Graphic novel

- voice over
- borderless panel
- splash
- emanata
- speech bubble
- icon
- panel
- gutter

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Definitions of features

Panel – Panel refers to the framed image. It offers the reader a perspective or point of view on the subjects also known as the camera angle. Sometimes panels do not have borders, creating a unique effect where the subject seems to stand outside the storyline.

Splash – Splash is a kind of panel that spans the width of the page. If it runs off the page entirely, it is known as a ‘bleed’.

Voice over – Narrators have the possibility to speak directly to the reader through a voice over. Usually this is done with a hard line separating the narrator’s speech at the top or bottom of a panel from the image within the panel.

Speech bubble – These are frames around the characters’ language, a kind of ‘direct speech’, where the characters speak for themselves. If these appear as clouds, they represent the character’s thoughts. If they appear in jagged lines, the character is shouting.

Emanata – This term refers to the teardrops, sweat drops, question marks, or motion lines that artists draw besides characters’ faces to portray emotion.

Gutter – This refers to the space between panels. Readers tend to ‘fill in the blanks’ and imagine what happens between panels, a process known as ‘closure’.

More aspects to consider

Style - The artist’s drawing style can be discussed using several terms. Scott McCloud, in Understanding Comics, shows that there are four ‘scales’ of style: complex to simple, realistic to iconic, objective to subjective, specific to universal.

Colour – The colours that an author uses will affect the reader’s experience as well.

Narration – Keep in mind that comic books allow the writer to show and tell at the same time, meaning there can be a combination of direct narration and indirect narration.
Time – Graphic novels and comic books do not have to tell a story in a linear way. Besides the use of transitions between panels artists can explore multiple moments in one panel, like a collage.

![Comic panel](https://www.marjane-satrapi.com/)

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**Graphic weight** – This term is used to discuss the amount of contrast in an image. Are blacks offset with whites? Are there many shades of grey in between? With regards to colour images, one can look for the degree to which colours are vivid or opaque.

**Foreground** – Where is the subject or the point of focus for the reader. If the subject seems closer to the reader, in the front of the scene depicted, it stands in the ‘foreground’.

**Midground** – If the subject stands in the middle of the scene that is depicted, then it is in the midground. Placing a subject off-centre can also be used to create visual tension.

**Background** – The objects in the background (not usually the subject) help add contextual information for the reader.

**Camera angle** – If the panel were a photograph, where would the camera stand in relation to its subject? How far away from the subject is the camera? Is it a long shot, medium shot or close up? At what angle is the camera pitched? Is it a bird’s eye view, a high angle, eye-level, or low angle? All of this will have an effect on the reader’s understanding of the subject.
**Transitions** - There are six types of transitions that artists use in comic books, all of which have a different effect on the reader. Transitions refer to the process of closure (where the reader mentally ‘fills in the gaps’) in the gutter, between panels.

1. Moment to moment

2. Action to action

3. Subject to subject

4. Scene to scene

5. Aspect to aspect

6. Non-sequitur

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Test your understanding

Apply the terminology that you have learned to the following page from Persepolis by Marjane Satrapi. Give a detailed analysis of the stylistic and structural features that she uses. Explain their effects on the target audience? Why has she made these artistic choices?