



Comic Artist

Newspaper cartoons, comic books, graphic novels . . . comic art is a broad, exciting, and growing field. Comics are sometimes described as “sequential art,” though some are only one panel. So what is a comic, exactly? It’s a visual story told however you would like to tell it. Go for it!

STEPS

1. Delve into the world of comics
2. Choose a story to tell
3. Draw it out
4. Frame it in four panels
5. Add the words

Purpose

When I’ve earned this badge, I’ll know how to create my own comic.



“A cartoonist is a writer, an actor, a director, and an artist. We write, act, and direct every scene. The drawing is the final stage of the productions, when I can touch the imaginary images, feel them, bring them to life!”

—Lynn Johnston, creator of the comic strip *For Better or For Worse*

POW!

HONK!

SHY-AH'S
IS ALREADY
THE HOUSE - WITH
A TON OF SUPPLIES!

You went
5.5 miles in the
time it took us to
walk five blocks,
Dr. Fan!

Fun FACT

Comic books, which came about in 1934, have become more popular as of late. In fact, the modern graphic novel, which made its debut in 1978, is the fastest-growing literary medium in the country!

Every step has three choices. Do ONE choice to complete each step. Inspired? Do more!

STEP 1 Delve into the world of comics

Get to know the art form in one of these fun ways.

CHOICES - DO ONE:

- Collect comic strips from the paper for one week.** Read them each day, paying attention to how all the elements work together. Keep track of what you like and don't like, how artists show feelings and actions, and how they work timing to make punch lines great.

FOR MORE FUN: At the end of the week, take your favorites, cut the panels into squares, jumble them up, and rearrange them to make new panels and a new story.

OR

- Visit with a comic artist.** If you can, visit one artist in person. Or, read autobiographical information about three artists in books, magazine articles, and online. How do their styles differ? Which is your favorite and why?

OR

- Make sticky-note comics.** Get the hang of comic stories by drawing one of these on a sticky note (rough, rough sketching, remember!):

- a dog floating on a raft
- a hawk diving
- a girl at bat

Take another sticky note and add:

- the cat that's swimming past the dog
- the prey the hawk is diving for
- the ball the girl is trying to hit

Now, take a third sticky note and add another element to each panel:

- another cat chasing the first cat that's swimming past the dog
- a larger hawk after the prey the hawk is diving for
- the catcher waiting for the ball the girl is trying to hit

Now, imagine how these could be turned into a comic story. Then make up a story with friends.

FOR MORE FUN: Draw all nine scenarios and make them tell one story!

More to Explore

Read all about it. For an in-depth look at the comic art form, read Scott McCloud's famous book, *Understanding Comics*.

Try One-Panel Punch Lines!

Choose characters and a situation, and create the comic gag.

Example: A family is walking up to the house with a new puppy, while through the window you see a cat packing a suitcase.

The one-liner: "This house isn't big enough for the both of us."

Character(s)

Talking dog and cat

Mom and child

Sisters

Penguins

Teacher and student

Boyfriend and girlfriend

Employer and employee

Singing star hopeful

Taxi driver and passenger

Girl Scouts

Situation

Odd food on dinner table

New pet

On a rope swing over a river

On a melting ice floe

Lost homework

A rained-out picnic

Jammed copy machine

Too-short microphone

Street parade

Roasting marshmallows

STEP 2 Choose a story to tell

At heart, comics are another method of storytelling. If you've got comic characters in mind already (people or animals you doodle in notebooks, perhaps?), let those inspire your story. If not, the story you come up with will lead you to your characters. Keep your story simple—it might even be one quick moment! In the next steps, you'll turn this story into a four-panel comic.

CHOICES - DO ONE:

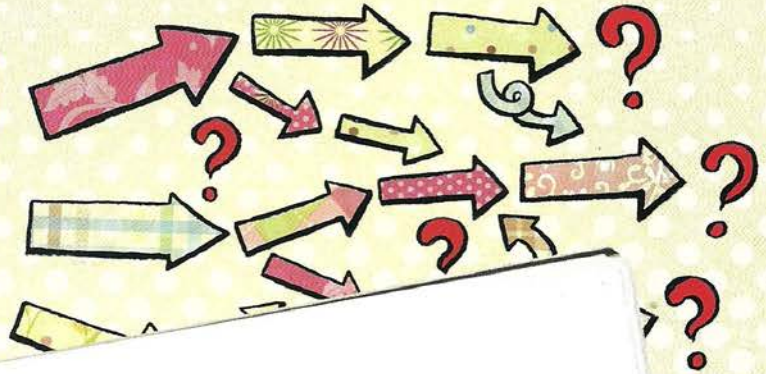
Think of a story from your life. Choose something that happened to you, a friend, or a family member. It could be a funny moment or a dramatic one, a favorite memory or an activity from Girl Scouts you want to share.

OR

Think of a story from a book or movie. Have you seen a movie or read a book recently that had a part in it that you could turn into a comic strip?

OR

Make something up. Think about the comic books, comic strips, or graphic novels you've liked. Now think of your own made-up story that would make a good comic tale.



DRAW YOUR ONE-PANEL PUNCH LINE HERE:

STEP 3 Draw it out

Take the characters in your story and start some rough sketching. (You may have only one character, depending on your story.) Stick figures are great! Bring them to life one of these ways.

CHOICES - DO ONE:

Use tracing paper. Find a comic strip with a style you love. Trace 10 or 12 panels, paying attention to the forms beneath the drawings, the simple shapes the artist likely started with. Now see if you can draw each character in your story in a similar fashion.

OR

Do a "free draw." Get a big stack of scrap paper and just keep drawing. And drawing. And drawing! Move quickly at first. Refine any details as you go until you feel you have characters worked out.

OR

Use a how-to book, video, or software. Are your characters people, animals, or both? Find one of the many manuals, such as the Marvel comics software, that give step-by-step instruction on drawing humans and particular animals.



Careers to Explore

- Comic book writer and/or artist
- Graphic novel writer and/or artist
- Comic art colorist, inker, or letterer
- Political cartoonist
- Syndicated comic strip or panel artist
- Freelance cartoonist
- Video game artist
- Advertising designer
- Portrait artist
- Caricature artist
- Police sketch artist
- Graphic artist
- Muralist
- Greeting card designer
- Special effects artist
- Storyboard animator
- Animated character artist
- Background animation artist
- Costume designer
- Fashion designer
- Children's book illustrator

Fun FACT

EMANATA are the scribbles that emanate from a drawing, like drops of sweat or lines to illustrate movement.

Types of Panel-to-Panel Transitions

Moment to Moment: Like flip books or animated film.

Action to Action: Slightly more is done per panel—it's completed action to completed action.

Subject to Subject: One person or thing moves to a different person or thing in the next panel, like showing a conversation.

Scene to Scene: From one place to another.

Aspect to Aspect: Shows a different part of same scene or thing or person.

And the non sequitur: A transition that purposely makes no sense!

—from Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics*

STEP 4 Frame it in four panels

It's time to put your characters into action, and that means framing them—drawing them in little boxes called panels. So imagine your story as characters in a series of actions. Create panels with sticky notes or by using a ruler to draw them on paper. Tell your story from step 2 by placing your characters into four panels in one of these ways.

CHOICES – DO ONE:

Use facial expressions. Some comics use only faces to illustrate their stories, simply changing the expressions to show emotion and move the story along.

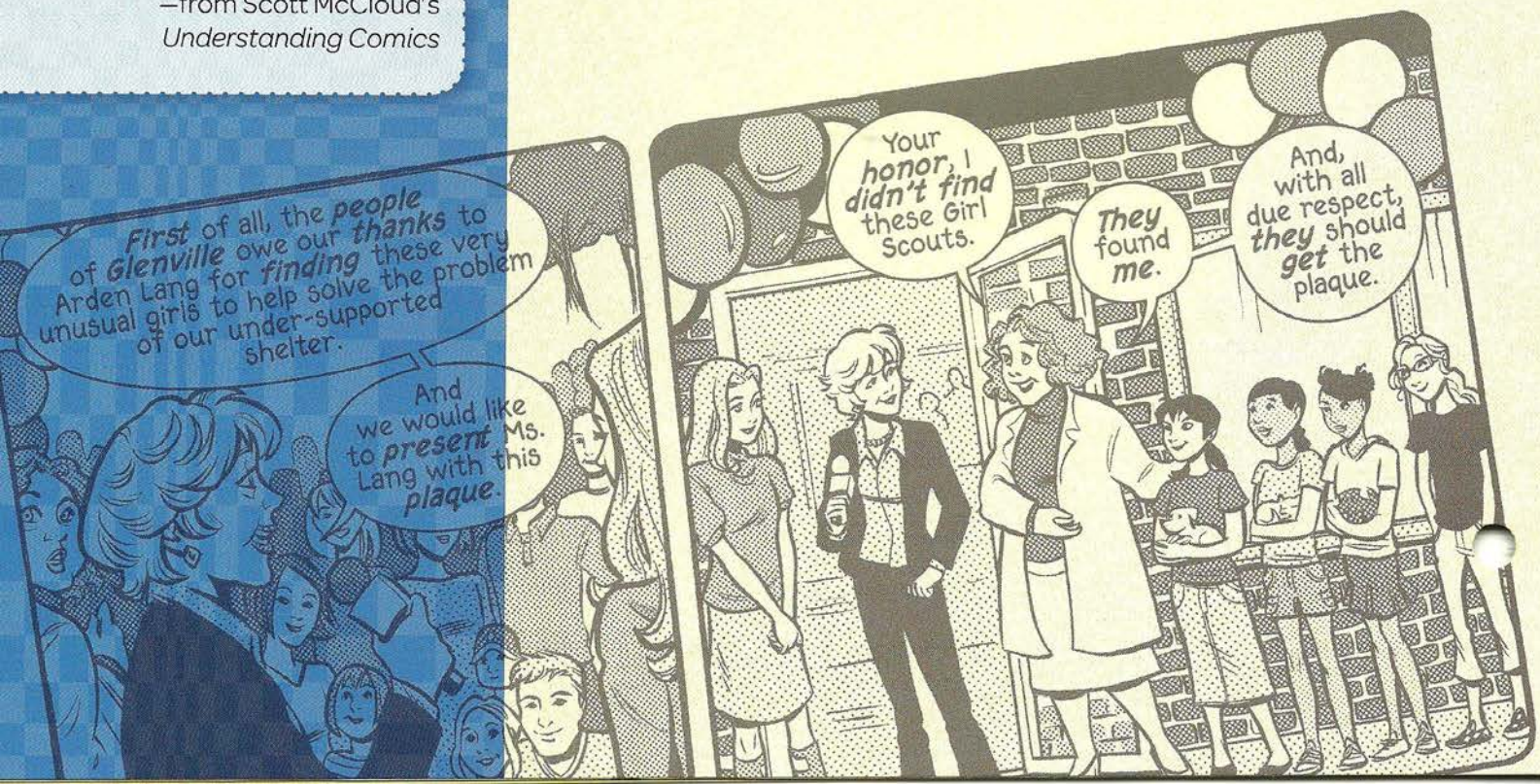
OR

Use body postures. For some comic artists—and for some stories—it's more about action than emotion. You can leave the faces pretty much the same and move the story along by showing small movements, such as shrugs, and big actions, such as running and leaping.

OR

Use both facial expressions and body posture. Illustrate movement and emotion using both techniques. Many artists will switch from one style to the other: One panel might show a ball falling on a girl's head, and the next panel might show a close-up of her face as she reacts.

TIP: To fill in your comics—a process called inking—try enlarging a small sketch on a copier. Ink in the details, then reduce it again.



STEP 5 Add the words

Yes, there are comics out there with no words, but for the most part the art is a melding of words and pictures meant to be experienced together. Add words to your four-panel comic strip in one of these ways.

CHOICES - DO ONE:

- Add some dialogue.** If you have more than one character, a classic way to tell your story is through dialogue. If both characters speak in a panel, the one on the left should speak first. Write your character's words in oval conversation bubbles connected to the character with a fine line.

OR

- Add thought bubbles.** If your story revolves around one character, have her "speak" in thought bubbles, putting her words in ovals connected to her with tiny bubble circles.

OR

- Run a narrative in separate boxes below the panels.** Instead of telling your story through dialogue or inner thoughts, you can write a running third-person narrative at the bottom of each panel.

More to Explore

Tell the whole story! Turn your four-panel comic into a full-fledged comic book!

Panel

Gutter

Speech bubble



Fun FACT

Comic creators agree that drawing ability has little to do with comic art success—many cartoonists use simple line drawings, even stick figures, to make their points.

FUN ADDITIONS

You could add some or all of these elements to your comic either by hand or by scanning your work and then using computer programs:

- color
- shading
- shadows
- backgrounds