

# Graphic Novel/Comics Terms and Concepts

## Layout

*Panel:* A distinct segment of the comic, containing a combination of image and text in endless variety. Panels offer a different experience than simply reading text:

- The spatial arrangement allows an immediate juxtaposition of the present and the past.
- Unlike other visual media, transitions are instantaneous and direct but the exact timing of the reader's experience is determined by focus and reading speed.

*Frame:* The lines and borders that contain the panels.

*Gutter:* The space between framed panels.

*Bleed:* An image that extends to and/or beyond the edge of the page.

*Foreground:* The panel closest to the viewer.

*Midground:* Allows centering of image by using natural resting place for vision. The artist deliberately decides to place the image where a viewer would be most likely to look first. Placing an image off-center or near the top or bottom can be used to create visual tension but using the midground permits the artist to create a more readily accepted image.

*Background:* Provides additional, subtextual information for the reader.

*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

**Continued**

## Graphic Novel/Comics Terms and Concepts (continued)

### Figures

*Faces:* Faces can be portrayed in different ways. Some depict an actual person, like a portrait; others are iconic, which means they are representative of an idea or a group of people. Other points to observe about faces include:

- They can be dramatic when placed against a detailed backdrop; a bright white face stands out
- They can be drawn without much expression or detail; this is called an “open blank” and it invites the audience to imagine what the character is feeling without telling them.

*Hands/Feet:* The positioning of hands and feet can be used to express what is happening in the story. For example, hands that are raised with palms out suggest surprise. The wringing of hands suggests obsequiousness or discomfort. Hands over the mouth depict fear, shame, or shyness. Turned in feet may denote embarrassment, while feet with motion strokes can create the sense of panic, urgency, or speed.

### Text

*Captions:* These are boxes containing a variety of text elements, including scene-setting, description, etc.

*Speech balloons:* These enclose dialogue and come from a specific speaker’s mouth; they vary in size, shape, and layout and can alternate to depict a conversation. Types of speech balloons include those holding:

- External dialogue, which is speech between characters
- Internal dialogue, which is a thought enclosed by a balloon that has a series of dots or bubbles going up to it

*Special-effects lettering:* This is a method of drawing attention to text; it often highlights onomatopoeia and reinforces the impact of words such as *bang* or *wow*.