Weaving comics pedagogy into a multi-level creative writing program
AWP 2024
Pre-recorded panel with Sarah Leavitt, Taylor Brown-Evans, Emily Chou and Eve Salomons.

SAMPLE ASSIGNMENTS
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Extreme Close Reading
Assignment developed by Sarah Leavitt for graduate level intro to comics class:

Choose one page from the set of comics attached here [PDF of short comics and excerpts]. If you'd prefer to use a different page, please check with me first.

Print out the page. Make sure the image is large enough and clear enough that you can see every detail of the comic clearly. This often means printing it larger than 8.5" x 11". Remember you also need space around the image so you can add notes.

This assignment is about focusing on the visual aspect of comics, noticing every possible choice the cartoonist made and noting the impact of that choice. How was the comic made? Why was it made that way? What is the impact on the reader? Observe everything you possibly can, dig deep.

You'll be doing all of the work by hand. You can draw arrows and circles and write notes in the margins. You can trace or redraw parts of the image. Get creative! Also, scroll down for two excellent examples made by students in this class last year to get an idea of what I'm looking for.

Your assignment should include a printout of the original page, with notes directly on the page (or on attached tracing paper or other material) about:

- The choices made in each panel and the page as a whole,
- The impact of these choices, and
- Thoughts on why/how the cartoonist created the page.

Your notes must refer to the five choices described in Making Comics by Scott McCloud and the principles presented in Jessica Abel’s comic, What Is A Graphic Novel.

The assignment can be messy, but it should be readable. Use diagrammatic elements, colour, etc to make your notes clear.

This assignment is based on an exercise developed by Nick Sousanis at San Francisco State University. Check out the examples of his students' work here for more ideas about how to approach this: https://spinweaveandcut.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/vis-analysis-examples-smaller.pdf
Assignment submission by Emily Chou: A page from Klezmer by Joann Sfar

Klezmer by Joann Sfar

The artwork is very focused on visual and visual details, making the reader engage with the story in a unique way. The use of colors and shapes helps to create a sense of movement and energy throughout the page.

The text on the page reads:

"Klezmer" by Joann Sfar

The artwork is very focused on visual and visual details, making the reader engage with the story in a unique way. The use of colors and shapes helps to create a sense of movement and energy throughout the page.
Diary comics
Assignment developed by Taylor Brown-Evans for undergraduate intro to comics class:

For this assignment you will be making your own week of daily Diary Comics!

Consider what we've talked about in terms of panel composition, sequence, and four-panel structures when making your Diary Comic.

In this exercise it’s important to remember to find inspiration from real life, but this is also about building a practice. Try to maintain a rigorous schedule, so that you produce at least one new strip a day. This can be difficult, and it’s not unusual to find yourself stumped on some days for anything to make a strip about at all. Do your best not to give up (and try not to simply make a strip about not being able to make a strip). What’s most beneficial about this exercise, why so many cartoonists find it revelatory and cathartic, is the routine.

This is a diary so, other than being based on your life, it doesn’t have to be about anything. Don’t feel pressure to be funny, or profound. But think about how to craft a sense of story in the four panels that you have, and how you’ll make the events that happen to you fit into this structure. Explore, experiment, build a practice, but above all, strive for honesty in your diary and have fun seeing where that takes you.

Before you start, review the examples of diary comics we've looked at. Also take a look at, and jot down your answers to, the Diary comics planning questions. (You'll be submitting these along with your daily Diary Comics.) From today until the next class (five days, you get the weekend off), draw one four-panel strip per day. These are not thumbnails; they are finished drawings in ink that are completely legible. Go back and look at the process guidelines, if it helps. You may use whatever tools you prefer to ink your final comic. These are diary comics — i.e. they are about what happens to you on that day. They can be as personal as you like. As with all of your work, they will not be shared beyond the prof and TA without your express permission. Do one comic per day. Do not procrastinate and do all the comics at once on the last day. One of the reasons for this assignment is to give you the opportunity to experience what it’s like to do a daily comic.
Feb 17, 2020

It's important to pick a good runway song.

Ideally, it'll start to build as the plane starts speeding up.

Then, it should crest...

The one I used today was "Motion Sickness" by Phoebe Bridgers.

...as you lift off.

Feb 18, 2020

There it is!

...it's kinda small, huh?

WOW!

Yeah, I was gonna say...