



# Surviving 24 Hour Comics Day

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REMEMBER, IT'S  
BETTER TO BE  
DONE!

## What is 24 Hour Comic Day?

*IT'S ABOUT CREATING A 24 PAGE COMIC IN 24 CONSECUTIVE HOURS.*

Started by Scott McCloud in 1990, 24 Hour Comics Day is now an institution, with artists not just tackling it in their own studios but participating at events held in venues all around the world.

**The easiest way to explain it is with Scott McCloud's own words.**

**THE DARE:** To create a complete 24 page comic book in 24 continuous hours.

*That means everything: Story, finished art, lettering, color (if applicable), paste-up, everything. Once pen hits paper, the clock starts ticking. 24 hours later, the pen lifts off the paper, never to descend again. Even proofreading has to occur in the 24 hour period. (Computer-generated comics are fine of course, same principles apply).*

*No sketches, designs, plot summaries or any other kind of direct preparation can precede the 24 hour period. Indirect preparation such as assembling tools, reference materials, food, music etc. is fine.*

*Your pages can be any size, any material. Carve them in stone, print them with rubber stamps, draw them on your kitchen walls with a magic marker. Whatever you makes you happy.*

*The 24 hours are continuous. You can take a nap, but the clock keeps ticking. If you get to 24 hours and you're not done, either end it there ("the Gaiman Variation") or keep going until you're done ("the Eastman Variation"). I consider both of these "Noble Failure" Variants and true 24 hour comics in spirit; but you must sincerely intend to do the 24 pages in 24 hours at the outset.*

From <http://www.scottmccloud.com/4-inventions/24hr/dare/index.html>

We, the authors, tried 24 Hour Comics Day several times and failed. Then we wrote the first version of this guide, collecting all the things we knew that worked and didn't. The next time we tackled 24 Hour Comics Day, we succeeded and you can too.

## ***USING YOUR TIME WISELY***

There are 24 hours in a day and 24 pages in a 24 Hour Comic, so you may think you have an hour to finish each page. Think again:

- **One Minute Spent During Each Hour Costs a Half Hour over the Day:** If you do something each hour, whether sharpening your pencil, live blogging your progress or getting a soda, ***the time it takes gets multiplied 24 times***. Even something that takes one minute adds up to 24 minutes over the day.  
*Congratulations. Texting your S.O. used up half an hour out of your twenty four.*
- **One Hour Spent During the Day Costs 2.5 Minutes out of Each Page:** If you take a break, whether to set up your table, to have dinner, or take a nap, ***the time spent gets taken out of each of your 24 pages***. Even a break as short as an hour chops chops 2.5 minutes out of each page.  
*Congratulations. Overthinking left you with 57.5 minutes to finish each page.*

The solution is not to skip dinner or never sharpen your pencil and if you're planning on never going to the bathroom, good luck. The solution is being realistic about how much time you need for adminstrivia and being smart about the rest of your time.

## ***PREPARING AHEAD VERSUS BEING REALISTIC ABOUT YOUR TIME***

But wait, you say. Why can't I just prepare ahead to save that time? Well, sure! There are things that you can do to avoid using time you don't need to, of course:

- Sharpen lots of pens, pencils and other writing implements before you begin
- Set your workspace up before the 24 Hour Comics day officially starts
- Pack lunch, dinner, snacks and breakfast so you don't have to break for lunch

But trust us: you *will* need to sharpen a pencil or adjust your workspace, and you won't be able to eat in zero time. Worse, what if something bad happens?

- Your RSI (repetitive strain injury) acts up so you need to take a wrist break
- You knock your jar of pens, pencils and other writing implements off the table
- You get sick from your packed lunch and lose an hour in the bathroom

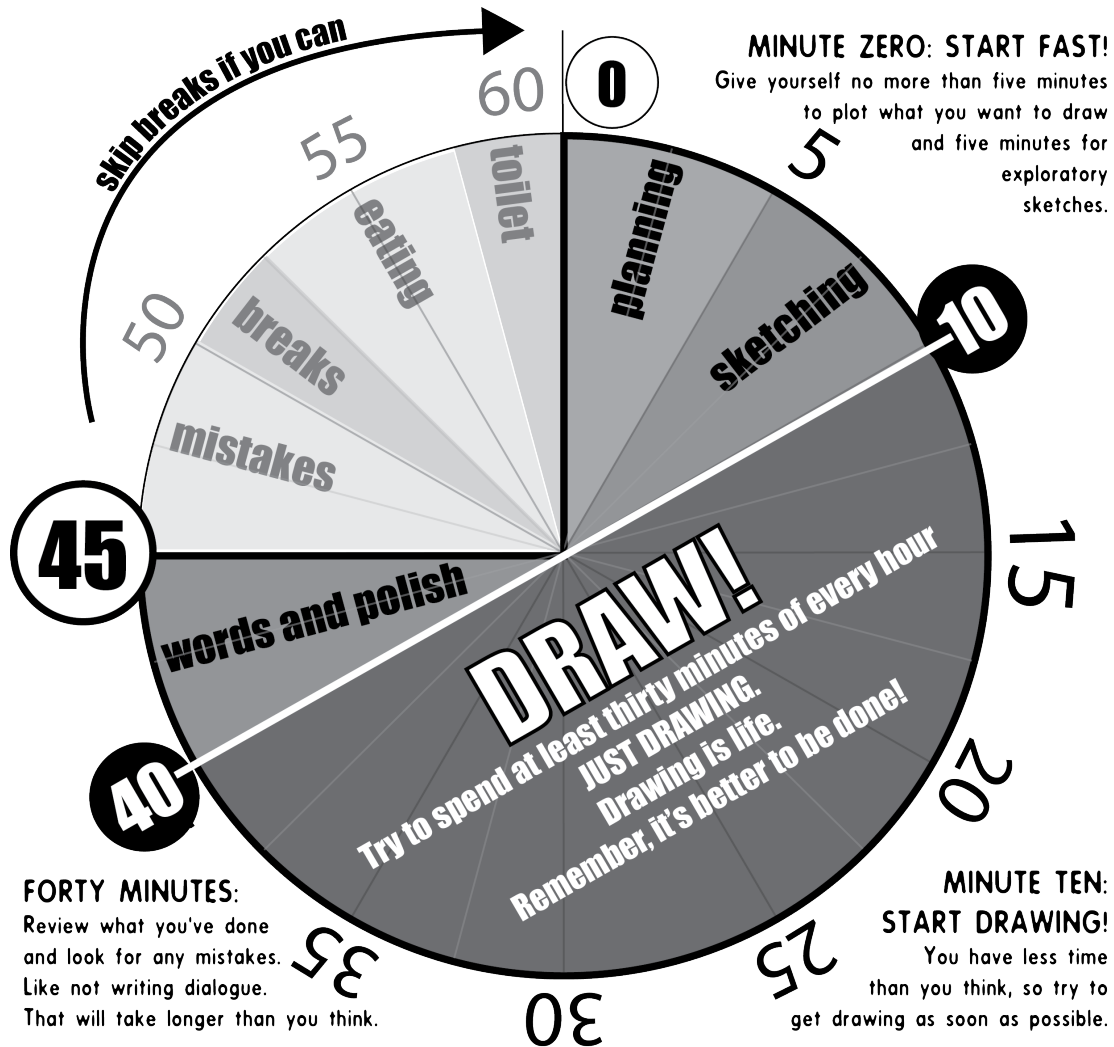
A better approach is to be realistic about your time.

First, list the things that you do once or at most a few times during the day lunch, dinner, breakfast, snacks, drinks, bathroom breaks, brain breaks, and naps and divide their time by 24 to figure out how much it costs each hour. **We estimate you'll spend two hours on adminstrivia, which will cost five minutes each hour.**

Then, add the things you have to do EACH hour that aren't actually drawing: planning your page, sketching it if that's part of your process, drawing it, and adding lettering. If you're a web-comic artist or have other elements of your process, add them in too. We estimate the support tasks of drawing will take up to ten minutes each hour.

**Between administrivia and support tasks, you can lose fifteen minutes each hour.** So if it takes 60 minutes to finish a page, congratulations: you're going to lose. At the end of the day you'll have around 18 pages done, maybe 20 if you're really hard on yourself, half starving, half mad with thirst, clenching your buttocks while you frantically scribble with a blunt pencil gripped desperately in your numb, throbbing claws. Or you can try to finish *each page* in 45 minutes so you can finish *all of them*.

To help visualize this, we created a diagram we call the **Hour Wheel**:



The hour wheel is a graphic way to visualize the minutes in each hour and how they translate into hours in a day. If fifteen minutes are spent on unproductive activities, you have forty five minutes to complete a page. Even then, you will probably spend at least fifteen minutes on non drawing productivity leaving half an hour to draw.

## WHY WE RECOMMEND 45 MINUTE PAGES

After our initial failures, we analyzed what goes on during the course of a day and added up the time things typically take. Think about spending an 8 hour day at work. Depending on your jurisdiction, your employer may be required to give you a 30 minute lunch and two 15 minute breaks for each 8 hour shift.

**Now think:** 24 Hour Comics Day is **THREE 8 hour shifts**. Even if you're going to be harder on yourself than your employer, do you realistically think you can eat, drink, hit the toilet and work without mistakes for 0 minutes out of the 24 hours?

If you are willing to be realistic that you'll lose some time, think about *how* you'll lose it. Make sure you don't waste more time than you need to on things that can cost you:

- **Eating:** If you give yourself no more than 30 minutes to eat lunch, dinner, and breakfast, and leave 15 minutes each for midnight snacks and beverage breaks, that's two hours over the course of the day, or five minutes lost from each hour. *Don't* assume you can power through by wolfing down crap food. It's not just that candy bars will cause blood sugar spikes where good food will keep you going. It's that you really can't shave off that much time. *Ten* minutes for breakfast, lunch, dinner, midnight snacks, and beverages will still take almost an hour2.5 minutes. Do yourself a favor: whether you pack a lunch or go to a café, eat good mealsand count that time.
- **Breaks:** There are a lot of reasons to take breaks. For your eyes. For your wrists. For your back. To recharge your brain juice. Realistically, you should take two and a half minutes out of each hour to at least stretch. For your health, you should take more. But we'll give you two and half minutes each hourone hour out of your whole day.
- **Toilet:** We don't know about you, but we hit the toilet more than once a day, and it takes more than a minute each time. It probably takes more than two and a half minutes, but most people don't need to go to the bathroom every hour. So we'll give you an hour to hit the can over the day, averaging out to two and a half minutes. If you're ahead of schedule, splurge. Go brush your teeth and splash water in your face. You'll thank us.
- **Mistakes:** Not every page is going to work. Not every idea is salvageable. And not every coffee spill can be mopped up before the stain sinks into the page. You're going to make mistakesin the design of a panel, in the execution of a drawing, in the ripping of the paper. If you knew when they were going to happen, you could avoid thembut you don't. Assume you lose less than one out of ten pages. That's two (idealized) hours out of the dayfive minutes of every hour.

All those sources of breaks add up to fifteen minutes. So you've got at most forty-five minutes left. So you now have two powerful motivations: to power through everything nonessential quickly and make no mistakesor to try to finish each page early.

## ***USING TIME EFFECTIVELY***

If you only have 45 minutes to finish a page, how can you use it effectively? Well, you need to do at least two things to finish a page: draw it and letter it. Depending on your process, you might just wing the whole thing. And that's perfectly OK. You'll get done faster if you do.

If you're doing something more planned, however, you're going to need to decide *what* you're going to draw, sketch out how it should look, script the words go with it, draw the page itself, and then letter it. A lot of that isn't drawing.

*You should spend the minimum possible time on things that aren't drawing.*

## ***TRY TO SPEND LESS THAN 15 MINUTES ON PREPARATION***

Plotting, sketching, and scripting are preparation: they do not actually produce pages. If you've got 45 minutes to produce a page, you're better off spending less than a third of that on stuff that doesn't produce output. Say ten minutes max. Here are some tips...

- **Plotting: Deciding what you want to draw on the page.** If you're winging it, this may be no more complicated than Cold Pizza Man duking it out with The Salad Avenger." If you've got a more complicated story, make sure you leave enough room in the story. If you want to end your story with the Salad Avenger's victory after a long struggle, but by page 22 the hero and villain haven't even met you're in trouble. If there's any doubt in your mind, spend at least five minutes thinking this through. Actually, spend at most five minutes thinking it through.
- **Sketching: Deciding how you want your page to look.** Again, if you're winging it, cartooning it, or playing it abstract, this may not matter. But whether you're doing a splash page, a complicated battle sequence or two people sitting down for dinner, having a rough sketch of what you want can make finishing the drawing go easier and faster and prevent mistakes. Spend at least five minutes sketching if there's any doubt. Actually, spend at most you get the idea.
- **Scripting: Deciding what your characters want to say.** We don't recommend allotting time for this separate from plotting, sketching, and lettering. The Marvel Method proved that it's possible to draw art to a rough outline and then letter it. If your comic depends heavily on words, however, you may want to take time from sketching and plotting to make sure the dialogue is right.

Rather than taking ten minutes out of every hour, you can take a couple of hours up front to storyboard your whole comic. This tackles plotting, sketching, and scripting all together and effectively packs what would be ten minutes of effort out of every hour into half that time but it's risky, as you can easily get carried away and lose track of time.

As another alternative, you can just wing it, throwing traditional narrative convention to the wind. It's your comic, and no one can stop you. Go nuts!

## ***SPEND AT LEAST HALF OF YOUR TIME JUST DRAWING***

Drawing and lettering are what produce completed pages. Typically, drawing is both the more time-consuming, demanding activity (unless you are an expert calligrapher who insists on working at a very high level of quality you do know this is 24 Hour Comic Day, right?) You can have scrawled lettering as long as it's legible, but a squiggle is just not Captain Godot unexpectedly arriving at one of Sartre's posh dinner parties.

We recommend spending **half of each hour just drawing**. If you spent no more than ten minutes on preparation, that leaves five minutes to letter your page (if you aren't doing it while you draw) which you can probably accomplish if you do it hastily (or you can take your time with if you're ahead). If you try to finish each page in thirty minutes of drawing, you should have more than enough time to hit the can, stretch your wrists, and sit down to do the next page well ahead of schedule.

Now let's talk about how, practically, you can get your 24 pages done.

## ***PRACTICAL ADVICE ON GETTING IT DONE***

This thing can eat you alive. Here are some tips on getting out alive. These aren't exclusive. Some of them are actually contradictory. Pick the ones that will work for you.

- **Plan at least one splash page somewhere** in the middle of your book. That way you won't have to worry too much about panels for that one hour. Just smack the page with something large!
- Spend five minutes of hour one **writing notes on each page** before you draw.
- Use a **story seed generator** to flesh out your story (if you're lacking one). Spend at most a few minutes on this. *See the Plot Line exercise for how to do this!*
- **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.
- **Decide on an ending.** (Or at least an abstract idea of the last scene).
- Even go as far as to **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.
- **Jot down some quick and easy notes on the final page.** That will help you remember during hour 21, just why you drew a unicorn with a cast on his horn eating some cake...
- You can even consider drawing your book backwards! **Write to the start!**

Feel free to ignore any or all of this advice. But consider this: what are you trying to achieve? Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons didn't complete *Watchmen* in 24 hours. The purpose of 24 Hour Comics Day is not to realize your every artistic ambition but just prove to yourself you can execute on some of your ambitions right away, in 24 hours, with a *completed* end product.

## ***TIPS AND TRICKS TO SHORTEN THE TIME ON CERTAIN ELEMENTS:***

- **Work small!** Nothing larger than 8.5x5.5 inch paper. Half the size of a regular sheet of paper. If you like what you did, redo the \*finished\* 24 hour comic onto better paper afterwards.
- **Work Light.** Wondering which pen to use? Don't. Use only 1 pen. You have 10 different pencils you want to use? Don't! Use just one type. (of course, bring a couple spares)
- **Work Forward.** Want to shade that oval for five minutes? STOP! Make the minimum number of lines to get the idea then move forward.
- **Work Cheap.** Use printer paper. Seriously, because you don't need to spend brain power worried you'll smear your \$3 Bristol Board...
- Use a **simplified style** of drawing. **Practice** making really fast backgrounds (Charles Schultz like). Practice drawing clothing faster.
- **Make faces with minimal number of lines.** Develop your 24 Hour Comic Day drawing style NOW, before the day!
- **A short list of design No-No's** (means *avoid* drawing these things unless you are waaaaaay ahead on time): Tentacles, Jungles, Cityscapes, Outer Space Vistas, Intricate Costumes, Pages With a Lot of Black.
- **When in doubt, black it out!** Don't spend too much time trying to get anything 'just right'. If you're spending too much time in one small area, and you doubt you can get it right in a few minutes, take your large marker and black that area out. It's an easy solution to potential deadlock.
- **Decide on your genre going in.** Practice drawing simplified versions of elements in that genre before the actual day.
- Stretch out your hands and wrists often, at least every hour. **Seriously.**
- **Don't give up!** What's better? Being exhausted with a shiny new completed 24 hour comic in your hands OR being exhausted with a half finished attempt?
- **No chips or candy as your sole food supply.** Your body will hate you after hour 14 or so...Make some of your own food beforehand and bring a small cooler. **If you don't**, consider this... Do you really wanna burn valuable time ordering up a sandwich at the deli around the corner when you can make it just the way you like it and bring it along?
- **If you stick to it, the pages can start writing and drawing themselves.** You must push forward till you hit that wall where you want to quit (you'll have many moments like this). One way to break through is have a character mirror EXACTLY what you are thinking and feeling. Draw the emotions and say the words your own brain is screaming! This will move that feeling out of your head and onto the paper! It's a Win-Win!
- **Don't be chatty!** Sure, field the occasional question but then buckle down again but fast!
- **Avoid doing pencils first.** Dive in and just use a pen! 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!

**If something doesn't work for you, don't feel bad about it - do something different!** Any piece of advice may work for some people but not others. That's particularly true of the "pages can start writing themselves" advice - that doesn't happen for everyone!

If our advice doesn't work for you, remember, you aren't the loser - we are, for giving crappy advice! Please feel free to do things your own way - it's *your* 24 Hour Comic!

### ***REAL WORLD OBJECTS YOU CAN DEFINITELY USE:***

- **Your own light source.** Avoid the clip style, it's hard to find a place to clip them. Go for one that is bendy with its own base. We recommend compact fluorescent lights (CFLs): they save power and don't get as hot as conventional bulbs.
- **Bring your own power strip** - essential if you have stuff you want to keep charged, like a phone, tablet, laptop, lights, MP3 player, etc....
- A cooler with your **food** and drinks.
- **A cheat sheet for basic facial expressions.** Sure you can do Internet searches but have you ever tried to trace on a computer screen?
- Find someone else in the room who inspires you. **If you're gonna chat with someone, choose that person.** (Beware: other artists might steal this from you)
- **A clean shirt, pants, and socks.** Not for the obvious reasons (24HCD \*is\* stressful, we know). When you feel restless, like you've been grinding slowly into dust and your butt is sticking to the chair...change your clothes into something more fresh. You'll be glad you did....
- **A chewable multi-vitamin.** Consider giving your body something to draw on (pun intended) that may translate into more brain power, a release of hidden energy, and clarity of thought. *Warning: Only you know if your body can tolerate a multivitamin. Use responsibly.*
- **Toothbrush and toothpaste.** Brush your teeth at night and you'll get a real mental and physical boost. There's really no need to marinate in your own juices all night...is there?

**Good Luck!**

Stirring words of conclusion and such. ***Remember, it's better to be done!***

*Very special thanks to **ComicsPRO**, **Scott McCloud**, and **Mission Comics** of San Francisco, CA.*  
To view the most updated information, please visit [www.ComicsPRO.org](http://www.ComicsPRO.org), [www.BlitzComics.com](http://www.BlitzComics.com), and  
[www.MissionComicsAndArt.com](http://www.MissionComicsAndArt.com)





### How to Complete this Idea Generator

Draw connecting lines between different headers, like so:

**Mythic Place** <-----> **Crime**

Keep drawing your connecting lines until you have a story structure that interests you. Example:

**Love** <-----> **Alien** : **Western** <-----> **Supernatural**

Try and limit the total number of connecting lines, for clarity sake.

## Create a Story Web

*CONNECT YOUR STORY PIECES..  
UNTIL YOU'VE CAUGHT IT!*

### THEMES

**Crime** ●

**Heroism** ●

**Fate** ●

**Resurrection** ●

**Restoration** ●

Add you own ●

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### CHARACTER

**Gardener** ●

**Panhandler** ●

**Superhero** ●

**Alien** ●

**Little Sister** ●

Add you own ●

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### GENRE

● **Western**

● **Romance**

● **Sci-Fi**

● **Epic**

● **Parody**

● Add you own

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### CONFLICT

● **Achievement** ●

● **Jealousy** ●

● **Love** ●

● **Survival** ●

● **Supernatural** ●

● Add you own ●

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### SETTING

● **Outer Space**

● **Mythic Place**

● **The Future**

● **Dystopia**

● **Crossover**

● Add you own

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



### How to Complete this Idea Generator

1. **WHO** "A hang glider pilot, who is afraid of cats
2. **WANTS** ..wants to glide across the English Channel
3. **BUT** ..but must first get permission from the Queen of England
4. **AND** ..and become friends with the Queen's feline companion.
5. **ACTION** So he adopts a cat and videos as he trains it to sit in a basket.
6. **GOAL** The video goes viral and the Queen personally calls our hero to meet his cat and give him permission to fly over the Channel."

## Plot Line Generator

*GET TO THE BOTTOM LINE  
OF YOUR STORY.*

