

DRAWING COMICS

THE 2011/2012 GATEWAY GUIDE



Published by



INTRODUCTION

Initial Concept and Content

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Editor 2011/2012

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The Gateway Comics
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Gateway Student
Journalism Society



Welcome to *The Gateway Comics* and Illustration section for the 2011/2012 publishing year!

I'm Ross Vincent, Design and Production Editor (a high-falutin' way of saying I'm in charge of the comics). I've been volunteering for the comics section for a few years and I'm always happy to share my knowledge and experience with new volunteers. This manual will let you know the ways you can contribute your artistic talents to the paper, including a step-by-step guide to making comics plus a few tips to help you avoid the mistakes made by many beginners (myself included).

So sit back, relax, and let this guide be a swirling dimensional portal into the world of newspaper illustration.

Interesting Facts

The Gateway office is located:
Suite 3-04, Students' Union Building (SUB)
University of Alberta Campus

Meetings: Tuesdays at 3:30 p. m., *The Gateway* couch room

Deadline for comics: Monday at 1:00 pm

Comics dimensions:
Strips — 10" x 2"
Single-panel — 3.5" x 5"

Why volunteer to make Comics?

Simple: because it's fun.

Okay fine, there's much more to it, but fun is a big part of volunteering. If you need more reasons, here are some of the best:

- It looks great on a resume to have published art.
- It allows you to hone your artistic skills, or develop them from scratch.
- Develops professional skills, such as meeting deadlines and working with editors.
- Exposure: your work will be seen by thousands of readers on campus and online.
- Travel opportunities: The Canadian University Press, of which *The Gateway* is a member, hosts journalism conferences twice yearly that interested volunteers can attend. These are great ways to learn more about journalism, network with industry professionals, or simply party with your *Gateway* buddies in some far-away land.
- You get to hang out with fellow illustrators (who are always the most fun of all *Gateway* volunteers).
- Campus experience: It's a great feeling to volunteer and be a part of something bigger than yourself. Take it from me that volunteering and getting more involved in campus life lets you get the most out of your university experience.

How can I volunteer?

The best way to get involved is to come to Comics section meetings **Tuesdays at 3:30 pm**. That's when I give out any assignments and can hear your pitch for comic ideas or give you feedback on stuff you've drawn. The following are some of

the illustrations we use in the paper:

Comics: The bread-and-butter of the Comics & Illustration section is, unsurprisingly, comics. The standard comic is *10" wide by 2" tall*. See *HOW TO MAKE A COMIC* to learn more.

Single-Panel Comics: We also print comics that are only one panel akin to syndicated comics like *Bizarro* and *The Far Side*. The dimensions are roughly *3.5" wide by 5" tall*.

Editorial Cartoon, or "Edtoon": These appear on the first page of the Opinion section, typically poking fun at a public figure and/or current event. The dimensions vary but are usually within the realm of *7" by 7"*.

Edtoons need to be done on press night so I usually give this out at the comics meeting. Both the topic and final drawing need to be approved by the Opinion Editor, Ryan Bromsgrove. You don't need to have an idea for the edtoon to draw it; Ryan and I will help you brainstorm ideas until we settle on something good.

Drawing edtoons is a great way to improve your skills as an artist. You may never have thought to draw Indira Samarasekera or Rory Tighe, let alone the two of them making out, but forcing yourself to draw things you wouldn't normally draw is the best way to improve. As an added incentive, edtoons are in a very high-profile location in the paper and get lots of reads.

Features: We often require illustrations to go with our weekly feature, depending on the topic and theme of the piece. These are planned well in advance so artists will have plenty of lead time to work on it. Depending on the size of the piece, more than one artist may be needed. Feature illustrations can vary from drawing specific images to allowing you free reign to create what you want so long as it's in keeping with the theme and tone of the article.

Random Assignments: Occasionally I get last-minute requests from other editors for

an illustration to go with an article. These need to be done on press night and will be given out at the comics meeting.

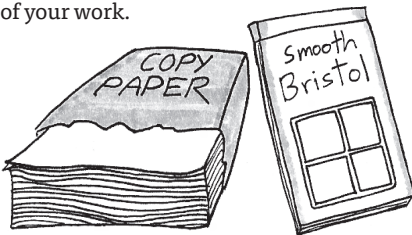
How to make Comics

If you're interested in writing comics but have no idea where to start, below is a step-by-step guide for the quickest way to draw a comic that's ready for print, beginning with what you'll need to do the job. However, this is by no means the only way to do comics; as you become a more experienced artist you will find your own ways of doing things as well as tools and methods that work best for you, and I encourage you to experiment and develop your own style. Until then, however, this is a good way to get started.

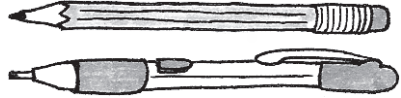
Tools of the Trade

Comic artists use a variety of implements in their craft, many of them specialized to the task. Luckily, most of them are fairly cheap. Here's the rundown of the things you'll need to start making comics. (NOTE: Almost everything listed below is available in *The Gateway* office for volunteer use, so you needn't buy anything. However, I encourage you to buy your own tools as you get more involved in comic-making).

Paper: Hey, you gotta have something to draw your comic on. Ordinary **white printer paper** is perfectly fine for comics, but can't withstand too much erasing. For advanced artists, I recommend **smooth bristol**, a card stock used by professional cartoonists. It can take a lot of erasing and is a good choice for long-term preservation of your work.



Pencils: Your primary drawing tool is the pencil, mainly because you can erase any mistakes and redraw until you get it right. The common **HB#2 Pencil** is perfectly fine for the job, though for finer details you should use a **mechanical pencil** with a 0.5 or 0.7 lead.



Eraser: The eraser is the cartoonist's best friend, and not just any eraser will do. For most erasing tasks you need a **white plastic eraser**, such as Staedtler Mars Plastic. Another useful tool is a **putty or "kneaded" eraser**, which is a squishable clay that is easier on paper and which you can form into different shapes for intricate erasing.



Pens: Cartoonists use *technical or artist pens* to ink over their pencil lines. These pens draw at a specific width and use a certain kind of ink that is ideal for comics. **DO NOT use a ballpoint pen to ink your comic.**

Brush pens are used for colouring, filling in black, and drawing thicker, darker lines. They aren't necessary to make a

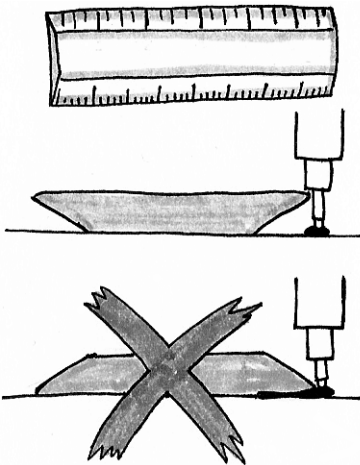


comic, but they can add richness to your artwork.

Artist and brush pens are typically only available in art supply stores, but the U of A Bookstore sells a decent variety of them. I recommend brands like Faber-Castell, Staedtler, and Pigma Micron.

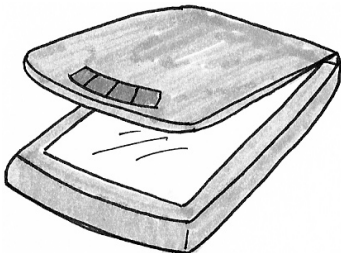
Ruler: Whether you're drafting your panels or drawing the horizon line, a ruler is necessary to keep your lines straight. Pretty much any kind of ruler works, be it plastic, metal, or wood.

Fun tip: most rulers are bevelled, so you can draw straight lines with a pen without smearing the ink!



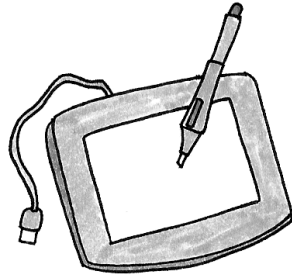
The following tools are not strictly necessary but can certainly be helpful, especially if you want to use computers in your cartooning process.

Scanner: Scans your finished comic onto your computer so you can edit it and e-mail it to me. Also handy for scanning pencilled



sketches and inking over them digitally.

Tablet: This tool lets you move your mouse cursor around by mimicking the more natural movement of pen on paper. Very handy for digital colouring and practically necessary for digital inking.



Adobe Photoshop: The best image-editing software available, perfect for editing, inking, and colouring your comics. It is expensive, however, so you may want to download **GIMP**, a free program that is similar to Photoshop.

Quick-Start Guide

Now that we've been introduced to our tools, it's time to put them to use. Here is the most basic way to make a comic ready for print.

Step 1: Plan ahead - Before you start drawing, it's a good idea to write down your characters' dialogue and what's going to happen in each panel. This helps you get a sense for story pacing, how many panels you'll need, and gives you a chance to revise your words before committing them to paper.

It's also handy to draw a crude sketch of your comic, called a **breakdown**, as a guideline for word-balloon placement and what to draw in each panel.



Step 2: Draft your paper – With your pencil and ruler, draw a rectangle 10" x 2" (or 3.5" x 5" for a single-panel comic) as your drawing area. Draw vertical lines to separate the area into panels as desired. If you like, you can draw your panels with a computer and print it out as your template.

Fun tip: Try drawing your comic larger than 10"x 2", but still conforming to the 5:1 ratio (eg. 15" x 3"). This makes it easier to add fine details, and your mistakes will appear less obvious when it's shrunk down to 10"x 2" for print.



Step 3: Pencilling – Draw your comic in pencil, including words and word balloons.



Step 4: Inking – With your technical pen, trace over your pencil lines in ink.



Step 5: Erase the pencilling – Go over your comic with your eraser, getting rid of as much pencilling as possible.



Step 6: Add details in ink – Make any corrections to your linework and add any details, such as crosshatching or shading.



Step 7: Colouring – A purely optional step, colouring is most easily done in Photoshop (see USING PHOTOSHOP), but feel free to use brush pens if you so wish. You can also "colour" in grayscale (various shades of gray) which shows up well on a black-and-white comics page.

Step 8: Send it to me – You can either give your comic to me in person by going up to the office, or you can just leave it on my desk (ask one of the editors' present which desk it is) or in my mailbox. Alternatively, you can scan your comic and e-mail it to

me at production@gateway.ualberta.ca. If this is your first comic, please be sure to *include your name and the title of your comic strip*. Remember, the deadline for comics is **Monday at 1 pm**. After that, I cannot guarantee your comic will run in Wednesday's issue.

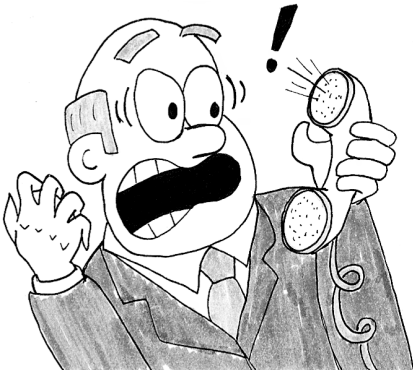
And that's basically how one makes a comic. Of course there's a lot more to comics than just how to draw them. Read on to learn a bit more about the intricacies of the medium.

Elements of Comics

Comics are a visual medium, yet in a quirky twist of fate, **writing is more important than your art**. People typically read comic strips to hear a good joke or an interesting story, and a comic that offers neither won't be read. A good comic starts with good writing, and most of the elements of traditional narrative (beginning, rising action, climax) also apply to comics.

That's not to say that art isn't important; people also read comics because they're visually appealing, more so than just text. Art conveys the action and gets readers emotionally involved in the story and characters. That said, the adage of "**show, don't tell**" very much applies. You should communicate actions and emotions visually rather than explained verbally if possible.

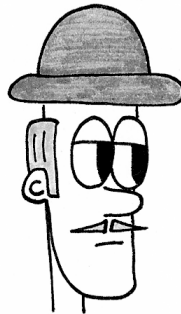
Show:



Tell:



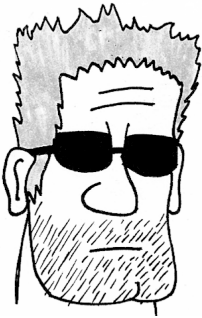
Character is an extremely important element in comics, as your characters are what your audience identifies with, thereby making the action more compelling and meaningful. They needn't be complex or fully-fleshed out; it's just a weekly humour strip, after all, but your characters should have identifiable traits and flaws that determine how they act in the situations they're in. You can use simple artistic cues in the look of your character to convey what he or she is all about.



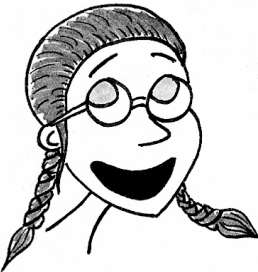
Middle-aged
Refined
Old-fashioned
High class
Unimpressed
Suave

Knowing your characters is helpful when writing comics, because you can put them in almost any situation and know how they'd react. A word of advice, though: **DO**

NOT base your characters on yourself or your friends. Characters' flaws make them interesting, but you likely won't depict a character you identify with in an unfavourable light or risk offending your friends. You can use people you know for inspiration, but don't make them the character. Your character should be a separate entity, cartoonishly exaggerated for the purpose of telling a story or joke.



Tough guy
Strong
Cool
Mysterious
Dumb?
Thug
Anti-hero



Young
Geeky
Quirky
Enthusiastic
Smart
Impulsive

Story needn't be complicated with a weekly comic strip, but should follow some internal narrative. Your first panel often sets the stage for action, telling the who, what, where, etc., preferably through visual cues rather than text. The middle panels set up the joke, if it's a funny comic, or otherwise flesh out the story leading to a payoff at the end. The last panel is the punchline, which satisfactorily concludes the action. In the case of larger story arcs, the last panel could end on a cliffhanger or a "to be continued...", letting your readers know that there will be more to this story and encouraging them to read next week's comic. If you do end on a cliffhanger, be sure to bring readers up to speed in panel 1 of next week's comic.

NOTE: Comics in a series should be able to stand alone, because casual readers may not have seen last week's comic or not remember what happened. You should make each comic understandable to someone who hasn't read the rest of the series.

Make your comic your own. It helps your craft to see and be influenced by other artists' work, but it's important to develop your own art and writing style. Readers want to see work that is unique to the artist and not simply a carbon-copy of someone else's style. Making comics is also a lot more enjoyable when done so in a way you developed and are comfortable with. Your process for making comics can also be tweaked to your liking; this guide, for instance, isn't the only way to do comics.

Content Restrictions

The beauty of volunteering for a student newspaper is that you have more or less free creative reign with your comic. Swearing and the like are perfectly acceptable, but anything atrociously in bad taste (hate speech, graphic violence, disgustingly unpleasant things) will not be run. I may request you make changes to your comic should it not make sense, but for the most part, I will not edit your work aside from adjusting it to fit into the proper dimensions and correcting any spelling mistakes.

In the event that I cannot run a comic you submitted, I will inform you and explain why we couldn't run it, and offer recommendations on how to make it suitable for print.

Using Photoshop

Below is a step-by-step guide for using Adobe Photoshop for various stages of comic making. Be warned: it's very dry and procedural, so feel free to skip this section and instead use it as a reference

when you're actually working with Photoshop.

Scanning

1. Turn on your scanner and place your comic inside, facing down, and close the lid.
2. Open Photoshop, click File > Import > and select your scanner from the list.
3. Your scanner's software will pop-up and should automatically scan your comic. When finished, you should have one selection box over the image. Click and drag the edges of the box around your comic so as to crop out most of the white space. If you have more than one selection box, click on each and press "delete" to get rid of all but one of them, then resize it around the comic.
4. If your comic is black-and-white, set the Color setting to Grayscale. If it is in colour or you plan to colour it in Photoshop, select Color.
5. Change the dpi/ppi to no less than 200.
6. Rotate the image if you need to.
7. Click Finish or OK.

Now you should have your comic ready to edit in Photoshop.

Making Corrections

1. Press "Z" to select the Zoom tool, right-click on your image and click "Actual Pixels."
2. Press "E" to select the Eraser tool, and use it to erase any lingering pencil marks or other mistakes throughout your whole comic (Tip: holding down spacebar lets you click and drag with the mouse to easily scroll through the image). Make sure the background colour is white when you do this.

Saving

1. Click on File > Save as...
2. Give it a descriptive file name so I know what it is and a way to distinguish it from other comics you've sent me, such as "ComicName_02."
3. Format can be JPEG, TIFF, PNG, BMP, PDF, or PSD. It doesn't matter too much to me which format it is.
4. Click Save.
5. If you get a pop-up that let's you adjust the image quality, put it at the highest setting, then click OK.

Inking

If you choose to ink digitally, I strongly recommend you use a drawing tablet. Drawing with a mouse is very difficult and can look bad. Use the Brush tool (press "B") when drawing because it detects the amount of pressure you put on the stylus, allowing you to vary the subtlety of each pen stroke. Always keep your non-drawing hand ready to press the undo hotkey (usually ctrl + z) to undo bad strokes. This only undoes the last action you made; to undo previous mistakes, you must go to Window > History and delete the unwanted actions.

Colouring

One way to add colour to your comic is by using the Paint Bucket Tool ("K"), which will fill any open field with the selected foreground colour. Another way is to make your image into a "colouring book":

1. Click Window > Layer to open your Layers window.
2. Right-click the "Background" layer and click Layer From Background. The background layer name will change, so it may be wise to rename it to "background."

3. A window will pop up. In the Mode section, select Multiply then click OK.

4. Click on the Lock icon at the bottom of the layer window. This will prevent you from accidentally colouring on your background layer.

5. Click the Create a New Layer button at the bottom of the layer window.

6. Click and drag the new layer to below the bottom of the layers.

7. Select the Brush tool (“B”) and start drawing. You’ll notice that your colouring will appear underneath the background image, not colouring over it. I recommend you create a new layer for every separate element you are colouring (ex. skin, hair, sky), and remember to drag your new layers below your “background” layer.

8. When you’ve finished colouring, right-click on any of the layer in the layer window, then click Flatten Image. This condenses all your layers into a single image.

9. Save your work.

Tips

Erasers are your friend. If something doesn’t look quite right, erase it and try again. Your art will improve if you are willing to self-correct and strive to do better.

Practice. The only way to get better at art and writing is to keep doing it, and always be open to constructive criticism.

Read comics. Read as many different comics as you can. You may discover elements you can adapt to your own work, get a better sense of story pacing, and generally be inspired.

AVOID PLAGIARISM. This may seem odd, but this has happened before. With the abundance of webcomics out there,

it’s easy to copy someone’s words and/or art when you’re strapped for ideas. But among the thousands of our readers on campus and online, there will definitely be someone who has read the original work and will call you on the theft. Aside from the legal implications for *The Gateway*, it’s embarrassing to us as a publication, and you will be banned from further involvement with the paper. Furthermore, why would anyone want to plagiarize a comic, anyway? It’s not like you get graded on them, and why draw something that’s already been drawn? Precisely; it’s senseless.

DO NOT draw stick figures. We don’t expect you to be a good artist right off the bat, but drawing a stick figure comic tells me that you’re unwilling to get better at drawing. I’d much prefer a crude attempt at a human figure than a lifeless stick anyday... wait, that sounded a bit gross ...

TRY to do a comic all by yourself. Often new volunteers want to write comics and have someone else draw them or vice-versa, and I will certainly try to introduce artists to writers if you so wish. However, comic-making is much better if you do it yourself because you have total creative control, don’t have to rely on anybody else, and it allows you to develop and improve both your art and writing skills.

Build up a buffer early in the year. It may seem like you have tons of time for comics at the start of term, but that will quickly change once midterms and papers come along. Therefore, it’s a good idea to have your comics done one or two weeks in advance so when something does crop up and you have no time for drawing, you can still submit a comic and not have to miss a week.

Always keep your audience in mind when making your comic. It’s important to write and draw what you want to, but it’s equally important that your audience understands what’s going on. You should always ask yourself, “will people get this

joke?,” “is it clear what this character is doing in this panel?,” “do they know what happened last issue?,” and so forth. If in doubt, err on the side of bluntness.

DO NOT use Comic Sans for text. Computer-generated text tends to look unnatural in a comic, and Comic Sans is an especially ugly font regardless. I recommend searching online for fonts specifically made for comics, or do your lettering by hand (which is an under-appreciated art form in itself).

Come to meetings! They happen Tuesdays from 3:30 - 4:00 p.m., but that doesn't mean you can't hang out earlier or later. Comic volunteers are always fun people, and it gives you a chance to meet your peers, bounce ideas of each other, and generally get more out of volunteering. Who knows, you can even pick up an assignment or two. (NOTE: Please pick up an assignment. Please?).

Further Reading

Drawing Words & Writing Pictures by Jessica Abel and Matt Madden. Most of what I know about comics comes from this book. A beautifully presented lesson-by-lesson guide that takes you through the terminology, conception, and technical aspects of creating comics, complete with real-world examples and fun exercises.

How to Make Webcomics by Scott Kurtz, Kris Straub, Dave Kellett and Brad Guigar. A how-to guide by professional web-cartoonists for making compelling comic strips, putting them on the web and making money off them. You can also download the authors' podcast series *Webcomics Weekly*, which has some relevant info and is often hilarious.

Final Thoughts

Well, that's the bulk of my comics knowledge, nicely distilled in this handy-dandy

guide. If you have any questions or just wanna talk comics, swing by the office on Mondays or Tuesdays or send me an e-mail at production@gateway.ualberta.ca and we can set up a time to chat in person.

Also, be sure to come to our weekly meetings to hang with me and your fellow volunteers, and stay tuned for news of workshops, conferences, and comic-related events. Hope to see you around.

Cheers,
Ross Vincent
Design & Production Editor, 2011-2012

Notes!!

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