

Developing a Unit Plan with BDnF

The purpose of this document is to accompany teachers organizing comics-making workshops with BDnF.

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Teacher’s Guides written by Ronan Le Breton, Thomas Jochum and Pierre Pulliat



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Introduction

The Creative Process of Making Comics

The user's path through BDnF follows the different steps that are traditionally used to create comics. In this way, pupils can discover both the theory and the practice through the same interface.

Many creative projects include these main stages:

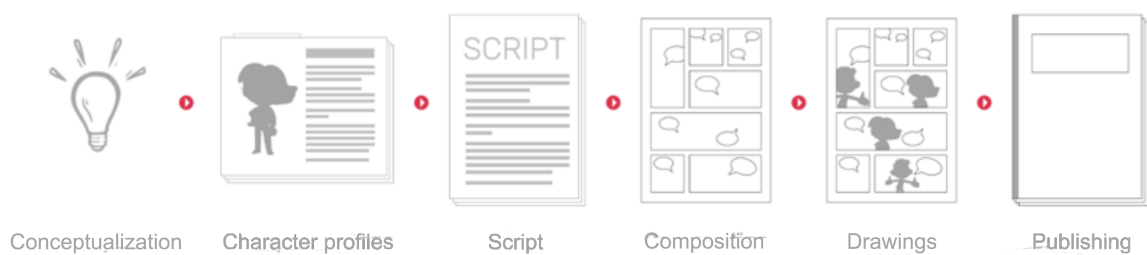
- Pre-production – concept, scenario, storyboard, scheduling, etc.
- Production – shooting film, drawing, recording, etc.
- Post-production – correcting and combining the various elements produced.
- Marketing and Sales.

Comics creators follow a similar process, which is adapted to the medium's specific features:

- Conceptualization – before telling a story, you have to find the idea.
- Creating the characters' world.
- Writing the script – defining the plot's twists, main stages, and narrative arcs.
- Composition and layout – arranging and organizing the frames and speech bubbles in a reader-friendly way.
- Drawing the characters – the characters are placed in the frames.



- Drawing the settings – the settings usually come after the characters.
- Dialogue – the speech bubbles are filled with the text that was written beforehand. Since the composition and illustration can affect the number of bubbles, their size and position, the text is sometimes rewritten or adapted.
- Colorization – this stage sometimes comes before the dialogue; in manga, this is when the backgrounds are laid down.
- Marketing, publication and/or sharing on social media.



Running a BDnF Unit Plan in Class

3 One-Hour Sessions

- **Session 1 :**
 - 40 minutes: presentation of comics' history, styles and conventions.
 - 20 minutes: becoming familiar with the app, short project.
- **Session 2:** Creating character profiles and building the project's illustration bank.
- **Session 3:** Writing the script and laying the page out.

Establishing a Framework

Choosing an Itinerary

BDnF allows you to create comics in the following formats: one frame (meme), comic strip (three frames), yon-koma (4 vertical frames), a classic comic-book page, webtoon (a format adapted to mobile devices) or to create your own, custom-made comic.

Creating your characters, thinking about their adventures and laying the story out on the page can take several hours. That's why BDnF offers three different types of projects, depending on the time you have available and your familiarity with comics:

- The "1-to-4 frame project": This is perfect for getting to know the conventions of comics through three short formats: memes, comic strips and yon-koma.
- The "full page or webtoon project": This is designed to allow you to create more complex and detailed works, from a single page to an entire comic book.



· The “custom-made” project: This path is aimed essentially at an initiated audience, it enables you to define the exact size of your page or frame, to make comics intended for social media, or even to produce postcards or bookmarks.

“Follow the guide”: This itinerary covers all the steps in creating a comic. You will be able to create your characters, write a script, choose a format, and then work on layout with the comic editing tool.

For an introductory approach, the “1-to-4 frame project” is an excellent way to get to know the app and the possibilities it offers. The limitations imposed by these short formats are also a good way to channel pupils’ creativity at first.

Choosing a Theme

We suggest choosing a theme in order to help focus pupils’ creativity. It could be historical, scientific, social, political, or other.

BdNF offers several image banks, including backgrounds, characters, and a wide range of items. The images are sorted into themes, such as “nature,” “urban environment” or “medieval.”

You can also create your own image bank by downloading images from Gallica or elsewhere (textbooks, press clipping, photos taken by pupils, etc.). Simply upload that file onto the workstations before starting the unit. Pupils will then be able to use the BdNF library’s “import” module to import the file.



The Stages in Your BDnF Comic-Workshop Lessons

Session 1 – Learning the History and Rules of Comics

The first session is based on teaching the history and rules of comics. The teacher's guides below will provide you with the key elements you'll need to introduce the topic.

We suggest the following steps as an outline for your lesson:

- The history of comics and cartoons
- Styles and formats – history, key works, and general rules
- The creative process behind comics
- How to write your story and characters
- Frames, gutters, tiers, strips, reading path
- How to compose frames
- Speech bubbles

Once this theoretical part has been taken care of, let your pupils explore the app with a “1-to-4 frame” project. This discovery stage will allow them to become comfortable with the interface so they will be more autonomous during the second session.

Session 2 – Creating Character Profiles

During the second session, your pupils will get to the practical, hands-on phase. The first few minutes of the session should be devoted to establishing the ground rules:

- Suggesting a theme and a format
- Open or closed image bank
- Time allotted

The first time you connect to BDnF, you'll have to go through the following steps:

- Creating a profile (choosing a pseudonym and an avatar)
- Accepting the terms and conditions of use
- Creating the project: “give your story a name”
- Choosing the type of project
- Selecting an image bank
 - If you have prepared your own image bank, make sure that it has been copied onto everyone's work stations.
 - If you choose the “follow the guide” itinerary, you'll be asked to create character profiles to get started
 - Appearance (ex. image from the bank, drawing done by the pupil, etc.)
 - Name, age, gender, profession
 - His/Her likes/dislikes
 - Etc.



This exercise in defining the character through its tastes, personal history, and personality will help draw pupils into the story.

- The Script
 - Helps establish the number of pages, frames, and speech bubbles, as well as their respective contents.
- The Format
 - Choosing a format that is intended for print or the web.
- The Composition
 - Choosing the page's orientation, and the direction it is meant to be read.

Session 3 – Composition (Layout) with the Editor

During the third session, your pupils will move on to composing the layout of their stories, bringing the script to life with the editor.

End of the session:

At the end of the session, pupils save their stories in different formats (JPG, PDF, video) so that you can collect and/or print them.



TEACHER'S GUIDES

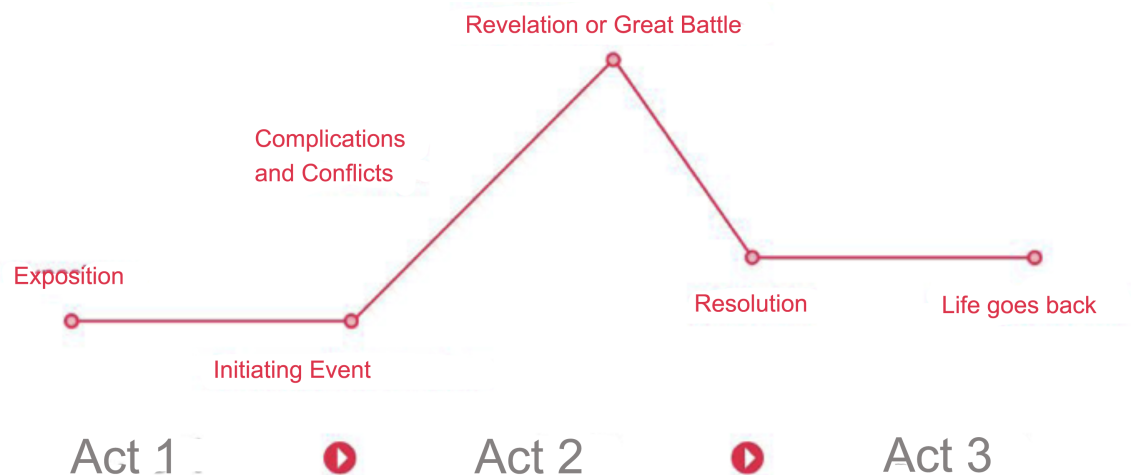
Narration in Comics

1. Writing Your Story's Plot

A Tale in 3 Acts

The most common narrative structure divides a story into three parts, which are also known as *acts*:

- The first act is called the set-up, or exposition. It introduces the characters and the setting in which the action will take place. The situation is calm and stable. At the end of this act, something unexpected will come to upset the usual order of things, shattering the peace and quiet and forcing the characters to react. It is called the initiating event, and it could be a demon attacking the hero's village, a character falling in love at first sight, someone discovering a dead body, or some other game-changing event.
- The second act is called the confrontation. The main characters have to cope with the event or the conflicts it leads to. This is generally the longest part. It could mean a quest to defeat the demon, an effort to win over someone's heart, an investigation to find the murderer, etc.
At the end of this act, the plot reaches its highest point, the climax. The characters are faced with their trickiest test. They achieve triumph or meet with failure. The hero defeats the demon, declares their love, or arrests the murderer.
- The third act is the resolution, or conclusion. It's the shortest one. The action is over and life goes back to normal.



2. Creating a Character

The Cast of Characters, Protagonist and Antagonist

Every story has one or more characters. That's what's called the cast of characters. There is often a protagonist and an antagonist:

The protagonist is the main character in the story. They have to have well-defined personality traits as well as values to defend in order to inspire readers to identify with them. For example: a brave witch who goes on a quest to defeat the demon, the shy boy who can't bring himself to declare his love, or the detective in charge of finding the guilty party.

The antagonist is the protagonist's enemy, their negative. As such, they must also have striking features to spice up the plot. It could be the ruthless demon who is terrorizing the poor villagers, the arrogant love rival or the Machiavellian murderer.

The other characters, who are called minor, or secondary, characters, are generally either the protagonist's allies or adversaries serving the antagonist. Well-written minor characters grant extra depth to the story as a whole, making it more substantial.



Protagonists



Antagonists

Recognizable Characters

The characters in comics should be easily identifiable. Each character has their own look and distinguishing feature that reflects their personality. For example, a friendly, likable hero might wear a straw hat and brightly colored clothes while their rival will wear a skull as a hat and a dark outfit.

Complex, Multidimensional Characters

You can also fiddle with those traits in order to create a character that is more complex than they seem to be at first glance. At the beginning of the story, for instance, the hero might be presented with limited personality traits: he's nice, but kind of dumb. But in the thick of the action, his bravery and intelligence will be revealed when he successfully overcomes near-impossible obstacles. In a case like that, we say that the character is multidimensional.

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Characters with a Past

For a character to seem more substantial, they can have a mysterious past. In other words, they have already had other adventures in the story's world, before the beginning of the story. Those events have taught them things and forged their personality. Their qualities and defects stem, at least in part, from their past.

The Narrative Arc

A good character evolves with their story. The conflicts they have to cope with challenge their personality and force them to change and to grow. That transformation is called the character's narrative arc.

To go back to the previous example, the character was betrayed at some point in their past. So they no longer trust anyone. One might imagine that to experience their transformation, the character will make an important encounter that will allow them to be trusting once again.

Character Profiles

Creating a character profile, the way you do in role-playing games, can help you to get a more rounded picture of your character and add to their psychological depth and texture.

You'll generally find their:

- Name
- Age
- Gender
- Nicknames
- Physical characteristics
- Profession
- Qualities and character flaws
- What they like/don't like
- Their past
- Their goals
- Their evolution over the course of the story
- And more

All those elements help define and shape a character. They make the character recognizable, multidimensional and coherent.

BDnF has a "character profile" step in the "follow the guide" itinerary.

3. Page Layout Is an Integral Part of Storytelling

Comics are a visual form of storytelling. The story is told via the frames and how they are arranged.

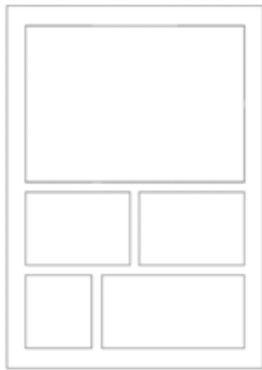
Frames' size is generally proportional to their importance. In horror comics, for instance,

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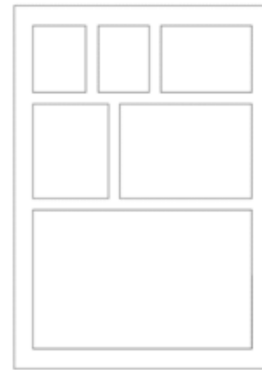


zombies appear when you turn a page, in large, well-placed frames, for maximum surprise and impact.

It is also possible to have some elements break out of the frame in order to catch reader's eye.



The top frame is clearly the most important one



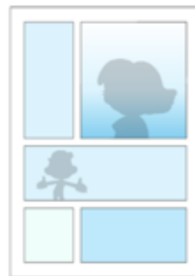
The frames get larger and larger, creating a cascading effect

Color also plays an important role, and can change the atmosphere. The overall shade of a frame or page can enhance the impact of the action taking place. The effect is all the more noticeable when a frame's color sets it off from the rest of the page.

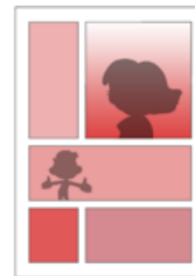
Monochromatic pages can create a sense of visual coherence, or, on the contrary, feel overwhelming.



The red frame stands out in midst of an otherwise pale-blue page



An all-blue page creates a calm, soothing impression



An all-red page creates an impression of violence

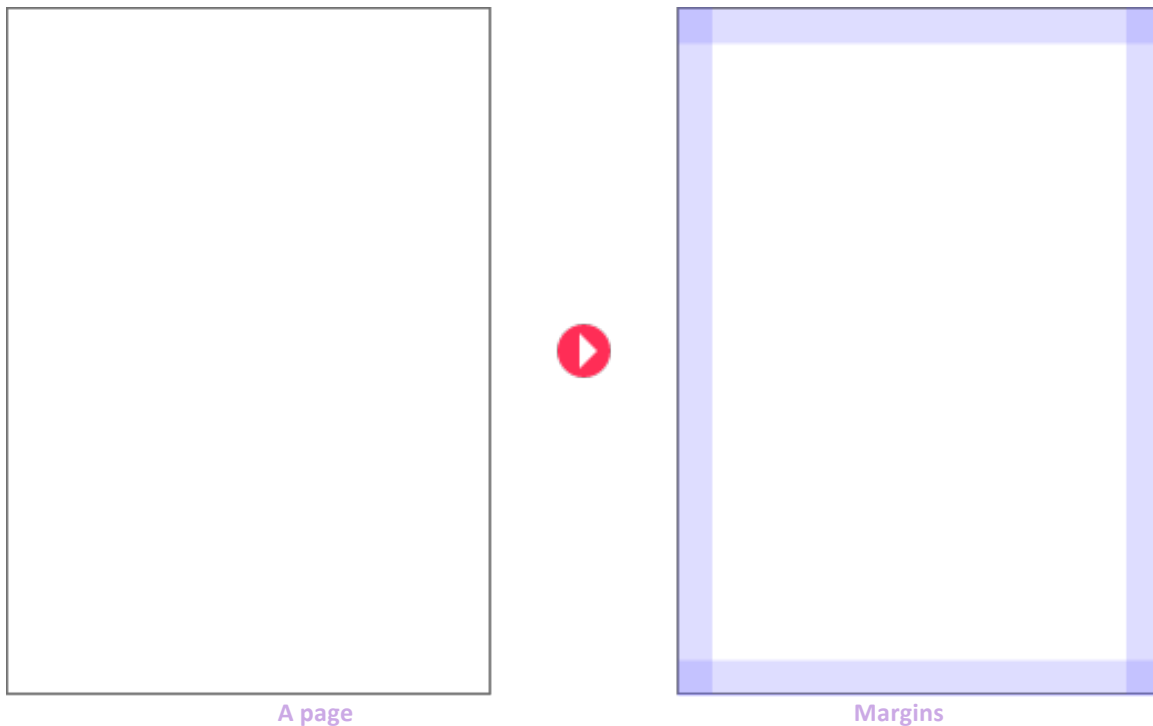
The layout should have synergy with the story, and contribute to narrating it. So let's see **how to lay your page out.**

How to Lay Out Your Comic-Book Page

These are the main terms used to describe the different elements that compose a comic:

Margins

The first thing we'll do on our page is to place the margins: at the top, bottom, right and left. They are empty spaces without drawings, text, or characters.



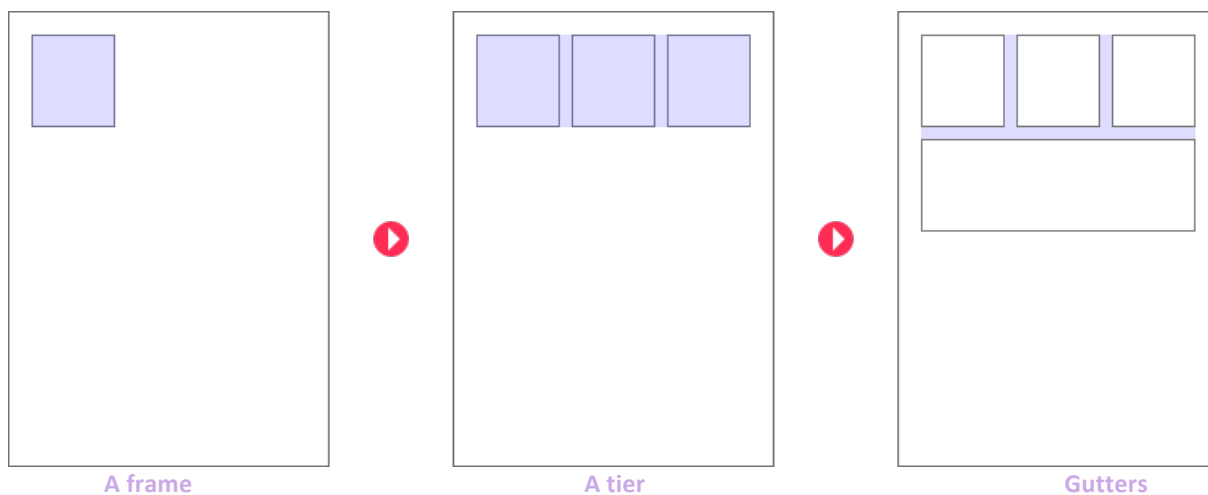
Frames or Boxes

Frames literally “frame” the drawings and text. Comics are a visual form of storytelling, and each frame freezes a moment in the story.

Tiers or Strips

A tier is a series of frames that fills the whole width of a comic-book page. A stand-alone series of frames is called a strip, or comic strip. They are often published in newspapers and don't necessarily fill the whole width of the page.



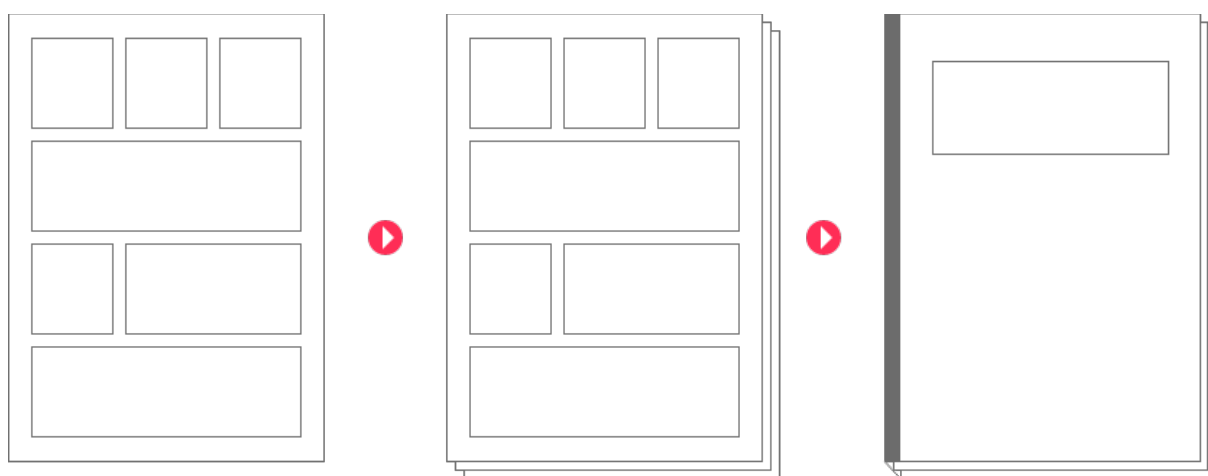


Gutters

The (usually white) space between two frames is called the gutter.

Books, Albums or Volumes

Depending on the context (USA, France-Belgium or Japan), comics pages that are bound together can be referred to as a book, an album, or a volume.



Comics can be bound together into a book, album or volume

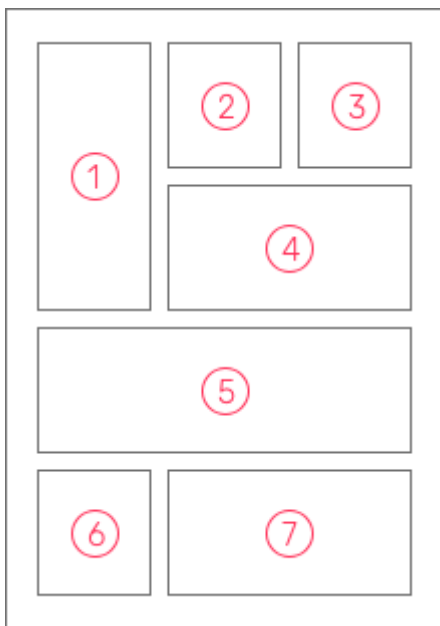


How to Compose a Comic-Book Page

A comic-book page should be structured in a way that makes it reader friendly. That structure is called composition. There are a few things to bear in mind when you compose a comic-book page.

Reading Direction for Frames

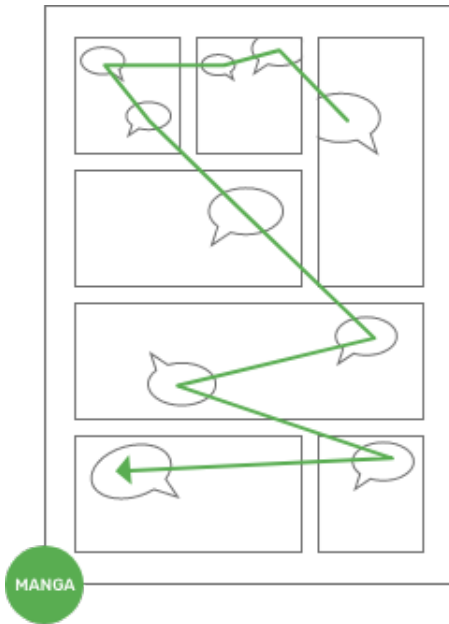
For comics from the western world, we read the pages from left to right and from top to bottom. So we start at the top left and finish at the bottom right.



Reading Direction for Manga

Watch out! Manga are read from right to left and from top to bottom. So the reading direction is a mirror image of the direction for comics from the western world.

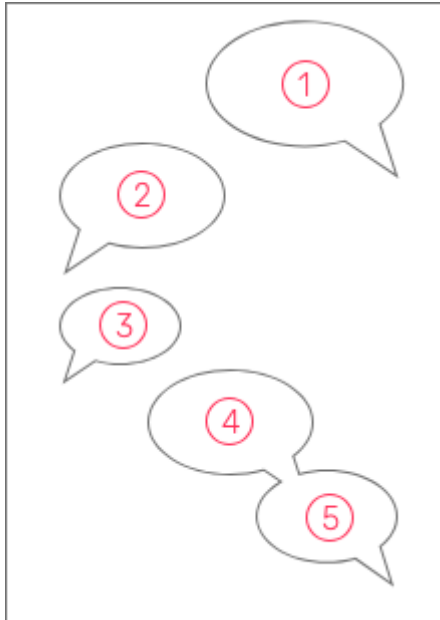




Reading Direction for Speech Bubbles

Speech bubbles are read in a similar way to frames. We start by reading the highest one, and then the dialogue unspools from top to bottom.

The schema below illustrates the reading direction for bubbles on a page and in a frame:



The Reading Path

Once you have composed your page, it is a good idea to trace a line from one speech bubble to the next, in the order that you want people to read them. That line, which

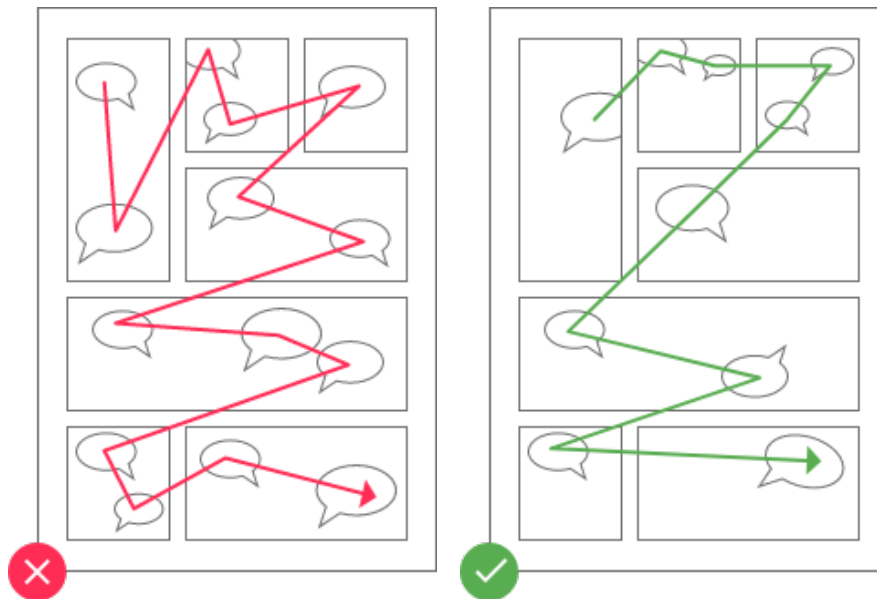
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Teacher's Guides written by Ronan Le Breton, Thomas Jochum and Pierre Pulliat



readers' eyes will follow, is known as the reading path.

If the path zigzags around too much, reading it will be annoying. In that case, you should consider rearranging where the speech bubbles are placed.



The picture on the left shows a poorly constructed reading path; readers' eyes will follow the one on the right instinctively.

A Few Ideas to Get Started

To improve your reading path, it's better to place onomatopoeias and captions along the path created by your speech bubbles.

It's also a good idea to place your most important drawings, like your characters or action scenes, along the path, in order to optimize it.

Bear in mind that it's better not to overload a page with too many frames or bubbles in order to keep the reading smooth.

How to Compose Frames

In comics, a frame is a zone defined by an outline. It can also be called a box. Frames can contain a certain number of different elements.

Setting

The setting is at the back of the frame; it establishes where the action is taking place.

Background

Settings can be replaced with backgrounds. Background colors or patterns can create an atmosphere.

Characters

The people in your story are the characters. They go inside the frames and are placed inside the settings.

Speech Bubbles

Characters speak through text that appears in speech bubbles, which can also be called “speech balloons.” Each bubble has a tail. The tail points to the character that is speaking. Speech bubbles.

Captions

A caption is text inside a box that is usually rectangular (as opposed to being inside a speech bubble). Sometimes the contents of the caption reflects the ideas of the narrator, the character who is telling the story. For example, Spiderman’s thoughts are often spelled out in captions.

Other times, the caption provides extra information, such as where or when the action is taking place. In that case, the caption is often short and followed by an ellipsis (dot dot dot). For example, “Once upon a time...” or “On a planet far, far away...”

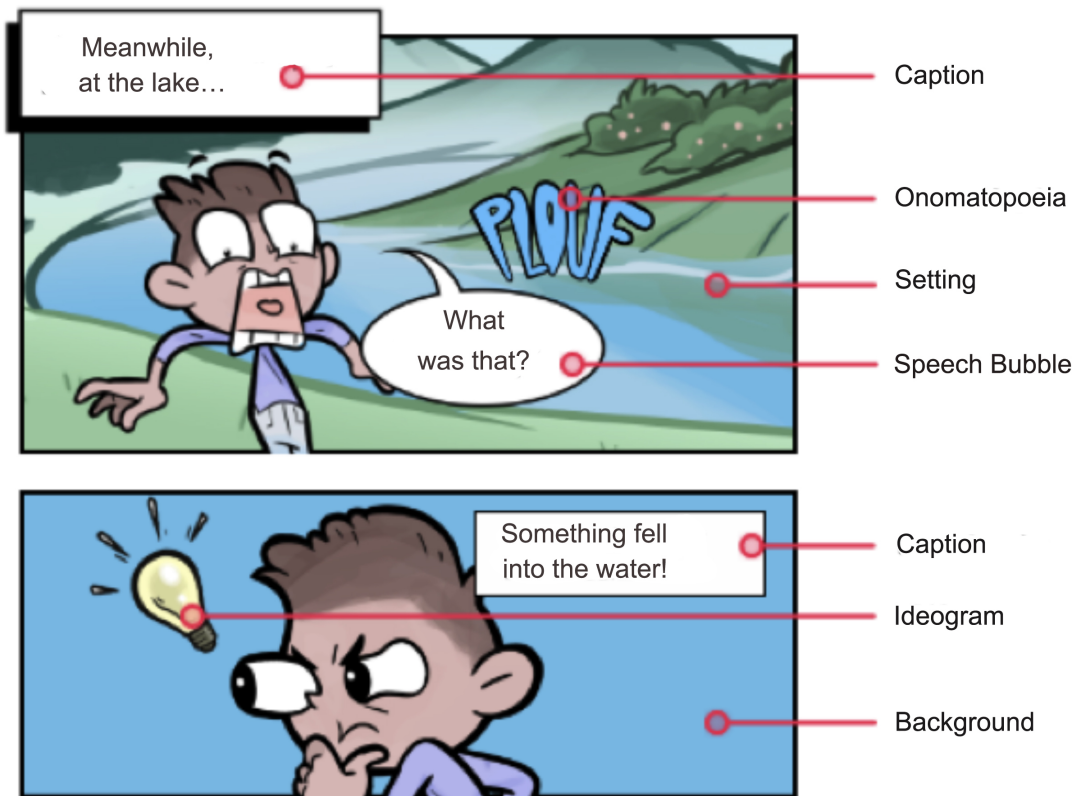
Onomatopoeias

Onomatopoeias are stylized text (i.e. lettering that is different from the rest) that represents noises made by objects, animals, or feelings. “Yuck” is an onomatopoeia that expresses disgust, “Cock-a-doodle-doo!” is a rooster’s cry, and “crack!” is the sound of something breaking.

Ideograms

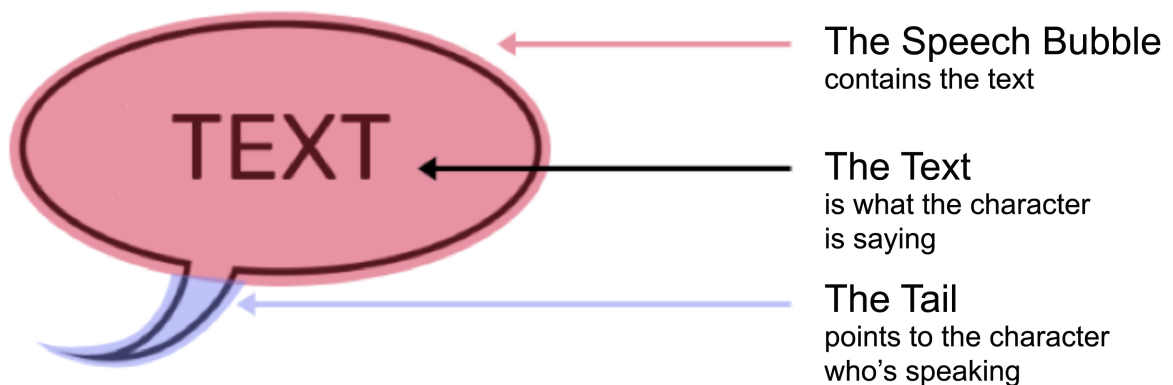
Ideograms are symbols that represent thoughts or emotions. A light bulb over a character’s head, for instance, shows that the person just had an idea.

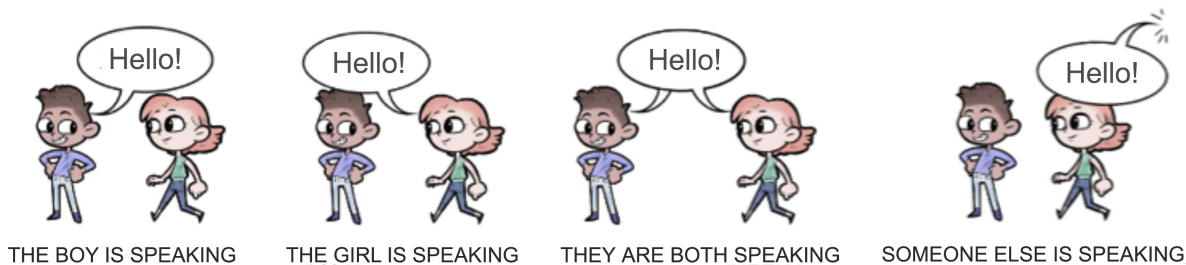




The Parts of a Speech Bubble

Speech bubbles are made up of three three elements:



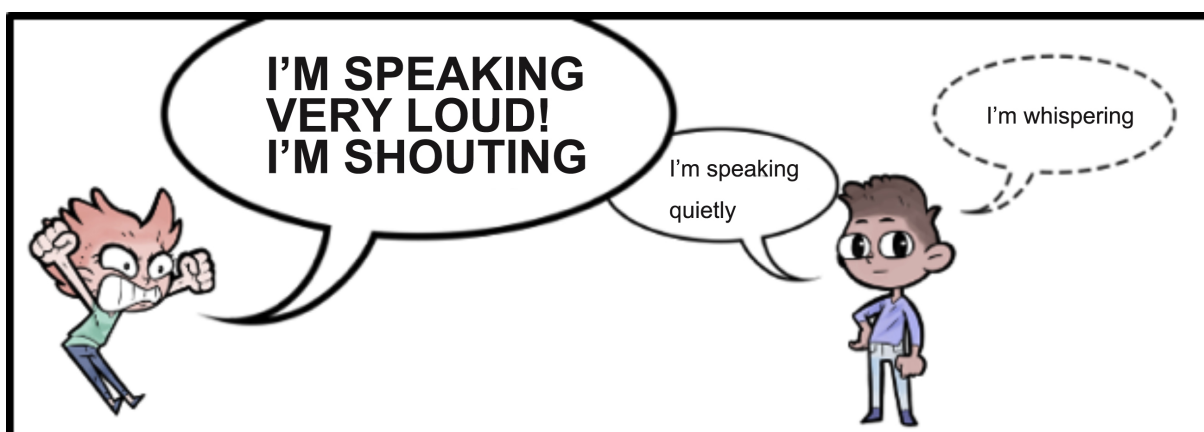


Speech bubbles should be big enough for the text to be legible. Ideally, throughout your comic, the text should be the same size, police (type of lettering), face (bold or light), and case (upper (i.e. capital letters) or lower).

You can, however, play with the size of the text to indicate speaking volume. Smaller text will create the impression that characters are speaking softly; larger text, that they are speaking loudly.

Making the whole sentence upper case, or boldface, will reinforce that effect. If you have large, upper-case, bold-face text, the character is shouting.

A bubble drawn with a dotted line is another way to show that a character is whispering.



There are different types of bubbles for different uses.

Using Background and Foreground in a Frame

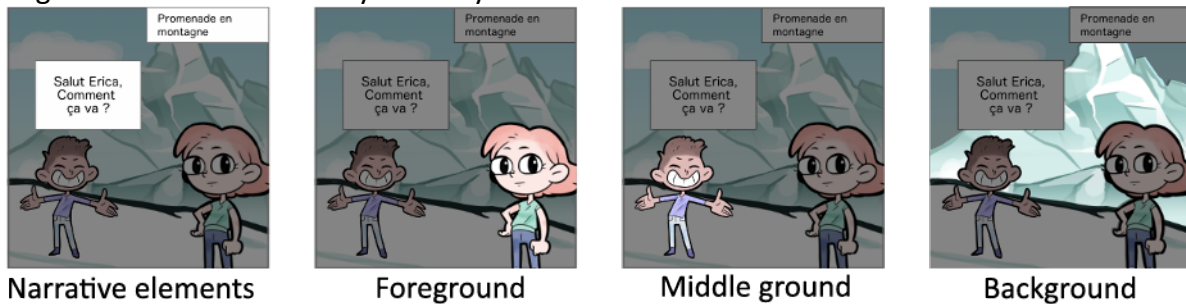
Frames are organized into “grounds” or layers that establish the distance between the reader and the elements in the image.

- The background is what’s furthest from the reader’s point of view. Usually that’s for the setting.
- The middle ground is in the middle of the frame, in between the background and the foreground.
- The foreground is where the elements at the front of the image are placed.

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Narrative elements, like speech bubbles and onomatopoeias, are placed in front of the foreground to make sure they are easy to read.



“Framing” a Frame

By changing the angle and distance of the reader’s point of view, framing changes the way the subject of the frame (usually an object or character) is featured in the story.

- **Long shot, or establishing shot:** This is the most panoramic point of view. The elements in the image are seen from far away, meaning that the characters are barely visible. The emphasis is on the setting. It’s a good way to introduce a new sequence or to show where the action is taking place.
- **Medium shot:** Now we can see the characters from head to toe; we get a better sense of what’s going on.
- **Three-quarter shot:** The image closes in on the characters from the waist up, focusing readers’ attention on their gestures.
- **Close up:** By zooming in very close to a character or other element, the setting virtually disappears. The focus is on the emotions expressed by the expression on the character’s face or some other detail.

Switching between different shots, perspectives and points of view makes the storytelling more dynamic.

The “Ninth Art” through the Ages

A Short History of Comics

Comic strips have changed a lot since their beginnings in the twentieth century.

One definition of a comic strip is, “A series of adjacent drawn images, usually arranged horizontally, that are designed to be read as a narrative or a chronological sequence. (...) Words may be introduced within or near each image, or they may be dispensed with altogether.” This definition from the Encyclopaedia Britannica covers many kinds of storytelling based on a series of images.

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According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, the term *comic strip* in the sense of “a group of cartoons in narrative sequence” was first used in 1913. The French equivalent of the word, *bande dessinée* (literally, “drawn strip”) is older. It goes back to 1833, when the Swiss artist Rodolphe Töpffer, created *L’Histoire de M. Jabot* (*The Story of Mr. Jabot*).

Still, some people consider that comic strips date back to the British painter William Hogarth and his story told in a series of six pictures, *A Harlot’s Progress* (1731); to Hokusai’s sketches; to old European engravings that included speech bubbles; to medieval illuminations, or even to prehistoric cave paintings!

Comic strips began to take shape as we now know them in the late-19th and early-20th centuries in the United States, with a series called *The Yellow Kid* (1896). It was a mischievous, irreverent art form published in the newspaper.

Comic strips and comic books didn’t really catch on until the 1930s and ‘40s. That was when super-hero comic books, with Superman as the most iconic one, appeared in the the United States; Spirou and Tintin became the figureheads of Franco-Belgian comics, and Osamu Tezuka’s first manga appeared in Japan. At that time, comics were considered strictly for kids.

With the emergence of 1960s and ‘70s counter-culture, comics opened up to a more adult readership, and broke with the conventions of entertainment for children.

Since then, comic strips have been acquiring far greater cultural legitimacy. Embracing both fiction and non-fiction, what is sometimes known as “the ninth art,” now covers every subject, from history and auto-biography to other non-fiction genres. And thanks to digital technologies, comics as an art form are continually evolving.

With the BDnF app, we are offering you a way of taking hold of this means of expression and using it to write your own story!

Many countries have developed their own conventions and styles of comics, depending on their cultural outlook. Here are the main ones:

Franco-Belgian Comics

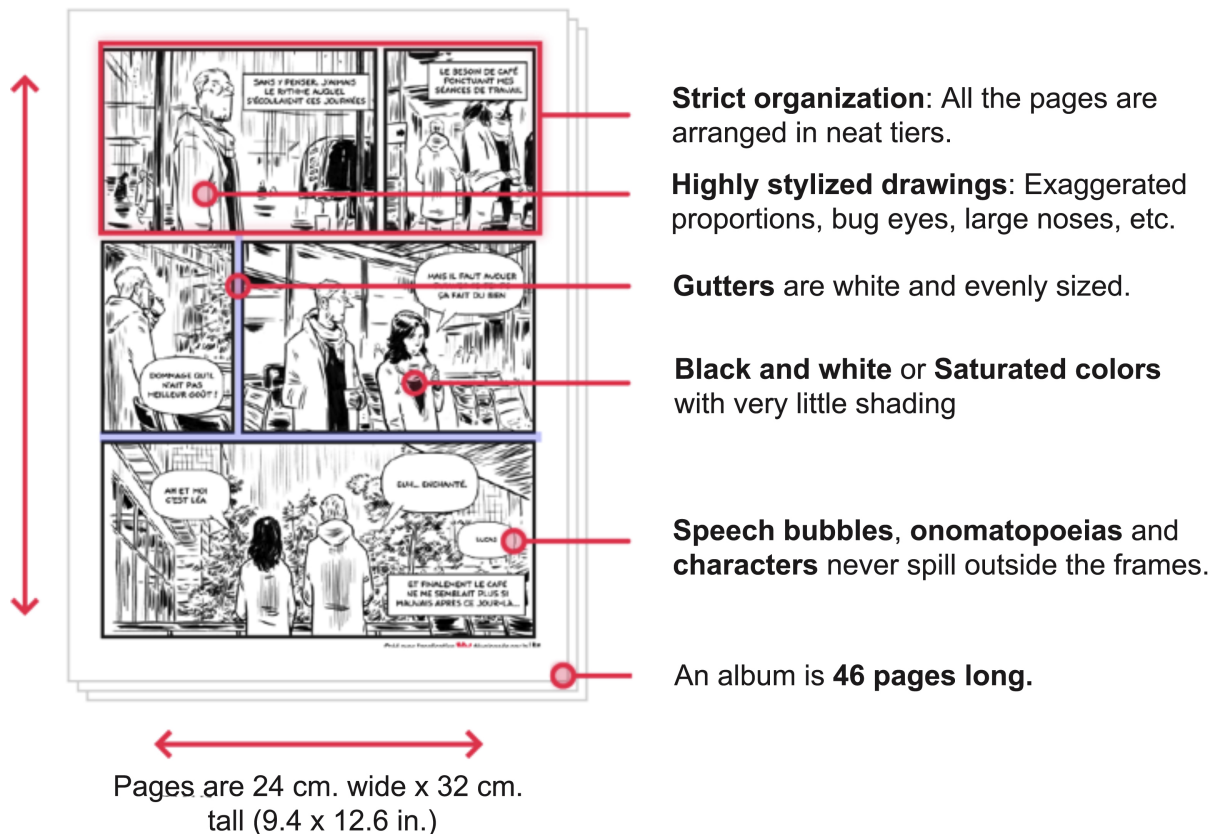
F.Y.I.

Two distinctive characteristics of Franco-Belgian comics are their artistic variety and the care taken in making the books themselves. They are usually hard-cover editions called albums (which are larger than U.S. comic books) with a compilation of stories in different genres (for kids, SF, fantasy, detective, etc.) for all ages.

The Basic Rules

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by Adrien Martin

Major Works and Cult Classics

Asterix, Largo Winch, Seuls, Sillage, Thorgal, Blueberry, Les carnets de Cerise, Emile Bravo, Pico Bogue and more

Graphic Novels

F.Y.I.

Having appeared in the early 1970s in the United States and developed rapidly in the 2000s, graphic novels allowed comic-book authors and artists to shake off the conventions of genre themes and of Franco-Belgian albums and to present more personal narratives. With complete freedom in the number of pages, and drawings – often in black and white – with a more spontaneous style, graphic novels offer a more human reading experience. Typical features of their style include duo-tone printing, rectangular frames, a higher text/image ration (long captions), much higher page counts, and a drawing style that leans towards caricature.

Major Works and Cult Classics

Persepolis, The Arab of the Future, Polina, Maus, My Favorite Thing Is Monsters

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Super-Hero Comics

F.Y.I.

The appearance of Superman in 1938 is often seen as the birth of the super-hero genre. Two publishing houses soon led the pack, and they still dominate the market to this day: DC Comics, with Batman and Superman; and Marvel, which came to prominence in the 1960s, thanks to Spiderman and the Avengers. Nowadays, there are hundreds of super-heroes published by a range of different publishing houses.

Super heroes' continued success is due to the fact that they have evolved to stay abreast with the times, and that their adventures often reflect the mores of an era.

The Basic Rules



The diagram illustrates the layout of a comic book page. It shows a stack of pages with a red double-headed arrow on the left indicating the height and a red double-headed arrow at the bottom indicating the width. The page content is organized into several panels: a large top panel showing a crowd, two smaller side-by-side panels below it, a large central panel with a close-up of a face, a horizontal gutter below that, and a bottom row of three panels, the last of which contains the word 'OUCH!' in a speech bubble. Red lines with circular endpoints point from text annotations to specific features in the diagram.

Realistic drawing style with more or less realistic shading.

Flexible, cinematic organization: Frames can be tilted and dynamic.

Gutters can be black or white, sometimes in color, and their thickness varies.

Speech bubbles, onomatopoeias and **characters** sometimes spill outside the frames.

Comic books are **22 pages** long.

Pages are 17 cm. wide x 26 cm. tall
(6.7 x 10.2 in.)

by Raphaël Meyssan

Major Works and Cult Classics

Batman, Wonder Woman, Harley Quinn, Spiderman, X-Men, The Walking Dead; Hellboy, Bone

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Teacher's Guides written by Ronan Le Breton, Thomas Jochum and Pierre Pulliat



Comic Strips

F.Y.I.

Comic strips were born a long time ago, during the nineteenth century. *The Yellow Kid*, launched in 1890, is considered to be one of the very first. Historically, comic strips were published in newspapers and magazines, often in black and white. The Yellow Kid stood out because of the yellow nightshirt he wore. The strip, which was published in newspapers that went in for sensationalize stories, is the root of the term “yellow journalism.”

Nowadays, they can be found in color and on line, where the they are still very popular.

The Basic Rules

Speech bubbles, onomatopoeias and characters stay inside the frames.

Gutters are white and evenly sized.

Black and white or solid colors with no shading or color variation.

Generally simple pencil drawings or cut-out photos

Rigid organization into tiers that are all the same height.

Stories are usually told in a single strip, sometimes two or a full page, but never more.

No standard page size

by Un Faux Graphiste : <https://fr-fr.facebook.com/unfographiste/>

Major Works and Cult Classics

Snoopy, Garfield, Calvin and Hobbes, Dilbert, Popeye, The Katzenjammer Kids

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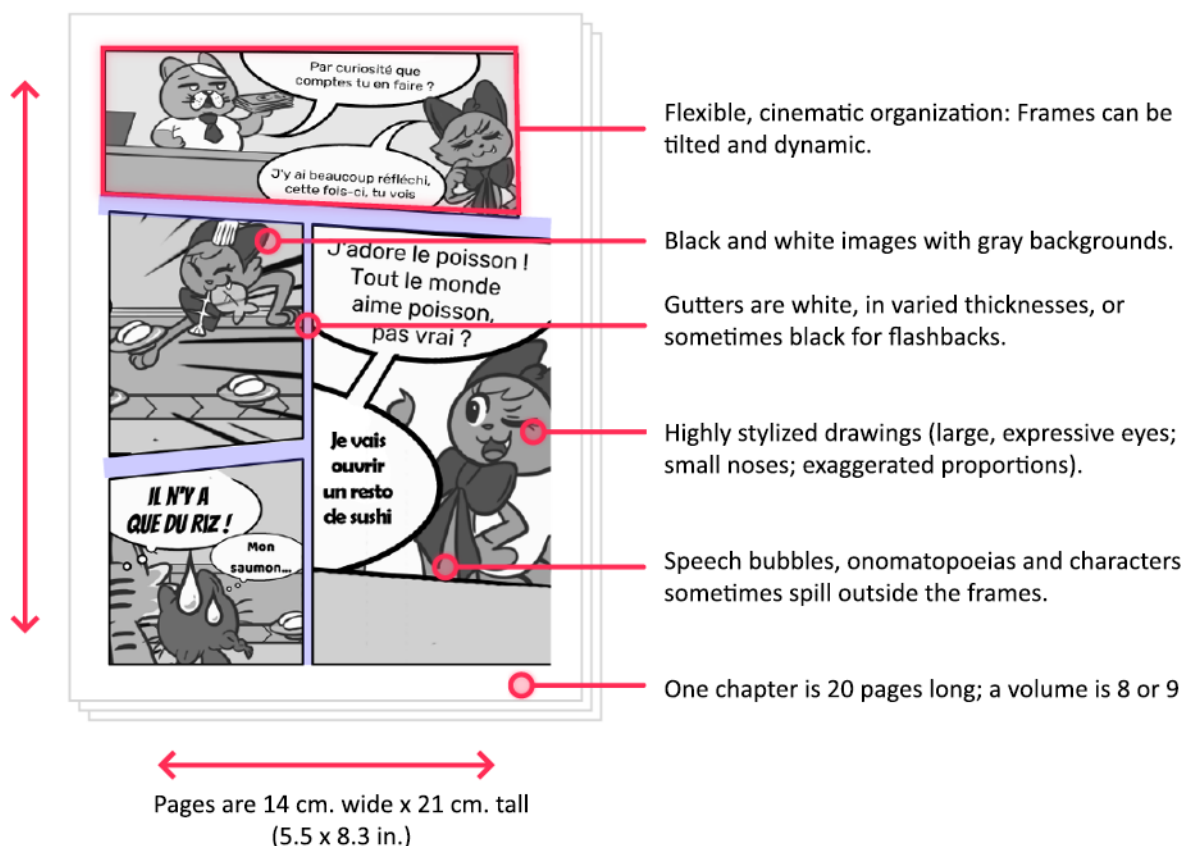
Manga

F.Y.I.

Manga (the word is the same in the singular and the plural) define Japanese comics. They caught on massively after World War II. Osamu Tezuka is seen as a precursor of the modern, dynamic manga. Mangakas (manga artists) usually work in black and white, and their stories are pre-published in periodicals with very varied themes. Readership is highly segmented before coming out as paperback books. Shōnen, for example, are manga for boys; while shōjo are manga for girls; and seinen are more psychologically complex or for more mature readers.

The Basic Rules

They are read from right to left. ←



Major Works and Cult Classics

One Piece; Nausicaa, Akira, Ranma 1/2, My Hero Academia, Astro Boy

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Teacher's Guides written by Ronan Le Breton, Thomas Jochum and Pierre Pulliat



Webtoons

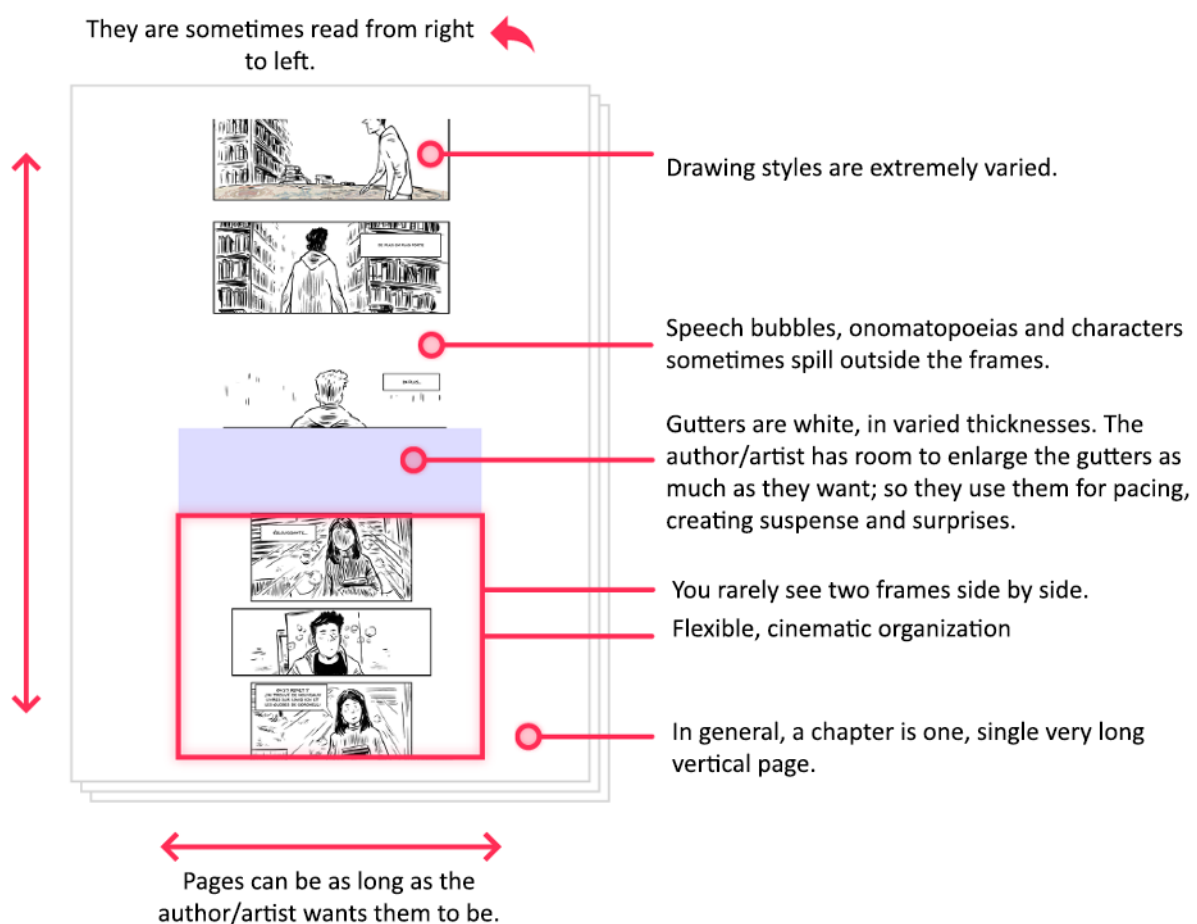
F.Y.I.

Webtoons were invented in the 2000s, in South Korea. Nowadays, people all over the world create webtoons, but the Koreans are still the undisputed masters of the genre.

Webtoons' most distinguishing characteristic is the length of their pages, which have been conceived for scrolling down to read on a smartphone. The "scrolling graphic novel" is a French variation on the theme; you read it by scrolling from left to right.

Webtoons play off of the codes of manga and revamp the rules and limits of comic-book page composition.

The Basic Rules



by Adrien Martin

Major Works and Cult Classics

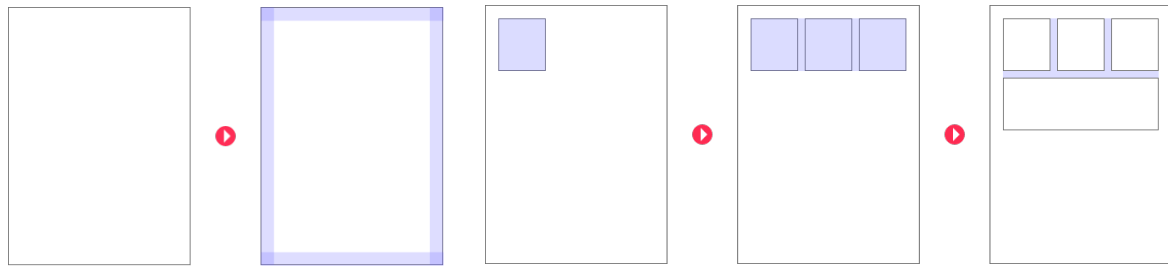
Noblesse, The Gamer, Relife, Bouhland, Tower of God, Honey Blood

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Teacher's Guides written by Ronan Le Breton, Thomas Jochum and Pierre Pulliat



The Elements on a Page



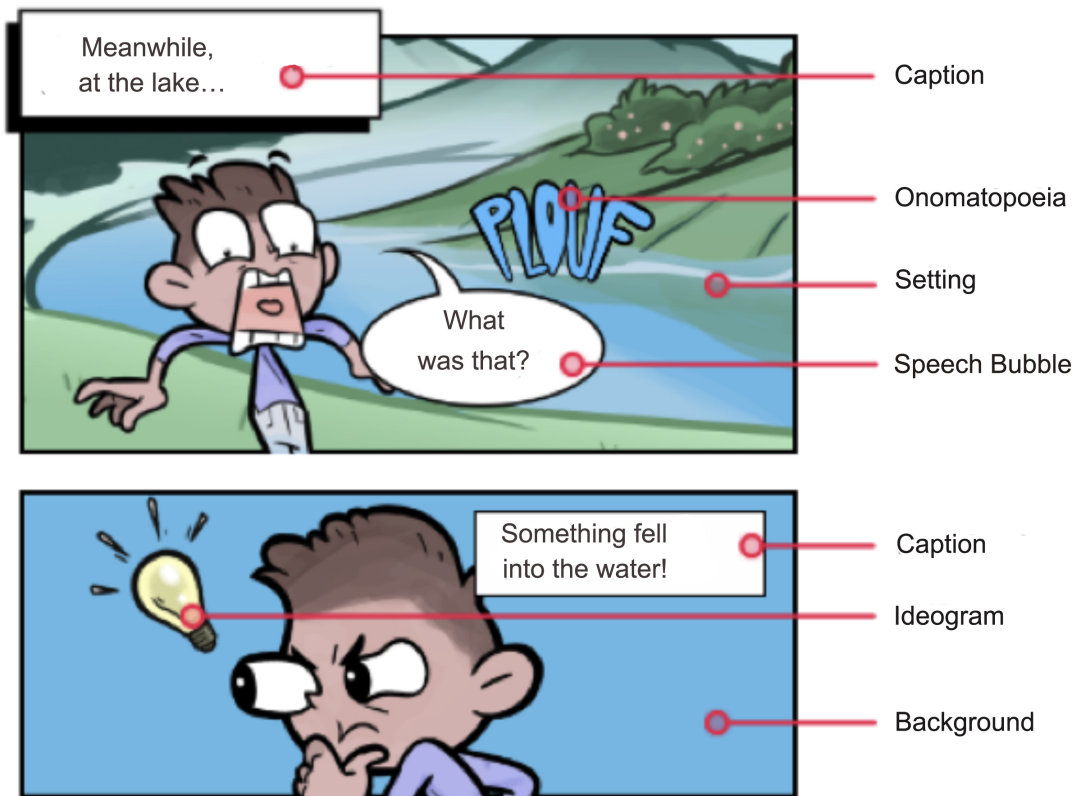
- **Margins:** The first thing you do on a page is to place the margins: on the top, the bottom, right and left. Margins are blank zones that have no pictures, no text, and no characters.
- **Frames:** also called panels, as its names implies, frames provide a framework for the drawings and text. Your story will be told inside the frames. Each frame freezes one moment in the story.
- **Tiers or Strips:** A series of frames that fills the whole width of a comic-book page is called a tier. A stand-alone series of frames is called a strip, or comic strip. They are often published in newspapers and don't necessarily fill the whole width of the page.
- **Gutters:** The (usually white) space between two frames is called the gutter.
- **Book:** When pages are gathered and bound together, it's called a comic book, or depending on the style, a graphic novel.

The Elements in a Frame

- **Grounds:** Images are composed using a series of grounds. The foreground is what's closer to the reader's point of view, the background is where the most distant elements are shown.
- **Bubbles:** Various shapes that contain what characters are saying, or, less commonly, thinking.
- **Tails:** The part of a bubble that points at the character who is speaking (or thinking).
- **Commentary:** Comments by the narrator that provide extra information about what's going on, when, or in what order.
- **Caption:** A neutral-colored rectangle placed on a frame that contains commentary
- **Onomatopoeias:** Words that represent noises (animal sounds, vehicles, things breaking, etc.) and are often stylized in comics
- **Ideograms:** Symbols that represent an idea or concept

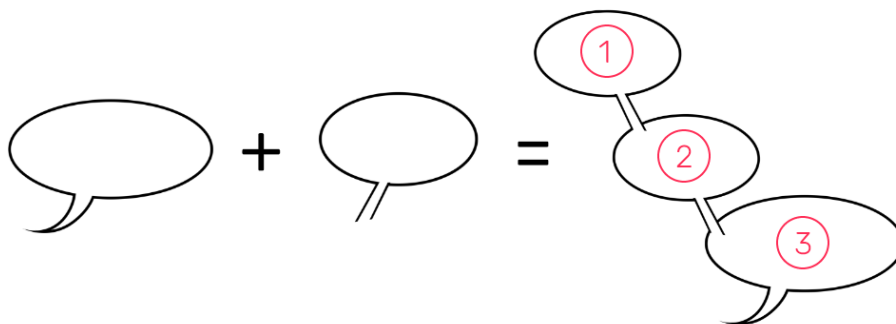
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Different Types of Speech Bubbles

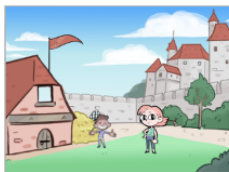
- Dotted-line speech bubble: The dotted-line outline shows that the character is whispering
- A rectangular bubble: represents a non-human, robotic or digital voice
- Stacked bubbles: make it possible to present several bubbles in a row



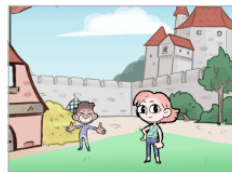
Framing

- Framing shots: As in photography or film-making, we use the term “shot” to describe how a comic-book image is framed.
- Long shot, or establishing shot: The elements in the image are seen from far away, emphasizing the setting rather than the characters, who are often quite small. The main purpose of a long shot is to show where the action is taking place.
- Full shot: The characters are a little easier to see.
- Medium shot: The characters can now be seen from head to toe; giving readers a better sense of what’s going on.
- Three-quarter shot: The image closes in on the characters from the waist up, focusing readers’ attention on their gestures.
- Close up: By getting very close-up, the setting virtually disappears. The focus is on the emotions shown by the expressions on the character’s face.

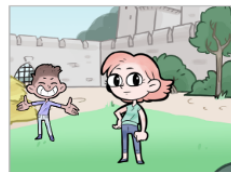
All together, these different shots allow comics artists to focus readers’ attention on different elements, guiding them through the story.



Long shot



Medium shot



Three-quarter shot



Close up

Comics Ideograms

Because comics are a visual form of storytelling, comic-book language involves both text and illustrations. Some graphic symbols have become codified so that readers know they stand for a specific idea or concept; they’re known as ideograms. Here is a list of some of the best-known ones:

Light Bulbs

A light bulb over a character’s head means they just had an “illumination,” i.e. a sudden idea or revelation.

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Stars and Lightning Bolts

Stars and/or bolts of lightning stand for pain. Placed near a character's knee or elbow, they mean the character has been hurt or wounded. Placed over a character's head, they stand for a severe headache, and often imply that the character is having trouble finding a solution to a problem.



Battle Clouds

A cloud of dust with punching fists, kicking feet and stars of pain poking out of it is used to portray a fight or battle between two or more characters.





Anger Veins

A vein appearing on a character's scalp or temple stands for anger. A manga-style, exaggeratedly large vein tips the situation towards comedy.



N.B.: This ideogram can appear on other parts of characters' bodies, particularly on their fist. In that case, it means they want to hit someone.

Drops of Embarrassment

This swollen drop of sweat symbolizes shame, embarrassment, awkwardness, stress or any other form of discomfort. It's generally placed on the temple. The bigger and more swollen it is, the funnier the embarrassment is meant to be.



Depression Lines

These parallel lines mean that the character feels crushed and on the verge of despair.



Action Lines and Wakes

Action lines indicate movement and speed.



Insults

To create a comic effect, a misshapen speech bubble containing images of anger and confusion stands for rude, insulting dialogue.



It is perfectly possible to modulate ideograms' meanings by varying their effects. If a character is smiling while an anger vein is showing on their temple, that means that they are forcing themselves to seem happy. Other commonly used examples include: a heart to stand for love, pink cheeks to show someone is blushing, spirals or blank eyes for surprise or stupefaction, gears over a character's head to show they're thinking, and many others.