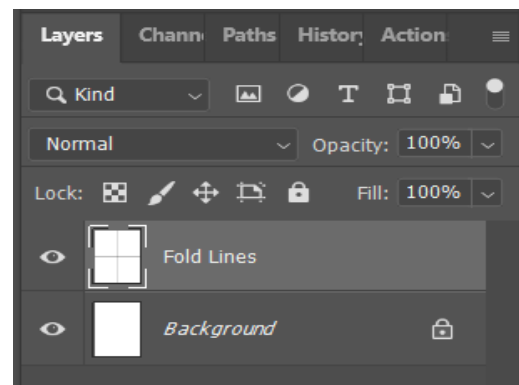

A4 sheet with fold lines

Select the whole of the small sheet and copy it. Go to the large, A4, sheet. Make sure no layers are selected and paste the small sheet four times. Each paste will create a new layer. Use the move command to move one sheet to the top left of the A4 sheet. Then move another to top right; the third to bottom left and the last to bottom right.

Merge the four layers containing the small sheets. Do this by hiding the background so that only the four small sheets are visible. Then go to the layer menu and "merge visible". It is a good idea t this point to rename the merged layers as something like "Fold Lines" to help keep track of the different layers as you build the card.

Layer stack after merging the four small sheets

You now have an A4 sheet with vertical line and horizontal lines dividing the sheet into four equal parts. The four parts of the card will fit into these four parts.

The Card Content

The card content can now be added. Look at the example it the right. The outside of the card is at the bottom with the front on the right. The inside of the card is at the top and is inverted. This is because the A4 sheet will eventually be folded across the middle.

Printer Margins

It is unlikely that your printer, or the printer owned by any friends to whom you might send this card, will print to the edge of the sheet. So, when placing the image for the front of the card you need to allow a margin to the right and bottom. The same margin needs to be at the top and left to make sure that the image can be centred in the bottom right quarter of the A4 sheet. The size of this margin will depend on the particular printer, but 60px is about right. At 300ppi that is about two tenths on an inch or five millimetres.

An example of a card with the content added

The original quarter of the A4 sheet was created at 1240px x 1754px. Since there are margins top and bottom as well as right and left, subtract 120px (twice 60px) from each dimension to give an image size of 1120px x 1634px.

The Image on the Front of the Card
Create an image 1120px x 1634px for the front of the card. Now use the "Move" tool to place the image in the bottom right of the card. You could align it on the fold lines and then nudge it 60px down and 60px to the right. However, it is just as easy to do it by eye.
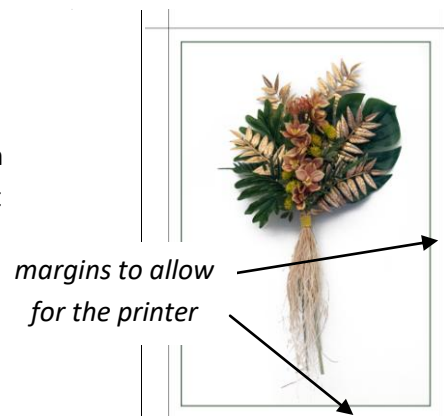
margins to allow
for the printer

Image in Place at Bottom Right

Text on the Front and Back of the Card
On the front of the card you could add text to say "Merry Christmas", "Happy Diwali" or whatever. Take a look at the fonts you have available and choose one which you think appropriate (As a suggestion, "Times Roman", "Calabri" and "Arial" are probably too formal and "Comic Sans" has been overused).

Create the text in a new layer, resize it to whatever you want and move it to a position where it doesn't obscure too much of the image you placed on the front page.

You might like to add a note to the back of the card to say that you took the photo on the front. Maybe you could give the location and date.
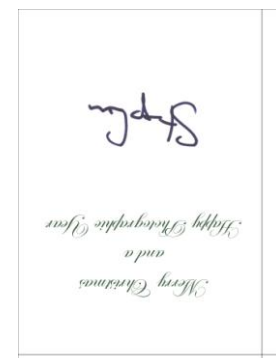
Text on the Front and back Pages

Text Inside the Card
Text inside a greetings card is usually on the right as you open the card. This will be the top left of the A4 sheet before folding.

Add the text in the same way as on the front of the card. However, since this will be turned upside-down by the folding, you need to turn it upside-down first. Do this using the "Move" tool. With the text selected choose the "Move" tool. Handles will appear round the text. Hover over a corner until

Inside Text and Signature

the cursor changes to a two-headed curved arrow. Use this cursor to rotate the text. Hold the Shift key to move in steps in order to get the rotated text level again.

Signature

If you want to include a signature, sign your name on a piece of white paper and scan it (or just photograph it). You may need to clean up your signature. This is easier if you make the signature fairly large using dark black ink.
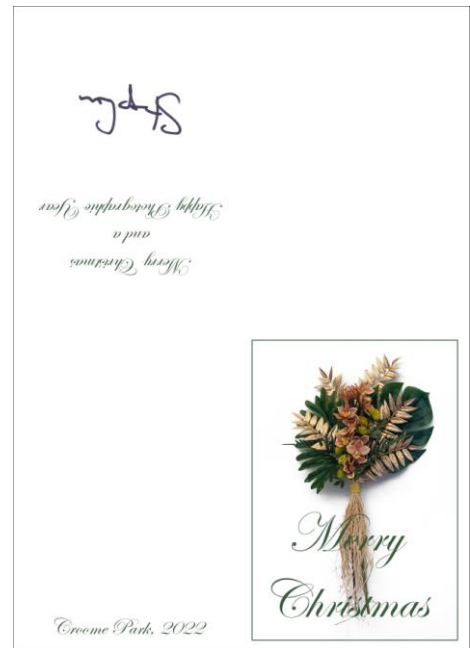
Import the signature file as a new layer. Use the "Move" tool to resize it and to place it where you want it. Don't forget that if you want it on the inside the card you will need to use the "Move" tool again to turn it upside-down.

Save and Print the Card

The Fold Lines which you created first are really only there to help position the text and images. When you actually come to fold the card they are not needed. So, before saving the card image, hide the "Fold Lines" layer. Then merge the visible layers and save as a pdf or jpg. Don't save it as a psd file, many of your intended recipients will not know what to do with one of those!

Finally, before emailing the card to anyone, print it out and fold it to check that everything is in the right place and the right way up.

When you print the card you may get a warning saying that you are printing outside the borders which the printer can use. This is because the card has been made with a full A4 sheet. Just say OK to the warnng.

Final card as Printed with the Fold Lines Hidden