MakingComics *Comics Education For Everyone*

UNDERDOGS

10 THINGS BEFORE YOU START A COMIC OR GRAPHIC NOVEL!

September 24, 2014 — Made by Jason Brubaker

Do you have a long form project in mind? Are you ready to pull the trigger and start the journey? Well, believe it or not, there are some really important things to know and do before you start. But don't just take my word for it either, sometimes you need to work for 20 years in an uphill battle before you can get something important through your thick skull. I know, because that is how it was for me.

So, here is my simple list of things to consider before starting your comic project.

1) Read books on the subject. I recommend Understanding Comics and Making Comics by Scott McCloud first. I would also pick up How to Make Webcomics because putting it online is the best thing you can do these days especially if you are a no-name artist or writer. [Also, it wouldn't hurt to check out Jason's own book – Unnatural Talent]

- Understanding Comics by Scott McCloud
- Making Comics by Scott McCloud
- How to Make Webcomics

2) Make a Model Sheet or Turnaround or even sculpt your characters in 3D or clay. The last thing you want to do is start redrawing characters half way through your magnum opus.


3) Start with an idea that you really believe in and want to share with others. This is important. It takes dedication to make a graphic novel so you really need to love and believe in what you are trying to say or do.

4) Write your story before you start drawing it. This may sound like a no-brainer but I have a bad habit of doing this. It always ends in disaster. You don't want to spend 10 years of your life on something that has no ending.

5) Develop a style that is doable and wont take you a gazillion years. I learned that I didn't need to ink my pages because I could boost the contrast on pencil lines in Photoshop. That trick alone saved me hours every page. My main character is simple (the cat) and easy for me to draw. If I were to draw a Mech robot graphic novel, it would take me forever.

6) Focus on your strengths. Draw what you love to draw. Don't make a story about the army if you suck at drawing tanks (unless it's your mission to learn how to draw tanks while making a GN). But I'd suggest not using this medium to learn how to draw something. It will just look different from start to finish and you'll constantly want to go back and fix old ugly tanks.
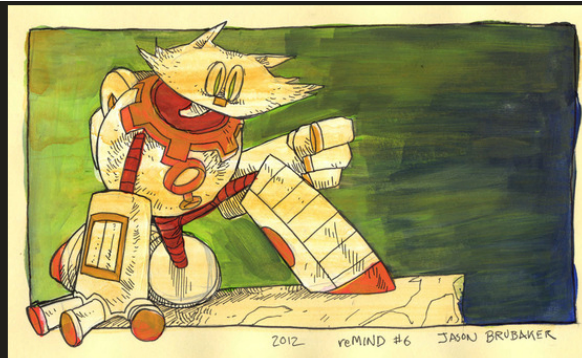
7) If you plan to draw realistic human characters, make sure you know anatomy. If you plan on drawing lots of perspective then learn the rules of perspective. Take some classes or buy some books FIRST. Practice your anatomy and perspective for a good year or two before starting your book. Trust me, you will waste a lot of time if you don't. Here are some of my favorite anatomy and perspective books that I learned from.

- **Drawing the Head and Figure by Jack Hamm** (anatomy)
- **Figure Drawing for all it's Worth by Andrew Loomis** (anatomy)
- **Figure Drawing: Design and Invention by Michael Hampton** (anatomy)
- **Constructive Anatomy by George B. Bridgman** (anatomy)
- **Framed Ink by Marcos Mateu-Mestre** (composition)
- **Successful Drawing by Andrew Loomis** (perspective) <–download links

8) Make rules for yourself to follow throughout your book or it will look like a different book at the beginning and end because you got inspired along the way with some new technique. My rules are pretty simple.

- I only use the paint textures that I made.
- Only 4 panels per page unless it's a sequence of frames where the camera doesn't move.
- I draw everything on paper and scan it. No digital lines except for subtle changes.
- All my pages are planned out as double page spreads so I can control the mood and story better.

Those were my rules for *reMIND*. My next book will have completely different rules because I'll be inspired by something new at that time.
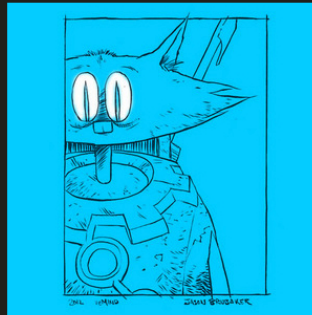
9) Work in RGB mode but print in CMYK mode. Simply flatten your page and convert it when you're finished but always save your master RGB file with layers if you need to change it. All printers print in CMYK. Everyone has their own opinion about this so study it up for yourself before you start. All I know is that this is the way I finally chose to do it and the colors in my printed book look perfect on paper. It also helped to have a good designer involved as well as a good printer.

10) Work in at least 300 dpi. That's what all the printers print at that I've talked to. Most Marvel and DC guys create their pages at 450 to 600 dpi but it all gets reduced in the end to go to print. If you want to print posters of your pages then you will want to make your file 600 dpi, though. Once again, figure out what you want out of your project before you just start making 50 pages.

Good luck!

————————————

See Jason's graphic novel here: www.reMINDblog.com *and his newest webcomic* www.Sithrah.com

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37 Responses to "10 Things Before You Start A Comic Or Graphic Novel!"

Francis C.   September 24th, 2014

Great advice, Jason! Totally agree with #4. Sometimes we have what feel are good ideas, so we start working on them, realizing later on that they have no depth, no ending, no conflict, or no real characters. I feel that working on the story first and foremost is what makes our work last.

Reply

Patrick   September 25th, 2014

Love the site Francis! Come write for us! Connect with me at py@makingcomics.dev if you are interested.

Reply

Greg Uchrin   September 25th, 2014

Also on #4. You learn a lot by telling a story. If you write it out first, when you hit page 150 and realize there was something you should have done on page 27, it's a lot easier to revise in a script than in a page layout–or back four months ago on your webcomic version.

Reply

Franky Plata   September 26th, 2014

Great advice. I've learned most of these the hard way this past year.

Here's a few others that I can add from the artist perspective:

1. Don't stop at the turnaround for your main characters. Go ahead and build them in 3D. Sculpting the character does wonders to learn how your character really looks like and will solve any concerns about odd angles.

2. Thumbnails are your best friends in the process of telling the story. I made the mistake of not having a consistent set of thumbnails during the first arc and the art style jumps all over the place. Thumbnailing a whole arc in a single sweep will help you figure out the story beats, placement of panels and will help you from keeping your pages too busy.

3. Perspective grids will save you a lot of time. Don't try to be a hero if you're not confident about your perspective drawing skills. Get a good set of perspective grids, download them or scan them and use them wisely.

4. Think about the placement of your text first, then proceed to work on the page. Unless you want to draw a detailed background that will just be covered by word balloons (I know, some people like semitransparent balloons, but I mention this just in case)

5. If you work in color, save your color swatch somewhere or make it part of your template file to save time and avoid crazy color changes.

I hope my mistakes will help other artists out too.

Cheers!

Reply

NotImportnat   September 27th, 2014

To tell you the truth I opened this article with beating heart, sure that I missed something crucial (I've started my webcomic less than two months ago) but luckily common sense and experience as an artist was enough for me, phew! 😊

Thanks for the book recommendations, I'll be sure to take a look!

Reply

Ana M.G   September 27th, 2014

Thanks for writing this article. I'm planning a graphic novel, but I'm right before pulling the trigger, like you said.

I have making comics and I loved it, but I have some other points that I have to work on before I start. Thanks for your advice!

Reply

Noni Kingstone   May 29th, 2015

What brilliant advice! There are some really sound pointers in there. I'd also advise using Stan Prokopenko if you're wanting to draw anatomically correct humans, or just humans in general. His mechanics for drawing heads and faces is brilliant, and it really helps you to get things right when it comes to proportions.

And I didn't know about the RGB/CMYK thing – that's DEFINITELY going to be a massive help in the future 🙂

Reply

Juju Sprinkles   June 9th, 2015

These are great advices!! I definitely need to work on getting your text bubbles done before I start drawing. I had to erase a lot of my details to add in my bubbles. Thank you for this great article! Juju Sprinkles

Reply

Luis Carreon Jr   September 6th, 2015

I like to start by saying your a great graphic novel person I being fallowing this this career for a long time its taking ten years of my life to finally get write I have a couple a novel I written down put I will love to make them in graphic novel the problem is am a horrible drawer I could use some help any options on the matter.

Reply

Kevin Cullen   September 8th, 2015

Lots of options available! I'd check around on the different comic book Facebook groups to see if there are any artists looking for work. The only catch here, however, is that you will most likely have to pay the artist for the work they do. Another option is you buckle down and learn to draw! It's extremely tough, but it's so very rewarding in the long run.

Reply

Kris   October 14th, 2015

Of course you have to pay them, artists have spent years on getting to where they are at + their education and they're also spending their valuable time on your work. That's not enough though, you should pay them WELL. Illustration is one of the most competitive fields of work, yet people go about their day thinking drawings should be for free. Not meant as a scolding comment, I'm only pointing out that paying an artist isn't a catch. If you think about it that way, it's better to do it yourself.

Reply

Drs   November 10th, 2015

I find just banging out comic strips as fast as possible is the best way.

Reply

delight sadazi   December 16th, 2015

true about learning anatomy

Reply

Matt January 2nd, 2016

This article was very helpful but it put me in a stand still. Here's the thing I have a story but I can't decide between a book or a graphic novel. What would you recommend?

Reply

Amy January 13th, 2016

How do you think of the story? I've written some novels (books) and they're great as such. Other times I've tried to write a novel but after a short time into it, I realize that I need to convert it to a graphic novel because it's just not working as only a novel (book).

This article gives some good advice, but I think following it 100% can keep you from moving forward. I disagree that you should practice for a "good year or two before starting your book." There's so much more to a graphic novel than whether the drawings are good. If I were you, I'd jump in with both feet and later go back and change things if needed. Maybe it WILL take a year before you're "good enough" but in the mean time you will have a bunch of solid graphic novel mechanics under your belt.

Reply

Richard February 29th, 2016

You're right. If it's going to take "a good year or two," then 1) you're never going to write that book, and 2) you likely don't have the aptitude anyway. I'd recommend you get a good quality sketchbook and fill two or three pages of it every day for a month, drawing anything and everything but especially human and animal forms. Try to convey action, tension. If you're not pleasantly surprised by your progress by the end of the month, you may have to confine yourself to simple comic characters.

Reply

PokemonLover October 2nd, 2017

My friends and I have no prior xp with comics, other than reading them. I've been developing my characters for a couple months, and the story's really starting to shape up. It doesn't take very long to get started, though it helps to have some comics to look at, such as Batman, Spiderman, Garfield, or Smile. I find these examples.

Reply

joe April 13th, 2016

Great advice, but I might add that although writing the story beforehand is kind of a good idea, I would not waste a terribly long period of time doing that because 2/3s or more of the written story will be caste aside anyway and replaced with images. Whats important in a story is the ebb and flow of scenes. I like to brainstorm my story on 3×5 cards without all the dialog and location description (unless there is a slight piece of crucial dialog or background that I don't want to forget). Then I draw the thumbnails according to how I want to present the scene. Final drafting of the images and layout come last…. and I always try to leave the work open for new ideas until the last moment. Good story telling is the key to good comics. Read plenty of books on creating story and characters – there-in lays success…. Anyone can learn to draw; not everyone can tell a good story.

Reply

Anayo Oleru May 9th, 2016

Nice and inspiring, you know I've really been thinking on how to work out my comic. I actually do my painting graphically on computer, not on paper. At times I go scared, thinking my work won't actually interest my audience. But at times I grow so anxious, that it would actually interest my readers, I just live in between that world. But what actually makes it so easier, is the fact that am a story-writer and a poet from the time I was a lad. So interesting story-lines are not scarce to me, more and more ideas drive into my mind, in every moment I give a thought on a problem… And I can actually draw, so am on the line already… Adding up this inspiring thought-out way of making comics, I know I'll make good and interesting ones, that my audience would actually embrace… It will actually be for everybody.

Reply

Anayo Oleru May 9th, 2016

I'll make sure I go through those novels….

Reply

Ian Moone

June 10th, 2016

Some good advice here! 🙂

Reply

Ben

July 4th, 2016

thanks for the advice hope to make my own comic book

Reply

Emma Lea

September 28th, 2016

I've been thinking about a graphic novel for a while and this has been a really useful read, cheers!

Reply

Amy Gatta

October 8th, 2016

it sounds awesome

Reply

Nasia

November 19th, 2016

I want to make a comic 🙁

Reply

alex

February 24th, 2017

make one then

Reply

Tanya

March 28th, 2017

This was very helpful. I have a question for a lot of people: what format should I create the comic illustrations? For example, I do a lot of my "drawing" on drawing software programs, but I think I prefer to sketch on paper. I like ink pens predominantly. If I draw on paper, just sketch pad or start with a template to plan space? Also, I've read up on lots and lots of drawing apps for tablets (or other computers) and I'm overwhelmed with the options. Finally, I am interested in checking out an ipad Pro and getting the pen, but it's very expensive. Would you recommend sticking with paper or....? I'm really not sure at this point. I've got a lot of great story lines that I know what those will be, and I think the dialogue is a little flexible, so what should I plan on being more or less than I think it will. I actually think the drawing will be the easiest, the actual drawing, but I can completely relate to not considering perspectives, or bubbles or enough room for bubbles.
Thank you for this website and everyone's feedback. It's really been a great help to me!

Reply

PokemonLover

October 2nd, 2017

I've started a comic book company with my brother and a couple of friends. This could be a really helpful article for all of us. Thanks!

Reply

michelle

April 10th, 2018

thanks v much 🙂

Reply

Marian

October 8th, 2018

I like the concept- write the story first then do the drawings

Reply

Sutton Turner   November 28th, 2018

I like how you said to make rules for yourself to follow throughout your book or it will look like a different book at the beginning and end. I am creating a comic book for my spouse's birthday. Thanks for the tips on comic book making.

Reply

Moco Comics » Inktober #2: Bocetos del Perrito   October 2nd, 2014

[…] personajes. Por cierto, gracias a Adriana Blake, que compartió un artículo en su Facebook, sobre 10 cosas que hay que hacer antes de empezar una novela gráfica. ¡Muy […]

Reply

Ep. 03 – How to Write a Graphic Novel – Brynn in Brazil   March 18th, 2016

[…] "10 Things Before You Start a Comic or Graphic Novel" on https://www.makingcomics.com (They also have a free online course on "How to Make a Comic Book". I have no idea if it's any good, but I'd love to hear from anyone who's taken it.) […]

Reply

Structuring and designing my graphic novel. | Burbo Creations   November 20th, 2016

[…] Website link: https://www.makingcomics.com/2014/09/24/10-things-start-comic-graphic-novel/ […]

Reply

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Starting a comic or graphic novel   February 21st, 2017

[…] in writing a comic or a graphic novel? Here's a helpful article from Jason Brubaker on the Making Comics […]

Reply

The Geekiest Jobs On Planet Earth Cuteek   December 6th, 2018

[…] resides in something a little more artistic, you might fancy trying your hand at comic book or graphic novel writing. If you are into art, love nothing more than picking up your graphics tablet for a doodle now and […]

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