

Tips and Tricks for Creating Comic Strips

Tip 1: Work out your story first.

Ask yourself:

- What do I want to say? Is there a point I want to make?
- What is required to achieve my goal?
 - What words; what pictures?
 - What is going to happen in each frame?



Remember, comics tell a story using both words and pictures. You wouldn't want to draw a picture of Jane running and also include text that says, "Jane ran." It would be much more interesting to include text like *HELP!* Reading cartoons can give you ideas for storylines and how to present them. Just don't copy!

Trick: Plan the story in writing, giving clear notes as to what you want in each frame of the comic strip. Add quick sketches with stick figures in your plan. Use pencil so that you can make changes without having to start the plan over. This plan will be your guide.

Tip 2: Visualize your characters and practice drawing them.

Ask yourself:

- Is your character a know-it-all, a bully, an innocent little girl?
- Do these characters have unique characteristics—a wild hairstyle or a funny nose or purple hair?
- Is your character happy, sad, confused, excited, angry, furious, or in love?
- What is your character wearing?



A character does not need to be a person. A circle can be a character, or an animal, or even a broom. What's important is to make your character come alive. Knowing your character's personality and emotions brings that character to life and makes your comic strip more interesting.

Trick: Use speech balloons and text to help express emotions. For example, a heart shaped speech balloon or an oval speech balloon with little hearts encircling the text can help convey a crush or being in love. Sometimes an image in the speech balloon works better than text to explain what is going on with the character. A light bulb in a speech balloon says your character has an idea. The possibilities are unlimited.

Tip 3: Visualize your setting and practice drawing it.

Ask yourself:

- Does your story take place in a park, on school grounds, or in a classroom?
- Is there an important object in your story like a broken-down car or a trash pile?
 - Do you want to give this object a personality? For example, turn the headlights of a car into eyes and have them react to what the characters are saying.



You need to make sure you have space for speech balloons, so don't crowd your settings with too many objects.

Trick: Keep backgrounds simple so that they are easily reproduced. If the story occurs outdoors, you might want to divide the frame into two parts: ground and sky. It's also a good idea to place objects in the same place in each frame, unless moving the object is an important part of your story. Otherwise, moving things around can distract the reader's attention.

Tip 4: Decide what colors to use beforehand.

Adding color to your characters will bring them more fully to life. Color choices can be as natural or as quirky as you wish, but you should always consider the context—an outfit of purple and green may look great on a super-villain, but not so much on a baby.

Color is also good for expressing a dominant mood. Warm colors like red, yellow, and orange evoke feelings of warmth and comfort, but also feelings of anger and hostility if used boldly. Blue, purple and green are cool colors. They are often described as calm, but can also evoke feelings of sadness or loneliness.

Ask yourself:

- How can my characters benefit from my color choices?
- Should I color the environment as it's normally seen (blue sky, green grass) or do I want to use unexpected colors to help create a mood?



it's important to remember that color isn't just about what color you use, it's also about intensity (do I use a bright red for my fire truck or a dull or dark red?) and applying color (do I want to shade my object to give it a more 3-D feeling?).

Trick: Don't use too many colors unless you want to create a confusing environment. Many of the most memorable comic characters were designed with just two dominant colors—Spiderman (red and blue) and Fred Flintstone (black and orange) are good examples. A color wheel can help you choose colors that work well together. Once you have decided on your colors, create a color pallet in your plan and stick to it.

Tip 5: Draw a rough sketch of your comic strip and share it with others to see if it conveys the message you want.

Trick: Use a soft-lead pencil and draw your sketch with a light hand so that you can easily erase. You might want to make changes to the text or your characters—like facial expressions—while talking with your reviewers.

Tip 6: Steps for putting it all together.

Follow these steps:

- Use pencil and draw with a light hand.
- Draw everything including speech balloons and text boxes, but DON'T include text.
- Use a ruler and lightly draw in grid lines where text will be placed.
- Pencil in text on the grid lines. Do not go outside the speech balloon or text box.
- Once everything looks how you want it, ink over the pencil.
- Erase the pencil when your ink has dried.
- Color.



Remember to use a light hand when you sketch out your comic strip. Using a heavy hand will make erasing the pencil very difficult. It will also leave an indentation in the paper that doesn't color well. Your comic will look messy.

Trick: It is best to use a black pen when inking your cartoon. Try to keep your technique consistent—if you use dots to create shadows, don't suddenly switch to cross-hatching. Wait about 15 minutes after you finish inking your comic before erasing the pencil. Use a soft or kneadable eraser.

There are many good web sites on comics. www.courtsed.org/courts-in-the-classroom is an especially good reference for the First Amendment Contest. Have fun!