

Penciling is a process. The more *patient* you are with your work the better your finished product tends to be. With every pass, with every state your drawing goes through, the more informed and precise your drawing will be. *Comic penciling is about precision, showing exactly what you need in a panel: nothing more, nothing less.* The information you need to convey in a panel should not be a *Where's Waldo* illustration, it should be a clearly articulated action, image or idea.

Your drawing should never be at odds with your design. To render well is a wonderful skill but if it does not communicate effectively then it is for naught. In a comic, good design will carry poor drawing; good drawing will not save poor design.

Ask questions. Each panel is an illustration challenge. How do you crop the image? Where do you focus the reader's eye? How do the different sizes and basic shapes within the panel create a sense of depth? How does lighting create design elements as well as depth of field?

Once you place two panels next to one another new questions are raised: How do these panels visually work side-by-side? Does the eye flow from one to another easily or with difficulty? If there is difficulty is it because of the spotting of blacks? How the image is cropped?

Once you place a third panel along side the first two these questions must be asked again. When a panel is placed beneath or on top of another you must also be sure that the reader's eye is being led to where you, the creator, want it to go. I often see even seasoned pros crop panels in such a way that the eye is led unintentionally down rather than across the page.

Panel placement and size is also crucial. Juxtaposing one panel over another should be done to meet a specific storytelling need, to convey additional information, not because you want to jazz up the page. The same with panel bleeds.

Word balloons are a visual element, a component of the picture plane that demand as much consideration in its placement as any human body part or any other visual object.

With all the following elements to manipulate and grasp, it behooves the cartoonist not to rush into "finished pencils." I'm sure there are professionals and wunder-kid cartoonists who have the chops to go right to finishes? odds are you are not one of them.

Process.

Some artists work up several drawings on tracing paper first, refining with each pass. Others draw on typing paper or white bond, using a light box to rework their drawings. Others use colored pencils: first starting with a light yellow, then redrawing it over with orange, then a darker blue (then light box onto Bristol).

Some cartoonists does pencil roughs on thick white paper, working the drawing until its close to a finish, he then scans it into the computer and converts the line work into a light blue line. He then reworks the drawing one more time over the blue lines.

Another cartoonist I know does incredibly small and elaborate thumbnail sketches making sure they are the same proportions as the size he draws. He then enlarges these on a copier and then light boxes over them onto Bristol.

A light box and a copy machine are incredibly helpful tools. A light box is crucial. It will save you time drawing. A copy machine allows you to resize elements in your drawing without having to redraw the entire piece. Sometimes you get an expression that's "just right" but the head is too big (or something to that effect), the copy machine allows you to preserve what's "right" and make it even righter. A scanner and PhotoShop work well for this too.

Don't allow your Bristol to decide for you when a drawing is done: A piece of Bristol board can only take so much erasing and redrawing. As the structural integrity of your paper weakens you are more likely to settle on a less-than-ideal solution (before you tear through the Bristol).

The finished piece is not your "original," the original is the printed page. Do not get too seduced by or fetishize your original art. If you blow a panel patch another one in. Use white out, rubber cement, postal labels?as long as it reproduces clearly!

Common Myth: When you work a drawing so long it takes the spontaneity out of it.

A finished drawing should feel spontaneous and not like it was guesswork. Reading any given panel should be as easy as falling off a greased log. True spontaneity is borne from knowledge and craft. Good drawing is confident. Confidence stems from experience.

A finished panel may take no more than ten minutes to draw but that ten minutes may come after an hour of probing, false starts, and hesitation. A simple drawing is like looking at an iceberg: all you see is the tip, what you don't see is what gives the drawing (and iceberg) its stature and impact.

Some cartoonists who are so familiar with their characters and have been at it for years on end make it look easy?especially the ones who are using very simple shapes and characters (like Charles Schulz for example). Again these are the exceptions, not the rule. Most only make it *appear* easy. Their drawings are a result of hours of finding reference material, many studies and false starts.

Size Matters: Some cartoonists work very large?two, three times up from the original. The greater the reduction the tighter the finish. Your hand shakes slightly?after reducing your art by 50% its effect will be lessened.

Common mistake of working large: not making the lines thick enough. After reduction

NACAE

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Other cartoonists work at 100%. The size of their art is the size that it's reproduced. This often creates a more intimate and direct feel.

Everyone has his or her own ever-evolving process of drawing. There is no one "right" way. You need to find what works best for you.

Become intimate with your process.