

An Answer Guide featuring

Top 10 Questions of Developing Cartoonists



**Visual
Banter™**

Free Guide for Comic Illustrators

Contents

Welcome to the Journey	03
What to do if I am not progressing?	04
Drawing From the Imagination	10
Drawing Anatomy	13
Perspective	16
Backgrounds	19
Artist's Block	22
Honest Feedback	25
Stop Creating Junk	28
Success or Sell-Out?	31
What Next?	34

Welcome to the journey!

To be able to create funny illustrations and situations that make others smile and laugh is a great thing to do. Imagine each new day is a way of putting a humorous spin on a grim situation, or making lemonade out of the various lemons in your life. That's what cartooning is all about.

But it's not all Fun and fiesta Mix.

Cartoonists, like all artists, have questions and problems of many kinds. From the artistic to the psychological, we have the same teeming bugaboos as any artist, and have to work through them. As someone who is a fellow traveller on this journey, I have made rest stops, listened to podcasts, and I have some of the same questions as you do.

What I am here to do is to assist you, the new cartoonist, no matter what stage of development you inhabit. I hope to clear some things up, hand out some pearls of wisdom, and be there to support you as you create some great images and to nurture that original voice of yours to put out something into the world that adds to the beauty, and flavor of it.

Can you imagine a world without Peanuts cartoons? What about without animation or Pixar? Or opening a comic book or a graphic novel and there is no magic to accompany the words. What about the first time reading that whimsical children's story that you wanted read to you repeatedly when you were a child?

I've been drawing humorous illustrations for too many years now. Ever since I learned to draw, I have wanted to add humor to people's lives. Drawing saved my sanity and allowed me to listen to my teachers in elementary school. It taught me valuable lessons on what to do with downtime. All those hours of drawing with one goal in mind, to bring a smile to the face and warmth to the heart.

A skilled cartoonist has an important job bringing laughter into the world and to communicate effectively about observations of the world and who we are. So come on, join in! And dig into this guide!

1. What's the solution when I feel I'm not progressing?

Banner art courtesy of vecteezy.com



Answer

Compare your work over time

The first step in addressing the frustration of a perceived lack of progress is to determine if it's true. One of the ways a sketchbook is important is it can show the artist a log of their progress over time. So the first step in analyzing your own work is to see where you are. You will see in your sketch books moments of triumph as well as embarrassing mistakes and bad starts.

Also, there are times when you just weren't ready to finish a sketch or drawing and revisiting an earlier work can give you a chance to complete what you started.

Write down your weaknesses

Maybe you have a problem with certain parts of the anatomy. Perhaps your figures appear static or your poses all appear to be the same. Maybe their clothing or expressions are all similar. You find yourself struggling with perspective or a decent background.

Or— maybe your work is pristine and beautiful and just lacks a sense of story. This too can be a problem where there is no story being told, and thus, nothing holds the interest of the viewer. Regardless, make a list of your weaknesses, whatever they are, and think about ways you can improve on them.

***One of my earliest weaknesses in drawing was a lack of cleanliness to the work.
Based on the way I held my pencil, I would smudge my drawings.***

Write Down Goals For Improvement

You have make goals. Face those weaknesses head on. Create projects taking you out of your comfort zone and make you focus on those weaknesses. If you have trouble drawing hands, then draw hands. If you struggle with perspective issues, then focus on creating pieces featuring perspective. How are you going to get any better at something unless you address it?

Do a master study of artists who inspire you

Chances are, when making the list of weaknesses, and creating some goals, you had a couple artists in mind you want to emulate or be like, so why stop there? A good exercise to do is to take an artist or two and copy them, see what techniques they employ when creating a great cartoon. Also look at how they turned a negative into a positive. For those who don't have the best drawing skills, how did they overcome the deficit? What did they do to improve?

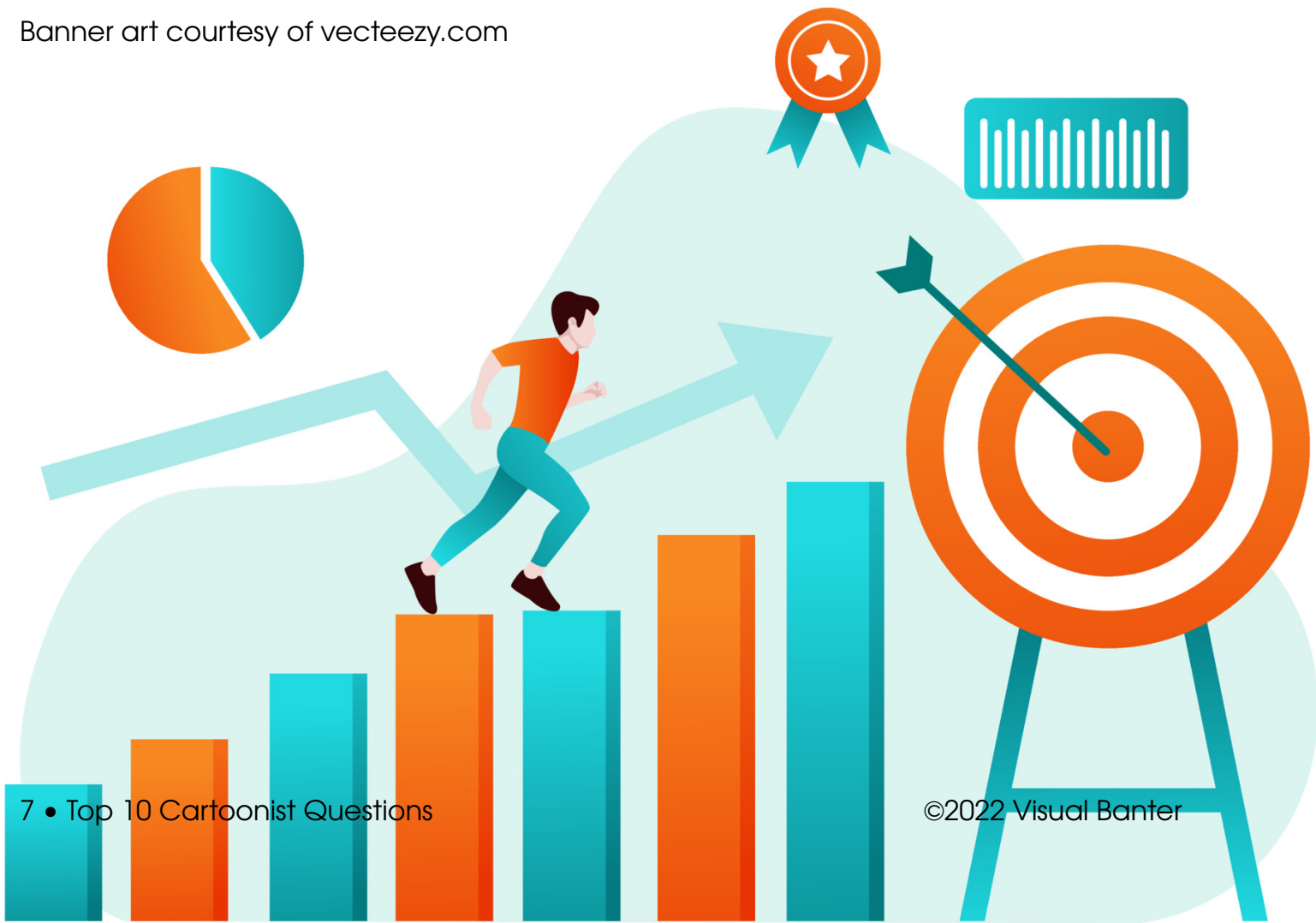
If you look at cartoonists today, you can see how their work was influenced by work previous to them. Such influences not only occur artistically, but thematically as well. Take for instance a number of cartoons that appeared in newspapers throughout the United States. There was B.C. which dealt with Caveman, and then also there was Hagar the Horrible, which had Vikings, Wizard of ID, which focussed on the middle ages, and finally Beetle Bailey which focused on Army life.

Here is a master study I did of a Bosch drawing. Some of the elements are different than the original drawing, but I tried to stay faithful to the overall spirit and content of the original drawing.



2. How do I stay motivated?

Banner art courtesy of vecteezy.com



Answer

Develop the sketching habit

The first thing to consider is it's not a question of motivation or discipline, but commitment. Try as you might, there will be days when you don't "feel" like creating. And it is good to listen to those feelings as they are indicators that you might need to do something to recharge.

But keep this in mind. If you develop the practice of setting aside time to sketch every day, you will get motivated. The very act of "doing" starts momentum, and that momentum is what sustains motivation. If you are waiting to be inspired, or you want the winds of creativity or a muse to guide your path, you will be waiting a long time.

Yes, there are days when it feels effortless to create, but what do you do when it's just a Wednesday?

Refill your creative tank

Creativity is a form of exchange, at times you breathe out, you put your work out into the world, but there is also time to breathe in, and consume and refresh the creative tank. There are a variety of ways to refresh your creativity such as watching a movie, listening to music,, taking in a podcast, follow a tutorial of a favorite artist, or simply getting some rest and going out into the world and socializing.

Being a consumer of art will help you stay motivated to create art.

Set aside a time and place to draw

You should do this not only to train your mind and body that "this is the place and time I go to draw," but you also are more likely to do that, if the place and time is the intended one for drawing. If you try to draw say at a dinner table, chances are you will get caught up in distractions like eating, or going over other things.

I like to draw during karaoke. So I will come to a bar and grill armed with my sketchpad and ideas on what I wanted to draw.

Learn New Skills

One of the best ways to recharge yourself is to learn a new skill. So when the creative tank starts to get empty or you lose motivation, it is a good idea to find something else to work on. This should also be a great way to inspire yourself to find ways to use these new skills in interesting ways in your work.

As you scour the internet you will realize there is always something new to learn, if not something completely different, maybe a variation on a technique or some new way that you can save time, effort, or do things at greater efficiency, Compare your work to other Artists and see how it stacks up against the. This too will help you assess your progress (if any.)

Do A master study of artists you look up to who appear to have addressed these weaknesses.



Inktober, the brain child of Jake Parker, is a time of year where you decide to use exclusively pen and ink or the digital equivalency to it to create images based on prompts. Here was my response to the prompt "Dizzy."

3. How do I become better at drawing from the imagination?

Banner art courtesy of vecteezy.com



Answer

Draw from life

In addition to refilling your creative tank, you also want to add to your “bank” of reference material to draw from, and this is what you will do when you draw from life. The more you observe and draw from life, the more you will be able to draw from the imagination. It won’t happen immediately, but the combination of muscle memory training, and retaining the experience of drawing something will help you replicate it from memory.

A simple version of this is drawing a cartoon character over and over again. Do it enough time and you can doodle it almost without thinking about it.

I can draw Garfield and Bill the Cat from memory due to drawing them all the time. Maybe it is an “orange cat” thing.

Combine two separate references

To help you on your journey of drawing things from the imagination, one of the ways to prompt the imagination is to blend two different references into a composite creature. As you create, you figure out the different prominent features that define these different references and develop a way to blend them together.

I remember in elementary school doing this by combining a giraffe with an elephant. I believe I called it a “girelephant.”

Doodle without a purpose

When you start drawing without a goal or a thought in mind, this should organically kick you into “imagination mode.” The point is to not over-think it and just let it happen, which is hard to do. Drawing like this will lead to some interesting creations, many of which will be drawn horribly. When you address these images and make bad ones, it will ultimately open the way up to create good drawings as well.

From a Prompt, Try to Draw something without reference.

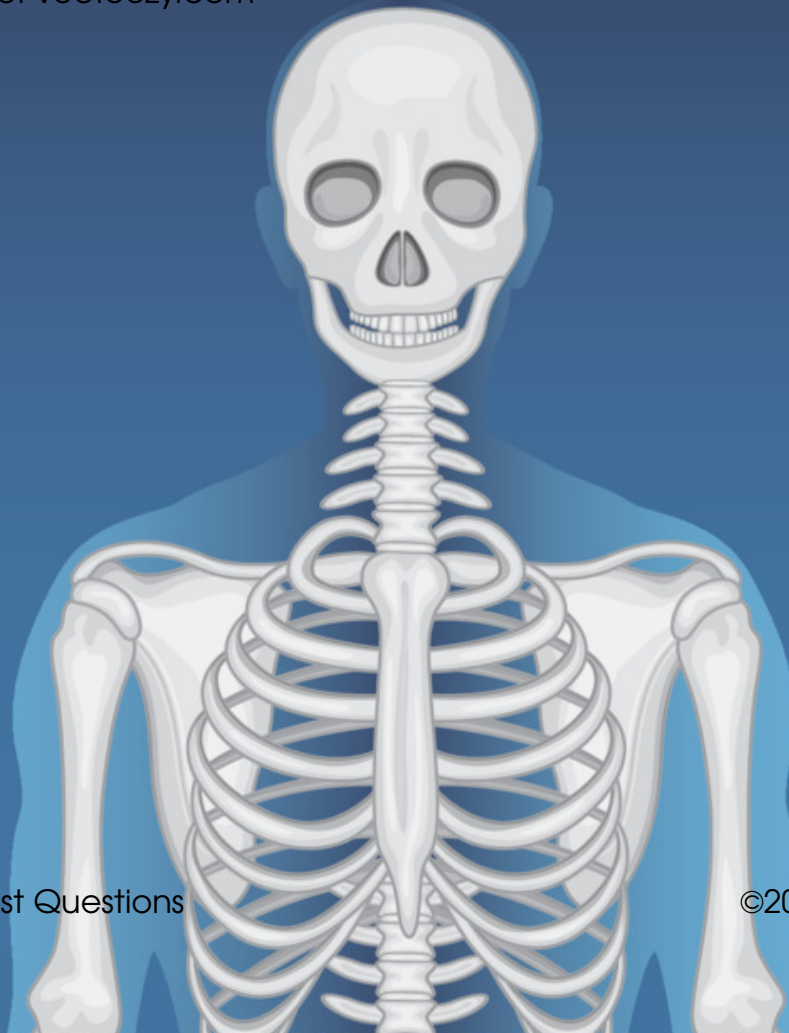
When getting a drawing prompt, attempt to create it without looking at any reference. At the worst, this can help you figure out how well the exercises and various strategies are working or not. If you are asked to draw a cat or dog, examine the creation to figure out if it looks similar to the idea of a cat, or if you need to work more on creating one.



I have done a series of aquatic robot pictures, each one building on the last. This one is of a robotic sea turtle.

4. How can I learn to draw human anatomy better?

Banner art courtesy of vecteezy.com



Answer

Draw from life, I know I sound like I am repeating myself...

This is the first best answer. Draw people whenever you can. The more times you draw them, in different poses, the better you will get at it. It doesn't have to be live drawings, although some experts and teachers swear by them. You can dig up reference wherever you can find it, whether online, or a magazine or a book on anatomy

Just about any time there is a new pose or emotion that I am drawing, It adds confidence to what I am doing to see it in reality.

Find Classes, Tutorials, and Books

It almost goes without saying, but if you can find a free class, a tutorial, or a book concerning anatomy, then seek it out. This will help guide you along the road to getting better at anatomy. There are groups that meet that do live Figure Drawing. If you are having trouble with certain parts of the anatomy, you can search those online, and finally, you can dig up books with tips and tricks from reputable artists. I was reading recently the Loomis book on illustrating the head and figure.

Isolate the anatomy problem areas

Chances are you already know the different areas you are having trouble with. So, take the time to draw those, practice drawing them in numerous poses and angles. This will help you gain a better understanding of the anatomy and how it works in context with the rest of the body.

I will have trouble with hands as long as I draw. I don't think I can ever truly master this part of the anatomy since there are so many poses for it.

Break down the anatomy into simplistic forms

Part of being a cartoonist is breaking down complexity into simple shapes and forms. This will help you also better understand anatomy. For instance, you break down the head into a series of circles. You see the arm as a number of cylinders. The hand itself can also be broken down into simple shapes to make it easier to visualize how it works.

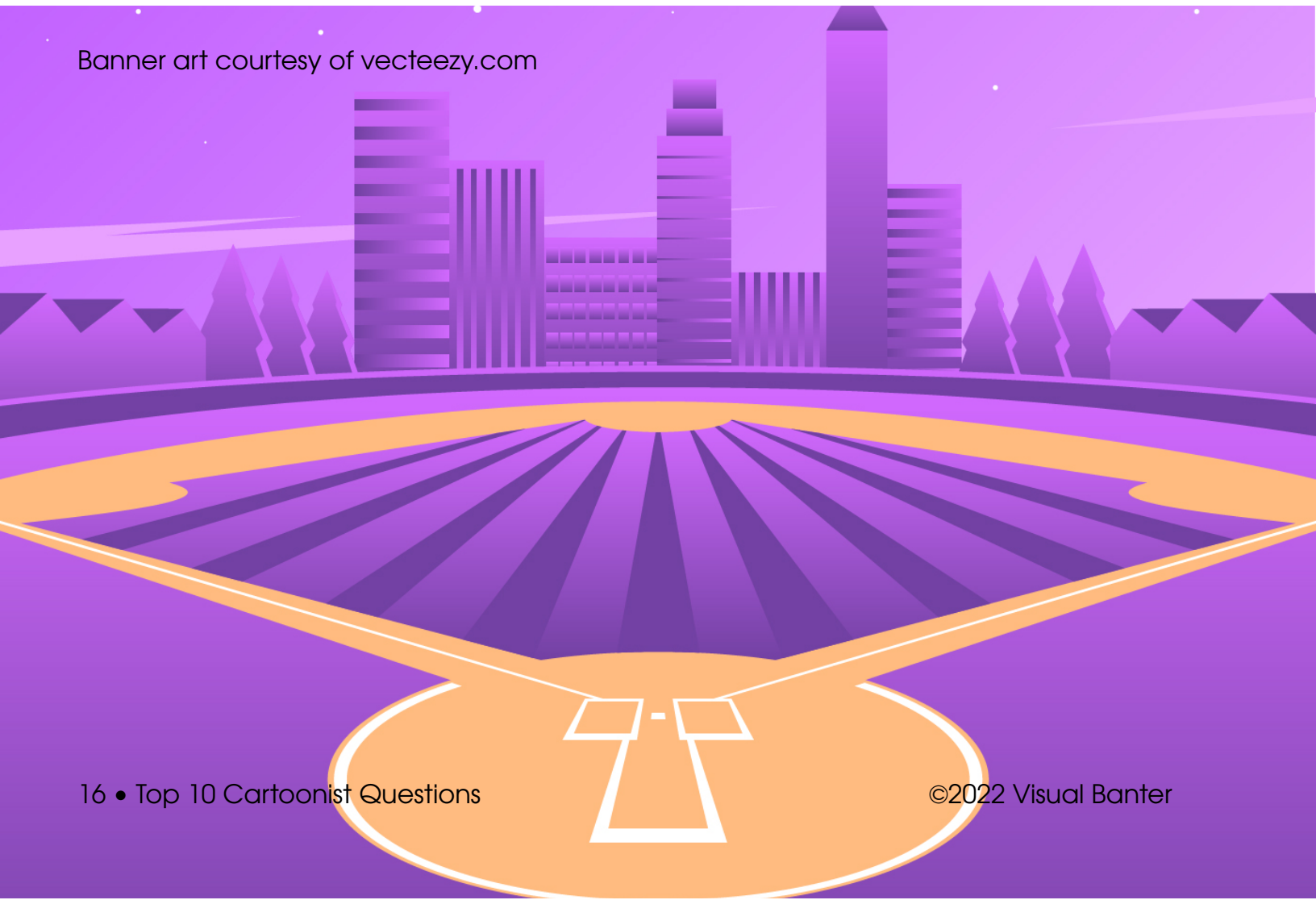
You can also break down the forms into cubes or boxes as well, and if you look at anatomy enough you will see triangles and other shapes as well. The point is to use these techniques to make drawing them easier and figuring them out and understand them.



This was for a drawing class in college. I decided to make my hand drawing a little more surreal than the assignment directed.

5. How do I draw perspective?

Banner art courtesy of vecteezy.com



Answer

Comic books have the perspective thing figured out to add dynamic and drama to a drawing just by showing the world and character in perspective.

Learn the differences between the types of perspective

There is one, two, and three point perspective as well as atmospheric perspective. The difference between the different “point” perspectives are the number of vanishing points. One point, like the name implies, has a single point of convergence, and the same goes for the other two.

Atmospheric perspective on the other hand gives the illusion of depth primary through the use of line and color. For instance, up close objects will be bigger and more defined, and the colors are more saturated. In the distance, objects are lighter, blurrier and less defined.

My natural inclination is to keep going with detail, even when the background should be kept in the background, I have a tendency to keep adding detail.

Draw an interior/exterior scene in perspective

Instead of drawing the room as a simple background, draw it in perspective. It adds so much more to the image when you do this. For instance, I love to draw a room interior in two point perspective, the requisite walls end in the vanishing points for the perspective and one of the corners becomes a focal point.

Learn how to draw people and objects in perspective.

In the last question, we talked about breaking the different parts of the body down into simple shapes. In a similar fashion, we can also show those shapes in perspective to get an idea on how the body or objects will look in perspective as well. Early on, the tendency will be to strictly adhere to the perspective grid, but as you get more experiences, you can simply create objects in perspective by looking at the guides and making your own determinations on how the objects look in space.

Seek out online tutorials, classes, and books that detail lessons in perspective

A book that I was using concerning how to create objects and backgrounds in perspective was the "How To Draw" book on perspective. This is a great book as it gives you ideas on how to construct objects in perspective and the way to use boxes and other shapes, divide them, all in order to show how they fill a space in perspective.

If you look at the Ralph McQuarrie books on star Wars art, you can tell in his concept art he often employs perspective in adding drama and a dynamic/ereel to his work.



I used atmospheric perspective in the creation of this illustration of the "Moonshine Turtle." As you can see the background is very blurred but up close it is detailed.

6. How do I draw better backgrounds?

Banner art courtesy of vecteezy.com

Answer

Think of an appropriate background for the comic scene

Some comics don't even use a background at all while others have a very elaborate background. The idea is that the background should compliment the story being told and not distract from it.

For instance, you wouldn't generally hold class outside unless it was a field trip, and you wouldn't play baseball inside unless it was cold or inclement weather. Such contradictions would create questions and confusion in the viewer. So the point is to create a background that propels the story forward—unless it is a fish out of water story, then the appropriate measure for the background would be that it was an odd background for the character.

Only include parts that tell the story

There are a couple of things background does. First, it helps tell the story. What use would Little Red Riding hood be if she wasn't in a forest? What would Finding Nemo be without the sea? What would Frozen be without the winter wonderland?

Another reason for background, is backstory, and you can include great clues to the backstory by adding in elements of the background into the scenery. The habitat of the character reveals what it is that interests them. Smaug sleeping on a pile of gold is a great indicator of what is important to a dragon. Doc Brown's house full of clocks says something about the person, he is obsessed with time.

Sometimes doing this is over the top, and in comedy as well as drama, this can hammer the point across of the type of character we are dealing with. On the other hand, there can be subtle touches that are overlooked that only a keen eye can see, or it becomes manifest in the subconscious mind.

My natural inclination is to keep going with detail, even when the background should be kept in the background, I have a tendency to keep adding detail.

Create contrast between the background and foreground

When creating a background, the idea is to make sure that the characters stand out from the background. So one of the major things you can do is make sure there is plenty of contrast between the back and foreground. So make sure the foreground is light on a dark background, or vice versa.

Produce backgrounds of different environments.

If you find yourself struggling with backgrounds, one of the best ways to address that is to create a number of different environments. Set a scene in a desert, or in a cold arctic place. Make some decisions regarding the story and ask yourself the question as to what kind of setting it takes place in.

Superman has his fortress of solitude, Batman has a cave, what would your character have that would be a reflection of the life they are living?



I wanted to create a subtle contradiction in this illustration. I took a character from the depression era and gave him trappings of modern society.

7. How do I push through artist's block?

Banner art courtesy of vecteezy.com



Answer

If you can still doodle, you don't have artist's block.

This might seem controversial, but I believe an “artist's block” is a misnomer. Unless you truly can't draw anything, you don't have an artist's block. Just as someone who writes memos doesn't have writer's block. If you feel uncertain, if you lack creative direction, this is not artist's block but something else entirely. Maybe this is a bit of a semantic argument.

If you feel like you're no good at art, this also is not artist's block, but rather, self criticism which can mitigate motivation. The point is to determine why it is you are not in the act of creating something, and remedy it. Many times it is simply starting to draw. Stop the excuses, stop the other activities you are doing to distract yourself from drawing and just draw.

One of the things that has prevented me from working in the past is knowing that when I get into the zone and start drawing in earnest, I won't want to stop, and sometimes I find this an frightening side effect of art, getting so into it that I don't want to leave.

Regardless, sometimes we get into a place where we are stuck artistically and want to move out of it.

I've considered “artist's or writer's block” to be more of an excuse than an actual reality. More often it is a rationalization for procrastination.

Don't wait for inspiration do precede drawing.

What some may see as a block, is really just a person at rest staying at rest. There will be days when you don't want to draw due to lack of motivation. This is not artist's block, but rather waiting for emotions (inspiration) precede the act of creation. You will be waiting a long time some days if you are waiting for it to hit you.

Some of the most creative times in my life were when I didn't feel like drawing.

Necessity for me made it impossible to do much else. If you are in a classroom listening to a teacher, the choice can be to talk to a fellow student, get in trouble, and face consequences, or you can start drawing to manage what many call “boredom.” There is nothing quite a visceral experience is that fidgety restless feeling associated with that, and so I would draw to manage that.

A general inability to do anything could be depression

If you not only don't feel like drawing, but also don't feel like getting up, eating, or socializing, this is an indicator of a much bigger problem being depression. So getting out of “artist's block” is not going to help much. Trying to tell someone chronically depressed to get up, move around, and do things doesn't work because the problem isn't easily countered.

More or less, medications and therapy are needed to counter this condition. It couldn't hurt to try to create art during this time, as it might loosen the logjam of lethargy. Yet, we don't know for sure. At times, depression is chemical in nature and only chemicals can help alleviate it.

Seek Out Art to become inspired to create art.

This might seem like a no-brainer, but it is a good idea to seek out good art to inspire you. There will be times that I will watch a movie or TV show and get an idea for a work of art. That's a good thing, go with it. In the movie “Finding Forrester” a writing student learns to write by starting with their teachers writing. He starts writing verbatim what the teacher wrote...and as he becomes confident and more comfortable with the act of writing he no longer reads or writes the teachers words, but relies on his own voice to complete the work.

In a similar fashion, creating work similar to the work that inspires you could be a way to free yourself from whatever it is that is making you “stuck.”

If a robot were to create and feel inspired to love, what would they paint?

In one version of this, the canvas was a “paint by binary numbers.”



8. How do I get honest feedback for my art?

Banner art courtesy of vecteezy.com



Answer

Find a group of illustrators in which you can post or display your work for critique.

Some friends and family can offer constructive and valid critiques, but to get a balanced opinion, it is best to seek out others who are in the arts.

There are critique groups out there for writing, There are also critique groups for illustration. The point is to try them out and see if you are a good fit for them. One of the ways to avail yourself of this type of environment is to join a membership site. Here you can find like-minded individuals who want to create art similar to yours, or at the very least, feel the inclination to create in general.

Taking a class or course on illustration usually will include critiques

Maybe you have a problem with certain parts of the anatomy. Maybe your figures appear static or your poses all seem to be the same. Maybe their clothing or expressions are all similar. You find yourself struggling with perspective or a decent background.

Or maybe your work is pristine and beautiful and just lacks a sense of story. This too can be a problem where there is no story being told, and thus, nothing holds the interest of the viewer. Regardless, make a list of your weaknesses, whatever they are, and think about ways you can improve on them.

If you are always seeking honest feedback from friend's and family, you might be experiencing insecurity around your art.

As a general Rule, don't ask family members or close friends for a critique.

First of all, you don't know if they are well-versed in artistic quality or not. Second of all, if they are that close to you there might be a tendency to spare your feelings so they may say something kind to dismiss you, or they want to encourage you, not realizing that honest critique is a form of positive feedback.

An example of vague praise gone wrong is American Idol. There were more than a few horrible singers on that show, and it is speculation that part of it was due to family "being nice" and friends "sparing their feelings." It could also be that the person in question has no actual awareness of how horrible they sound when singing, but more often than not, the person didn't realize for whatever reason that they lacked the ear to sing.

Personal attacks are not acceptable

On the other side, if someone says something like "your art sucks" or "maybe you should consider accounting." This isn't acceptable either. Without saying why something isn't any good is just as bad as receiving vague praise. Neither form of response is honest, or constructive. On your end, you also have to demonstrate the ability to take constructive criticism. You should also be mindful that at times the feedback you get will not be constructive.

What you will have to do, is not necessarily develop a thick skin, but rather commit to not being defensive. Also, when you do get defensive, there may be a reason for it. The point is to figure out why you are responding the way you are to their criticism, perhaps there is some truth to it that is to be discovered.

All this is recognizing that there is a difference between examining the work, versus attacking the person creating it.

A variation on the BBQ theme of a "smoked pig." Warning, this illustration in no way endorses tobacco use.



9. How do I stop drawing such bad work?

Banner art courtesy of vecteezy.com



Answer

Making Mistakes Is Part of the Process

The sad thing about movies and entertainment, is that it often portrays the arts as something where you can create great things the first time around. This is far from the truth. I have sketch pads full of bad drawings, half-finished drawings, and drawings I should have given up on early and often.

How are you going to figure out the right way to do things unless you can figure and work out the wrong way to do things as well? It is said that for an artist, they have many bad paintings and drawings in them, and the point at continuing to work is to burn out all of those bad drawings so only the good ones remain.

When you draw things you don't like, you clarify and make clear what it is you want and are all about, and that isn't a bad thing.

Post your junk to see if it actually junk

When you draw something, there is a good chance no one else sees the mistakes.

You do.

You think they are very obvious to everyone, and yet you will find resonance and responsiveness to work that you post. That you think is not very good and also you will find yourself with little to no response to work that you consider to be great.

Now maybe the work does not match what you think it should look like in your head, in that case, why not try it again, and this time hone your skills or techniques to make it more like what you want it to look like. There is nothing wrong with not being satisfied with the way something turned out.

You aren't alone

Talk to any artist and they will confess similar problems with work that isn't very good. We know this is true because if you look at one of the great master's paintings, there are paintings underneath it as well. This could include false starts, completely different paintings, or just things the artist was experimenting with, didn't like and decided in the end to just start over because it wasn't working.

At times, I too like to save my bad digital work. I will have layers of bad or useless drawings, and once I finally like something, then I refine, color, and add to it, but at the same time keep the previous drawings around as references to the process.

Besides, I never know what I might want to use that older drawing in a new work of art.

Good works of art are done at the feet of many mistakes and bad works of art.

Drawing junk is part of an artist's life. Not every image is going to be a masterpiece. The best thing to do is to accept that and know that you've already got a head start knowing that not every illustration is going to be a great one. That shows you have some awareness of what works and what doesn't.

The good news is that mistakes also go the other way, You will find yourself slipping up and going in a different direction than you thought you would, as a result, the work turns out better than originally intended.



Dragon Rhino was created as a way of exploring possible dark continent origins to fantasy mythology.

10. Is it a “sell-out” to be successful?

Banner art courtesy of [shutterstock.com](https://www.shutterstock.com)



Answer

You're not a sellout being successful.

Sometimes narrative art, or creating art a client wants created "feels" like you are selling out. Success alone is not an indicator that the artist has opted for money over creative expression. That couldn't be further from the truth. Now if you do art that is not only for pay, but also against your principles then you personally are selling out unless your motto is "anything that pays."

The line will be different for different people. In the end, the whole idea of selling out only matters to one person...You. But let's think about it some other way.

Do you think the guy mowing your lawn is called a sellout because he is doing it for the money? What about the person who picks up your trash? The person who works with you in physical therapy? All these people are being compensated for what it is they do, so why not an artist? The problem with the idea of a "sellout artist." Is predicated upon the "starving artist."

Should an artist have to struggle in order to survive creatively?

You're not a sellout for being successful, but you might be a sellout if you are creating work you don't believe in.

Take a job that takes you out of your comfort zone

Another indicator that you might be a sell out could be due to avoiding work that exposes your weaknesses. If you take the path of least resistance, you could be a sell-out. So it is good to lean into those projects which help you grow and develop as an artist.

You may not be selling out if you choose not to take gigs or jobs that prevent you from growing as an artist, but it can't be that helpful either. To accept jobs that are right in your wheelhouse could stunt your development and prevent you from propelling yourself forward in a way that could open up new opportunities for you.

Appearances can be deceiving

If you happen to get a project that you enjoy doing, that fits into your wheelhouse, and you are getting well-paid for it, that isn't being a sellout, that is leaning into your strengths. If you can find work like that, then more power to you! It shows that you are beginning to get known for something, and better yet, that you recognize that in yourself.

As you grow and mature as an artist, you will start to identify what it is you want to do, and in so doing, you will also ignore the things that you are not good at doing, or that don't interest you. For instance, an artist who has no interest in sports taking on sports related projects might be considered a sell-out.

Creative freedom without critical thinking is equally detrimental..

There is also the problem of having creative freedom, but realizing that what you are creating doesn't resonate with the people around you. At this point it might be prudent to examine your work, and wonder if it is an aesthetic that only you enjoy. If no one else likes the work you do save you, that will not help with your creative journey. You need at times to compromise and know your audience, and if you are not serving them, you may need to either find a new audience (if one exists) or learn better how to serve them.



Something to think about...

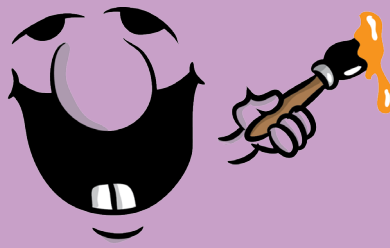
You made it this far, why not go a little farther.

Maybe you feel like you are alone in your interest in cartoons and comic illustrations. It doesn't have to be that way. You can find the support you need, as well as resources and lessons that will help you along in your journey to create great comic illustrations.

You will also find a place where you belong, a community of like-minded individuals who will be there to support you as you support them in their journey to bring humor and joy to other's lives. Having those people nearby and to support you will make your journey that much more rewarding and will propel you forward in your journey to become the artist you know you can be.

Imagine finding a place where people actually understand you when you express your questions, struggles, and challenges in creating interesting albeit humorous art. At best, you will find a group of people that understand you, at worst, you will find people who don't understand you but that's okay, because others don't understand them either. You can marinate in your mutual enigmaticness.





Visual Banter

**Follow the Instagram Channel
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for the comic illustration
game.**

Get Expert Illustration Advice, see behind the scenes into the process,
and see what other leaders in the field
have to say about creating dynamic comic illustrations.

