

**Conceptual Tools for the Analysis of Graphic Novels and Comics**

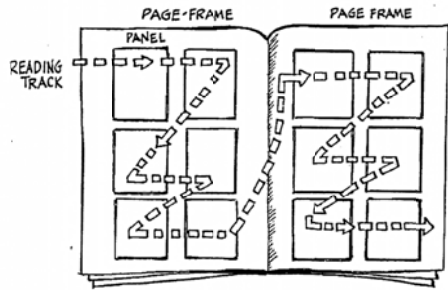
**Frame**

In comics, there are two 'frames':

- the *total page*, which borders constitute the physical frame of the comic and on which there are any number of panels
- and the narrative framing, the *panel* itself, within which the narrative action unfolds and which structures the narrative action.

These frames are the controlling devices in sequential art.

The *Reading Track* (see above) illustrates what is, by convention, the normal flow of the reader's eye. In practice, however, this is not always the case.

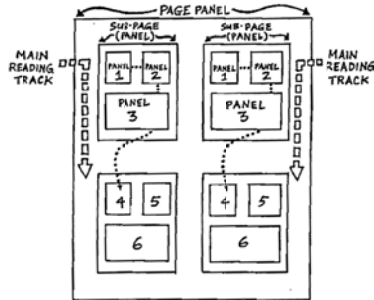


**Panel Outline**

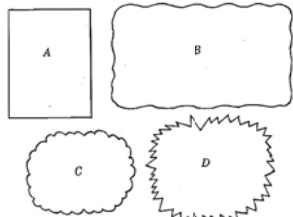
The range of possibilities of outline is limited only by the requirements of the narrative and the constrictions of the page dimensions.

The figure above shows an example of a panel outline. Control of the reader's eye must be carefully considered.

A *splash panel* (e.g. panel 3 or 6 above) takes up the space of several panels, *splash pages* similarly take up the whole page of a comic. *Gutters* are the spaces between the panels.



**The Language of the Panel Border**

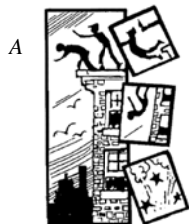


In addition to its primary function as a frame in which to place objects and actions, the panel border itself can be used as part of the non-verbal 'language' of sequential art.

- (A) *rectangular panel* (usually implies that the actions contained therein are set in the present)
- (B) *wavy edged* or (C) *scalloped panel border* (is the most common past time indicator or can define the picture as being a thought / memory)
- (D) *jagged panel border* (is most commonly used to indicate sound, emotion, or a state of tension)

However, there is no universally agreed upon convention and we need to pay particular attention to the effect(s) a violation of these conventions can have.

Examples:



Variations:



Absence of panel outline can convey unlimited space



Panel narrates visually, as the 'panel' here is actually the doorway



Bleeding / Crossing the Panel Borders can display the illusion of power and threat

**Angles**

- *Close-up*: Images that are shown in a large view.
- *Extreme Close-up*: Images that are shown in very large view, often focusing on a small portion of a larger object or character.
- *Longshot*: Images that show objects fully, from top to bottom.
- *Extreme Longshot*: Images that show objects or characters in very small scale. Frequently, extreme longshots are used to show a full landscape or a crowd of characters.
- *Reverse*: Images that are in reverse position from the previous panel.

As these definitions are adapted from Film Studies, see also *The Syntax of Film: A Glossary*.

**Text Containers**



DO YOU KNOW THE MUFFIN MAN?

**Caption**

Text that speaks directly to the reader. Frequently, the text appears below the comic panel.



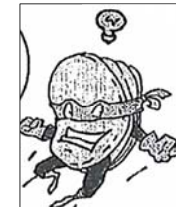
**Labels**

Text labels written on characters. Frequently used in political cartoons to identify public figures or personifications.



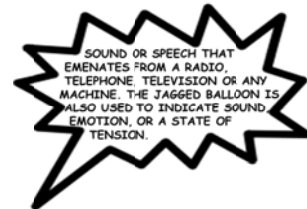
*Narratory Blocks / Narrative Box / Voice-over* Rectangles / squares in which a narrator / character from the story shares special information with readers.

**Representations of Speech**



**Emanata**

Text or icons that represent what is going on in the character's head.



**Sources**

- Will Eisner. *Comics & Sequential Art*. Exp. Ed. Tamarac: Poorhouse, 1985. Print.
- Scott McCloud. *Understanding Comics*. New York: Harper Collins, 1994. Print.