



How to create a graphic novel

by Ruth McNally Barshaw, author of the *Ellie McDoodle* books – www.ruthexpress.com

1. Write a story. For best results it should be a really good story, revised and honed until it's great. Script form is best. Pretend you're writing a movie. Think about stage directions and character movements.
2. Create character sheets so you know what your characters look like from all angles. Keep them consistent from page to page (a sure sign of professionalism).
3. Decide on the look of your graphic novel. This is entirely up to you. Realistic – cartoony – abstract – superhero – manga – there are a million styles. Do what you love, and what's easy for you to do, since a GN is a huge undertaking and you want to still be interested in it when you're in the middle of it. You'll notice there is a huge variety in how graphic novels look. The world wants to see what YOU come up with – and the timing has never been better.
4. The lettering: Use a nice font on the computer or learn to hand letter well. Readable text matters. Decorative fonts are harder to read.
5. The layouts: Use variety to your advantage (if the tone is supposed to be boring, then it's ok to use boring art). Dynamic camera angles keep the reader wanting to see more.
6. Drawing skills: Even the pros still take art lessons sometimes. Push yourself to do your best. Push yourself to always improve, even if you're already great. Draw from life. Draw people, animals, plants, everyday things. Draw scenery. Try to take things down to their essence using the fewest number of lines possible.
7. Roughs: Draw in pencil to start. Don't ink until your book is completely done and you've thought about revisions.
8. Intended audience: Your audience is your first concern. Make sure they understand what you're saying.
9. The hook: The thing that reaches out and grabs the audience. Hook them early and give the audience a reason to read beyond the beginning – and a reason to keep turning the pages.
10. Pacing: Give the appropriate amount of time to what needs to be said or accomplished. Example: Person is running to the store. Do you show every frame in a series of panels? Do you show him running in one panel? Do you just use narration and no picture? It depends on how important that particular action is to the story.
11. Action: If you can show it in pictures, don't say it in the words. Keep your characters moving, keep the plot moving forward.

Once you have all that mastered, try this:

Spice it up with quirky stuff.

Use fun words and lots of expression in the characters' faces.

Use metaphors and similes and symbolism.

Be yourself. Do what only you can do.

Play with contrast. In a snowstorm, the viewer's eye is drawn to a little red bird.

Repeated motifs or themes or callbacks are fun for the audience to notice and remember.

Here are a few examples of graphic novels, including cartoony art/text mash-ups of various sorts. You can get a much better list at your local library.

Miscellaneous:

Akiko by Mark Crilley (a Michigan author-illustrator)
American Born Chinese by Gene Luen Yang
The Arrival by Shaun Tan
Astronauts of the Future by Lewis Trondheim, Illustrated by Manu Larcenet
Babymouse by Jennifer Holm, Illustrated by Matthew Holm (brother-sister duo!)
Babysitters Club, Smile, Drama, and anything else by Raina Telgemeier
Blankets by Craig Thompson (mature theme, by a Michigan cartoonist)
Bone by Jeff Smith
Diary of a Wimpy Kid by Jeff Kinney
Ellie McDoodle by Ruth McNally Barshaw (a Michigan author-illustrator)
Gaijin by Matt Faulkner (a Michigan author-illustrator)
Hardy Boys by Scott Lobdell
The Invention of Hugo Cabret by Brian Selznick
Little Lit: It was a dark and silly night by Art Spiegelman
Mouse Guard by David E Petersen (a Michigan author-illustrator)
Nancy Drew by Stefan Petrucha, Illustrated by Sho Murase
Seadogs by Lisa Wheeler (a Michigan author), Illustrated by Mark Siegel

Manga:

Digital Digimon Monsters by Yuen Wong Yu
Dragon Ball by Akira Toriyama
Sailor Moon Super S by Naoko Takeuchi
Yu-Gi-Oh! Duelist Vols. 1-4, 6 by Kazuki Takahashi

Superheroes:

Astonishing X-Men Vol. 1 by Joss Whedon
Batman : the dark knight returns by Frank Miller
Batgirl : a knight alone by Kelley Puckett
Fantastic Four : the ultimate guide by Tom DeFalco
Spyboy : the deadly gourmet affair by Peter David
Superman : the ultimate guide to the Man of Steel by Scott Beatty
Ultimate X-Men Vol. 5 by Mark Millar
Wonder Woman : Second Genesis by John Byrne

Literature:

The Best of Ray Bradbury by Ray Bradbury
Bram Stoker's Dracula
H.G. Wells War of the Worlds
Left Behind : a graphic novel of the Earth's last days by Tim LaHaye
Mary Shelley's Frankenstein by Gary Reed
Moby Dick by Will Eisner
Trapped by Dean R. Koontz
William Shakespeare's Macbeth

Nonfiction:

The Amazing True Story of a Teenage Mom by Katherine Arnoldi
Maus by Art Spiegelman
Mom's Cancer by Brian Fies
Persepolis by Marjane Satrapi
Warren Commission Report: A Graphic Investigation into the Kennedy Assassination by Dan Mishkin (a Michigan author), Ernie Colon, and Jerzy Drozd (a Michigan author-illustrator)

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