

**CAMBRIDGE
NATIONAL**

LEVEL 1/LEVEL 2

CREATIVE IMEDIA

J834

**Judi Brown, Sarah McAtominey
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Introduction

This book will help you to develop the knowledge, understanding and practical skills you need to complete your Level 1/2 Cambridge National Creative iMedia course. As well as preparing you for your final exam and set assignments, the book will introduce you to the creative digital media sector. You will learn how to design, plan, create and review digital media products to meet client briefs and target audience demands.

Each of the chapters in this book closely follows all the topics required for each unit in the course specification, which you can find on the OCR website. To help with your learning the book covers the key content in detail and includes a range of real-world examples. There are also lots of activities and learning features; you can find out more about these and how to use them on the next page.

Note for teachers: You can find out more about how we have designed the textbook to support you at: www.hoddereducation.co.uk/creative-imedia-teacher-intro.

Mandatory and optional units

The Cambridge National in Creative iMedia qualification is made up of seven different subject units. All students will need to complete Units R093 (Creative iMedia in the media industry) and R094 (Visual identity and digital graphics); these are the mandatory/compulsory units.

In addition, you will complete one of the following optional units:

- R095 Characters and comics
- R096 Animation with audio
- R097 Interactive digital media
- R098 Visual imaging
- R099 Digital games.

Assessment: Examined unit and final set assignments

- Unit R093 is an examined unit where you will sit a one hour 30-minute examination paper, which is set and marked by OCR.

- Units R094 through to R099 are assessed through a series of tasks for a set assignment that you will be given. The assignments are set by OCR each academic year, marked by your tutor and then moderated by OCR.

All the examination questions contain 'command' words. These tell you what you have to do to answer a question or complete the task. You can find definitions of the most common command words on page 2; a full list is available on the OCR website. Always check the command word before starting a task or answering a question. For example, if you describe something when an explanation is required, you will not be able to gain full marks; this is because an explanation requires more detail than a description. There are a range of practice questions in this book in Unit R093 to help you get to grips with the command words.

Once you have learned all the required parts of the moderated units, you will complete an assignment that will be used to assess your knowledge and skills of the subject. It will be set in a vocational context, which means that it will simulate what it would be like to be given a project by a client or employer in a work situation. You will use the OCR set assignment for the assessment. This assignment will include a series of tasks that follows the same process and sequence of the unit, to plan, create and review a creative media product. The assignment practice features in this book in Units R094–R099 will help you get used to working in the relevant media contexts.

Note: The practice questions and accompanying marks and mark schemes included in this resource are an opportunity to practise exam skills, but they do not replicate examination papers and are not endorsed by OCR.

Plagiarism and referencing

Your work for the OCR set assignments in Units R094–R099 must be in your own words. You must not plagiarise. Plagiarism is the submission of another's work as one's own and/or failure to acknowledge the source correctly. Sometimes you might need to use a diagram or include a quotation from someone else or a website. If you do this it is very important that you always provide a reference for any information you use that is not your own work. Quotation marks should be placed around any quoted text. You should put the source reference next to the information used. In addition to referencing the picture, diagram, table or quotation, you should explain in your own words why you have used it, what it tells you, how it relates to your work or summarise what it means.

Providing a reference means that you will include details of the source, which is where you found the information. You should include the full website address (url) and date that you found it or for a textbook, the page number, title, author's name, date it was published and the name of the publisher. For newspaper or magazine articles you should give the date of publication, title of the paper or magazine and the name of the author. When producing your work for the assessment, you should never use any templates or writing frames. You must always decide yourself how to present your information.

How to use this book

This book covers all units for the Cambridge National in Creative iMedia, including the two mandatory units, R093 and R094 as well as the five optional units R095–R099. All of the teaching content for each topic area is covered in the book.

The book is organised into chapters as per the units in the qualification. Each unit is broken down into the topic areas from the specification. Each unit opener will help you to understand what is covered in the unit, the list of topic areas covered, and how you will be assessed, fully matched to the requirements of the specification.

Key features of the book

About this unit

A short introduction to the unit.

Topic areas

A list of the unit's topic areas, so you know exactly what is going to be covered.

Resources for this unit

An overview of the resources, including software and hardware, needed for the unit.

How will I be assessed?

A summary of how the unit will be assessed.

Getting started

Short activities to introduce you to the topic.

Key terms

Definitions of important and useful terms across the qualification.

Case study

A real-life scenario that involves the creative and digital media concepts covered in the unit.

Activity

A short task to help you understand an idea or assessment criteria. These can include group and research tasks.

Test your knowledge

Short questions designed to test your knowledge and understanding.

Synoptic links

Links to other sections of the book so you can see how topics link together.

Practice questions

Summary questions that allow you to apply the knowledge and skills covered in the unit. This feature appears in examined Unit R093 and will help you prepare for the exam. The accompanying mark schemes are available online at www.hoddereducation.co.uk/cambridge-nationals-2022/answers.

Note: The practice questions and accompanying marks and mark schemes included in this resource are an opportunity to practise exam skills, but they do not replicate examination papers and are not endorsed by OCR.

Assignment practice

A summary activity that will allow you to apply the knowledge and skills covered in this unit. This feature appears in the optional non-examined units and will help you prepare for non-examined assessment.

Unit R093

Creative iMedia in the media industry

About this unit

This unit is a foundation in what makes up the media industry and how Creative iMedia fits into it. You will learn about the job roles and processes required to create a wide range of media products. As part of this, you will find out how to convey meaning, create impact and engage audiences through the use of media codes when planning a product. You will move on to pre-production techniques, media formats and distribution platforms to further develop your knowledge of the media industry.

Topic areas

In this chapter you will learn about:

- the media industry (TA1)
- factors influencing product design (TA2)
- pre-production planning (TA3)
- distribution considerations (TA4).

Resources for this unit

With this being the examined unit, you will not be using computers and software applications in the final assessment, which is a written exam paper. However, you may use a range of these

in your learning about the media industry and pre-production techniques prior to taking the exam, which may help you in your answers to the questions.



How will I be assessed?



You will be assessed through a 1 hour 30-minute written exam, which is set and marked by OCR. It will be marked out of 70 and worth 40 per cent of the total when working towards a Certificate in Creative iMedia. There will typically be two sections:

- Section A will have multiple-choice questions and other questions needing a short written response.

- Section B will have a scenario with questions based on it. This will provide a context for the paper and your answers should always relate closely to this. Within this section there will be some longer (extended response) questions.

Exam command words

Many exam questions will use straightforward command words such as choose, label, circle, draw and annotate. The following table shows what some commonly used ones mean.

Table 1.1 Command words

Command word in the question	What it means you should do
Identify	Your answer might select the relevant part or state what it is.
Explain	Your answer must include reasons why, so aim to include the word 'because ...'.
Describe	Your answer must be detailed, using words to express an overall concept, idea or need so that it is clear for the reader/listener.
Discuss	Your answer must give both sides of the argument with some analysis and evaluation.
Outline	Your answer should state the key points with a brief description.

Another word you will see used is 'Purpose'. This may be part of a question. This means

what the subject of the question is used for or the reason for its use.

Topic area 1 The media industry

Getting started

In small groups, discuss what media products you see or use as part of everyday life. You can include school, home, hobbies and interests. What do you actively do (for example, read or watch on

TV, computer or smartphone) in addition to what is around you (for example, billboards, posters and advertisements)?



1.1 Media industry sectors and products

Sectors of the media industry

This is separated into two different areas. Firstly, there are traditional media sectors that have adapted to use digital technologies and processes. Secondly, there is the evolving area of 'new media' that is only produced in a digital format.



Figure 1.1 Different parts of the media industry

Traditional media

This includes:

- film
- television (TV)
- radio
- print publishing.

Film and television are closely related but they are different sectors of the media industry. You might watch a TV for both films and regular television broadcasting but the production process and hence media sectors are different.

Film making

Films tend to be large media projects that can take months or years to produce. They involve large teams of people and high budgets since they can be very expensive to make.

The film industry is evolving in many ways, both for production, post-production and distribution

Key terms

CGI Computer generated imagery.

SFX Special effects or sound effects.

VFX Visual effects.

4K/8K Very high-resolution video formats.

3D three-dimensional video (most films are made in 2D).

through the use of **CGI**, **SFX**, **VFX**, **4K**, **8K**, **3D**, surround sound, plus the use of premium streaming services for new releases.

Television (TV)

This covers a wide range of content such as:

- soaps
- TV series
- chat shows
- game shows
- reality TV shows
- cartoons
- outside broadcasts (OB) to include events coverage, sports (for example, football matches) and news location reporting
- documentaries
- news and weather.

The production of these is much shorter and quicker than film making. This might be an episode per week for a TV series or daily broadcasting for news programmes. Reality shows can include live streaming, which adds another challenge to the production.

The television sector is evolving through on-demand, streaming and catch-up services. These services are available using Apps on smart devices or set-top boxes/plug in accessories for use with a regular TV.

Content is also evolving with service providers, such as BBC, ITV, Channel 4, Netflix®, Amazon Prime®, Disney+® and Apple TV®, all producing their own exclusive content and TV series (note that these have the ® symbol to show it is a registered trademark – more on that later). It is likely that many of the technologies used in film making will also appear in the television industry.

Radio

The traditional format for radio broadcasting is on AM or FM frequencies, although this has now become multi-platform distribution through digital technologies. Basic radio programming is typically created in a similar way to traditional broadcast radio, but can now be distributed over the internet, through DAB and catch-up services using smartphones and tablets.

Radio stations still work to schedules and broadcast clocks (which is a term used to define the content and sequence of a programme). Some examples of content for a radio programme or broadcast would be:

- news
- weather
- adverts
- traffic
- talk/music show
- radio play
- sport
- phone-ins.

Radio is evolving through multi-platform distribution methods and on-demand, catch-up services. These services are available using apps on smart devices or through a website. An internet radio is a device that can be connected to a home Wi-Fi network and used to stream high-quality audio via the internet.

Print publishing

This includes:

- newspapers
- magazines
- leaflets
- posters
- brochures
- comics and graphic novels.

Print publishing has evolved through the use of digital technology and printing processes. This includes better printing inks and printer technology (colour laser and ink based), together with production using computer equipment and desktop publishing software.



Figure 1.2 Radio recording and broadcast facilities

Note that print publishing is declining in some areas with more content being made available in a digital format, saving resources and the environment. Newspapers and magazines are examples where the trend is more noticeable. Comics and graphic novels are another product that were traditionally print based but are now frequently published in both digital and print based formats.

Activity



Obtain a newspaper and a magazine. Make a list of the different content that is found in each one. Identify the range of text, images, articles and advertisements. As a class discussion, talk about how some of these may have been created. Would it make any difference if the content was to be distributed in a digital rather than printed format?

New media

This includes any form of digital media. A common distribution method is now the internet. New media sectors include:

- computer games
- **interactive** media
- internet
- digital publishing.

Key term

Interactive Something which allows the user to be involved in the process of watching or listening. This could involve user input such as clicking, typing or speaking to interact with the media.

Computer games

The computer games sector covers both the development of the games and the development of the platform (the hardware) they sit on.

These are typically different industries. For example, a digital games developer may not build and sell a dedicated gaming computer for the game to be played on. Some games are online only.

Popular platforms include:

- consoles
- computers
- smartphones
- tablets
- hand-held gaming devices.

Games are categorised by their genre. Some of the main examples would be:

- FPS (first person shooter)
- RPG (role-player games)
- racing
- action/adventure
- quiz.

Computer games are evolving in several ways, through the use of:

- higher **resolution** graphics
- realistic video motion
- online/multiplayer games
- VR (virtual reality).

Interactive media

Any form of media that enables the user to interact with it is part of this sector and includes a broad range of products. For example:

- websites
- information kiosks, for example, for local maps, shopping malls, train timetables, ordering systems in shops
- apps (for use on smartphones and tablets)
- interactive multimedia (used on computer systems, for example, interactive presentations)

- Blu-ray/DVD feature selection menus
- learning resources
- quizzes.

Interactive media is evolving through web technologies, software availability, smart device capabilities and cross **platform** support. A computer game is another form of interactive media but is classified as a different sector.

Internet

As a sector, this covers internet-based media. The internet is a worldwide network or wide area network (WAN). It connects millions of web servers together to make up the World Wide Web. The websites and content that are hosted on the internet becomes the Internet Industry, which is very broad in scope.

Examples of the content found on the internet include:

- websites (for example, to sell products, services, provide information, news, entertainment)
- social media (for example, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube) and the work of influencers
- streaming services (for example, for on-demand services such as films, TV series, radio, **podcasts**)
- communication (such as email, VoIP for voice calls, online meetings (for example, Zoom, Microsoft Teams), messaging services (for example, iMessage, Signal, WhatsApp).

Key terms

Resolution A property of an image that states how many dots per inch are present. (Different to the resolution of a story.)

Platform A method for sharing media content.

Podcast A digital audio file made available online. Often created as a series and involving spoken dialogue, interviews and conversation.

The internet is evolving through the range of content and services together with the connection speeds through wired, Wi-Fi and mobile connections.

Digital publishing

This is where the product is only available in a digital format and not physically printed or distributed. As an example, a comic could be published as a PDF file or provided via an app, rather than be physically printed. The distribution of digital formats is typically by the internet, whether by download or through streaming services. The **interface** could be either a website or an app on a smartphone or tablet. Some apps can now work on a computer as well as a smartphone.

Examples of media found in the digital publishing sector include:

- web graphics (for example, buttons, banners and backgrounds)
- animations (for example, animated/moving advertisements, banners or short films as entertainment products)
- eBooks
- podcasts
- video podcasts
- slide shows of images
- tutorials (video)
- blogs and vlogs
- comics and graphic novels
- computer games.

Digital publishing is evolving through a wider range of image, text, audio and video products. This is made possible by wider availability of simple and cheap equipment used to produce content, which is available to home users. Apps are readily available for distribution purposes for both Apple and Android devices. More efficient compression techniques enable a high quality but with a lower file size.

Key term

Interface The system that allows the user to interact with the product.

Activity



What forms of digital publishing content do you enjoy the most? Make a list of the type of content and where you access it. What is it that makes it enjoyable?

Test your knowledge



- 1 What is the difference between digital publishing and the internet?
- 2 A film would be produced by the film making sector but what sectors might be involved in the distribution for people to watch it?
- 3 For the film, what other sectors could be involved for its promotion and advertising?

Synoptic links



Creative iMedia has strong links to the digital publishing sector within the media industry. Further information on products and sectors is in the NEA units as follows:

- R094 (mandatory): digital and web graphics, print publishing, digital publishing
- R095 (optional): comics, print publishing, digital publishing
- R096 (optional): animation and audio, digital publishing
- R097 (optional): interactive media, digital publishing, interactive digital media
- R098 (optional): visual imaging, digital publishing, print publishing,
- R099 (optional): digital games, computer games, digital publishing.

Products in the media industry

Both the traditional and new media sectors have a range of typical products. However, that does not mean a specific product is limited to one sector – it could also be used as part of other sectors. Although not a complete list, in Table 1.2 are some examples.

Table 1.2 Products in the primary and secondary sectors

Product	Primary sectors	Secondary sectors
Video	Film, TV	Interactive media, internet/social media
Audio	Radio	Internet/podcasts, digital publishing
Music	Radio	Digital publishing
Animation	Digital publishing	Film
Special effects (SFX, VFX)	Film, TV	Computer games
Digital imaging and graphics	Print publishing, digital publishing	Internet (websites)
Social media platforms/apps	Internet	
Digital games	Computer games	Internet (online gaming), digital publishing
Comics and graphic novels	Print publishing	Digital publishing
Websites	Interactive media, internet	
Multimedia	interactive media, internet	Digital publishing, computer games
eBooks	Digital publishing	Internet
AR/VR	Interactive media	Computer games

1.2 Job roles in the media industry

As you have learned, the media industry includes many sectors and a wide range of product types and media. The many different job roles within the industry can be categorised in a number of ways, including by:

- sector: for example, job roles in television or digital games creation
- medium or platform: for example, jobs in creating online content or print publishing
- production phase: for example, jobs which are carried out in only the pre-production or post-production phase
- skill type: for example, jobs which are creative and ideas-based or technical and practical

- seniority: for example, junior, mid-weight or senior job roles.

Some people work alone as freelance or independent creatives, meaning they may carry out several job roles at once. They may have to liaise with clients, design, create and review products and control budgets and oversee project time management. Others work as members of a larger team for design studios or companies and have a particular role often with a narrow specialism. The larger the project and production, the more likely that it will involve many people. Each job role within the production is important in its own right, and has its own distinctive responsibilities.

Senior roles

Design studios and companies have a hierarchy of job roles based on experience and expertise. Senior roles involve overseeing projects, taking overall responsibility for style and design decisions and managing teams of people to ensure work is completed on time and within budget. Many senior roles also include liaising with clients to agree a design brief and check that designs meet the client requirements and expectations.

Campaign manager

A campaign manager controls the overall direction of projects in the advertising sector. They will often have marketing experience and will oversee the choice of **assets** during the pre-production phase of advertising campaigns. During production and post-production, the campaign manager will check that the campaign matches the overall style and direction agreed with the client.

Creative director

Creative directors work across a number of sectors and media including motion, video and animation and 2D and 3D design. They are responsible for interpreting the client brief and

Key term

Assets The different images collected that will be used to make the final product.

developing the overall design response and **concept** for a product in the pre-production phase. Creative directors work closely with other team members such as art directors, animators or developers to oversee the production phase. They also ensure the final product meets the client requirements by overseeing the post-production phase. In larger design studios, the creative director may have one or more creative leads. This role is one step lower in the line of seniority and may undertake management of single projects, while the creative director will oversee a number of projects at the same time.

Director

A director leads the creative and technical teams for products such as video, television, animation and live theatre during the production phase. The director may provide creative input to explain how a script or storyboard will be translated into action by suggesting how **dialogue** should be delivered. Technical input is also involved, as the director decides which shot types, camera angles and lighting work best. The director may also contribute to the post-production phase by taking part in the editing process for a product.

Editor

An editor takes completed aspects of a product and compiles them into a 'rough cut', removing unwanted and less successful elements, before generating a final product. Individual elements may be edited separately, for example by video editors, copy editors and sound editors, before the editor receives a rough working version. Some editor roles, for example a web content editor, require expertise in a range of media types including sound, video, images and text.

Production manager

Production managers are often employed in the TV and film sectors. They oversee the business, budgeting and recruitment aspects of television and film during all phases of a production. The role includes monitoring the workplan or production schedule and liaising with producers to check

that a project will meet its deadlines and keep within the agreed budget. Production managers are often involved in employing technical crew, organising locations, equipment and resources and arranging permissions and risk assessments. They need to be well organised and able to manage teams of people effectively.

- In larger design studios, leads are also employed as one step below the senior roles. Creative leads, lead animators, design leads and so on will generally take charge of one project at a time and report to the senior role as a sort of deputy.
- Mid-weight job roles fill the gap between junior and senior roles. They generally earn more than juniors and may have some individual areas of responsibility.
- Junior designers, artists, animators and developers will typically carry out basic, small assignments such as preparing assets and writing code to generate items designed by more senior staff.

Creative and technical roles

Some job roles within the media industry are more creative and ideas-based than others which involve practical or technical skills. This is an advantage because it allows people to work to their strengths. For example, some people excel at thinking up wonderful ideas for new digital games or stories which can be turned into film, comics or animation; but they lack the technical skills to produce them. Others love to write code for applications, work in 3D character modelling or use technical and practical skills to bring ideas to reality but prefer to work from designs which are provided for them. Some of the most common creative and technical roles are described in Tables 1.3 and 1.4.

Key terms

Concept An idea for something which has not yet been created.

Dialogue The words spoken by a character, narrator or voiceover artist.

Unit R095

Characters and comics

About this unit

In the creative media industry there are a huge variety of technical and creative job roles involving character creation and comic design. This unit will enable you to identify core conventions of both character and comic creation and understand the basics of planning, designing, creating and reviewing characters and comics.

This unit is all about creating characters and using those characters to create a comic which will tell a story. You will learn how to design and create effective and engaging characters which will engage your target audience. You will also learn how to use comic conventions to design and create comics which tell a story.

Topic areas

In this chapter you will learn how to:

- plan characters and comics (TA1)
- create characters and comics (TA2)
- review characters and comics (TA3).

Resources for this unit

Hardware/equipment: Alongside standard computer hardware, you could use the following if they were available to you – digital cameras, scanner, stylus, graphics tablet, modelling materials.

Software: Graphics creation and photo editing applications, such as Adobe Photoshop,

Illustrator, Fireworks, Serif DrawPlus, PhotoPlus, Affinity, Pixelmator, GIMP.

You will also need software to create your comic which could be comic specific such as Comic Life, Pixton and Comic, iStudio or more generic software e.g. Microsoft Publisher.

How will I be assessed?

You will complete an assignment that is set by OCR. This will be completed independently by yourself, without using any additional resources or teacher assistance to help you. The assignment will have a scenario or client brief that defines what you will need to create. You will work through a series of tasks that

cover the three topic areas to plan, create and review a character and comic. Your evidence will then be marked by your teacher using the OCR marking criteria, which will then be externally checked/moderated by OCR to confirm your achievement.



Topic area 1 Plan characters and comics

Getting started

Think of a famous character from a children's film, book or television programme. Draw a sketch of this character. Now think about this character and answer the following questions.

- What are the main features of this character?
- What are the things that make the character unique?
- Why do you think the audience engages with this character?



1.1 Character features and conventions

Types of characters

Characters can be represented in a range of different styles. When deciding on a style there are a number of things to consider, such as target audience and the purpose of the character.

Cartoons

Characters designed to appeal to a young target audience often use bold colours and cartoon styling such as bold outlines and strong detail, usually with limited fine detail, so that they are eye catching and friendly. Characters designed for an older audience may vary more in their appearance and the style may be more

dependent on the character's purpose. For example, characters used in infographics are often simplified to show the key points of the graphic, such as using an image of a penguin to show facts about it in the zoo. Characters are also used to display information, as in an infographic, and are often used to complement text when delivering information or a story.



Figure 3.1 Characters designed to engage a younger audience

Doodles and photorealistic

Doodle style characters are used in comic books or as illustrations in fictional books. These types of characters may have the appearance of being created quickly and simply to illustrate a point. But these characters are carefully thought out and designed to create this illusion for the reader. This style of character design has been in use for a very long time.

In contrast, photorealistic character design is a recent addition to the design style of characters. Photorealistic characters are created using computer software and are generally 3D character designs. This style is often used for human character design, such as in video games, but can be used for other types of characters too.

Geometric and minimalist/simplification

Geometric and minimalist/simplification styles are where shapes and silhouettes are combined to form characters. Characters created in a simplified form may, for example, not include facial features or the finer detail that would complicate the design and detract from the purpose of the characters. The detail of the animal design is not the key feature here, that is the statistics, so the finer details of the characters have not been included.



Figure 3.2 Characters can be used to display information using minimalist character design

Features of characters

Colour

Colour is significant for character design. There are particular colours which an audience will identify with different genres, emotions and character traits. Some examples of colour use for character design are shown in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Colour use for character design

Colour	Impact
Red	Love, anger, passion
Orange	Energy, happiness, warmth
Yellow	Happiness, hope, energy
Green	Nature, growth, fresh
Blue	Calm, sad, nature, cold
Purple	Royalty, wealth, richness
Black/grey	Mystery, evil, formal

The other colour-based convention used in character design is the assignment of primary and secondary colours. The hero or protagonist in a story is generally designed using mainly primary colours, whereas the villain or antagonist will usually be designed to incorporate secondary colours. This is a way of subtly indicating the character’s position in a story to the reader.

Proportion

It is also possible to create a different style of character by using changes in proportion. This is generally used to either highlight a feature of a particular character or as a general design style for all the characters in a comic. For example, in some comic series all the characters can be seen with disproportionately large heads compared to the rest of their bodies. Similarly, in fairytale style stories, the witch characters are often depicted with disproportionately large pointy noses.

Key terms

Protagonist One of the main characters in a story, often the hero.

Antagonist One of the main characters in a story, often the villain.

Activity

Create this table in word processing software and then use your own research to complete it.



Type of character	Example	What audience and purpose do you think suits this type of character?
Cartoon		
Doodle		
Photorealistic		
Geometric shapes		
Minimalist/simplification		



Figure 3.3 Minimalist character design

Characteristics and conventions

Character tropes

Simply put, character **tropes** are a generalisation of how a character with a particular trait might look. For example, the 'villain' character in a story may be a large imposing character, dressed in dark colours with strong features. Or the 'hero' characters may wear capes. Character tropes are often used in character design and can allow a character and its place in the story to be easily recognisable to the user. The downside of character tropes is that if overused they can make a character seem a little less authentic and more generic.

Key terms

Trope A generalisation of how a character with a particular trait might look.

Anthropomorphism Applying human physical and non-physical characteristics to non-human items such as inanimate objects or animals.

Physical characteristics

The physical characteristics of many characters are represented by a signature look or outfit. For example, Superman's blue suit and red cape, with the S icon on his chest or Tintin's quiff hairstyle and signature clothing style are both instantly recognisable.

Comic characters often have exaggerated physical characteristics, such as facial features, hair styles or even outfits. The characters' physical appearance is consistently used throughout the comic and other strips within the series. This consistency allows readers to easily identify the core characters throughout the storylines. Sometimes this look can reflect the characters' personality, such as the use of darker colours in the outfits and design of more sinister characters. Other times it will link more to the overall theme of the comic as an indication of the genre of the story.

Anthropomorphism is very common and well-used in character design. It involves giving an object or non-human being human characteristics. There are many examples of this, such as talking animals or animal characters walking on two legs or wearing clothes like a human. This can also be seen in the

design of facial characteristics, where the character is given a more humanised face than the character would have in real life, allowing them to express human emotions more easily. A more extreme version of anthropomorphism is when inanimate objects are given human-like characteristics and in effect come to life. For example, a walking, talking teapot, with arms and legs and a face that is not dissimilar to a human face.

Manga characters have their own distinctive and easily identifiable physical characteristics. For example:

- they are usually drawn with very large eyes, which are used to show the character's feelings
- the mouth and nose are often small
- they have distinctive hairstyles in a range of colours
- they often appear youthful and have a childlike appearance.



Figure 3.4 Examples of Manga facial characteristics

Two comic creators are Charles Schulz and Georges Hergé, who create the American comic *Peanuts* and the Belgian comic *Tintin* respectively. Their character design was much simpler in form than later comics such as Marvel or DC but is distinctive for its hand drawn appearance. The characters were not always as detailed as more modern comic characters. In terms of facial features they are quite simplistic, but as comics which were aimed at a broad audience and have stood the test of time in terms of storytelling and popularity they are none the less very successful designs.

Non-physical characteristics

Superhero characters typically have exaggerated strengths and weaknesses, which are often emphasised in the storyline of the comic strip. They are usually the link between the hero and the villain that go back to the origin of how they came to be adversaries in the character backstory.

As with other fictional media, to draw the user into the story, characters in comic strips often have characteristics that the reader can relate to, whether this is a personality trait, skill, a fear or an insecurity.

Many of the non-physical characteristics seen in superhero comic characters are linked to the superpowers of the hero or villain. For example, mind reading, telepathy, x-ray vision. Some will demonstrate more conventional characteristics such as high intellect and technical ability, as in the character of Tony Stark (*Iron Man*).

Some comic makers create characters which have non-physical characteristics that are woven into their backstory and appear throughout the storylines. For example, DC and Marvel comics both focus on superheroes but with a different approach. DC comics base their characters and storylines on superhuman heroes, such as Superman or Wonder Woman. These characters are often portrayed as the hero saving the human race from disaster. In contrast, Marvel create more 'everyman' characters, with normal people gaining powers or abilities which allow them to become superheroes. For example, Peter Parker and his alter ego Spiderman or the Hulk and his alter ego Bruce Banner. These characters are often more flawed, with storylines tending to depict their weaknesses as well as their strengths. They are often overcoming issues within their own life as well as defeating the villain of the story.

Not all comic book characters are superheroes; the non-physical characteristics will often link to the genre of the comic strip. For example, in a horror comic strip you would expect characters to reflect scary characteristics such as dishonesty and deviousness. Children's comic book characters will have more simplistic characteristics such as happiness, sadness or

humour. As there are now such a wide range of comic book genres there are opportunities to create a huge range of both physical and non-physical characteristics for comic characters.

Facial characteristics

Facial characteristics are an important tool for designers in using characters to tell a story or give information. When using characters in static graphics such as comics, rather than dynamic graphics such as animation, the facial expression and characteristics of the character's face have a very important part to play. They can set the scene by showing the tone of the interaction or dialogue. For example, in some scenes there may not be any dialogue between characters or there may only be one character in the scene, but the facial expression of the character shown can indicate what is happening in the scene.

Facial characteristics in character design can often demonstrate a range of different design elements to show emotion. This is often linked to the features of the face and using the position and size of these features can indicate a lot to the reader.

Eyebrows

The placement and design of a character's eyebrows can add a lot of expression to the face, for example:

- harsh eyebrow lines which point downwards towards the nose can be used to express anger (as in Figure 3.5)
- raised or arched eyebrows can show disbelief or surprise
- eyebrows pointing down towards the edge of the face indicate sadness.

Eyes

The size and position of eyes can be used in a similar way to convey the emotion of the characters. The shape of the eye will actually often mirror the shape of the eyebrow to show a particular emotion. For example, to show sadness, eyes are often wide with a slight narrowing at the outside edge, with the eyebrows pointing down towards the edge of the face.



Figure 3.5 Example of character facial expression setting the tone for the scene without words

Mouth

The shape and positioning of the character's mouth can be used as a tool to show emotion or to complement the tone of the dialogue. Sometimes the mouth is shown open simply to allow the reader to see who is speaking, but often the shape of the mouth conveys much more than this. A wide-mouthed smile with the teeth showing is often a sign of happiness or pleasure, while showing the mouth as a straight horizontal line with no lips or teeth can indicate that a character is cross or frustrated, for example.

Techniques

Characters' features are often exaggerated or drawn out of proportion deliberately to help the designer to create a character that appeals to the target audience and that reflects some of the tropes you looked at earlier. Often characters that are designed for a younger target audience have exaggerated or over-simplified features to make them appear friendly and their tone easier to read. For more mature audiences, you tend to find that the character design is a little more realistic and the features created are more in proportion with the character as a whole. For example, Mrs Potts the talking teapot from Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* is clearly designed for a younger audience whereas a character such as Wolverine from the Marvel comic books is targeted at a much older audience and so is designed in a much more realistic way.

Activity

Find images of two cartoon-style characters. Label each one to show how colour has been used to indicate physical and non-physical characteristics of the character.



Synoptic links

You can find further information about this topic in Unit R093, Sections 2.1 and 2.5.



1.2 Conventions of comics

Conventions for storytelling in comics

Panel layout and story flow

Comic strips have very clear characteristics in terms of layout and **story flow**, which is unlike many other illustrated storytelling methods. Western-style comic strips conventionally display their artwork in a sequence of boxes, which are read left to right across the page. These boxes are known as **panels**. Comic book pages typically have six to nine panels arranged in a variety of layouts.

In Manga comic strips, the story flow is different. The story flows across the panels from the right to the left. This also applies to the speech and thoughts bubbles, which are also read from right to left. Figure 3.6 demonstrates the story flow in a Manga comic strip.

When creating a story flow, the use of panel layouts to make sure your audience know where the story is set is important. The first panel is called an establishing shot and allows the reader to know where the story is taking place before the story moves on to the action in later panels. The following panel layouts are all important in ensuring the reader can follow the story flow of your comic.

Splash pages

One layout tool which can be used to help establish the scene is called a splash page. This is where the whole page of a comic is made up

of one panel. Using one panel shows the context and geographical location of the story in one single image. Splash pages are sometimes combined with the title and other front page details. They can also be used for scenes:

- with lots of action, such as a fight scene, where the creator wants to show lots of different things going on at the same time
- where one character or image is a **focal point** and so surrounded by a vast amount of space, such as a figure standing in an empty warehouse.

Spread pages are another tool used in a similar way. A spread page is in effect an extended splash page, where the scale of the panel and its imagery is increased to cover two whole pages in a comic. This can be done in two ways:

- by using the centre pages of the comic as a double page spread
- by creating a fold-out page from a single page in order to create the same effect.

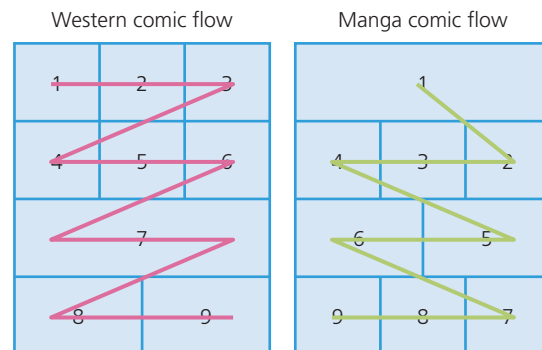


Figure 3.6 Examples of story flow in a Western-style and a Manga comic strip

Key terms

Story flow The path of the story from the beginning, to the middle, to the end.

Panel A container used to contain one scene in a comic strip.

Focal point The place in a panel where the creator wants the reader's eye to be focused.

Rule of thirds and panel staggering

The rule of thirds is a common technique used in many different forms of graphic and photographic construction and can be used equally well in comic design. It involves dividing the page into three equal chunks. For comics, this is usually done horizontally to create the rows of panels for the page.

This technique is often combined with something called panel staggering. Staggering is a method used to divide a comic row into a series of individual panels. This can be done by dividing the row up into two or three equal-sized panels, but this is not generally seen as the best approach. Instead, the size of the panels is dictated by the content that the panel needs to contain. So, one row may have two larger panels followed by a smaller panel on the end of the row, then the next row down may have two large panels which fill the row. This uneven pattern is why the technique is called staggering and is an effective way to guide the reader through the story as the creator intended.

If a comic has a regular pattern of panels similar to how a storyboard can be presented, the reader may interact with the panels in a way the creator didn't intend. For example, they may read down the panels rather than across, disrupting the flow of the story.

Panel shape and size

Panel shape and size can be used to indicate different actions in a comic strip. It can indicate the pace of the storyline and can be used to highlight important parts of the story. A common example of this is the use of a long panel spanning the width of the page to show either the passage of an extended period of time or distance, such as a character travelling down a long corridor.

Another use of panel design to influence story flow is in the size of the panels. Larger panels tend to slow down the pace of the story and a series of smaller panels speed it up. For example, a series of small panels in sequence might show the unfolding of a series of actions

happening in quick succession. When creating a comic story, try to create some variety in the layout of the panels on the page and match this to the story flow, but remember the story flow of the panels shown in Figure 3.6.

Use a good variety of images in the panels to keep the audience's attention. If the same image is used in a range of scenes, consider making the storyline more concise to allow the imagery to change at a good pace.

Communication bubbles

As well as images, a number of text-based conventions are used to explain the story in comic strips. Speech or thought bubbles are used to show the speech or thoughts of characters. How these are used affects how emotion and expression are shown in comics.



Figure 3.7 Examples of speech and thought bubbles

Shape

The shape and style of the bubble indicates the type of communication it contains. Speech bubbles are usually rounded squares or circular in shape with a pointed tail off one corner pointing in the direction of the character who is speaking. The style of the bubble can also indicate the tone of the speech. For example, a spiky outlined bubble might suggest shouting or anger, whereas a bubble with a dotted outline might represent whispering or talking quietly. Communication bubbles representing speech from a radio, television or phone are shaped like lightning bolts or have the tail of the bubble in a lightning bolt shape.

Thought bubbles tend to be shaped as a cartoon-style cloud. There are usually two or three smaller circles leading off the cloud shape, which link the thought to the character.

Sequence and placement

The positioning of speech and thought bubbles in the panels is really important to the story flow. When creating speech in panels it is good practice to avoid crowding your panels with too many communication bubbles. In general, up to two or three per panel, depending on the panel size, is a good guide. Think carefully about where to place the bubbles – they should read left to right across the panel in the order you want the reader to read them. The bubbles also need to be positioned carefully so that they do not conceal any important part of the graphics, for example the facial expressions of the characters.

Narration and captions

Narrative and caption boxes are another convention used in comics to tell the story. These boxes usually contain a small amount of text which can be used to narrate the content of a panel or to clarify a change in the location or situation in the storyline. The boxes are usually placed in the top or bottom corner of the panel either to set the context for the panel or to link to the next part of the story. For example, they often contain text such as 'later that day' or 'to be continued ...'.



Figure 3.8 Examples of correct and incorrect positioning of a caption box within a panel

Onomatopoeia

Another key feature of communication in comic strips is the use of **onomatopoeia**. An onomatopoeia is a word that sounds like what it represents. They are often used to create emphasis for sounds and actions, for example, CRASH! or ZOOOOM! The spelling of these words reflect how it sounds and are usually combined with an exclamation mark.

Key term

Onomatopoeia A word that sounds like the thing it is describing. For example, 'Slurp'.

The style of text used in this type of communication is equally iconic. Onomatopoeias are designed to highlight key elements of sound, movement or communication and their design demonstrates this by standing out from the page. They use bold blocky fonts, which are oversized in order to create impact in the panel. They also usually have a bold, bright coloured outline in either one or a range of colours.

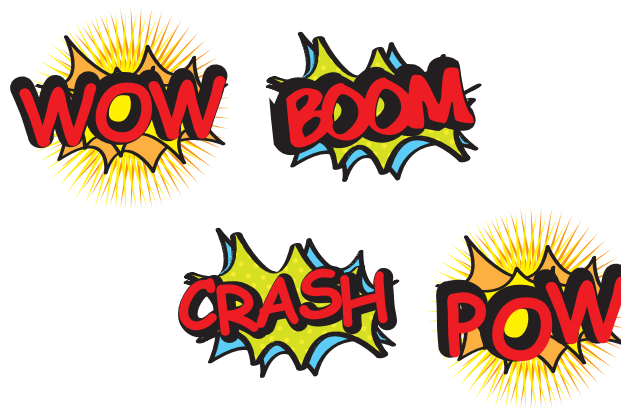


Figure 3.9 Examples of onomatopoeia

Creativity in characters and comics

Originality and imaginative design

We have talked a lot about design conventions and rules which can help you design your comic; it is easy to think that with all the rules to follow there isn't much room for originality, but this is not the case. It is important that your comic combines both comic creation convention that makes the comic accessible to the reader but also some really original and imaginative ideas to make the comic new and engaging.

Derivative design

With the huge range of existing comics and the ability to use templates to construct your comic it is very easy to create something that looks good and follows the conventions but is actually really generic. A comic which is based on another design is called a derivative. It is a fine balance to create a comic that is unique and creative whilst still following the conventions that make the comic easy as possible for the user to engage with. This is where your skill as a comic creator comes in. You need to be able to use the conventions of comic design effectively but

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