> When in doubt, tell the truth. – **Mark Twain**

So here we are! It's finally the day! You're at the venue and ready for 24 Hour Comic Day! You're mentally prepared, you're fresh and rested, you're sitting in your chosen venue, in your comfy chair, holding your favorite pen … and are facing the most challenging obstacle in the creative universe: *a blank page.*

Now what?

Some of you are asking: *A blank page? So what? They don't scare me!* Well, if you're one of those blessed people who already has a story in mind, feel free to move on to your next obstacle, or, hell, just get on with drawing! The rest of us want to talk about *writer's block.*

Writer's block is that dreaded moment when you *want* to be writing a story but the words or art simply won't flow. There are lots of varieties of writer's block, and lots of theories about how it happens, but one of the most common ones is that you haven't *thought through your story.*

But you don't have time to think through your story – not to the level of a typical comic book, where a writer might spend more than 24 hours just considering ideas. Worse, a deadline can work against your creative thought processes, cluttering your head with worries.

That's why *we recommend a hard deadline of an hour to decide on an idea for your story and outline it*. Remember, each hour taken off the front bites two and a half minutes off the time you need to draw each page. At worst, check in at three hours and just start drawing.

You have an amazing experience ahead of you!

If this is your first time, you may come to see your life as "Pre 24HCD" and "The Aftermath"...

Smile! Your courage and preparations are about to pay off.

Generating Ideas

What if you don't have an idea? Good news – ideas are everywhere! If you are at a loss, use a story seed generator to figure out where to start. What's a story seed generator? Even better news – you can use almost anything!

- **Don't have a story in mind?** Pick one of Aesop's Fables or Grimm's Fairy Tales to illustrate! Your interpretation will be unique, which makes it valuable. If you think that's too easy, think again. We've seen artists turn traditional folk songs into comics, and trust us, it's just as much of a challenge as coming up with a story from scratch – you need to pace the words out over the pages, decide on art, draw it, fill in dialogue balloons and color, and so on. Even if you take on something seemingly simple, like "The Twelve Days of Christmas" with each day told over two pages, you still need to complete 24 pages worth of art, and that will be challenge enough.

Ideas are usually just groups of smaller component ideas that themselves have ideas inside them.

Peel away the outer layers and ask yourself, what is this idea based on?

Simplify.

- **Don't want to use an existing story?** Use Rory's Story Cubes or The Writer's Block to come up with ideas that can seed your choice of setting or character. If you don't have access to either of these, you can use something like a Tarot deck or cards from a collectible card game like Magic the Gathering. All of these tools gather a large set of possible concepts and give you a way to select a random subset. The way you use these tools is to take the random subset and imagine that all of them came from the same story. You don't have to use all of them, or even any of them: if you deal out a set of cards including a star, a pancake, a lemon, and a mug, perhaps that would remind you of breakfast on vacation – and that's enough.

- **Want a more metaphorical starting point?** Start with a random page from a favorite book or a random quotation from a favorite author. Go to Wikipedia and find their article for the day (don't get sucked into endless clicking). Look up the "Evil Overlord Plot Generator", or check out TV Tropes. Any of these things can provide a seed that you can use to tell a story. If you're having trouble using those ideas as a starting point, imagine a character at a place or in a situation related to the idea you've found, and how that character might react to the idea.

- **Still at a loss? Try autobiography!** If you can't think of a fictional story, follow the advice of Mark Twain and just tell the truth about the situation you are in, or about a situation that matters to you. You are unique, and your individual story – who you are, how you came to be doing 24 Hour Comic Day, what you are feeling at this moment, and what matters to you in your past – is will be interesting. Write it down! Draw it!

Spend at most a few minutes finding an idea – you don't need the "best" one. You just need to find something that's interesting. Scratch that – you just need to find something of interest *to you*, that will spark your imagination to move forward. Once you have it – move forward!

Remember, it's better to be done but progress is good.

3 Types of Generators

Discover how you come up with your creative ideas.

BLitz COMICS

http://www.blitzcomics.com   Remember, It's Better to be Done!

How do you come up with your ideas? If you're creatively blocked try switching to a new type of generator. You can add your ideas to the lines, dots and squiggles then consider how they all might combine into something new. You can convert your ideas into energetic stories!

## Influenced and Affected by Outside Forces

When you have an idea that is influenced and affected by outside elements. These elements can be anything and should be anything.

Add your own ideas next to the squiggles, lines, and dots.

I Got An Idea!
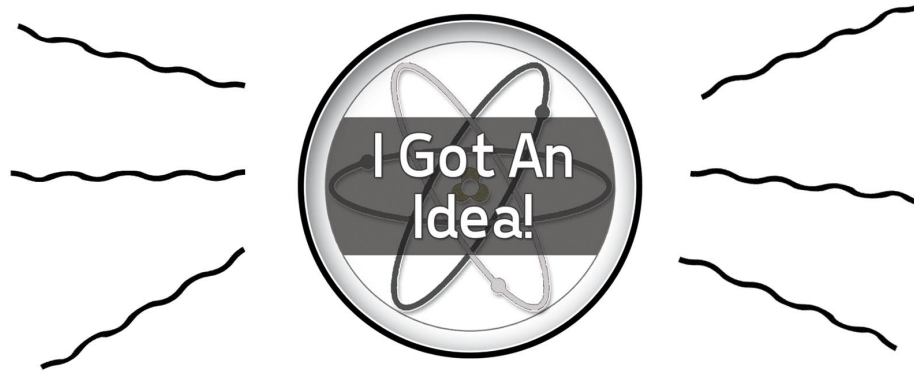
Absorb and/or Lose Elements of an Idea

When you start with an idea like "Movies" and you absorb and/or remove elements from your idea until you have the final idea you want.

I Got An Idea!
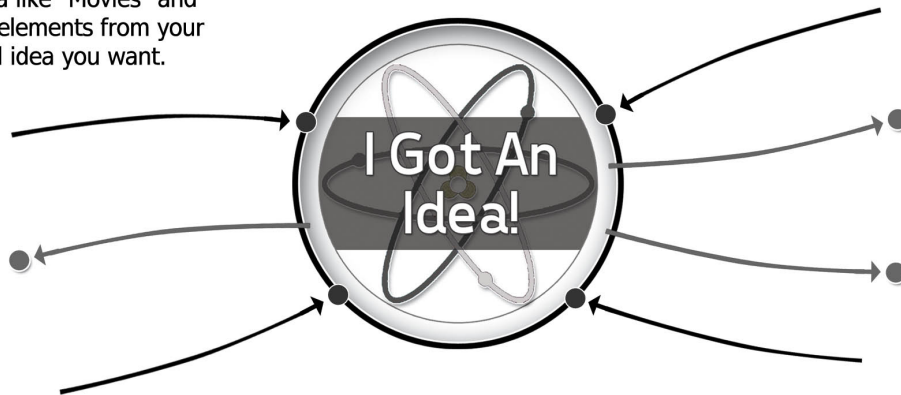
When 2 (or more) Heavy Ideas Collide, then either Combine or Split Apart

When combining ideas like Sherlock Holmes solves crimes in the 33rd century and meets the TMNT. Smashing some heavy ideas together can create new energetic stories.

I Got An Idea!   I Got An Idea!

Heavy Idea 1   Heavy Idea 2
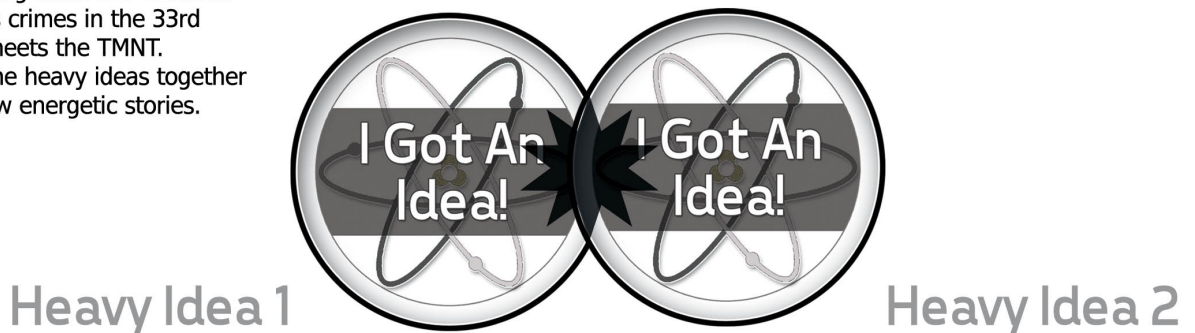
Hey, a blank page.
Design a science-fiction device that helps
objects go faster than light.

Excelsior! – **Stan Lee**

What if you can't turn an idea into a story? Don't spend six hours considering alternatives! You don't have that time to lose. Why are you doing this, to perfect your masterpiece or to practice sequential art by throwing your raw emotion on the page? Instead, try using scaffolding.

Scaffolding in manual labor is a physical structure – a stabilized platform that helps people work higher than they could standing on their own two feet. Scaffolding in mental labor is a conceptual framework – structured choices that help people focus on creative decisions.

One piece of scaffolding we can give you is a breakdown of the parts of a story:

> **Theme:** What is your story *about*? Star Trek stories are about encountering things in space. Sherlock Holmes's stories are about solving crimes. The Batman's origin story is about childhood loss, and the heights that it can drive a person to.

> **Genre:** *How* are you telling your story? The same event – the death of the Batman's parents – could be told as the origin story of a superhero, or as a detective story focusing on the crime, or even in literary style as a coming of age story.

> **Setting:** *Where* does your story take place? The same event – the death of the Batman's parents – could take place in fictional Gotham, real-life New York, Victorian Britain, a medieval castle, a colony on the moon - or the land of faerie. It's up to you.

> **Character:** *Who* does the story happen to? The young orphan who becomes the Batman is a rich upper-class heir. But couldn't he have been an impoverished working-class orphan? What about a young undocumented immigrant girl? More stories!

> **Conflict:** What is at *stake* in the story? What clash of values is at play in its events? Is it the Batman's desire to find the killers of his parents versus the killer's desire to hide … or the Batman's struggle within himself not to kill once he's identified the killer?

As further scaffolding, we created the Story Web exercise to help explore these ideas. The Story Web contains sections for Theme, Genre, Setting, Character and Conflict, with pre-existing selections to jumpstart your creativity and a few blank slots so you can add your own.

To put it as simply as possible, stories are just about sharing what someone did with something.

Then describing what someone felt about it.

That says nothing about how 'interesting' or 'complex' the story is.

Thinking that, in order to be 'good' your story needs to be complicated, is like thinking that to enjoy some candy it should be complicated.

No. Just chew on it for a minute, pick out the stuff you dislike, the stuff you like and then smile.

Repeat as needed.

You can use the Story Web however you want to. You can simply check off items that inspire you for your story. You can draw lines between items that seem connected to you. You can even look at where the lines cross to find the interesting points of connection in the story.

Tips for Success

Here are some options for speeding up the story crafting process. Note everyone's story is different – pick the advice that works for you.

Keep it simple. 24 Hour Comic Day is about raw emotion and experience poured out onto the page. You don't need a complex plot to tell an interesting story! A simple story structure can still make a very interesting comic.

Focus on what interests you. There are thousands of different possibilities for theme, genre, setting, and so forth. Start your search for a story on the point that interests you, and use your interest to help guide your decisions.

Don't second-guess your decisions. Theme, genre, setting, character and conflict are all important – but they're ideas, not pages. Once you have made a good choice in an area, don't go back on it – build on it to move forward.

Decide on your genre or theme going in. If you already know what you like, just do it! The advantage of deciding your genre or theme is that you can practice drawing simplified versions of elements in that genre before the actual day.

Now that you have all your lines criss crossing and connecting ideas together, the next step is to figure out what it all means. This is the fun part because your story is right there in front of you. Where lines cross that's where those elements directly influence each other. If other lines are parallel and never cross then those elements move in tandem but don't directly affect each other. If you see some lines are more packed together in one area of the sheet then it's likely thats the meat of your story because those elements are drawn together.

Where lines go from curves to sharper angles interpret that as the element seemed to be going in one direction then changed direction for some reason. If a line passes through an element but doesn't stop, that means the element appears briefly in that thread and leaves it behind.

The key is how you interpret how your lines are interacting. Spend at most a few minutes on this. Remember, it's better to be done!

The Story Web
Mix and match, to catch a story in your web.

1. Circle your main conflict(s).
2. Shade the stars next to all the choices you like.
3. Connect all your shaded stars together with some lines, making sure the lines all pass through your conflict(s).

GENRE

Historic Old Western ☆

Forbidden Romance ☆

Science Fiction ☆

An Epic Journey ☆

Parody or Satire ☆

Add your genre here ☆

SETTING

☆ Post Apocalypse

☆ Sword and Sorcery

☆ Parallel Worlds

☆ Dystopia

☆ Large City

☆ Add your setting here

CONFLICT

Jealousy

Achievement

Survival Against..

Love Wanted or Lost

Supernatural/Demons

Add your conflict here

CHARACTER

Sickly Superhero ☆

Parapalegic Politician ☆

Nimble Old Hermit ☆

Opinionated Midwife ☆

Awkward Assassin ☆

Add your character ☆

THEMES

☆ Person vs Nature

☆ Technology is Gone

☆ Survival Detective

☆ Religious Conversion

☆ Love Lost

☆ Add your theme here

Hey, a blank page.
Draw some fantastical creatures.

Making Your Story Go Places

Creating Interesting Plots with Conflict

> Ideas are worthless. Execution is everything. – **Scott Adams**

So you've decided on an idea for a story. Congratulations! But you're not done – because an idea for a story is not the story itself. Theme, genre, setting, character and conflict don't become a story until they are embodied in a sequence of meaningful events – a *plot*.

There could be many superhero stories about a rich heir in a contemporary city dealing with the aftereffects of a childhood murder. It doesn't become the origin story of the Batman until you put the events in the right order – when the theme motivates the character and conflict.

For example, if the theme is murder, the murder must happen early in the story, so the character can be derived from it. And since the story is in the superhero genre, the kind of character formed by this event is a superhero – in other words, it's an origin story.

Theme can help us leave out events as well. Many things probably happened to Bruce Wayne the morning after his parents were killed; maybe he got up, brushed his teeth, sat down on the side of his bed, and cried. We don't follow *all* of those events – perhaps just the crying.

Conflict should also follow the theme. As another example, perhaps the conflict in the story is the Batman chasing the murderer of his parents, who wants to escape. Or perhaps the Batman wants to fight crime – but to honor his parents, he swears to avoid killing.

There are many possibilities for creating a sequence of meaningful events that make up a plot. If you are having trouble, the conflict itself can help you resolve it. At its most basic, a conflict is about someone who wants something – and has trouble getting it.

To help you think through plot and conflict, we created the Plot Line Generator exercise. It's a series of questions and answers, designed to help you identify a character, their values, and how they may have trouble getting it. There are four rows in the table:

> **Who wants what?** Conflict is based on a character's values; make that concrete and identify who it is in your story that wants something.
>
> **Why can't they get it?** Conflict arises when a value is thwarted. What's the 'but' to the character's desire? What concrete form does that obstacle take?
>
> **How will they resolve it?** Story arises when characters attempt to resolve a conflict … or fail trying. What action will your character take, with what goal?

Let's say you have a car, the kind you can get inside and drive.

'Plot' is what you would do with that car if you needed to get to the store but the gas tank was empty.

You can start with something this simple then imagine all the unexpected actions you'd do to solve the problem.

How about rolling the car down a hillside and steering through the trees?

'Story' tells us how you felt about the situation.

What kind of story is that? Lastly, for your benefit, summarize your story: think about the concrete premise of the story (the Batman, chasing the killer of his parents) and then restate it in terms of theme (a superhero dealing with childhood trauma).

If you've ended back where you started – you've found the story you described has the same theme you started with – congratulations. You've got a story that realizes your idea. If you've ended at a different place, you may want to tweak your story – or adopt it as your new theme.

One way to deepen your story is to think of a twist – a violation of the reader's expectations. Before you start the Plot Line generator, pick one of the first six boxes and write in the word "twist". Then, when you get to that box, try to make a choice that isn't obvious.

For example, put the twist on 'but,' then make it an unusual obstacle. It's obvious to have the Batman's parents killed by a criminal; but what if the killer was Commissioner Gordon, who was then driven to a life of exemplary police work by his regret? Riddle that, Batman.

Tips for Success

There are many alternatives to the Plot Line Generator – for example, the *DC Comics Guide to Creating Comics* describes the "Classic Story Arc" and summarizes Christopher Vogler's more detailed take on it found in *The Writer's Journey*. But don't dive too deep!

Keep it simple. You've only got 24 pages to tell this story, so don't write the outline to Cerebus the Aardvark and expect to squeeze it all in. If you can choose, focus on a simple arc that expresses your idea in the clearest way possible.

Focus on at most one major idea. According to legend, George Lucas had enough material to make nine movies; he took the most self-contained idea as his starting point in Star Wars. You don't need to tell your magnum opus – just a twenty-four page story.

Focus on at most one major twist. Even then, the pages you create will be simpler than you expect; don't try to do too much. When Anthony adapted his story "Stranded" over three 24HCD's, he found each issue could handle one major plot twist.

Don't write scenes that your pen can't ink. It's easy to create a story that sounds awesome, but you want a story that sounds awesome that you can draw, in 24 hours. Do you need a Chronicles-of-Narnia-scale battle, or will a fistfight do?

Decide on an ending. We know some creators don't work that way, but if you can, decide on how your story will end – or at least come up with an abstract idea for the last scene. It's easier to drive if you know what your destination is.

Plot Line Generator
Discover what makes your plot work.

BLitz COMICS

http://www.blitzcomics.com   Remember, It's Better to be Done!

Answer each plot section in a similar way to this example:

WHO?	A hanglider pilot who is afraid of cats...
WANTS?	wants to glide over the English Channel
BUT?	but he needs to get permission from the Queen
AND?	and make friends with her fiesty Royal Cat.
ACTION?	So the pilot adopts a cat and creates a video of the kitty getting trained to sit in the hanglider basket.
GOAL?	The video goes viral and the Queen loves it. She gives him permission so she can watch his kitty fly!

WHO

START

WANTS

BUT

AND

ACTION

GOAL

PREMISE   Summarize your plot concretely.

Summarize your plot abstractly.   THEME

FINISH

Hey, a blank page.
Draw some spirals and imagine that
you're creating new galaxies.

Storyboarding Your Plot with Thumbnail Sheets

> Comics is an arrangement of images in sequence… the content tends to shape the way we communicate with this medium. -**Will Eisner**

So now you have a plot. Congratulations! But what if you don't have the first clue about how to break that plot down into pages? You may not have thought about it before, but there's structure to a traditional comic that can help you complete 24 pages in 24 hours:

The Starting Page: The first few pages of your comic must introduce the story to the reader. In many traditional comics the first page (and sometimes the next two pages) introduces the situation that our hero will confront. While some comics dive straight into the story, that can be too much for some readers, who need orientation. Think of the self-contained mini-story at the beginning of most Indiana Jones and James Bond films. We could break this down further:

The Establishing Page: More typical for Japanese than American comics, this is a page that sets the stage rather than advancing the narrative. Before showing a shot of your hero talking to his sidekick, show a full-page shot of his hideout, or six panels showing typical things from your character's daily environment. This is a powerful tool to set the tone: the same panel of your hero and sidekick talking will seem completely different if preceded by a page of people-crowded panels from downtown New York or sparse cactus-adorned panels from desert Arizona. And it can eat a whole page.

The Splash Page: A splash page is a page with just one panel – a single drawing, say, introducing the main character (or villain) in the setting of the story. American comics often skip the Establishing Page, making the Starting Page into a Splash Page. But let's continue finding ways to chew up page count with things that are easy to draw, and imagine that after seeing an Establishing Page of New York City, we then follow with a Splash Page introducing our hero, Radioactive Scorpion Man, staring grimly off into the distance.

The Title Page: Next, some traditional comics have a Title Page, which introduces the main character verbally: "A man bitten by a radioactive scorpion, Radioactive Scorpion Man uses his sting to strike back at evil!" This technique can help orient readers towards the kind of story you are telling, and can even throw the hero into the main conflict of the story – say, a giant robot terrorizing New York. Congratulations! You've now plotted another page, or, if the action is big enough … maybe two …

Truthfully, you don't really have to stop at only 24 pages.

We're pretty sure you could find more sheets of paper or more screen space somewhere.

How would you make your story expand further than 24 pages? Write some ideas here.

The Double Page Spread: Many comics allow a single striking image to cover two pages in a "double page spread". Sometimes this is the title page, showing the first encounter of the hero with the forces of the villain … but it could also be in the middle of the story, showing the villain's hideout, or near the end, showing the beautiful vista of the hero's victory. Or you might not use one at all. It's up to you.

The Finishing Page: The last page of your comic wraps up your story. This sounds obvious, but think about it: the first page of your comic must clearly introduce it, and the last one must satisfactorily conclude it. That usually means the actual climax of your story must come on a page before the ending, allowing you to use the last page to end on the right emotional note.

So, if you really wanted to cheat and burn up pages (and we encourage that), if you start your book with an Establishing Page, a Splash Page introducing your hero, and a Title Page Dual Page Spread showing the hero facing the villain's monster, then you've consumed four pages right off the bat, which should be easy to draw. Add a Dual Page Spread for the final climax, and end with a Finishing

Page with the hero thinking wistfully about the future, you've now consumed seven pages for your story! Now to fill in the remaining 17 ...

These tools give you three different levels at which you can pack story, from a normal page with panels, to a splash page which highlights an idea, to a dual page spread which enables you to set off something amazing in its own striking way. But if your comic is aimed for the web, you may not be able to do dual page spreads. Even in a traditional comic, your dual page spread may be cut in half if you aren't careful to make sure the spread appears on two pages that face each other!

The way pages are laid out in comics is called "imposition." For example, many American comic books have the Starting Page appear by itself, on the right hand side, at the start of the book. If all the remaining pages are side by side, left and right, then the Finishing Page will also be a lone page, appearing on the left. Marvel Comics are often the exception to this rule, starting the comic with a "Previously" page and finishing on a "Next Issue" page, which means the Starting Page and Finishing Page are both included in the side-by-side page flow – giving the artists complete freedom to include them in dual page spreads, to have them be splash pages, or to be conventional panel pages.

Regardless of how you break this down, you want to have the ideas in your story spaced out to fill the 24 pages. We've shown you how tell the beginning of your story in two to four pages and the end in two to three pages, but you should pace out the rest as well. To help you, we've included the **Thumbnail Sheet exercise**, which provides a single grid for you to sketch all 24 pages of your comic so you can visualize how your story progresses, helping you to control pacing and rhythm. To use it, in each Thumbnail, draw a small version of that page.

Write notes about each page before you draw. You can do this on the thumbnail sheet, on a separate outline, or even pencil them in on the pages themselves.

Make ACTION based story notes. Focus on what's happening and who it's happening to. At the start is not the time to wax philosophical.

Plan at least one splash page or dual-page spread. Not only are they dramatic, that way you won't have to worry too much about panels for that one hour. Just smack the page with something large! It really is easier to draw that one drawing than five panels!

Jot down some notes about the final page. Even if you have no fixed breakdown, write down whatever you can about the end of your story. That will help you remember during hour 21, just why you drew a unicorn with a cast on his horn eating some cake...

Try working forwards … or backwards! You can draw out the final panel on the last page during the first hour, then fill in the rest of the story to get to that ending. You can even consider drawing your book backwards! Write to the start!

The only rule dictating how you'll ultimately connect your story together is...that you eventually have to put the images next to each other.

Simple, right?

Feeling liberated? **Great!** Start thinking about how you can use these tools to plan a story. Feeling constrained? **We totally understand.** *Your* comic could be completely nonlinear, designed to be read in any order. Your story could be a time loop and could cycle back to the beginning so it could be started at any point, like FINNEGAN'S WAKE. Your comic could be a 4x6 grid plastered across a wall. You could do 24 completely abstract pages. Or, as Scott McCloud has suggested, you could do 100 panels of a webcomic.

It's all up to you!

Congratulations! You made it to page 50!
Draw a really large 50 and
get creative with the shapes!

Thumbnail Windows
Storyboard your entire story, on a single page.

http://www.blitzcomics.com   Remember, It's Better to be Done!

Quickly sketch your pages inside each box.

Layout your panels, pacing, and compositions before you commit to your final design. Add as much or as little detail as you like.

1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24

Hey, a blank page.
Copy, and recreate here, a page from your
favorite comic book, in a thumbnail format

Laying out Your Page

Arranging Panels so They Tell a Story

> Closure is our ability to complete an action or an idea between the panels. That's the heart of comics… it's unique. – **Scott McCloud**

Comics combine pictures and words sequentially into a story. But unless you've decided to do your comic as 24 photographs with captions written at the bottom of each one – and who's stopping you? We sure aren't! – then you probably want to draw multiple pictures per page.

But how should you lay those pictures out? It can get overwhelming if you look at the complex drawings of your favorite comic book artists, so let's break it down and look at a simpler page. Even the most basic art can tell a story if you tell it using rules your audience can recognize:
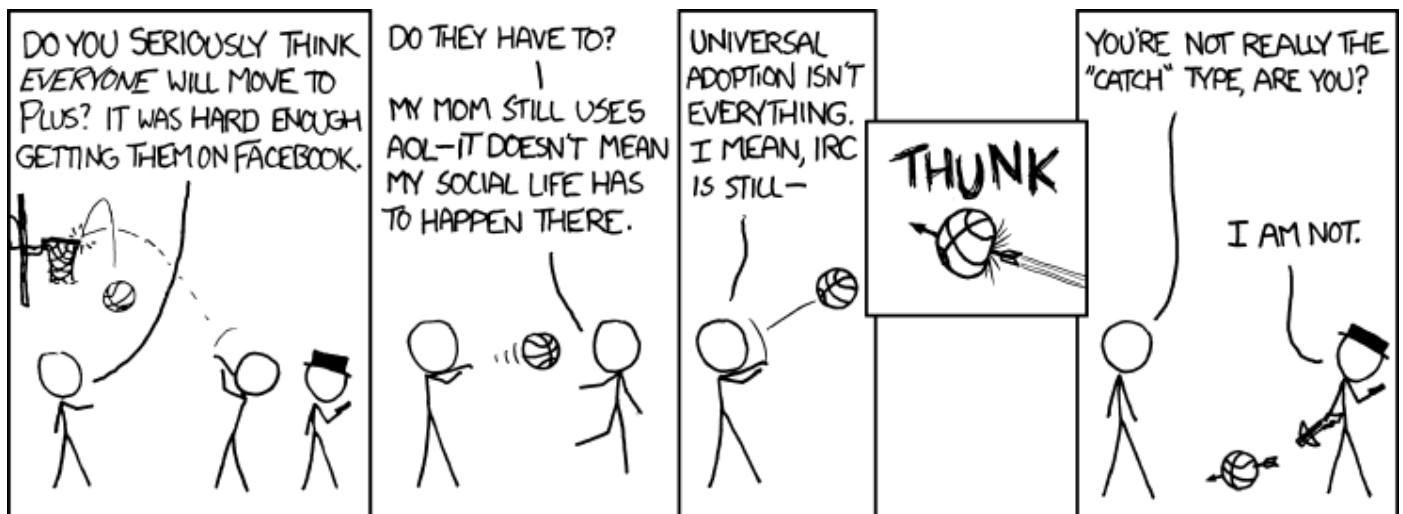
'I was pretty good at skeet shooting, but was eventually kicked off the range for catching the clay pigeons in a net and dispatching them execution style.

XKCD comic downloaded from http://xkcd.com/929

Here, webcomic artist Randall Munroe has told a story, using little more than stick figures and scrawled text, about what happens when everyone isn't playing the same game. What's more, this comic also showcases almost all the basic tools for traditional Western comics: the page, its panels, their borders, their art, word balloons, sound effects, and motion lines.

- ■ **The Page:** The canvas that the comic is drawn on. American comics are roughly 7 by 10 inches (actually, 6⅝" x 10¼"), but you should probably shoot for standard 8.5 x 11 paper or A4 paper depending on what's easiest for you to get in your country.

Webcomics live on the internet and can follow different rules than paper comics.

For example, they can be hundreds of pages deep but any one panel might also be a single click away.

Still, most comic book standard conventions still apply.

53

■ **The Panel:** A region of the page that represents a snapshot in time or an idea. Often panels are rectangular because that's both convenient and conventional – thus less distracting.

■ **Borders:** Panels often, but not always, have borders. In the XKCD comic, there's a traditional panel, a borderless panel, and even a panel overlapping another panel—symbolizing Mr. Black Hat's spring-loaded interruption of the other characters.

Artwork: Consisting of foreground characters, objects, and backgrounds (largely absent from XKCD) the artwork represents what's visually going on in the scene.

■ **Balloons:** Word balloons (shown as outlined words or text with lines as above) and thought balloons (shown with cloud outlines, absent above) represent what people are saying and thinking as events happen – which otherwise would be invisible.

Sound Effects: Text unconnected to a character that represents non-speech sound visually ("Thunk," in the comic above).

Motion Lines: Represent actions happening in the panel (like the motions of the basketball above). Often, they represent moving objects, but manga also use them for backgrounds.

*As often used by Stan Lee in early Marvel Comics –the Eds

Literal comic strips are easy to lay out: they're horizontal ("landscape style") and have three or maybe four panels and are read in the direction that text is read – in many Western countries, from left to right. But a traditional comic book page is vertical ("portrait style") and presents more challenges on how to lay out your art. But one thing remains the same: you should follow the eye direction of your intended reader: left to right, and top to bottom:

Tips for Success

Don't get fancy. Even outside 24 Hour Comic Day, unusual panel breakdowns can confuse readers. Learn the rules before you break them!

Use a fixed layout. For example, *Watchmen* uses a simple 3x3 panel breakdown which gives the story rhythm and is easy for readers to follow.

Vary your panels from time to time. But sameness itself can be boring! Feel free to change it up – it creates interest for your readers!

The Page is Your Archive
Build a Collection of Panels That Tell Your Story

Describe what is happening in this panel.   PANEL #

What's being said?

D R A W   I T

Describe what is happening in this panel.   PANEL #

What's being said?

D R A W   I T

Describe what is happening in this panel.   PANEL #

What's being said?

D R A W   I T

Hey, a blank page.
Go for it and create a 5 dimensional
shape of some kind

What to Show in Your Panels

Understanding the Dramatic Options for Your Artwork

> You've got to be able to draw… from any angle, keep it interesting… draw it fast… keep everybody's attention engaged… – **Dave Sim**

Once you've broken your page down into panels, what do you put in them? If you drew recognizable drawings in your thumbnails or your panel breakdowns, then take heart! Just scale it up to a larger size and flesh the idea out. No need to get fancy! But if you don't have something that can scale up, if you didn't even scribble stick figures into your panels, hopefully you have written notes or at least some vague idea of what you want to go in the panel. But … how do you translate your idea into art?

Well, before we talk about what goes into your panel, let's talk about what goes around it: the dark line called the border. Panel borders can be plain lines, or can be absent; occasionally a panel border can have jagged edges or other effects. Panels with borders create a snapshot effect, focusing on one image, but an endless sequence of them can be monotonous. Panels without borders break that rhythm, allowing art to stand on its own, or to bleed out, covering more of the page.

Whatever border (or lack of) you put on it, the panel is the unit of comics storytelling: a piece of art that represents a single idea, often a view of a person or place in a moment in time. Comics as "sequential art" *is* a sequence of panels. But what goes in a panel? It could be anything! Literally any piece of art can be placed within a panel – up to the limit of your artistic imagination. You can have characters, objects, buildings, landscapes, machinery, diagrams – anything. But that freedom is a curse. Unless you have a specific need to create an amazing piece of art for a panel, it's more useful to imagine that you are a documentary filmmaker, recording the action with a camera. Your story is filled with interesting events, and you want to be in the best place to show each one:

Establishing Shots: When a movie takes us to a new place, filmmakers often use establishing shots to show what kind of vehicle, building or landscape we are now in. To do this, inside the panel, draw the environment surrounding your scene.

Long Shots: While you can depict a forest with its trees, or a skyscraper looking up its facade, a close up shot of a desert looks like a sandbox. To create long shots, draw the scene at large scale – with characters appearing at small size within the panel.

Medium Shots: Once you know the backdrop for an action, you want to see the action itself and the characters that participate in it. These are best done with medium shots, and to create them, draw characters at roughly the size of the panel.

Your reader is a strange beast. While they are experiencing your story they want *to be fooled, lied to, and shocked.*

It's called 'willing suspension of disbelief' and it's the greatest asset you have working for you as a storyteller.

They know they are reading something imaginative, so use *your imagination.*

Help your reader escape their own mundane world and fall face first into your *exciting Universe.*

Close-up Shots: To understand what characters are doing or what they are feeling, we often have to zoom in closer – looking at their hands or faces. These are close-up shots, and to create them, draw body parts or objects at roughly the size of the panel.

Often more than one character is interacting in a panel – for example, a soldier arm-wrestling with her partner, or a chef fighting with a suspect. Or a character might be interacting with an object – for example, a writer defusing a bomb, or a bomb disposal officer at her typewriter.

When the action is clear, make sure the panel is big enough for all the objects and characters. A rule of thumb is to scale panels up by 50% for each new character – two characters fill one and a half normal panels; three characters need a double-sized panel.

But sometimes the action is less clear. For example, when two characters are just talking, the "action" is actually invisible! Comic artist Wally Wood tackled this with "22 Panels That Always Work." (He actually had 24 in his original list, but never mind). A few good ones are:

Extreme Close-ups: Showing a speaking character's head or face very large can provide an appropriate counterpoint to the dialogue.

Extreme Contrasts: Placing a large body part – a gun, a pointing hand – in the foreground and a character in the background creates interest in the relationship.

Dynamic Cropping: Showing *parts* of talking heads – the back of one head opposite the face of another – can create dramatic tension for dialogue.

Empty Backgrounds: Eliminating detail by using all-white or all-black backgrounds behind characters creates dramatic outlines while keeping the focus on the speakers.

Silhouettes and Outlines: Using silhouettes of characters against all white (or even a filled-in background) also creates interest. You can also do white on black.

Pulling Back: Showing the car or building the characters are in, with the dialog balloons coming out of it, can remind the readers where the events are happening.

Perspective and Layering: Showing several layers of objects and characters in perspective creates a sense of place. You can combine this with silhouettes!

Unconventional Panels: At any time, you can throw in a newspaper, a map, a diagram, a high-contrast panel filled with blacks, or delicate outlines. Go nuts!

In our exercises for this section, we give you more ideas on how to break down panels

- **Avoid doing pencils first.** You can 'wake up' at 3AM and find yourself only halfway through your pencils. Be bold - dive in and just use a pen!

- **Be smart fixing mistakes.** If you're using cheap paper and you mess up...just retrace what you've already done onto a fresh sheet of paper OR redraw that panel all by itself on a separate piece of paper and GLUE IT IN PLACE! Trust us...it's better to be done!

- **Use a simplified style of drawing.** This is easiest to develop before 24 Hour Comic Day. Practice drawing faces with the minimal number of lines (cartoon style). Practice drawing simple backgrounds (Charles Schultz like). Practice drawing streamlined clothing. Develop your 24 Hour Comic Day drawing style NOW, before the day!

A short list of design no-no's (*avoid* drawing these things unless you are way ahead on time): tentacles, jungles, cityscapes, crowd scenes, outer space, architecture, elaborate costumes, and pages with large areas of black. On that note ...

- **Use shorthands.** Think you need to draw black backgrounds for every night scene? Forget it! Draw just one and let readers fill in the night *with the power of their minds!*

- **When in doubt, black it out!** Conversely, silhouettes – small areas of black that pick out the outline of an object – are your friends. Don't spend too much time trying to get anything 'just right'. If you're spending too much time in one small area, take your large marker and black that area out! It creates a dynamic silhouette and is an easy solution.

- **If you're really stuck … move on!** If the current page is getting too complicated, either because the drawing has become impossible to finish or you were more ambitious than you realized, move on to the next page. Like taking a test, you can always come back to it when you have time at the end, and it's better to have 23 finished pages and one half-done page than one really awesome page.

It's much better to create simple images with a few lines and then, if you get done early, come back and fill in more details.

Hey, a blank page
Write a love scene between a giraffe and
*Boston Terrier. Height doesn't matter*

BLitz COMICS

Panel Choices #1
Different Ways to Group Your Panels Together

http://www.blitzcomics.com   Remember, It's Better to be Done!

Instructions

Mix and match the many choices for panel layouts that can fit on a single sheet. As a reference sheet, this should get you started on thinking how to use enclosed spaces to communicate your story.
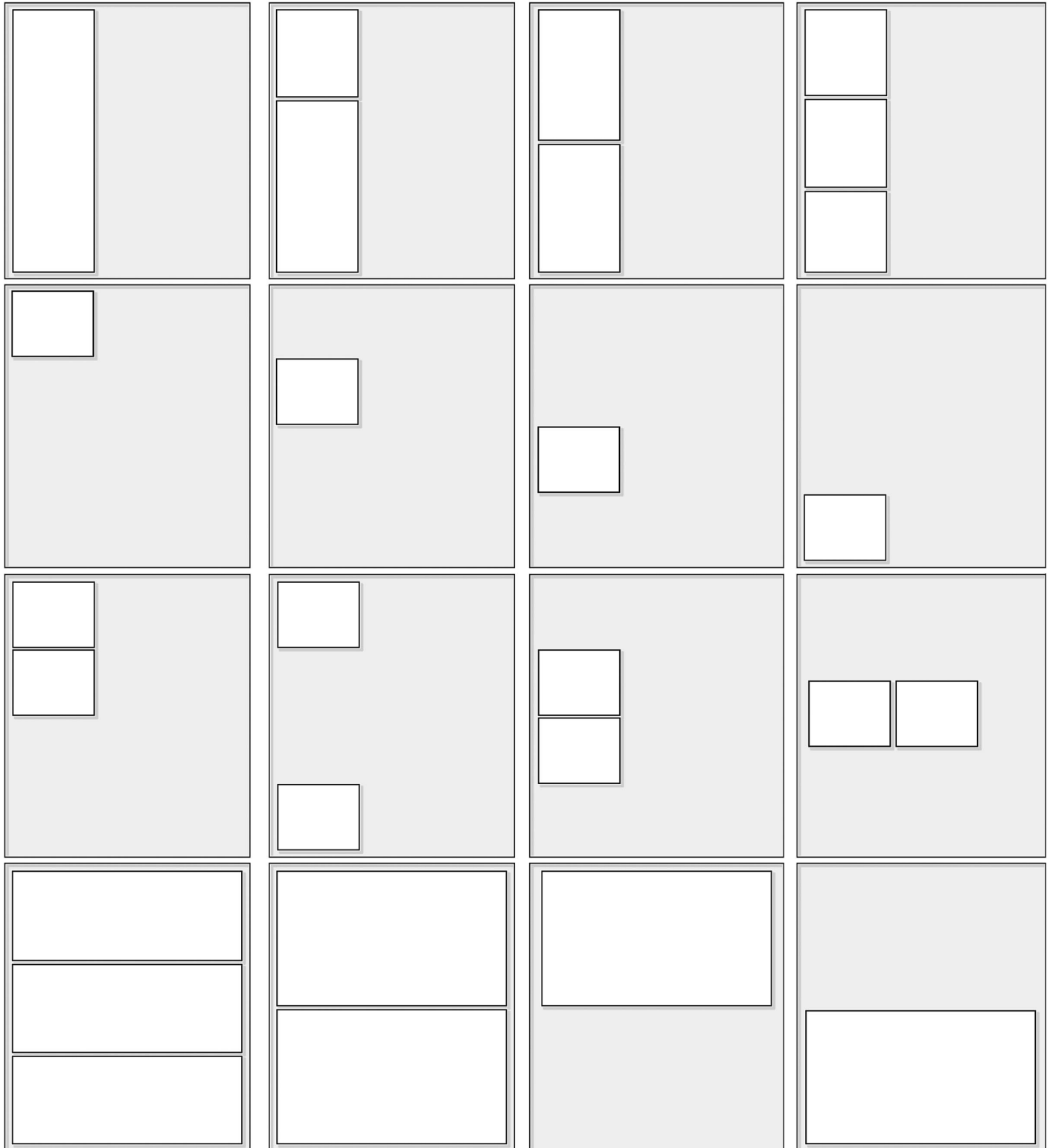
Hey, a blank page.
You've been reading for a while, why not take
a break and stretch something.

Panel Choices #2

Different Ways to Establish Look and Feel in Panels.

BLitz COMICS

http://www.blitzcomics.com   Remember, It's Better to be Done!

Establishing Shot

Extreme Close Up

Extreme Contrast

Long Shot
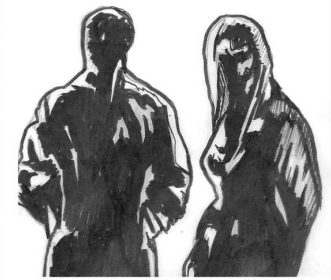

Pulling Back

Perspective Layering

Medium Shot

Empty Background
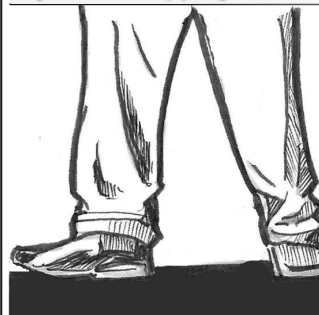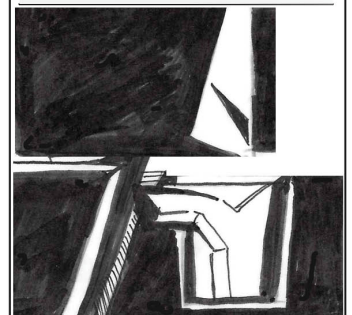

Silhouette

Closeup Shot

Dynamic Cropping

Unconventional

Hey, a blank page.
Write a 5 line poem about watermelons

Turning Shapes into Art

Use Basic Shapes to Make Drawing Easy

> Most things around you are based on three essential geometric shapes: the circle… the square… and the cylinder. –**Stan Lee**

Ok, first off, the bad news: we can't teach you how to draw in a few short pages, especially not if you're already twelve hours into 24 Hour Comic Day, wondering how to tackle the drawing of a contortionist juggling chainsaws that seemed like a good idea in hour 1.

What we can do is provide you pointers to more detailed references, and few basic tips on the tricky stuff. But first, we have to **un-ask the question**. Does your drawing really *need* to be accurate? It's 24 Hour Comic Day! You can draw with stick figures if you have to!

Even though a 24HCD event will likely include some drawing, you could tell your story just using squares and circles talking to each other.

Tips for Success

If artistic integrity (or embarrassment, or stubbornness) demands that you draw something accurate, here are a few suggestions:

Practice first. Earlier we recommended you work cheap and use printer paper. This has several advantages, the first being that you should feel free to break out several sheets of extra paper and try several different approaches to your drawing.

Practice large. Fitting your drawing into a small panel can be hard; try drawing at a much larger size to work out the kinks. If you've got a computer and printer, it's easy to shrink it down, but if not … try the next piece of advice.

Trace yourself. Yes, you can pencil, then ink your drawing, but if you have tracing paper, a lightbox, or thin printer paper, you can often make more progress by doing one drawing, then slapping down a new sheet and inking over that.

Use references. Hopefully you're not surfing the Internet while trying to do 24 Hour Comic Day (but, hey, it's your day), but if you're stumped on a drawing, fire up Google Images and hunt down a photo reference. It is MUCH easier and often looks better!

Tracing paper is a gift from on high. Some people get stone tablets. We get thin, see-through sheets of paper to help change the world.

How does tracing paper free you from worrying too much about making inking mistakes?

Write some ideas here.

Breaking Shapes Down

Now, this may not be concrete enough. You could check out books on drawing comics – *How To Draw Comics the Marvel Way*, the *DC Comics Guide to Penciling Comics*, *Wizard Comics How To Draw – Getting Started*, and many more. But there are a few common techniques:

Use basic shapes. The **sphere**, the **cube**, and the **cylinder** are easy to draw and many shapes can be approximated by distorted spheres (think eggs), cubes (think boxes), and cylinders (think cola cans). The **cone**, **pyramid** and **plane** are also useful.

Break shapes down. Complex shapes like the human body can be broken down into basic shapes. The head is a distorted sphere. The torso is a flattened, tall box. Arms and legs are jointed cylinders. Even hands and feet, notoriously difficult to draw, can be broken down: feet into stretched-out, wedge-shaped pyramids (with an embedded ball for the ankle) and hands are small jointed cylinders stuck onto a flattened box.

Use yourself as a model. Can't figure out a pose? Whip out your cell phone or your laptop / iPad camera and take a picture of yourself as a character. This works really well for many tasks, especially if you break shapes down, then trace yourself.

Pay attention to the negative space. A well-drawn outline can sell an object – think of the silhouette of Indiana Jones - but it's hard to get it right. If you're using reference material, look at where your object is not. That can help you get the outline right.

Remember, objects have depth. Outlines aren't enough, though. Real objects have width, height *and* depth. Train yourself to "think through" an object and think about where its back is. That will help you not clutter things up in the frame.

Comic Book Conventions

What if you have good drawing skills, but don't know how to translate that into comic book art? Use comic book conventions – and we don't mean San Diego Comic-Con. We mean *graphical short-hands that quickly communicate an idea to your intended audience.*

Think of a cloud of smoke, with fists and feet poking out, obscuring a fight. Now, fights don't look like that – but if you've read enough newspaper comic strips, it's an immediately recognizable image that means "fight in progress – humor to follow."

Don't you want to draw panels that are that easy for 24 Hour Comic Day?

There are three major kinds conventions: facial expressions, genre conventions, and to a lesser degree sound effects. All of these are different in different cultures; we'll give examples from American comics and Japanese manga because, hey, that's what we know.

Facial Expressions: There are eight universal human facial expressions: ***neutral and surprise, fear and anger, disgust and contempt, sadness and joy***. Beyond these eight, there are hundreds of variants, but you don't need to master all of them to communicate effectively. You should practice the major expressions in advance, or use a facial expression cheat sheet to help you draw the right expression on the fly.

Genre Conventions: While human expressions are essentially the same across all cultures, there is a whole language of expression and movement particular to American comics, Japanese comics (or even American comics in a Japanese style):

Speed lines: In American comics, lines indicating motion. Trailing parallel lines indicate fast movement (imagine them trailing a fastball) and radiating lines can mean a sudden stop (imagine them shooting off the ball in the catcher's mitt).

Patterned backgrounds: In Japanese manga, a non-real patterned background behind a character indicating a sudden revelation (imagine a wall of wavy lines behind Vader as he cries "Luke, I am your father!") or emotional distress (now think a strike of lightning behind Luke as he cries "No! That's impossible!")

Sweat drops and nosebleeds: Stereotyped, unnatural bodily reactions are seen more in Japanese manga than American comics—a large single sweat drop can mean a character is worried, whereas a comically spraying nosebleed generally means a boy has fallen for a girl.

Sound Effects: The printed depiction of a noise on a page. These are controversial; some American manga use sound effects extensively, whereas "widescreen comics" sometimes eliminate them completely. You have to decide what YOU want to do.

Study your favorite comics or get a cheat sheet that summarizes the conventions for you. We've included some cheat sheets below, and the reference section has pointers to more books and references on art and drawing.

Hey, a blank page.
Write the first 3 paragraphs of a science fiction
murder mystery that involves amoebas.

See the Basic Shape #1
Train Your Hand to 'see' What is Really There

http://www.blitzcomics.com   Remember, It's Better to be Done!

Everything you will ever draw is built on basic shapes. To see the shape of things, without being distracted by surface details, cut on the dotted lines and create a Portable Grid System. Hold this grid up and open the windows (in any sequence) to help you learn to 'see' what's really there.

Snip on Dotted Line to Open Window #1

Snip on Dotted Line to Open Window #2

Snip on Dotted Line to Open Window #3

Snip on Dotted Line to Open Window #4

Your brain holds a 'Picture Dictionary' of all the physical objects you've experienced. But these internal pictures are not real. Use this Portable Grid System to train your hands to draw.

Hey, a blank page.
Stare deeply into the blankness and try to see
what's going on in a different dimension.

That's All We Have - Now It's Up To You

So that's it! That's all we have. Actually, it isn't, but this isn't a complete comic book creator's guide – it's a survival guide to 24 Hour Comic Day. To get 24 pages of a comic done in 24 hours, you need to focus on the essentials, and we've tried to give you that here.

If you need more information on any of these topics, we've provided references on the reverse of this page, and there's even more information available on the Blitz Comics web site at http://www.blitzcomics.com/ .

But watch out! There's more material in all of those references than you can possibly read in 24 hours, much less than in 24 hours in which you hope to complete 24 pages of a comic! Ultimately to survive the day you're going to need the greatest resource you have – *yourself!*

Now that you've read this guide, you have all the tools you need to prepare for a successful 24HCD! When in doubt, do some completely basic (and yet awesomely clever) thing like *not worrying too much, drawing whatever you have to, and moving on to the next page!*

Remember, buck up! You are awesome, and 24 Hour Comic Day is there for you! The only thing that's preventing you from completing it are the creative barriers you place on yourself; if you eliminate those, you will find anything is possible!

Now, it's up to you! **Good luck!**

> Oh...and remember, it's much, much better to be done.

You should drop us a line and tell us what you hated about this guide, what you loved, and what you'd like to see added.

Send your messages to: **contact@blitzcomics.com**

We'd love to meet you and hear about your 24HCD experiences or just about your life. We visit conventions and run seminars (we call them Learning Labs) all over the United States.

Find us, come say hi and let's break down some creative barriers together!

Books and Web Sites with More Information

Someone might take away your pens. They could steal your paper. They might even tie your hands behind your back, but they can NEVER take away what you know.

Knowledge is Power.

24 Hour Comic Day:

- ■ www.24hourcomicsday.com

- ■ **Find a venue:**
  www.24hourcomicsday.com/event-locator/

■ **Blitz Comics:**

- ■ www.blitzcomics.com

- ■ Latest version of this Survival Kit:
  www.blitzcomics.com/go/kit-latest

■ **A Fantasy Name Generator:**

- ■ www.rinkworks.com/namegen

■ **Scott McCloud's Websites:**

- ■ scottmccloud.com

- ■ *Understanding Comics*:
  scottmccloud.com/2-print/1-uc

- ■ *Reinventing Comics:*
  scottmccloud.com/2-print/2-rc

- ■ *Making Comics:*
  scottmccloud.com/2-print/3-mc

■ **ComicsPRO Web Site:** http://www.comicspro.org

■ **Comics and Sequential Art:**

- ■ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comics_and_Sequential_Art

■ **Donna Young's Comics Templates:**

- ■ donnayoung.org/art/comics.htm

■ **Wizard Comics How to Draw: Getting Started**

■ **DC Comics Guides**

   DC Comics Guide to Penciling Comics

   DC Comics Guide to Inking Comics

   DC Comics Guide to Creating Comics

Other Comics Guides

   How To Draw Comics the Marvel Way

   Stan Lee's How to Draw Comics

   Joe Kubert's Comic Book Studio

   Comic Book Rebels

The Authors Would Like to Thank…

All the Hardworking People Who Make 24 Hour Comic Day Possible

> Beware anyone trying to sell you on their way of doing a 24 Hour Comic… do what works for you, not for them. –**Nat Gertler**

Go ahead and use this column to draw some doodles. Let your mind wander.

Allow your imagination to dream.

24 Hour Comic Day has changed our lives, and we want to thank all the people who helped bring that force of change into the world and helped us nurture our interest in it:

A special thanks goes to Scott McCloud, the godfather of this guide, for inventing the 24 Hour Comic *challenge*. He made a challenge we couldn't refuse:

scottmccloud.com

Additional thanks goes to Nat Gertler for inaugurating 24 Hour Comic *Day*: We hope to help it reach more people every year.

www.gertler.com

Very special thanks to Leef Smith and Mission Comics of San Francisco, CA, for hosting our local 24HCD and giving us our first big break:

www.MissionComicsAndArt.com

Thanks to Dan Vado and the staff of Slave Labor Graphics for encouraging Blitz Comics to write down our ideas for the Survival Guide and providing the motivation to do something about it in our city:

www.slgcomic.com

Finally, a super thanks to ComicsPRO for keeping the 24HCD dream alive and for being so supportive of what we are trying to do with Blitz Comics:

www.comicspro.org

This is our attempt at giving something back to the art community, so use it in good faith.

So, what are you waiting for?
GO FORTH AND CREATE!
:-)

The Dare: Create a 24 Page Comic Book in 24 Hours
The Challenge: Finishing 24 Pages ... and Surviving!

Ever wanted to create your own comic? Believe us, you can! 24 Hour Comic Day is a worldwide challenge to create a new comic in 24 Hours, and this guide will help you not just survive, but succeed!

Created by two five-year veterans of 24HCD, the Guide covers:
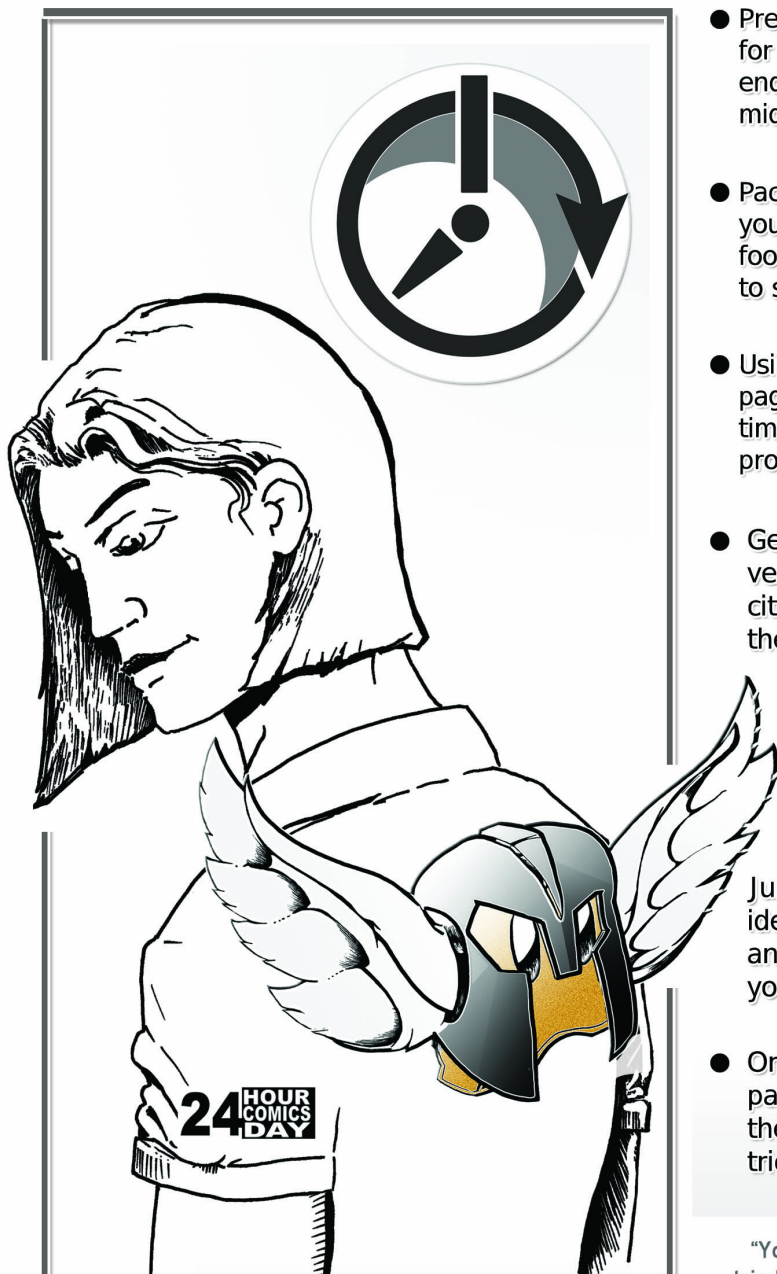
- Preparing your mind and body for best chance of getting to the end without falling asleep in the middle.

- Packing effectively so that you've got the art materials, food – and toiletries! – you need to survive the event.

- Using time effectively – finishing pages in 45 minutes, avoiding time traps, and checking your progress regularly.

- Getting the most out of your venue by being a good comics citizen (and how to deal with the bad apples).

Also Learn...

Jumpstarting your story with idea generators, story webs, and plot line tools that help you identify conflict.

- Organizing your art to fill 24 pages, to communicate within the page, and to deal with tricky drawings (hint: cheat!).

"You haven't really lived until you have tried to make comics under the effect of sleep deprivation."
-Kevin Copeland, Author of Scatterbrain

24 HOUR COMICS DAY

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