

# **Comics Annotation Tool (CAT) - Instructions**

## **Overview**

The CAT is a browser-based tool that will lead you through a step-by-step annotation process.

The CAT stores a number of comic pages. These are displayed one at a time on the left side of the webpage. The right side of the webpage presents a series of tasks. New tasks will appear as each consequent task is completed, leading you through the annotation process. All tasks essentially involve drawing rectangles directly on the provided comic page to outline the different panels/sections, characters, and text sections, and then typing in or indicating some simple information about these elements.

This section of the guide will describe these tasks step by step. The section after these instructions will provide some examples and tips for annotating the pages. Please refer to this guide as needed throughout the annotation process.

## **General Instructions: Heuristics of how to use the CAT**

- The CAT works best on a Chrome browser, when the browser is made as large as possible. If not, some of the elements on the webpage may begin to overlap.
- The Cat works best when **completing the steps and tasks one at a time** - that is, make sure you fill out all the forms and inputs in the “character” or “text” section tasks before pressing the “End Task” button that prompts the next task.
- The annotations are meant to reflect the order you read the comic and take in the visual and textual information. **Please annotate the elements on the page in the order you read them.** If an element on a later page contradicts something on a previous page, there is no need to amend the previously annotated page.
- **Please use the controls on the CAT to navigate between pages and stories, and do not refresh or go backwards or forwards using the browser controls!**

## **Step 1: Outline the Image Sections/Panels**

On the first page you will see a button: “Start Annotations”. Click this to start the annotation process for all the comic stories stored in the CAT.

First, you will be asked to outline the distinct image sections by drawing red rectangles directly on the image. Press the “Start Task” to turn on the drawing capabilities and begin outlining sections by drawing rectangles directly on the comic page.

If you make a mistake or want to redo a rectangle, use the “Clear Last Rectangle” and “Clear All Rectangles” buttons. Once the sections are all outlined to satisfaction, click the “End Task” button.

The "Start Task" button will turn red when pressed, which indicates that you can draw directly on the comic page.

## Step 2: Outline, Label and Describe Characters

After the "End Task" button is clicked, the right side of the webpage will generate a series of forms. Each form corresponds with each outlined image section/panel, and the number of each section matches to the number on the top left of the rectangle outlines.

You will have to complete the same tasks in each of these forms. First, you will be prompted to outline the main characters **in that section only**. Click the "Indicate Characters" button in Section 1 to start the task.

This task works the same way as in Step 1 - once the "Indicate Characters" button is pressed, outline all the characters in that section by drawing purple rectangles directly on the comic page around each character. Each outlined character will generate a new purple form on the right side of the webpage. Each form asks you to provide a character label (which should stay the same for

a character through the whole story), a description of that character, and action that that character is performing. Use the “Remove Last Character” button to erase the last made rectangle and its associated form if you make a mistake. Once all the characters have been outlined on the canvas and all inputs are filled in, click the “End Task” button.

**Please input all the character information before clicking “End Task”, rather than fill it out later.** The CAT works best when the tasks are done completely and sequentially.

### Step 3: Outline and Describe Text Sections

After the “End Task” button is clicked, the “Indicate Text Boxes and Bubbles” button will appear in the same section underneath the purple forms. Pressing this button starts a task that works the same way as in Step 1 and Step 2 - outline all the text sections on the comic page by drawing green rectangles to roughly delineate these text sections. Each text section outlined will generate a new green form. Each form asks you to indicate the text section type for each corresponding rectangle. Use the “Remove Last Text Section” button to erase the last made rectangle and its associated form. Once all the text sections have been outlined on the canvas and all the forms have been filled out, click the “End Task” button.

When “Speech/Thought” or “Other” is selected, an input appears that asks for the character associated with that text section.

**Please input all the text section information before clicking “End Task”, rather than fill it out later.** The CAT works best when the tasks are done completely and sequentially.

#### Step 4: Describe the Background

After the “End Task” button is clicked, several questions about the background of the section will appear beneath the green forms. You will be asked to give a label for the location (which should stay the same for a location through the whole story), a description of the depicted location, and indicate whether the section has a drawn in background or an empty background (see the “Annotation Examples” section for examples). If there are more sections left to annotate on the page, the “Indicate Characters” button will appear in the next section. **Repeat Steps 2-4 until all Sections have been annotated.**

The screenshot shows a comic strip titled "The SPITEFUL SPIRIT". The strip is divided into three panels. Panel 1 shows a woman in a blue dress looking shocked at a ghostly figure. Panel 2 contains a speech bubble from the ghost. Panel 3 shows the woman and the ghost in a room. The annotation form on the right is titled "Page 1 of 3". It asks for "Characters seen so far:" and "Locations seen so far:". Below this, a section labeled "2:  Narration  Speech/Thought  Other" has a "Background" button. It also includes fields for "Location Label" (One variable (e.g. L1)) and "Location Description" (One or two words (e.g. forest)). A radio button for "Empty" is selected. At the bottom, there are buttons for "Previous Page", "Reset Page", and "Next Page".

indicate whether the section has a drawn in background or an empty background (see the “Annotation Examples” section for examples). If there are more sections left to annotate on the page, the “Indicate Characters” button will appear in the next section. **Repeat Steps 2-4 until all Sections have been annotated.**

#### Step 5: Navigating Between Pages

At the bottom of the right side of the webpage are three buttons: “Previous Page”, “Reset Page”, and “Next Page”. Once all the sections have been filled out for that page, click the “Next Page” button to start annotating the next page in the story, beginning again at Step 1. Complete Steps 1-4 for all pages in the story, clicking “Next Page” once a page is completely annotated. If any information from the tasks is missing, these will be highlighted so you can fill them out before moving onto the next page.

If there is any need to go back to a page that was already annotated, use the “Previous Page” button to go back one page in the story. All the annotations on previously annotated pages will have been saved. However, **there is a section at the top of the page that will keep track of all the characters and locations you have described on previous pages to help you remember which labels are assigned to specific locations and characters.**

The screenshot shows the second page of the comic strip. The title "Page 2 of 3" is at the top. It asks for "Characters seen so far:" and "Locations seen so far:". The "Characters seen so far:" box lists "x1: Woman" and "x2: Ghost". The "Locations seen so far:" box lists "L1: Crypt".

If you need to completely restart the annotation task from Step 1, use the “Reset Page” button. This will get rid of all the annotations completed so you can start from scratch.

Reminder: please use the controls on the CAT to navigate between pages and stories, and do not refresh or go backwards or forwards using the browser controls!

If the annotation tasks get “stuck” (for example, the “indicate characters” button doesn’t work), please use the “Reset Page” button to start the annotation task again from Step 1 for that page.

## **Step 6: Navigating to the Next Story**

Once you reach the last page in a story, the “Next Page” button will change to say “Last Page: Submit All Annotations”. This button submits all the annotations you have made on that story to a database, and takes you to another page that lists how many stories you have already annotated and how many stories you have left to annotate. Click the “Next Story” button to start annotating the next comics story, starting at Step 1. There is no way to revisit a story that you have already annotated.



You have completed 1 story – there are 2 remaining stories!

Next Story

Once you have annotated all the stories, you will receive a message that says “Thank you for using the CAT”! You may then close the browser or the browser tab.

# Annotation Examples

## Overview: Heuristics of how to Annotate

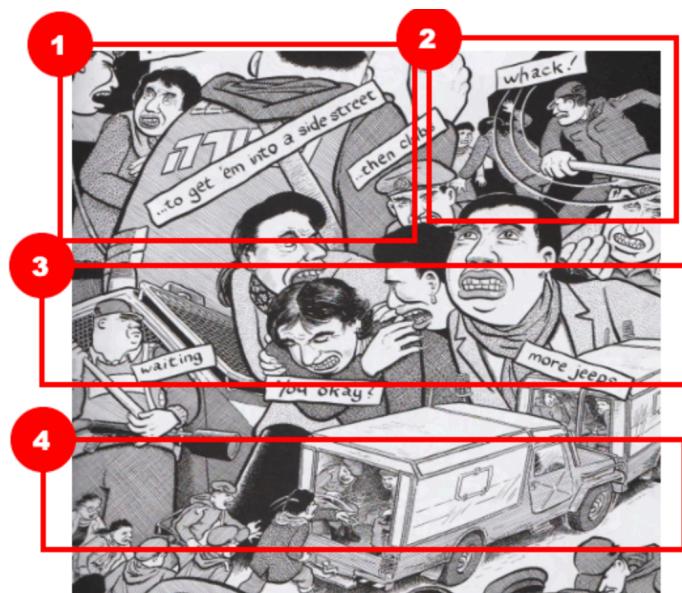
- The goal of this annotation task is to get an idea of where the main elements of comics (characters, text bubbles, etc.) are placed on the page.
- Overall, this research is interested in why these elements are placed where they are, or where they may be placed to effectively communicate a story through the medium of comics. Therefore, when inputting information about the elements on the page, think of annotation through the lens of “**what (new) information is this element giving me**”.
- The labels (e.g. X1, X2, Y...) should stay the same for the same characters and locations throughout the story, while the descriptions may change.
- Annotate only the things you see directly on the page.
- It's completely fine if the rectangles overlap.
- Don't worry it's difficult to fit a panel, character or text section inside a rectangle - just try your best! :)

## Image Sections/Panels:

Comics are, essentially, a series of sequential images. Much of the time, these sequences are placed inside demarcated panels, and it is really clear where each image section is on the page. These sections contain components such as speech bubbles and images of the main characters and setting.

However, in some cases there may be image sections that are more difficult to outline. Try your best to outline what you perceive to be **coherent and distinct image sections**, even if the comic page does not have clear panels. There is no perfect or correct outline, and all that's needed is a good idea of where these image sections are situated on the page. It may be the case that the whole page is one image section, or one overall illustration.

## Examples:



## Characters:

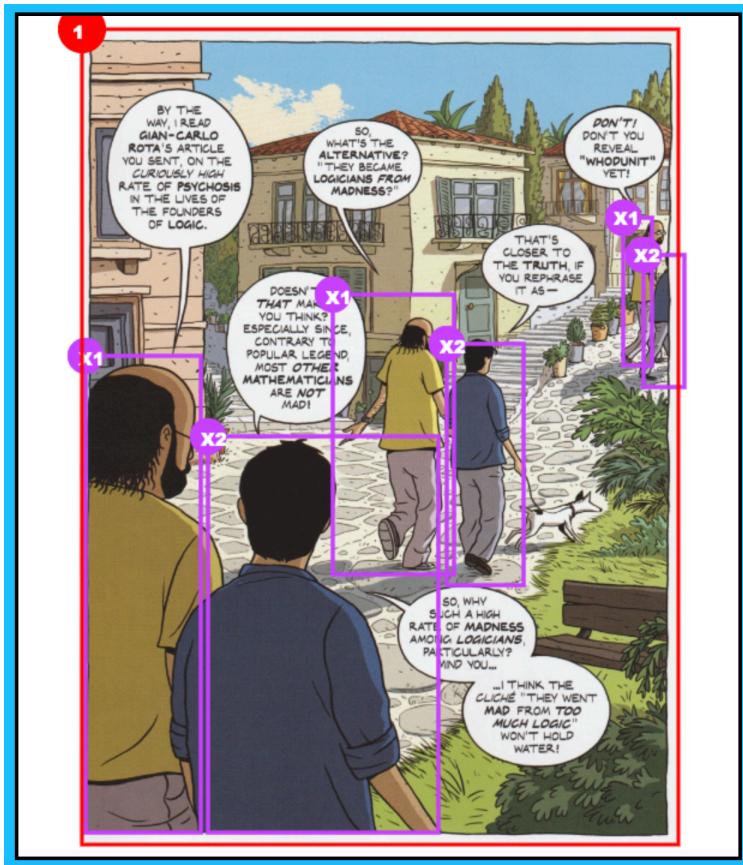
Characters are any active participants in the comic narrative - individuals in the background or in crowd scenes are **not** considered characters.

Give each character a **label that will stay the same for that specific character throughout the whole story (that is, for all pages in that story)**. - e.g. X1, X2, X, Y, Z...

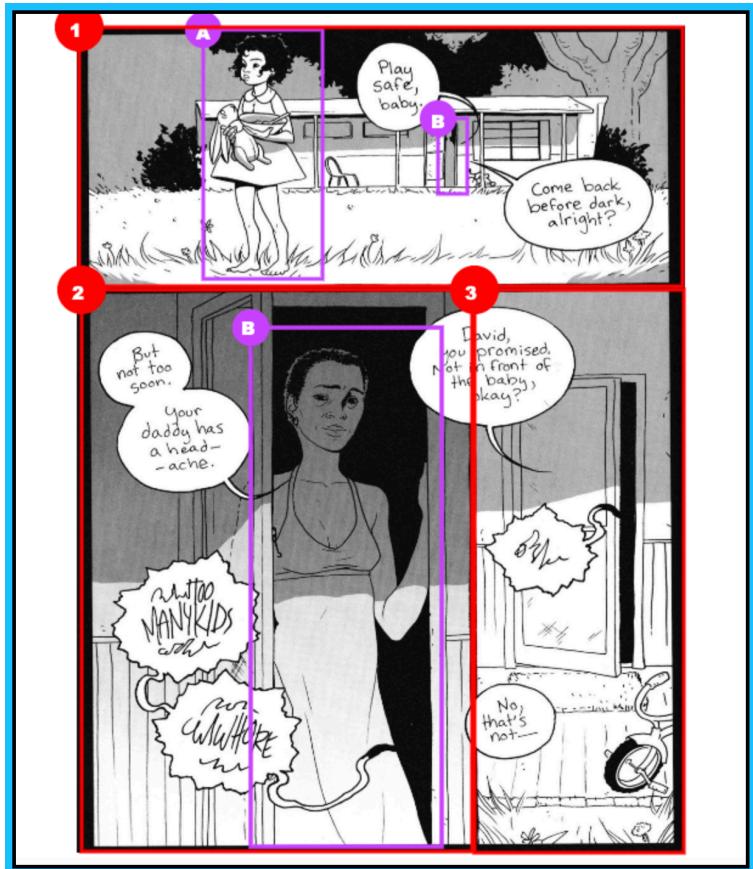
You are also asked to give each instance of the character a description of how it appears, and what action the character is taking in that particular instance. The description can be whatever is the most salient feature of that character, or what is appropriate to identify that character - for instance, "tall woman", or "Woman's hand holding a cup" if only the character's hand is shown. The action is the main thing that the character is doing in that instance of the character - for instance, "running" or "talking with character X1".

Note that while the **label must stay the same per character**, the description and actions may change.

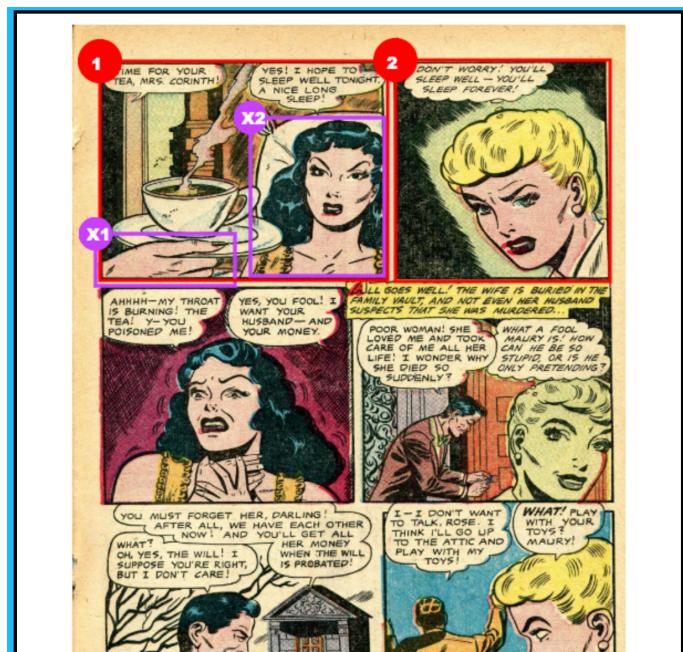
## **Examples:**



**Example 1:** This page has one image section, and multiple instances of the same characters. All instances of the characters should be outlined, and consistently given the label assigned to that character.



**Example 2:** Sometimes a character may be present, but not explicitly shown. For instance, on this page in panel 3 the speech bubble suggests that there is a character speaking from inside the house but is hidden behind the door. In this case, do not outline where the character might be - instead, you will be able to **outline the speech bubble and assign that speech bubble to the correct character** in the text section outlining task. Remember, annotate only the things you see directly on the page.



Page 3 of 3

There are 2 sections on this page.

Characters seen so far:

Locations seen so far:

N: nnn

M: mmm

### Section 1

#### Characters

[Indicate Characters](#)

[Remove Last Character](#)

Character Label: X1

Character Description: Woman's hand

Character Action: Holding a teacup and saucer

Character Label: X2

Character Description: Woman, Mrs. Corinth

Character Action: Laying in Bed

**Example 3:** Similar to Example 2, sometimes only a part of a character is visible. In the first panel on the page below, one the hand of one of the characters is visible. **Outline whatever part of the character is visible** on the page, and put what is depicted in the description. For instance, a good description of the character X1 in panel 1 is "Woman's hand holding a teacup and saucer".

## **Text Sections:**

Outline any sections of text that are in each image section on the page. Usually text sections are clearly demarcated as speech bubbles or thought bubbles, or narration text that is separate from character's thoughts and speech.

Once you outline a text section, choose what type of text section it is: Narration, Speech/Thought, or Other. A **Speech or Thought Bubble** is directly associated with a specific character, and shows that the character is speaking out-loud or thinking. If it is a speech or thought bubble, fill in the character label it is associated with. **Narration** is text from a third person perspective, and typically describes parts of the narrative. If the text section is neither narration nor a speech/thought bubble, choose the Other button. You will then be able to write in what type of text section it is, for instance a “title” or “onomatopoeia”.

### **Example:**

This text section would be “Other”, and described as a “Title”.

This text section is a “Narration” text section.

This text section is a “Speech/Thought” bubble, associated with a specific character.

Page 1 of 3

There are 3 sections on this page.

Characters seen so far: Locations seen so far:

Character Description: One or two words (e.g. girl)

Character Action: One or two words (e.g. running)

End Task

Text Sections

Indicate Text Boxes and Bubbles | Remove Last Text Section

1:  Narration  Speech/Thought  Other  
Character: Title

2:  Narration  Speech/Thought  Other  
Character:

3:  Narration  Speech/Thought  Other  
Character:

End Task

Previous Page Reset Page Next Page

The image shows a comic strip titled "The SPITEFUL SPIRIT". The first panel contains narration about a miasma of death and decay. The second panel contains a speech bubble from a character named MARY. The third panel contains a speech bubble from a character named ROGER. The interface on the right allows the user to indicate text boxes and bubbles, choose text section types (Narration, Speech/Thought, Other), and describe characters and actions.

## **Backgrounds:**

The background is the overall scene that is depicted in the image section/panel - for the purposes of this annotation process, the background essentially refers to everything that hasn't so far been outlined.

You are asked to assign the specific location of each image section/panel with a label. In the same way that characters are labelled and described, the **label will stay the same for that specific location throughout the whole story (that is, for all pages in that story)**. The description of locations may change.

You must also indicate whether the background image of each section is "Detailed" or "Empty". A "**Detailed**" background is one that is drawn in, either fully drawn or drawn in to a considerable extent to give evidence of the wider setting and location. This contrasts with an "**Empty**" background, which leaves out discernible elements of the location and is instead only a blank tone.

It helps to think about Detailed versus Empty backgrounds through **how much information about the location is shown**. If there is any information about the overall location and setting, then it is Detailed. If there is no information about the overall location in that panel, then it is Empty.

It also helps to separate **foreground elements** from **background elements** - if the background is a solid tone, then it is empty even if there are some elements (e.g. characters, objects the characters are interacting with) present in the foreground.

## **Examples:**



Detailed

Empty

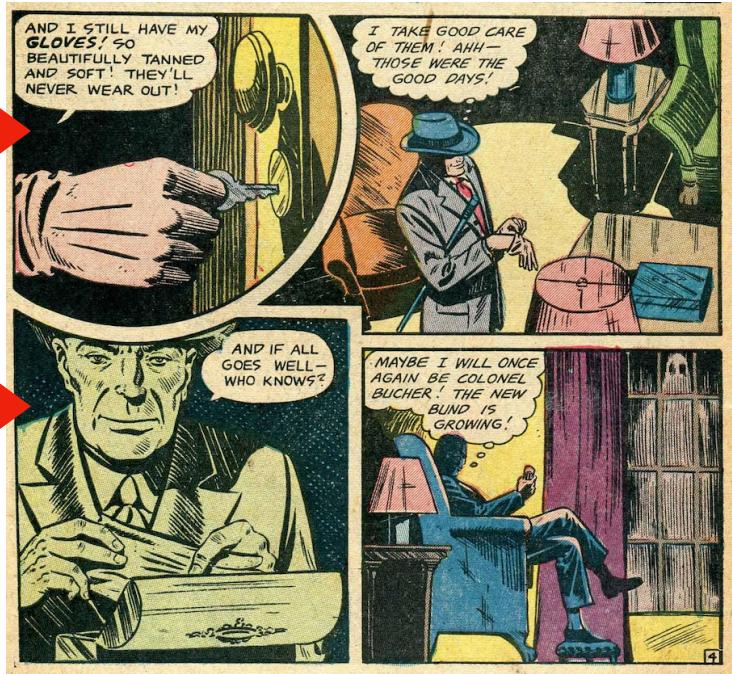


Empty

Detailed

This one is tricky - the black background is a solid tone, so it should be **Empty**. The door and hand is in the foreground, and does not give evidence of wider location.

This panel is **Empty** as there is a dark cross-hatched tone and no distinguishable elements to identify the location of the scene. This may be interpreted as the background of a dark room covered in shadows, however there is no clear information about the location or setting when taking this panel separately from the others.



Detailed

Detailed

Empty

Detailed



Empty



Detailed

Empty

Empty



Empty



Detailed

Empty