



GAIL SIMONE

@GailSimone



2 hours ago, 67 tweets, 13 min read

Students! CLASS IS IN SESSION!

It's DAY THREE of [#ComicsSchool!](#)





Okay, we have some quick business to go over, but today is going to be a GREAT day. Today we start with the actual writing, and it's going to be great fun!

But first, I heard that some students stole the RockSchool's mascot and fed it a huge vat of beans.

DISAPPROVING GLARE.

First things first. I am four minutes late and it goes to the very first thing I wanted to discuss.

So please grab your notebooks and start a page, with the title at the top, **INDISPUTABLE TRUTHS**.

Trust me, it will be important.

First, let's refresh a bit.

Do you remember what the first three **UNIVERSAL TOOLS** are?

Do you remember who your first customer is?

Do you remember the industry term for an 'elevator pitch,' the first part of the pitching process?

I'll give you a moment. All three of these things are vital to know.

Now, a lot of this stuff used to be taught by editors with new writers as they went along. But editors are overworked and rarely have the time to tutor anyone.

Remember, the goal here isn't just to write, but to actually **HAVE** some knowledge to help you negotiate those waters.

FIRST THING. You guys have been doing not just well with the homework so far, but you have **FAR** surpassed my expectations.

This isn't empty smoke, you brought some goods to the table, and I am impressed. I am hearing from some of my friends and **THEY** are impressed, too.

You give us all hope that the next group of writers is going to bring some fire with them.

Nothing in the world is going to make me happier than seeing some of you go on to print your own books or be printed by some publisher.

All right. Before we get to your first pages, there's one thing I want to cover just a little bit. And that is, remember when we put our excuses and fears in our Roadblock Box?

Those are still put away. But I know a lot of you have internalized those things.

I have some advice.

The advice is this. There are two kinds of roadblocks out there, internal (I'm not good enough, no one will like it, I can't do it), and external (family and friends who are not supportive, lack of time, lack of knowledge about how).

The goal is to not take anything EXTERNAL and make it INTERNAL.

Don't add to your load. When you are carrying a bed frame, don't put an anvil on top.

Here's how to beat those demons.

Write when you can.

If you have a 200 page graphic novel in mind, beating yourself up because you're not FINISHED is just self-abuse.

Because you CAN be finished, every day.

Write a page. Write TWO pages.

Then you are finished for the day. FINISHED.

Looking at a HUGE project is overwhelming and painful no matter your experience level.

Looking at the pages you FINISHED that day is a source of pride.

Even long-term pros beat themselves up over this.

THINK IN PAGES FINISHED, then every day is an accomplishment.

How do I know this works?

Because the writer who frets and hates themselves because they aren't done?

He goes far, far slower than the one who says, "okay, got that scene done, good job!" And moves on.

Think in chunks, each step is a small victory.

Okay?

You can do this.

Good. Now, about those fears and stumbling blocks. I was a few minutes late to start class today, and it has to do with the first INDISPUTABLE TRUTH.

Which is this.

NOTHING IS EVER OPTIMAL.

Please write that down on your IT page.

It means that, maybe your partner isn't as supportive as they could be, maybe you have a health issue, maybe you are exhausted from your day job.

All of those things are valid, don't let anyone tell you they aren't.

BUT.

I thought a writer had to have a guest house on a lake with a warm fire going and no interruptions, like a Stephen King novel.

But NOTHING IS EVER OPTIMAL

And what I ACTUALLY had was a tiny nook in our bedroom above my day job where I had to type quietly after a ten hour shift.

There is no 'sweet spot' for writing, it happens when you sit down to do it, and it doesn't care what is going on in the rest of the world.

This is where your Universal Tool, PASSION comes in.

Write anyway.

Whenever you can, write anyway.

If you have a talent, or a voice, or a vision, or some lovely combination of all three, you owe it to yourself to try, and you might be the exact voice that reaches someone who really needs it. And one last thing before we roll our sleeves up.

The next on the INDISPUTABLE TRUTHS list.

YOU DEFINE YOUR GOALS, SO YOU DEFINE YOUR SUCCESS.

Think about it.

For many, only writing Batman will ever feel like success to them. Or earning a living or getting awards.

All of those are valid.

But I have a friend who is a writer who has a tv series and a bunch of projects that make her happy beyond words, and none of them include Batman.

If your goal is to make a slice of life autobiography mini-comic and you DO it, that is absolutely success.

And success tends to breed opportunity.

Opportunity breeds more success.

It's a happy path, you just have to follow it.

OKAY! Work time!

There's a lot to cover today. We have one exercise and two homework assignments, all related to actual writing of the actual story.

This is where you start to learn your chops.

And this is where a LOT of people panic.

:)

But let's look at it a different way. Indulge me for a moment.

For some, that chair and the blank screen are an electric chair for the condemned, and they dread it.

But what if it's not that at ALL?

Think about it. What if that chair is the Batmobile, or a command chair for a Gundam, or the pilot cockpit of an X-wing?

Or what if it's a time machine where you can go and relive a bit of your life where you had regret and wish you had done things differently?

This isn't cornball stuff, it is damn powerful real world magic.

I'm a tea-drinking former hairdresser. But when I write a fight scene for Batman, part of me is throwing those punches.

That's what that chair is, that's what that blank page is.

There is SO much in the world we have no control over, but in that chair, you can be the engineer of EVERYTHING.

It's a feeling unlike most anything, it's art, it's an outlet, it's storytelling.

It's a tradition that has gone on since before written history.

Don't be afraid of the page, make the page afraid of YOU.

;)

Now, we are going to talk about craft.

This is not the pie-in-the-sky creative rah rah thing, these are your pliers and wrenches.

Talent, you are mostly given. Craft you can LEARN.

So that's our focus today.

And this includes our first exercise of the day.

We started a thread under the hashtag [#FirstPage](#), for yesterday's homework assignment. If you can, it's great if you put your first page on that thread.

Then I want you to read at least FIVE entries on that thread, after class.

I will ask you to REFRAIN FROM CRITICISM. Everyone wrote their First Page with no guidance, intentionally. You can say something positive to the poster if you like.

But read five, and ask if they make you want to read further.

THAT is the goal of the first page.

So after you read the five first pages by OTHER people, and after this class, I am going to ask you as part one of your homework to REVISE your first page.

EVEN IF YOU THINK IT'S PERFECT, do a revision, small or significant, with what you have learned.

Got it?

Here are some facts to consider.

Arguably, the first page is THE most important page of your story.

It is certainly the one that must be constructed the most carefully.

Guys, this is the page that determines if someone turns the page or closes the cover.

VITAL.

I just realized [#ComicsSchool](#) doesn't have a school song, thus we can't have a heartwarming scene of us signing together in the gym.

BUT ENOUGH DISTRACTION.

How many times have you started a book and said, this isn't grabbing me, and put it down?

How many movies have you started on Netflix and turned off after ten minutes?

THAT is your opening page.

It is the greeting between writer and readers.

Shine your shoes, comb your hair.

Your first page should present enough information to set the scene, and in a story this short, it should almost certainly introduce a major character or more.

Did your first page tell us WHERE it takes place, and with WHO?

When I read scripts by new writers, and sometimes long-term pros, a few things frustrate me EVERY TIME.

- 1) No panels establishing location
- 2) Characters are not named.

Let's look at both.

First, an establishing shot. MOST stories need one.

Which leads to my next INDISPUTABLE TRUTH for the list, please write it down.

NOTHING IS WRONG IF IT WORKS.

Remember that rule. What I am saying works for 90% of the stories out there. But if you tell a story and the character only appears in the LAST PANEL and it's told from the point of view of a cat's butt, and it WORKS, then it's not wrong.

Now.

The establishing shot. It's not just essential for storytelling, it is a VITAL part of comics.

The shot says SO MUCH. Is it a lonely forest with the rain coming down, is it an exhausted soldier behind enemy lines, is it a Star Destroyer passing overhead?

Everyone likes GI JOE figures, but every kid is DYING for Cobra Command. We want the Batcave playset.

The establishing shot is a handshake with the reader..."We're here, okay?"

When you play D&D, the FIRST thing they do is tell WHERE YOU ARE.

And also, don't be afraid to ask for a MOOD in this shot. It's okay to ask for a lonely tree or an angry desert or a hateful steamship.

The artist will have that in mind when drawing, it comes out on the page.

It lends depth.

But the best thing is? It's a cheat code.

Say there are two options in your house to keep cool if it's hot out. One is the switch for the air conditioner, the other is a hand fan you have to keep waving forever.

The ESTABLISHING shot is the switch. You turn it on and forget it.

Done well, it stays in the reader's mind.

If the first shot is an arctic compound, and you plant that seed on the first page, you don't have to keep REFERRING to it, you don't have to keep showing your GPS.

Which leads to our next INDISPUTABLE TRUTH.

A GOOD ARTIST WILL MAKE YOUR WORDS LESS NECESSARY.

It's a fact. Let them tell as much of the story as possible.

A PICTURE of a rusty truck is better than three captions of "Boy, that damn truck was sure rusty."

Let your artist do THEIR craft.

SO, what does the rest of the page do?

Hopefully, it introduces a character or characters, and potentially a bit of the conflict. Our story is MAX at 8 pages (please do NOT go over), so we want to get to the meat. Be charming, be clever, but get to the STORY, okay?

Now, I read a TON of the assignments on the [#FirstPage](#) thread and again, I was really impressed.

But I did see a couple mistakes several times. These are what I want you to watch for.

A) Characters are not named or established.

This is where your craft comes in.

When you don't name your characters, or explain what kind of person they are, you are making the job difficult for the artist and IMPOSSIBLE for the reader.

So when you make your revision, add a little character description. Bit players just need a look, antagonists need more.

This leads to another INDISPUTABLE TRUTH.

NO ONE KNOWS WHAT YOU INTENDED IF IT'S NOT ON THE PAGE.

This is SO important. I once wrote an entire special issue that revolved around ONE simply plot point. Then I wrote the script and forgot to mention the plot point.

The issue is fine, but that will bug me forever.

Don't worry, we are getting towards the end for today. :)

The SECOND objection I had was the opposite thing, there was simply too much information in some of the [#firstPage](#) entries.

Some had a LOT of information that was a bit much to process immediately.

Think of it as Tetris, have you ever played, and made some mistakes up front, and left holes that you can't fill, and pretty soon there's no room for more blocks, but they still fall and you lose?

That is what making a page too busy is, everyone loses.

Here are the basic guidelines that have been in place a long time.

Again, nothing is wrong if it works. But use these as guidelines.

1) Average 4-6 panels per page. Uneven numbers tend to be more interesting layouts.

2) 35 words per panel is generally ample. Less if possible.

A couple things to be careful with.

Don't have a character perform two actions in one panel generally. The artist can't draw a character rising from the grave and biting someone both.

Be careful with crosstalk, which is multiple back and forth dialogue of multiple characters. And remember, the script is ALSO your work letter to your editor and artist.

You can include notes, explain decisions, give direction.

That was something we need more of, from the [#firstpage](#) samples. Tell the artist what you are hoping for!

I start every script with a new artist with two questions.

What do they like to draw, and what do they hate to draw?

I know for a fact Nicola Scott hates drawing cars and technology.

She CAN do it, but it's drudgery. So I write other things.

Make sense?

Okay, we are winding down for today.

Remember this Indisputable Truth and write it down, please.

YOUR ARTIST IS NOT YOUR SERVANT.

Even if you are paying, they are your collaborator. Give them OPTIONS, not orders.

I asked for a bit of advice on how to work with artists from faculty superstar [@MagsVisaggs](#), and she said,

“Don't micromanage your artists. give them what they need to accomplish the goal of each panel or page, but respect their creativity, independence, and collaboration.”

THAT is what a first page should do, particularly in a short story.

So first exercise after class, read at least five of the [#FirstPage](#) entries.

Homework one: Revise your First Page script, include whatever information the artist and editor need to know (be nice to Fred).

Now, on your UNIVERSAL TOOLS page, write the next two tools, please.

They are

TALENT

and

STYLE

We covered these a LITTLE today, more tomorrow.

Think of the Universal Tools as D&D stats.

You have ALL of these, you just have them in different amounts, and THAT IS OKAY.

There's just one more, we will reveal it on the last day of class.

;)

And your final homework assignment of the day...

INCLUDING your revised first page, write the first half of your story.

Remember, the MAXIMUM length is 8 pages, and minimum is five.

So total today is between 2 1/2 and 4 pages. PLEASE don't go beyond that.

That's it, students.

I am very proud of you.

We had close to a quarter million impressions on the first DAY ONE tweet alone, Day Two was like 150000, I believe, already.

People are watching you, and you had the courage to participate.

You are doing it.

As always, the great [@jessneon](#) has set up a discord chat, I will hang out and answer questions for a little bit.

Please feel free to share your work with each other.

Remember, script format is up to you, but commonly it will be something like the following tweet.

PAGE THREE:

5 panel page, first panel is an ESTABLISHING shot.

PANEL ONE: A lagoon, we see an actress in a white bathing suit swimming. This is ANNE.
She has a camera crew watching her, 1930's tech.

CAPTION: The Paradise Studios Backlot

DIRECTOR: More SMILES, Anne!
Just make it READABLE and I will be happy.

GO, TEAM GO!

CLASS DISMISSED!

