

HOW TO WEBCOMIC!

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO
MAKING ONLINE COMICS



BY STAR PRICHARD

HOW TO WEBCOMIC!

**The Ultimate Guide to Making Online
Comics**

Written and Illustrated by
Star Prichard



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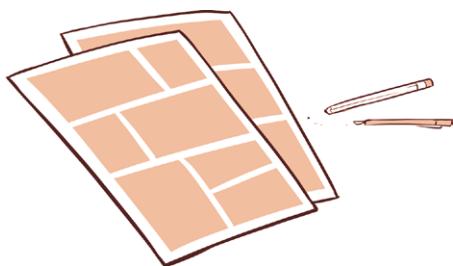
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INTRODUCTION

HELLO! And welcome to ***How to Webcomic***, the ultimate guide to making your very own webcomic!

If you didn't know, webcomics are comics you can read online! (Like... on the web. Get it?)

Webcomics are a popular platform for creators to make and share their own stories and comics without having to go through a publisher.

Webcomics have become an increasingly popular storytelling medium over the last few years, and now there are thousands of webcomics made by people all over the world! And most of them can be read for free!



Quick introduction!

Hiya! My name is **Star**!

I currently write and draw a fantasy webcomic called **Castoff**, but I've been doing webcomics in some form or another since around 2008!



Read at [castoff-comic.com!](http://castoff-comic.com/)

I started running “*How to Make a Webcomic*” panels at anime and comic conventions as a way to help out aspiring comic creators, offering them tips and advice I wish I had known when I was first starting out. But trimming down everything to fit into an hour-long panel was tough, and I had to skip over a lot as a result.



Enter: This book! This thing has all the tips and tricks I’ve picked up over 10+ years of making and posting comics on the internet, and now I’m going to pass it on to you!

We’ll be covering how to get started in comics, writing and drawing your story, and how to share it with the world!

Let’s get into it!

PART 1: ARE WEBCOMICS RIGHT FOR YOU?

If you're reading this book, you're probably thinking about starting a webcomic. Or maybe you already have! Maybe you're still trying to decide if a webcomic is the best format for the story you want to tell. So, why make a webcomic?

- **Practice.** Webcomics are a great way to practice writing, drawing, visual storytelling, and self-promotion! The more you do it, the better you'll get!
- **Discipline.** Nothing builds discipline like having readers who depend on you to update your comic regularly!
- **Portfolio.** If you're an artist, having a large volume of work is great, especially if it lets you see a progression of your skills over time!
- **Personal satisfaction.** You get to make a thing and then share it with the whole world! That's AWESOME!
- **Nobody can tell you what to do.** With mainstream published comics, creators are bound to the whims of their publishers. But with webcomics, YOU are your own publisher! The internet is your gigantic, weird oyster! Feed it your comics.
- **It's fun!** Really!

Personally, I chose webcomics because they're very visual! I tried writing *Castoff* as a novel and didn't enjoy it as much as I would enjoy drawing it.



However, on the flip side, here are some reasons you **SHOULDN'T** make a webcomic:

- **To get famous.** Because you likely won't. Sorry to crush your dreams! It'll take a few years at least to build up a fan base. You won't get famous right away, or maybe ever.

**Comics that get a huge fan base right away probably have a well-known creator, or some other support network behind-the-scenes. Audiences don't come from nowhere!*

- **To make \$\$\$.** Some people who've never done a webcomic might think it's a good way to make a quick buck, but this definitely isn't true. Most people make webcomics as a hobby, not as a way to pay the bills. When starting out, your goal should be fun, not profit! Worry about monetization after you've gotten the comic ball rolling. You can't make money off a comic that doesn't exist.



So, should you make a webcomic?



It can be hard and stressful, but the satisfaction you'll get from creating something awesome overcomes all the bad parts! It's a great way to make friends, improve your art and writing, and learn lots of cool stuff! *WEBCOMICS ARE GREAT!!!*

NO EXCUSES!

Whenever I tell people they should make a webcomic, they always shoot back with one of these lines:

“But my art isn’t good enough yet!” You’ll get better while you work on the comic! Improvement over time is normal and expected. Learn by doing! Practice makes progress!

“It’s too much effort!” Everything takes effort! Comics are no exception!

“But I don’t have any motivation!” Screw motivation, learn *discipline*! If you want to make a comic you can’t just wait for inspiration to strike you- you’ll never get anything done. You have to learn to sit down and do the thing.

“The story isn’t perfect yet!” And it won’t ever be! Perfection is a myth! Every story has flaws, so try not to get wrapped up chasing the perfect story. Focus on making something you’ll have fun with!

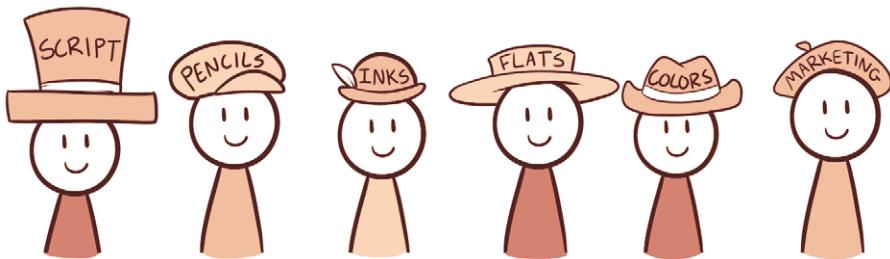
“But I don’t have time!” Okay that’s fair I guess, but you should make a comic anyway~

GO MAKE COMICS!!!!



“Making a comic is a lot of work! I don’t know where to start!!”

Hey friend, I get it! Starting a webcomic can be intimidating. In larger productions like published comics or TV/movie production, each team member only has to wear one hat- I.E., they only do one job.



Meanwhile, webcomic artists are typically working by themselves, and have to wear all the hats at once.



But that’s what this book is for! My goal is to guide you through the process and introduce all the steps to you in an easy-to-digest format. Together we’ll take the mystery out of comic-making, and help you step into webcomics with a better idea of how to proceed!

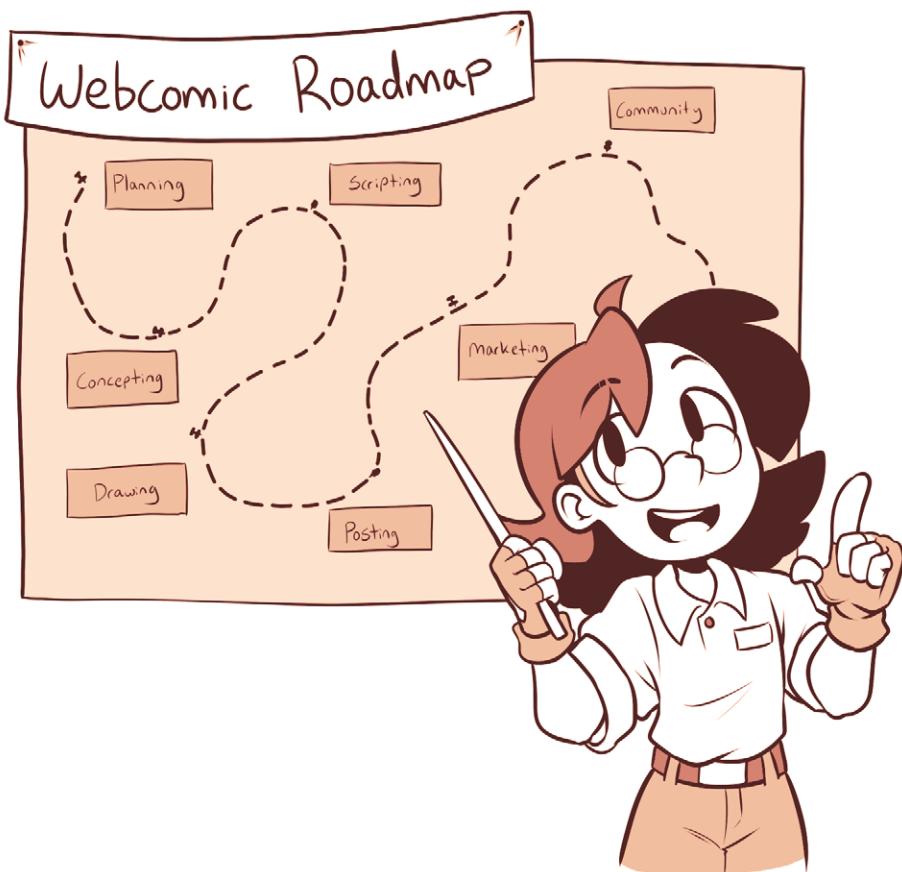


As we progress through this guide, we'll start at the very beginning: how to develop your ideas for your story, world, and characters, along with tips for how to actually GET those ideas in the first place!

Next, we'll cover tips for writing and scripting: general advice for bringing your story from the brain to the page.

After that is drawing, and how to translate your script into the beautiful comic pages of your dreams!

Lastly, we'll talk about everything that comes after: how and where to post your comic online for readers to find, how to get people to actually read it, how to market and make money from your comic, and more!



Side Note: Finding Motivation

"How do you stay motivated?" is the most common question I get when talking about starting a comic. **The hard truth is that motivation comes differently to everyone.** There's no one-size-fits-all answer that'll make starting a comic any easier.

My best advice is to do whatever you can to make comics **FUN!** How do you make your comic fun? Depends on what you find "fun"!

Do you love world building? Design the most interesting setting you can think of, and play around with how you'll show it off in the comic! What happens in this world? How do the characters and story fit into it?

Do you love drawing your characters? Think of interesting situations to put them in and different ways to challenge them, and see where it takes you!

Choose an art method you love doing and a style you love to draw, but is also simple enough that it doesn't wear you out. You should be so excited about your story and making your comic that NOT doing it feels like torture.

The glimmer and excitement of a new comic will wear down eventually, but by then you'll have hopefully built the self-discipline to keep you going. **Like any hobby, it's about enjoying the process, not just the finished product!**



PART 2: **DEVELOPING YOUR IDEA**

The first step to making a comic is coming up with your idea!

What's your comic gonna be about? What's the plot? Who are your characters? Will it be a short story, a sprawling epic, or a simple joke comic strip? Let's figure it out!

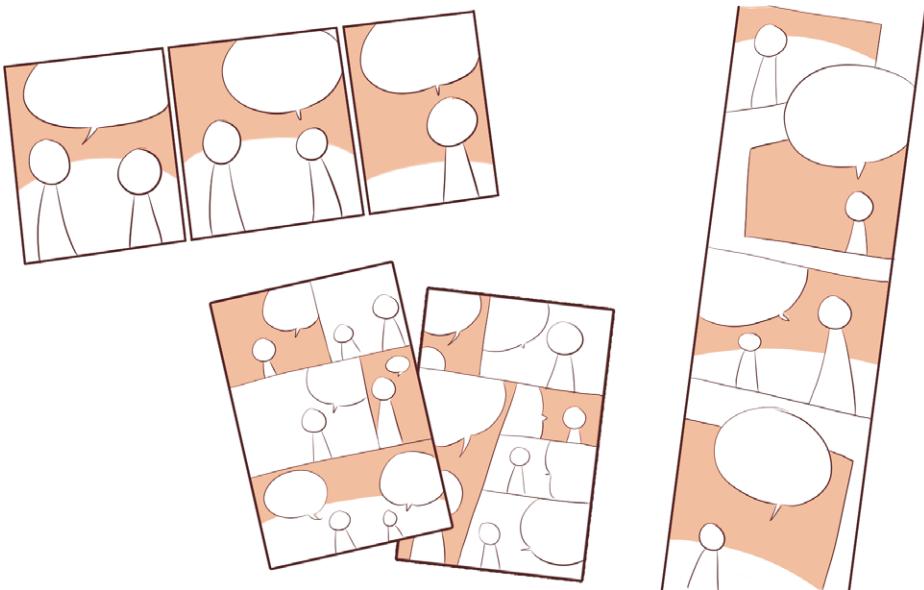
Comic Format

First, think about what you want your webcomic to be! Is it...

- **A “gag-a-day” comic strip?** Simple short stories or jokes that contain the setup and punchline all in a few panels or less. Calvin and Hobbes, Garfield, and 4-panel manga are all good examples of this.
- **A page-by-page long-format comic?** This is the style of most manga and graphic novels- a longer story usually broken up into different issues or chapters. This is a good format to choose for plot-focused comics, or if you dream of printing your comics one day!
- **A “vertical scroll” comic?** These are popular on sites like Webtoon, with the appeal being that they’re easy to read on mobile devices. They’re harder to print, though, so if you ever want to make a book, keep this in mind!
- **Something else entirely?** There are plenty of comics out there that break the mold in creative ways. Some comics even include animation, sound, or other cool features. Don’t be afraid to try something different!

How you present your comic will impact how you write it, how often you can upload new pages, etc. It's a good idea to figure this out early on!

For example: a comic strip with no continuous story might be easier to write than a long-format graphic novel-type story. And vertical scroll comics have a very different visual format than other types of comics.



Not sure what type of comic you want yours to be? **Experiment!** Try sketching out a short scene in multiple formats. Does anything stick out to you? Is one faster or easier than the other? Keep this in mind as you decide how to move forward!



Who Is It For?

Another big question to think about is: **Who do you want to read your comic?** Is it a story for younger kids, or something darker and more mature for older readers? It's a good idea to pick a target demographic, or at least figure out who your ideal reader is.

If your goal isn't to be traditionally published, this is less important, but it will come in handy when you're trying to market your comic to readers later on.

My personal recommendation? Write something YOU'D love to read! If you're gonna spend hundreds of hours on this comic, probably with little to no pay, you should be making something that you love! If you write something that YOU'RE passionate about, other people will be into it too. **Be your comic's biggest fan!**

Don't be afraid of tropes! Be self-indulgent!! Put all your favorite things in your comic! YOU'RE the boss!!!

Seriously, my comic is EXTREMELY self-indulgent. This thing's got all of my favorite tropes and character types in it, carefully curated for maximum creator enjoyment. It's easier to motivate yourself if you genuinely love what you're working on!

My favorite tropes in *Castoff*: Found family, characters with glowing eyes, MAGIC, mystery and intrigue, angry lady characters, etc.



Tips:



Don't start with your "Big Idea"! First comics usually end up abandoned for one reason or another. You'll probably struggle a bit your first time working in a new medium, after all!

My advice is to **start with something small** you can finish easily. A shorter story is more manageable and you'll learn a lot that can be applied to bigger, future projects!

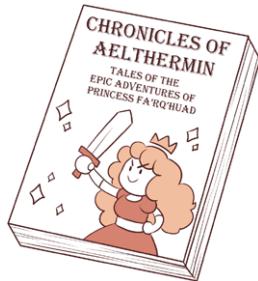
For example: I did dumb 4-panel comics about stuff my friends said back when I was a student. They were just silly doodles I did in my sketchbook, but those comics gave me good practice in figuring out comedic timing and basic comic paneling!

If you already have a big comic idea and can't bring yourself to work on anything else, consider starting with **short side stories set in your comic's universe!** Maybe make a short comic about a character's backstory, how two characters met, or pick a scene and make it into a one-off comic. You can even go on random writing prompt generation websites and see if inspiration strikes. This is also a good way to get people interested in your world and characters before starting a longer comic endeavor.

Fan art comics are also a good way to cut your teeth on comic-making and experiment! I personally made a lot of joke comics about Pokémon and Ace Attorney as a teen.

Don't do what's popular just because it's popular. Romance and drama comics get a lot of views, sure- but if it's not something you're passionate about, the likelihood of burnout and disenchantment with your work is much higher. Make a story you'll enjoy making!

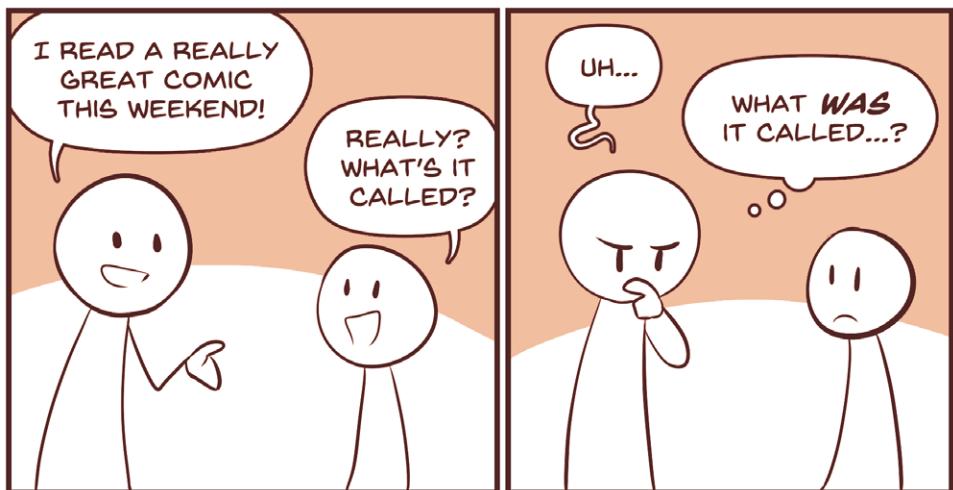




Make your comic's title easy to remember!

I recommend using something short, unique, memorable, and most importantly, easy to spell. You might love the name “*Chronicles of Aelthermin: Tales of the Epic Adventures of Princess Fa'rqu'had*”, but the average reader won’t remember that much information, let alone how to spell that.

If people can't Google your comic, they won't read it because they can't *find* it.



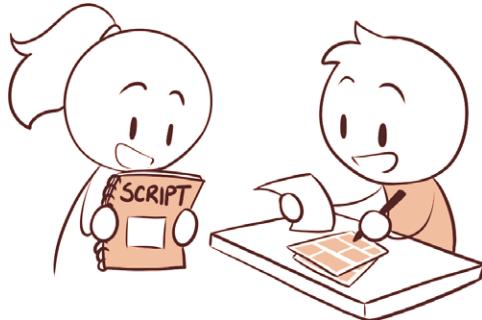
THIS IS BAD!!!!

Also, make sure that the name you decide for your comic isn't already taken. I have... personal experience with this. My first webcomic was called *PSY*... and I started it 6 months before *Gangnam Style* came out. My first webcomic is now impossible to find unless you know exactly where to look, because it gets buried in Google's search results.



Collaboration

Love drawing but aren't so good at writing? Great at writing but aren't so confident with art? Consider collaborating with an artist/writer!



If you and a friend are working on the comic together, make sure you **collaborate with someone you can trust** to get the work done, not just because you're friends. Being excited about the project you're doing together is all well and good, but remember that comics are a lot of work, and everyone involved has to pull their weight!

I also suggest **writing a contract** before starting the comic, to make sure all priorities are laid out and agreed on in case any issues arise. This is especially important if/when money gets involved!

You can also **hire someone** to be your artist or writer! But this will cost money, so it isn't an avenue available to everyone.

However, one note on this:

Writers: Do not expect artists to draw your comic for free. Your artist has bills to pay just like you do, and expecting them to work on YOUR passion project for no pay is insulting.

Artists: Do not work for free. Value your time and effort and make sure you get paid for it. You deserve payment for your skill, so don't let yourself be taken advantage of.

Good Collaboration:



Bad Collaboration:



PART 3: WRITING YOUR COMIC

If you don't have one already, you'll need to figure out your comic's plot. For something like a comic strip with no overarching story, this will be easier to figure out. But for a longer format story, you have a lot more to think about.

If you're interested in making a comic, you probably already have some sort of idea in mind. Whether you already have an idea for a plot or even just a single character, let's get started fleshing out that idea into a full story!

Your story needs **characters, a world, and a plot**.



Characters are the ones your story focuses on. The narrative will follow them and how their actions drive the story and change the world around them.

The world is your story's setting. Where does your story take place? A gentle, easygoing village in the mountains, or in the vast expanses of space? Where do your characters exist?

Plot is your story's conflict. Characters don't get up and leave their homes to go on an adventure unless there is a problem to be solved. Whether it's stopping an evil god from destroying the world, rescuing their love interest from a terrible fate, or finding a lost puppy, a story can't exist without conflict.

A good rule of thumb is that your characters, world, and plot should all work together to make a cohesive story.

- **Your characters drive the plot forward.** How are your characters moving to solve a conflict?
- **The characters affect and change the world.** What mark do your characters leave on the world around them? Are they saving a whole country, or just helping out a single person?
- **The world shapes your characters.** How do your characters fit into the world around them? How does their place in it affect their personality, their lifestyle, their motivations?
- **The world creates conflict.** What's wrong in the world? How are the characters affected, and how/why do they try to change it?
- **The plot drives the characters to action.** How does the conflict affect them? What are they trying to do or change?
- **The plot alters the world.** When your characters solve (or fail to solve) the conflict, how is the world affected? What are the consequences of change?

Unsure about your plot, setting, or characters? It's okay to jump around and try different things during early development! Now's the time to brainstorm as many ideas as you can to figure out what really speaks to you! Throw that writer's spaghetti at the wall and see what sticks.

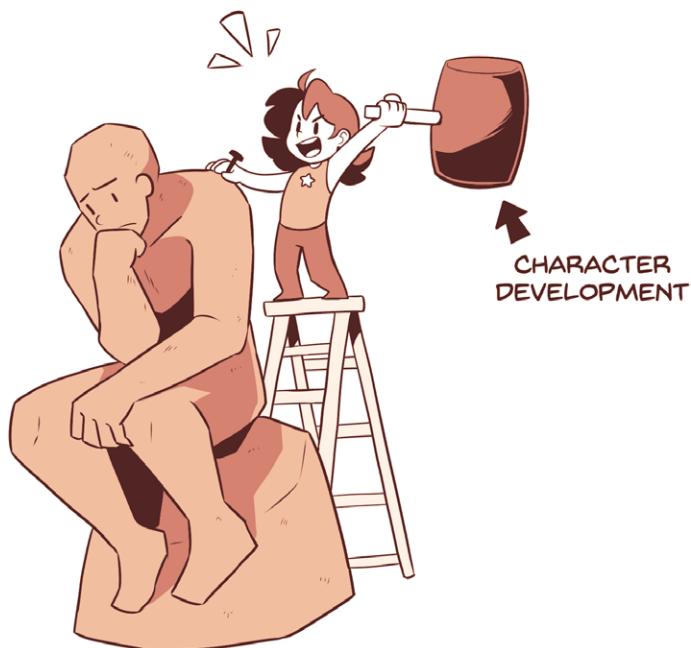


Creating Characters

Characters are arguably the most important part of any story. So, it's time to figure out yours! When figuring out your characters, here's a few questions to ask yourself:

- **Who are they?** What's their name? How old are they? Where are they from? Who or what do they like? Dislike? What is their occupation or role within their community? What are their responsibilities? How do other people within the world view this character?
- **What is their role in the story?** Are they the protagonist, the driving force? An antagonist, working against the main heroes? Supporting cast, there to provide assistance? How do they fill out this role?
- **What are they good at?** Do they have any special skills? Are they a strong fighter? A smooth talker? An empathetic helper? An intelligent problem-solver?
- **How competent are they?** Do other characters see them as reliable? How does this make others perceive them? Is your character the strong fighter everyone knows can protect them? Or the bumbling trainee who can barely lift their sword?
- **What are their flaws?** What are they bad at? What is their weakness?
- **What do they want?** What is their goal? (More on this in a bit!)
- **What do they need?** Sometimes what a character *wants* is different from what they *need* to solve their problems. How do their needs differ from their wants?
- **How do they mesh with others?** Do they make friends easily, or are they a loner? Do they fit into their place in the world, or are they an outcast in their community? Are there certain types of people they get along with better than others?

- **What do they fear?** What is their worst nightmare? Why are they afraid of it? Is it something physical, like an animal or object? Or emotional, like a fear of failure or being alone? How would they react if confronted by it? What lengths will they go to to avoid it?
- **What is their “ghost”?** What guilt or baggage do they carry with them? Do they have a tragic or traumatic backstory? What about past regrets or failures? Did they do something bad, or was something bad done to them? How do these affect their current actions and decision-making?
- **Are they hiding any secrets?** How do they hide them? Are they GOOD at hiding them? What lengths will they go to to keep their secret from getting out? What happens if someone discovers it?
- **Consider their morals.** Do they hold fast to what they believe in, or will they betray someone for the right price? Are they loyal to others, or do they only care about themselves? Are they selfless, or selfish? What happened in their lives to make them this way? What, if anything, would cause them to change?



If you need some inspiration, take a look at your favorite characters in media. Take a good, hard look at them and answer the questions above. You can also analyze characters you dislike to better understand your distaste for them and what you may want to avoid when making your own characters. Analyzing existing characters can help you figure out how to build your own!

Also, an important thing to remember is that **no character will be universally loved**. So you shouldn't aim to make them that way! Instead, aim to make a character *interesting*.

How do you make them interesting? Figuring out their flaws is a good place to start!

Flaws

Everyone has flaws, whether they like to admit it or not. You should always give your characters flaws. **If your character always wins, what reason do we have to cheer for them?**

As readers, we're more likely to connect with characters that are imperfect, more human, and that we can relate to. There's a saying that "everyone loves an underdog", and it's true! Seeing a character achieve victory despite their flaws is cathartic, and can really help readers root for them! Give them flaws, make them messy, make them feel human.

I like to divide flaws into 3 types: physical, mental, and emotional.

A physical flaw doesn't necessarily refer to their looks. Rather, it serves as a weak point, some kind of crack in their armor. Achilles was invulnerable except for his heel. Superman is weakened by Kryptonite. Maybe your superpowered fighter always skipped leg day, or your magic user can't actually control their special abilities.

A mental flaw comes from how they think. They could be overconfident: flying too close to the sun, only to get burned. Or maybe they're stubborn, and refuse to change their mind. Maybe your beefy fighter always rushes into fights without thinking.

Lastly, **emotional flaws** can be things like fears, trauma, and how well they connect to their own emotions or the feelings of others. Are they distrustful of others? Do they cry easily? Are they too aggressive, or overly passive?

Also, think about how characters **work to overcome their flaws**. Maybe a character with trust issues gradually learns to open up more over the course of the story. Or a fearful character slowly gains confidence and starts standing up for themselves after being encouraged by their friends. This is one way to form a satisfying character arc!

Need some ideas for character flaws? Here's some ideas to get the imagination juices flowing!

Aggressive	Hubristic	Arrogant	Prideful
Selfish	Cowardly	Manipulative	Obsessive
Stubborn	Violent	Spiteful	Anxious
Spoiled	Quiet	Shallow	Naive
Lazy	Self-centered	Awkward	Judgmental
Reckless	Gullible	Childish	Vague
Air-headed	Unforgiving	Loud	Dishonest
Controlling	Vulgar	Perfectionist	Forgetful
Gossipy	Irresponsible	Skeptical	Materialistic
Jealous	Greedy	Narcissistic	Paranoid
Hypocritical	Petty	Sloppy	Vain

More Character Tips

Give them room to grow and change. Over the course of the story, how does your character grow? How do their experiences change them as a person? Maybe they learn to forgive themselves for past mistakes. Maybe they learn to overcome their fears or past traumas. Consider how the story will drive them to change!

Treat them like people. An empathetic character is a believable one. Could this character be a real person? Do they behave the way a real person would behave? Are their actions understandable for someone in their position?

Talk to them. This sounds weird but hear me out- it's time to unleash your inner theater kid. Pretend you're sitting in front of your character, and ask them questions. How do they respond? What information are they free and open with? What takes a little more prying?

If it helps, you can also write this down like a script. Just let the "conversation" flow naturally, and write down your questions and how they'd respond. You can even treat it like a dialogue tree in a video game. This exercise is a good way to get your characters to "open up", and can make it easier to think about them less as characters, and more as people.

Avoid sexy lamps. The Sexy Lamp Test says "if a character can be replaced by a sexy lamp with a note attached to it, they're a poorly fleshed-out character and don't need to be in the story". The idea of it being specifically a sexy lamp is that these poorly-fleshed-out characters are often women, who are only in the story as eye candy. Try to give your characters more purpose and agency!

Consider why your characters exist. What role do they provide? What purpose are they there to fulfill? If you can't think of a good answer, they may need to be cut from the story.



Keep your characters' names easy to remember! Like your comic's title, if your readers struggle to remember your character names, it's going to make it hard for them to keep up with the story. If you have two completely different characters with similar names, or a cast filled with wacky, hard-to-spell character names, your audience may end up getting them confused or forgetting their names altogether.



(TIP: If you *love* longer, fantasy-esque names, consider giving your characters nicknames that are easier for your audience to remember!)

Personally, I try to keep my character names on the simple side, and give each of my characters a name that starts with a different letter. I'm not sure why, but in my opinion it makes it easier to remember. Every member of the main cast in *Castoff* has a name that starts with a different letter!



VECTOR



ARIANNA



FRANKIE



MARINA



RORI

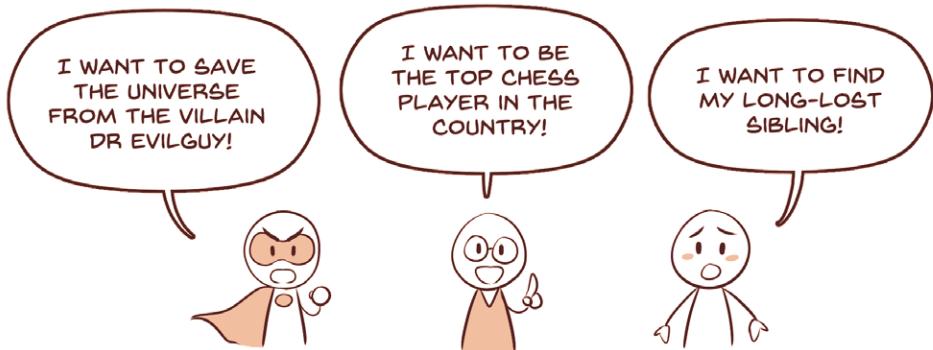


ZERA

“I have some characters I want to use for my comic! But I don’t have a plot yet...”

This is something I see a lot with aspiring comic creators. You’ve got all these cool characters in your head, but you’re not sure how to use ‘em. If you’ve got your characters figured out, then it’s time to talk about **goals**. Your character’s goals, specifically!

Every character needs to have a goal. **What does your character WANT?**



Once you’ve figured out their goal, ask yourself these questions:

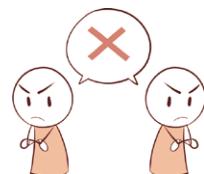
- **Why** do they want it? Why is it important to them?
- **How** do they plan to get it?
- **Who or what** is standing in the way of their goal?
- **What** are they willing to do to get what they want? How far will they go?
- What do they **refuse** to do? Where do they draw the line?
- What happens if they **succeed**?
- What happens if they **fail**?
- How are **other characters** affected by this goal?

Characters can have more than one goal! If they have multiple goals, which are the most important to them? Do any of their goals conflict with each other? How does that affect their journey?

Try figuring out the answers to these questions for all the major characters within your story. Once you start roping other characters in, how does this affect character dynamics?



Characters with the same goal could become **allies** or **rivals**!



Characters with opposing goals may become **enemies**!

What reason do characters with different goals have to work together?

Groups of characters can have goals as well! Are two countries in your fantasy comic fighting over the same resources? Does an evil intergalactic crime fleet have their hearts set on dominating the universe? Does the student council want to shut down the protagonists' club? How do these entities or factions mesh with your cast of characters? Do the members of these groups all agree with the goals of their group, or are some more hesitant than others?

Goals give a reason to keep your characters (and the plot) moving forward! If you're stuck, **think about the goal!**



Building the World

Like your characters, the world your story takes place in can have a big impact on the plot! Depending on the genre of your story, the amount of effort you have to put into your worldbuilding will vary wildly. For example, a comic set in a real-life, modern-day city won't need as much worldbuilding as one taking place in a made-from-scratch fantasy world. Some of the below questions might not apply to your story, depending on your chosen setting. Regardless, it's still good to think about your comic's world as part of the development process!

Like we did for building characters, here's some basic questions to ask yourself while developing your world:

- **What is the genre?** Is this a modern-day drama? A fantasy adventure? A futuristic sci-fi? A post-apocalyptic wasteland?
- **Why are you choosing this setting?** What's important or special about it? Could the story work in another genre? Who choose this setting over any other?
- **What effect will the setting have on the plot?** Does the setting limit the type of story you can tell there?
- **What are the basics of the setting?** What is the name of the world? What languages are spoken here? How long has this society existed? How do the people live? What are the positives and negatives about the world?
- **How big is the setting?** Does your story take place entirely in a single town, or is it a sprawling adventure through varied landscapes? Where will your characters go? Where will the plot lead them?
- **What effect will it have on the characters?** How do they fit into the world around them? Do they fit into their society, or are they a fish out of water? How do they handle the circumstances given to them? How does their place in the world affect their own personal story?

- **What are the cultural or societal norms in this world?** What is the expectation for people living in this society? What roles are the people in this world expected to play?
- **Is there magic? Technology? A mix of both?** How important is it to the world? How advanced is it? How do your characters interact with it? How does it affect them? Most importantly, what are the limits? What CAN'T be done with magic and/or tech?
- **Who runs the world?** How did they get their power? What is their reputation among the people in their society? Was the right to run things given to them, or did they take it by force?
- **What is considered taboo?** What in this world or society is forbidden? *Why* is it forbidden? What is the consequence or punishment for breaking it?
- **What threats does this society face?** What dangers do these threats pose? Are the threats external, like another nation attempting to invade, or giant beasts that threaten the lives of the citizens? Or internal, like an army of rebels planning to overthrow the current rulers? What could cause the downfall of this society? In the event of a fall, who risks losing the most?



Finding the Balance

When crafting a story, finding a balance between characters, story, and world building can be tricky. If your world building is too bland, it might drag the rest of the comic down with it. But if your setting is significantly more interesting than your characters and their story, it can push away readers who prefer to focus on the narrative. So, what are some guidelines for striking that balance?



With webcomics specifically, I personally recommend **keeping your “on-screen” world building limited to what’s important to the plot and characters**. It’s perfectly fine to work out every single little detail about your comic’s setting- in fact, I find folks that do that kind of thorough worldbuilding really impressive! But I would advise you to keep the details that are less relevant to the story from clogging up the script. For example, if your story has nothing to do with fishing, I don’t need in-depth details about the fishing economy in your comic’s script. It’s just filler at that point.

If you have extra details (like those fishing details from before) and want to share them, many webcomics include **lore or worldbuilding in pages on their websites!** (This is one of many reasons I suggest making your own website for your webcomic- more on that later!) Interested readers can have access to that info, and those who aren’t don’t get pulled out of the story by excessive, less-important details.

However, on the flip side: **If a worldbuilding detail is important to the story, make sure to include it in the comic!** Don’t make your readers do homework and read through extra documents just so they can understand your story.

My last tip is **don’t dump all your worldbuilding at the start!** A worldbuilding-heavy opener can feel like reading a textbook. Give us just the important things to start, and sprinkle in additional details as the story progresses.

Crafting a Conflict

When coming up with a story, figuring out your conflict is a good place to start. And, to clarify: a “conflict” doesn’t need to be a world-changing battle, or an actual “fight”, per se. **A conflict is any sort of challenge or obstacle for your characters to overcome.**

Different sources will argue about the exact number of conflict types, but to keep it simple let’s stick to three: Man vs. Man, Man vs. World, and Man vs. Self.

Man vs. Man is a direct conflict between people or other characters. This could be a superhero vs their arch nemesis, two lovers going through rough times in their relationship, or any other sort of conflict that is directly focused on the actions of characters.

Man vs. World can be a number of things, depending on how you interpret “world”. “World” could be the society a character lives in, and the conflict is that character fighting against their circumstances. It could also be taken more literally: sometimes called “man vs. nature”, this deals with conflicts against natural disasters, or the difficulty that arises from their environment.

Man vs. Self represents an internal struggle: characters working through their own mental obstacles and roadblocks, coming to terms with their feelings, or learning to deal with trauma or other baggage.

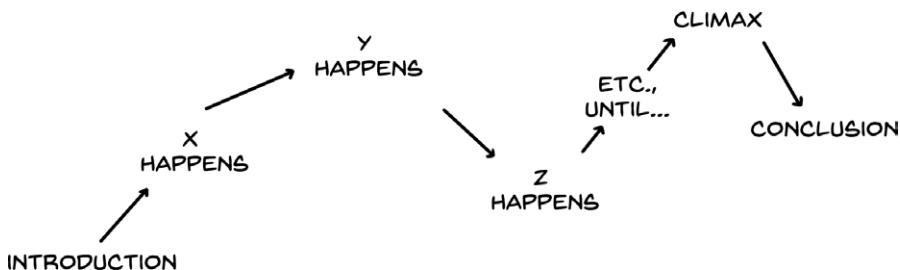
Some others that are commonly cited are “man vs. technology”, “man vs. supernatural”, “man vs. God”, and “man vs. fate”. The conflicts in your story will depend on your world and characters, as well as what you, personally, are interested in writing.

Similar to your character goals, **your conflicts should have some sort of stakes!** What happens if your characters overcome their conflicts? What happens if they lose the fight? How are other characters or the world affected? Why do we, as readers, care about the conflict? Think about this as you write!

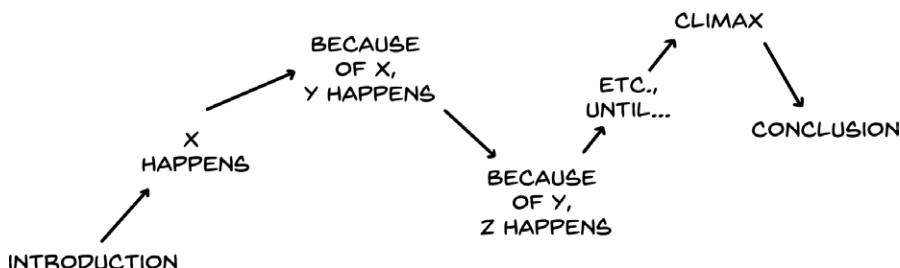
“Okay! I have my characters, my setting, and I’ve got an idea for the story! What now?”

Well, I always recommend starting with an **outline**. An outline will help you lay out all the events in your comic, and how they fit together. Start by setting up the starting point for your story, the major story events that will take place, and how the story ends. Try to keep it simple, and stick to the major plot beats for now. You can always add more detail later!

A very basic outline might look something like this:

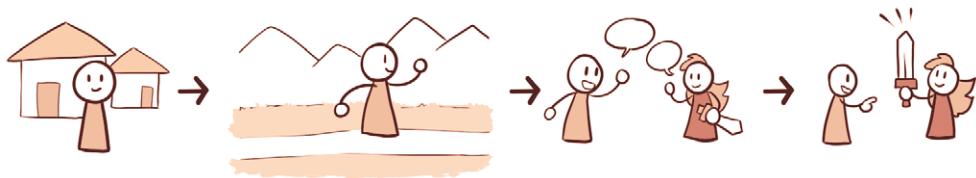


This outline is... okay, but one tip to keep in mind is that **your plot points should link together- cause and effect**. What does that mean? Using the same structure as the previous outline, let's improve it slightly!



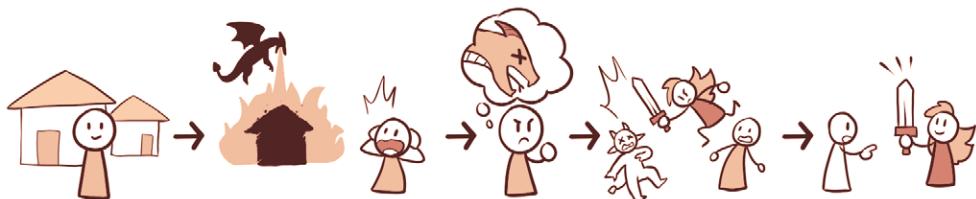
Let's go into a little more detail on what this means and how it works.

If your characters just go from one plot point to another without reason, it will seem like your characters are just going somewhere or doing something because the writer wants them to. Which, in a lot of cases, leads to a boring, wishy-washy story. For example:



"Bob lives a peaceful life in his small village. Then, he leaves his hometown to go on an adventure. Then, he meets another traveler. Then, the traveler teaches him how to fight with a sword."

This example is built on “*Then...*” statements. There’s no real motivation, reasoning, or causation pushing Bob forward in this story. So, let’s tweak it, and switch out those “*Then...*” statements with “*Because of that...*” statements.



"Bob lives a peaceful life in his small village. Until one day, a dragon attacks and burns his village to the ground! Because of that, Bob leaves town to get revenge on the dragon. Because he leaves his town, Bob is attacked by monsters. Because Bob gets attacked, a traveler rushes in to fight the monsters and save him. Because the traveler saved him, Bob asks the traveler to teach him how to fight with a sword to defend himself."

In this version of the story, Bob has a reason to leave his home and go on an adventure, and like a game of dominoes, each event in the story has an effect on how the next part of the story plays out. Give the events in your story strong cause-and-effect connections, and the narrative will be much stronger!



Other things to think about:

- **The theme:** What do you want to tell your audience? What message are you trying to convey? What do you want readers to take away from your story? What do you want to stick with them once they're finished reading? What's YOUR goal with this story?

(NOTE: Sometimes the theme of your story might not be obvious at first. The themes will likely show themselves after your first draft. Then, you can revise your story to strengthen or alter the theme being presented!)

- **The audience:** We covered this earlier, but it bears repeating: Who are you making this story for? Who do you want to read this story and why? What message do you want to send to them?
- **The feeling:** Consider how you want your reader to FEEL in each scene, or during each chapter. Art is all about causing an emotional reaction in the audience. What emotions do you want your audience to experience?
- **The length:** Is this a short story you can tell in just a few pages? A slightly longer one that will last a few chapters? Or is it a longer narrative you'll be working on for years and years?

I suggest you try to...

Keep It Short

I recommend erring on the short side when writing your comic. Keep your story tight! Sprawling epics are all well and good, but when you're 10 years and 500 pages deep into your comic and you're only 1/8th of the way through the story, you might start having regrets. Shorter is better!

Kill Your Darlings

This phrase gets passed around in writing circles all the time. It basically means that **if it doesn't help the story, don't keep it in.** This applies to characters, plot beats, scenes, etc.



If you've ever watched deleted scenes in the bonus features of movies, a lot of times filmmakers will say things like "*We really loved this scene, but ultimately it didn't have a purpose in the plot, so we took it out.*" That's what "killing your darlings" is. If a scene doesn't add value to your story, why spend your time drawing it? Why waste your reader's time by making them read it? Get it out of there!

If you love it enough, you can always make "deleted scene" bonus comics! Consider it a little bit of bonus material for your readers that won't detract from the main narrative. (I use these all the time for Patreon rewards. More on that later!)

An example: in an early draft of *Castoff*, I made the characters spend a few chapters at a magic academy. But as I kept writing the story, I realized that this segment was adding a bunch of unnecessary plot points and characters that didn't actually move the story forward. So, I completely removed this arc, while taking the most important bits and planting them into the story at other points. Because of the length, that arc would have taken me *almost 3 years* to draw, and removing it meant I was 3 years closer to finishing the story.

Know How It Ends

I always ALWAYS recommend knowing how your story is going to end before you get too in-depth writing the beginning/middle segments. It's always easier to get somewhere if you know where you're supposed to be going. Knowing how your story ends can help you if you're stumped on how to move the plot forward, and even help set up your story's "humble beginnings".

Not sure how your story is going to end? Go back and think about your characters' goals some more! Will they succeed? Will they fail? What are the consequences for each option? What do they learn? What's the lesson/moral you want your audience to take away from your story?

Character Voice

When writing, it's a good idea to give your characters their own distinct voice. Think about it: a country woman from Texas has a pretty different speaking pattern from a rich British businessman. Characters will speak differently depending on where they were raised, how they grew up, etc.

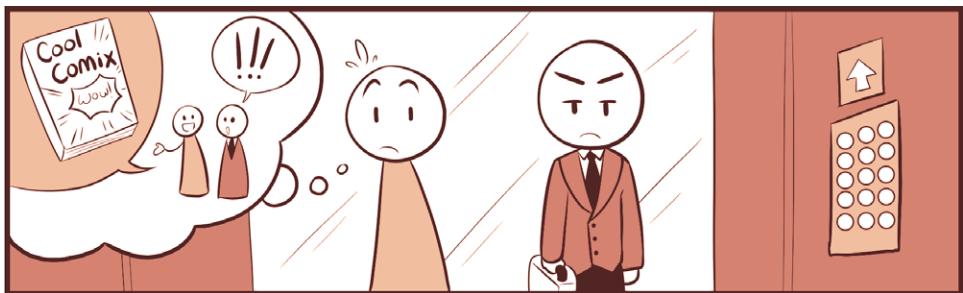
Some characters will talk more than others, some use profanity while others choose not to. Some get straight to the point while others are less confident and beat around the bush. You'll know you've established character voices well when your readers can tell which character is talking without seeing their faces.



Elevator Pitch

While you're working on your story, try thinking about your elevator pitch.

Imagine you're in an elevator, and in walks the head honcho of your dream publishing company! You want to sell them on your next big comic idea, but you only have a few seconds to catch their attention before they leave the elevator and you lose your chance forever.



The idea of an elevator pitch is explaining your story in a **fast and simple way** that also **grabs a potential reader's attention**. How can you explain your story in a simple but interesting way?

You might be thinking “I haven’t even finished writing my story yet! Why do I need to be thinking about this stuff NOW?!”

Easy: **Simplicity is understanding.** If you can figure out the most important points, the key elements that make your story, and explain them quickly, it’s a sign that you understand what your story is really about. If you struggle to narrow down your plot into one or two sentences, you may need to take some time and think about what parts are really the most important.

Side note: The book “Save the Cat” by Blake Snyder* has a whole chapter about writing a good, interesting, short story summary (also called a “log line”). While that book is about screenwriting, most of the ideas presented in it are universal to storytelling, and I highly recommend it to anyone looking to up their writing game!

*Not getting paid to say this, I just really like this book. It's a good read!

Chekhov's Gun

Chekhov's Gun is a writing principle that talks about efficiency in storytelling. The basic premise is: *"If a loaded gun is seen hanging on the wall in Act 1 of your story, it needs to be fired by the end of Act 3."*



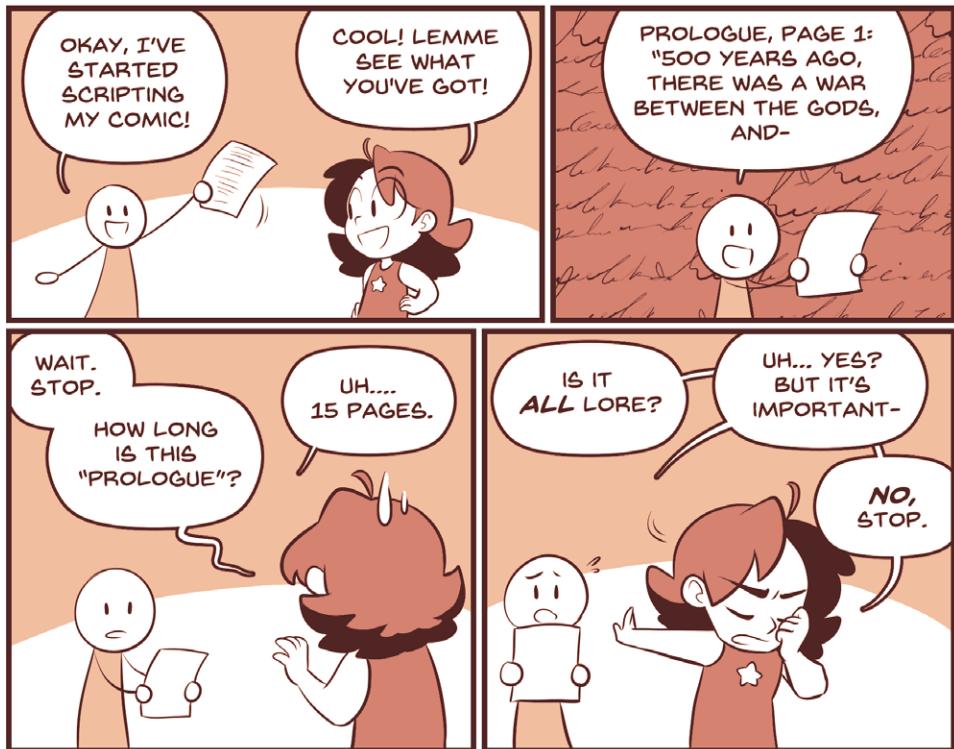
How does this apply to your story? If you set up something, like a plot hook or hints at a future event, it ideally needs to have some sort of payoff before the end of the story. Otherwise your readers will be questioning why it was brought up in the first place. Some might even get frustrated that they were led to believe something would be important, when in actuality it meant nothing to the story as a whole.

Imagine if the main character of your comic was seen working on a painting in several scenes, and a lot of emphasis was placed on how much they love painting, but we never actually get to see the painting they did. That's frustrating, right?



Not everything has to be symbolism, and not everything has to be foreshadowing, of course! But try and consider how your audience will think about the events in your story. It's all about having some sort of payoff for the important things you're setting up. Keep this in mind as you write!

The Hook



Allow me to be salty for just a moment of your time.

Why should I care?

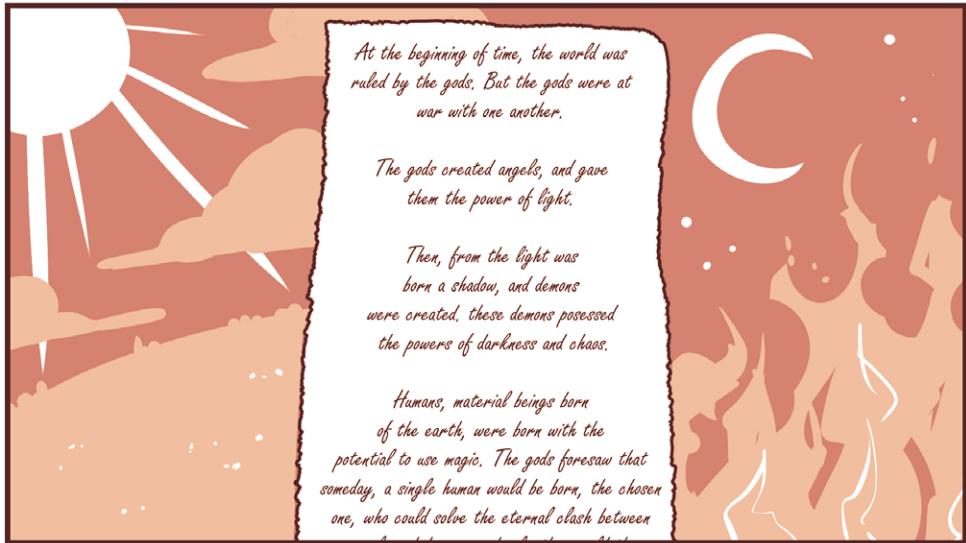
No, seriously, why should I, as a reader, care about all this lore you're throwing at me on the FIRST PAGE OF YOUR COMIC? You're writing a comic, not a history textbook! Give me a character to root for! Give me a conflict to get invested in! Give me a reason to care! Give me a **HOOK!**





The beginning to your story should have a “hook”—**something that gets your readers interested and makes them want more!** 9 times out of 10, throwing a bunch of lore/names/history at your reader right away doesn’t make people interested— it just makes them bored.

I don’t know about you, but when I go to the first page of a new comic and see THIS—



...I close that tab and I don’t come back.

A good story hook usually includes setting up **character and conflict**. It should make your reader ask questions, and be curious about your story! HOOK them in and make them want to find the answers!

Here’s an exercise for you: Pick 5 movies/games/comics/books/etc that you enjoy, preferably in a similar genre to your comic. What are the openers like? What made you decide to keep reading/watching/playing? What made you care? What’s the “hook”?

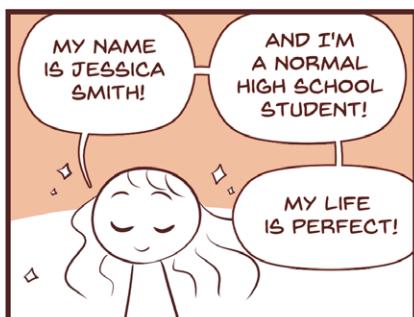
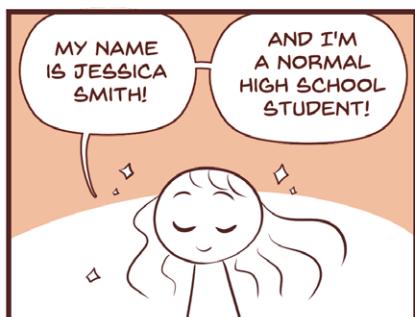
Now, think about your comic’s opener. Pretend you’re a new reader: is your beginning interesting enough to keep reading after page 1? Page 5? Page 15? What questions are you encouraging your readers to ask? **What’s your hook?**

Page Turn

Comics are a medium that can take advantage of a “page turn”. Basically, a small cliffhanger or motivating factor at the end of a page that makes you want to flip to the next page and keep reading. Think of them as small hooks that keep your readers interested page-to-page!

Junji Ito is a horror manga creator who uses this a lot by showing a character reacting to something that we can’t see until we flip to the next page. It makes you curious! What are they reacting to? What awaits you on the next page?

Since webcomics are usually updated one page at a time, it’s a good idea to give your readers incentive to come back for the next page! Here’s an example: Between these two, which one makes you want to keep reading?



BORING.
NO INDICATION OF
A STORY. NO HOOK.

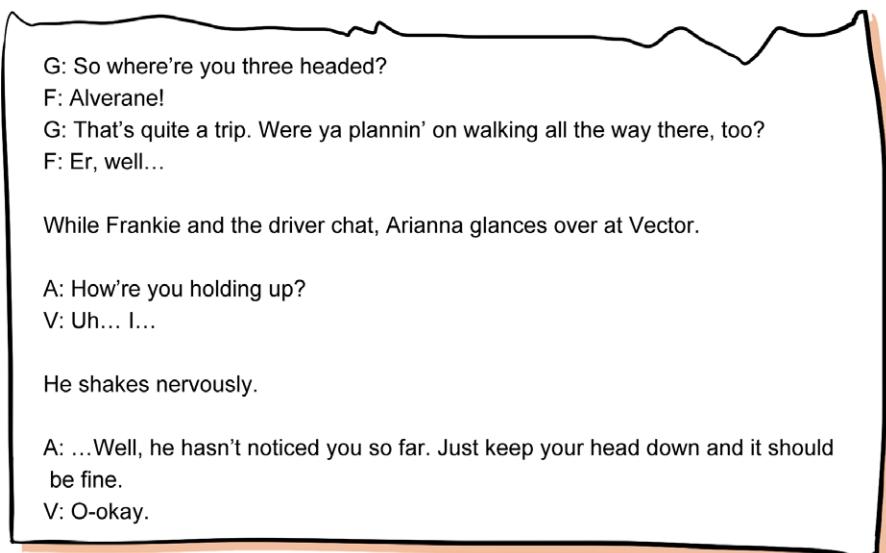


OH! WHAT'S THE
"ONE THING" SHE MENTIONED?
I WANT TO KNOW!

Little things like this can help motivate your readers to come back for the next update. It isn’t needed on every page, but if you can format your script and pages for a little bit of guessing into what’ll happen next, it’ll help keep your readers on their toes. It also entices them to leave comments and talk about what they think could happen on the next page!

“How do I write a script?”

Well, that's the thing! Assuming you aren't working for a publisher, or you aren't collaborating with an artist, **your scripts only have to make sense to YOU**. Personally, my scripts look a bit like this:



I keep it simple: abbreviations for character's names, their speaking lines, and screen directions/details added in where necessary. It's easy, and lets me knock out scripts super quickly.

But I know some comic writers who do their scripts in full screenplay format, and some who don't work from a script at all! I recommend playing around a little, and finding a method you're comfy with. Embrace the freedom!

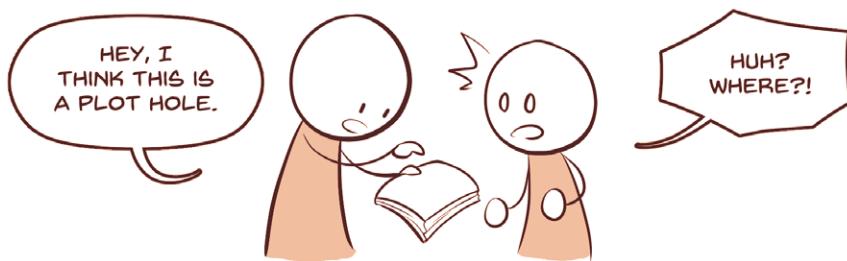
A quick note, though: I recommend keeping your script format consistent and easy to read if you plan on collaborating with others, or using beta readers.

“What's a beta reader?” you ask? Well...

Beta Readers/Proofreaders

While you're writing, it's always a good idea to have someone to help! Someone who will read your work and give you feedback from a reader's perspective. This person is called a **Beta Reader!**

Beta readers are extremely helpful to have around. Since we, as writers, know everything about the story we're writing, sometimes we end up writing things that make sense to us, but don't add up for the average reader.

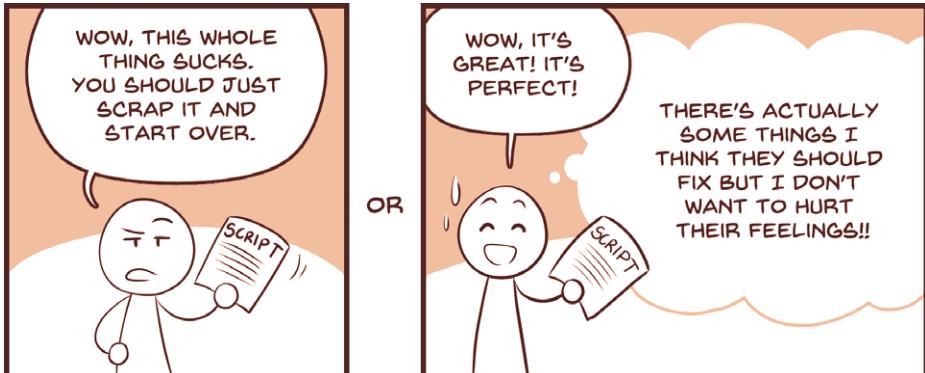


How do you find a beta reader? Most of my beta readers are close friends of mine I don't mind telling story spoilers to. You can also try asking around on comic message boards or chat groups!

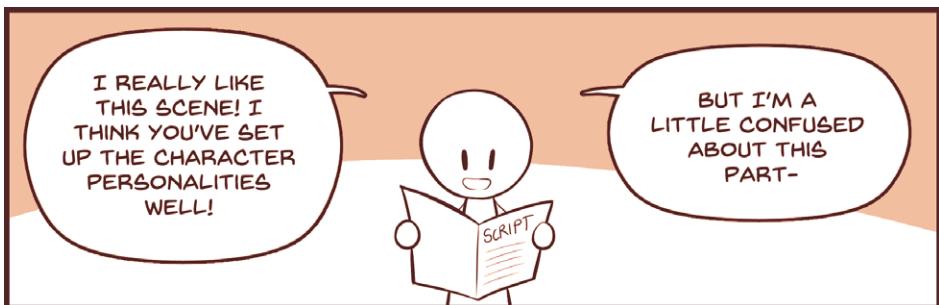
A good beta reader should **enjoy the genre you work in**. Personally, I'm not into romance stories, so I probably wouldn't give the best advice when it comes to writing romance. But your friend who loves romance novels would probably love to beta read your love story! They should be interested enough to ask questions about your world and story, and help you build on your concepts and make them better!

They're also someone who **gives good, constructive feedback!** Emphasis on "constructive". If hearing a person's critique about your comic makes you feel like a terrible writer, you probably aren't a good match for each other. But at the same time, someone who only gives you compliments and never gives you anything constructive might not actually be that helpful.

Bad Beta Readers



Good Beta Readers



Sometimes a beta reader doesn't even have to know everything about your story. I have some friends who I just use as sounding boards for ideas. I can use their reactions as a way to judge how I want to approach certain plot points!

I used to be very precious about giving away webcomic spoilers... Now I'll spill my entire comic's story to anyone if they sit at a restaurant with me for long enough.



Writing For Your Readers

When writing your story, it's important to remember that you, as the creator, know everything about your comic's world, characters, and story. However, **your audience will only know the information you give them.** Your beta readers can help you figure out where things are confusing for the audience, sure- but being proactive about making your story clear and understandable for your audience will go a long way!

A tip for this: As you're scripting each scene, **write down what the audience will learn from this scene.** This will help you keep track of what details you've given to your audience already. If the audience doesn't learn anything new, consider: Does this scene need to be in your script? If your story has too much fluff or filler (scenes that don't push the story forward), your audience might get bored. A bit of fluff is fine, but be mindful of how much you're including! Remember: you or your artist will have to DRAW all that fluff, too!

Also, consider **keeping track of what your audience DOESN'T know!** What information HAVEN'T you given your readers, and WHEN in the story will they learn it? Having this information laid out can be super helpful when setting up your story so you can keep track of your details and make sure your audience doesn't get confused!

Keeping track of what your readers have already learned, as well as what they don't know yet, will help you get the important information across to them, and help you avoid forgetting to add details to your script.

Lastly, I mentioned it earlier, but again: **If information is important to understanding the narrative, make sure it's presented in the narrative!** Don't leave your audience guessing about important things in your story.



“Everything has been done before! I can’t come up with an original idea!”

...So? Why does your story have to be original?

Let me blow your mind a little: **There is no such thing as an original story.** Pretty much every story concept has been done before, over and over and over again. *The Lion King* is just *Hamlet* with animals. There are hundreds and hundreds of “superhero saves the world” comics. There are dozens of Sherlock Holmes retellings out there, and fairytales are adapted and retold over and over again.

It doesn't matter if your *idea* is original. What matters is the **execution** of that idea. How do you tell that story? How do you take an idea and make it yours?

Let's say I take a room full of writers, and tell them to each write a story about a character trying to find a lost pet.

- Jerry writes sci-fi about a ship captain scouring the galaxy for their lost alien hamster.
- Lisa writes an edgy detective drama about a kidnapped parrot.
- And Alex writes the story of a lonely child searching for their lost dog that'll probably make you cry at the end.

Despite all having the same general concept behind them, all of these stories are unique, because a different person wrote each one. While the general concept is the same, the setting, plot, and characters are all vastly different from each other. The execution is unique, even if the story itself is not.

What's truly original is *you*, and how you tell your story. Don't worry about what's been done before, think about how you're going to tell the story you want to tell.



Final Notes:

As we wrap up the writing segment, I wanted to touch on a question I hear a lot: **“How much of my comic should I write before I start drawing?”**

There's really no right answer for this. Personally, I've had an outline of my full story since very early on, and finish scripts well in advance of actually drawing them. But I know other webcomic artists who script each page as they're drawing it. Obviously, if you're working in comics professionally, there are certain expectations. But in webcomics, where we're usually doing this as a hobby, the “rules” aren't as important.

My advice is to play around during the early days of your comic, or with a shorter experimental story, and find your comfort zone. If it works for you, then it works!

It's also a good idea to **keep your ideas and story flexible**. Comics can take years to finish, and your tastes may change during the course of working on a story. For example, a few years into working on *Castoff*, I had a really cool idea for some late plot events, and ended up completely reworking the ending. I won't get to it for years, yet, but I'm now even more excited about the late stages of the story, much more than I was before.

It's a good idea to take a look over your comic's outline every few years to figure out if you're still enjoying the upcoming events. If your passion has dulled at all, what changes can you make to get excited about your story again? Thinking about this sort of thing will help you maintain passion and enthusiasm for your work!



PART 4: DRAWING YOUR COMIC

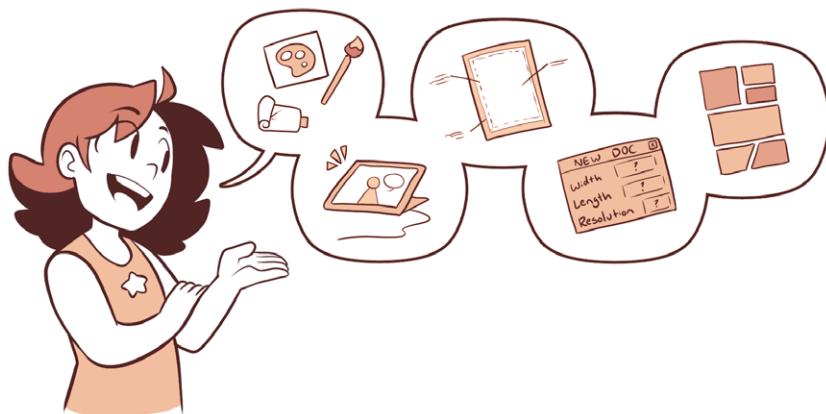
Once you've got the writing portion done, it's time to move on to the art part! You've got your words, now let's make 'em pretty. But before we start actually making art, we need to take some time learning about technical aspects. It's important to lay out a good baseline of understanding before we start worrying about art style and things like that.

Some of the most frequently asked questions I get are:

- What art program do you use?
- How much does your program cost?
- What tablet do you have?
- How big are your pages? In inches? In pixels?
- What resolution should I draw in?
- What does "resolution" even mean?

...The list goes on and on.

So, before we start building the beautiful comic pages of our dreams, let's start from the foundations and work our way up!

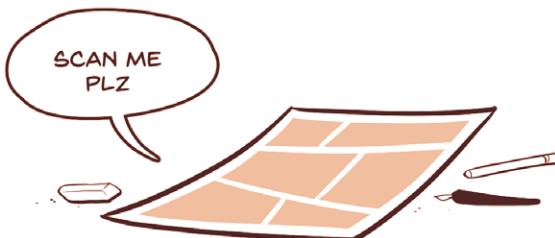


Art Programs for Comics

When it's time to make art, the first question is: **What tools will you be using to make said art?** Will you be doing your pages traditionally (drawn on paper), digitally, or a mix of the two? And what supplies/software will you need?

Even if you're planning on doing your comic 100% in traditional media (drawing it on paper and scanning it in), it's still important to get familiar with at least one digital art program. Whichever program you choose can be used to tweak your pieces, adjust colors, correct mistakes, and save them into a format that can be posted online.

(A note for traditional artists: PLEASE don't just take low-quality cell phone photos of your pages and upload them straight to the internet. Either buy a scanner, or use one at your local library or print shop. It'll make your images MUCH higher quality, and your readers will thank you.)



If you're working digitally (like me), your art program of choice will likely come down to what you have the hardware for, and what you can afford. Luckily, there's lots of different choices, so let's check them out!

My personal favorite and the one I will always recommend is **Clip Studio Paint**. I switched to it a few years ago and it is a LIFESAVER, with so many intuitive functions that really help make comic-ing a smooth and enjoyable experience. However, it can be a bit complicated for a digital art newbie to figure out, and is on the expensive side (but the desktop version goes on sale several times a year). I highly recommend testing out the free trial available on their website and seeing if it works out for your needs. There's also plenty of tutorials online if you need help getting started (including some of my own!).

Another option that's fairly well-known is **Procreate**. If you have an iPad this is what many people recommend. It's fairly inexpensive and easy to learn, but has a surprising amount of depth to it. It's only available on iPad, however, and limits the number of layers you can use depending on how much memory your device has. I use it a lot for sketches and drawing on-the-go, but it wouldn't be my pick for full comic work.

Paint Tool Sai is one I hear recommended a lot, especially for those with painterly art styles with a lot of blending. It's fairly easy to use, but lacks some essential features for comics, such as a text tool and rulers.

Unless you already have a license for it, I wouldn't recommend **Photoshop**. It's an expensive monthly subscription and just about everything it can do can be done on better, cheaper software. I say this as someone who used exclusively Photoshop for most of my life: You can do better.

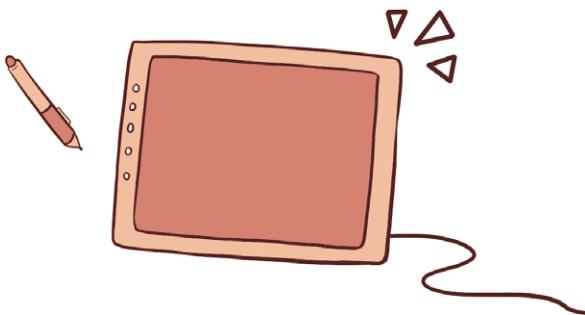
If you're on a budget, there are a number of free programs you can try! **Krita**, **MediBang Paint Pro**, **FireAlpaca**, and **Gimp**, among many others, are all available to download for free, so you can try them out and see if they work for your needs. Since these programs aren't as widely used, there are generally fewer resources and tutorials available for them, so it's a "pick your poison" scenario. It really comes down to what you prefer to use!

There are plenty of other art programs out there at a variety of price points, and going into detail on all of them would take a whole other book to cover. I recommend trying out the free trials of software you have the hardware to use, and seeing what strikes you. It's always a good idea to look up video tutorials as well- they can teach you a lot! Do your research, play around, experiment, and decide what's right for you.



Art Hardware and Tablets

If you'd like to get into digital art and don't have one already, you might be looking into getting an art tablet! There are so many brands and models out there, all at different price ranges, that I highly recommend doing your own research: looking up reviews and seeing what other artists have to say about the tablets they use. But, to help you out, here are some factors you can use when researching!



Screen vs Non-Screen. When I was first starting as a digital artist, screen tablets (tablets where you can draw directly onto the screen, like iPads and Cintiqs) were extremely expensive and hard to come by. So, I spent the first ~10 years of my digital art journey drawing on a non-screen Intuos tablet. Non-screen tablets are like fancy mousepads; connect them to your computer and draw/write on them with the provided pen, and what you draw will show up on your screen!

Nowadays, screen tablets are much easier to afford, and if you can afford one, I highly recommend them as they are much easier to use. Non-screen tablets can be difficult to use because they require more hand-eye coordination than drawing directly onto a screen. However, if you're constrained by a very tight budget, a non-screen tablet is a good place to start!

Monitor vs Standalone. Some tablets (like iPads) are completely standalone devices. Your art software will be available on the tablet itself, meaning you don't have to connect to a computer to use it. But others are more like an external monitor, and need to be connected to a computer to function. Make sure you research this and choose a tablet that works with your setup!

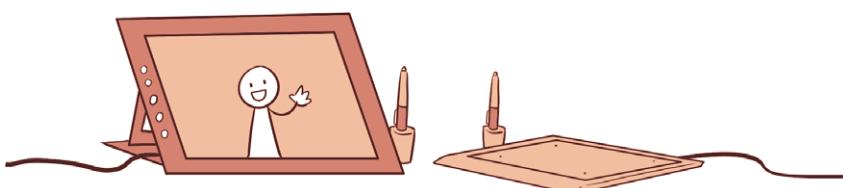
Some other factors to consider are:

Size. Small tablets can be difficult to use because of the limited size, but larger ones have their own set of difficulties. For example, my desk is small, and I don't have a lot of space, so my screen tablet is small too! Also, I made sure my portable tablet (an iPad) was big enough to be comfortable to draw on, but could still fit in my purse to make it easy to carry.

Surface texture. How smooth or rough a drawing surface is can have a big impact on how easy it is to draw on! Your favorite artist may prefer a smoother surface, while you work best on a screen with a little tooth to it. I've found that traditional artists have an easier time transitioning to digital if the surface feels more like paper! If your tablet's surface isn't working out for you, try looking into screen protectors that have a different feel to them. It's a small detail that can make a big difference!

If possible, I highly recommend trying out tablets in person before buying! Some brands will be harder to find in-store, but many computer and tech stores will have stations where you can test out different tablets and brands. It's nice to get a feel for a device before making a decision!

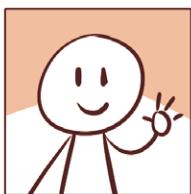
Also, an extra tip: When you're trying out a tablet for the first time, **don't get discouraged if it's hard to adjust right away!** There's a bit of a learning curve when you first start using a tablet for digital art. It took me weeks to get acclimated to drawing on the computer when I got my first tablet. It's surprisingly different from just drawing on paper and takes some time to get used to! I recommend allowing yourself time to just doodle and get comfortable with the interface at first.



Canvas Size + Resolution

When you start figuring out what size to make your pages, I suggest **working in at LEAST 300 DPI**.

A quick lesson, if you're unfamiliar! **DPI = Dots Per Inch**. In this context, resolution is basically how many pixels fit into an inch of printed paper, or an inch of your monitor. The higher the resolution/DPI, the more pixels per inch. You can set this when you make a new file in your art program of choice (or change it at any time from the settings. But be aware that changing the resolution after drawing won't actually increase the quality of an image!)



300 DPI
-MORE DOTS PER INCH
-HIGH RESOLUTION,
LARGER FILE SIZE
-GOOD FOR PRINTING



72 DPI
-FEWER DOTS PER INCH
-LOWER RESOLUTION,
SMALLER FILE SIZE
-GOOD FOR WEB

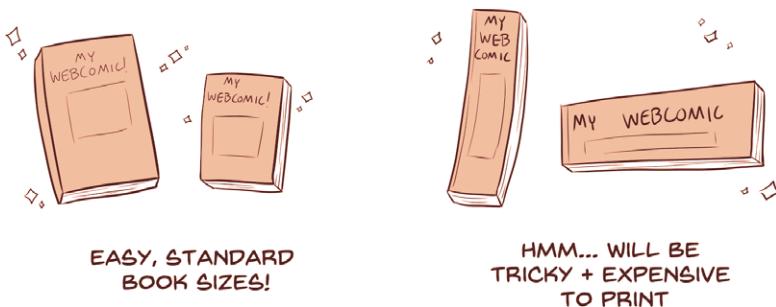
72 DPI is the default for many art programs, and is the standard resolution for web images. So why work at a larger resolution?

Printing. 300 DPI is the standard resolution for printed works, and if your pages are drawn in anything less, they'll look grainy and gross when you go to print. Even if you don't currently have plans to print your comic, you never know if that will change in the future! **It's always a good idea to work at 300 DPI or higher!** It's better to draw in high resolution and have high quality, print-ready files on the off chance you decide to make a book someday.

(My first comic was drawn in 72 DPI... don't make my mistakes.)



Also, if you have any dreams of printing your comic, if there's even the *slightest* chance you'll maybe want to make a book someday, I recommend **picking a page size that's easy to print**. If you work with printing in mind, it will save you a lot of time, hassle, and stress when it comes time to print your comics. Go look at what size comic printers have available, and think about what you might want a future book to look like. If your books deviate from standard comic sizes, you'll either have to reformat your pages or pay more when it's time to print!



But what sizes are easy to print? I recommend **looking up some templates for comic pages online**, specifically from a comic printer's website! Rather than just telling you outright, "*This is the size you should draw comics at,*" I think it's valuable to learn about the different sizes yourself, and come to your own conclusions for what's best for your work.



But what if you're not sure how to use a comic page template? Let's talk about that real quick!

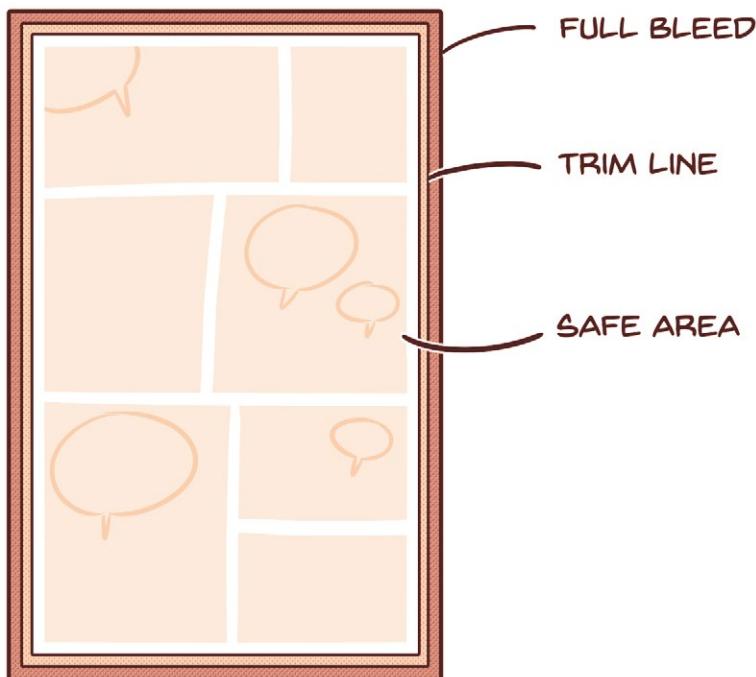
How to Read a Comic Template

A comic template will generally tell you the size your pages should be, as well as give you a few guidelines including the Safe Area, Trim Line, and Full Bleed Area. (Note that these terms may vary slightly on different templates!)

The **Safe Area** marks where everything important on your comic page should be! Any art, text, dialogue balloons, etc. should stay within the boundary of the safe area to avoid it being cut off when printed.

The **Trim Line** shows where the pages will be cut when your comic book is made. Anything that goes past this line will be cut off when your pages are trimmed.

The **Full Bleed Area** is for when you want your art to go all the way to the very edge of the page. While anything that goes past the trim line will be cut off, your art should go all the way to the edge of the bleed area, since the exact cut line might vary slightly during printing.



Exporting for Web

Lastly, even if you draw nice, high-quality pages, you don't want to post the print resolution files to your website. They're too big!!

When posting online, you'll want to downsize your pages so they don't take too long to load. Most comic-hosting platforms have a maximum width of ~900 pixels, and this is generally a good size to export. Just make sure your pages are readable at that size!



An easy way to do this is to find out if your art software of choice has an **Export for Web** function (or something similar). That way, you can export your comic page as a smaller, flattened, web-sized version, without having to mess with your actual working art file.



In short: Draw your pages at 300 DPI (or higher), then shrink them when you post them online. Trust me, you'll be glad you did.

Art for Comic Pages

Now that we're done with the technical talk, it's time to talk about comics now! We're almost 60 pages into this book and we're FINALLY talking about comics. Took long enough, am I right?

When it's time to start making comic pages, one of the first things to decide is the format you'll be using. Will your comic be...

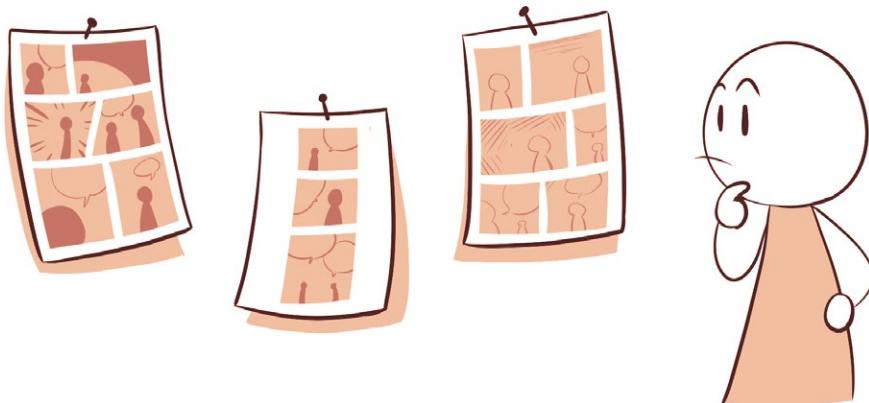
- A series of comic strips?
- A multi-page/long format comic, like a graphic novel?
- Vertical scroll, like on Webtoon and other online sites?

Likewise, how will you be making the pages? Will you use...

- Full color?
- Black and white?
- Greyscale/screentones?
- Spot color?

Not sure which art method is right for you? **Practice first!** Pick a page of your story you think would be fun to draw, and try drawing it in a few different styles. Try out full page format, strip format, and vertical scroll format! Did any feel more natural to you than the others? Which one did you find the most enjoyable?

Render the same page in both color, greyscale, and black and white! Which one was easiest for you? Which one did you have the most fun doing? Which one suits your story the best?



General Advice

Before we get too deep into the nitty-gritty of comic-making, here's some general advice before you put pen to paper (or tablet, or whatever):

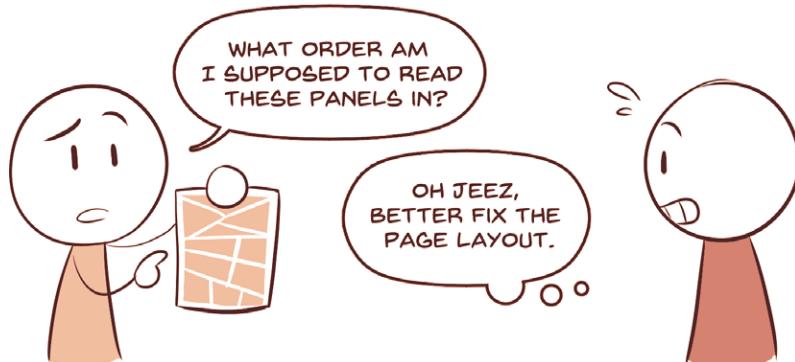
Pick an art method that you enjoy doing and doesn't burn you out! If you hate working in color, don't force yourself to make a full-color comic. The key is to enjoy the process!

Keep It Simple. An important thing to remember about comics is that readers generally won't look at the art for too long. Every panel doesn't need to be a masterpiece! It's okay to cut corners to help speed up the process. I can assure you that your readers won't even notice. More on this later!

Try to stay zoomed out. You don't need to agonize over small details your readers won't even notice. When working digitally, I recommend not zooming in more than 200% of your page's actual size. The average reader will only look at each panel for 1-2 seconds, so try not to sweat the small stuff!

Time yourself when you draw and try to make yourself as efficient as possible. Comics are a big time sink; if you can find a way to work faster and smarter, you'll thank yourself later!

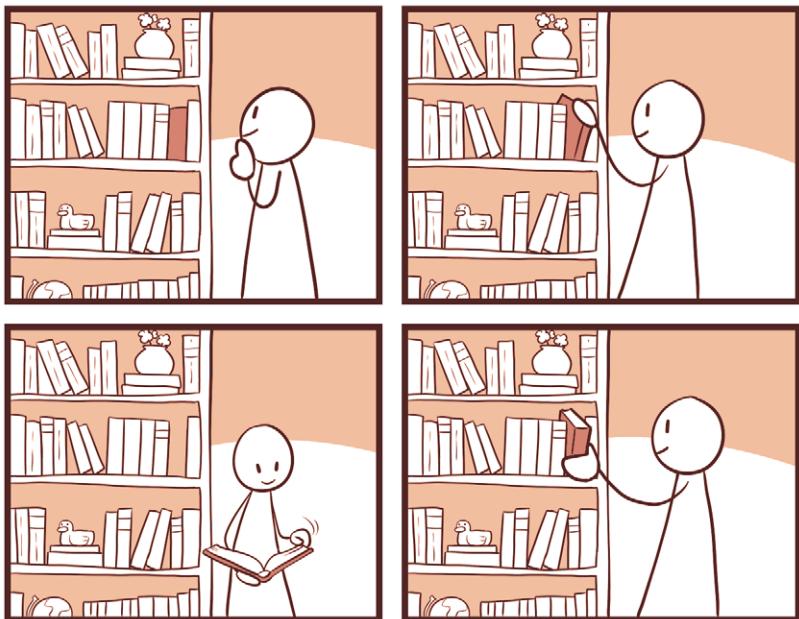
Use your beta readers! If you aren't sure if something in the art is working, show it to someone who can give you a different perspective! Even if your beta reader isn't an artist, they can tell you if something is confusing as a reader.



Paneling: The Art of the Page

When you first sit down to draw your comic, you might get a little stumped about how to make a comic page. Drawing an illustration is one thing, but telling a story with a series of sequential images is another thing entirely. There's a lot of work and artistry that goes into drawing comics- specifically, how to lay out your panels and get them to work together. So let's talk about it!

Each comic page is made up of multiple panels. And each panel is a moment in time in your story. One thing to keep in mind is that **each panel should only contain one action**. You can't have a character stand up, grab a book off a shelf, flip through the book, and put it back on the shelf all in one panel. If you want to show each of those steps, each needs to be its own panel.



But how do we decide what types of panels to use and when? It's time to talk about paneling!

Types of Panels

- **Extreme closeup:** to focus on a particular object in detail, or subtle expression changes. Use sparingly!



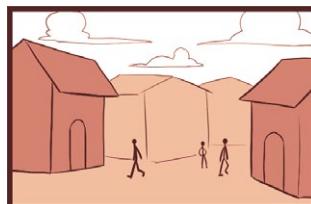
- **Closeup:** to focus on facial expressions or something important.



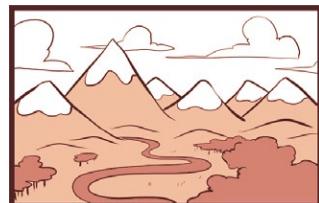
- **Medium shot:** to focus on body language or movement.



- **Long shot:** for an emphasis on the environment or big action.



- **Extreme long shot:** for establishing shots or focusing on environments.



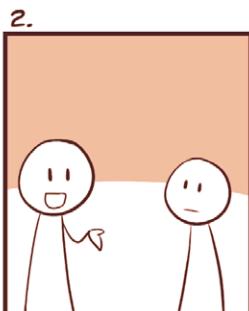
Generally, the closer the “camera” is to the subject, the more emotional/impactful/meaningful the moment is. A camera that is further away can signify that what’s happening in the panel is less important, or that the thing that’s important is the environment, rather than the characters.

To show you how panel composition can mirror the tone of your scene, let’s play a little game! Which dialogue do you think fits best with each panel?

A:
"HAS ANYONE
SEEN MY KEYS?"



B:
"... BOB IS ACTUALLY
YOUR TWIN BROTHER!"



C:
"I WENT TO
THE GROCERY
STORE TODAY."



(The best answer is 1B, 2C, and 3A, by the way)

Additionally, I recommend using extreme closeups very sparingly. I know it can be tempting to just show a character’s eyes as their emotion changes (especially because it’s very easy to draw), but zooming in too close can cause you to lose the emotional context of the character’s entire face. It can also be claustrophobic being so close to your characters all the time. Give them some personal space!

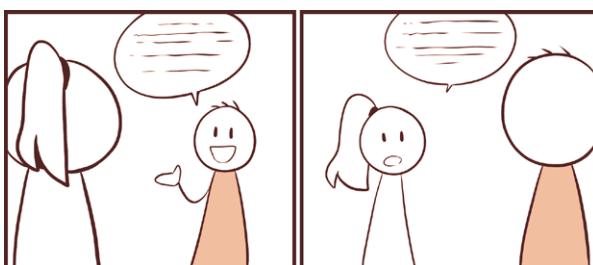


More Panel Types

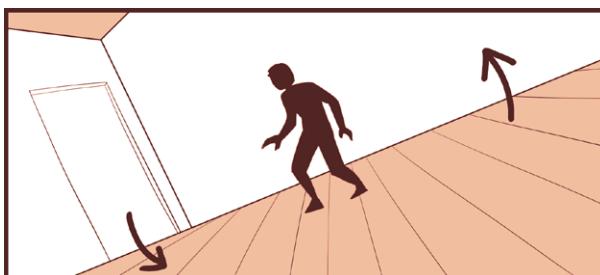
- **Point of View (POV):** Imagine your character's eyes are the camera. What are they looking at?



- **Over the Shoulder:** useful for dialogue between characters!



- **Dutch angles** (a.k.a. tilted camera) can give your readers a sense of unease or fear, or make action shots more dynamic!



In general, it's always a good idea to look outside your medium of choice for more inspiration! I learned a lot in college storyboarding classes that can be applied directly to comics. A good exercise is to pick a movie you like, and try to do a thumbnail sketch of each shot in the film. Every time the camera changes, pause the movie and draw a very loose compositional sketch. You'll be surprised how much you can learn by emulating films!

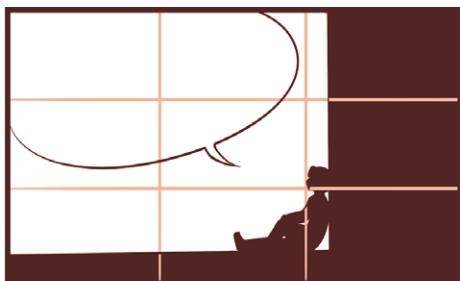
Rule of Thirds

If you've studied art at all, you've probably heard of the Rule of Thirds before. The concept is that, if you divide your composition into 3 equal rows and 3 equal columns, it forms a baseline for your composition.

(Have you ever opened the camera app on your phone and noticed it's got a bunch of lines on it? This is what those are for!)



The basic idea is that the most important things in your composition should line up with either A) the lines, or B) the intersection points. Try doing this for each panel if you're having trouble deciding where things should go!

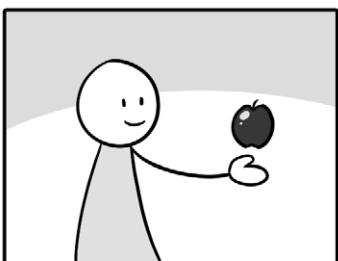


(Also, if this is freaking you out a bit, don't worry- it's just a helpful guideline. Eventually it becomes second nature, and I hardly ever actually divide up my panels like this unless I REALLY can't figure out a composition.)

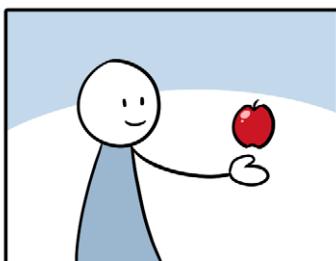
More Paneling / Composition Tips

Something to think about when planning your panels and page layouts is how to **guide the reader's eye across the page**. A page with good panel flow is easy to read, and helps guide the reader's eye where they need to look. Pages with bad flow can interrupt the reading experience and confuse the reader. So, how do you guide the reader's eye?

In general, **the eye is drawn to areas of high contrast**. If you want your readers to focus on something, make it contrast from the background and the rest of the panel to really make it pop!



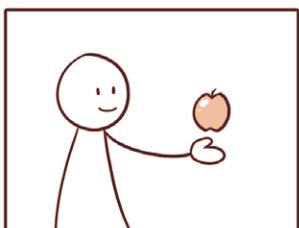
VALUE CONTRAST



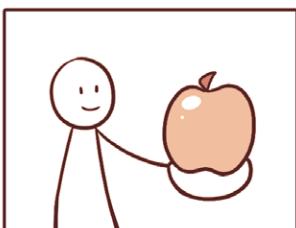
COLOR CONTRAST

Another tip for paneling and composition is to **use your layouts to help tell your story!** You can say a lot about your characters and the story just by using creative compositions. In general, some tips for this are...

Size. In general, the larger something is, the more important it is. This applies to objects as well as characters!



THIS IS A
NORMAL APPLE!



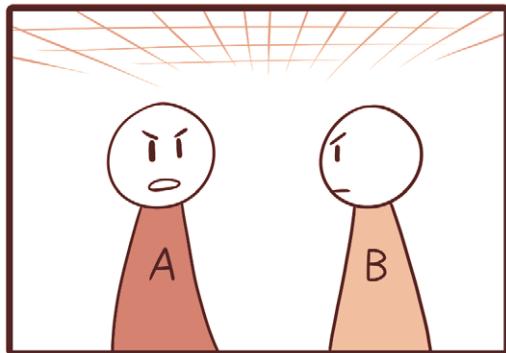
THIS IS AN
IMPORTANT APPLE!



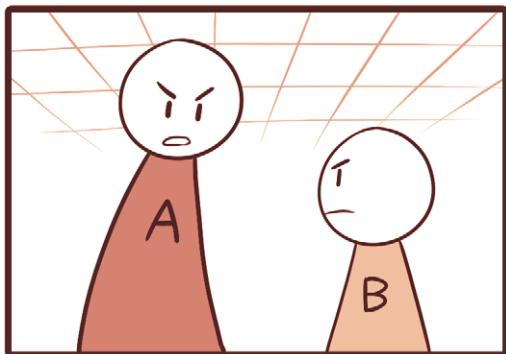
THIS IS A VERY
IMPORTANT APPLE!

IT'S SO IMPORTANT
IT'S THE ONLY THING
IN THE PANEL

Camera angle. In the panel below, the camera doesn't favor one character or the other; they're both at relatively the same height, and one doesn't take up more space than the other. These two characters seem to be equals...



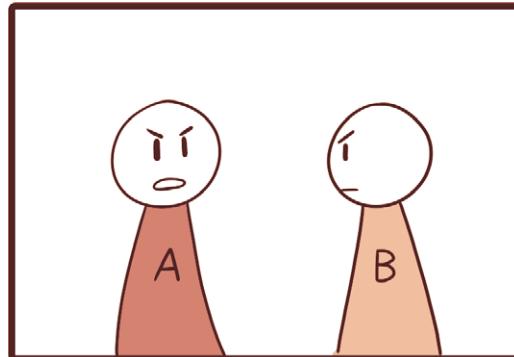
...While in this panel, the same two characters seem to have a different relationship.



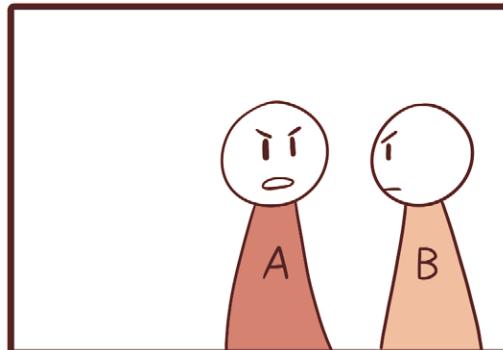
Why? The camera angle.

In the second panel, character A is looking down at character B. This makes character A feel more powerful and imposing; they're standing over character B and literally looking down on them. Meanwhile, character B looks like they're at a disadvantage; they're definitely the underdog. Even without dialogue, you can infer some things about this character dynamic just by looking at how the shots are composed.

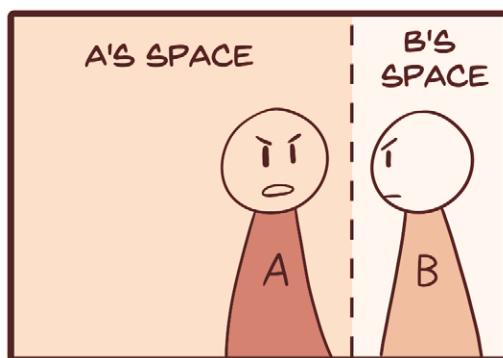
Character positioning. In this panel, the two characters once again feel like they're equals; they take up the same amount of space in the panel.



However, if we adjust their positions slightly...



Because of how we laid out this second panel, character A, who takes up more space on the panel, visually feels more important than character B. A feels like the one in charge, while B isn't left with a lot of their own space. The more real estate a character takes up in a panel, the more important and powerful they feel. There's tons you can say with just the visual language of your panels!



Panel Sizes and Pacing

In general, the size of your panel is proportional to how long you want your audience to look at it. Bigger panels are looked at longer. Smaller panels are shorter, choppier, and less important. Basically: If you want your readers to look at it longer, make the panel bigger.

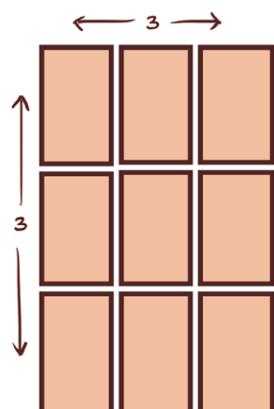


Big panels are often used for big establishing shots, emotional and impactful story beats, or panels with a lot of detail. Meanwhile, smaller panels are good for quick glances, focusing in on small details, a change of expression, etc.

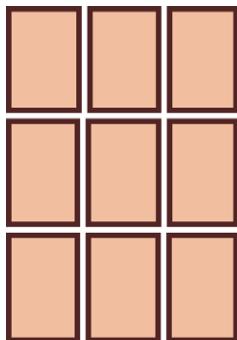


But, how many panels should you be putting on each page? To be honest, there's no solid answer to that, and it's something you'll figure out as you practice. But a good rule of thumb to start with is the 3x3 rule: No more than 3 panels across and 3 panels up and down.

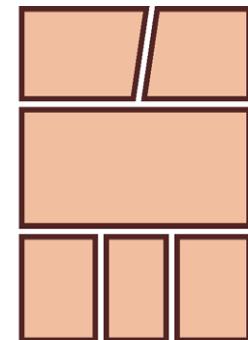
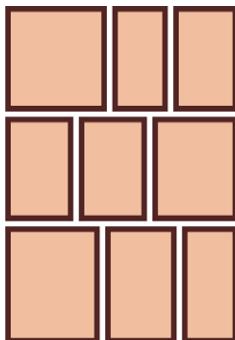
(I usually do 4 rows vertically, but I also draw tall pages.)



Another tip is to use a mix of panel sizes! If you just stick to a perfect 3x3 panel grid on each page, your layouts can look pretty dull. Personally, I try to have a full-width panel on each page for a bit of visual contrast. Remember what we said a few pages back: big panels draw the eye for longer periods, small panels show smaller moments.

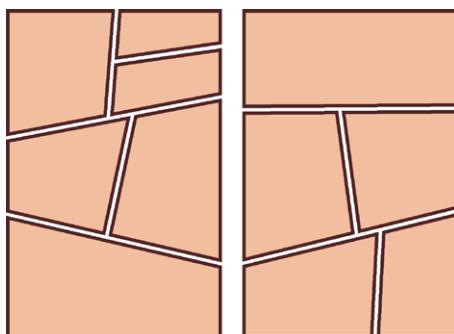


KINDA BORING,
MIX IT UP!

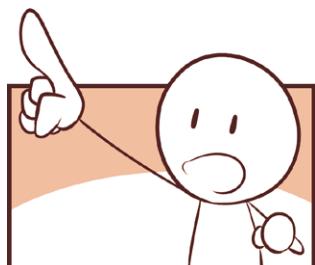


VARYING PANEL SIZES,
MORE INTERESTING!

Now, square and rectangular panels are a good standard. They're simple and functional and get the point across. But don't be afraid to get a little wacky with your panel shapes and sizes! Personally, I love to use tilted panels in tense, action-packed moments. It makes the page more dynamic!

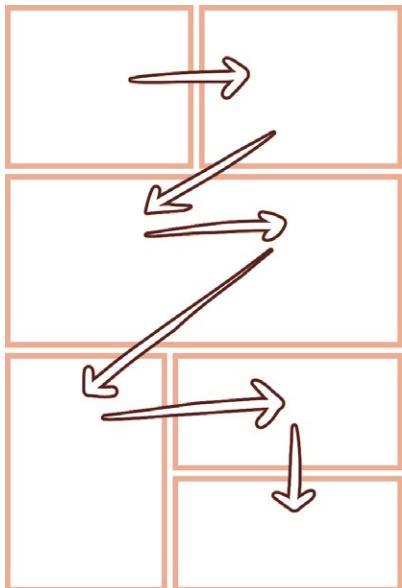


You can also have characters or objects break out of panel borders for a bit of emphasis on that particular thing. Some manga series do this a lot and it's a great way to add visual interest. Have fun with it!



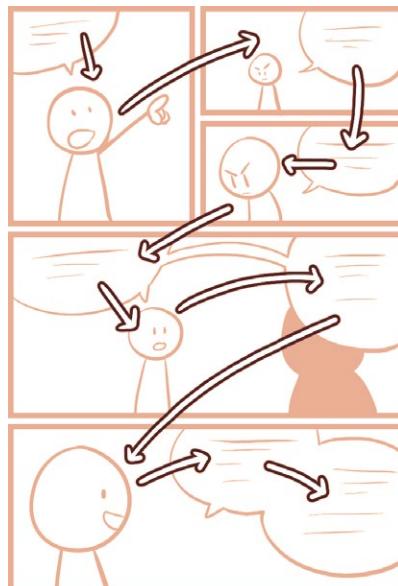
Paneling Flow

When planning out a comic page, it's important to think about the page's flow, i.e., how your readers will look at the page.



In English, we read left to right, top to bottom. In general, your comics should follow the same pattern. Your reader will generally always try to read your comics this way by default.

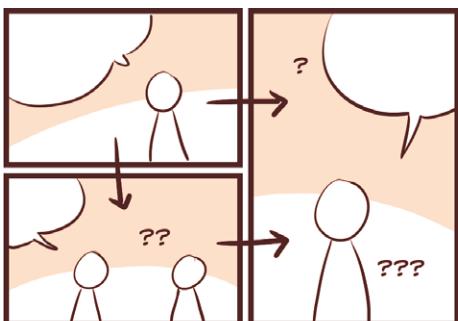
You can also guide your readers' eye with your panel compositions and characters!



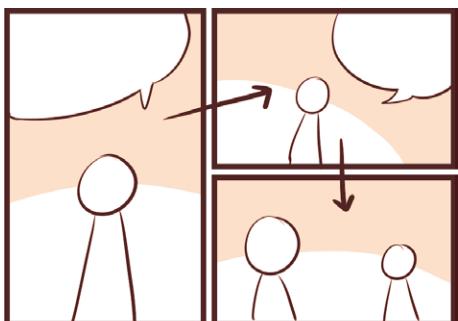
This is one of those things that gets easier with practice, so I highly recommend playing around with different panel compositions! If you need inspiration, find some comics you like and study how they lay out their pages.

When figuring out panel layouts, it's important to think about how your readers will read them. In the English language, we read left-to-right, top-to-bottom. So, when we read comics, our brain naturally wants to read the same way.

Try to have your panels fit a left-to-right, top-to-bottom flow, so it's obvious which way they're intended to be read. If you mix it up TOO much it can create issues where your readers don't know which panel to read next.

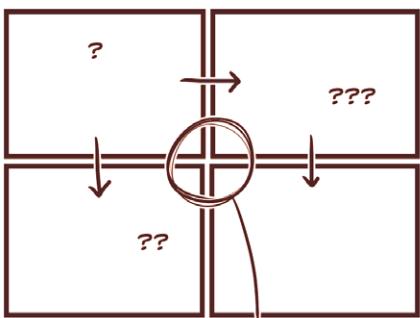


UNCLEAR LAYOUT.
WHICH WAY DO WE
READ?

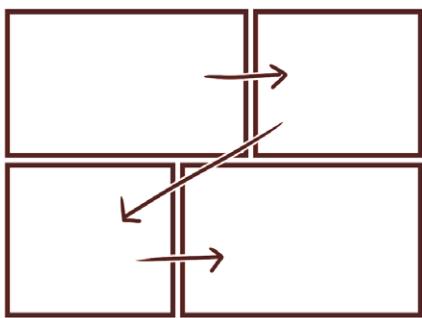


CLEARER LAYOUT,
EASIER TO READ

Another tip is to stagger your panel edges so the corners don't line up with each other. This can cause your readers to question which way they're meant to read.



CORNERS ALIGN, UNCLEAR
INSTRUCTIONS. DO WE READ
DOWN OR RIGHT FIRST?



STAGGERED CORNERS,
EASY TO UNDERSTAND!

Screen Direction and Comics

One of my favorite tips for anyone looking to get into comics is actually to study screen design and storyboarding! A.k.a., the art of setting up shots and scenes in movies and TV. Storyboarding is a lot like comics, except all their “panels” have to be the same size. Here’s some things I learned from screen design that also apply to comics!

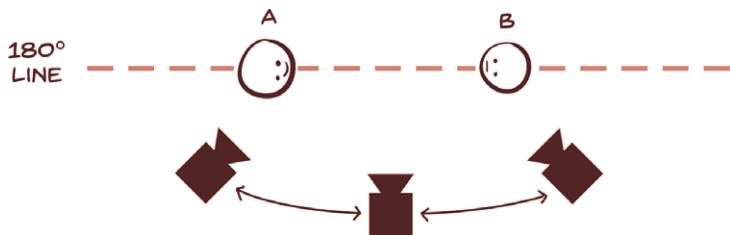


180 Degree Rule

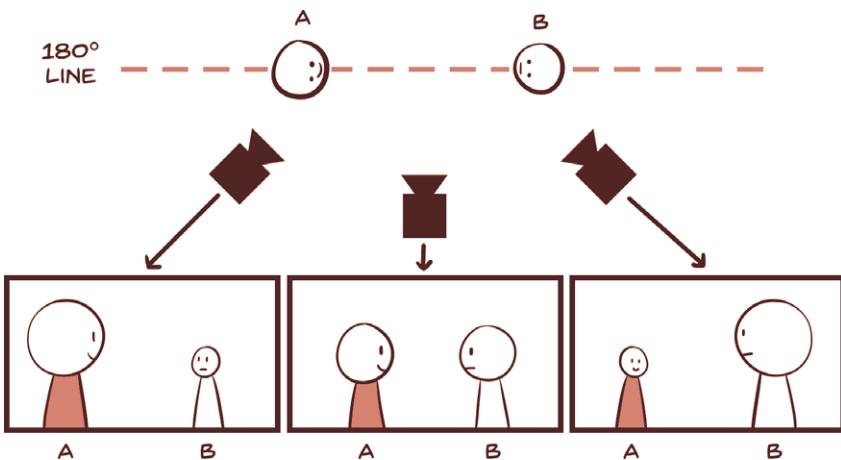
The 180 degree rule is something that a lot of people probably realize exists, but don’t know how to identify it until it’s pointed out to them. The idea is that, when you’re setting up a scene, you should draw a line across it, and your “camera” should never cross it. This is hard to explain with words, so here’s pictures.



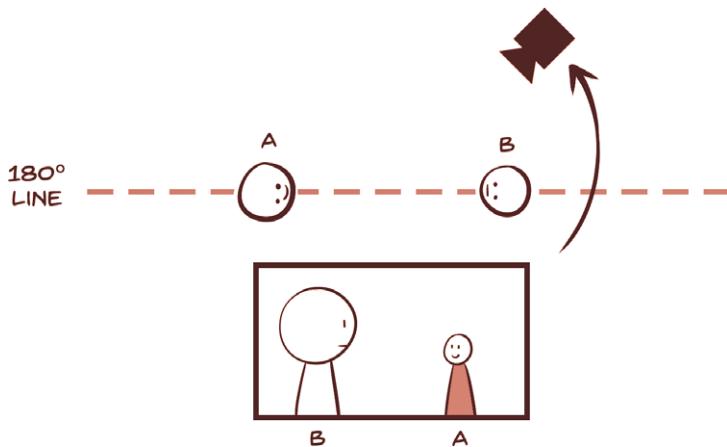
Imagine 2 characters are facing each other and talking. Now, imagine there’s a line that connects them. This is your 180 degree line. When you’re planning your shots (or, in our case, panels), your “camera” should never cross this line.



Using this means that Character A will always be on the left side of the screen, and Character B will always be on the right, no matter where the camera points. This helps your reader understand what they're looking at more easily, even if the camera angles change.

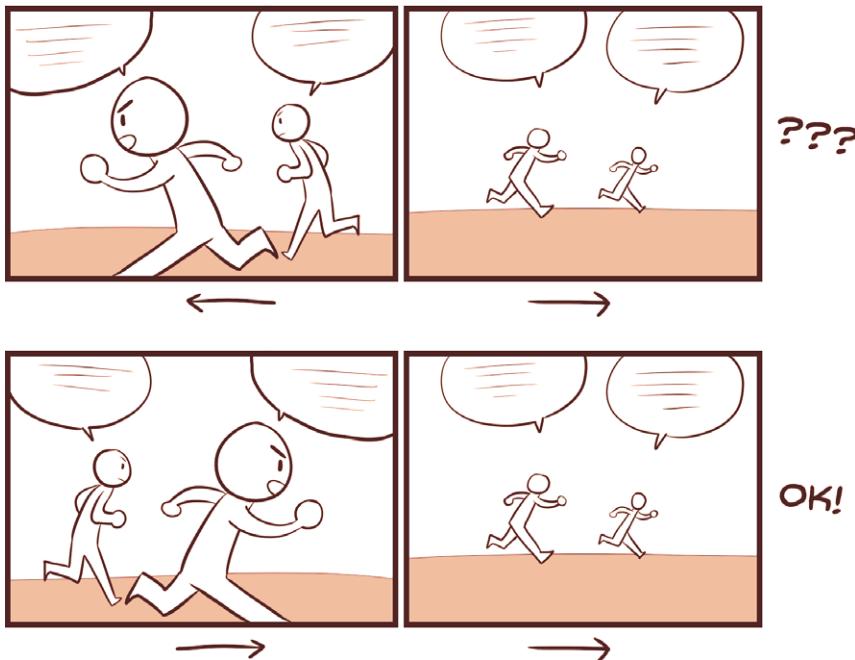


Now, what happens if we cross the line?

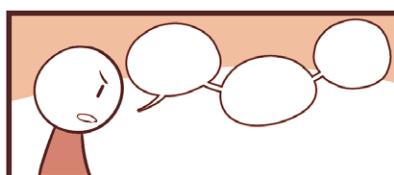


Suddenly, Character A is on the right, and Character B is on the left! This can confuse your audience and disorient them, causing them to question the layout of the scene, where characters are standing, which way they're facing, etc. It seems minor, but it can cause a lot of clarity issues if you aren't careful!

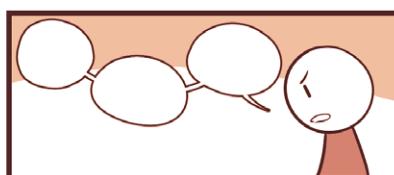
The 180 Rule also applies to things like movement. If your characters are running to the right in one panel, but running to the left in the next, your readers might get confused about which way they're running. You should always try to keep movement direction consistent!



Here's a quick sidebar for some psychology trivia: English and most other Western languages read left-to-right. Therefore, when Westerners see movement left-to-right, we view it as purposeful, faster, and more representational of forward progress, and right-to-left movement as slower, more difficult, or going against the flow.



CHARACTER IS FACING RIGHT- THE SAME AS THE DIRECTION WE'RE READING. WE NATURALLY WANT TO READ THIS DIALOG QUICKLY, SINCE THE FLOW OF THE PANEL GOES LEFT-TO-RIGHT.



CHARACTER IS FACING THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION, GOING AGAINST THE FLOW OF OUR READING. WE READ THEIR DIALOG BALLOONS, BUT NATURALLY WANT TO STOP WHEN WE HIT THEIR FACE. WE MAY LINGER ON THIS PANEL, OR EVEN WANT TO GO BACK AND REREAD THE DIALOG SIMPLY BASED ON THE DIRECTION THE CHARACTER IS FACING.

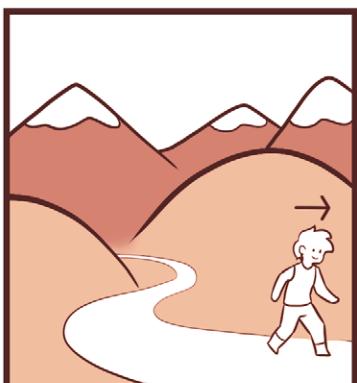
If you watch travel montages in Western movies, you'll probably notice the characters usually travel from the left to the right on the screen. Chase sequences often do the same thing; it makes the chase feel faster and more intense, because our eyes expect the movement. Meanwhile, moving left across the screen feels slower to us. Right-to-left movement can symbolize a return journey, slower progress, and/or characters feeling lost and unsure.



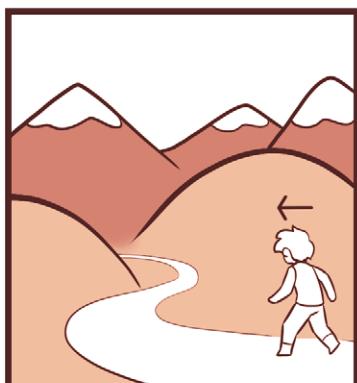
STARTING A JOURNEY
(WALKING RIGHT, WITH THE PATH
AHEAD OF THEM)



RETURNING HOME
(WALKING LEFT, WITH THE PATH
BEHIND THEM)



MID-JOURNEY
(STILL WALKING RIGHT, WITH A
PATH BEHIND THEM SHOWING
THEIR PROGRESS)

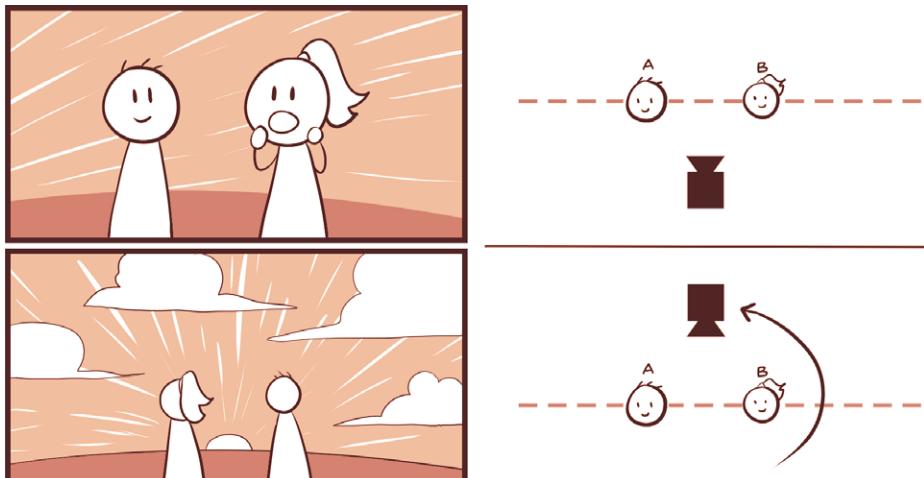


STARTING THE TRIP HOME
(WALKING LEFT, WITH THE PATH
AHEAD OF THEM)

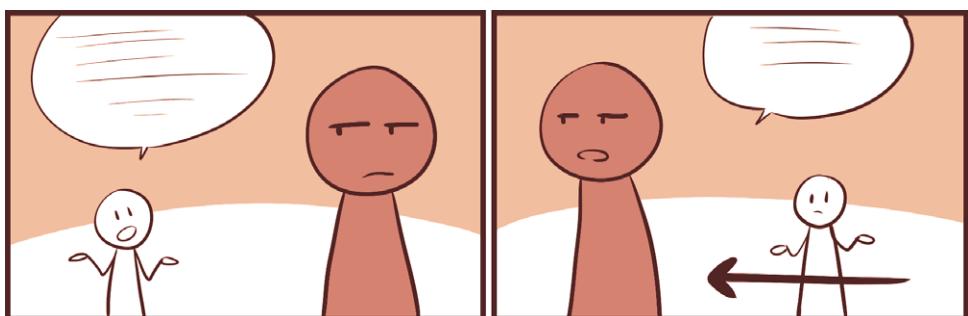
And all of this is reversed in Eastern-language media, like manga, where their text is usually read right-to-left! Cool, right?

TLDR: If you want movement in your comic to feel fast, or to make it feel like your characters are progressing, make your characters travel to the right! And to slow things down, do the reverse!

Now, there are certainly times you can break the 180 rule (often called just “breaking” or “crossing the 180”). For example, if your character turns around to look at something behind them.



Or if your characters physically move to a different place, you might need to change which side of the panel they’re on. The important thing is to SHOW this movement happening. SHOW the character moving, so that your readers can mentally adjust.



You can also break the 180 to confuse your readers on purpose! Movies do this sometimes to create a sense of unease, convey that a character is lost, or purposefully disorient the viewer or characters. Try it for scenes like a twisting, chaotic car chase, or if a character gets lost in the woods. It can help you get the mood across!

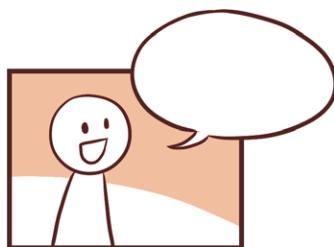


Vertical Scroll Formatting

If you're familiar with sites like Webtoon, you've most likely read a comic in vertical scroll format. These comics are formatted specifically to be easily read on mobile devices, are usually only one panel wide, and are read by scrolling down. If you want to make your comic in this style, most of the advice for paneling and layout will still apply, but here's a few things I recommend!

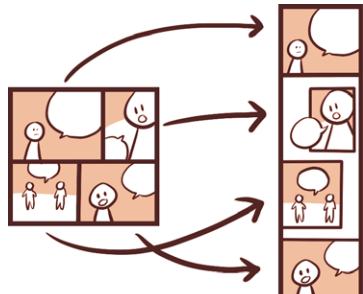


Just like how larger panels = more important in normal pages, the same is true for vertical formatted comics! Try to take advantage of your space: the larger the space between panels, the more your reader will have time to ponder what happens in said panel. Larger/longer panels will naturally make the reader pay more attention to them.



Feel free to space out your lettering as well! Since you aren't bound to the constraints of a printed page, you can get away with word balloons breaking out of the panel. Just make sure your lettering size is consistent, and large enough to be read on mobile devices!

Also, if you plan to print your comic someday, you can draw your pages in a print page format and then separate and rearrange the panels into a vertical format. This will save you the trouble of having to puzzle them into a standard comic page format when it's time to print.



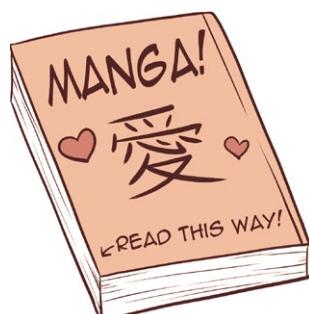
Manga and Right-to-Left Comics

If you've read manga (Japanese comics), you'll know that manga is usually printed in such a way that you have to read them right-to-left, as opposed to Western comics that read left-to-right. This is because the Japanese language is written right-to-left, so their comics are the same way. These days, when manga publishers localize manga for an English-speaking market, they just replace the text and preserve the right-to-left format. And if you love manga, you might be tempted to do the same!

Don't.

Now, listen- I adore manga. It was almost all I read for most of middle and high school. So I understand the perceived appeal of making your webcomic look like manga. But by using a "backwards" manga format, you're going to alienate a **HUGE** part of your potential audience who either don't read manga, or don't want to read a webcomic in that format. Assuming your comic is made originally in English, reading a comic "backwards" can be really confusing to some readers. As much as I love manga, if I open up an English webcomic that tells me to read right-to-left.... I probably won't read it.

It's one thing if a work was originally created specifically for a right-to-left format, and reading it "backwards" is just a side effect of translation. It's another thing entirely if an artist is purposefully making their work try to be something it's not. **Make your comic read the same way as the language you're writing it in.** If you're making an English comic, make it read left-to-right. It'll flow a lot better, mesh better with the art, and won't confuse your readers.



Show, Don't Tell

One of the joys of a visual medium is that you can **use the art to tell the story for you**. This is often called “Show, Don’t Tell”.

Here’s a simple example: If you want to say that a character’s favorite color is blue, you could “tell” the audience that by having the character say “My favorite color is blue!” in the script. Or, alternatively, we can “show” that their favorite color is blue with the art. Maybe we see the character wearing lots of blue clothes, having blue accessories, using blue pens to write with, or their bedroom being painted blue. Instead of having that character’s favorite color being *told* directly to the reader, readers can see them gravitating towards the color blue and come to that conclusion on their own.

"TELL"



"SHOW"



Think: Do your readers need every little detail spelled out for them, or can they discern those details just by looking at the art? Can you tell the story with the visuals and actions of the characters without relying on just dialogue to get the point across?

We discussed this a lot when we discussed screen design- how different staging and panel compositions can tell a reader a ton of information about your characters. But other aspects of the art can also be used to *SHOW* your readers things, and cut back on unnecessary *TELLing*.



A good example of “show” being used effectively is in dialogue-free animated short films, like the ones Pixar shows before their movies. Because there’s no dialogue, they’re relying 100% on the visuals to tell the story. Studying these films can teach you how to effectively “show” in your story!

However, “show”-ing isn’t perfect, nor is it the be-all-end-all of storytelling. Sometimes it can be hard to get things across if you’re only “show”-ing in your story. The narratives in wordless short films are usually fairly simple, but your webcomic’s story might be more complex. Maybe you need you to “tell” the audience something to make it easier to understand. But how do you know when to “show” vs when to “tell”? How much “show” is too much? Is one always better than the other?

The “show vs tell” debate is a contentious one in all types of storytelling, from comics to movies to books. And, like many things in this book, there isn’t a perfect black-and-white answer. However, one thing that helped me use it more effectively is the concept of...

Expanding vs. Condensing

One alternative way to think about Show vs. Tell is by rewording it to “expanding vs. condensing”. Basically: If you want to draw something out, spend the time to *show* it to us. If you need to get a point across quickly and concisely, it’s better to just *tell* the audience the information.

Now, the truth is that sometimes you can’t show everything. But in visual mediums like comics, it’s usually better storytelling to show something rather than telling it. But sometimes, if you need to get information across to the audience, it’s easiest to just tell it to them.

In general, a good thing to remember is that **your readers are smarter than you think they are**. A problem I had when I was a less experienced writer was feeling like I needed to over-explain everything that was happening in my story or else my audience wouldn’t understand the story. But you’d be amazed what sort of small details your readers can pick up on. They don’t need to be told everything!

On the other hand, over-relying on showing, or just not showing things well, can cause your audience to get confused. If your showing is too subtle or indirect, they may miss the point, or, in the worst-case scenario, interpret things completely incorrectly! Storytelling is a difficult skill to learn, and honestly the best way to learn it is with practice.

If you’re worried about how your storytelling is coming across, remember to **utilize your beta readers!** Show them your scripts or comic pages and ask what they can understand from the page, if anything is confusing to them, and if they’re picking up what you’re trying to get across. It’s always okay to ask for help!



Character Design

Character design is its own beast that I could write a whole other book about. There are plenty of guides out there, and I encourage you to do your own research and try out different things when designing your characters! I will offer a few key tips, though:

Make them easy to draw! Or, at the very least, design them so you won't go crazy drawing them over and over again. When you're drawing that ornate outfit for the 300th time and your arm feels like it's going to fall off, you might wish you had stuck with something simpler. Plus, all those fiddly details will be hard to remember, and it'll slow you down if you have to constantly keep looking at references. Once you think you've settled on a character design, try drawing them a few times without reference. If you constantly forget part of your character design, it might be a better idea just to toss it.

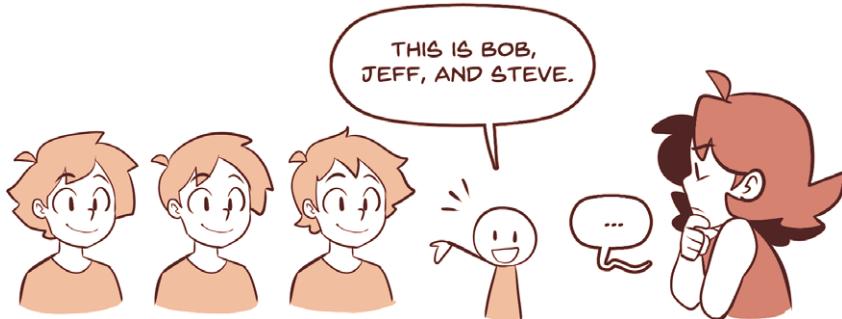


EXTREMELY DETAILED!
WILL TAKE A LONG
TIME TO DRAW, AND
HAS A LOT OF EASY-TO-
FORGET DETAILS.



MUCH SIMPLER!
WILL BE FASTER TO
DRAW AND EASIER
TO DRAW WITHOUT
REFERENCE.

Make them varied! Especially important for comics with lots of characters. Make sure that your cast is easy to differentiate between one another and give them different silhouettes and color schemes. Otherwise, your audience might get them mixed up.

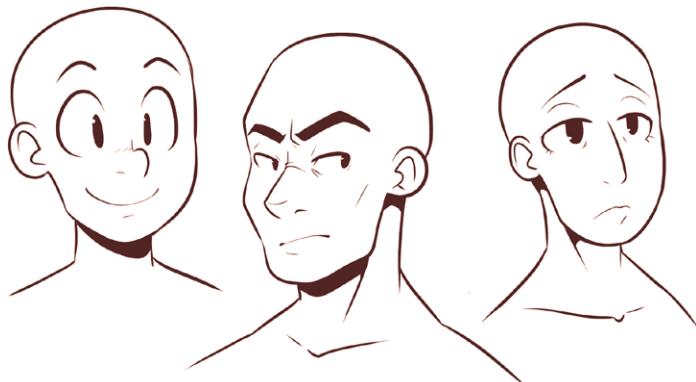


Not sure if your character designs are up to snuff? Here are a few tests:

- **Draw your characters' silhouettes!** Can you tell them apart? If not, try mixing up their heights, body types, and distinguishing features such as hair and clothes. Below are the silhouettes for the main cast in *Castoff!*



- **Draw your characters in black + white, with no hair, clothes, or accessories.** Can you still tell them apart? If not, try varying their face shapes and features!



Facial Expressions

Think of your characters as actors! While written books have to describe facial expressions, in comics you can actually **SHOW** your characters' faces! Take advantage of that!

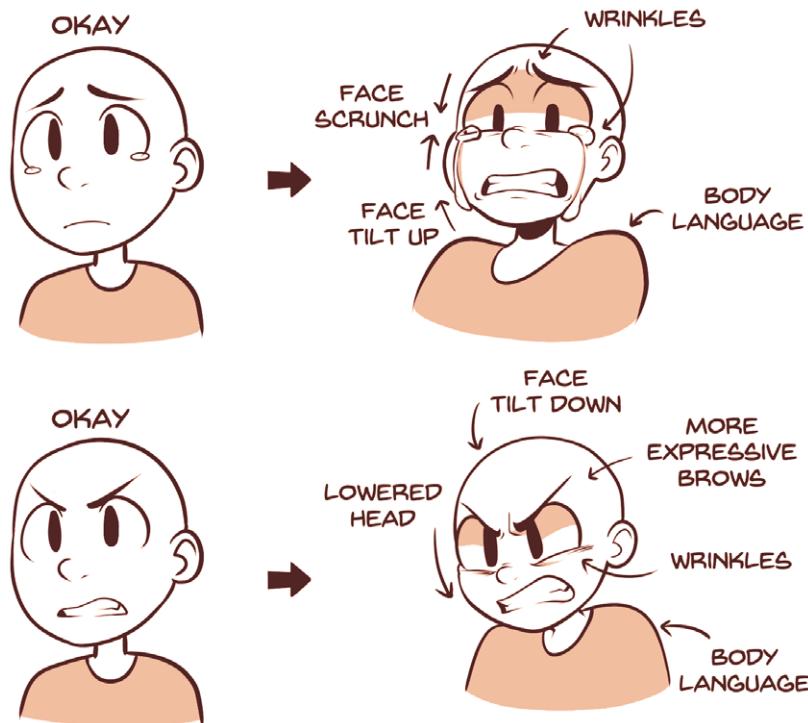
Try to give each character their own ways of emoting. Some will wear their feelings openly on their face, while others will be more subtle. What do their expressions say about their emotions in-the-moment, and about their overall personality? Are their faces over-the-top, or more subdued? Simple character expressions can convey a LOT of... well, *character!*



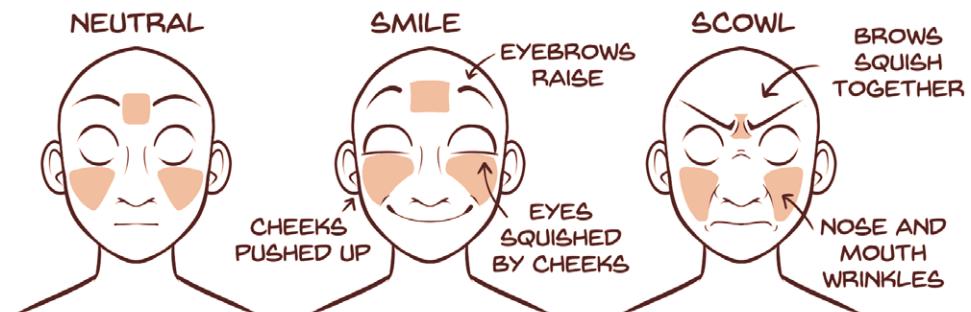
Having trouble getting an emotion just right? Grab a mirror or a camera and use your own face as a reference! Pay close attention to things like the angle and furrow of the eyebrows, the shape of the eyes, and the shape of the mouth, and try your best to replicate it in your drawings!
When in doubt, use a reference!



A few more tips: Do your best to really PUSH expressions to be more expressive! The art can say SO MUCH. Push the eyebrows, head angles, mouth shapes, and body language to *really* get the emotions across, especially in big, emotional moments!



Also, remember that the movement of the face affects other parts! For example, smiling doesn't just affect the mouth, it also affects the corners of the eyes and the eyebrows. Frowning affects the eyes and cheeks, and a furrowed brow will cause wrinkles between them. For more dynamic expressions, be sure to keep the whole face in mind!

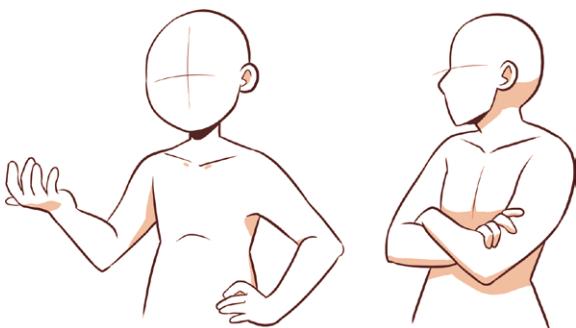


Body Language

The way they emote, move, and carry themselves can give a lot of insight into their emotions. If a character is sad, don't just show it in their face- use their whole body!



A nervous character might fidget, avoid eye contact, or slouch over to make themselves seem smaller.



How a character uses their arms can show if they're inviting, or more closed off.

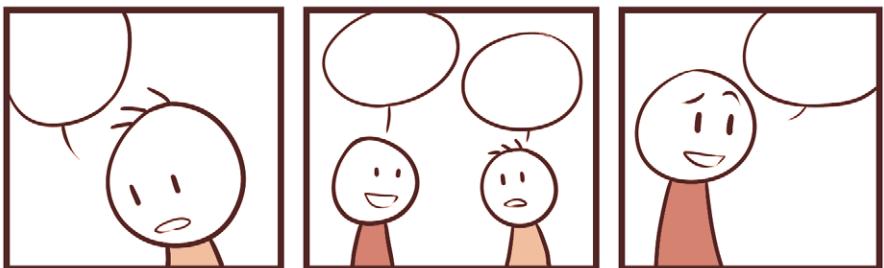
Would your character talk with their hands a lot? Let them emote with more than just their face!



It's a good idea to try acting out scenes as you draw them, to get an idea of how a character might move or pose. You can also try looking up Body Language Analysis videos on Youtube. They can help give you ideas for what kind of body language you can use for your characters!

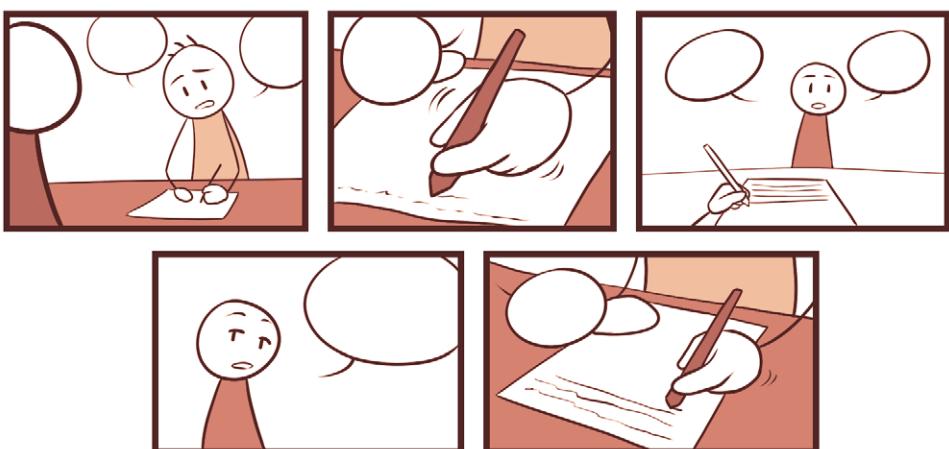
Avoid “Talking Heads”

If you write a comic with a lot of dialogue and characters talking to each other, you might fall into the problem of having too many panels of “talking heads”. I see this a lot in novice comic creators’ works, and it can make your comic’s visuals very stale.



So, how do we avoid this? **Give your characters something to do!**

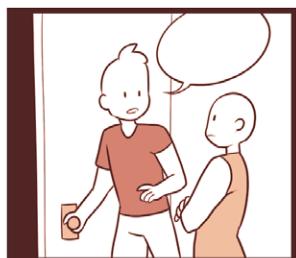
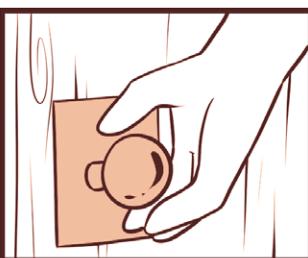
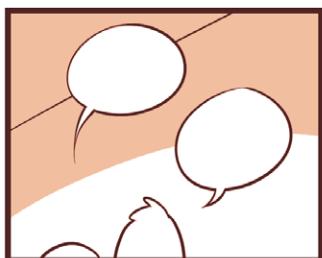
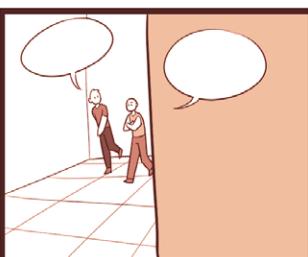
If your characters are stuck in one place- for example, sitting at a table and talking- put props on the table they can play with. You can incorporate a lot of subtle acting by showing how characters interact with the objects and space around them, AND keep your panels from getting too repetitive. Two birds with one stone!



Another idea: Do your characters HAVE to be just standing and talking to each other, or can they be on the move?

Show them talking as they travel between locations, and occasionally cut to the environment around them to break up the talking heads.

Highlight their body language. Do they take long, confident strides? Does one character struggle to keep up with another's walking pace? Do they walk in tandem, or does one lead while the rest follow? Consider how you can use this type of detail to show the personalities and relationships between your characters. This is a great way to utilize "show don't tell"!



Show Feet

...Did that title grab your attention? ...Good. Let's move on.

While you're planning your pages, it's important to show your environments as well as your characters! We all love drawing close-ups of our characters, but it's important to zoom out every now and then to give your audience an idea of the characters' surroundings.

The "show feet" saying means that once every page or so, you should zoom out enough that we see your character's whole body. If you stay zoomed in too close for too long, your readers can lose track of where your characters are.

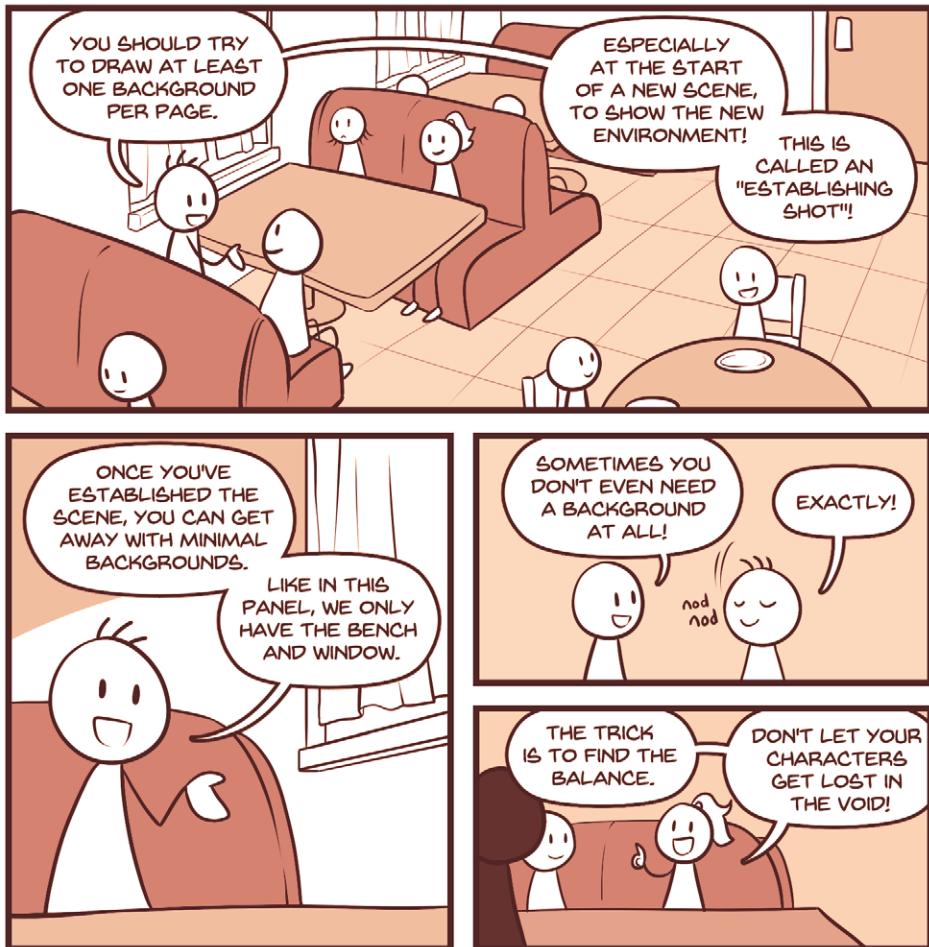


Now that we know it's important to show your characters in their environments, let's talk about...

Backgrounds

The hardest part of making comics is drawing stuff you don't want to draw. For a lot of people, that's backgrounds.

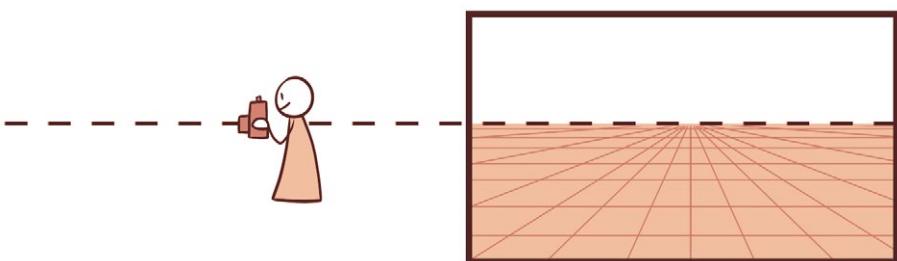
It's a hard-to-swallow pill for some, but it's true: **You need to draw backgrounds in your comics.** Depending on the story you're telling, your backgrounds can be just as important as your characters! However, that doesn't mean you *HAVE* to draw a super-detailed background in every single panel. **I recommend at least one well-drawn background per comic page**, to keep your characters grounded in their environment. However, once you've established the scene, you can breeze through on minimal details for the rest of the page!



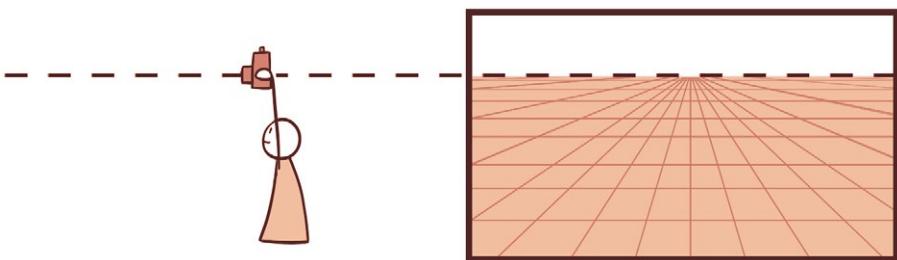
Background and Perspective Tips

Like many other topics in this book, backgrounds and drawing in perspective are topics that I'd need an entire other book to go into full detail about. Improving your backgrounds will require some extra research and practice on your part! However, here are a few tips I've picked up over my time making comics!

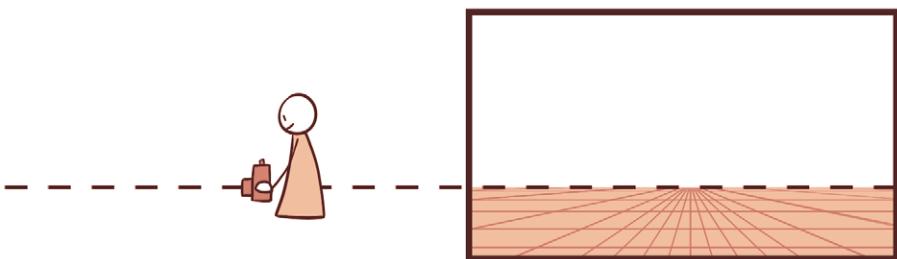
Let's start by talking about some perspective basics, starting with the horizon line. Imagine a character holding a camera. **The horizon line is the camera's eye line.** The height of the camera will affect the height of the horizon line.



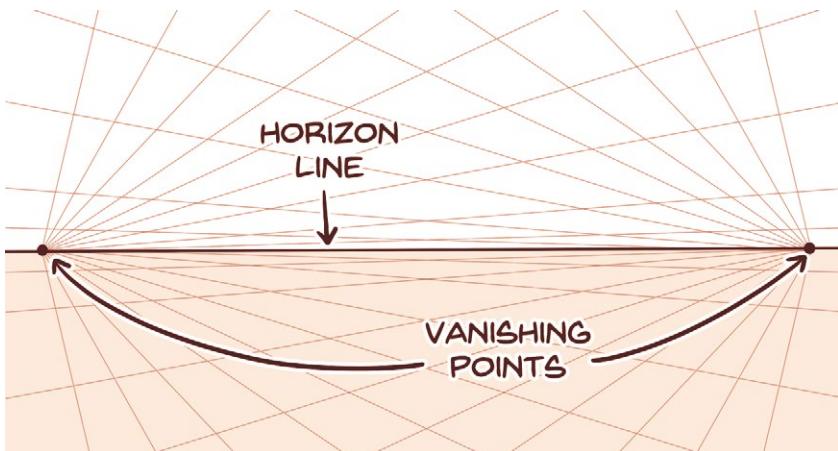
A higher point of view will make the shot have a higher horizon line.



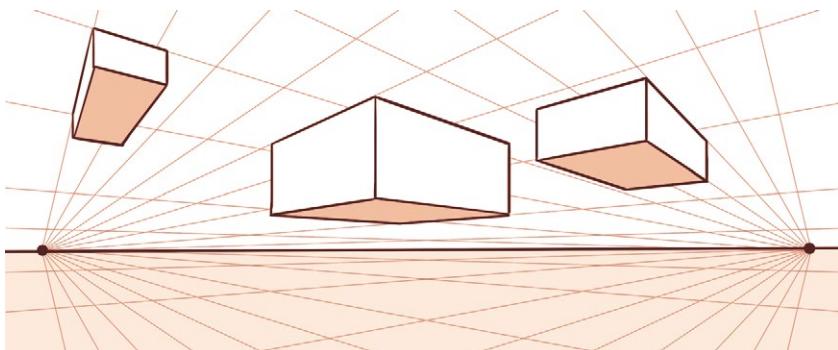
A lower point of view will make the shot have a lower horizon line.



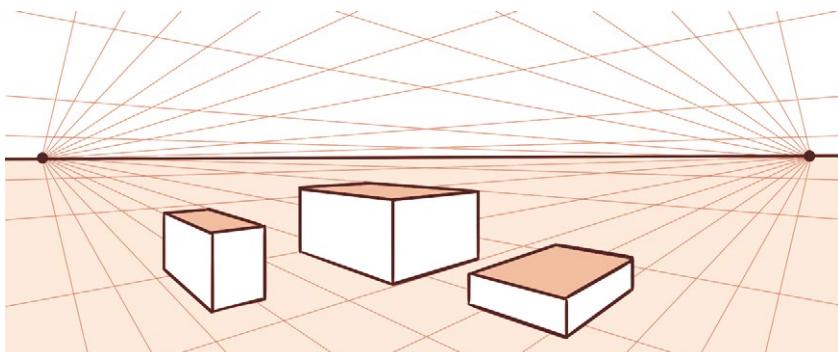
Your perspective vanishing points (for 1- and 2-point perspective) will always be somewhere on the horizon line.



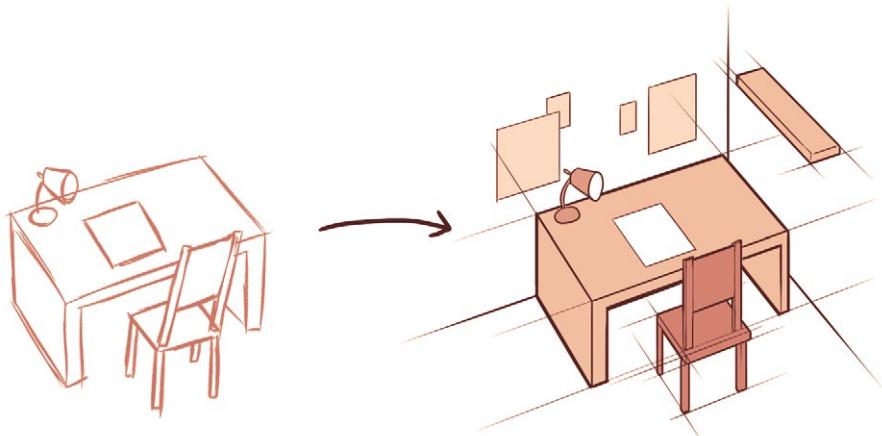
For things **above** the horizon line, we'll see them from below, and the bottoms will be visible.



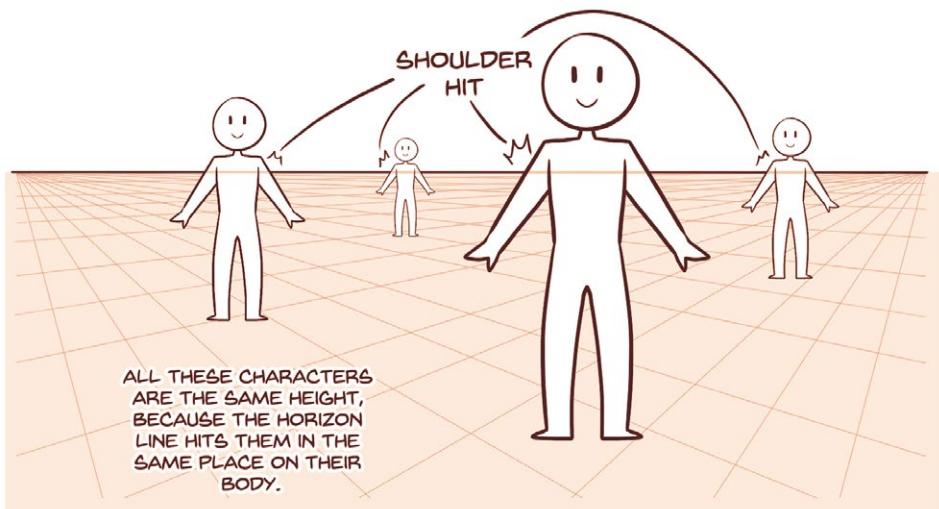
For things **below** the horizon line, we'll see them from above, and the tops will be visible.



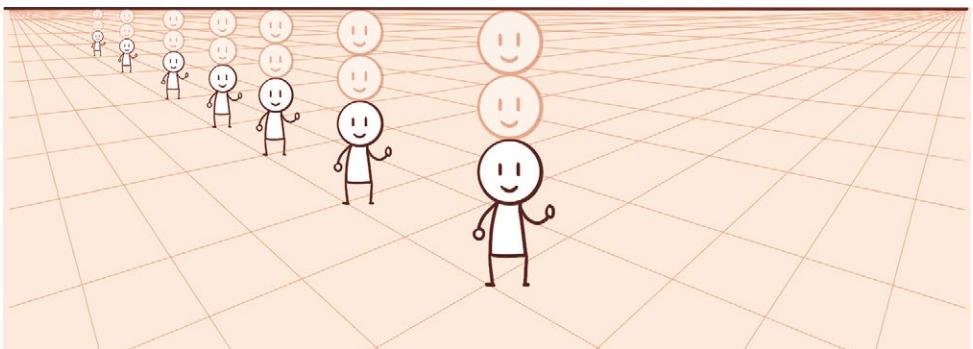
When planning a background, it's easy to get lost in the weeds trying to figure out the perspective. A lot of the time, it's easier to sketch out a rough composition, then **refine the perspective based on the sketch**, instead of the other way around.



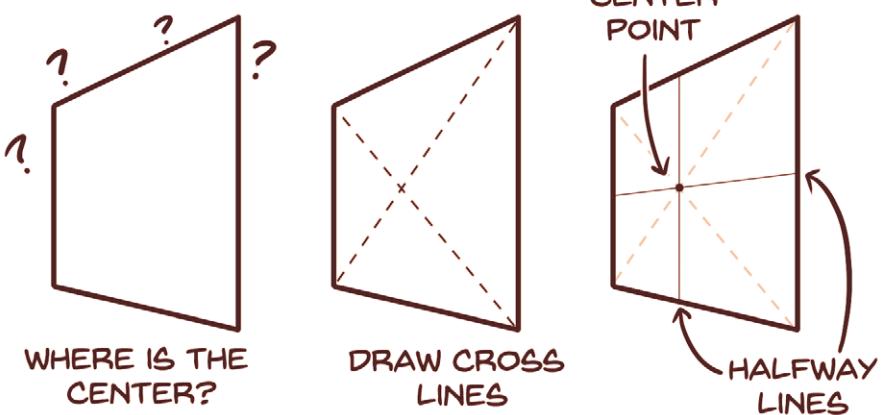
How do we get characters to fit into our environments with the correct perspective? **Characters that are the same height will be hit at the same place by the horizon line.** No matter how close or far away from the “camera” a character is, the horizon line should hit them in the same place. Using this idea, you can “hang” characters on the horizon line when planning shots in perspective.



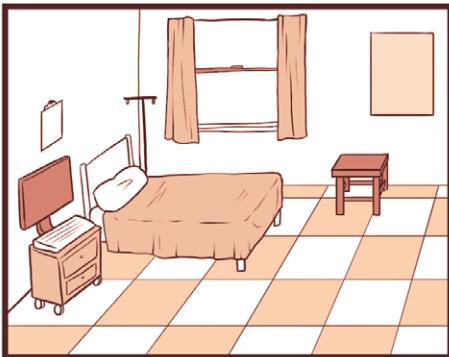
But what if the horizon line is super high and your characters don't intersect with it? **You can use their heads as a guide!** If a character's head is 3 head lengths below the horizon line, other characters will also be 3 head lengths below it. Just make sure you're keeping the head lengths proportional to their size.



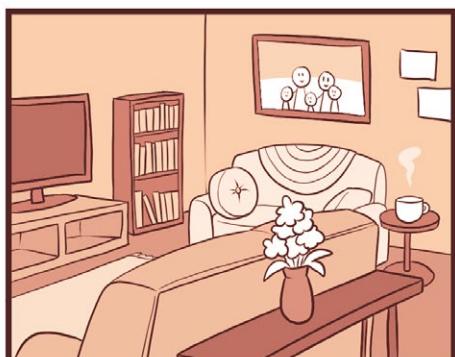
Also, one of my favorite perspective tips: You can find the exact center of a shape in perspective by drawing an X over it. Where the lines of the X connect is the exact center point!



When designing the backgrounds in your comic, try to think about the purpose of the space, and what has/will happen in that space. Then, utilize this information and reflect it in the background design! What's in the space? How is it decorated? What is its purpose? The interior of a hospital will be designed very differently than a child's bedroom.



Simultaneously, think about who or what inhabits that space, and what effect the inhabitants have on their environment. If you're drawing a character's home, are they messy, or do they keep their space tidy? Do they have a ton of decorations and trinkets, or are they more of a minimalist? What does the environment say about the characters that live there? What can you learn about a character by studying their living space?



To get ideas, do some research and gather references! Sites like Pinterest will be your best friend. Whenever I have to draw a new environment, I like to spend some time gathering ideas from photos and illustrations!

Simplifying Your Art

As I mentioned at the start of this segment, webcomics are hard. Drawing comic pages takes a lot of time, and many people never start their webcomic because they're paralyzed by how much work it will be. However, your webcomic pages don't have to be amazingly detailed, fully-rendered masterpieces! Keeping your comic art simple can help you speed up the process, let you update more frequently, and avoid artistic burnout while working on your story. Here are some of my tips for simplifying your art process!

Keep character designs simple. We covered this earlier, but it's worth repeating: making your characters simple and easy to draw will help you save a lot of time when drawing them over and over.

Not every panel needs a background. Again, while setting your scene is important, you can save a lot of energy by keeping backgrounds simple on panels that don't focus on them. You can often get by with just one or two backgrounds per page, to keep your characters grounded in their environment and make sure your readers know where they are (see the "show feet" page from earlier). Then, you can do flat colors or simple "hints" at the background on other panels.

Draw in greyscale. Webcomics don't NEED to be in color! Greyscale comics are generally faster because they remove the need to fiddle with colors. Some comics opt for just black and white lineart, while others use grey values or screentones.



Unfortunately, some readers would argue that black and white comics are "boring". While I heavily disagree, here are some ways to add some color to your comic without adding too much extra work!

Spot Color. Doing your comic in black and white with occasional splashes of a single color can be a good way to add interest and intrigue to your art, while keeping the actual rendering of your pages fairly simple. Many printed graphic novels use this method, as printing with only one color is fairly simple and cost-effective!

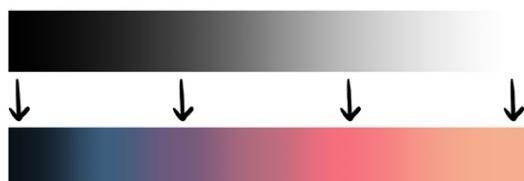


Gradient Maps. Not every art program will have these, but gradient maps are super fun and easy to use! Gradient maps look at the value (how light or dark your image is) and convert those values to color!

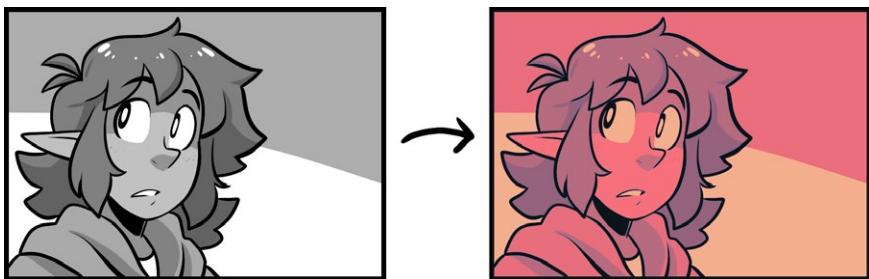
For example, say your image looks like this:



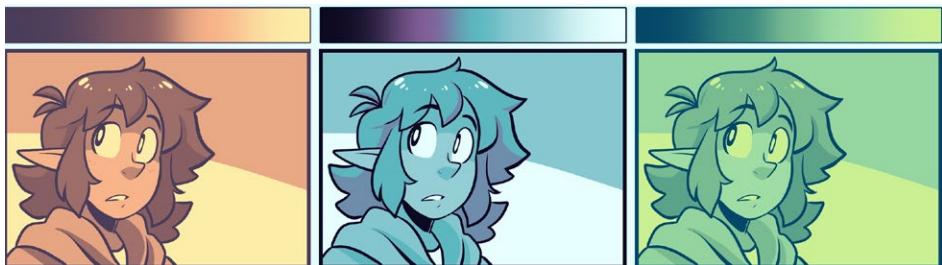
A gradient map will take the values of your image and convert them into colors you choose, like this!



Which would turn the previous image into something like this!



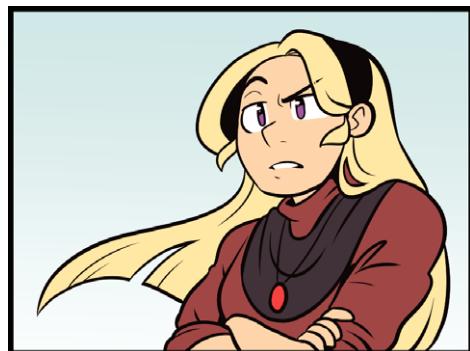
You can adjust the colors of your gradient maps very easily to create a wide variety of color schemes and moods!



You can also use gradient maps in combination with other types of shading. I personally love to use them to add atmospheric lighting to my pages! Play around and look up tutorials to see what you can do with them! (I used gradient maps for almost all the illustrations in this book!)



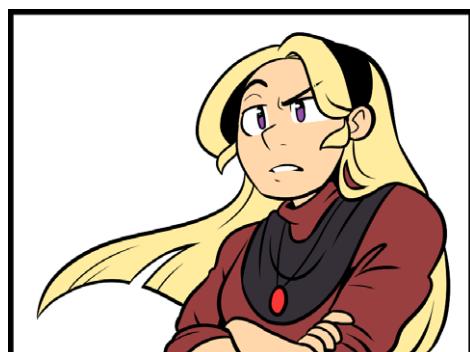
Keep shading simple. You don't need to fully paint every single panel. Many beautiful comics don't shade their pages at all! If you use your colors and light/dark values well, you can just stick with flat colors and avoid shading entirely. (My first webcomic was done this way for the first several chapters)



If you can't bear the thought of not shading your pages, then at the very least try to keep your shading simple. Here's a fast, simple way to color that I use for *Castoff* pages using **layer styles!**

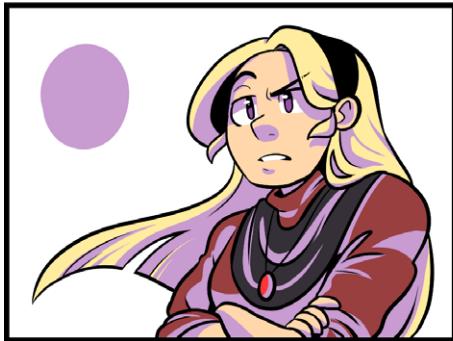
(This should work on most digital art programs. If you aren't sure, look up if your program allows for layer styles!)

First, I start with my flat colors all on one layer.

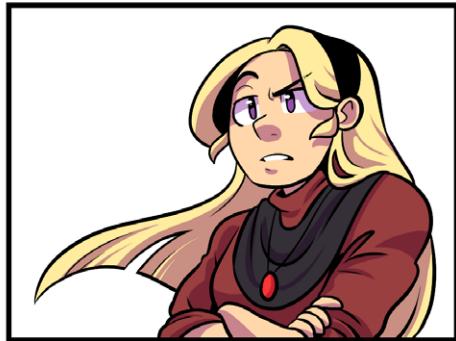


Then for shadows, I make a new layer on top and set its style to multiply. Multiply layers will darken colors, which makes them good for shadows! I typically use a light gray-purple to draw in shadows, like this, but be aware that the colors you use may change depending on the lighting of the scene!

SHADING - SET TO NORMAL

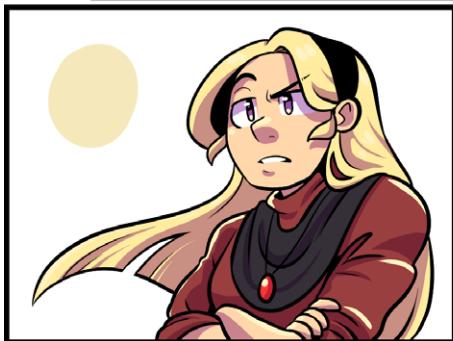


SHADING - SET TO MULTIPLY



You can do the same thing with highlights! Use an Overlay or Screen layer with a highlight color (I often use a light yellow) to draw on highlights!

HIGHLIGHTS - SET TO NORMAL



HIGHLIGHTS - SET TO OVERLAY



Ta-da~ Quick and easy shading using only two layers!

You can change the color of your multiply and overlay layers to change how the shading looks, as well! A quick tip is that, usually, the color of the shadows will be the opposite of the lighting color. Purple shadows for yellow lighting, blue shadows for orange/red lighting, etc. Try playing around and seeing what works best with the color palette of your scene!

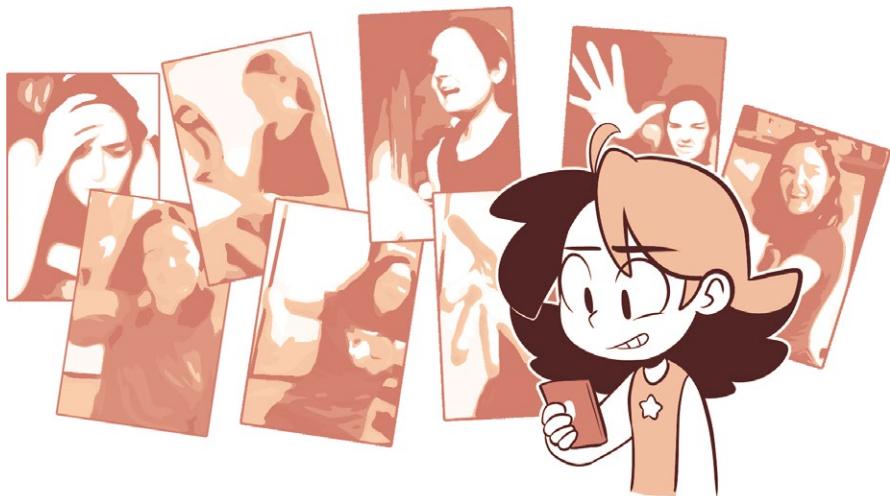
Other Shortcuts and Time-Savers

If you followed my work before reading this book, you're probably aware that I love my shortcuts. Comics are time-consuming, but there are lots of ways to help speed up the process and save time! Comics are already a huge time sink, so if you can shave some time off your comic work, it'll make your life much easier in the long run. As you get more comfortable with comics and your medium of choice, you'll naturally get faster, but here are some tips to help you save even more time!

Reference Photos

As an artist, you should use reference photos as much as possible. It's easier to draw a thing if you actually know what it's supposed to look like. Try to look at a reference photo whenever possible! I like to take photos of myself doing whatever pose I need for that panel and use them as guides, especially for awkward or difficult poses.

...I have a lot of weird stuff in my phone's camera roll.



If you need reference for a pose that's hard to photograph, then I suggest using...

3D Models

3D models can be your best friends when it comes to getting reference. Whether it's moving a humanoid mannequin around to get the perfect pose reference, designing a room interior to keep details consistent between panels, or modeling an entire city block to quickly block in complicated perspective, I highly recommend using 3D models to your advantage!

Clip Studio Paint, my comic-making software of choice, has a collection of 3D assets you can use and reference in your art. Programs like **SketchUp** or **RoomSketcher** are good for building sets with existing assets. And some modeling programs (like **Blender**) are free if you need to make your own models for props, buildings, and more. There are a lot of free guides online if you want to learn how to use them!

Personally, I like to use the models as reference and either sketch over them, or trace directly on top of them. But some software (like Clip Studio Paint) will allow you to directly convert 3D models into lineart, drastically simplifying the process! It depends on what software you have available. Play around, do some research, and see what you can do!



Custom Brushes

This one really only applies to those working in digital art programs, but don't underestimate the value of custom brushes! In digital art software, you can create brushes to do almost anything, and save you time in the process. Custom brushes are like stamps, and they can allow you to "draw" repetitive shapes extremely quickly. Each software has different features and limitations for their custom brushes, so I highly recommend researching and experimenting with yours!

Foliage brushes are fairly common, as well as brushes for adding effects and textures. I've made a brush to draw bubbles for underwater scenes, books in crowded library scenes, etc. Below are some examples of brushes I've made! Try making your own, or browsing the web to see what you can find. If used well, they can save you a lot of time.



BOOKS



COIN STACKS



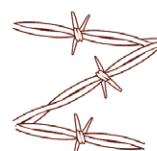
RAIN



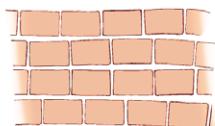
CHAINS



FESTIVAL FLAGS



BARBED WIRE



BRICKS



SPARKLES

Handwritten notes:
↳ Customizable brush size
↳ Customizable brush color
↳ Shaded brush effect

FAKE TEXT

Keyboard Shortcuts

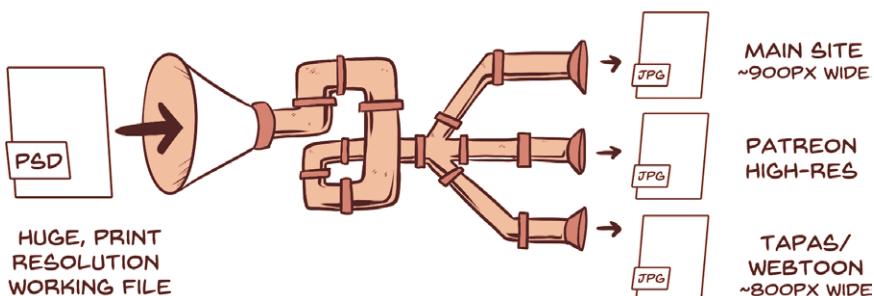
If you work digitally, keyboard shortcuts will save you HOURS of precious time. Pressing a button is a lot faster than digging through menus, after all! Your art program of choice should have some set up already, but if you don't like the arrangement you can always change them and make your own!



Multi-step Auto Actions

Another tip for digital: If there's a step of your drawing process that involves several steps, and you do it frequently, I recommend seeing if your program lets you make Actions! Actions are a bit like computer scripts: once you've set them up, you can repeat that entire process with a single button press!

For example: Since I post *Castoff* pages on multiple platforms, all with different size requirements, I have an action set up that will export a page in every size and save them in their respective folders. It saves me about 10 minutes of tedious exporting every time I finish a page!



“Isn’t that cheating?”

This is a bit of a contentious topic among artists. Digital art has a lot of shortcuts and tools that make drawing faster and easier. But some people see these shortcuts and “art hacks” and are quick to call it “cheating”. Because REAL artists don’t need to rely on tricks like that. REAL artists can draw without using those cheats.

It’s very dumb.



Let me ask you this: Is using an eraser to correct a mistake cheating? Is using a ruler to draw a straight line cheating? Is using a broom to sweep your floor cheating? Of course not. So why are digital art shortcuts “cheating”?

Digital art is a tool, with its own benefits and shortcomings, just like anything else. Using the capabilities of your tools isn’t “cheating,” it’s using them for what they were designed to do. It’s common sense. So don’t be shy about using shortcuts or “hacks” to make your life easier. If you can do something in 5 minutes, why would you purposely choose to do it in a way that takes an hour instead? Working more efficiently will allow you to save time you can put back into your comic, your other projects, or your personal life. And besides, unless you tell them, *your readers will never know the difference anyway*. They’ll only see the finished product, and not the amount of time you spent or saved working on it.

Work smarter, not harder. You’ll be glad you did.

“But my art’s not good enough!”

This is an excuse I hear a lot when people say they want to start a webcomic. I’ll ask why they haven’t started yet, and they’ll say something like “I want my art to get better first” or “I don’t know how to do paneling/composition/lettering/etc yet.” And this has always confused me, because how do you expect to get better at something by NOT doing it? You don’t get good at playing the tuba by looking at the tuba and thinking about it really hard. If you want to improve at something, you have to actually DO the thing. So stop hoarding tutorials on Pinterest, sit down and DO COMICS!

One of my college professors told me, “*We all have 1000 bad drawings inside us. And if you want to get to the good drawings, you have to get those 1000 bad drawings out of your system first.*” *

Say you want to draw a bicycle. You’ve never drawn a bicycle. Is your very first bicycle going to be a masterpiece? Of course not! It’s probably gonna look pretty bad, especially if you’re not using reference (which you should, by the way. Use reference!!). But I’m willing to bet your 10th bicycle will look better than your first. And your 100th bicycle will be even better. And by the time you’ve drawn 1000 bicycles, you’ll be *amazing* at drawing bicycles!



You improve at something by doing it. You’ll figure out how to make comics when you start making comics. This is why so many people suggest starting with a smaller webcomic project first: you can use it as practice, as a learning experience. My first attempt at a webcomic was only 6 pages, and it was *awful*, but my second attempt was much better, because I had learned so much from that first comic. And *Castoff* (my 3rd webcomic) is light-years better than it would have been if I didn’t have that experience under my belt. **If you want to improve your comics, you have to DO comics.** Don’t be shy about your progress, just get out there and draw!!!

*He actually used some different words here, but I’m trying to keep this book rated G, so I’m paraphrasing. Just imagine some additional vulgarity!

But what if you're worried about your art in general, not just comics? What if you look at your art and say “Wow, my art is so bad, no one will want to read my comics”? First of all, that’s a terrible way to think about yourself, so knock that off. We all start somewhere, okay? Wanting to improve already tells me you have the right mindset to be an artist. So let’s talk about improving.

Comics are a great way to improve your art, because you’ll find yourself drawing things you might never have drawn otherwise. Weird poses at weirder angles. Environments. Props. Expressions. Anything, you name it. Include it in your webcomic, and you’ll learn to draw it before you know it, just from how much practice you’ll be getting.

But if you still want to work on your art before getting into a big webcomic project? Then it’s time to hit the (sketch) books. **The best thing you can do is practice, and practice a LOT.** Look at reference images and draw what you see. Go to figure drawing sessions if you can find some local to you. Trace over photos to learn about structure. In art school we did “master studies”, where we took art from other artists and tried to replicate it as best as we could. Go on YouTube and watch art tutorial videos. Getting out of your comfort zone is a great way to level up your art abilities!

Does that sound boring? It might. I know I personally have trouble just sitting down and drawing without purpose other than “getting better.” What I recommend in this instance? **Practice with your comic in mind.** Do figure drawings, but instead of drawing the model, draw your characters in those poses. Draw what their bedroom looks like to practice environments, prop design, and perspective. Make concept art sketches to practice color and lighting. Do what you can to make your practice more interesting and exciting, and you’ll not only be more connected with what you’re drawing, you’ll also be more motivated to practice more!



One last thing I'll note on artistic improvement: Don't expect to grow constantly or consistently. **Artistic improvement is not linear.** Every piece you draw won't necessarily be better than the last. The important thing is you **keep going**. Your progress might seem wavering, but when you look back on your older art, you'll be able to see the overall improvement over time.

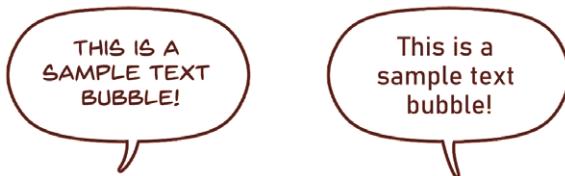


Lettering

Lettering is one of the most important parts of comics, because your readers need to be able to READ your comic!

Firstly, choose your font! First and foremost, make sure that you pick one that is easy to read. If your comic is difficult to read because of the font you chose, people might not think it's worth the headache. If you tell a masterful story written in a font that's impossible to read, it will go unread.

A lot of comic fonts are in all-caps to make them easier to read and more condensed. But your font doesn't have to be! Try to find something that meshes well with your art style. Sites like **Blambot** have lots of free comic fonts you can browse through and try out. (Just make sure you're allowed to use them for professional use if you plan to make money off your comic!) If you have trouble deciding, make some samples and compare them. Also, don't be afraid to ask friends for an outside opinion!



You can also hand letter your comic and write in all the words yourself! But, just like a font, you need to make sure that your handwriting is legible and consistently sized and spaced.

Want that hand-lettered look to your text, but want to save some time? Try making a font out of your handwriting! There are a few different websites out there that will take your handwriting and make it a font.

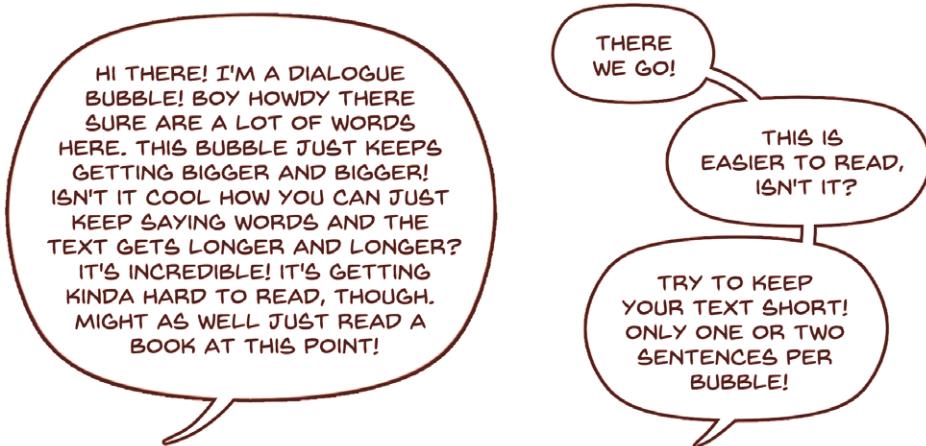
This is a font I made with my handwriting! You can do this too! It's much faster than handwriting everything, but has a similar look and feel. Try it out!

Wondering how much font choice affects the readability of your comic? Here's some examples of poor font choice. Hard to read, huh? Don't put your readers through that.



When lettering, keep the text in your word balloons short!

1-2 sentences, maximum. If there's too much text in your word balloons, your readers will struggle to read it. If you have a longer sentence, you can break it up into multiple balloons and connect them. Like this!



You can also use multiple balloons to show separate thoughts! Separate balloons imply a “breath” or a space between thoughts or sentences.



DO YOU SEE HOW LONG THIS WORD BALLOON IS?
WOW THIS LOOKS PRETTY BAD HUH? IT'S HARD TO
READ AND IS A REAL PAIN TO FIT ON THE PAGE.

Make sure your balloons aren't too long!

Overly long text balloons are sometimes called "hoagie balloons," because they look like hoagie sandwiches. Try to avoid these, as they can be difficult to read!

Also, **tall text balloons** are similarly bad form. You see them a lot in manga, because of the way Japanese text is written. As a result, a lot of artists who read lots of manga tend to mimic the taller word balloons, even though it isn't designed for Western styles of writing.

TALL TEXT
BUBBLES
HAVE THE
SAME
PROBLEM!
YOUR
WORDS WILL
GET CUT
OFF!
MANGA
DOES
THIS A LOT
SINCE
JAPANESE
IS WRITTEN
VERTIC-
ALLY,
BUT IT ISN'T
GREAT FOR
ENGLISH
COMICS!

Break up your text lines and try to keep your text as square or rounded as possible for the cleanest look!

ISN'T THIS
NICER TO READ?
I'M NICE AND
COMPACT!

However, your word balloons don't have to be perfect circles! There are lots of different ways to style them. Try experimenting to find one that meshes with your art!

THIS IS A
SAMPLE TEXT
BUBBLE!

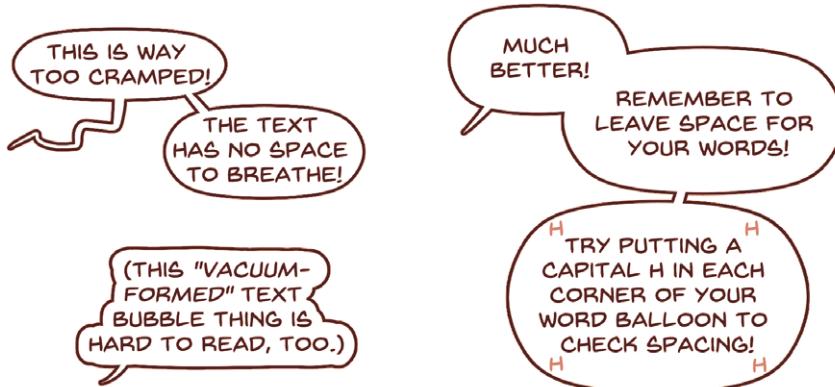
Different styles of word balloons can show different ways that characters are talking! For example, if a character is nervous, maybe their dialogue balloon is shaky to match their shaking voice. Or use a big, pointy balloon to show shouting!

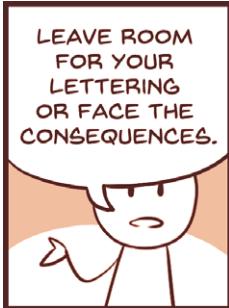


Don't forget: balloon tails and connecting lines work the same way!



Keep your dialogue **centered**, and make sure to give your words space to breathe! Try to keep about one letter's width away from the edges of the word balloon! If you aren't sure, **try writing a capital “H” in the corners of your balloon**. You should be able to fit one in between the balloon edge and your dialogue. This is a good guideline for how much space to put between your words and the word balloon edge!





Do your lettering early! I plan out where my text will go during the thumbnail phase of drawing. I recommend figuring out where your word balloons will go before you move past the sketch phase, at the very latest. Otherwise your word balloons might end up covering something important... Like a character's face, or that background you spent 3 hours drawing.

Don't cross word balloon tails! It's visually awkward and can confuse your readers. Try to format your panels to avoid this! (Another good reason to plan your word balloons early on!)



NO!



**BETTER, BUT
STILL NOT GOOD**



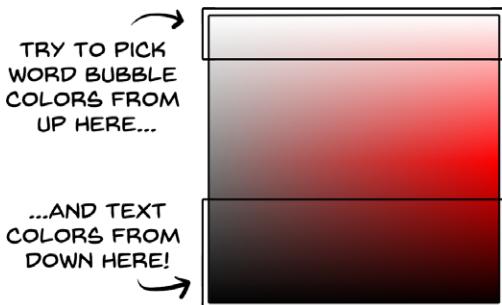
GOOD!

Watch where they're pointing! Your word balloon tails should always point to the speaker- specifically, their mouth. You don't have to get the tail super close to the subject; it just needs to be close enough that your readers understand who's talking.



Keep your font size consistent, unless you have a contextual reason for it to change! For example, if a character is shouting, you might make the text bigger to represent an increase in volume! Likewise, if a character is whispering, you might make the text smaller. But try to keep your font size the same otherwise!

Keep your balloons and text high-contrast! You might want to play around with using colored text or word balloons, instead of using pure black and white. This is a fun way to add a little flavor to your word balloons! However, it can also make your lettering harder to read, depending on your color choices. Make sure that there's enough contrast to make your words easy to read! Keep your text dark and your balloons light.



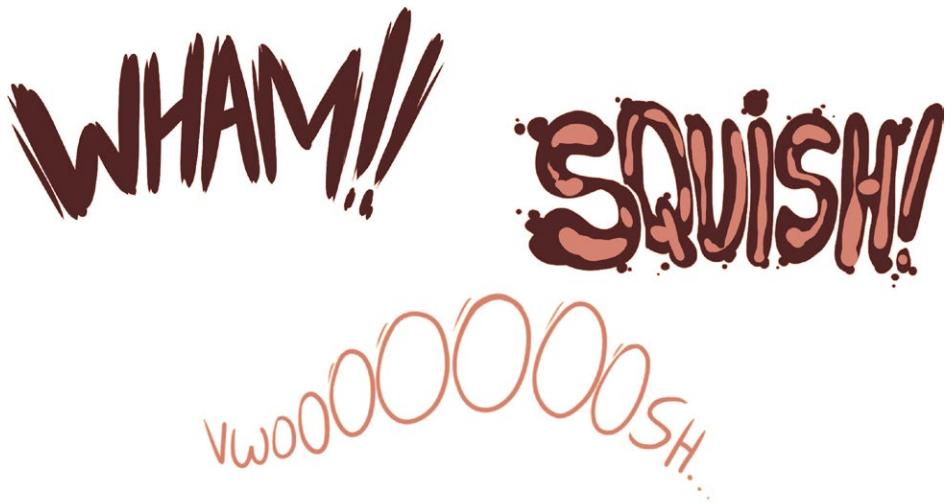
A good way to test balloon readability is to pull them up on your computer monitor and scoot back a few feet. Are they still visible from afar? Is the lettering still clear? If not, try adjusting the contrast!

Let's talk about "I"! Generally in comics lettering, if you're using an all-caps font, your "I"s should only have the cross bars at the top and bottom if it's the proper noun "I". Otherwise, just use the "I" with no cross bars. Here's an example of this in action:



Sound Effects

Just like your actual dialogue, your sound effects should look like the sound they're representing! How much you use sound effects is a choice every comic artist must make for themselves, but they can really help give readers an idea of atmosphere or action!



However! Sound effects should be exactly that: representations of SOUNDS, not actions. Try to resist using sound effects to describe what's happening in a panel. Your visuals should be self-explanatory!



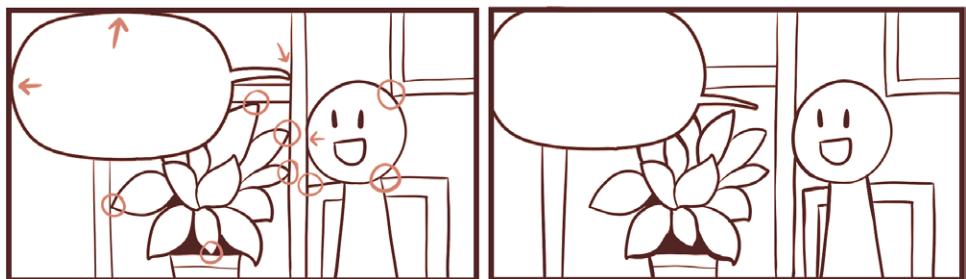
More Tips

Not every panel has to be a masterpiece! Try to find a balance of drawing speed and appeal. If your comic is going to be hundreds of pages, you won't want to spend 20 hours on each page. Consider simplifying your art style for your comic to help make pages easier to draw!

Back up your files!!! Imagine you've been working on your comic, and all of a sudden your computer goes up in flames. If you don't have your files backed up, you'll lose all your work. And that's bad. Back up your pages in multiple places, like an external hard drive or online file service, just in case disaster strikes.

A college professor once told us the story of a student who had the files for his senior film backed up on his home computer, the school's network, and an external hard drive. In one day, the school network crashed, he dropped and broke his external drive, and his house was robbed and his home computer was stolen. In one day, he lost a year of work. *DON'T LET THAT BE YOU. BACK UP YOUR FILES.*

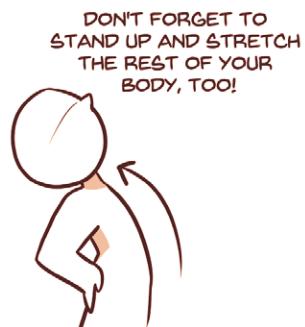
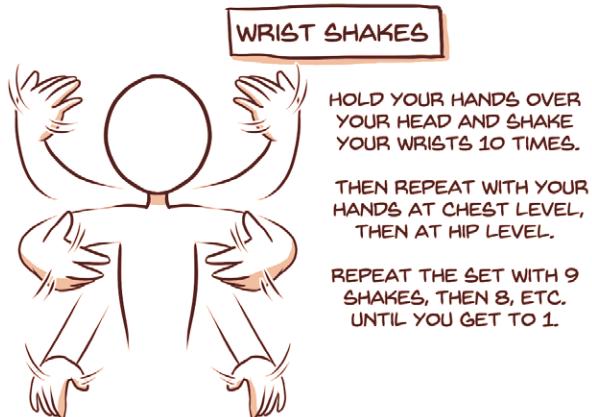
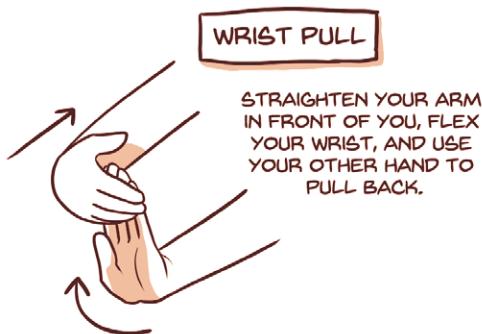
Watch out for tangents! Tangents are when lines, corners, or edges bump up against each other so perfectly that it looks like they're touching, and it can cause a weird visual effect that flattens your art. You can fix them by separating your lines, adjusting where certain shapes overlap, etc. Keep an eye out for these as you draw!



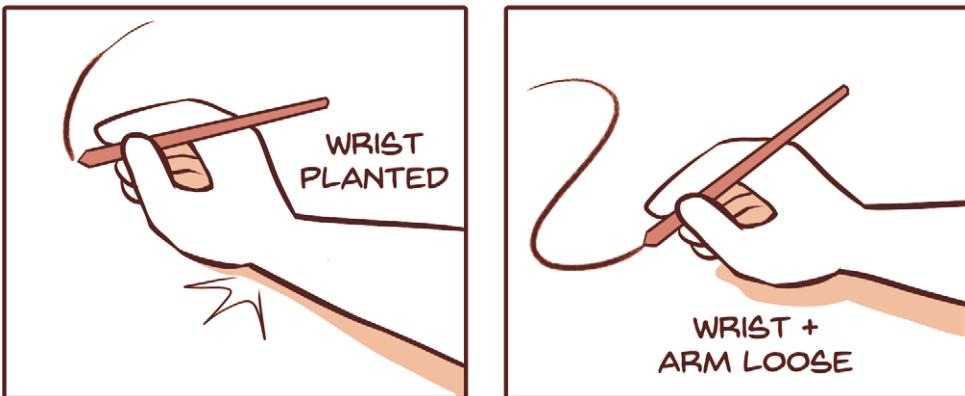
Take a break! Making comics is fun, but remember to stop and stretch frequently (at least once an hour)! Carpal tunnel and repetitive stress injuries suck, and destroying their wrist from drawing too much is what caused a lot of my friends to stop drawing altogether. *Don't let this be you!!* If your wrist hurts, take a break and stretch. Wear a wrist brace if you need to. Take care of your body, I beg you.



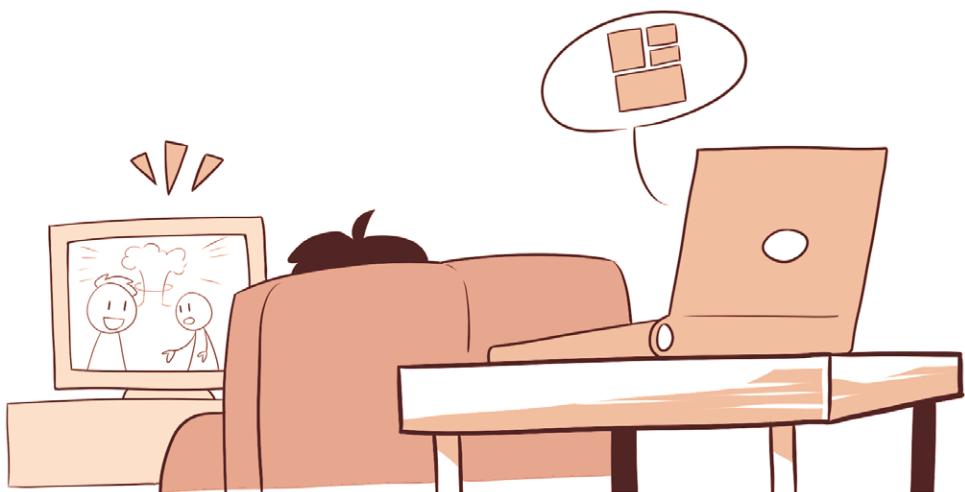
Here are some stretches you can do to help keep your drawing hands limber and relaxed!



Another tip to help keep your art hand healthy is to **draw from your shoulder, not from your wrist!** Keeping your wrist stuck to your drawing surface puts more tension on the wrist, and can lead to injury. Try using your whole arm when drawing, instead of relying solely on your wrist to do all the work. It makes drawing easier, keeps your art hand loose and relaxed, and with a little practice, will make it so you'll be able to draw for longer periods without hurting yourself!



Step away. Take some time between steps of comic-making to stare at something else, then come back to your work with a fresh pair of eyes. This will help you spot mistakes, and give your hard-working art brain a bit of a refresh. After your break, look over your page, and fix anything that doesn't look right before continuing.



Try not to fall into the remake-loop. Too many stories just stop because the artist feels the need to redo older pages. Imagine you've just finished the first 10 pages of your new comic... but then you look at your first page and think "Wow, I've gotten so much better since I drew that first page, I should redraw it!" And then you redraw the first page.... And then the second... and the third... And pretty soon, you don't have a webcomic. You have 10 pages running in an infinite loop. Let your old pages be, and keep moving forward! You improve over time, that's normal and good!



Batch Work: Is It Right For You?

When working on comic pages, you may ask yourself: **Should I work on each page one at a time, or work in larger batches?**

The short answer is: it's up to you! While working in batches is generally more efficient, it might not be best for you and your work style. I recommend experimenting to find out which works best. For reference, here's a little anecdote!

A few years ago, I used to work on *Castoff* pages in large batches. I'd sketch 8-10 pages at a time, then ink all those pages at once, then color them all in a row. This was very efficient! But over time I found it difficult to focus on anything else when I had a batch of comic pages in progress. If I had time to draw, I *needed* to be working on comic pages until the most recent batch was done. And because a batch of pages took several weeks to finish, I would only have a few days to rest before needing to start the next batch. While I was very productive, it wore me down quite a lot and made me start resenting my comic work. Which was bad!

Instead, I started working in smaller batches of 2 pages at a time. Since *Castoff* updates with 2 pages per week, I just needed to complete 2 pages each week to keep up with the workload. At the start of each week I'd sketch 2 pages, then ink them both, then color them. I usually finish my comic page workload for the week by Wednesday, and have a few days off to work on other things until I start the process again on Monday. This is the workflow I've stuck with for the last few years, and it's freed up my schedule immensely.

The moral of this story isn't to tell you how you should be making your comics. Rather, it's to encourage you to experiment! **Your personal comic-making process will grow based on the conditions you grow it in:** How much time you have to make pages, what other commitments you have, how fast you can work, etc. Batch page work can be more efficient, but it might also tire you out depending on how large your batches are. Make sure to balance your productivity and your personal happiness. This isn't something I can teach you, it's something you have to learn on your own.

Comic Pages: Start to Finish

Now that I've given you the tools you need to make comics of your own, I thought a good way to round out this chapter would be to show you a full, step-by-step guide to making an entire comic page, from start to finish! (Also: I'll be using Clip Studio Paint for this whole process!)

These are the general steps I take for drawing a digital comic page, and I'll be using a page from *Castoff* as an example! Yours don't need to perfectly match mine- this is intended to give you some insight on what *my* general flow for making pages is like, rather than to force you to adapt to my method. I'll also be dropping some additional tips and tricks as we go through the process.

STEP 1: Start With the Script

Remember a hundred pages ago when I talked about scripting your comic? Well, go get that script again, because that's gonna serve as our starting point!

Cut ahead to the group hiking up a steep hillside. The area around them is densely forested. Everyone (minus Frankie and Arianna) seems exhausted.

R: ...This place had better be worth the hike.

A: I said you didn't have to come.

M: Couldn't we have just.... (pant) taken the trail?

A: I don't wanna risk anyone seeing us. This way's better.

R: Can't believe we're going up a freaking mountain just to see some school.

F: It's actually not a mountain, just a big hill!

R: What.

V: Frankie's right. To be classified as a mountain it has to be over a certain height-

R: *Marinaaaaaaaa heeeeeeeeelp I'm surrounded by neeeeeerds*

Marina looks at her, unimpressed.

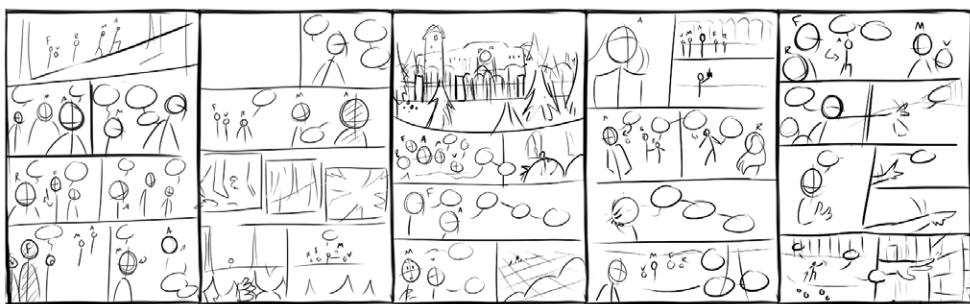
M: Rori-

A: (Without turning around) It's not "some school". It's a magic academy.

I know some folks who like to break up their script into pages, or even separate panels, during the writing process. This is helpful if you have to stick to a certain number of pages, to make sure you aren't going over your maximum page count. Personally, since I let my chapters be as long as they need to be (one of the joys of webcomics!), I usually don't break the script into pages until it's time to start thumbnailing. Which brings us to...

STEP 2: Thumbnails

Before you dive straight into sketching, I recommend starting with a thumbnail! Thumbnails are loose sketches of a page's layout you can use to plan out your comic page.



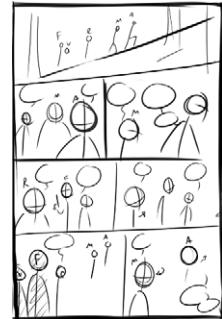
Your thumbnails should be **loose and rough**. This is the phase where you're just hashing out ideas to see what looks good on the page! Don't put too much detail into them, or you'll be more hesitant to be flexible and change them. Personally, my thumbnails are usually just terrible little stick figures with the character's first initial written above them. Maybe some arrows to indicate movement, and crudely drawn expressions to serve as reference for later.

thumbnails should also be **small**. This will help prevent you from adding too much detail during the rough phase. (It's called a thumbnail because, if working on paper, the size of your drawing should be about the size of your thumb nail! Keep it small and simple!)

Again, **your thumbnails aren't precious!** Treat them like you're drawing on a paper napkin at a fast food restaurant. **They only exist to get the ideas out on paper.**

I usually do thumbnails in batches, and will rough out an entire scene at once to help keep details like camera direction (remember that 180 degree rule and other page flow tips? That's important here!), character blocking (where each character is), and other important details consistent across the entire scene. I usually do thumbnail batches all together in the same document, so I can look at the scene as a whole as I work. While the end result will probably be pretty rough and sketchy, thumbnailing is often the stage that requires the most brain power!

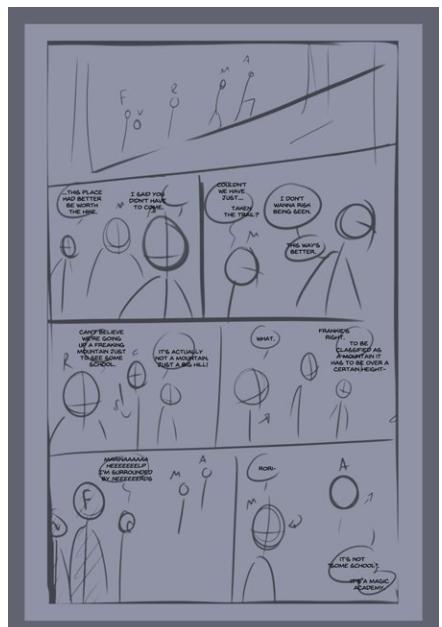
Once I'm done with a batch of thumbnails, I'll make a separate comic page file for each page in the scene, drop the thumbnail onto it, and blow it up to fit the full-size comic page. Then, we move onto the next step!



STEP 2.5: Lettering (Beginning Phase)

I hear you saying “Star! Isn’t it a *BIT* early to be doing our lettering? I thought that was one of the last steps?”

While finalizing your lettering usually comes toward the end of the comic page process, I HIGHLY recommend hashing out the basic placement of your lettering as early as possible! For me, this means **adding in the dialogue text before I even start sketching**. Using my thumbnails as a guide, I copy-paste the text from my script into my art file, and break it up into word balloon size. This can often reveal if I need to adjust my page layouts to make room for my text. It's WAY easier to do layout changes during the thumbnail stage, so I recommend doing it early!



Getting your art and lettering to play nice is a bit like introducing two cats to each other: If we want them to play nice, it's best to introduce them at an early stage and give them each their own space to breathe.

We want the art and lettering to work together, and not fight each other for dominance on the page. Both are important, so make sure you're treating each one with the space and respect it deserves!

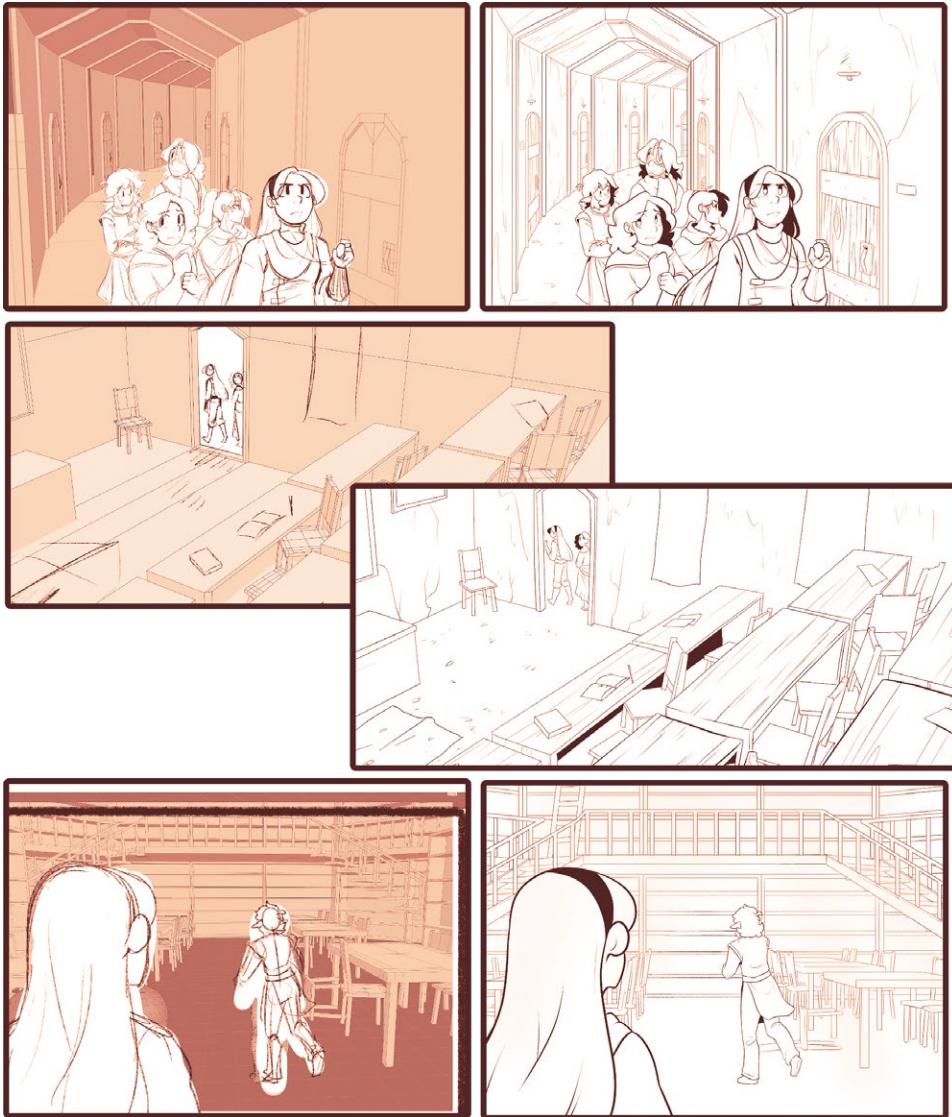


VS.



STEP 3: 3D Models / Reference Images

If you want to use 3D models for your comic, this is a great time to prepare those! If I want to make a 3D model for a scene, I'll usually model it around the same time I'm doing my thumbnails. I'll then go in and take screenshots of the model at the angles I need, and use that to sketch over during the next step. I didn't end up needing any models for the demo page, but here's a few instances where I did!



This is also usually the point where I'll take reference photos and save them somewhere so I can access them while I'm sketching.

STEP 4: Sketching

Once I have my page layouts about how I want them, it's time to move on to sketching! I take my page, with the thumbnail, dialog, and any 3D references dropped in, and sketch directly on top of them!

Since I post 2 pages a week for *Castoff*, I usually sketch 2 pages at a time before moving on to the next steps. But you might prefer sketching just one page at a time, or even sketching in large batches! It's all about finding a workflow that works for you.

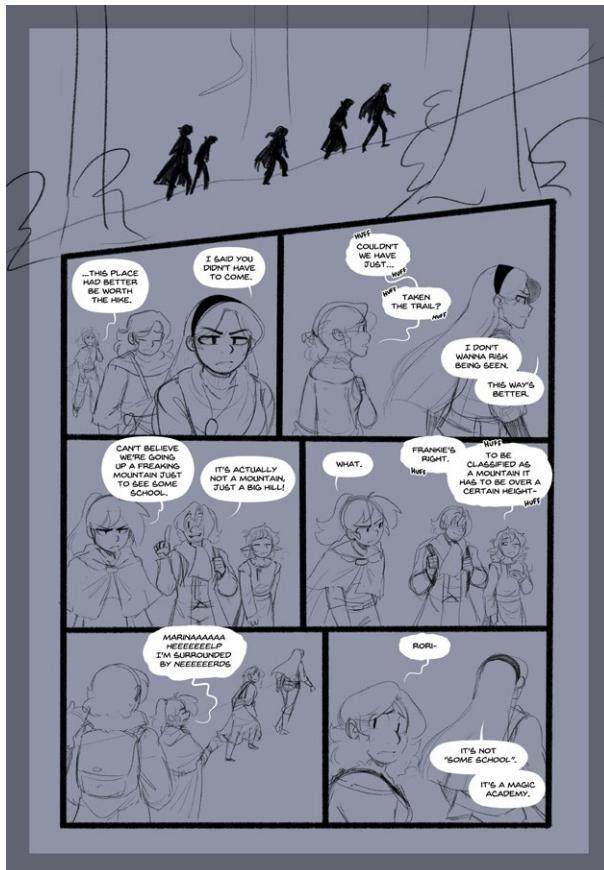
(**TIP:** I usually use a medium gray/purple tone behind my sketches because it's easier on the eyes than drawing on white! I highly recommend it if you're working digitally!)



STEP 4.5: Lettering Clean-Up

Yep, it's time to mess around with the lettering again! This is usually the step where, before I start laying down my final lineart, I come back to my lettering and finalize its location. I put in my word balloons, add the little tails, and adjust my sketch if needed.

If a sketch is taking up so much space that the lettering is blocking it, I'll usually resize the sketch in that panel to give the art some room to breathe. Likewise, if the lettering is feeling too cramped, I might break it up into smaller text balloons to make it easier to read and digest, adjusting the locations and flow if I need to. It's best to tweak everything and get it just right before starting on the permanent stuff!



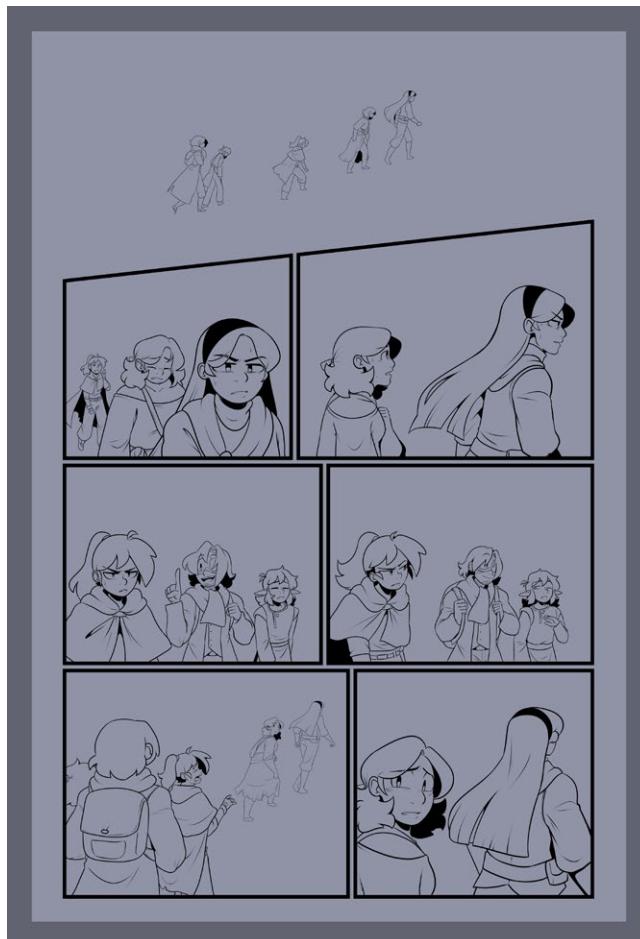
Once you're happy with your sketch and page layouts, it's time to start...

STEP 5: Inking / Lineart

Tidy up your sketch by putting down the final lines! (I hid the dialogue to show that yes, I do draw behind my word balloons! It makes things easier if I ever have to adjust my word balloon locations.)

TIP: I prefer inking my characters and backgrounds on separate layers. If you're working traditionally you won't really have this option, but when working digitally it helps me keep my layers organized.

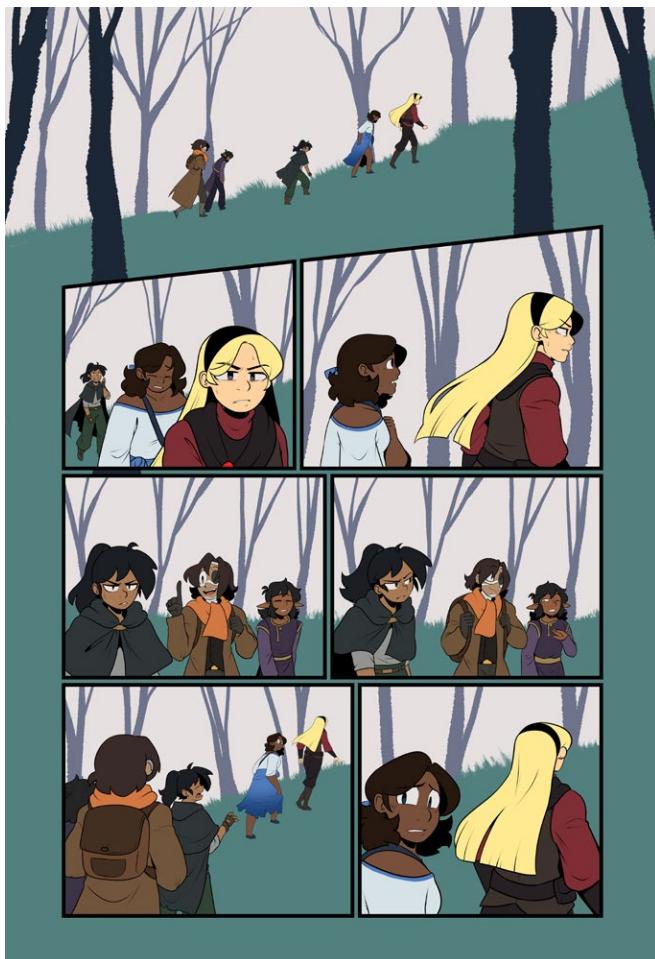
TIP: As shown, I again recommend doing your digital lineart with a darker color as your base background color! It's way easier to look at than a stark white background and can help avoid eye strain.



STEP 6: Flat Colors

From here on, your process may differ depending on if you're doing your comics in color or not. I personally do my comic pages fully colored and rendered, so I'll be showing all the steps of that process.

First up is laying down flat colors! Like the lineart, I do the flats for my characters on a separate layer from my backgrounds. My character flats will all be on the same layer, while my background flats tend to be divided into a few different layers, depending on the scene. This is because my backgrounds are typically more organically painted, whereas my character art is always crisp and clean. Your mileage may vary, depending on your art style and process.



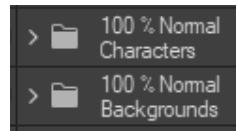
STEP 7: Shading

Once the flat layers are all in place, it's time to do shading and rendering! I typically opt to do the shading on my backgrounds first, then the characters. In my mind it's like eating your vegetables before eating your dessert.

This page takes place in a forest, so I had a lot of layers dedicated to drawing the many types of grass, bushes, trees, and other plants to fill out the backgrounds. The nice part about organic backgrounds like this is, if you do them right, you can spend a lot of time on making one panel look good, then copy-paste it into the rest of the panels and adjust if needed. We love time-savers!

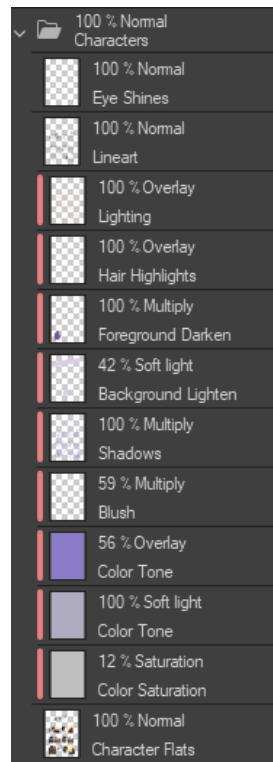


Just like the inks and flats, I keep my shading for the backgrounds separate from the shading for the characters. I typically like to put all my layers into 2 folders at this point: one for backgrounds and one for characters.



I discussed a simple way to shade and render comics earlier on in this chapter, so instead of repeating that info here, I'll just show you how my layers typically break down! From the bottom up:

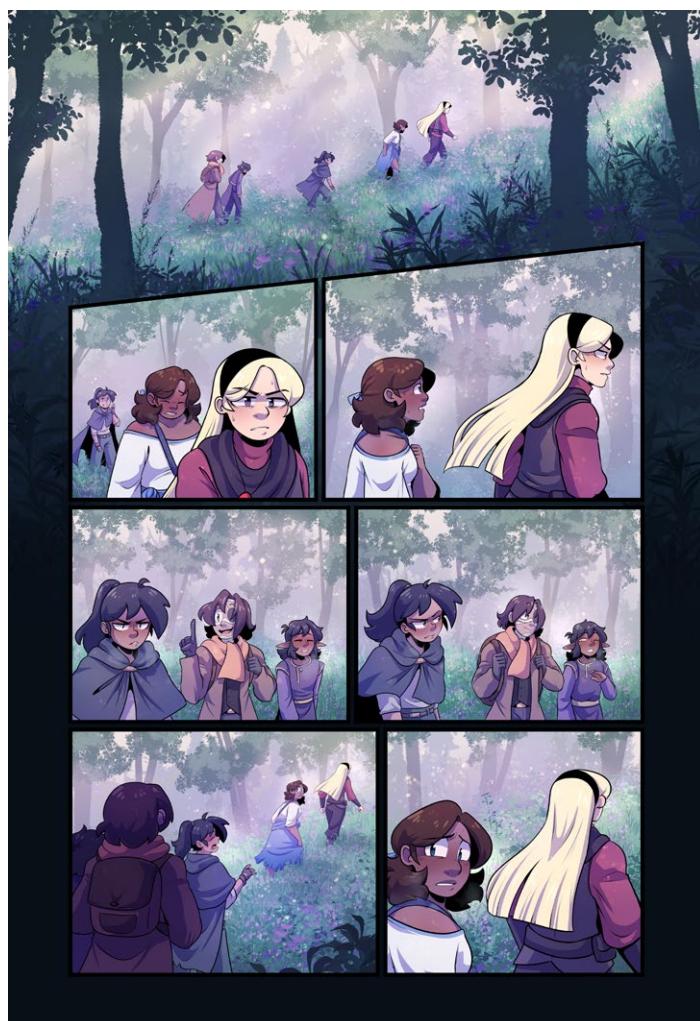
- **Character flats:** My flat colors for my characters!
- **Color Saturation / Color Tone:** Since I use the same flat colors for every scene, I sometimes do color tweaking with layers like this. Since I wanted the lighting in this scene to be very soft, slightly desaturated, and have a touch of purple, these three layers help adjust the flat colors to the atmosphere!
- **Blush:** I usually add some subtle blush to my characters to help them feel more alive. In this scene, since the characters are in the middle of a hike, the blush is more exaggerated than normal.
- **Shadows:** My cel-shaded shadows I described in my previous shading tutorial!
- **Background Lighten:** For characters that are further away from the camera (like in panel 1), I used this layer to lighten their colors a bit and make them feel pushed into the background
- **Foreground Darken:** The opposite of the previous: For characters that are very close to the camera (like in panel 6), I added a multiply layer to darken their colors.
- **Hair Highlights:** The highlights method I described in my previous shading tutorial!
- **Lighting:** I used a “dappled light” brush I made to simulate light hitting the characters through the trees.
- **Lineart:** Self-explanatory.
- **Eye Shines:** I add the little white eye shines in my character's eyes on a separate layer from the inks to make them pop a little more!



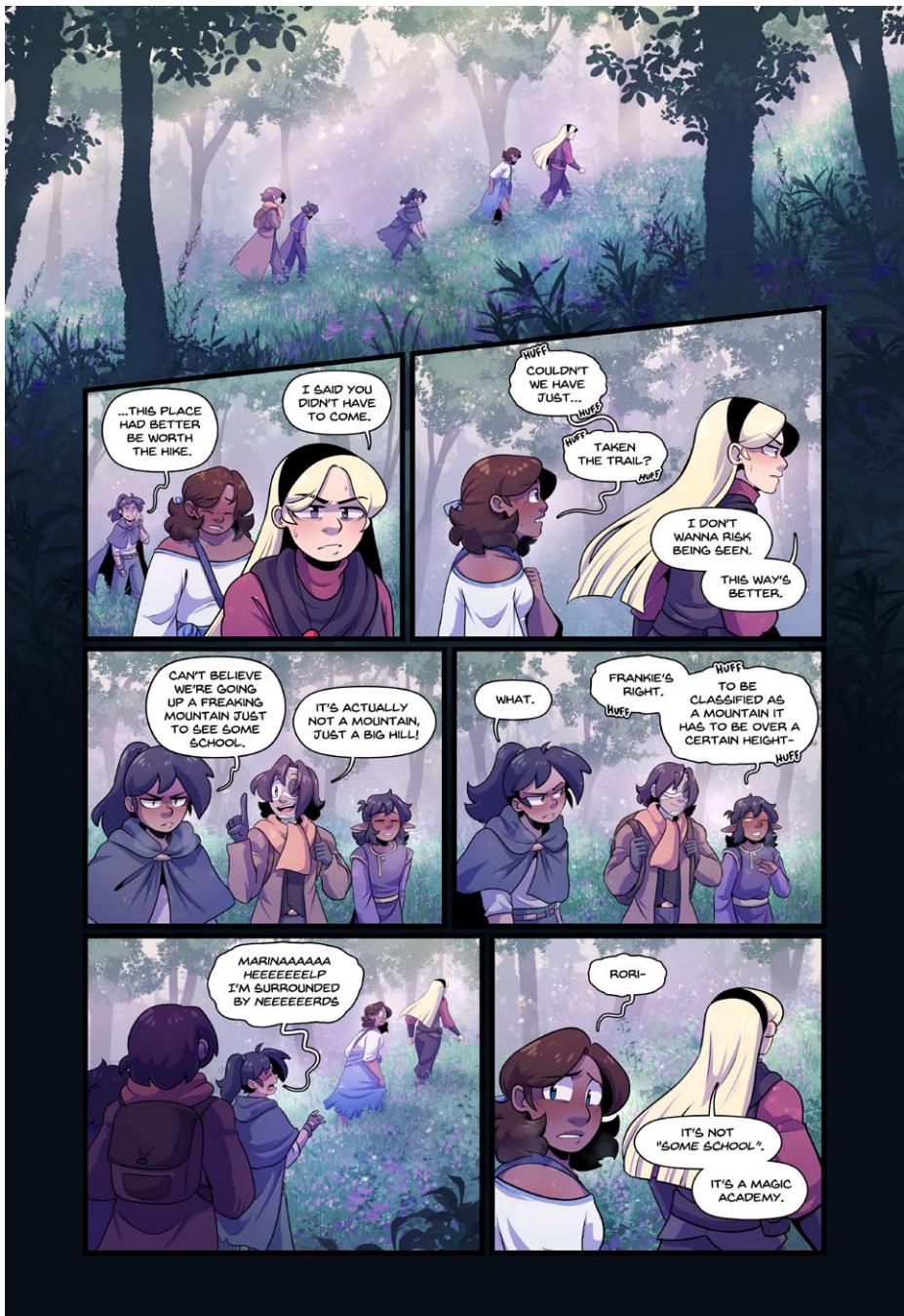
STEP 8: Final Render + Color Correction

Now, in some cases we'd consider the page done at step 7! The page is fully colored and rendered, and everything looks lovely, right? Well, I personally enjoy adding one more step, which is "Messing around with color adjustments and lighting effects to make everything shiny and add a bit of punch". It's very.... messy, but it's become a big part of my process!

I use a big, soft airbrush and overlay/multiply layers to add lighting, emphasize certain colors, and add subtle effects like dust particles. I'll also use adjustment layers to tweak the color balance and contrast.



And then, once everything is done, it's time to turn the lettering back on! I add a black outline to the dialogue balloons, make any final tweaks as necessary, and the page is finished! Yaaaay!



STEP 9: Exporting

Now that our comic page is complete, it's time to export the page and post it online! We already discussed this earlier on in this chapter, but here's the highlights to reiterate:

DON'T post your huge, full-size comic pages online! The large file size will make the images load very slowly, and will annoy your readers!

Instead, use the “**Export for Web**” function (or whatever equivalent your art program has) to create a smaller, flattened (no layers) version of the file you can post online.

For most websites, you'll want to use a .JPG or a .PNG file. .JPGs are standard, small, and load quickly, but .PNGs are higher quality and allow for transparency (not generally important for comic pages but hey, if you wanna be fancy I've seen folks to cool stuff with .PNG comic pages on their websites)



Whatever you do, be **VERY CAREFUL** to not overwrite your main working file with your web-safe file! Your web-safe files won't be large enough for printing, and also don't have any layers, meaning it will be much, MUCH harder to go back and change things if needed.

I also recommend **backing up your working files** somewhere safe as soon as possible. I have a reminder set up so I remember to back up my files at the end of every week, to make sure I keep potential losses to a minimum. Be smart and don't lose your work!

Congratulations!



If you've made it this far, you're now armed with the knowledge to create your very own webcomic! *Huzzah!*

Once you've made your wonderful comic, I bet you want people to actually read it, right?

Let's talk about that.



PART 5: **SHARING YOUR COMIC**

[*A BIG DISCLAIMER* before we start:

- *Because of the ever-changing nature of the internet, some info provided here might not be up-to-date. Websites get shut down all the time, and new ones can crop up suddenly! The data provided here is current as of spring 2023.]*

Finding a Home For Your Comic

Once you've made your comic, you have to put it online! You can **build your own website**, or host it on a **free comic hosting site**. (Or both! Some folks choose to host their comic only on their own site, but I and many others offer our comics on multiple platforms.)

Building and hosting your own website will be more time consuming and costs \$\$\$, but will allow you to make a site that looks exactly how you want with all the features you need. Free comic hosts are free, but aren't as customizable as a website you built. Decide which is best for you!

I unfortunately can't talk too much about the actual process of building a website. I'm awful at coding and paid a friend to make my site for me. But there are plenty of webcomic-specific CMS (Content Management Systems) out there, with features designed to cater to webcomic creators! I'll get into those in a bit!

If this is going to be your first comic, or if you've never made a website before, I suggest starting with a comic hosting site first. You'll want to get your own website eventually, but this will save you a bit of money at the start. So, **where should you put your comic?**

Webcomic Hosting Platforms

When putting your comic out into the world, you have the option of hosting it on different free comic-hosting websites! Some examples are:

- **Webtoon:** Favors vertical scroll comics. Popular with teens and young adults. Very large user base. Very little comment moderation. Readers often complain about “too short” comic updates.
- **Tapas.io:** Favors vertical scroll comics. Smaller user base than Webtoon, but a more friendly atmosphere among readers in my experience.
- **Comic Fury:** Very customizable, you can basically make your own website. Has been around longer, but is less popular than other platforms, especially among younger audiences.
- **Tumblr:** Can customize your blog with a webcomic-specific theme, but doesn’t have a large user base like other platforms.
- **Other:** New platforms crop up all the time, but remember to be wary of newer sites! Make sure you read the Terms of Service to make sure there isn’t anything sketchy going on.



So, let's discuss making your own website!



No, no, listen. Say you only post your comic on **CoolComics.net**. You have a huge audience, and thousands of readers that love your comic!



But one day... **CoolComics.net shuts down**. And suddenly, all that work is just... gone. Your audience scatters to the winds, and you're left with nothing.



This is not a hypothetical. This can, will, and has happened. The problem with relying on external comic platforms is that you have no control over them. Sometimes a website might make changes you don't like, or disappear entirely! This is why having your own site is good: if you're in charge, you don't have to worry about sudden changes out of your control!



Setting Up Your Website

Now let's talk about setting up your site! Unfortunately, since I am absolutely awful with coding and website construction, I can't give too much advice for this section. However, I can at least talk you through the basics!

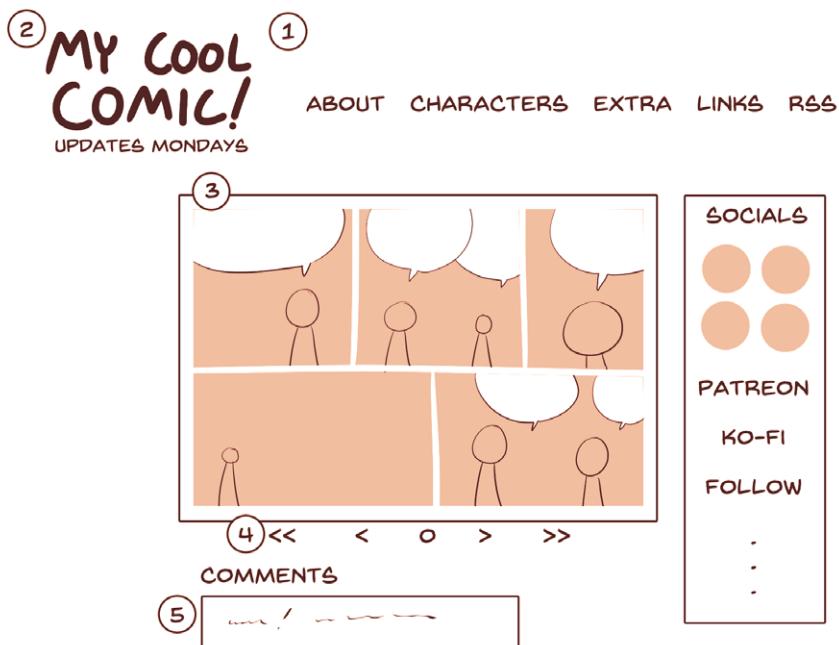
To set up a website, you'll need a **domain name** and a **host**. A domain is the URL that points to your comic. Reserving a domain for your comic is fairly cheap, usually about \$10/year, depending on which service you use. A host, meanwhile, keeps all the data you upload: comic pages, website assets, etc. Hosting is a bit pricier, and the price will vary depending on a variety of factors. But many hosting services offer free domains with your hosting plan!

URL <http://my-cool-comic.com>

Once you have these, you'll need to build your website! Rather than coding something from scratch, I recommend using a comic-specific **CMS (Content Management System)** that will have all the features you need set up by default. An easy one for beginners is **WordPress!** It's fairly simple to use even for the coding illiterate, like myself. (My first website was done in WP, and I only broke it 4 times! Which is pretty good, for me.) You can use a theme designed for webcomics to quickly and easily put a site together and customize it. Some themes to check out are InkBlot and Comic Easel! There's also other CMSs, like **Grawlix** (the one *Castoff's* current site uses), **ComicControl**, and others. Do some research and decide, based on your level of website-building skill, which one is right for you!

If you need help with your website, you can always ask for help online! Many CMSs and WordPress themes have their own support pages where you can ask questions or research ways to solve whatever problem you might have. You can also try asking on webcomic-specific forums! (I'll drop in another mention of the SpiderForest Collective forums here as a good place to start!) If you decide you'd rather pay someone to make your website for you, forums are also a good way to find someone to hire.

The Anatomy of a Webcomic Website



On your comic's homepage, you should have...

1. **A header** with your comic's title. I also suggest putting your update schedule here, so readers know when to check back for new updates!
2. **The logo** for your comic in the header! Logo design is a whole beast unto itself, but my advice is to make your logo visually represent your genre, while being easy to read. Remember: If they can't read your title, they won't know what your comic is called, and they won't be able to find it again later!
3. **Your comic!** The homepage should show **the most recent page of your comic** (unless you opt for a different landing page). When your readers come back to read the newest page, this should be the first thing they see! But if this is someone's first time reading your comic? You'll want to make it easy to find your...

- 4. Navigation** below (and above, if you like!) every comic page. This should include a Forward button (go to next page), a Backward button (go back one page), a Skip to Page 1 button, and a Skip to Most Recent Page button. They're usually set up like this:



For easier navigation, clicking on the page you're reading should take you to the next page of the comic! You should also enable **keyboard navigation**: Clicking > should take you to the next page, and < should go back a page. Having multiple methods of navigation will help keep your site accessible to your readers!

- 5. A comments section** on each comic page, to help your readers communicate with you (and vice versa). This is optional- some comic makers (especially those with large audiences that are harder to moderate) prefer not to have comments on their work, and that's fine! But being able to comment on each page can let your readers connect with you and feel more engaged with your story!

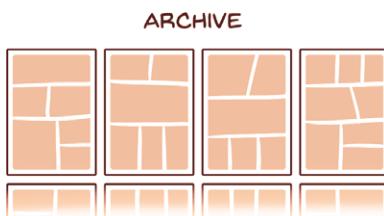


Other Pages

Your comic's website should also have:

- **An Archive page** that readers can use to navigate through your comic pages. If someone starts reading your comic but has to stop, this will make it easy for them to find their place again and pick up where they left off!

There are different ways to set up a comic archive, but I always prefer it if archives have a thumbnail view: small versions of your comic pages that readers can look through. As a reader, I might not remember the exact page number I left off on, but I can probably remember what the last page I read looked like!



- **An About page** that includes a brief synopsis of the story, when the comic updates, a blurb about the creator(s) involved, and credits if multiple people are working on the comic! For those writing more mature comics, this is also a good place to put any content warnings!
- **A Characters page** with pictures and character descriptions. This is a useful resource for your readers, especially if you have a large cast!



BOB - 18 - 5'7"
THE MAIN CHARACTER!
A COOL DUDE



JOE - 19 - 5'9"
ANOTHER DUDE!
LIKES FISHING

- **A Links page**, with links to other webcomics you like. Spread the love! Links pages are especially beneficial for promoting yourself, and helping to promote other comics! We'll talk about this more in the "Promoting Your Comic" section.

COMICS I LOVE!

- EPIC COMIC PARTY
- SUPER SEQUENTIAL
- CO-MIX
- DRAWTIME ADVENTURE

- **Easy to find social media links.** List all the major platforms you post on, in an easy-to-find location! (Usually in a sidebar, or near your header.)

Not on social media? You should be! We'll talk about why every comic should have a social media presence later on.



- **An RSS feed for your comic**, so people can be notified when you update! Most comic CMSs have one automatically, but in case yours doesn't, make sure to include one for your readers who use them!

(If you don't know, an RSS feed is like a personal news feed. Once you've added a website's RSS feed to your news feed, you'll be alerted every time it updates. Many people use them to keep track of when comics update!)



Additional Bonus Pages

If you're like me and enjoy making additional bonus content for your comic, your website is a great way to organize and keep all of it in one place!

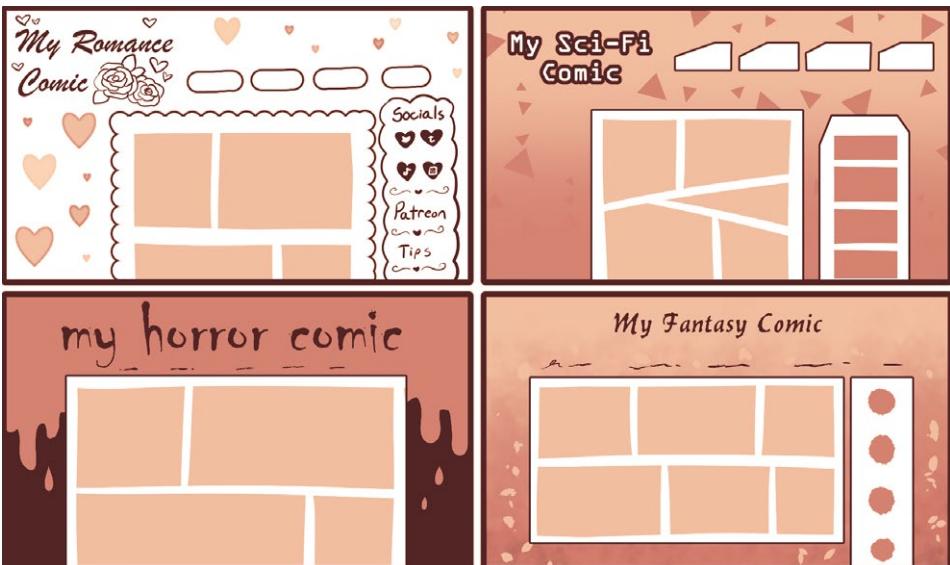
Some ideas for additional content include:

- **A “story so far” recap.** Very useful for longer comics.
- **Concept art** for your world and characters. Many readers love seeing behind-the-scenes work like this!
- **A gallery page** to show off any non-comic art you've made related to the comic.
- **Character design reference pages**, to show off the designs of your cast. If you want to encourage your readers to make fanart of your comic, this is a great resource to provide them with.
- **A fanart gallery**, to show off any fan creations your friends and readers make.
- **A support page**, to inform your readers about how they can support your series! (More on this later!)
- **Videos.** If you make videos about your webcomic, it's a good idea to have a page on your website that links back to all of them so your readers can find them more easily.
- **Playlists.** If you enjoy making music playlists for your characters (like me), you can organize and share links to them on your website. I've had many readers tell me they love to listen to my character playlists!
- **Other!** I encourage you to get creative with the bonus content you share on your website. The sky's the limit!

Site Design

Since you're going through the trouble of building your own comic site, you should try and make its appearance thematic to your comic itself! Have your site complement the visual style of your comic pages.

Website design is another big thing that would take a whole other book to dive into, but my starting advice would be to gather up screenshots of other webcomic websites you like. What did they do successfully? Why do you like certain design choices they made? How do their websites complement their content? Etc., etc.



It's also a good idea to ask for feedback! Ask some friends to check out your website, and ask if anything was hard to find or confusing to navigate. It's best to do this early on- a poorly designed website can be a turn-off for potential readers!

Hiring someone to design your website for you is also an option! You'll have to pay them for their service, but if you're weak at design, it might be a good route for you to consider.

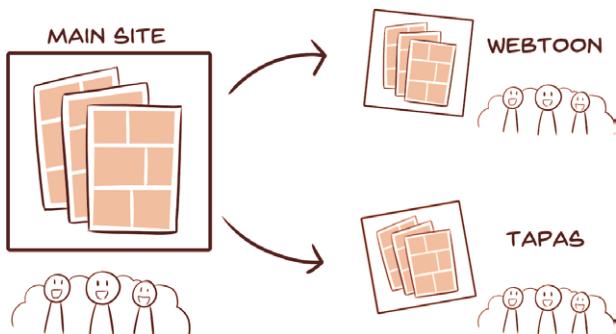
While I made all the visuals for *Castoffs*'s website, I paid a friend to do all the coding and put it together for me.

Mirror Sites

While it might be harder to attract readers to a standalone website, YOU control that website, and as long as you pay for the domain + hosting fees, it'll stay there.

But of course, you don't have to limit yourself to one platform! In fact, I highly recommend **mirroring your comic** on several different platforms to make it easier to find and attract new readers.

For example, I mainly post *Castoff* on my own website, but I also post it on Webtoon and Tapas. Comic hosting sites have lots of users who are there to read comics, and if you post your comic there, they might also read yours! Broaden your audience!



Picking an Update Schedule

When posting your comic, make sure you're sticking to **a regular update schedule!** Nothing is more frustrating to readers than a comic with irregular, erratic updates. Pick a regular schedule that works for you, and stick to it!

Most comics update **once a week** or more. If you update less, you risk having disinterested readers. Give them something to look forward to every week! Alternatively, you could try posting larger batches of pages once per month, 2 pages every 2 weeks, etc. Some readers even favor longer, less-frequent updates. Experiment a little, and don't be afraid to ask your readers for their opinion if you want it!

The important thing is to **let people know when you update!** Typically webcomics post their update schedule at the top of the page, near the logo. Easy to see!



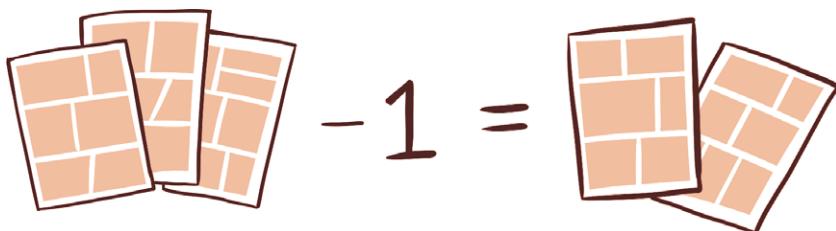
CASE STUDY: My first webcomic, *PSY*, didn't have a regular update schedule for the first year or so. I just posted pages when they were finished and left it at that. Sometimes I'd go months without posting any pages. I didn't have many readers at the time, but the ones I did have said it was frustrating not knowing when pages would be posted.



So, I started updating the comic once per week, on a set schedule. Once I did, I started to get a lot more views and comments on my comic! The consistency really helped myself and my readers, who knew when to check back for updates. The comic started performing a lot better as a result, and I was more motivated thanks to an increase of reader feedback! It's a win-win for everybody~

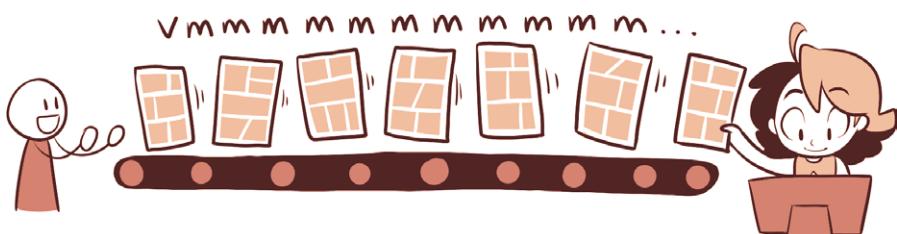
Manage your time. Before committing to an update schedule, spend a week working on your comic when you have time. Work at your normal pace, and only use as much time as you normally have. How many pages can you complete in a week? Subtract 1 from that number. That's how many times you should post every week, maximum.

(Was your answer to this “1”? I suggest tweaking your comic-making process. Try to simplify your art or learn some shortcuts to help speed up the process!)



It's important that you balance your comic-making time with other things in your life. Working at 100% output constantly will wreck your brain and body pretty quickly, and trust me, you don't want that.

Always be a few pages/updates ahead! Often called a “buffer” or “queue”, having pages done beforehand is less stressful than scrambling to finish a page a few hours before it goes online. (I try to stay about a month ahead of my update schedule!) This can take some pressure off if an emergency comes up, or if you just decide you need a break for a little. It also gives you time to double-check your pages for mistakes, or make adjustments before pages go out to the public!



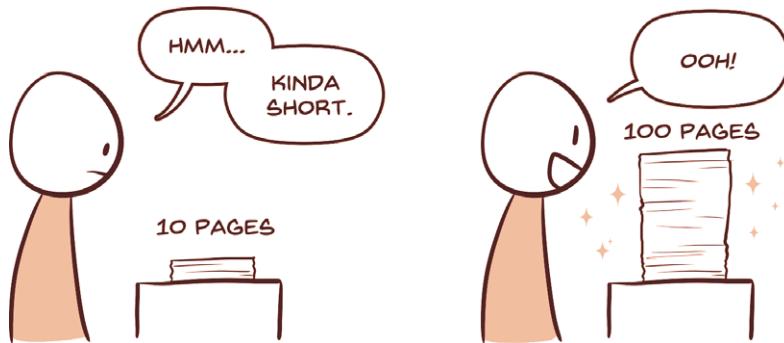
Remember: Webcomics are a marathon, not a sprint! Don't burn yourself out with an update schedule you can't keep up with!

It's okay to miss an update occasionally, but strive to be reliable. If you have to miss an update, **let your readers know**, and provide a comeback date if you can. Your readers will appreciate honesty. Be open with them! Don't leave them in the dark wondering when the next update will be.

General Tips

Avoid perfectionism! No comic page will be perfect, and there will be plenty of times when you're less than enthusiastic about the page you just finished. But artists are so much more critical of their own work than outsiders, and your readers won't see all the same "flaws" that you do. Learn when to call a page "done" and move on. It's difficult at first, but it gets easier with time, I promise.

Don't expect your comic to be super popular right away! It'll take a few years to build an audience, and people generally won't start getting invested until you're around 100 pages in. This is sometimes called the "100 Page Rule"



(Also, a note: comics that start with a large number of readers probably have an artist who is already popular online. Audiences don't spring up overnight!!)

If you can, **launch your comic with the entire first chapter**, or at least a large chunk of pages! Post a chunk of pages at the start for readers to sink their teeth into. Leave off on a cliffhanger, an enticing hook, or the intro to a new story beat. Get them hooked and make them want to come back at the next update. If they're excited about what's coming next, they'll be more likely to stick around!

Also, making pages beforehand takes some of the pressure off, and gives you an idea of how fast you work/how often you can update. It gives you some time to find your comic-making rhythm without the pressure of people waiting for the next page.



Now that you have your comic online, let's get people to actually read the thing! It's time to talk about....

PART 6: **PROMOTING YOUR COMIC**

Once you've made your comic and started posting it online, the next step is to start bringing in an audience!



There's plenty of free and paid ways to get your comic into new eyes. Let's start with one of the easiest: **Webcomic Listing Sites!** Listing sites are websites that compile information about webcomics so users can manage comics they read and find new ones. Add your comic to their database, and users may find your comic as well! Some notable ones are:

- TopWebcomics / TWC
- Comic Rocket
- The Belfry Comic Index
- The Webcomic List
- Piperka



TvTropes is also a site you can use to get some traffic to your website. If you're unfamiliar, it's a website that lists out what tropes are used in all kinds of media (not just TV, despite the name), and any user can edit and add to listings as they see fit. Typically TvTropes pages are made and maintained by fans (a friend and fellow comic creator actually made *Castoff's* TvTropes listing), but you can also make your own page if you're so inclined!

Why is this useful? Say I really like stories about characters with glowing eyes. I can go on the TvTropes page for "Glowing Eyes" and see a whole list of different media- including webcomics- that have characters with glowing eyes. It acts as a way for people to find new media with content they enjoy, and is a great way to find new readers!

You can also **pay for advertising** on some platforms!

TopWebcomics has its own advertising system, with ads costing a different amount based on the placement of the ad.

Comicad.net is a newer site that allows comic creators to host ads on their comics, and for other users to buy out that ad space. The ads are usually fairly cheap, so I recommend playing around with the service, and maybe put some ad space on your own website to make a bit of cash!

(If you remember Project Wonderful (RIP), ComicAd is like that, but specifically targeted at comics.)



Making Ads For Your Comic

So, how should you go about making an ad for your comic? Well ultimately, the goal of any ad is to draw readers to your site. **What are you going to use to reel them in?**

Take the opportunity to show off your comic's art, and include some snapshots of the characters! Try to represent the genre and overall vibe of your comic to the best of your ability. If you want, try to sum up the plot in a few words to get people interested and excited! (Remember when we talked about log lines and elevator pitches? Those will come in handy here!) Too much text can be overwhelming, though, so try to keep the text minimal.

A good ad is **intriguing**, and makes the viewer want to know more. And ideally, that curiosity will make them click your ad and read your comic! There's a reason clickbait articles work so well; While I don't necessarily recommend leaning too hard into that direction, we can take some hints from them and learn how to attract attention with just a few words!

I recommend including a **call to action** in your ad: some kind of callout that tells people what you want them to do. "*Read Now*", or "*Click Here*" are good examples.



Some additional tips for making an ad intriguing:

- Show 2 or more main characters, and position them to imply what their relationship is. For example, two characters looking at each other longingly to show they might have romantic ties, two characters in a fight to hint at an action-packed rivalry, etc.
- Add a tagline that hints at the story in a short and concise way (IE, one sentence or less)
- Have a tagline that asks a question relevant to your story
- Show off some of the world and hint at the genre. If your series has magic, show a character using magic. If it's sci-fi with space ships, show a spaceship.

If you're savvy with art programs, you can also add **animation** to your ads! Even just a little animation can help draw the eye tremendously, especially if it's the only thing moving on a webpage. However, if the animation is TOO obnoxious it can be a turnoff and look like a virus. My advice is to keep it noticeable, but simple. A simple slideshow between 2-4 static images is a quick and easy way to add some pizzazz! (I obviously can't show this in a book, so I must ask you to use your imagination.)

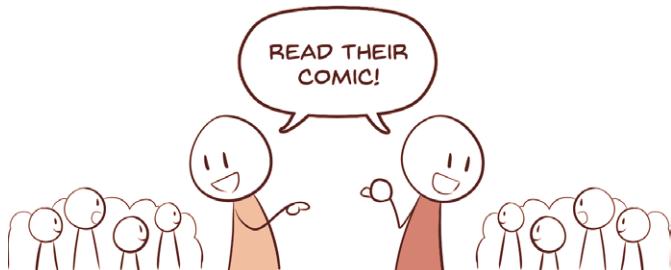
When picking places to advertise, I also recommend **advertising in places where your target audience will be**. If you make a romance comic, you'll find more success advertising on other romance comics, rather than in the ad space of a post-apocalyptic sci-fi action story. Think about what kind of reader you want to attract, think of what stories they're already reading, then advertise to them there!

Advertising is a complicated beast, and I've simplified it for our purposes here. But if you're planning on making ads, I highly recommend doing some additional, independent research into how to make effective advertisements! A little knowledge can go a long way.

Fan Art and Link Exchanges

If a webcomic you love has a fan art gallery, consider drawing them fan art! Many webcomics have a fan art gallery, and having your work there can get new eyes on your work!

On the same note, if a comic offers link exchanges, displaying their banner on your website and vice versa will help attract new readers to both comics!



Neither of these options are foolproof, but if you're polite and lucky it can work out in your favor!

(Just don't be like "Um I drew you fan art that means you are now required to advertise my comic". Don't be that guy. Nobody likes that guy.)

Comic Collectives

There are lots of comic collectives floating around on the internet! These are communities of comic creators who help each other grow, usually via cross-promotion, running group events, etc.

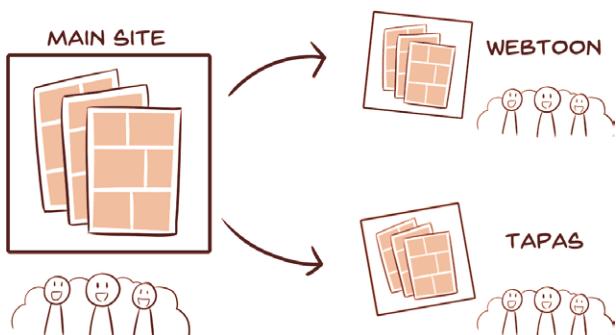


For example, I'm a member of the collective **SpiderForest!** We do link sharing and cross-promotion events, plus joint projects like yearly comic anthologies. Different collectives will have different goals and requirements for joining, so it's a good idea to do your research and find a community that's right for you!

Mirror Sites and Comic Platforms

We touched on this earlier, but it bears repeating: different people read webcomics on different websites. Some read only on your main website, while others prefer using sites like Webtoon or Tapas. These comic sites have built-in audiences, and if you host your comic there, you can broaden your reach!

For example, I host *Castoff* on my main site, but I also post the comic on Tapas and Webtoon to catch those audiences.



(Sometimes platforms will also have an option where they'll pay you in ad revenue or for reaching certain view thresholds! I make a small amount of money each month from these sites, which is always helpful! More on this in the "**Making Money**" section!)

Social Media

In this day and age, having a social media presence is a vital tool for self promotion! Here are some social media platforms, and how they can be used to promote your comics and other work!



Twitter: The Birds and the Memes

Twitter is a short-form text-based social media platform that's good for posting short thoughts, showing art, and conversing with other users. It's a good multi-purpose platform!



Pros:

- Good for conversations with fans and other creators
- Allows hyperlinks in posts
- Up to 4 photos in one post
- Posts can be shared easily through likes and retweets
- “Threads” can keep strings of thoughts or pictures together, even if they were posted at different times.

Cons:

- 280 character limit
- Only 4 images per post
- Hashtags aren't super effective
- Sometimes crops your pictures weird

Tips:

Try to join in trending hashtag events! Things like *#PortfolioDay*, *#ArtvsArtist*, etc. can help get your work in front of new eyes. If you see other artists participating in something, try to join in!

It's also a good idea to follow other artists and webcomic creators, to keep up with what's happening in those circles and keep in touch with your peers!

Instagaram: Not Just for Food Pics

Instagram is an image-based platform that is primarily used for photos, but a lot of artists use it as well!

Pros:

- Great venue for posting art
- Large community; easy to find other artists
- Great for strip comics! You can post one panel per image so users can swipe to see the next panel



Cons:

- No hyperlinks in posts, so you can't link directly to your comic
- Algorithm keeps changing; sometimes followers won't see what you post
- Pictures must be square, or close to it
- No built-in sharing method (e.g., retweets on Twitter, reblogs on Tumblr, etc) aside from Stories, which not a lot of people look at

Tips:

Instagram allows you to use up to 30 hashtags in each post. I recommend finding successful artists with a similar style to yours, looking at what hashtags they use, and using them in your own posts! The number of hashtags the site recommends fluctuates constantly, however, so try to keep an eye on how others are posting.

You can also look through hashtags yourself to find other artists to chat with! Like others' posts and leave encouraging comments on their work, and they might do the same!

TikTok: Not Just For Teens

TikTok is a short-form video app that's especially popular with younger teens and adults. While you have to post videos to make content on the app, a lot of artists (including myself) have been able to find success by using it!

Pros:

- Depending on what you post, very easy to "go viral" and grow an audience. (I've found a lot of success making tutorials and how-to art videos!)
- Video format allows for interesting content
- Videos can continue to be shown to new viewers, even a while after posting.
- Live stream capabilities once you hit 1000 followers



Cons:

- Can only post videos
- Algorithm changes constantly and can be difficult to please, making it harder for your videos to get seen.
- Like Instagram, only 1 "bio link" and no hyperlinks

Tips:

Try to **jump on trends** while they're popular! Use popular sounds and hashtags, and keep your finger on the pulse!

Keep it short! People are more likely to watch all the way through a video that's quick and interesting, rather than something longer that drags on and takes too long to get to the point.

Tumblr: It Still Exists

Tumblr is a blogging platform that peaked in popularity in the early 2010's, but has been in decline since they banned NSFW content on the site. However, there's still a fairly active community there, if you know where to look!

Pros:

- Post up to 10 images at once
- Generally won't crop images
- Hyperlinks and text formatting
- Chronological timeline: No having to appease an algorithm
- Reblogs can keep posts circulating without much input; easy to "post and run".



Cons:

- Hard to talk to others; no easy method for conversations
- Scheduling posts is tedious; no scheduling through third-party apps
- Weird and broken sometimes
- Way less popular than it used to be

Tips:

Remember that you can **reblog your own posts!** I like to reblog my art posts a few days after posting to get some additional views on my posts.

Encourage people to reblog your posts! While this can be easy to overdo, I find a simple "Reblogs appreciated!" at the end of a post is enough to get some additional interaction!

YouTube: Videos for All

YouTube is the most-used video platform on the internet, and it can be a great way to spread the word about your comic!

I often record myself drawing and add commentary and stories in the background to show off my art process and entertain viewers. While I'm fairly new to YouTube myself, I've been able to get a lot of new readers for my webcomic by talking about and promoting my comic in my videos!



Pros:

- Huge audience! Billions of people use YouTube
- No video length limit, unlike other video platforms
- A great place to cross-post videos, if you're making videos for TikTok or Instagram
- Can monetize and earn money from videos once you pass the requirements

Cons:

- You'll need to learn at least basic video and audio editing to get the most mileage out of the platform
- Very different from standard social media platforms. Content is generally more high-effort than just posting single pictures

Tips:

Recording yourself drawing, speeding up the footage, and making speedpaints set to music can be an easy way to start making videos!

Short tutorials also do well on the platform. Share your process and tips to help other artists!

Other

New social media platforms are popping up all the time, so it's a good idea to keep your ear to the ground in case of promising future venues!

There are also other social media/content platforms I didn't go in-depth on, including Facebook, Pinterest, etc. I personally have less experience with these platforms, so my insight wouldn't be terribly valuable. However, a good rule of thumb is that **if you enjoy using a platform, it can be a viable place to market your comic**. You just have to experiment, research, and learn what works!



Extra Tip: “Link in Bio”

For sites like Instagram and TikTok, where you can't post a direct hyperlink to your comic update in your posts, I recommend making a links page on your comic site, or using a link aggregator. Usually social media sites will allow you at least one link on your profile, usually called a “Bio Link” (because it's a link... on your bio page. Get it?) But since you only get one link, you really have to make it count. Link aggregators allow you to use your one allowed bio link to make a mini web page with all of your relevant social media and other important websites (IE, a link to your webcomic!)

Linktree and **Carrd** are popular ones, but I also enjoy **Beacons**: it's easy to customize and you can even add little animations to attract extra attention to certain links.

Social Media ≠ Self Worth

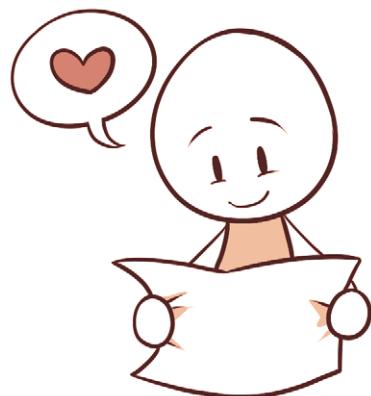
Before we get any deeper into the social media section, I want to pause and take a moment to discuss something many people are probably already familiar with: The illusion that the size of your following on social media is related to how skilled of an artist you are.

A trap that many artists fall into is thinking that the size of their social media following is related to their skills as an artist. That the way to get a larger following is by being a better artist. And that, inversely, if they don't have many followers, that just means that their art isn't good. But here's the reality:

Your following on social media is not representative of your skill as an artist. Rather, it is representative of **how good you are at marketing.** Which is an *entirely different skill set!*

I've seen absolutely amazing and incredible artists in all mediums struggle to gain traction on social media, not because of the quality of their work, but because they have trouble with the "social" aspect of social media. And to be fair, it's difficult! There are people whose *entire job* it is to maintain a social media presence for companies and brands. Being a social media expert involves SO MUCH time, effort, research, and keeping your finger on the pulse of different websites and platforms that it can honestly be exhausting to do. Growing an audience on social media can be a hugely valuable asset to help you promote your webcomic and other works, but it isn't the only thing that matters. Not by a long shot.

So, while I can vouch that growing a social media following is beneficial, take care not to let yourself become too addicted to the numbers game. A larger following does not mean a better artist. **Don't link your value as an artist to your numbers on social media. Your art is important, no matter how many followers you have.**



Why Should I Care About Social Media?

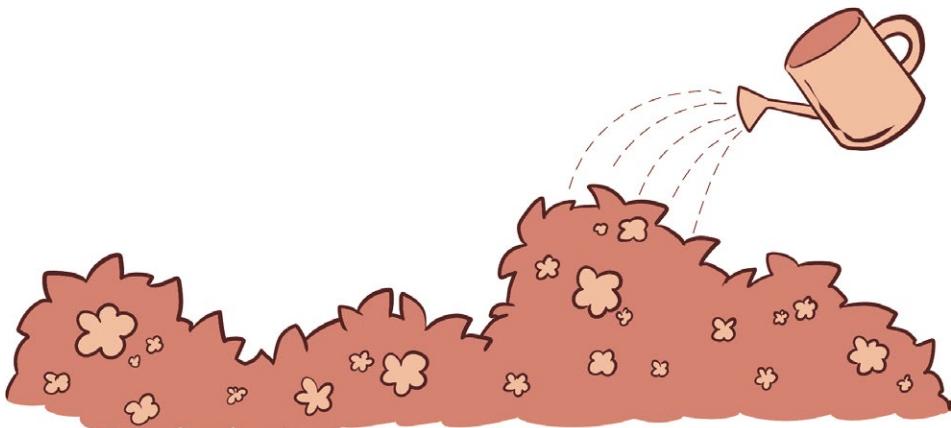
Followers on social media
=
People who like what you make
=
Potential comic readers

Not everyone who follows you online will become a fan of your comic, but it's still a good investment of your time! People who enjoy your art will likely be interested in your comic, and vice-versa, people who read your comic might be interested in what you post in other places.

How to Grow

(Note: These tips are, of course, not guaranteed to work, but these various methods have helped me in the past, and they might work for you, too!)

Make a separate, art-only account. If you have a large variety of interests and post a lot of different things, I recommend making a separate social media account where you only post art. Folks who want to follow you for your art may not be interested in your food pics, selfies, or non-art hobbies. (This is more relevant on Instagram and TikTok, less so on Twitter in my experience)



Post frequently! Most platforms suggest posting at least once per day. This seems like a lot, but it can be made easier. Here are some ideas for things to post:

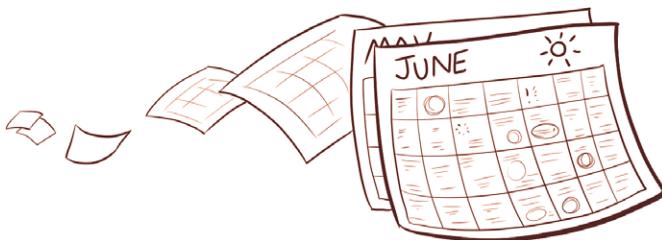
- **Finished artwork.** Obviously, you'll want to post new pieces when you finish them! But you can also post...
- **Comic update announcements.** Did your comic update today? Make a post about it with pictures and link to the new page!
- **WIPs.** Personally, I love to see sketches from other artists, and I'm sure your followers will feel the same!
- **Before and After.** Post a finished comic panel or illustration alongside the sketch and other sections of your process! (Lineart, thumbnails, flat colors, etc)
- **Timelapse videos.** If you work in software like Procreate or Clip Studio Paint, the program can record timelapse videos of your work that you can use for social media! You can also record them yourself with screen recording software, but you'll have to edit them separately.
- **Repost old artwork.** There's no law stating you're only allowed to post a piece online once. I like to repost old art to remind people "Oh hey! Here's that cool pic I drew!" if a piece is a few months old and I don't have anything new to post.
- **Art challenges** like Inktober, MerMay, Huevember, "Draw This in Your Style" events, and other trends are great resources that can help improve your art and get some additional exposure! Try participating if you can!
- **Memes.** Silly jokey pictures with your characters in them can do really well and make people more interested in your characters.



If you're having trouble keeping a steady flow of posts, I recommend **Batch Creating**. It's a good idea to try and draw a lot at once and then stagger posts throughout the week to help keep a steady flow of art posts! Something that can help with this is...

Scheduling. I highly HIGHLY recommend using some kind of scheduling app to make your social media management easier. It frees up your brain and makes your promotions easier to manage: you can spend an hour scheduling all of your social media posts for the entire week or longer, then just coast and let your social media run itself.

I've used **Later.com** for years. It has a drag and drop calendar, can schedule posts for multiple sites at the same time, will automatically post when scheduled, and can save captions/hashtags so you don't have to copy/paste. They have a free plan, but for fancier things you'll have to pay a monthly or yearly cost. Personally, I think it's worth the investment, but your mileage may vary.



What time of day should you post? “Ideal posting times” are a good baseline (you can research these yourself depending on which platform you’re using + your timezone), but check your analytics for when your actual audience is online. Try posting similar art at a few different times to see which time gets the most engagement!

“What’s engagement?” Engagement is interaction. Liking, commenting, etc. Ideally, you want your posts to get lots of interactions and engagement. Depending on the platform, more engagement can help your posts get around to new audiences.



Engage with your audience! Ask questions in the description of your posts to encourage people to leave comments. Try and respond to their comments as well!

The most comments I ever got on an Instagram post was when I asked “What’s your favorite type of tea?” in the description. It was relevant because the character I was posting likes tea.

(Pictured: A certain character from a certain D&D streaming show)



Engage with other artists! Talk to them, comment on their posts, like/share their works, etc. If you want people to engage with what you’re making, engage with them first! Artists should support each other!

(TIP: Talk to people and be friendly without the expectation of getting something in return. Be genuine!)

Engagement Case Study

I have 2 Instagram accounts: One for cosplay, one for art.

On my cosplay account, I post daily and use a variety of hashtags. I “post and run”- I very rarely like or comment on other user’s photos. After 6 months I gained about 300 followers.

On my art account, I post daily and use a variety of hashtags. I also regularly like and comment on other user’s posts. I sometimes feature other artists on my account, host art giveaways, and reply to as many comments as I can. After 1.5 years I gained about ~10k followers.

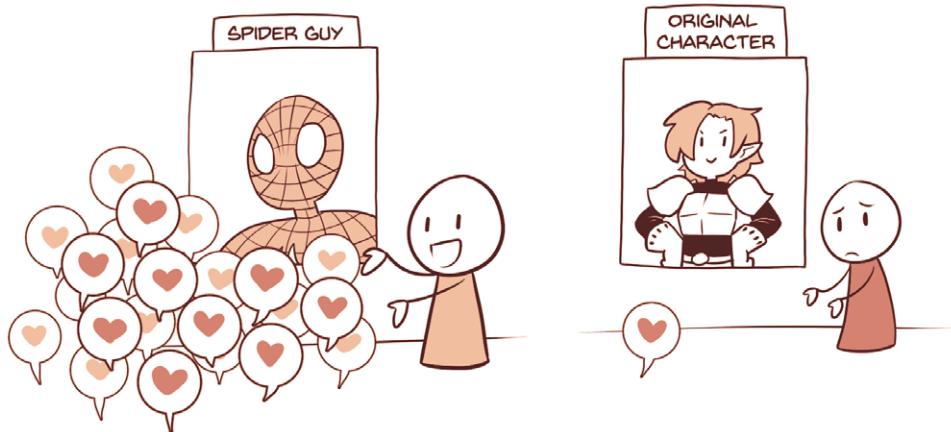
See the difference?



Building an Audience for Original Characters

Something that many artists lament is how hard it is to get people to care about their own original characters. You might be an amazing artist, but if you post art of your original characters on, say, Twitter, you might not get as much engagement as you would if you draw fan art of a character from a show or video game.

The reason fan art often performs better on social media is because people already have an established emotional connection with the characters. If people see a drawing of *notable and totally legitimate* superhero character Spider Guy, they're more likely to engage with it because "Hey! That's Spider Guy! From the comic series and movie franchise *Spider Guy!* I love Spider Guy!" Meanwhile, when you're first starting out, people aren't going to know who your characters are. If people don't have an emotional connection with a character, they're less likely to care, and therefore, less likely to engage or interact with your art of them.



What can we learn from this? Well, if you want your original art to perform well, the best way to do it is to **establish an emotional connection between your audience and your characters**. This is easier said than done, but here's a few ideas on how you can do just that:

Spark curiosity. As humans, we are driven by our desire to learn new things. If something catches our interest, we're likely to try and search out more information about that thing. So, if you can post about your characters and story in a way that makes people curious to learn more, you're one step closer to reeling them in and getting their eyes on your webcomic!

Drop small tidbits and lore. Little breadcrumbs and facts about your characters and story can really catch people's interest, especially if it makes them ask follow-up questions. I sometimes like just posting out-of-context panels from my comic with some witty commentary to show off a joke or story snippet I think will catch people's attention.

Be your characters' biggest fan. If you're making a webcomic about these characters, you probably love them a lot, right? So show it! Draw them! Post about them! Pretend like they're already popular and show them some love as their creator! If people see your characters often, and see the love you have for them, they might start getting attached! Plus, a character with an interesting or unusual design can be enough to spark people's interest.

Make joke comics and memes. No, I'm not joking. Often, an easy way to a reader's heart is to make them laugh. If you can redraw a silly meme or reaction image that includes your characters and works with your comic's story, it's a good way to get people curious about them! Humor is a very valuable tool!

Crossovers. Want to draw your characters but still add a bit of fan art flair to them? Have some fun with crossovers! Draw your characters dressed up as, or interacting with, movie, TV, or game characters! Draw how your characters would react if put in another story! Draw your characters in the style of another series! Crossovers are super fun to draw and can create a reference point for people who are less familiar with your characters.

Draw fan art. If there's another series that you're passionate about, drawing fan art can be a good way to get some new eyes on your work! Because one of my favorite methods for promoting my webcomic is...

Ye Olde Fan Art Bait-and-Switch. If you enjoy drawing fan art for established series, this can be a great way to attract some attention on social media, and get some more eyes on your original work!

Let me give you an example: I'm a big fan of a lot of D&D podcasts and streaming shows, like *The Adventure Zone* and *Critical Role*. I've drawn a lot of fan art for both series, because I genuinely enjoy the stories and have a lot of fun doodling the characters.

BUT... since my webcomic is a fantasy story, just like these series, people who come to my page for D&D show fan art would probably also like my comic. And a lot of the times, they do! I've gotten tons of new readers who enjoy my fan works and eventually started reading my webcomic. It's a viable method that has helped me plenty, and it may work for you as well!



Self Promotion Dos and Don'ts

DON'T annoy people constantly to read your work. You'll reek of desperation! Let them come to you!

DON'T try to become friends with someone just so they'll check out your comic/draw you fan art. This is super scummy and artists can always tell.

DON'T be a jerk! The comics community is small and word gets around fast.

DON'T promote yourself in other people's comment sections! It's skeevy and will likely get you blocked.

DON'T self-deprecate! Stop doing it!!!! If you can't say something nice, say nothing. "Nothing" is better than an immediate bad impression. Fake it 'til you make it, etc.

DON'T follow-for-follow. Some social media users will claim "Follow me and I'll follow you back!", which in theory helps both of you get new followers. But a follower you gain this way will not help you. You need to be finding followers who enjoy the work you create, not ones who are just there to inflate your follower count.

DO try to post once a day (when people are awake).

DO ask questions or invite conversation to get more engagement.

DO interact, even just by liking stuff on Instagram.

DO help promote others!

DO be sincere and enthusiastic.



The Value of Self-Promotion

I hosted a poll on *Castoff*'s website, asking readers how they discovered the comic for the first time. The results were pretty interesting, and might give you some insight into how well different styles of promotion can help find your audience!

41% - YouTube (I recently delved into making YouTube content and have seen quite a lot of success from it, so this is definitely skewing my numbers!)

13% - Tapas.io mirror

10% - Webtoon mirror

5% - Spiderforest Collective cross-promotions

5% - Twitter

5% - Word-of-mouth recommendations

4% - TikTok

2-3% each - Links pages, livestreams, paid advertisements, Tumblr, Instagram, TopWebcomics rankings

Assorted “other” responses:

- Freebies from my online store (I include a free *Castoff* sticker and other goodies with each purchase!)
- Met me at a convention
- Have been following me since my deviantArt days
- Heard me promote the series on completely unrelated projects (like my podcast or the D&D series I play in)



PART 7: **MAKING MONEY WITH YOUR COMIC**

Once you've started your comic, you might start asking yourself "Hey, I wonder if I could possibly monetize this somehow?" This chapter will help with that!

However, before we dive in, I'd like to reiterate what I said toward the beginning: **don't start a webcomic for the sole purpose of making money.** There's no guarantee that you'll ever be able to make a substantial amount of money with your comic, and if you do, it'll take years and years of hard work to get to that point. Earning some money off your comic should be a goal to aspire to, not your main motivation behind comic-making.

For the first few years, I called the revenue I earned from *Castoff* my "Burrito Fund". Back then, I was making just enough from my various revenue streams that I could buy myself a burrito for lunch every few weeks. It was a nice little bonus reward for my hard work, but definitely not enough to make a living off of. However, after several years and a lot of hard work and support from my generous readers, I'm lucky enough that my comic and its various revenue streams are now a significant chunk of my income. Growth can happen, but it takes time, effort, and a lot of trial and error.



So! With that in mind, let's discuss how to make some money with your comic!

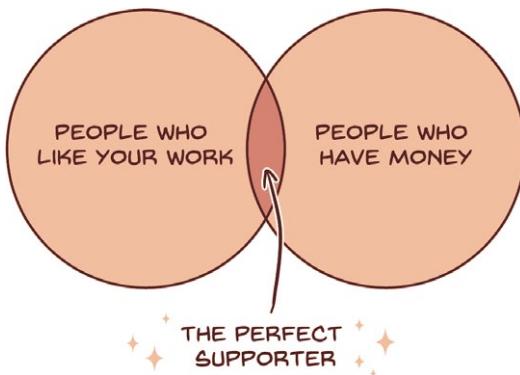


Patreon

Patreon is hands-down the most used community support service available. It's a monthly subscription service, like Netflix for internet creators. For a certain amount each month, donors (or "patrons") can access exclusive content from creators. How much patrons pay is up to them, and the rewards they get are decided by the creators. If you have an audience, it's a good way for them to help support your projects!

"If you have an audience."

Patreon is most effective for creators with an established fan base. Realistically, **less than 1%** of your fans will financially support you. *This is why promotion is important!!* The more you build your audience, and the more you build a reliable rapport with your readers, the more likely they are to financially support you.



Now, you may be asking "**How do I build a rapport with my audience?**"

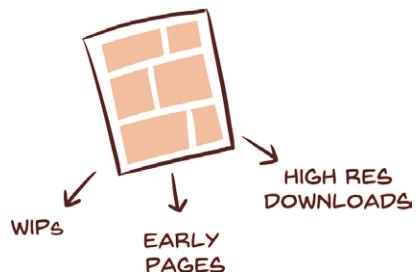
- **Be consistent!** Prove that you can update your comic regularly and not miss too many updates.
- **Communicate!** If you DO have to miss an update, let your readers know!
- **Be reliable!** If you promise something (e.g., Patreon rewards), deliver on that promise!

Tiers + Rewards

When you start your Patreon, your first thought is probably “**What should my rewards be?**” Many readers will just want to support you because they like your work, and won’t care so much about rewards. But some will only support creators if they get something out of it. So, what should you offer?

The best Patreon rewards are things you’re already doing, aka “**Comic Byproducts**”. Ideally, rewards should not be extra work!

The most common reward for comics is early pages, WIPs, or behind-the-scenes stuff. Don’t give yourself more work! You’re already making a whole dang webcomic!!



The next big question is “**How much should I charge for each tier?**” Think about how much *you’d* be willing to pay for certain rewards. If you wouldn’t pay \$10/month for something, your audience probably won’t either. In comics, the standard tiers usually look like this:

- **\$1 - \$2:** “I like your stuff, but I’m not made of money.” The Tip Jar. Very basic, easy rewards. Things like page sketches, extra doodles, etc.
- **\$3 - \$5:** “I really like your stuff, and might want some cool bonuses, but I’m also not made of money”. Early access to comic pages, more in-depth behind-the-scenes, etc.
- **\$10 and higher:** The Good Stuff™. Some artists do monthly sketch requests, with inked and colored monthly requests for higher tiers. Maybe physical goods, if you have the means.

I recommend starting with just one or two tiers with easy rewards when you’re first starting, and adding more once you feel ready and comfortable.

Setting Goals + Rewards

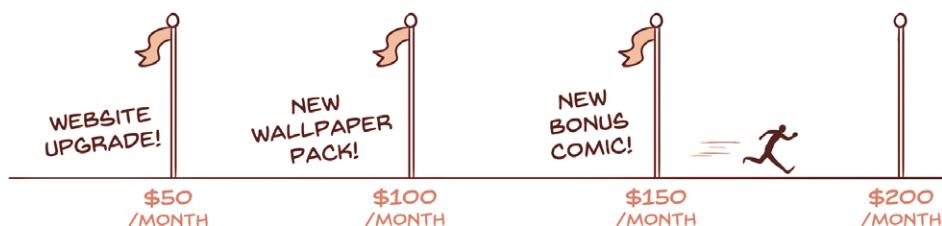
Patreon and sites like it encourage you to set funding goals- like “Once we’re making XYZ amount per month, I’ll do this to say thanks!”

When you’re first starting, **set some small, easy-to-reach goals** and slowly work your way up. For example, \$10 per month to cover web hosting, etc. Sometimes, goals will include rewards that patrons will get to say thanks for helping to reach that goal. For example, “when we reach \$100/month I’ll make a new bonus comic!”

The best goal rewards you only have to make ONCE. For example, a new bonus comic or side story, a special behind-the-scenes blog or process video, etc. Adding more monthly rewards as a funding goal is tempting, but very easy to over-do. Take it from me, adding more and more onto your plate can get excessive really, really fast. Don’t overwork yourself!

For example, early on I promised “If we hit \$50/month I’ll make a digital wallpaper pack every month!”, which sounded easy at first, but then suddenly I had to commit to posting a new wallpaper every month. Which ended up being too much work for me to do consistently.

So, on that note, don’t promise something that you can’t reliably do! If you make promises you can’t keep, you’ll disappoint your fans and/or end up with a bad reputation. It’s okay to do rewards without making them a regular thing.



Patreon Dos and Don'ts

DO promote your Patreon like you would your webcomic.

DO focus your promotions on people who already read your comic! People who don't read your comic won't be interested in throwing money at it. Focus on those who already enjoy your work!

DO look at successful campaigns and use them for inspiration.

DO have a link to your Patreon on your comic's site

DO regularly remind people that it exists! Make it easy to find for people who want to support you!

DON'T promise more than you can do.

DON'T set your expectations too high. Getting financial support is an uphill battle and a difficult grind, so don't be discouraged if your Patreon doesn't take off right away.

DON'T beg or guilt people into supporting you. Being annoying will only drive people away.

DON'T take your supporters for granted! Make sure to thank them for their support!



Ko-fi

Ko-fi is a support alternative that many creators prefer for its versatility. It's more of a "Tip Jar" compared to Patreon's monthly subscription, and many artists find it easier to maintain as it places less pressure on them.

Ko-fi's main service is one-time tips or donations, called "coffees", which are \$3 each (but donors can buy multiple for larger donations!). Think of it as buying your favorite creator coffee at a cafe. Ko-fi is nice in that it **takes no fees** (aside from payment processing, which is usually about 3% and is a requirement for any platform).

One-time support + tips are good for people who can't manage a monthly payment, and "Spur-of-the-moment" fans who maybe just found your work and want to throw you a few bucks out of kindness.

There's also a premium option called **Ko-fi Gold**, which costs a few bucks per month and adds a lot more features, such as an option for recurring subscriptions and a few other nice bonuses.



Other Crowdfunding Sites

I'm focusing on Patreon and Ko-fi because they're the ones I use and am familiar with, and are arguably the most well-known amongst comic creators. But there are other options out there!

If you plan to use other sites as your crowdfunding options, I recommend researching their features, fee structures, and checking to make sure they line up with your needs and goals.

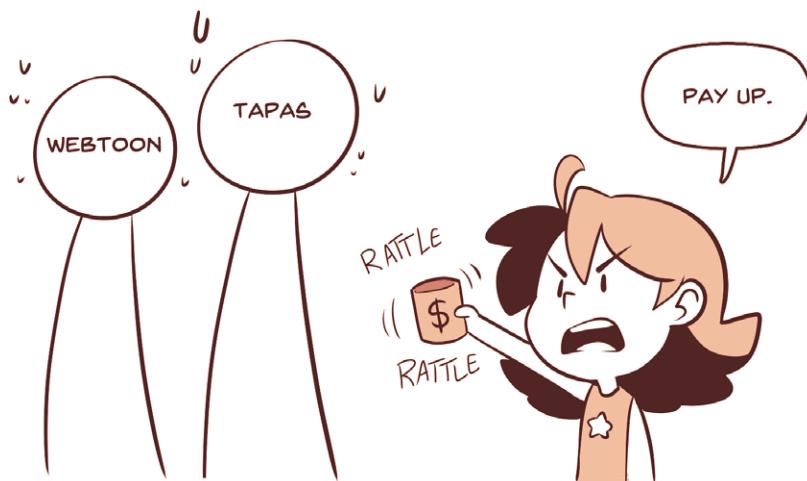
Webcomic Platforms

If you post your comic on certain platforms, sometimes you'll be eligible for **ad revenue or monthly bonuses** from them, depending on how many subscribers you have and the number of page views you get per month.

On **Webtoon**, I used to get a certain amount of money depending on how many page views and followers *Castoff* got each month. However, they recently discontinued this service, replacing it with creators receiving a percentage of ad revenue instead, leading to a pretty intense decrease in my earnings from the site. Be wary when relying on payment from platforms- Things like this can and often do happen!

Tapas has the Creator Bonus Program, which gives you a small amount of money every month based on how many pageviews your comic gets- although at the time of writing this it's invite only. I also get a small amount of ad revenue from them, and the site allows members to tip their favorite comic creators with in-app currency called Ink.

If you post your comics on platforms that offer revenue, it's a good idea to promote this as a way your audience can support you for free! Encourage them to subscribe and read the comic on those platforms to help support you.



Webcomic Platform Publishing: The Good and The Bad

While we're on the subject of webcomic platforms, let's dig a little deeper into the "published webcomics" side of things, shall we?

In general, posting your webcomic to comic hosting platforms is a good idea. It's free and easy, allows you to get new eyes on your work, and can be a great way to grow your audience. And if your comic does well, you might even catch the platform's attention.

Sometimes, comic hosting platforms will reach out and offer to publish a webcomic, offering the creator a contract and a monthly salary in exchange for posting the comic on their platform. To many indie comic creators, this can sound like a dream come true! Getting paid to make your webcomic? That's amazing! However, I offer a word of caution: If you're getting paid to make your comic by a platform, you're going to need to sign a contract. And you should **always be sure to read and understand any publishing contract before signing**.

While getting your work officially published by a webcomics platform may sound like a dream come true, I've seen far too many people get taken advantage of because they got too excited and signed a bad contract. I know people who signed away the rights to their comic in exchange for payment, only to have their series canceled because it didn't hit performance goals. And since their contract stated that the platform owned the rights to the comic, **the creator could never continue that series in any way ever again**. The platform essentially stole their webcomic, and then threw it away because it didn't perform well. And the artist was left with nothing.

I've also seen comic creators jump at the chance to be paid for making their webcomic... only to be saddled with intense workloads and monumental amounts of stress for very little pay. They pulled all-nighters, worked 60-80 hours per week to keep up with their publishing schedule, caused themselves physical injury and mental trauma, and got paid barely above minimum wage.

If that sounds scary, that's because it is scary! Losing the right to make and publish a story that you created is a terrifying concept! Working yourself to the bone for barebones pay is demoralizing! Bad contracts are scary! So while not every webcomic publishing contract will be this bad, it's always a good idea to be very careful about what you sign. Read through the entire contract, and get help or advice from a trusted, knowledgeable party if you need help understanding the terms. Getting your webcomic published can be a great opportunity, but make sure to be smart about what you sign.

The terms of any contract should be beneficial to the platform you're posting on AND you as the creator. The workload should be manageable, and you should be fairly compensated for your work. In addition, you should ideally get other benefits for signing a publishing deal: Will the platform be helping you market your series? Will you be part of promotions on their website? What do you gain by partnering with the publisher?

If you want a bit of further reading on this subject, go look up the **“Tokyopop Rising Stars of Manga scandal”** and do some reading. Bad contracts are nothing new in the comics industry, and if you can learn to spot the red flags sooner, you'll save yourself a lot of grief in the long run.

In closing: Just posting your comic to comic hosting platforms is fine. If a comic platform offers you publication and makes you sign a contract, proceed with caution and don't sign anything until you fully understand the terms.



Other Money-Making Methods

Tips! Some comic creators have a “tip jar” link to their PayPal, allowing for donations in a way that’s more flexible than Ko-Fi.



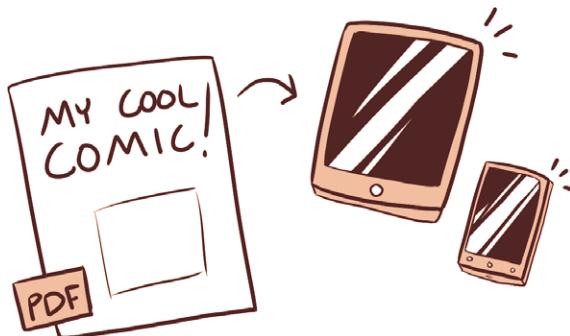
Selling merchandise (shirts, buttons, stickers, keychains, etc.) can make some side income! Fans of your comic might like some physical goods as well. If you’re just starting out, I recommend using a **print-on-demand (POD)** site like Redbubble: you can post your designs there, and the company takes care of the rest. When someone orders from your shop, the POD site will print and ship it to your customer without you needing to do anything. However, since the company does all the work, the profit margins are usually pretty low.

If you have the means, you can also make the merchandise yourself, which will have higher profit but means more work for you. You’ll have to make, pack, and ship everything, and maintain a storefront on a site like Etsy, but will make more money than going through a POD service.

I recommend starting with a POD site to test the waters, then moving up to making your own merch once it’s viable for you.



Sell digital books! Allowing your readers to buy PDF/ebook versions of your comic is a good way to make some money without much additional work on your part. I like to bundle each *Castoff* chapter into a PDF, and put it up for sale on my store. I also make them free for Patreon supporters, since they usually cost about as much as my lowest tier and it's a nice little bonus I can offer. I recommend selling ebooks on a site that can send the files to your customers automatically, like Etsy or Ko-Fi.



Sell physical books! Once you've made some headway into making comics, you can start thinking about doing print runs of your comic! Physical books can be a hard sell online and when you're first starting out, but if you do conventions you can sell your books in person! But if you need help paying for physical editions of your webcomic, you might need to use...



Kickstarter (and other crowdfunding services)! When it comes time to print your comic, a lot of creators hold crowdfunding events to help fund the printing of their physical books! Let's talk about that some more.

Kickstarter / Crowdfunding Tips

Kickstarter and other crowdfunding platforms exist as a way for creators to earn money to fund their projects. Project backers can pledge their money to these creators through the platform, with the promise that the creator will follow-through with their vision and deliver a finished product if enough money is raised. Crowdfunding campaigns are a popular way for independent comic artists to raise money to print and sell physical copies of their comics!

I could spend a whole other book talking about this topic, but if you're interested in possibly crowdfunding a comic project, here are a few basic tips to get you started:

Don't try to crowdfund a comic that doesn't exist yet. A successful webcomic Kickstarter, 9 times out of 10, is raising funds to print physical versions of a webcomic that has already been created. However, I've seen a ton of Kickstarters fail because they were asking for money to help *create* a webcomic, I.E. "I need this money to hire an artist", or "If this Kickstarter succeeds I can quit my job and make comics full-time." In general, these Kickstarters fail because **the audience doesn't have any proof that you'll actually make the comic**. And if they don't have any proof they'll get something out of it, why would they give you their money? Focus on creating the comic first, and ask for money later when you have a comic worth selling.



Look at past Kickstarters for inspiration. When planning a crowdfunding campaign, it's always a good idea to do some research before jumping in. I recommend looking at other comic Kickstarters and learning from them. If they succeeded, what did they do well? What can you learn from their success? If they failed, what went wrong? What mistakes did they make that you can avoid in your campaign? Try to find comics with a similar-sized fanbase to yours to analyze. This can give you an idea of what to expect and what to aim for when planning your campaign!

Be smart about your budget. If you're raising money to print a book, remember that fulfilling a crowdfunding campaign will cost more than just the cost of printing the books. It will also include the cost of shipping the books to you, buying shipping supplies like envelopes, boxes, and packing tape you can use to ship the books to your backers, postage costs, and more. Plus, crowdfunding platforms and payment processors will usually take a percentage of your earnings up front. Even once you factor in all of these costs, it's a good idea to **include an emergency buffer in your budget**, just in case fulfillment ends up costing more than expected. Remember to factor in all of these things when setting your funding goal!

Have a variety of price points. Some backers will only be able to throw you a few bucks, but some might be willing to pitch in big. Try to include some higher-priced tiers for the folks who might be willing to spend big! A great way to add this is to include some custom artwork for backers, but I recommend putting a limit on this tier so you aren't drowning in extra work.

Don't ship anything smaller than your book. Like Patreon, Kickstarter allows you to set separate support tiers for your audience to pledge to. Things like "\$10 for a digital copy of the comic, \$20 for the book, \$30 for both the digital and physical versions", etc. Let's say you're trying to print a book version of your webcomic. **I recommend not offering any tier that involves physical goods that cost less than the tier with just your book.** For example, when I ran the Kickstarter for my first webcomic, I offered a set of art cards featuring the main cast, and had a tier for just the art cards set at \$5. The only person who bought the art card tier

was in Australia, and I ended up having to pay \$15 to ship them from the US, which means their pledge *lost me* \$10. To avoid this, I recommend having any tiers below the cost of the book be purely digital rewards: things like an ebook version of your book that will be free and easy to send out to backers.

Timing is everything. Try to time your campaign around when potential backers will have money to spend. I've heard many people say that running a crowdfunding campaign around April is generally a bad idea, because it's right around the tax season deadline. Running a campaign at the end of the year is also a bad idea: if you don't spend your raised funds before the end of the year, you'll have to pay income taxes on them, eating a huge chunk of your profits! Plus, in November/December people are usually spending their money on holiday shopping, and will be less likely to pledge to a crowdfunding campaign.

Don't go crazy with add-ons. While it can be tempting to add different types of cool, exclusive merchandise for crowdfunding campaigns, be careful not to go overboard! Producing extra merchandise will quickly eat into the profits for your campaign, and make fulfillment that much more complicated. Plus, non-flat items (like pins, keychains, buttons, etc) will sometimes be difficult to ship alongside a book or comic issue. I recommend keeping any additional goodies small, cheap to produce, and easy to ship. Stickers and bookmarks are great add-on merch items!

Promote, Promote, Promote! Remember those self-promotion tips from earlier? Make sure to utilize them for your Kickstarter! Start hyping up your Kickstarter early and use everything in your arsenal to promote it!

Be a good communicator. Kickstarters are prone to delays, but most backers will be understanding and patient as long as you're open and keep them updated on how the project is coming once the campaign is funded. When I run a Kickstarter, I usually update my backers whenever anything at all happens behind the scenes, from ordering the books to shipping announcements to delays to general behind-the-scenes snippets of fulfillment. Open communication makes for happy backers!

Closing Remarks

One final note on the money-making side: **all of these ideas will be useless if your audience doesn't know they exist.** You have to promote your support options just like you would your comic, but **focus your promotions on those who already read and like your work.** After all, people who don't read your comic probably won't be interested in throwing money at it, right? Post about your Patreon and what your readers can get by supporting you. Show off the new merch you've made. Remind them every so often, as they're bound to forget.

If you have your own comic website (*which you should!*) I recommend including a **Support page** with all the options you have available listed out. Include all the ways your readers can support you, and **include some free options!**

Financial support is great, but not all of your readers will have the disposable income to throw at you. So, give them ways they can help you out for free, and include these on the support page as well! Examples of free support would be following you and sharing your posts on social media, subscribing on the platforms you post the comic on, sharing the comic with friends, etc. Support is support, financial or otherwise, and doing something simple like recommending your comic to a friend can help you find more readers who CAN support you monetarily.

Again, building a support network takes time- but keep at it, and eventually you'll see the results!



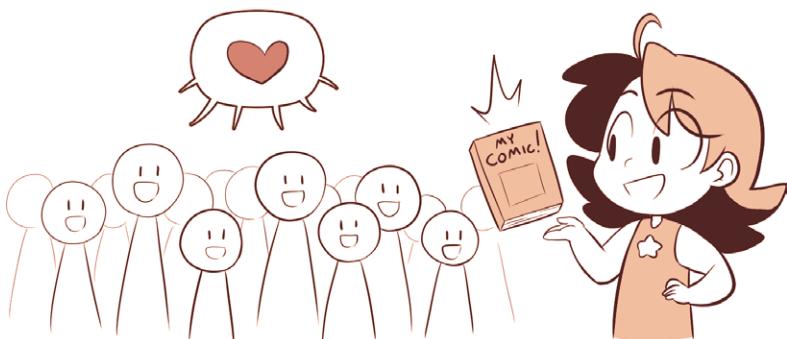
PART 8: WEBCOMIC TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS

A lot of resources talk about starting comics, or making a comic, but there's not a lot of info out there about how to manage other aspects of your comic's presence once it's out in the world. So, this chapter is some assorted advice I have on managing your comic, your community, and yourself.



Crafting a Community

As your comic starts to gain more readers, it's a good idea to give your readers ways to interact with you and each other! So, here's some ideas for making a community around your comic!



Your Comments Section

In general, comments are a good thing to have! They let your readers interact with you and other readers, share theories, post their reactions, and more!



Like I mentioned in the social media section, if you want readers to comment, it's a good idea to **give them something to comment on!** Ask questions or make jokes in the description box under your comic pages. Start a conversation with them, and they'll be more likely to reciprocate!

However, by including a comments section, you're opening yourself up to comments from anyone and everyone who comes across your website. So it's important to **moderate your comment section** in order to make it pleasant for not only you, but your readers as well.

Think about it this way: If you open the door to a cafe and see two people near the entrance having a screaming match, it might make you hesitant to actually walk in. You might even just turn around and leave. The same applies to your readers: if they see a lot of fighting, negativity, or just general grossness in your comments, they might not want to join in that discussion. Don't let people be scared off by other members of your community!



Generally, I like to follow a rule with my comments section: “**If I wouldn’t let you say it in my house, I don’t let you say it in my comments**”. The internet may be a public space, but as the owner of the website, I ultimately decide what comments get to exist on it. If a comment makes me angry or uncomfortable, it will probably also make other readers feel the same way. So I usually delete it and/or give the commenter a talking-to fairly quickly. If they continue to make comments I’m uncomfortable with, I ban them.



I encourage you to not be shy with using the ban hammer if needed. Back when

I first started *Castoff*, I let my comments section get away with... Well, a lot. For example, one time a reader tried to explain why I should have guns in my fantasy world, and then did an entire role play in my comments section detailing how he would use these guns to murder one of my main characters. Gross.



Now that I’ve started being more choosy about the type of comments I allow in my comments section, myself and my readers are a lot more comfortable, and it shows. Like I said before, though, you aren’t required to have a comments section. If the idea of comments on your work freaks you out, you can always disable them. It’s ultimately up to you to curate your comic-making experience.



Discord

Discord is a chat program that was originally intended for games, but has spread into a useful tool for all kinds of online communities, big and small. Many comic creators make their own Discord servers, where fans of a comic can talk to each other, discuss the comic, etc. A server is divided up into multiple chat rooms (or “channels”), and each chatroom generally has its own theme. (For example “General chat”, “comic discussion”, “announcements”, etc.)

Cool Comic Server!

- # announcements-and-rules
- # introductions
- # general
- # comic-discussion
- # memes

I recommend joining a few servers for comics that you like, to get an idea of how they work before starting your own. Observe what other servers do and get ideas for yours!

I've found that it's helpful to have a main channel for comic discussion, and a few channels that aren't related to the comic itself. For example, since *Castoff* is a fantasy story, and I enjoy tabletop games (as do many of my readers), I have a *Dungeons and Dragons* channel in the *Castoff* Discord where members can talk about their own D&D/TTRPG antics. We also have an art channel where members can show off their drawings, a pets channel for cute animal pictures, and a channel where folks can recommend and drop links to their other favorite comics!

If many members of your community enjoy something, and/or if something relates to your comic in some way, I recommend including a chat channel for it! Having extra non-comic discussion channels keeps the server more active, and helps the members loosen up and talk to each other more freely. And if they come back to the server to talk to each other often, they're more likely to talk about the comic as well! It's all about building up a fun environment that people want to hang out in: make a welcoming atmosphere, and people are more likely to come by and chit-chat.

Livestreaming

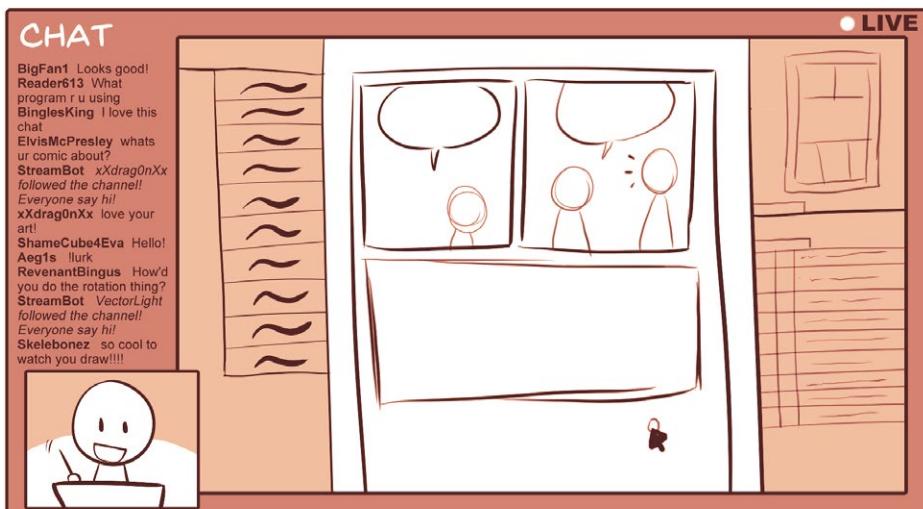


Livestreaming platforms like Twitch, YouTube, Picarto, and others all have fairly active art communities. Artists of all kinds can stream while working and show off their process while chatting with viewers. Streaming is a good way to connect with your readers while you work on your comic or other projects!

Streaming, however, is an entirely different skill versus just drawing comics. You need to not only be good at what you're doing, but also be entertaining enough that folks will stick around to watch you work. You also need to be comfortable with eyes on you. If you tend to freeze up while people watch you draw, this might not be a viable option for you.

I've personally found that streaming can be a great way to interact with your audience! You likely won't get many new readers just by streaming, but it's a good way to strengthen your community and even teach your audience about your process.

(Learning how to stream is an entirely different can of worms, but there's a lot of helpful guides on YouTube if you want to learn more!)



Working on my Webcomic! (art)

@ThatComicKid

Conquering Art Block

The dreaded “art block” is something that all artists deal with. And if you’re feeling generally crummy about your art, it’s likely to affect your webcomic as well. While there’s no be-all-end-all method to getting yourself out of an art funk, here’s some tips I have!



Draw badly on purpose. No, seriously. In my experience, art block usually sets in when the art I’m creating isn’t meeting my expectations for how I want it to look. The best way around this? Have no expectations. Grab a notebook or your tablet and say to yourself “I am going to draw badly”. And then do it! Scribble some nonsense! When you get tired of what you’re drawing, move onto something new. Just churn out some random, meaningless doodles. Focus on the act of drawing, not the end product! Put on a movie or show in the background and just mindlessly scribble for a little while. You’d be amazed what you can do when you aren’t holding yourself back by expecting every piece to be a masterpiece.

Do art studies. A little bit of study can go a long way. Find some art by artists you admire, study them closely, and try to recreate their work. We often did “Master copies” like this as an art exercise when I was in art school, and they can be a great way to learn new things you never would have tried otherwise!

Take a break. If you’re feeling worn out by art, it’s okay to set the pencil aside for a while. Take a little time for yourself, and while you’re resting, try to find some new inspiration! Find some new comics to read, watch a new movie or show, or visit an art gallery!

Try new things. Getting a fresh sketchbook or experimenting with a new medium can be a great way to shake up your art brain. If you only ever work in digital mediums, try doing some traditional art! Pick up some cheap art supplies from a craft store and see what you can do with them. You might even stumble upon a new favorite art method!

Conquering Writer's Block

Just like artists, writers can struggle with a lack of motivation, or simply just a lack of ideas. Writer's block is often just as detrimental as art block, if not worse! So, here's my advice to help get yourself out of a rut!

Take a walk. My best ideas come to me when I'm up and moving around. My personal favorite way to shake myself out of a writer's block is to head outside, play some music on my headphones, and walk around my neighborhood for an hour. If no one's around, sometimes I'll even talk to myself and act out scenes quietly. Embracing your inner theater kid can help hash your way through dialogue ideas!

Take notes and write down everything. As I'm going about my day, if I happen to think up a cool idea for my story, I'll pop open the Notes app on my phone and jot it down. I write down every single thought and idea I have, even the ones I think aren't so great. It's always better to have something written down and not use it, than to forget a cool idea because it got lost in your brain.

Avoid the problem (for now). If you're stuck on a particular moment or scene in your comic, and you're not quite sure how to proceed, just skip it and move on! I can't tell you how many times I've written “[*Insert a cool one-liner*]” or something similar into my script when I couldn't think of a good line on the spot. Don't lose momentum by stopping in your tracks trying to figure out the perfect line. If you need to skip over something, skip over it! You can always come back to it later.



Find inspiration in other media.

Have a show or movie you've been putting off watching? Go watch it. Got a book or comic you've been dying to read? Set aside some time to read it. As creators, we can often find inspiration from others. If you're stuck, try something new!

Just write *something*. A mantra that's been especially helpful for me as a writer is “*The only thing your first draft has to do is exist*”. Your first draft is allowed to be bad. In fact, I’d argue that the first draft HAS to be bad! Like getting over art block, sometimes writing something bad, acknowledging that it’s bad, and fixing it afterwards is more productive than sitting at your computer, paralyzed, waiting for the perfect words to flow into your brain. Just write SOMETHING down, and come back to it to revise later on! You can’t fix a story that doesn’t exist, and writing something imperfect is better than not writing at all.

Everything you write works toward building your skill, even if it doesn’t get used in the final product. Let your messy first drafts and scrapped ideas be the fertilizer for future growth. Every step you take, even clumsy ones, are still forward momentum on your writer’s journey of improvement. So just write *something!*



Why Webcomics End

(And How to Prevent It)

Before we get into this segment, here's a story:

My very first attempt at a webcomic (We'll call it Webcomic 0) ended after 6 pages. I was a high school sophomore, I had no plan, I just really wanted to make a comic. So I slaved over my tablet, made those 6 pages... and then got bored and stopped.

My first actual webcomic, *PSY*, I started the summer after I graduated high school. I had a loose script of the first chapter, a brain full of cool ideas, and an entire summer vacation's worth of time on my hands. So I made a webcomic. I finished the first chapter before heading off to art school that fall, and continued to work on it for the next 3 years. Then, once it was time to work on my senior film, I had to put the comic on hiatus so I could focus on schoolwork. Six months later, when I finally came back to the comic... I hated it. I looked at what I had spent the last 3 years on, and all I could see were flaws, a lame story, and terrible artwork. I looked ahead at the next few chapters I had written and didn't look forward to it at all. I wasn't excited. I wasn't motivated to continue. And so, after about a year's hiatus, I finally put *PSY* to bed for good. A few years later, I started *Castoff*, which has been running for over 8 years at the time of writing this.

Why'd I go off on that tangent? Because when we talk about webcomics ending, I want you to know that **I've been there**. It's a harsh reality that most webcomics don't end up finishing for one reason or another. So let's talk about it- specifically, why it happens, and ways you can avoid it happening to you. A few of these things are touched on in other sections of the book, but I'll be repeating them here for emphasis, and so you don't have to go digging to find them again.

So: What's the problem, and how can we solve it?

“I’m not excited about the story anymore!”

As we grow older and time passes, our taste in stories can change. The things we liked as teens might not be the same things we like as adults, etc. So, if you’ve been working on the same comic for a long time, it’s safe to say that your tastes will likely be different now than when you started.

If you find yourself no longer excited about continuing your story, consider: **Is it salvageable?** Would rewriting the parts you haven’t already drawn make things more enjoyable? If the answer is yes, then good news! You can totally do that! About 6 months into working on *Castoff* I completely restructured the ending, and continue to tweak plot points in future chapters to fit what I think I would have the most fun with. You don’t have to throw out all that hard work if you can still have fun by changing a few things.



“It’ll take too long to finish!”

If you become intimidated by the scope of your comic project, there’s no shame in finding an earlier stopping point. I’ve seen a few comics wrap up their stories at the end of a story arc, do as I mentioned above and rewrite the later bits to be faster-paced, or even switch to a written-out summary of the rest of the plot to get through the story and satisfy readers’ curiosity without the artist needing to draw out everything.

Remember: You can avoid this by narrowing your scope early on. Aim to make it as short as possible, and cut out unnecessary plot!

“Comic pages take too long and are exhausting to draw!”

If this is a problem you’re having I highly, highly recommend figuring out some ways to simplify your art style and/or speed up your drawing process. For more on that, check the “Drawing Your Comic” section!

"I want to keep working on this comic, but I hate the early art!"

Earlier on in this book I talked about how you should never go back and redo early pages. But, if you *really* want to go back and fix your earlier art, I can't stop you. A bit of advice, though: Small tweaks are much easier than redrawing entire pages. If you can redraw just a characters' face, fix their proportions, or adjust the little things that bother you instead of redrawing whole pages, it'll save you a lot of time. I've done this before, and many artists choose to do this before printing their comics.

If you *really* feel like you need to redraw entire pages, then do it, but be mindful that it's going to take away time from making forward progress on the comic.



"Nobody reads my comic and I'm sad about it!"

If you want to get more eyes on your comic, you have to promote it and get it in front of as many new eyes as possible, and be enticing enough that they read it. I talk about different ways to do this in the "Promoting Your Comic" section, but here's a few quick tips I have:

Join a webcomic collective. Find one that lines up with your goals, make sure you meet the requirements, and apply to join. Most collectives will help cross-promote each other's comics, on top of other benefits!

Advertise on other comics in a similar genre to yours. Most ads on fellow webcomics will cost just a few cents per day and can help attract new viewers to your work! ComicAd Network is great for this.

Do some fan art/guest art for other webcomics. Similar to the above, this has helped me a lot in the past. So many of my readers found me by seeing guest art on a comic they like, enjoying my art, and coming over to read my work.

Promoting your comic is a lot of work, and it takes time to find an audience. Do your best to keep your chin up and keep trying!

"I want to work on something else!"

If your passion has drifted elsewhere, it's okay to take a break from your comic and come back to it later! If you can find a good balance, you can also try working on multiple comics at once. It's tricky, but if you don't want to give up on your current comic to start another, it's a viable option for many creators, and it may also work for you.

If you *completely* lose motivation for your comic, then ending it might honestly be the best choice. It's a hard decision, but you have to choose what's right for you. My only recommendation is that you be upfront with your readers about ending the comic. Otherwise they'll be left in the dark, unsure if you'll ever return to it. They'll be disappointed, but you have to do what's best for you. Plus, they'll likely continue to support your work. When I quit my first comic, most of my readers continued to follow my work and are now readers of *Castoff!*

Ultimately, you have to decide what's best for you and the story you want to tell. Take your time, weigh your options, and go from there.



Your Comic and Your Mental Health

Webcomics are a big time endeavor, and it's important to take care of yourself while you bring your story to life! Here are some tips I have on this subject.

Save nice comments. I'll be the first to admit it: Comics are hard. So hard, in fact, that a lot of times you may find yourself doubting your skills. It happens to everyone, trust me. To combat this, I recommend that, whenever you get a positive comment about your work, screencap it and put it in a folder on your desktop. Read through them all on the days when you're feeling discouraged to get a nice confidence booster!



However, while nice comments can help give your self esteem a boost, validation from others shouldn't be the only thing motivating you to work on your comic. I suggest you learn to...

Rely on self-gratification. Comics take a LOT of time and energy, and counting on others to encourage you can be a fast track to losing motivation. Learn to rely on self-gratification! You should enjoy making your comic so much that NOT working on it drives you crazy. Like I said before: Make something that you love working on, and be your own biggest fan.

It's okay to take breaks! Sometimes when life throws a lot at you, your comic will have to take a backseat, and that's completely okay. Take breaks when you need to! Skip an update if you're feeling overwhelmed! Take a vacation when you finish a chapter! The most important thing is that you take care of yourself. Just be sure to **keep your readers in the loop.** Announce breaks in advance when you can, let people know if you'll be skipping an update, and give them an idea of when you'll be back. Don't just disappear and leave them wondering where you



went. Chances are, if you read webcomics, this has happened to you at least once before, so you know how bad it feels. Don't inflict that on your readers if you can avoid it.

Myself and many other comic creators like taking longer breaks between chapters to rest and recuperate during natural stopping points. I even took almost 3 months off *Castoff* when I moved to another country a few years back. I wasn't sure how busy I'd be with the moving process and my new job, so well in advance of moving I announced that I'd be taking an extended hiatus when the move happened. My readers were completely understanding and were excited when I was finally able to come back!

If you know you'll be taking a hiatus in the future, and you don't want to leave your comic fully stagnant while you're gone, you might even ask for guest art that you can post in the interim. **Guest art** is essentially another artist or comic creator making fan art for your comic, that you can then get permission to post on your website. Many comic artists will jump at the chance to do guest art, because it's a good way to market their own work to a new audience (yours). It's a mutually beneficial arrangement! Just make sure you give people time to make their pieces, and credit your guest artists with a link back to their work!



Some people won't like your comic- and that's okay. No piece of media is universally loved by everyone, and trying to make your comic please everyone is a fool's errand that will only weaken your work. Your comic could be the most amazing comic ever, and some people just... don't like comics. Don't spend your time trying to please people that won't like your work anyway. Focus on pleasing yourself, and making something *you* love, that *you're* passionate about.

Don't compare yourself to others. Every comic creator is different, just like how every comic is different. It's okay to take inspiration from other creators, but don't try to mimic them exactly. Something that works well for them might not work for you. But likewise, you may stumble onto something that really helps you that others have never tried! Don't let the successes of others tarnish your drive to succeed!

Instead of comparing yourself to other creators, **compare your current self to your past self.** How have you improved in the last month? Year? 5 years? What have you accomplished? What do you want to accomplish in the future, and what steps can you take to get there? What have you learned, and how can you continue to improve? What steps can you continue to take to become the best comic creator you can be?

Be proud of your achievements, and let them be the wind at your back as you continue toward even greater heights! And have some fun making comics while you're at it!



PART 9: **FURTHER STUDY**

Want to learn more about comics? Here are some further study materials I recommend!



***Making Comics* by Scott McCloud**

A book on how to make comics, written as a comic! This is actually used as a textbook in some comic-making college courses. It's great for beginners looking to get a better grasp of the basics of comic-ing. The author has some other books on comic-making (*Understanding Comics* and *Reinventing Comics*), but this is the only one I've read personally. I hear good things about all of them, though!

***Save the Cat* by Blake Snyder**

While this book is technically about screenwriting, a majority of the story-crafting tips can apply to all media, including comics! This is a phenomenal read for anyone struggling with their story, as it breaks down a lot of essentials and really makes you think about your work in new ways.

Pixar's 22 Rules of Storytelling

If you need some more tips to help you think about your story, I highly recommend looking up "Pixar's 22 Rules of Storytelling". They're good tools from the pros to help you develop your story and characters. I can't include the entire list here, but it's easy enough to find a list of them on Google.

Blambot's Lettering Tips

Blambot is a website dedicated to providing fonts for comic artists, but they also have tons of resources on their website to teach you about lettering! Some of their tips were covered in this book, but there's a lot more to learn, so I suggest checking out their guides!

Iron Circus Comics'

"Let's Print a Comic" and "Let's Kickstart a Comic"

If you're looking into making physical books of your comic, or running a Kickstarter campaign, these ebooks are invaluable resources and are well-worth the money!

Comic-Making Forums

There are so many forums and Discord servers out there for those who want to discuss making comics! Several comic hosting platforms (such as Tapas and Comic Fury) have their own forums for their users to discuss and promote their comics.

I'll also throw in another mention of **SpiderForest** here. We have not only a forum, but also a Discord server open for members and non-members alike to discuss comics and ask for feedback!

The Whole Internet

This may come off as a little cheeky, but it's true!! There are so, SO many art, writing, comic, marketing, and monetization tips out there on the big wide web. If you're having trouble with something, I suggest searching it up on **Google** or **YouTube**, or even taking some online courses. You never know what useful things you'll find! (I even have some tutorials on my own YouTube channel! Find them at [YouTube.com/TheStarfishface!](https://www.youtube.com/TheStarfishface))



CLOSING COMMENTS

If you've made it here, congratulations! You've stuck with me all the way until the end, and I've taught you everything I know.

All I have to say now is: You're ready. The world of webcomics is waiting for you. It's time to jump in. You can do it! I believe in you!!

Go make comics!!!



SPECIAL THANKS:

To my parents, who encouraged me as an artist throughout my life and believed in me enough to let me go to art school. That was pretty cool of you.

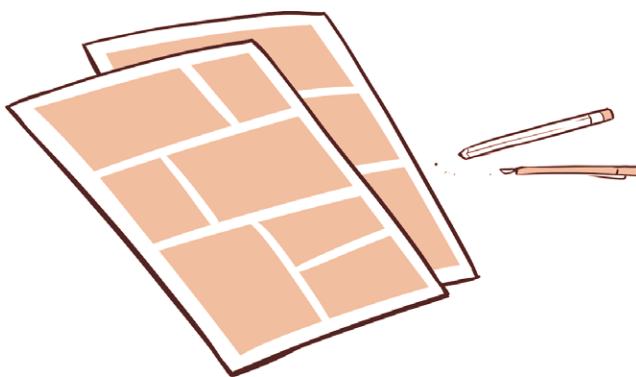
To String Theory, my wonderful pals who listen to my rambles and post the best memes in the group chat. You light up even the hardest of days.

To my Patreon supporters, the members of the **SpiderForest Webcomic Collective**, and my other pals for helping to proofread this monster and providing all your wonderful feedback.

To the Castoff Crew, my lovely readers who keep me going with their enthusiasm and constant kindness.

And to you, dear reader, for your support. I look forward to reading your webcomic someday!

Star ♥



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Star Prichard is an artist from Austin, TX. She graduated from Savannah College of Art and Design with a BFA in animation and storyboarding. Currently, she works as a freelance comic artist and illustrator.

Her current webcomic, ***Castoff***, is a fantasy-adventure series about a group of magical misfits on the run from the law. In 2017 *Castoff* won StArt Faire's Excellence in Webcomics People's Choice Award, along with an honorable mention for Best in Fantasy. In 2020 *Castoff* was nominated for the Webtoon Canvas Awards for Best in Fantasy. Read *Castoff* for free at [castoff-comic.com!](http://castoff-comic.com)

When she isn't working on comics, she enjoys thinking about comics, teaching others about comics, and playing video and tabletop games.

See more of her works at TheStarfishface.com.



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