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Chapter **1**

Foundations of Drawing

As the popular cooking show host in *Iron Chef* barks the command to the cooking contestants to gather their fresh ingredients, in this chapter I introduce you to some cool art materials to use for your graphic novel creation. The graphic novel world is so diverse in styles that you may even find that you already possess some of the tools that you enjoy working with. (Cool, huh?) If you already have experience drawing comics or the ever-popular manga (Japanese comics) and like the tools that you are using, no one is going to fault you for wanting to save money and work with what you have.

However, I feel it's also important to expand the ways of executing your ideas on paper. Researching YouTube (www.youtube.com) art product reviews, videos by fans and artists, is a great place to start if you are curious about trying out new art materials to use for your next graphic novel. Shopping online for art materials is easier than ever and cheaper than buying at a brick-and-mortar store. That being said, I do miss touching and feeling the brushes and testing the drawing pencils before making my purchase at Pearl Paint Art Store in New York City; it's a shame they closed!

I recommend visiting Wet Paint Art (www.wetpaintart.com) and JetPens (www.jetpens.com). Both online stores carry an impressive array of art materials, including major brands that aren't easy to find in the United States. Amazon (www.amazon.com) is another great resource for materials, but when it comes to Amazon, you should always be aware of no-name products offered at bargain-basement prices — you may end up with something whose quality is less than stellar.

In this chapter, I explain the various types of materials typically used by graphic novel artists, including my personal favorites. I show you how to use and properly maintain them. I also talk about the importance of setting up your studio and environment. After reading this chapter and gathering the necessary gear, you'll be ready to get down to business.

Gathering Materials

The essentials for drawing manga are surprisingly simple: a pencil, a pen, an eraser, and some paper. While there are countless brands, types of pencils and brushes, and various paper sizes available, you don't need anything fancy to begin. However, that doesn't mean you can always rely on the tools from your elementary school pencil case — sometimes, investing in more professional-grade materials can make a difference. As my art school instructor once said when I tossed out my cheap brushes after just a day of use: “You get what you pay for.”



REMEMBER

Starting with the right paper size and using materials commonly favored by graphic novel artists can make a big difference. Although I offer advice and recommendations on specific tools that are widely available, don't worry if you can't find everything I mention. Many successful artists have thrived without using every suggested material. However, if you have the budget and access, I challenge you to experiment with them to see what suits you best. If they don't work for you, you can always return to the materials you're comfortable with.

Using these tools offers the advantage of easier collaboration and technique sharing with other artists when everyone is working with similar supplies. Moreover, many of these materials are crafted specifically to meet the needs of artists. For example, although cheaper generic inks may be easier to find, they often smudge or fade over time.

The same idea applies to paper quality. You can't expect excellent results when drawing or inking on thin, low-quality paper. High-quality materials are crucial for achieving professional results. Although you don't need to invest in overly expensive, luxurious tools, putting in some effort to find reliable supplies that reduce unnecessary difficulties can make a noticeable difference — and it's often quite affordable.

Paper

If you're drawing a graphic novel for the first time, don't worry about the type or size of paper you're using (after all, paper is paper). I don't see anything wrong

with using regular photocopy paper to practice your characters or when you're just sketching people at the local coffee shop. If you're thinking of self-publishing or presenting your work to editors and publishers, consider working with archival-quality paper, which doesn't yellow or tear as easily as the thinner photocopy paper. Also, consider that printers and editors may expect to see a certain paper size from artists and young prospects. You don't want to submit your best work on, say, a crumpled receipt! If you're already experienced and looking to be published, check out some graphic novels to get an idea of the page proportions and dimensions. After all, if you draw your graphic novel pages using paper that's too big, publishers can't fit all the content within the allotted space. As a result, your image runs off the page and gets cut off (that or scaled down to the incorrect ratio).



TIP

If you're new to graphic novels and feeling overwhelmed with the many different graphic novel formats, don't fret — start off with an 8½-x-11 inch (letter size) ratio for now. You can easily find this size at your local art/hobby shop, where they are sold in spiral-bound form or in packets. You can always challenge yourself to try different sizes down the road if you choose to do so. I have found the letter size easy to follow, as many of us are already familiar with reading this print size.

Typically, a graphic novel artist uses the standard comic book artist's page size — 11-x-17-inch — quality paper known as *Bristol paper*. Bristol paper comes in various thicknesses (measured in *ply*) and surface quality (usually *rough* or *smooth*). If you want to go this route, start with the smooth surface in 3 ply. The company, Strathmore, produces great quality Bristol paper. Smooth surfaces are easier to sketch your detailed pencil and brush line art. Although Bristol paper is high-quality material, it's significantly more expensive than the regular sketching paper you find at art supply stores, and depending on the size you choose to work with, the cost can add up as your graphic novel pages grow. (Don't forget, graphic novels are lengthier than your average comic book.)

DIGITAL PAPER — THE PERFECT “PAPER”?

Let's address that elephant sitting in the room desperately flailing its trunk in the air, wanting to be called upon — the computer armed with the popular artist/illustrator apps or software. Digital programs such as Clip Studio Paint, Photoshop, Illustrator, Procreate, and Paint SAI have a built-in template library that is specifically catered to the graphic novel artist's needs. Not only are the dimensions accurate, but the UI (user interface) makes navigating and selecting different popular templates easy, fast, and, of course, free, no matter how many pages you use. Sending your final artwork to the printers and publishers is simple, fast, and again, free. (See a pattern?)

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So, is digital paper so good that I recommend converting 100 percent to it and putting aside your art paper, and possibly even investing in a digital studio? The short answer is yes . . . *BUT*. Yes, the programs I list above provide you with templates with precise measurements, which are easily customizable. *BUT*, if this is your first time working on a graphic novel, I challenge you to first work on physical paper.

There's a mind-body connection when working with a physical object that you can touch, rotate, and draw on. Yes, you can digitally manipulate a page using your computer software — but I find that it's easy to fall into the trap of relying on the convenience of these tools. For example, I'm guilty of heavily relying on my zoom tool to add detail to my artwork — so much so that I neglect the overall balance and composition of the whole page. In addition, it's easy to get caught up spending hours in such small areas of the frame that ultimately are too small to notice when it goes for the final printing.



TIP

Since the rise and influence of Japanese comics (*manga*) in the western graphic novel industry, artists have adopted many of the materials that the Japanese manga artists use. I challenge artists to try using the B4 manga art size, which measures 180-x-270 mm. While working on my first business graphic novel version of Patrick Lencionni's, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, I found this size to be a great match because I could add more detail to the artwork that would have been difficult on a 8½-x-11 letter size paper yet easy to physically scan into my computer for my assistant to lay in the special effects before sending the files over to my copy editor in Japan. If you are interested, I recommend buying from a Japan-based manufacturer called Deleter (available at www.jetpens.com, where you can also find other awesome manga art supplies). Deleter makes different paper sizes for different purposes and is cheaper than what you'd pay for a Bristol paper pad. These thinner sheets are specially treated so that they don't warp or buckle from the inks the artist uses. Also, they don't tear easily from erasing or using sharp-tip pens or pencils.

PROTECTING YOUR BORDERS

Line frames, known as *borders*, tell you how much of the paper space you can use for your manga images. Artists rely on these boundary lines to contain their drawings and avoid having their work cropped out when it's published. You need to be aware of several border measurements, and you should indicate them on your paper even before you pick up your pencil to draw. Here are the terms you need to know:

- **Safe area:** All images within this area are guaranteed to be printed without any threat of being cropped out.

- **Trim area:** Basically, this area signifies the “end” of the paper. The closer an image runs to the border, the better its chances of being cropped by the printing machine.
- **Bleed (expendable) area:** Cutting machines are imperfect. Sometimes, you want to extend an image all the way to the end of the paper, but unfortunately, the cutting machines don’t always cut right at the trim line, sometimes going past it. Therefore, if your image stops right at the trim line and you want it to go all the way to the edge, it may be cut too short due to the overshoot of the cutting blade. To ensure that the edge of the image doesn’t end before the printed image does, use the bleed area. The printing company considers this area expendable. Art must extend past the trim line all the way to the bleed line.

Drawing supplies

Drawing supplies differ depending on an artist’s personal choice. Try different types of pencils, erasers, and inking methods until you find what you like best. The good news is that pencils are generally inexpensive. If you don’t like one type of pencil, getting another one is cheap.

In this section, I explore different types of pencils and drawing tools that artists commonly use today. If you’re just starting out, pick up any pencil, as long as you feel comfortable drawing with it. However, if you’re interested in either publishing or showing your work around, consider investing in a variety of pencils and drawing tools.

Choosing your drawing pencil

Art supply companies sell drawing pencils in different degrees of hardness or softness. Ultimately, rather than just choosing a pencil at any generic stationery store, I recommend going to your local art supply store where you can see a large selection. There, you can find pencils with varying degrees of lead hardness and softness. Some brands range from extra-hard (5H) to extra-soft (8B). You can find the degree of hardness or softness by looking at the ends of the handles.



TIP

I recently started using a graphite/clay composite pencil called a Faber-Castell 9000. It’s smooth and easy on the fingers when drawing for hours. These varnish-encased leads are a pleasure to draw with, and I recommend getting at least three different pencils with contrasting levels of hardness to get a “feel” for the different lines you can draw. If you go online at Blick (www.dickblick.com), you can get a set of different hardnesses. I recommend getting the range between 2B and 8B. The harder the lead is (higher H level), the more accurate your lines are. This accuracy means you can easily erase the lines after you’re done inking over them. The trade-off is that you lose a certain degree of feel or sensitivity of

the line. Drawing with harder leads also damages the paper if you apply too much pressure. If you're drawing carefully and lightly, this isn't a problem. Most American comic book pencilers opt for a harder lead because it facilitates the inker's job of erasing and gives the penciler more accurate lines, which minimizes any misinterpretations during the inking process. In contrast, the softer the lead (higher B level), the looser and wider the range of line quality. Like the harder leads, softer leads have their own trade-offs. The lines you draw with high B pencils tend to be messier and much harder to erase.



REMEMBER

Although there are a few exceptions, as a graphic novel artist, you're likely inking your own work (unless you have an assistant), so you don't need to worry about someone misinterpreting your penciled lines.

Adding a couple of mechanical pencils

Take a look at mechanical pencils. They're cheap and easy to use, and you're always guaranteed a sharp point. You can find a lot of fancy brands on the market, but you don't need to shell out big bucks to get one that works. Make sure that you get a lead that is the right size to go with your mechanical pencil. Most mechanical pencils come in the standard 0.5 mm size. To refill them, pop open the cap and load the lead. In addition to the 0.5 mm lead size, mechanical pencils come in sizes 0.3 mm, 0.7 mm, and 0.9 mm (the thickest). With a thicker mechanical pencil, you have more choices of lead softness because thinner leads are more brittle and break too easily if the lead is too soft.



TIP

If you are a comic artist already working with a different inker, consider penciling your artwork with light blue-colored leads (also commonly known as *non-photo repro blue*, which doesn't show up when scanning the final artwork to be digitally printed). Art material supply company Pentel sells a variety of colored leads on its website (<https://www.pentel.com/>).

If money's no object: Lead holders

Lead holders are another alternative to pencils, but they're pricier than mechanical pencils because you also need a barrel-shaped sharpener. Like the mechanical pencil, you load or refill the lead by removing the end cap and inserting the lead from the top. After you replace the end cap, press down on it while holding the pencil right-side up. This causes the metal contraption at the front opening of the pencil to release the lead. The advantage of using a lead holder is that you can get a very fine line detail when you need it. The leads come in a package of a dozen with a wide range of softness and hardness.

Templates

Templates — semitransparent plastic sheets with various cutout shapes — are great for drawing geometric objects that are difficult to draw freehand.

Tools to ink with

You have many options to consider when selecting your inking materials. My advice to beginners is to try out as many as you can and see which ones work the best. Be patient with this process, and don't be afraid to experiment with different techniques. I always tell my students that I'm much happier seeing them take risks rather than just attempting to get good grades. Try different inking techniques, even if it means not always getting the desired results.



TIP

Say you already have a set of inking tools, I still want to challenge you to build your own inking library using the popular social media library resource, Pinterest (www.Pinterest.com). Many graphic novel artists post their final inked art pages using various types of brushes, nibs, markers, gel pens, and the like. Try using keywords such as “graphic novel art” and “brush art” to see which styles/executions inspire you to say, “I want to adopt that style.” I find Pinterest very useful when looking for new ideas and techniques to use on my next project. Once I land on a style that inspires me, Pinterest allows me to compile a digital library to store that image. Also, Pinterest is a great place to find inked artwork by other graphic novel artists. Pay attention to the descriptions in case the author of the post reveals what kind of inking tools they used. Give it a try!

Markers/pens

Although they are useful when you want to draw mechanical objects, border frames, and small details, markers today have evolved to produce a variety of artistic line qualities. They also save artists time spent dipping their traditional brushes into their ink wells every other stroke they make on their artwork. Markers are fast and easy to use. There are so many markers to choose from in today's sophisticated market. The following sections break down the categories you'll want to consider adding to your arsenal. Don't worry; these won't break the bank!

Hard tip (Pigment Liners)

If you want to explore the hard-tip pens, such as the Sakura Microns (often referred to as “pigment liners”), note that although they're expensive when compared to cheap kids' markers, they're certainly worth every cent. Used by artists for decades, Microns are great for drawing architecture, technical, and fine detail renderings. Many graphic novel artists also use these for inking border

frames for their artwork. Three sizes I recommend for starters are 0.3, 0.5, and 0.8 mm. Microns range from as thin as 0.15 mm to as thick as 3 mm.

SIGN BRUSH MARKER PEN /HARD-TIP BRUSH MARKER PEN

Despite what the name suggests, the fine pointed tips of these “brush” marker pens don’t look like your average calligraphy brush head. They have more flex than the Sakura Microns to create thinner and thicker widths in my line art. Pentel’s sign marker pen (www.pentel.us) is one of many excellent brands I use. I also recommend investing in the marker pen series, Fudenosuke, manufactured by Tombow. Like Pentel’s sign marker pen, these budget-friendly, hard-tip brush marker pens (available at www.jetpens.com) create subtle, thicker lines when you increase the pressure on the tip. The Fudenosuke series is also available in color sets, making it a great choice for fleshing out your graphic novel character designs, which I show you in the color insert section of this book.

WIDE BRUSH PEN

If you need a wider range of line thickness than the options I list above, these wide synthetic hair brush pens look and function like a calligraphy brush. The Kuretake No.7 Brush Pen (www.kuretakezig.us/brushpen) is just one of many wide variety of options to choose from. Although they are slightly more expensive than Sharpie markers, with a little practice, they produce an impressive wide range of ink strokes. An added bonus is that some of these brush pens have replaceable ink cartridges, which means that you don’t have to buy a new brush pen when you run out of ink. To maximize the lifespan of the brush pens, be sure to replace the cap after each use so they don’t dry up. Also, be forewarned that these inks are *not* waterproof.

COLOR MARKERS

Finally, I would be doing a disservice if I didn’t mention color/grayscale alcohol-based markers that typically showcase a broad tip on one end and a narrower pointed tip on the opposite end. Alcohol-based inks are vibrant, water resistant once dry, fast drying, and great for blending. They are also very expensive for the average artist just starting out. Well-known quality brands such as Copic and Prismacolor are among the elite brands sporting more than 300 flavors of colors (take that, Baskin-Robbins!). Fortunately, many graphic novel artists who use these types of markers typically work with a limited, grayscale palette to shade in large, general areas. I own a 12-grayscale marker set that I use in my artwork, and I love the seamless coverage I get with using the broad end of the marker. The great news is that there are now cheaper brand alcohol-based ink alternatives, such as Ohuhu (not making this name up), that perform well enough at a small

fraction of the price of their more expensive counterparts. Be sure to check this brand out at <https://ohuhu.com/>.



TIP

Be careful if you use low-grade markers that aren't waterproof because they fade and discolor over time. Cost is a huge factor for my beginning students when they're purchasing quality markers. Although they're not ideal for inking smaller details, I recommend getting Sharpie or Bic Mark-it Permanent markers. Both are waterproof, cheap, and commonly used among graphic novel artists to ink frames around the images. To ensure as much longevity as possible, always remember to put the cap back on the marker when you're not using it and store them tip-side down when not planning on using them for a long time.

Brushes

In this digital age where many artists are transitioning to digital brushes, high-quality sable brushes are still used by many graphic novel artists — especially in the indie community. And although I personally no longer use them myself, I can see why. Quality sable brushes, such as the Windsor Newton Series 7 or the Da Vinci Maestro Kolinsky series just feel more responsive in the artist's hand when compared to synthetic brush markers. (Artists call this a “snappier” response.) Even if you decide to go with slightly cheaper art store brands, such as Blick or Utrecht, they typically last longer than markers *if* you properly clean and maintain them after each use. Although there are a wide variety of brushes, round sables in sizes of 3–5 are among the most widely used. To ensure longevity of your investment, always wash them with soap under warm water and store them upside down to prevent any debris from getting into the feral (where the hairs of the brush meet with the cylindrical, metal part of the brush). One way to store them is to tape the brushes to a slanted drawing table. As my painting instructor once said, “Respect the brush head as if it were your own hair.”



TIP

In addition to brushes for inks, I advise getting a couple of thin brushes that you only use for correcting mistakes with correction white fluid.



REMEMBER

Never use your art brush for applying the white correction fluid you find in regular office stationery stores. Correction fluids such as BIC's Wite-Out quick-drying product will cake up your brush ferals and ruin your brush instantly. I will talk more about what options of correction fluids you want to consider later on.

Nibs

A *nib* is a classic tool used by many comic book and graphic novel artists; it resembles a sharp, pointed dart when fitted into its nib holder. Thanks to Japanese manga (Japanese comics), art stationery companies such as Zebra, Nikko, and

Tachikawa produce or sell excellent nibs exclusively for ink illustration. When you use a brush, the quality and length of the hair strands determine the thickness of the stroke, but a nib has the flexibility of two metallic sharp prongs, which pinch tightly together. Dip the nib in ink, and it stores and dispenses the ink from between the two tightly compressed metal tips. By transferring the pressure from your hand to the tip of the pen, you control the thinness or thickness of the line.



REMEMBER

The difference from one pen nib to another is the flexibility of the two prongs. The softer the metal is, the easier it is to draw wider lines. When you have harder, more resistant metal, you get thinner, more tightly controlled lines. Nibs will also gradually lose their flex, depending on the amount of usage, and will need to be replaced every so often. Should you decide to work with these tools regularly, you'll want to buy them in larger quantities to save time and money.

Although nibs may be difficult to find at your local art store (depending on its size and location), you should have no problem finding and ordering them online. I recommend starting off with the G Pen. It's the most popular nib used among pros and amateurs because its metal is well-balanced and allows artists to draw both wide and narrow lines with equal flexibility.

The following are the most common nibs used in manga:

- »» G Pen (most widely used)
- »» Maru (Circle)
- »» Spoon
- »» Kabura
- »» School



REMEMBER

Don't forget to get the nib holder that corresponds to the nib. Not all holders accommodate all nibs. Make sure you check for the matching size. Also, note that since nibs are designed to flex, you'll want to replace them regularly. (I have to replace mine after 3–5 pages of inking.)

Inks and whites

Using waterproof ink is a high priority, considering that accidents happen all the time. My personal favorite is the Japanese Kuretake Sumi Ink. It's not only waterproof, but it also delivers excellent deep blacks and has a nice texture. If you visit

the Deleter store (<https://deleter-usa.com/>), you'll see plenty of other choices marketed as “manga ink,” which are also waterproof and smudge-proof.

What I love about this company is that they have a variety of ink finishes (glossy to matte) to choose from. This Japan-made product is a bit pricey, so if you're on a tighter budget, I recommend getting the Higgins India Ink, which you can find at any local art supply store; Higgins India Ink is waterproof and popular among American comic book artists.

Deleter also makes various types of white correction/editing fluids, ranging in viscosity and drying time. White #2 is what I use to cover up my ink mistakes. Also, I use it to create special effects like snow on a dark background, a technique I show in Chapter 2. Again, these are a bit pricey but worth every penny. There are always cheaper white-out solutions found at local office supply stores. Just be sure that you only use the supplied brush that comes attached to the underside of the cap to apply the solution to your work.

Other cool stuff

The following are other types of tools you should have in your manga arsenal. You can find these items in most art stores or even in grocery stores:

- » **Kneaded eraser.** This soft, putty-like, pliable material eraser can be used to blend, soften, and delete pencil/charcoal lines. What I love most about this is that it leaves no eraser dust behind after erasing my mistakes on the paper, and you can also shape the eraser into any form that comfortably fits your finger grip.
- » **Plastic eraser.** This hard-edged rubber/vinyl eraser is ideal for erasing dark pencil lines and erasing smaller sections of your artwork.
- » **Paper towels.** For cleaning any ink spills.
- » **Rulers.** Triangle and straight edge.
- » **French curve.** For drawing long and short curved lines.
- » **Plastic or Styrofoam cups.** For rinsing brushes.
- » **Thumbtacks.** For securing your ruler or French curve.
- » **White correction fluid.** For correcting ink mistakes.

THE DIGITAL GRAPHIC NOVEL WORLD

Ready for a shocker? What if I told you that fewer younger-generation graphic novel artists are using the materials that I list in this chapter? Advances in digital technology now allow software programs such as Clip Studio Paint, Photoshop, and ProCreate to create professional-looking (and amazing!) artwork from scratch to finished work, using digital art tools that are supplied with the software. All you need in addition to your software of choice (I prefer Clip Studio Paint — www.clipstudiopaint.com) is a laptop/computer and a digital pen display tablet. I use a 24-inch high-definition digital pen display tablet by Wacom (www.wacom.com), which connects to my laptop. My pen display tablet includes a pressure-sensitive digital stylus, which I use to select my favorite ink brushes, nibs, and pencils. (I can select various watercolors, oils, pastels, and charcoal sticks.)

Buying the equipment can be pricey, but it's worth saving up for, considering the increasing popularity of digital art. The good news is that budget tablets, such as Huion (www.huion.com), offer display tablets that are significantly cheaper than Wacom. Although they are stand-alone in that they don't need power cords or an external power supply to function, tablet devices such as Apple's iPad and Android's Galaxy are now powerful enough to run optimized software such as ProCreate and Clip Studio Paint. However, be mindful that the screen sizes are significantly smaller than today's larger desktop/laptop screens. Also, consider the learning curve of getting used to the workflow with your tablet's digital keyboard shortcuts, because there is no physical keyboard unless you pair one via Bluetooth (which eats up your tablet's battery life.) That being said, working digitally also has many productivity advantages over traditional methods of drawing, including

- **Easier edits:** No more messy correction fluid or dealing with eraser dust when making changes to your artwork.
- **Faster execution:** All the software programs I list in this chapter allow you to work in digital layers (think tracing paper). Artists can use a layer that has their rough sketches to create a finished inked artwork on a separate layer above.
- **Exposure:** No need to digitally scan large art originals on that small flatbed scanner before sharing them with friends, clients, or social media. With a click of a button, your creation is ready to be viewed.
- **Smarter storage:** Tight on studio space? Digitally stored artwork doesn't cramp your style with storage boxes filled with your art originals. Not to mention, it's so much easier to store and organize files on your computer's hard drive and/or cloud storage.

Establishing Your Studio

When you have the materials you need, set up a proper environment so that you can work productively. When you first start out, the basics of setting up a place to work are quite simple. You need a chair, a table to draw on, and a light source bright enough that you don't strain your eyes. It's that simple. (Or, is it?)

"Okay," you say, "So what's the catch?" I'm glad you asked; the catch is that the place you choose to work needs to be a place where you can be productive without everyday distractions. This task is a lot more challenging than you may imagine. Small distractions add up and can throw an artist off focus. As my children are entering their teenage years, my house is full of noise, ranging from electric guitar and violin practices, video games, loud streaming shows, and neighborhood peers incessantly ringing our Alexa doorbell, asking my kids to play. Sometimes, it's good to bring a sketchbook and pen to my local coffee shop or bar to relax or blow off steam before resuming my work. In some cases, I may struggle throughout the day without finding my groove. Bottom line: It happens.

Discover your Fortress of Solitude

Although no single right solution works for everybody, try to identify some distractions that prevent you from concentrating on your work. For example, do you have chatty friends who keep calling your smartphone? If so, set the phone to silent mode when you work and let your voicemail pick up. Does your neighbor blast the radio so loud that you can hear it all the way across the street? I used to wear earplugs or listen to my favorite podcast to combat this problem when I lived in Brooklyn. How about siblings or roommates who watch their favorite streaming shows or play video games all the time in the same room where you draw? Move to a different room with a door or designate a quiet time when the TV stays off. Bottom line: Be proactive in getting the most out of your working environment. You may find the best place for you to work is as simple as the kitchen table or the bar table in your basement.



TIP

When looking around for a good place to work, keep track of your time to see how much you can accomplish in 30 minutes without having to stand up or leave your drawing table. Are you able to do it? Good! Next, try to work for 45 minutes and then for a full hour. This exercise helps you gauge your work productivity.

Get the right stuff

As I mention at the beginning of this section, all you really need to start your first graphic novel studio is a drawing table, a comfortable chair, and a lamp. You don't

require several thousand dollars' worth of equipment for your studio to be an effective working environment from the start. My first setup was a ping-pong table, an old toddler's bar stool, and a 15-year-old lamp.



TIP

If you plan on working for more than an hour, I recommend getting a good lamp that reduces strain on (and ultimately prevents damage to) your eyes. There are many LED lamps equipped with camera mounts to position your smartphones to record live drawing sessions on your social media channels, such as YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram. Even better, there are now LED studio lights made for artists working in low-light conditions that allow users to adjust the warmth (temperature) of the light to closely emulate natural outdoor daylight.

I have always used a studio arm lamp that has a circular fluorescent light with a warmer LED standard bulb at the center. When both are turned on simultaneously, the cool temperature of the fluorescent light pairs well with the warmer temperature of the LED bulb. If you're on a budget, consider trying the LED lamp with temperature control, as they are about half the cost of the fluorescent/LED lamp that I own.

Want to hear my guilty evening pleasure? When I'm working nights at my digital tablet, I turn off my studio lights and turn on my LED strip lights that I have attached to the backside of my workstation table. Changing the colors of the lights according to my mood helps me zone in on my work and shut out any distractions around my house. It's cheap and easy to apply. Try it out!

You should also take a moment from time to time to stand up and stretch your body. Some chairs come with adjustable height levels so your neck doesn't strain from supporting the weight of your head leaning over the artwork. In the next section, I give you some advice on upgrading your work equipment if you plan on working for an extended period of time.

Studio 2.0 (it's possible!)

If you ever decide that you want to upgrade from the basic table, chair, and lamp setup, the following list can help you decide what you need:

- » **Drafting table:** Your drafting table should be slightly tilted toward you, which minimizes the strain on your back and neck from your head weight. Back pain occurs when you constantly bend too far forward over your work. Aside from the ergonomic issue, a tilted table can improve your work. Having your work parallel to your body minimizes the amount of distortion perceived by your eye. You should also get a side tray to hold your pencils, brushes, inks, and nibs. (See "Gathering Materials" earlier in this chapter for more info.) Your side tray should be sturdy and have enough compartments to accommodate your

wide range of materials. Because your table is on an incline, your tools slide off if you don't have this tray.

- » **Lights:** As I mention earlier in this chapter, lights are an essential tool in reducing the strain on your eyes. If you're drawing for long hours every day, consider getting an LED lamp on Amazon (www.amazon.com) that allows you to alter the temperature and intensity of the light.
- » **Chair:** Choose a solid ergonomic studio chair for your workspace if you plan on sitting at your drawing table for more than an hour at a time. If possible, try out the chair you're interested in before you buy it. (You should visit different stores and try out several chairs before deciding.) You'll potentially be sitting in this chair for a long time, so make sure that you get an adequate cushion and back support. Your drafting chair should come with a lever to adjust its height, and it should give your feet the option of touching the ground for support. Finally, should you need to stretch your back or move away from your drafting table, the back section of the chair should tilt, and the legs should have ball-bearing coasters that enable you to move around without having to get up.
- » **Side table:** Your side table can be anything that's stable that you can use to place extra stuff that can't stay on the drawing table. It doesn't even need to be a table. It can be your dresser, a mini-bookshelf, or even a trunk or case that happens to be lying close to your drawing table. If it has a place in which you can store items, that's an even bigger plus! In my case, I keep my oil painting materials for my illustration work on my side table. On top, I have my most treasured equipment of all — my coffee maker!
- » **Light tablet:** This item comes in handy when I need to copy or transfer a drawing from one paper to another. This thin USB-powered tablet has a milky plastic surface, where I place my original drawings. On top of the original, I place the paper onto which I want to transfer the drawing. When I switch on the power, a bright LED light shines through both sheets of paper and reveals the original image. Using the image as my guide, I trace over the lines to get an accurate reproduction. I use a light box to transfer my thumbnail sketches to my final manga drawing paper.
- » **Flatbed Scanner:** In today's printing world, everything is submitted and formatted digitally. So even if your computer is 10 years old, having a basic flatbed scanner is essential. It allows you to scan and prepare your artwork for print submission — or, like I often do, you can send your scanned files to another artist or friend who can help with formatting.



REMEMBER

You don't need to get everything at once, but if you're serious about drawing manga, this equipment may improve not only your working environment but also your final product.

