

**Comics Economics:
How To Earn A
Living With A
Comics Degree.**

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for Cartoon Allies
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Where do I fit into the market place?

The North American Market

Superheroes & licensed works -> part of a team, corporate support
[Marvel, DC, IDW, Dark Horse, Boom]

Graphic Novels-> individual / part of a team, corporate support [First
Second, Random House, Abrams, Scholastic]

graphic novels/art comics -> individuals, smaller support
[Fantagraphics, D&Q, Top Shelf, Adhouse, Nobrow]

webcomics-> largely individuals , some teams, some collectives, DIY
support [Topatoco, Study Group]

Minicomics/self-publishing/ collectives & distro - individual work,
community support [Spit & a Half, Oily Comics]

editorial comics & gag comics- individuals under heavy editorial over-
sight, corporate support depending on publication
[The New Yorker, AltWeeklies, Mad Magazine,
niche market mags like Cat Fancy etc, websites]

overseas market:

Europe: Albums, BD's, translated material

- helps to speak a language, need contacts abroad

Japan: manga-

1- You NEED to speak Japanese perfectly. At least as well as you
speak English.

2. Only Felipe Smith has gotten published there. Paul Pope tried & it
didn't happen.

3.) Viable as a translation market if you sell Scott Pilgrim numbers.

WHERE DOES MY WORK FIT?

Genre:

Format: (GN, series, issues)

Approximate page length:

True story? ___ Fiction? ___

Age appropriateness / movie rating equivalent G PG PG-13 R
NC-17 X

Age of main characters

How do similar works by other authors sell?

RESEARCHING A PUBLISHER- ARE THEY A GOOD FIT FOR YOU?

1. Where do they do business? Just comic shops? Bookstores- chain & independent? Amazon & online retailers? Libraries & Schools? Digitally? What kind of conventions do they attend?
2. Where do they market their products & to whom? In their own books? Blogs/ news sites - which ones & what audience? On their own websites? What info do they put out for their books?
3. What is their target audience? Is it your target audience too? Are they going to do the best job of getting your book in front of / to the attention of people who'll be most interested in seeing it?
4. What kind of contract / deal do they use? Advance / page rate? Creator owned/ work for hire? Can I live off that money while doing the work? Or, is it a personal project & what matters most is my work gets into print & out into the world under my own artistic vision?

MONEY

Know yourself & what you can accomplish.

A.) How fast do you draw?

B.) How many pages do you typically finish in a week? Month?

C.) What's the difference in your output between full time & part time?

D.) What is the quickest you can complete 22 pages of script & art?

WHAT TO ASK FOR:

$$\frac{(\text{PAGE LENGTH OF PROJECT})}{(\text{NUMBER OF PAGES YOU DRAW IN A MONTH})} = \text{TIME TO COMPLETE PROJECT}$$

$$\text{X} \frac{(\text{TIME TO COMPLETE PROJECT})}{(\text{YOUR MONTHLY BUDGET})} = \text{MINIMUM DESIRED RATE}$$

Other factors:

Extent of editorial involvement- do you need to submit thumbnails, pencils, or other work at stages to be approved? This slows down the process. + \$

Is there a script? Or are you being given something to adapt? More work, + \$.

Do you have to color this? Is another colorist involved? Who pays them? (You? + \$)

Are you on a tight deadline? Yes + \$.

How difficult are the other members of this project to work with? (Very? + \$)

Working with corporate clients, it can take a long time to get paid because of their billing procedures. Many times they have 30 or 60 days to pay you before they're late. Have a cushion for in between projects, late checks, lost invoices, missing checks, etc.

DO NOT QUIT A DAY JOB UNTIL THE CHECK CLEARS.

ADVANCES

These will depend on your contract. Typically, they'll be paid out in chunks over the course of work, maybe just at the beginning & end, possibly at milestones (x pages turned in) if you work it out in the contract.

They're a reflection of what the publisher expects of your sales. You get the money up front to work on & finish the book, then earn back a percentage of each book sold, typically around 10%, possibly split between you & other creators.

When you earn back the advance, then you start to collect royalties quarterly.

Most books never earn out their advances. [Does not mean they all lose money.]

The cost of a book breaks down like this:

Printing costs ~ 10%,

Publisher costs- editor, marketing, promotional stuff, - fixed costs like salaries

Payment to Author/ Artist - 10%

Distributor- buys books for 35-50% of the cover price

Retailer: buys books for ~60% of cover price

Really successful books fund lots of smaller books.

Smaller publishers (including Image) will probably just pay royalties out of books sold, possibly after first recouping their printing costs/ expenses first. Know what the financial commitments are to your book.

PAGE RATES

You are getting hired to churn out material, hopefully at a living wage. They retain the rights to the work you do, and have control over its printing.

The most reputable publishers will pay something that allows you to mainly work on this book. Anyone requiring a tight deadline & full time work of you should do this.

Licensed work + corporate stuff pays the highest page rates. Marvel & DC pay best, leave you with least rights. Ownership of work + control of rights is in your advantage in the long term, you can keep your work in print & earn more long term.

You should control the physical artwork for resale., the collectibles market will pay for your kids braces.

RIGHTS

You earn \$ off of work kept in print. You have control over things you keep rights to. Many streams eventually build up a better income & some savings.

You have no control over work for hire & may just see a check one time for that, unless you have agreements regarding royalties, and the book sells well. Try to own the rights to your work.

Rights can expire if your publisher lets a book go out of print for a year.* They can also be negotiated for a certain length of time.

*This famously fucked over Alan Moore with Watchmen because it was so popular, and DC kept control of the project forever.

Merchandising rights can be a big source of income.

On teams, artists spend way more time drawing the book, and should be paid more, but rights should be split equally between creators.

CONTRACTS

Contain the following agreements:

1. The Work, The Grant of Rights, Territory, and Duration

“Your Book” will be published! Which rights are granted, where it can be published & for how long.

2. Advance

How Much & when you get it.

3. Royalties

This is broken into several categories, for different forms of distribution. It's how much money you get from each thing sold. Usually around 10% for paperback & hardcover, maybe more for digital, weirder amounts for some other things.

Hardcover, Paperback, Mass Market Paperback (airport copies), Electronic Editions, Audio Editions (doesn't really apply to comics), Multimedia Rights & Game Rights, High Discount/Special Sales/Remainder Sales, Export, Direct Consumer Sales, Premium Sales, Short-run Printings, Collections, Free Copies,

Additional & Subsidiary Rights / Licensing

Defining rights & each party's cut in % for:

First & Second Serial Rights (a selection can run in like Reader's Digest), Selection Rights (Best American Comics!) Sound Reproduction Rights (not so much for comics), Non-dramatic Reading Rights, (radio play), Translation Rights (other languages), Motion Picture & TV Rights, Multimedia & Game Rights, Dramatic Rights (stage production) **Merchandising & Commercial Rights** (tee shirts & stuff), Right to Enable Access (Braille)

Intellectual Property Ownership

Who owns all your stuff. It should be you.

Rights Reserved To The Author & Competitive Works

You will not try to make a competing form of this book.

The Author's Deliverables

What you owe them, at what point in time. What happens if you're late/ problems arise from what you deliver. Clearing rights for quotes, etc, used in your book.

Editing And Correction of Proofs

You agree to let your book be edited & the editor may use proper English in this book.

Publication

The publisher's responsibility to YOU to put out the work.

Promotion

You agree to help promote your book & participate in the promotion, possibly on an Author's Tour paid for by the company.

Author's Copies

How many copies you'll get of each edition.

Subsequent Editions

If you write a new forward to your amazing comic that sold super well, the publisher has a right to use that in all its future editions.

Author's Property

They are not responsible for physical copies of stuff, unless they do it by total stupidity. (CONSIDER: Your original artwork.)

Accounting & Payments

When they'll look at your sales & make royalty payments.

Remainders

They are selling off all copies of the book. You can buy it cheap.

Termination/Unavailable for Sale

When they can stop printing & selling your book.

Author's Warranty & Indemnity

You aren't plagiarizing, infringing on any rights, or doing anything that can get you sued. What happens if you get sued, who's liable.

Option

If you must offer your next book to this publisher. How long they have to accept.

Agency

If you have an agent, you authorize them to collect money for you & bargain for you.

Insert of Advertisements

Can they do this y/n

Assignment

Who gets the rights if you die.

Further Documents

You will sign stuff for other rights sales.

Force Majeure

If something happens outside of the publisher's control to delay publication, (strikes, riots, fires, xtreme weather) you can't hold them responsible.

Publisher's Default

What happens if they break this agreement.

Remedies, Notices, Applicable Law

If you're suing them, how to do that & where.

PERSONAL FINANCES

1- STAY OUT OF DEBT. GET OUT OF DEBT AS FAST AS YOU CAN. WAIT UNTIL MONEY IS IN YOUR HANDS TO SPEND IT.

2- Put a monthly budget together / know what your fixed costs are.
Rent + Food + Transportation + Medical Expenses + Phone + Internet
+ Tech needs + Upkeep + Entertainment + Emergency funds + Taxes
+ Student loans

The Federal Poverty Line is now at \$11,490/ year, or just under \$1000/month. It's a minimum salary for living on your own.

Self- employment taxes are 15% for Federal taxes, + state & local taxes. Freelancers have quarterly taxes.

3- SAVE YOUR RECEIPTS. (Also your old taxes in case of audit.)

The Schedule C form allows you to deduct:

Advertising

Car & truck expenses

Depreciation (part of equipment for work you bought in past years)

Insurance (auto/home/biz)

Interest on loans (for business)

Legal & professional services (ACCOUNTANT!)

Office Expenses

Rent/Lease on machinery & equipment on biz property (Risograph)

Repairs & maintenance

Supplies (paper, ink, RESEARCH MATERIAL LIKE COMICS)

TRAVEL, MEALS, ENTERTAINMENT (conventions)

Utilities

Form 8829: Expenses for business use of your home- write off a portion of your rent for your studio space. Could be 35% or higher.

Student loan interest is tax deductible, as are lots of other things.
Learn what's acceptable, possibly from an accountant.

NETWORKING (AND MANNERS)

*** Have a solid & professional body of work to build your rep on. ***

Be nice to everyone.

Never expect things to pay off quickly. Karma is not your bitch, you're in it for the long haul.

Go to cons whenever possible, big & tiny. Also book launches, artist talks, portfolio reviews. Talk to people in attendance too, it's highly likely some of them make comics.

Keep email contacts for everyone you talk to/ write to. Get cards, or make an effort to remember people's names & which company they work for so you can look them up online.

Have a good business card or postcard. With your contact info.

Never force anything bigger than a card on someone at a convention. (Unless you're trading with other artists.) If you do give out minis, etc, don't expect that they'll be read.

Never expect anyone to remember you right away at a convention. Conventioneers encounter tons of people, and it will take a few times for you to stick out. Try to introduce yourself with your work or with a twitter/tumblr/deviantart handle if you have a big presence on that platform, to give people context for how they might know you.

Over the course of several introductions, as your work improves, you build a rep with people you make an effort to seek out. Eventually they'll remember you, and they might start to think of you for projects.

Be polite to everyone. People's careers take them unexpected places, like editorial positions, and you don't want to be remembered as THAT guy.

Have some conscious effort go into your appearance at shows. Try and look professional & like someone who should be taken seriously. You don't want to end up trying to pitch to DC in a Spiderman shirt & you aren't likely to get hired by a lady editor if your funny tee shirt is super sexist. Wear something neutral & you don't have to worry about that.

Don't assume women at booths are underlings.

Have an elevator pitch ready to go. Be able to pitch something as succinctly as possible and answer follow up questions about your project. Know it so well you can do it drunk.

Never bring a written pitch to an editor at a convention. Pitches go to their office, in emails- ideally be between Tuesday & Thursday.

NEVER harass someone you've sent something to, and don't give them reasons NOT to publish you by acting like a dick.

Polite reminders around three weeks after contact should be okay. Err on the side of politeness, and if they need more time, give it to them. Ask for a good time to follow up, people will usually tell you the minimum amount they need, but be prepared to wait longer.

Assume this editor is busy. Learn to "Hurry Up & Wait."

You can have a really good book idea & still get rejected. Don't burn bridges. They might like your work in general but not this project. They might have something like it already in production, or have mandates coming from the top to seek out a particular type of book. Think the long game over ego gratification. Patience pays off.

THIS INCLUDES FACEBOOK. Do not go bitch on Facebook, or anywhere on the internet, EVERYONE can see that shit. Only bitch IRL in a safe NDA space. Beers with bros is the safe time to talk about it and is a million times more rewarding anyway. Don't let a screen grab set back your career.

HOW YOU GET JOBS AS A WRITER

1. Complete a couple big projects.
2. Network. If you can, get an agent. Have nice cards.
3. Figure out who you want to work for. Target publishers you want to publish your work, know what they put out, and make contact with them.

HOW YOU GET JOBS AS AN ARTIST

1. Draw lots of comics pages.
 - Full pages
 - Full backgrounds
 - With a variety of characters that look, act, and dress like real people. (Vary looks, age, race, sizes, personalities, and if you draw a group of grandmas, have them all be distinguishable.)
 - with AMAZING backgrounds & objects that the characters interact with
2. Put your best work on its own portfolio website for viewing. Update frequently, edit down. Make your contact info easy to find so it's easy to hire you. Use your real name or your pen name, not just an internet handle.
3. Have a good looking business card with your art on it, or postcard. Have some on you all the time. Make sure it represents the kind of work you want to get paid for. If you want to get hired to do lettering, it better have nice lettering, same for design, color, inks, etc.
4. Always be hustling. Get your nice cards out to people. Promote your stuff on the internet.
5. Finish things in a timely way. If life stuff happens, take the time to deal with it, then get back to work.

PITCHING A BOOK

Verbal Pitch:

Ideally about ten seconds/one sentence that sums up the most interesting struggle in your story.

“A tough-swinging archeologist tries to save a biblical treasure from the Nazis to save the world.”

“The wisecracking son of the devil fights monsters and solves mysteries for a secret government organization with his scientifically-abnormal friends.”

Try and explain the genre, setting, and tone of your work with this sentence.

-Action, drama, mystery, romance, comedy, horror?

-Sci fi? Paranormal? Furry? Steampunk? Real World?

-Funny? Lighthearted? Dark? Serious? Bizarre?

-Workplace? School? Nomadic tribe in Mongolia?

Know what's at the heart of your story, and be able to tell it briefly if someone asks you more about it. Explain why your hero is an interesting character.

Written Pitch:

THE WHOLE POINT IS TO LET THEM KNOW WHAT PRODUCT YOU ARE OFFERING & HOW THEY CAN SELL IT.

Needs to have all the elements to explain who will buy this book.

If you have a script/ finished pages, those need to go with it. If you have an artist, there should be art. A couple scenes, maybe a whole chapter, of the least boring pages you have.

COMPONENTS OF A PITCH

TITLE PAGE

YOUR NAME & CONTACT INFO

Agent, if you have one

Nice Artwork, if you have it

SYNOPSIS

-Like a paragraph for a back cover summary, but with less “What will happen next?!” & more “This hero travels into space to kill the president, ultimately saving the universe from the terror of invasive brain parasites.” Give your editor a glimpse at the book they’re investing in. The only thing to tease is how many units you’ll sell.

BOOK OUTLINE

-About 2-3 pages, words only (can have art, but about that much text written first), breaking down the entire story & detailing all major scenes & plot points. This is where they see what kind of story they’re getting.

CHARACTERS

-Major ones get whole pages, if you have an artists, have them include REALLY NICE SKETCHES- no rush jobs.

-Important but minor ones get mentions, about a paragraph, & sketches, but don’t need to be as fleshed out.

What makes them awesome?

Why are they here?

Why do we care?

SETTING

Spend a page detailing the place these characters live in, with both words/pictures.

AUTHOR/ARTIST BIOS

All works & honors, anything that a lot of people might know you from. Higher education, any workshops, programs, or residencies you have been through. Sum up your CV in a hefty paragraph.

SELL YOURSELF. THIS IS NOT A PLACE TO BE HUMBLE OR SILLY. OWNING CATS WILL NOT SELL YOUR BOOK AS MUCH AS COMPETENCY WILL.

STUFF PUBLISHERS NEED TO KNOW

Intended audience: Who they will mostly try to market to

age appropriateness

primary intended age bracket (picture book, middle grade, YA, adult)

Genre & Format

Plant costs information= cost of printing this book

(you don't have to call it plant costs, you just have to include a sentence or two with the following info)

approx. page length

color/ B&W

book dimensions (i.e. 6 x 9)

of people on the creative team (writer/artist/colorist)

MARKETING

Are you famous somehow?

Any built in audiences, i.e., webcomic readership, that this would be marketed to?

Do you have a genius marketing strategy already in place?

Do you regularly go to conventions?

Is Oprah your godmother? Do you have another media connection to help get press?

What about your book makes it stand out?

What other books are similar that have been successful? "Fans of X" might indicate sales of X too.

EXCERPT

Show off your work, either script or art.

SIZE OF PROJECTS

An ideal graphic novel is going to be an average of 200 pages, falling somewhere on a range of 150-300 pages. YA is ideally on the longer side (250ish). 400+ pages is going to be a more expensive book, and not something you cut your teeth on. 200 pages is an easy investment for a publisher to make.

Short stories: 20-24 pages will make a standard single issue comic book. For binding purposes, things are made in 16 page signatures, so 16/32 pages booklets are the smallest you can get offset printed for larger runs.

Collections of issues: Generally 5-8 22 or 24 pages issues = ~110 - 200 page book. Story arcs usually cover about this many pages.

Kids books: brevity works in your favor. Less than 30 pages.

300 PAGES

If you can write, draw & ink a page a day, a 300 page book is about what you can expect to do in a year. Extra time for conventions, illness, life stuff, rest, etc. If it takes you one day to draw & one to ink, that's 150 pages a year.

If you can do a page a week, total, a 300 pages story will take you 6 years to finish, at which point you'll have to fix the first 50 pages to match the last. Your subject & characters better be HELLA interesting to prevent burnout.

Comics Jobs

Lettering	Negotiating contracts &
Coloring	representing books as an agent
Translation	Funding work/ book packaging
editing / copyediting	Web design
layout & design	Accounting
Cover Artwork	Merchandising
Marketing & PR	Digital production
Distribution	Software design
Criticism & Journalism	Retail
Publishing	

Other Jobs Your Comics Degree Is Good For

Storyboarding
Some animation work, (less so than actual animation students)
Anything where visual storytelling is involved, which is a lot of media
therapy
education/teaching- TEACHERS ARE THE NEW LIBRARIANS.
marketing
advertising
some crazy internet thing that does not exist yet
photoshop -> photo retouching, graphic design
illustration
textile design

REALITY

Your first book is likely not going to be a 3 book deal. You have to prove your selling power first.

It takes a long time to build a career and get established. Potentially close to a decade. It can be done.

Try and find a day job that allows you mental freedom to work on comics at or after work, or something that is seasonal and gives you plenty of time off.

Rules & norms can be broken, but you have to be a genius to make an outlier book. Mediocre work will not cut through industry bullshit.

Struggling & rejection force you to improve. Early success can hinder a long term career, if the artist doesn't have the goods to back it up.

Try not to be jealous of your peers. They aren't getting recognition for sitting around on their ass, even if you don't like their work or they're a complete asshat. And you're probably getting upset over like, \$10 dollars.

Acquaint yourself with shouldiworkforfree.com.

The advice in here is for working in the comics industry & geared towards earning a living in that industry. When you make comics for yourself, do whatever you want, just make it awesome.