

(Apparently when I am lecturing and someone asks a question, I grab my wrist and try to look like a carp. Thanks to Ultimate Comics for the photo!)

Someone compiles a list of general tips given out during the Ultimate Comics Writer's Workshop. Very kind of them.

I magically resisted rewriting this too much, but corrected one word ("tracking," not "packing") and made I think a couple edits for clarification.

Some of these are ways to start developing your critical eye and your craft, some of them are nuts and bolts. They're all over the board, but maybe someone will find something useful here.

[Edited to add: I included some tips I've gotten from friends of mine at various times. These should be taken with a grain of salt as my interpretation of what they said off the cuff. Meaning: do not go yelling to Ed or Ellis saying that I said they said whatever and you have a problem with it. Okay? Don't make me look like an asshole. There are also several uncredited Fraction tips in there – reverse-engineering scripts, in particular, is a thing I learned from him.]

(Note: This may be incomplete since Abby aka Professor-Bumblebee and I had to leave before the Workshop was up.)

General Tips Given During Q&A Session

- Take as many writing classes as you can: prose, screenwriting, etc.
- Take a comic issue and reverse engineer it: Write the script that would have made the comic.
- Get ahold of other comic scripts either in books or on the [Comic Book Script Archive](#) and reverse engineer scripts in the styles of various writers. (In scripting a page where two guys walk down a beach, Garth Ennis would simply write "Two guys walk down a beach" while Alan Moore would write nine pages of script describing every detail to the millimeter.)
- There is no standard for scripts. Everybody's scripts have different formatting and different styles that show what background (TV, theatre, prose, etc.) they came from.
- Really good editors can see weaknesses coming and notify you of them and/or work around them.
- Whether or not you mean to, your voice will come through even when writing established characters, but always write to serve the character first. When you do your best work, you are honest and True (yes, with a capital T). You'll know when you're forcing a script. If you're bored while writing it, your readers will be bored while reading it. If you can't stay focused while writing it, your readers will not be able to stay focused while reading it.
- Comics are a collaborative art form! Respect the artist as your partner and collaborator. Communicate.
- Everything you put in the story should do one of two things: 1) Advance the plot and 2) Tell something important about the character that we don't already know. Ideally, it should do both.
- While comics has gone through writer/artist cycles, it seems to now be entering an editorial cycle. If editorial interests you, contact editors at both the big two (Marvel and DC) and smaller companies (Dark Horse, Image, Oni, etc.) about internships.
- Write a backstory that readers won't necessarily read in the actual work to develop your characters. Write journal entries from the perspective of your characters. This way, you develop distinct voices and

vocabularies for your characters so that all your men don't sound the same, all your women don't sound the same, all your racial minorities don't sound the same.

How to Read a Comic Critically

- On the first read-through, just have fun. You may notice certain things that catch your attention, but just have fun.
- Go through and count panels. Panel count per page varies with whether it's exposition or action and on the artist. Current industry standard is 5-6 panels at Marvel and 4-5 panels for DC. Figure out average panel counts. Compare average panel counts between writers and artists.
- Ed Brubaker's tip for action scenes: 3 panels with insets for detail like a fist connecting with someone's jaw.
- Warren Ellis's tip for action scenes: "Call your shots." If a vase is going to be smashed against someone's head, show the vase in a panel before it's used. If a gunfight is about to happen, zoom in on the fighters taking out their guns.
- Look at size of word balloons. The following three bullets are general guidelines and can be broken.
 - Max of 210 words per page (Moore)
 - Max of 3 lines per balloon (Brubaker)
 - Max of 3 balloons per panel (Ellis)
- What looks good to you? *What feels right to you?*
- Balloons affect tracking. Where you have the most text is where the reader's eyes will stay the longest, so make sure there's something interesting going on there.
- Show, don't tell. Do not write what can be drawn.
- Do not tell the readers what they see. If the art shows the heroes riding across the prairie, do not say in the caption box, "Our heroes rode across the prairie."
- Do as little handholding as possible with transitions. Give enough for clarity, but not so much that it's redundant.
- Read David Mamet's book on filmmaking.
- Take note of repeated themes in other writers' work. Neil Gaiman often goes Meta and explores the very act of storytelling. Warren Ellis talks about technology and optimism in spite of or even with human failings. This repeated theme is Truth.

How to Analyze and Write for Artists

- Humorous side note: Why does the Avengers kitchen have a sink in the corner of a V?
- Do not think you can make artists redraw unless it's super important—there just isn't time. Once it's inked, it's not changing, so bring problems up during layouts or adjust your script to suit the art you have. [Big 2 Work]
- If you've determined your partner doesn't excel at drawing certain things, do not write them in your script. Write to his or her strengths.
- Adjust panel counts to artists to reflect their style.