



DRAFTSIGHT: WORKING IN THE INTERFACE

For experienced AutoCAD users moving to DraftSight



This guide covers the working interface: the ribbon and the elements around it, including the title bar, the drawing tabs, the command window, the panels, and the status bar. Much of this will be familiar from the first minute. The aim of this guide is practical. Where a detail has genuinely changed, the guide points it out and tells you what to do. Where nothing has changed, it says so and moves on.

THE START PAGE

DraftSight opens on the Start Page, a full tab that stays available next to your drawings. It is where you start a new drawing, reopen recent work, and reach the sample and favorite files. Most of it explains itself. One option on it does not behave the way its neighbors suggest, and that one is worth knowing before you use it.

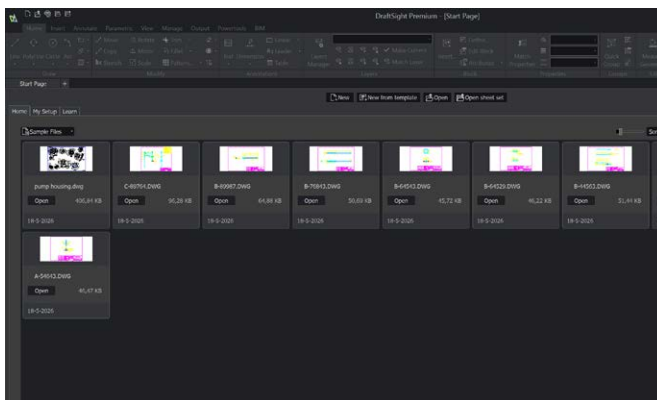


Figure 1. Start Page - the Home tab with the Sample Files tiles

Across the top are four buttons: **New**, **New from template**, **Open**, and **Open sheet set**. Below them, the **Home** tab holds the file area, with **My Setup** and **Learn** beside it.

The file area shows drawings as tiles. Each tile carries a preview, the file name, its size, the date, and an **Open** button. The dropdown at the top left chooses which set you are looking at: **Recent Files**, **Sample Files**, or **Favorite Files**.

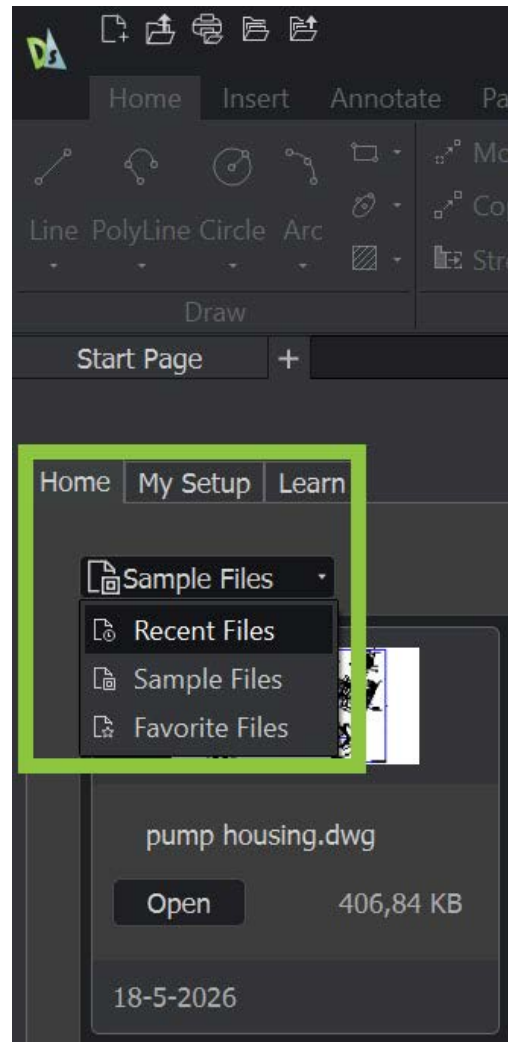


Figure 2. File set selector - Recent Files, Sample Files, and Favorite Files

The controls at the top right adjust the view, with a **slider** for tile size, a **Sort by** order, an ascending or descending toggle, a **Grid** view, and a **Find a file** box to filter by name.

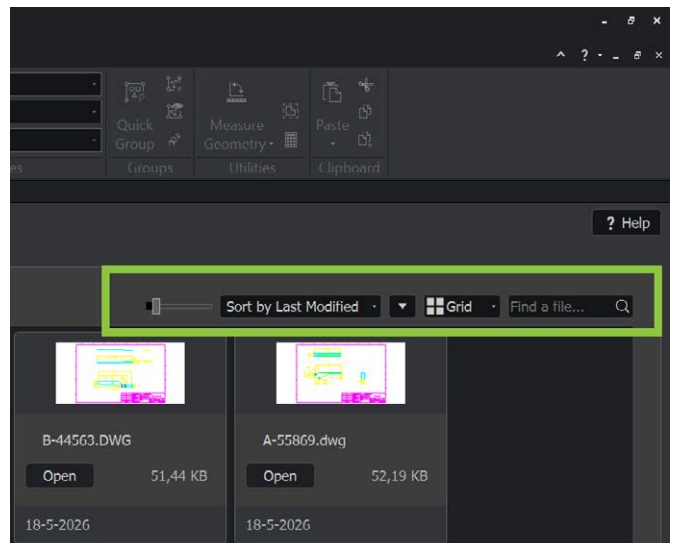


Figure 3. View controls - slider for tile size, sort order, Grid view, and the Find a file box

Sample Files is the set DraftSight shows first. These are the example drawings that come with the program.

Recent Files lists the drawings you opened most recently and puts a **New** and **New from template** tile first, so you can start a drawing without leaving the page.

Favorite Files stays empty, and reads **No favorite files**, until you add something to it.

Right-click a Sample File tile for the file options. The menu shifts a little with each set. Every tile offers **Open**, **Delete**, **Browse Containing Folder**, and either **Add to favorites** or, once a drawing is a favorite, **Remove from favorites**. Recent Files adds **Remove from recent**. **Browse Containing Folder** opens the drawing's folder in Windows, a quick way to reach another file that sits next to it.

One option needs a word of warning. **Delete** does not remove the tile from the list. It moves the actual drawing file to the Windows Recycle Bin. The file is recoverable from there, but this is a change to your disk, not a cleanup of the page.

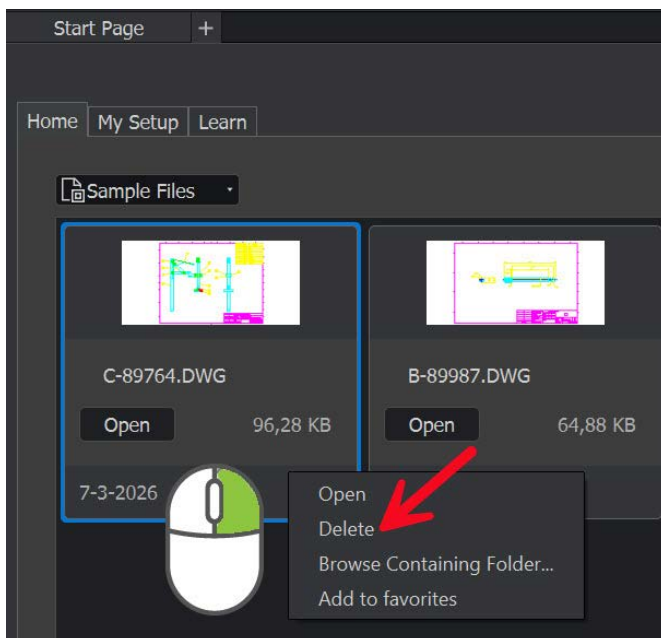


Figure 4. Right-click menu on a tile - Delete moves the drawing file to the Recycle Bin

When you only want to clear an entry, use **Remove from recent** or **Remove from favorites**. Keep **Delete** for when you mean to remove the drawing itself.

STARTING, OPENING, AND SAVING DRAWINGS

Starting a drawing, opening one, and saving your work follow the routine you already use. A few points are worth noting.

Starting a new drawing is the familiar workflow. **Ctrl+N** opens the Specify Template dialog, where you choose a **.dwt** template

as usual. To start without a template, click the arrow next to **Open** and choose **Open with no Template - Imperial** or **Open with no Template - Metric**. Both options are available there.

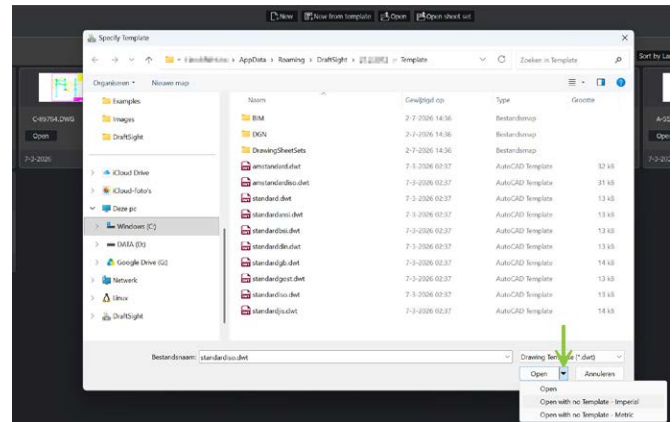


Figure 5. Specify Template - the arrow next to Open holds the no-template options

Opening an existing drawing is equally familiar. **Ctrl+O** brings up the standard Windows file selection dialog. DraftSight opens and saves DWG and DXF files directly, so there is no separate import or export conversion step.

In the Open dialog, the arrow next to Open holds one choice worth knowing: Open Read-Only, which opens a drawing for viewing without allowing changes. If you open a drawing read-only and then try to save it, DraftSight cannot overwrite the read-only file and reports: "Drawing file is write protected." To keep your changes, use **SaveAs** and give the drawing a new name.

Saving uses the commands you already know. **Save** saves the current drawing under its current name, **SaveAs** saves it under a new name, and **SaveAll** saves every open drawing at once. In DraftSight 2026, the default save format is the AutoCAD 2018 drawing format (R2018). A colleague on that release or a newer one opens your files directly. When you exchange drawings with someone on an older release, save to an earlier version from the file type list, or change the default format in **Options**.

THE TITLE BAR

At the top of the window sits the title bar: the Application Menu on the left, the name of the current drawing in the middle, and a row of buttons on the right. The name in the middle tells you where the drawing came from. A drawing opened from disk shows its full path. A drawing started new and saved shows its name alone. An asterisk after the name means the drawing has unsaved changes. The title bar also shows which DraftSight version you are running. That leaves the two ends, and this guide takes them from left to right.

On the Mac the asterisk shows on the drawing tab only, not in the title bar.

THE APPLICATION MENU

At the left end sits the Application Menu. Here you find the main file management commands, the way you are used to.

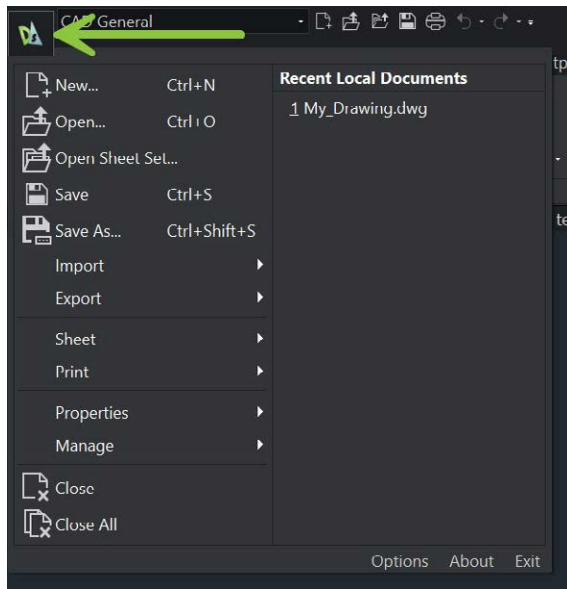


Figure 6. Application Menu - the file commands, with recent documents on the right

ADDING SAVE AS TO THE QUICK ACCESS TOOLBAR

The Quick Access Toolbar at the top of the window holds the everyday buttons, Save and Print among them, but not Save As. The arrow at the end of the toolbar makes it show more or fewer: click it and a checklist of commands unfolds, with a check mark for every button currently on the toolbar. Save As is not on that list.

One item on that checklist does more than add a button. Show Menu Bar, at the bottom of the list, brings back the classic menu bar in its old place below the title bar.

On the Mac this item is missing: the menus already sit in the menu bar at the top of the screen.

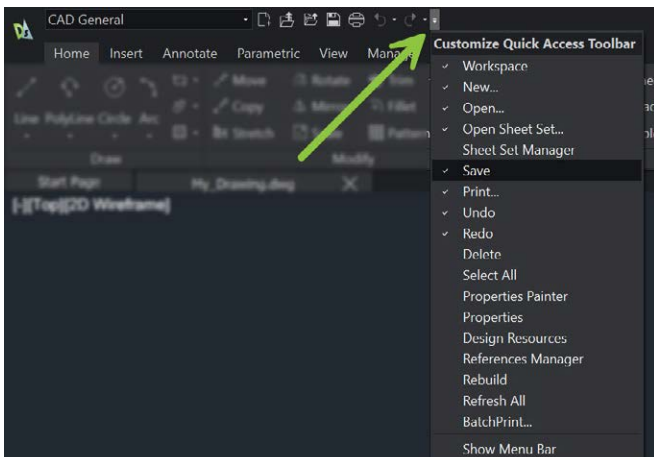


Figure 7. Customize Quick Access Toolbar - the checklist behind the arrow, without Save As

The command itself is never far away. It sits in the Application Menu and runs from **Ctrl+Shift+S**. Adding it to the toolbar is worth doing only if you reach for Save As often and want it one click away. The route runs through the Customize dialog.

1. Type **Customize** at the command line, or right-click the ribbon and choose **Customize Interface** from the list.
2. In the left column, select **Interface**, then open the **Quick Access Toolbar** dropdown and choose **All Quick Access Toolbars**.
3. Open the **Command Explorer** with the small button on the right, if it is not already showing.
4. In the **Find** box, type **save**.
5. Drag **Save As...** from the results into the Quick Access Toolbar list on the left.
6. Click **Apply** to add the button, then **OK** to close. Apply keeps the dialog open, so you can move on to other settings before you close it.

The toolbar layout is stored with the workspace, not with your profile. The workspace holds the layout, and the profile holds settings such as options and colors. Because the Save As button belongs to the layout, it stays with the workspace and is still there the next time you start DraftSight. Set it up again in any other workspace you use.

FILE FORMATS

DWG and DXF are the formats DraftSight works in. It opens, reads, and writes both directly, so your existing drawings need no conversion on the way in and none on the way out.

Importing other formats, such as STEP, SAT, STL, DGN, DWF, and PDF, is available too. The entry points are spread around the interface and each shows a different subset, so the practical route is the command window: type Import and the autocomplete list shows every **import** command (over 20!), including one per file format. Pick the format you need from the list.

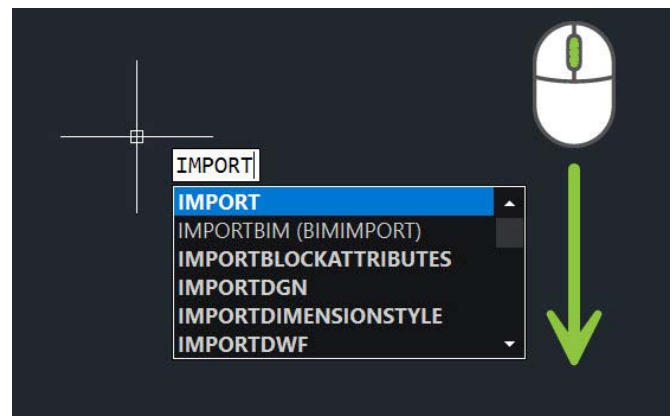


Figure 8. Import autocomplete - one import command per file format

THE RIGHT SIDE OF THE TITLE BAR

The **Menu** button offers the second route to the classic menus: click it and they unfold as a vertical list, from **File** at the top to **Help** at the bottom, without keeping a bar on screen. Prefer the bar itself? That is the **Show Menu Bar** item from the QAT checklist. On the Mac, neither route exists: the checklist has no Show Menu Bar entry and the title bar has no Menu button. It does not need them: on the Mac the menus sit where every Mac application keeps them, in the menu bar at the top of the screen.

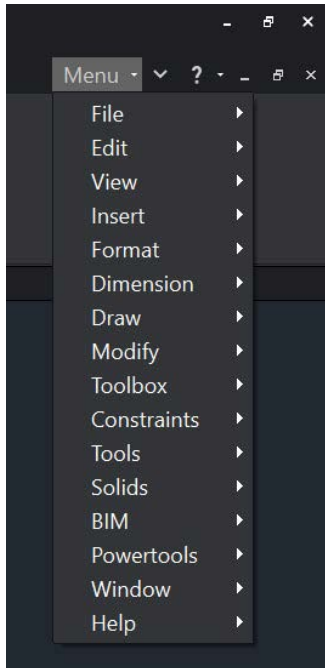


Figure 9. Vertical menu

Between **Menu** and the question mark sits a small arrow: **Minimize the Ribbon (Ctrl+F1)**. One click and the ribbon seems gone. Another click brings it back. Worth knowing before you go looking for a lost ribbon.

The question mark opens the help menu. The buttons next to it minimize and close the window, as in any Windows program.

DRAWING TABS

DraftSight shows a tab for each open drawing at the top of the drawing area, the same convenience AutoCAD offers as file tabs. If you never adopted them there, they are worth a look here: one click on a tab switches you to that drawing.

A right-click on a drawing tab holds more than file switching. The shortcut menu bundles the file commands (**New, Open, Save, Save All, Save As**) with **Close, Close All**, and **Close Other Drawings**, and adds **Open Containing Folder**. With more than one drawing open, **Make First Tab** and **Make Last Tab** join the list.

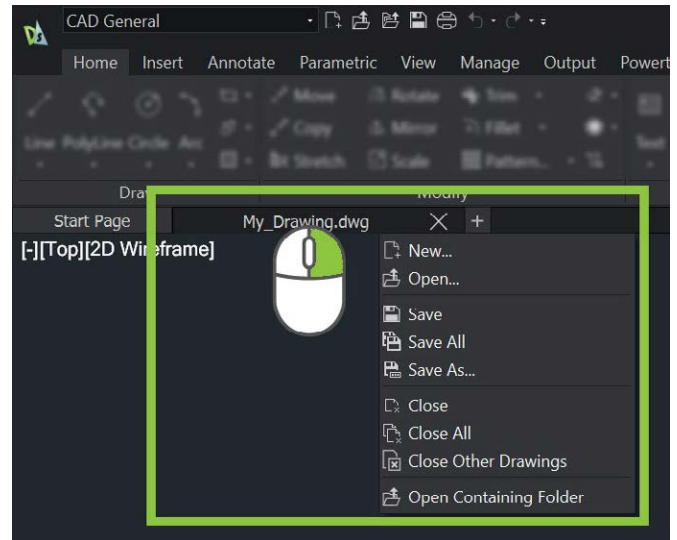


Figure 10. Right-click menu on a drawing tab - file commands, close options, and Open Containing Folder

The tabs also respond to dragging. Drag a tab left or right to change the order or drag it out of the DraftSight window entirely: the drawing becomes a floating window that you can move to a second monitor while the rest of DraftSight stays where it is.

You can also hide the tabs bar completely. Type **HideDrawingTabs** to hide it and **DrawingTabs** to bring it back or use the checkbox at **Options > System Options > Display > Drawings tabs > Show drawing tabs**.

DraftSight has a second row of tabs, so it helps to keep the two apart. The drawing tabs at the top switch between open drawings. The tabs just above the command window, **Model, Sheet1, Sheet2**, switch within the current drawing, between model space and the sheets. A sheet is what AutoCAD calls a layout, the same paper space under a different name, and you will meet the word everywhere DraftSight deals with layouts.

Right-click a sheet tab and the layout menu you know appears under its new names: **New, From Template, Delete, Rename, Move or Copy**, and **Select All Sheets**. Two renames continue the pattern: the Page Setup Manager is called **Print Configuration Manager** here, and Plot is **Print**.

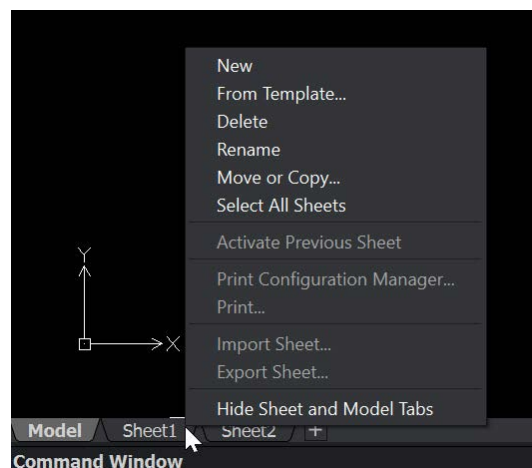


Figure 11. Right-click menu on a sheet tab

THE RIBBON

One habit does need replacing. AutoCAD taught you that a panel hides its less-used tools below the visible part, behind the expander at the bottom edge. DraftSight panels do not expand. What you see is the whole panel, and the depth sits behind the small arrows next to the buttons. So when a tool seems missing, check the flyouts first. If it is not there, type the command name you know. Those two steps resolve nearly every “where did it go” moment on the ribbon.

DraftSight also uses contextual ribbon tabs. Start **Hatch**, for example, and a Hatch Creation tab opens on the ribbon with the pattern controls.

VIEWPORT CONTROLS AND THE VIEW NAVIGATOR

Below the ribbon, the drawing area carries two familiar overlays. At the top left sit the viewport controls, the bracketed labels reading **[Top][2D Wireframe]**. The viewport controls have their own switch: type **VPCONTROL** and set it to 0 to hide them, 1 to bring them back. Unlike the other two, this is a program setting: it applies to every drawing at once.

At the top right floats the View Navigator, which AutoCAD calls the ViewCube. The **View Navigator** button on the **View** tab turns it off and on. One thing to know before you switch it off: this is a per-drawing setting, and the same goes for the coordinate system icon (the CCS icon) at the bottom left. Turning either off affects the current drawing only. For a permanent choice, set it in your template, and every drawing you start from that template follows it.

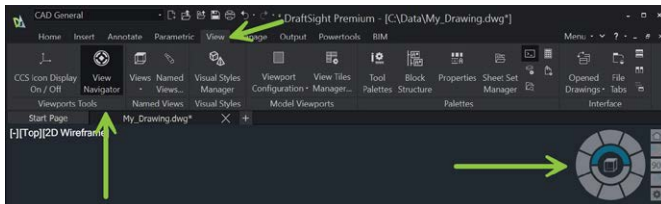


Figure 12. Turn off View Navigator if you don't need it

THE COMMAND WINDOW

Below the drawing area sits the command window, and it needs no introduction. It works as it does in AutoCAD: type a command, read the prompt, choose an option. **Ctrl+9** hides and shows it, the same shortcut you know.

DraftSight adds one refinement. The options in the prompt show as colored text, so they stand out at a glance. The colors are markers, not buttons, and clicking them does nothing. Pick an option by typing its highlighted letter, from the right-click menu, or with the down arrow, which unfolds the options beside the dynamic input at the cursor.

The command window is also where your AutoCAD vocabulary keeps working. Type a command name you know and the autocomplete list answers with the DraftSight name behind it in parentheses. Type **ERASE** and the list offers **ERASE (DELETE)**.

The short aliases carry over too: **E** gives the same result. Where the names really differ, the list is your translator: **MEASURE** resolves to **MARKLENGTHS**, **DIVIDE** to **MARKDIVISIONS**.

Press **Enter** or click your choice in the autocomplete list, and the command runs. System variables follow the same pattern. You learn the new names on the job, one command at a time, without ever being stopped by them.

You do not have to type in the command window itself. Just type in the drawing area and dynamic input picks it up, autocomplete included. That saves a click: the command window needs to be activated before you can type in it, the drawing area listens right away.

THE PROPERTIES PALETTE

The Properties palette works the way you expect, and it opens the way you expect: **Ctrl+1**, or select an entity, right-click, and pick **Properties** from the menu. With nothing selected the palette shows the current drawing settings. Select a line and it shows that line's properties, geometry with deltas and length included. The sections match what you know: **General**, **Geometry**, **View**, **Misc**.

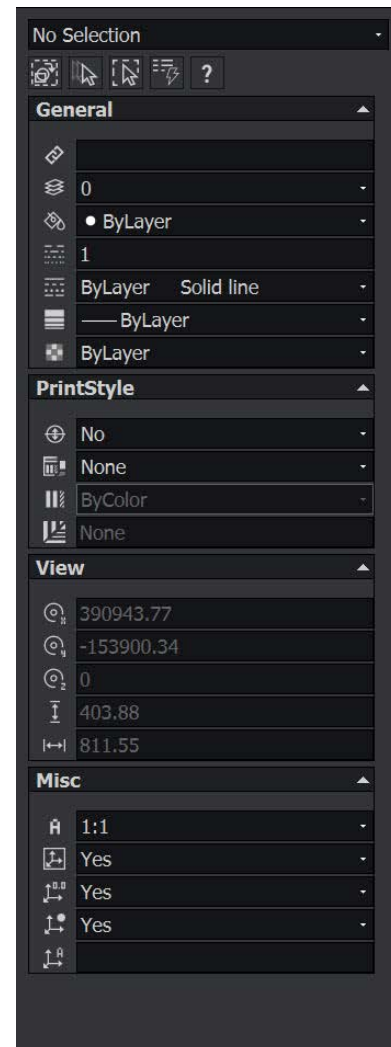


Figure 13. The Properties palette with nothing selected

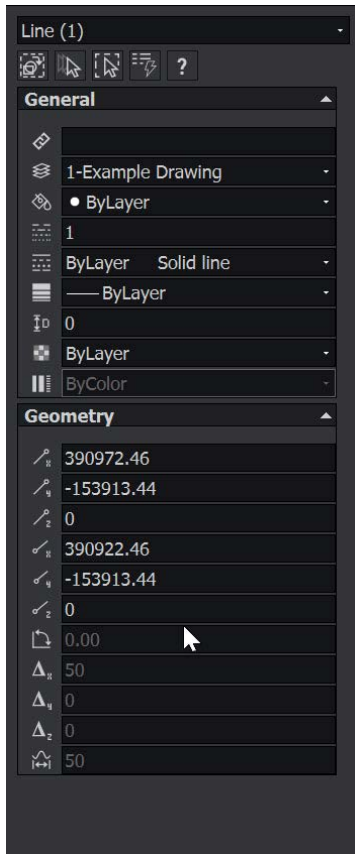


Figure 14. The same palette with a line selected

The first difference you see: DraftSight marks each property with an icon where AutoCAD writes out its name. The icons take a moment to learn. Hover over one and the property name appears after a second. The reward is a markedly narrower palette, which leaves more room for the drawing itself.

One rename to note: what AutoCAD calls Plot style, this palette calls PrintStyle. Where AutoCAD plots, DraftSight prints.

THE STATUS BAR

The status bar runs along the bottom of the window. On the right it shows the pointer coordinates, with the row of drafting aid toggles beside them.

The toggles are old friends. **Snap**, **Grid**, **Ortho** and **Polar** even kept their names. The rest do exactly what you expect, under a different name:

AutoCAD	DraftSight
Object Snap	ESnap
Object Snap Tracking	ETrack
Dynamic Input	QInput
Dynamic UCS	Dynamic CCS
Selection Cycling	Cycling Selection
Annotation Monitor	AMonitor

Two patterns explain most of the list. What AutoCAD calls an object, DraftSight calls an entity, so Object Snap (OSNAP) becomes Entity Snap (ESnap).

And the user coordinate system is a custom coordinate system here, so Dynamic UCS becomes Dynamic CCS. You will meet both renames everywhere, not just on this bar.

The bar starts out showing icons only. During your first weeks, have it spell itself out: set **Options > System Options > Display > Status bar mode** to **Icons & Labels**, and every toggle wears its name.

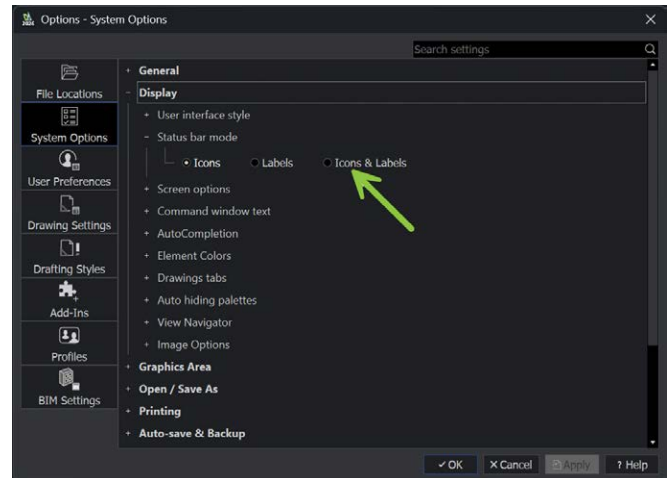


Figure 15. Toggle Icons & Labels on

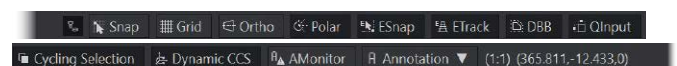


Figure 16. The DraftSight status bar with labels switched on

The shortcuts are unchanged: **Snap** still answers to **F9**, **Grid** to **F7**. One thing is different from what you are used to: there is no Drafting Settings dialog. These settings live in the Options dialog, and the quickest way in is a right-click on the toggle, then **Settings**. Options opens with the right section unfolded, **Snap** under **Pointer Control**, **Grid** under **Display**. A few buttons do without the menu: **Dynamic CCS**, **AMonitor**, the annotation scale, and the coordinates.

Two buttons have no AutoCAD counterpart. **DBB** shows or hides dimension bounding boxes, frames around entities that speed up dimensioning. **TBLayers** belongs to the Toolbox and can give every entity type its own predefined layer, color, and line weight. Both can wait until you need them.

One button is gone: PAPER/MODEL. In a sheet, double-click inside a viewport to work in model space and double-click outside it to return, the same double-click you already use. The status bar answers in its own way: with a viewport active, a **Viewport Lock** toggle appears and the annotation scale shows the viewport scale.

FROM HERE

That completes the tour. Every part of the screen now has a name, and most of those names turned out to be old friends with new labels: entity for object, CCS for UCS, QInput for Dynamic Input, sheet for layout. That pattern is the most useful thing to take away from this guide. Once you expect it, DraftSight rarely surprises you again.

The move also brings gains, and this guide marked them along the way: command options you can read at a glance, a status bar that spells itself out when you ask it to, a narrower Properties palette, and DWG and DXF handled directly, with an import list of more than twenty formats behind them. The status bar hinted at more: TBLayers and DBB, two tools without an AutoCAD counterpart, waiting for the guides ahead.

This guide gave you the overview. The real work, drawing, modifying, dimensioning, comes next, and it assumes what you now have: you know where things live and what they are called here. Time to draw.



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