

Chapter 1

The Skinny on Cartoons and Comics

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- ▶ Exploring the various cartooning genres
 - ▶ Understanding some drawing basics
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So you want to be a cartoonist? Or maybe you already consider yourself a cartoonist — and a darn good one — but you don't have the slightest idea how to market your work. Or perhaps you just enjoy drawing and you'd like to become better at it.

If you want to draw cartoons, you're not alone. Right about now, thousands of budding cartoonists are doodling on any scrap of paper they can find, dreaming of breaking into the cartooning business someday. And who's to say you won't be the next Charles Schulz or create the next Garfield? One thing's for certain: If you're a cartoonist with something to say and you get your point across well, you can — thanks to the Internet — be published anytime and anywhere, even if it's just on your own Web site or blog.

Many people draw well, but they aren't sure how to adapt their drawings for the cartoon or comics market. Others have new ideas, but they draw somewhat crudely and need help pulling a cartoon together. Whether you're brand new to cartooning and want to experiment with different characters and settings to create your first strip, or you've been drawing for quite a while and want some helpful advice to improve your characters, you're probably looking for someone to give you a few pointers. You've come to the right place.

This chapter serves as your jumping-off point into the world of cartooning. Here I give you an overview of cartooning and the different cartooning genres that I cover in this book, I show you how to master the drawing basics, and I discuss how cartoons are marketed and how those markets are evolving. If you've always wanted to be a cartoonist, this chapter gives you the skinny.

Understanding the Different Genres

To be a cartoonist, you need a firm grasp of the different types of cartoons and comics in today's market. I discuss several in this book. Some categories that were once popular now face challenges with the ever-changing market, especially traditional comic strips and editorial cartoons that are married to newsprint.

However, other forms of cartooning that were once off the beaten track have exploded in popularity; they include webcomics, editorial cartoons on the Internet, graphic novels, and comic books. The traditional markets are changing, and the new markets provide an exciting opportunity for cartoonists to get in on the ground floor of cartooning's future.



If you love to draw cartoons and are thinking about trying to become a professional cartoonist, study the categories in the sections that follow and the details about each. Do you have to stick to just one genre? No, but many cartoonists do, which helps their work become identifiable. Check out Chapter 2 for more on different genres and how to work within them. No matter what type of cartooning you may be interested in, it all begins with the basics of drawing and character development. Great ideas and great character development are what make animation in all its forms continue to be popular (refer to Chapter 4 for drawing basics).

Following familiar characters: Comic strips

When you think of cartooning, *comic strips* may be the first thing that pops into your mind. Comic strips are basically a satirical look into the lives of the characters that inhabit them. Comic strips often reflect the subtle truths about our own lives in their observations and insights into the world around us. Comic strips have the longest continuing run of popularity among cartooning genres, largely because people like to follow their favorite characters. This genre historically has been a staple and popular feature in newspapers. As newspapers face market challenges and try to adapt and evolve, popular Web-based comic strips have popped up all over the Internet.

Modern comic strips were first created at the turn of the 20th century as a way to attract readers to newspapers. Comic strips appeared on the scene long before other forms of entertainment media — like radio, movies, and TV — became popular.

Expressing a viewpoint: Editorial cartoons

Editorial cartoons are a popular and sometimes very controversial form of cartooning. *Editorial cartoons* are simply cartoons written to express a political or social viewpoint. They also first appeared on the scene about the same time as the modern newspaper gained widespread popularity.

Early newspaper publishers used editorial cartoons the same way they used comic strips — to attract readers. Editorial cartoonists in the early part of the 20th century were the media celebrities of their day. Their cartoons preceded TV by several decades and were a source of information and entertainment for readers. Editorial cartoons of that era were very influential, even influencing political elections and reforms. From Thomas Nast and his exposure of corruption in the underbelly world of New York politics to the Washington Post's Herbert Block (better known as Herblock) landing on Nixon's enemies' list during the Watergate scandal — and up to the scathing criticisms of the war in Iraq — editorial cartoons have played and continue to play an important role in the annals of political discourse.

Editorial cartoons have evolved over the last century and remain very popular today. However, market realities are challenging for new editorial cartoonists. The profession has traditionally been tied to print journalism, and in the past few years, newspapers have had massive layoffs and cutbacks. But like comic strips, editorial cartoons are thriving on the Internet, and unlike their print counterparts, the Web versions are done in full color, and some are even animated. Check out Chapter 11 for more info on editorial cartoons.

Delivering the punch line: Gag cartoons

Gag cartoons are another popular category. *Gag cartoons* may look similar to comic strips, but in fact they're quite different. Unlike comic strips, most gag strips don't have a regular set of characters or story lines, and they're usually single-paneled. Each new cartoon is a brand new gag or visual punch line delivered in a single frame or box.

Despite not having regular characters, gag cartoons do have advantages over comic strips. One main advantage is that they're marketable to publications and Web sites that want a lighthearted, joke-of-the-day feature that a strip with characters may not fulfill. Gag cartoons tend to be more generic and better suited for these markets. One of the most well-known gag cartoons, *The Far Side*, set the bar high for the genre, and the next-generation successor to *Far Side* creator Gary Larson has yet to surface, so get busy, before someone else beats you to it!

The comic strip's close cousin: Comic books

As the other cartooning genres face the challenges of a shrinking and evolving newsprint industry, one cartooning genre closely related to comic strips is becoming so big, so fast that it dominates not only the cartoonist business but the whole entertainment industry as well. Comic books have exploded in popularity in the last decade, and you have to look no further than the top movies in the last few years as proof.

The following is a list of movies based on comic books or graphic novels, along with each film's worldwide box office sales numbers as of 2009:

You can see by the numbers that these movies grossed more than \$8 billion. That kind of financial

success guarantees that Hollywood will make many more movies based on comic books in the future.

The comic book/graphic novel industry continues to thrive. If you have the skills necessary to enter this popular market, go for it — it's a worthwhile and potentially lucrative market to consider. Although comic books merit an entire book of their own, I focus this book more on cartooning and comic strips. But even if you're more interested in creating comic books, you can still use many of the core pieces of advice that I offer about character development, humor, background, lettering, and so on.

The first four <i>Batman</i> movies	\$1.3 billion
<i>Batman Begins/The Dark Knight</i>	\$1.5 billion
Three <i>Spider-Man</i> movies	\$2.5 billion
<i>Iron Man</i>	\$582 million
<i>Hulk</i> and <i>The Incredible Hulk</i>	\$509 million
<i>Sin City</i>	\$159 million
<i>300</i>	\$456 million
The first three <i>X-Men</i> movies	\$1.2 billion

Getting Started with Drawing

To begin drawing your cartoons, you need decent quality supplies and a designated workspace. Chapter 3 goes into the art of setting up an office, cubicle, or corner for your art and which supplies you need.



Before you go to the store and spend any money on supplies, keep in mind that although expensive drawing tools are great, they won't help you at all if you don't have a little talent and a strong commitment to practice. Your best bet is to try different drawing supplies to see what works best for you. And whatever supplies you end up getting, just be sure to draw, draw, draw!

Reminiscing over the history of cartoons

Cartooning is far from a new art form. Cartoons go back a lot earlier than Charlie Brown, or even the earliest cartoon newspaper strips.

The word *cartoon* comes from the Italian word *cartone*, which means “large paper.” The earliest cartoons can be traced back to some very large canvases — prehistoric cave drawings discovered in the late 19th century. These images were painted on the side of a cave and reflected the daily life of early humans.

Centuries after people drew all over their cave walls to tell a story, cartoon-style drawing continued to evolve, and by the early 1300s,

Egyptians were creating large murals with a series of images that told a story. These images were simple and easy for the observer to comprehend. This form of communication proved to be very popular and has continued in one form or another up to the present day.

However, it was the 20th century and the invention of the modern newspaper that brought most forms of modern cartooning into existence. Although newspapers today are struggling, the art of cartooning isn’t about to die with the death of newsprint; like the news media, cartoonists have found a new outlet for their work on the Internet.

Drawing a basic character’s head

Your character’s head is the focal point for the reader, so you need to understand a few simple basics in the construction and design of the cartoon noggin:

- ✔ **Start at the top with the head shape:** Begin with a simple shape, usually an oval or small circle. In cartooning, almost every detail is exaggerated, particularly when drawing from the neck up. In real life the human head is disproportionately larger in kids than adults and gets smaller in proportion to our bodies as we grow. In Chapter 6, I spell out the steps necessary for the basics when drawing your character’s head, whether you’re drawing a child or a senior citizen.
- ✔ **Fill in facial features and expressions:** The face is the epicenter of all expression, and cartooning is all about exaggerating expressions for effect and drama. In Chapter 6, I show you numerous examples of expressions and their relationship to the different facial features. In addition, I explore the options you have regarding the size, shape, and position of the facial features, as well as the different types associated with male and female characters.

Sketching a character’s body

Designing a cartoon character’s body is always a challenge, and in many ways it’s not unlike building or designing anything else. You have many different parts, and as a designer you’re in charge of how they fit together to

achieve the best design result. Cartoon characters can be created in an assortment of different sizes and shapes. In Chapters 7, 8, 9, and 10, I discuss the basics of character body types and overall construction and the options you have regarding male, female, and creature shapes and sizes.

Honing your skills

To get better at anything, especially a physical skill like drawing, you need to practice. And practice. And practice some more. Consider these basics when honing your skills:

- ✔ **When first starting out, it doesn't matter what you draw — just draw something.** After you have the drawing basics down, you can concentrate on your content.
- ✔ **Persistence is the key, and you'll get better over time.** Practice makes perfect.
- ✔ **Copying the art of other cartoonists when you're young and learning to draw is okay as long as you never claim it as your own.** Make sure you develop your own style and ideas if you want to be a professional.
- ✔ **Try and create something fresh while still being marketable.** Your mind works in a way different from any other human being's. Take advantage of your unique perspective on the world to find something different, but not so far out there that it's unmarketable except to the very odd.
- ✔ **Don't be afraid to ask others for advice, especially if they're cartoonists themselves.** And remember, your mom isn't the best person to critically judge your work, although she's great for your ego.

Not sure how to improve your art? Check out Chapters 4 through 11 for more specifics on drawing everything from parents and kids to the family pet and the family car.

Peering into the Future of Cartoons

For many years the syndicate model has been the primary way cartoons have been marketed. With this model, syndicates sell comic strips to newspapers to build readership for their features. However, this business model is changing, and quickly. This section takes a closer look at how things are changing and what the future holds.

Understanding the changes

Newspapers are going through an evolutionary period, and the end result may not be encouraging for newsprint. The Internet has become a more and more popular venue for aspiring cartoonists and even veteran cartoonists to upload their cartoons.

Two factors have hit newspapers hard in recent years:

- ✔ **The economy and its effect on advertising.** Advertising is one of the largest streams of income for newspapers, and without it they're forced to make big cutbacks, layoffs, and in some cases fold altogether.
- ✔ **The generational shift to getting news from the Internet.** This has had a profound effect on newsprint, and not for the better. Although newspapers have made the shift to the Internet, the operations are more scaled down and pale in comparison to the print editions.

One problem with marketing online is that the traditional syndicate model doesn't work on the Internet like it does in newsprint. For example, newspapers cater to and service individual markets, so a syndicate could take the same comic feature and sell it to multiple newspapers. This worked because the people in Denver weren't reading the same newspaper that the people in New Jersey were reading, so it didn't matter that the same cartoon content ran in each paper. The syndicate could essentially sell the same feature content over and over again.

The Internet basically destroys this model. Unlike newspapers, which represent many markets across the country and throughout the world, the Internet by comparison is one big market. Why would a newspaper's Web site pay for content that can be seen by the same set of eyes elsewhere just by clicking a button? The Internet puts access to almost every newspaper in the world right at your fingertips.

The answer to this changing market is exclusivity. One comic feature is put in one place and all readers must come to it, instead of the old syndicate way of the cartoon going out to readers via their local paper. This model changes the dynamic considerably and points to webcomics as an eventual successor to traditional comic strips.

What the Web offers that syndicates don't

Many webcomics are similar to comic strips you read in the newspaper, except that they're only available on the Web. They're also only available on one Web site that the cartoonist creates. If people want to read the webcomic, they must go to that site.

Cartoonists can generate revenue from webcomics in a couple of ways:

- ✔ **Advertising:** The more people come to read the comic, the more traffic the Web site gets and the more likely it is to pick up a small amount of revenue from advertising.
- ✔ **Merchandise and books sold on the Web site:** Many online print-on-demand (POD) companies cater to Web sites that can offer books for sale as well as other merchandise such as T-shirts.

The creator of a webcomic has more control over his feature than a traditional cartoonist does, but he also must bear more responsibility. Webcomic creators are like small businessmen. They're responsible for not only writing and drawing the comic feature — just like if they partnered with a syndicate — but also the Web site design, advertising, marketing, and sales of related merchandise. The upside is the webcomic creator keeps 100 percent of the revenues instead of giving half to the syndicate.

The Internet has a vast sea of popular webcomics. They're done by amateurs and professionals alike, who take advantage of the ability to publish anything on the Internet. The more advanced webcomic creators display their features in full color and even use some animation.

The future of cartooning has more to do with the public's appetite than with newsprint. The future of comic strips is in transition. Many of the newsprint-based comics may die along with print. As long as the public loves to read comics in all their forms, cartooning will live on indefinitely. New strips will take their place on the Internet. There's no indication that the public will stop reading or that those who have the cartooning bug will stop drawing. The future may seem uncertain on one hand, but on the other hand, an exciting new frontier is just waiting to be explored. The Internet is a vast, relatively new place where cartoons of all kinds will be born and will flourish.