

Conceptual Tools for the Analysis of Graphic Novels and Comics

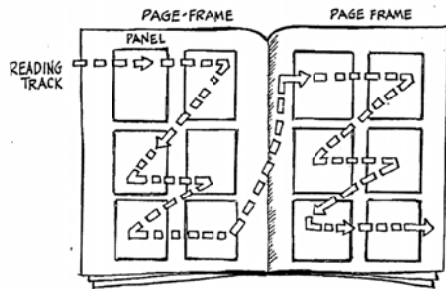
Frame

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.

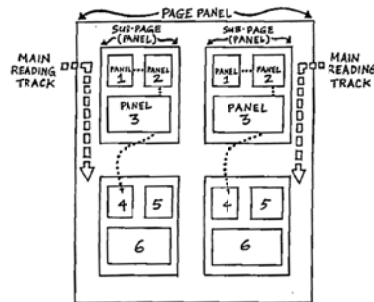


Panel Outline

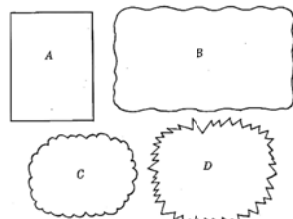
The range of possibilities of outline is limited only by the requirements of the narrative and the constrictions of the page dimensions.

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

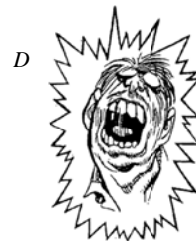
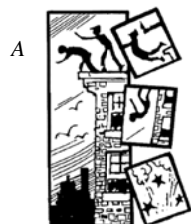


In addition to its primary function as a frame in which to place objects and actions, the panel border itself can be used as part of the non-verbal 'language' of sequential art.

- (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

Distance

- *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*.

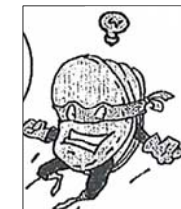
Text Containers



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



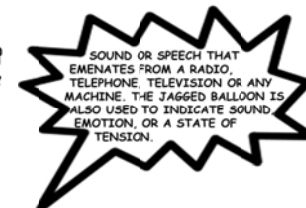
Narratory Blocks / Narrative Box / Voice-over
Rectangles / squares in which a narrator / character from the story shares special information with readers.



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



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



Sources

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