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2 - Comic Terminology

This section breaks down the basic terminology used for comics. This will grow and be amended as we learn more.

2.1 Meta-terminology

- **Series Title:** This is the title of the series
- **Issue Title:** This is the title for the issue that appears within the series.
- **Letter(s) Page:** This is where the author talks about what is happening in the series. There can be quotes from letters from fans, and replies from the author. First issue usually just talks about how the story to get to be.
- **Cover Image:** Is important to the comic experience. It is the illustration on the cover that gives the reader an idea of what to expect from the story. It should be described in detail as its own section within the reader.
- **Previews:** Description of cover with first few pages. Gives the reader a hint of what the comic will be like.
- **Description:** Is the overview of story.
- **Page:** The story of a comic is broken down by pages. Each page can contain 2 or more panels (a page with a single image is a **splash page**). They will usually have between 4 and 9 panels, but there are no rules about this. For Western Readers, panels are usually read left to right, up to down, but sometimes some other layout may be used (i.e., clockwise, counter-clockwise...some kooky writer/artist has probably even zig-zagged!) The layout of the page is important to the narration of the story.



If a comic uses a layout that is confusing, non-linear, or widely open to interpretation, it might not be a suitable comic for us to describe. The Assisted Reader we produce is constrained by the format of the document, and the information will be presented in a linear fashion. If this linear format does not serve to recreate the comic book experience for the reader, it might not be worth describing. Not every comic is suitable for description - ask your editor if you are unsure!

- **Panel:** A panel is a framed image (except when it is a **borderless panel**) that appears in sequence on a page. The action of the story is told through these panels. Each panel has its own story. The size, position, and frame of the panel is part of its narration. Movement from panel to panel tells story over time. The size of the panel often refers to a span of time. For instance, a wide panel represents a longer span of time, where a smaller panel represents a short span of time. If the panel has no border it can represent a long pause.
- **Borderless Panel:** Is used to describe a panel that has no borders. These images may bleed behind other panels. See **bleed** for more details.
- **Insert Panel:** Used to describe panels that float over a **borderless panel** or **splash page**.
- **Splash Page:** A page with one image that takes up the entire page. See **page** and **panel** description for more details. It may have **gutters**, or **bleed** to the edge of the page. It may also have insert panels set on top of the splash page image.
- **Frame:** The frame is the border around the panel.
 - Sometimes the frame can be an image such as with the following two examples:

E. The 'panel' here is actually the doorway. It tells the reader that the actor is confined in a small area within a wider one — the building. It narrates this visually.



"The entryway to the room makes up the frame of the panel."



An example of the use of a doorway or window which, while resembling a panel, is nevertheless a structure in the setting of the story.

- **Gutter:** The space between panels. This may be black, white, a pattern, or something else.



If the comic uses the same gutters all the way through the issue, (e.g., they are always white), then it only needs to be stated once. If they are one style most of the time, and another style occasionally, let the reader know in the page description when it changes. If they are different on every page, let the reader know what they are using in every page description.

2.2 Graphic terminology

- **Bleed:** Bleed is used to describe an image that goes beyond the border of the page, or panel. It can also be used to describe images that go across two pages.
- **Motion Lines:** The abstract lines that appear by a person or object to indicate movement. Usually things like shaking or speed.
- **Impact Explosion/Starburst:** These are visual effects that that are commonly drawn as a starburst or concentrated explosion of lines. Impact explosions are used in cartooning to show impact, whereas starbursts are usually used to show quick movement.



Starburst



Impact Explosion

- **Graphic Weight:** A term that describes the way some images draw the eye more than others,

creating a definite focus using color and shading in various ways including:

- The use of light and dark shades; dark-toned images or high-contrast images draw the eye more than light or low-contrast images do
- A pattern or repeated series of marks
- Colors that are more brilliant or deeper than others on the page



This type of description not often used, and it will be clear by looking at the panels themselves when **graphic weight** is used vs. when it is not used. Remember not to over describe your panels. Only mention colour or style of art if it stands out and is important to the story, do not describe it if the entire comic is drawn in the same style throughout.

2.3 Text terminology

- **Speech Bubble:** balloon that comes from mouth of character. What is written here is what the character is saying.



Speech bubbles and their text are rarely described (special instances are provided below); rather, we use a “coded” language to indicate when a special bubble is being used. Listed below are the most common types of speech bubbles, but many more exist. For a more extensive list and visual examples, please visit [Blambot](#).

2.3.1 Common Bubbles

- **Scream Bubbles** (aka Burst Balloons, Shout Bubbles): These bubbles have a jagged outline, and usually indicate that the character is screaming. When there is a scream balloon, write (for example) ““I ain’t going back! I’ll die first!””, he screams.”
- **Emphasis bubbles** (aka Double Outline Bubbles): These bubbles have a bold outline, and may be used to enclose a variety of different speech types. Use a descriptor that best describes how the character is speaking. For example: “No.” She says sharply. Or “Rick!” She yells.
- **Whisper Bubbles & Whispered Text:** Whispering and muttering may be indicated in a number of ways, including being enclosed in a bubble that uses a dashed outline, or by using text that is smaller than usual. When text is whispered or muttered, simply say so. For example: ““Oh my god...” she whispered.”
- **Thought Bubble:** These bubbles have a rounded, cloud like outline, and smaller bubbles for the directional tail. When these are used, say, for example, ““Where am I?” he thinks.”

As mentioned, speech bubbles are rarely described, but there are occasions when the appearance of the bubble is important to the story, or to the visuals of the comic. Here are a few examples; please note that this list is definitely non-exhaustive. Describe the bubble when:

- It overlaps the gutter.



His answer appears in four speech bubbles which form a chain and cross over the gutter into the next panel.

- It points to an Off-frame character



The tail of a speech bubble leads up and out of frame as the man holding his shoulder says, "Jim...Stop...It's over."

- It highlights/appears to highlight an important aspect of story
 - e.g. If two people are talking, and one speaker's bubble covers the other person up in some way, this may be a strong visual representation of "talking over someone".
- It is different than a standard bubble.

2.3.2 Other Text Effects

- **Captions:** These do not emanate from any character. The text can appear in a rectangular or square box, or the comic may use its own style, like a banner. Sometimes a caption may appear

as floating text. Please see **floating caption** for more information. They can signify that a narrator is speaking, or the thoughts of a character. Make sure to clarify this in your description, if it is necessary to the narration.

- Write Caption Says.... etc..
- Describe where caption is, and how it looks.
 - Caption text floats over bottom right corner of panel.
 - Caption text appears in a rectangle at upper left corner of panel.
- **Floating caption:** This is when a caption is not in any sort of box and appears as floating text over the panel image. This can be described in a similar fashion as mentioned above.
 - Write floating caption says...
 - Floating Caption text appears in lower right corner of panel.
- **Sound effects:** These are words that appear outside of speech bubbles and captions and are used to represent a sound. Common examples are the sound of someone falling, or being hit. These words are often in a different and larger font than other text. Write them as they appear in the panel and use the strong style.
 - Only describe details of the word if it is part of the visual narration. For example, when the word for the sound overlaps the top of the frame and over the gutter above.
 - Sometimes a sound will appear within a speech bubble. In this case describe it as you would dialogue.
 - “Oof!” Rick grunts sharply.
 - “Sniff, sniff” He smells something in the air.
 - Examples of sound effects:
 - **CLANG!**
 - **REEARHUH!**
 - **BLAM!**



- **Breath Marks:** Breath marks are little lines that emanate from text within a speech bubble. This will almost always be a “Gasp” or a “Sigh” or a “Huff” - something breathy. They do not need to be described as their use is outlined in the Producer’s Notes. Simply describe it as you would dialogue, like in the “Sniff, sniff” example given below.



"Sniff, sniff." He smells something in the air.

2.3.3 Additional Resources

For more information on Speech Bubbles and Text please check out these resources:

- [BlamBot: Comic Grammar & Tradition](#)
- [Creative Comic Art: Bubble Placing](#)
- [Chris Oatley: Comic Balloons and Clarity](#)

2.4 Views

Each panel has its own view. This is a description of the entire scene within the frame. This terminology is borrowed from cinema. It can also help to check the script if you are not sure, or ask your co-writer and editor.

2.4.1. Changing Views

When the view (or angle, see next section for more details) is the same for multiple panels you do not have to repeat the view, only when the view changes. When the view/angle does change, but the scene is the same as the previous panel, we use the terms 'Pull in' or 'Pull out' depending on what is called for. You do not need to use these terms if there is a scene change, only if there is a view or angle change of the same scene.

- Pull in example:



Close view of Shane. ... Pull in to a tight close-up on Shane's face.

- Pull out example:



Close view of Ricks face. ... Pull out to a mid-view of Rick, as he mounts the bicycle. ... Pull out to a wide view of Rick on the bicycle.

2.4.2 List of Views

*The following are some working examples of types of views:

- **Extreme/Very wide view:** Characters, if present, will usually be quite small in comparison to

their surroundings. Examples include: a whole field or an eight-lane highway leading into a city.



Extreme wide view



Very wide view

- **Wide view:** Characters can usually be seen in full figure, panel includes clear background/surroundings.



Wide view

- **Mid-view:** Generally character focused, minimal detail to background. Character generally seen from the waist or chest up.



Mid-view

- **Close Up:** The character can be seen from the chest, shoulders, or neck up, depending on the perspective.



Close up

- **Extreme Close Up:** The face, eye, mouth of the character takes up the entire frame.



Extreme close up

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