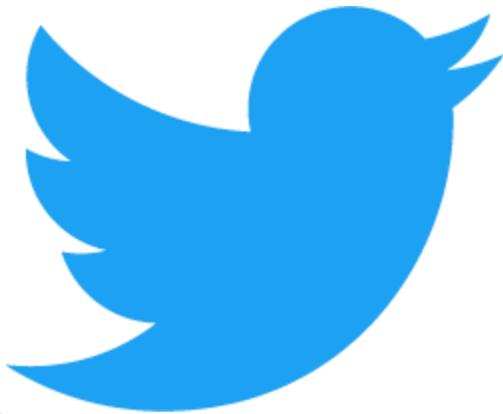# GAIL SIMONE

@GailSimone

2 hours ago, 81 tweets, 15 min read
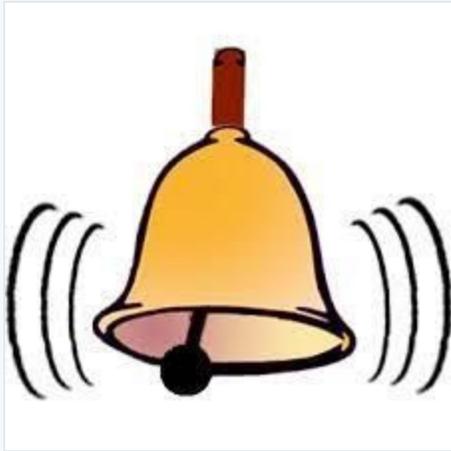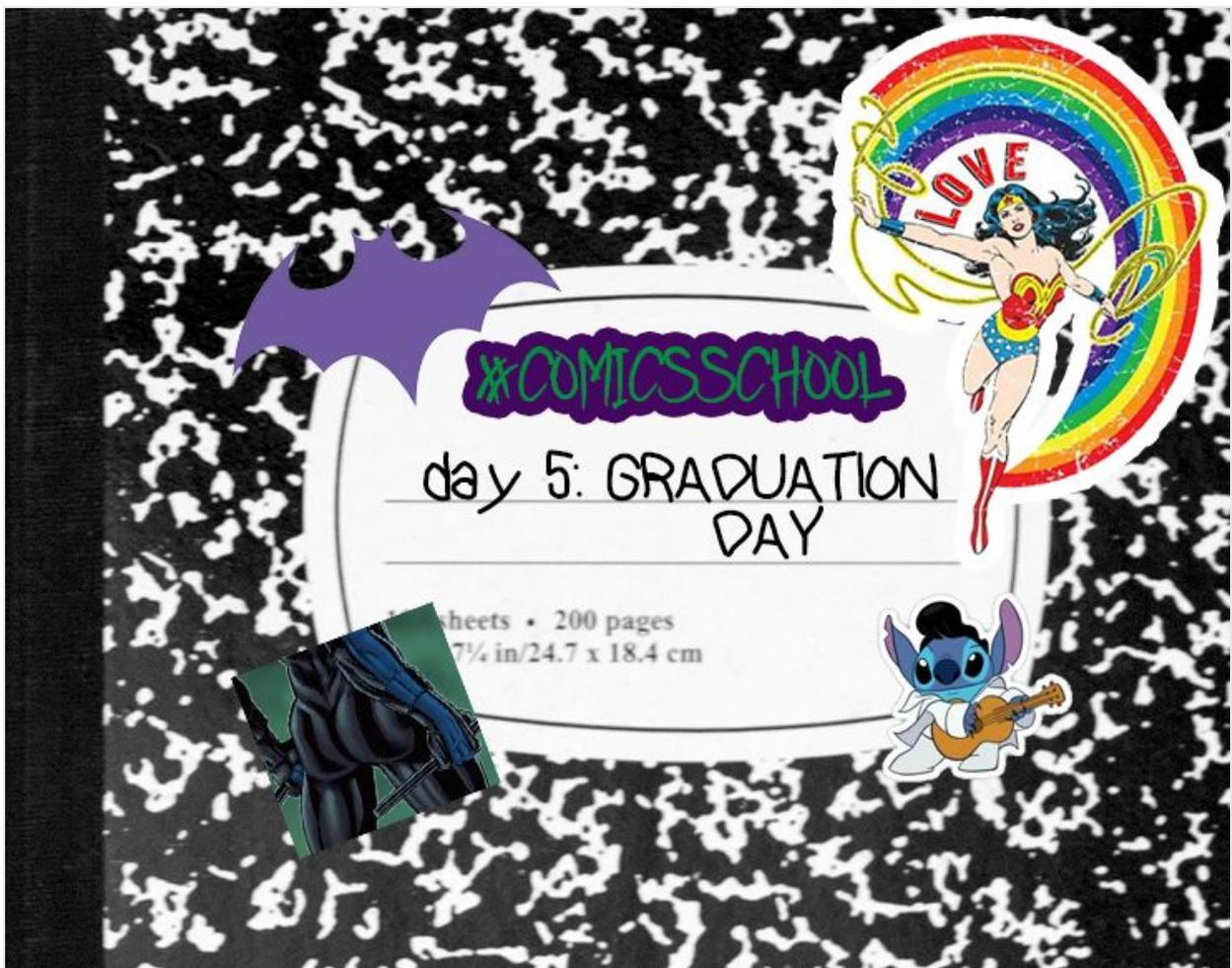
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STUDENTS.

Welcome to GRADUATION DAY.

CLASS IS IN SESSION!

It's #COMICSSCHOOL DAY FIVE!

Today is a big one, we have announcements, expert advice from guest faculty, some surprises, and lots more!

IF you started late or you got behind because of life or cooties, IT'S OKAY. You can catch up on our Discord server, where @jesseNeon has archived ALL our lessons and threads!

Join the #ComicsSchool Discord Server!

Check out the #ComicsSchool community on Discord - hang out with 1,076 other members and enjoy free voice and text chat.

https://discordapp.com/invite/dV295qb

But first, I have a little thing for you to watch, from the heart. Don't worry, it's short.

BUT IT'S AS SINCERE AS LINUS' PUMPKIN PATCH ON HALLOWEEN!

Check it out and come back!

Also, @muskrat_john of MUNCHKIN and DORK TOWER fame drew us a mascot!

I am telling you all the facts. You have made me SO PROUD this past week, I have had SO much fun and been so impossibly impressed with what you have done.

YOU.

DID.

IT.

And people noticed, guys. There are a bunch of news stories out there, the NEW YORK TIMES talked about us.

A BUNCH of my busiest and most brilliant pro friends have offered to help.

Because of YOU.

Hundreds of thousands of hits, thousands of springboards, posts, revisions and more.

Our DISCORD community has over a thousand members already and is growing every hour.

But best of all...

The COMMUNITY you all built. If someone needed a Fred, or just someone to share ideas with, you all just jumped in.

I have been making comics a while now, I never saw anything quite like it.

Note for the day: We all need a Fred sometime!

I don't want to take up our whole day handing out gold stars. But you earned them.

I want you to think about what you accomplished here for one last moment.

There are a bunch of fantastic books on the techniques of making comics. You should get them.

But I wanted to present something that was a little more like the EXPERIENCE we get as freelancers.

So, no class covers everything.

But you learned what a springboard is, how an outline can look, you wrote a first page, and half a story, revised and edited, and then FINISHED a story.

Along that trail, you learned industry vocabulary, the creator-to-reader chain, and more. It's a TON of information.

I deliberately had you do your homework twice...once BEFORE the lesson and once after. Because writing to a bunch of rules is not, I feel, as great a teacher as jumping in and TRYING. Then the rules MEAN more.
Suffice it to say you exceeded my expectations and hopes many times over.

Honest truth, if I were putting together an anthology right now, there are a BUNCH of assignments that were turned in that I would be PROUD to publish.
Okay. We have to move on. But you did it, and you earned one of these.

This document, dated   of the year   , certifies that:

has completed the full study course and requirements
as specified by the faculty and alumni of the

COMICS SCHOOL UNIVERSITY

and therefore is designated as a
GRADUATE WITH HONORS
and is hereby granted this
DIPLOMA
in recognition forever.

Jerome T. Godzilla
Jerome Theodore Godzilla, PhD.
Principal

E
PLURUBUS
FRED

Gail Simone
Gail Simone
Professor

Or, if it's easier for your printer set-up, here it is vertically.

Please feel free to print it out, and sign it, to remind you of what you accomplished!

This Document, dated ___ of the year ___ , certifies that:

has completed the full study course and requirements
as specified by the faculty and alumni of the

COMICS SCHOOL UNIVERSITY

and therefore is designated as a

GRADUATE WITH HONORS

and is hereby granted this

DIPLOMA

in recognition forever.

Jerome Of Godzilla
Jerome Theodore Godzilla, Ph.D.
Principal

E
PLURIBUS
FRED

Gail Simone
Gail Simone
Professor

And for now until forever, if you see me at a con, bring your diploma and I will happily sign it in person. I am going to have a gold sharpie with me at every con JUST for this reason. All right. We're going to talk about two last things that I hinted at a bit original.

The first INDISPUTABLE TRUTH and the last UNIVERSAL TOOL.

First, the truth. Make this your motto.
NOTHING IS WRONG IF IT WORKS.

Many classes and papers on writing tell you how the AUTHOR does things. That's fine.

But one look at the layouts and scripts show that you all found your OWN way.

NOTHING IS WRONG IF IT WORKS.
And that counts for STUDENTS, too.

When I was offered a gig writing Simpsons comics, because they liked a column I did online, I thought -I- was the wrong thing. Wrong gender, wrong location, wrong experience, everything.

But I wrote stories they liked. Nothing else mattered.
Don't let ANYONE tell you YOU are the wrong thing.

Make me that promise, okay?

And when you are making your next stories, and you have an idea, PROMISE ME YOU WILL TRY IT.

Because nothing is wrong if it WORKS.

Nothing builds confidence like finishing a work.

A story kept locked unfinished in your desk drawer is not helping your confidence, it's picking at it.

Finish. Make small goals. Finish those.

The next thing, something we have been building to since the first day.

Remember the five UNIVERSAL TOOLS we have covered so far?

They are

FOCUS

TALENT

PASSION

CRAFT

and STYLE.

With one more.

PROFESSIONALISM.

Those are your D&D stats as a writer, okay?

Just like strength, dexterity, and constitution.

Your experience becomes your experience points. And you CAN level up, with enough experience.

But here's the secret.

Everyone's character sheet is different.

AND THAT IS OKAY.

It's possibly you have studied craft, or you have a strong, strong compositional education.

But perhaps your style score is low.

NO ONE ROLLED 18 ON ALL OF THESE SCORES, you guys.

There are writers who are not perhaps the boldest visionaries on the planet, but their CRAFT and PROFESSIONALISM scores are high, and so they have devoted followings both with readers and editors.

That is 100% VALID.

Your stats are your own. You can work on any of them that need it, but also, remember to highlight those things you feel you are strongest in.

If you are a hyper-focused writer, you may be great at epic sagas that would crush a daydreaming genius talent.

So, you are not allowed to beat yourself up over the things you need to work on. An artist draws a hand a hundred times before it looks like a hand.

A writer might write a hundred balloons before it sounds like a person speaking.

Make sense?

Now, I have worked hard on improving my lower stats. And you can, too. Think of leveling up, like in your favorite RPGs.

Talk to Freds, ask pros about it, read interviews.

You CAN raise up your lowest stats.

Professionalism, as a UNIVERSAL TOOL, is as important as talent for most freelancers. It's also where I, and a lot of other newbie writers, messed up the most.

You may always struggle with one of your tools. But that's why there are SIX categories. You can dazzle with the rest!

So I have a final Universal Truth for you to put in your notebook.

YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU CAN DO UNTIL YOU DO IT.

I heard over and over again that students in #ComicsSchool had wanted to do this for YEARS but didn't know how, or were too anxious.

All these people, most of whom had never done this before, now have a complete script in hand.

You don't know what you can do until you do it.

Now, a word about professionalism. There are people who are more qualified to speak about this than me, but the BEST lessons are going to come from the people who actually have to steer these projects to market.

That's your real life Fred, your editor.

When I started, I was foolishly wary of editors. The vast majority of them want the same thing you do, the best possible story out the door and onto the page.

So I asked some of my favorite editors what THEIR best advice would be to you students.

This is a big thrill for me.

GLEE!

First is three tips from the great @sxbond, a fabulous editor, used to run the VERTIGO line when I was doing clean room. She has three tips for YOU specifically.

) Avoid repetition. And by this, I mean check your work for the number of times you have a character saying —or showing!—the same thing, repeating words, phrases, etc.

2) State time of day and the weather for every scene. Your colorist will love you. And weather plays a huge part in your story.

(She means in the script here, not always in dialog).

3) Avoid the name toss! State a character name once, Gail, and wedge it between words for a more natural exchange.

Know what I mean, Gail?

Yes, Shelly?

By this, Gail, I mean that in conversation, we don't actually keep referring to ourselves by name, Gail.

Next is from one of the best editors I have ever had, Desiree Rodriguez, who edits SEVEN DAYS and more.

She has some practical advice here.

Dez: My advice for scripting would be: study. Reading other writers scripts is a great way to learn how to script a story.

Here's a decent website that breaks some comic stuff down:
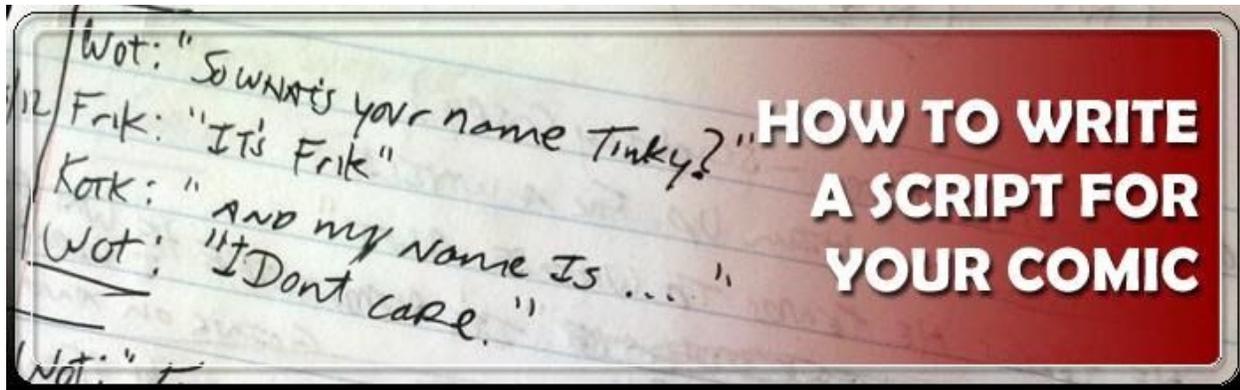
How to Write a Script for Your Comic - MakingComics.com

Intimidated by the writing process? Having a hard time getting what's in your head down on paper? (Do you even use paper? If so, does it have "From the desk of…" printed at the top or is it 23 napkin…

https://www.makingcomics.com/2014/03/08/write-script-comic/

Dez: I would also recommend folks look into this book, they might be able to find it at their local library: amazon.com/Panel-One-Scri...

Dez: If folks can invest a bit, Scrivener is a really great writing resource. It has comic scripting formats already installed.

Don't approach editors with the sole purpose of pitching, try to create organic relationships by networking at cons and being able to take criticism.

And final Dez: When pitching a project, it helps to have a sample script, but just as important, an outline of your story along with demographics. What age group is this story targeting? What genre(s)? Who is this book for? Also an idea of the art style for the book.

Okay, the thread forked above, sorry folks! This is the part two of #ComicsSchool Day Five!

We are discussing the tips some of the best editors in the business have for you students in particular, they wrote these for this lesson for you!

This is from Kevin Kettner, a great editor at @dynamitecomics!

"Make sure they let the art breathe on the page. We all get excited about wanting to tell a story and there may be a complicated backstory behind it, but it doesn't all need to be on the first page.. You can dole out information so you don't overwhelm the artist and their art."

That's a GOOD one to remember.

This next is some of my favorite advice, from the great @chrisrobinson, my editor on Domino.

DEFINITELY follow this.

"There's no comics industry standard, but that doesn't mean there's not something we can steal there...being able to identify the dialogue or panel descriptions on a page at a glance (because your format makes it obvious) is hugely helpful for editors and ultimately the artist."

"

Pick your formatting conventions and stick with them for the duration of your script. Those are your rules now. Change it up on the next one if you like, don't change midstream. "

"Avoid choosing a script format that creates large gaps or weird line breaks in your dialogue. Use mixed case, not all caps. Your letterer will thank you.

Start a new comic page on new pages of your script document. "

"Be sure to insert the page break just before "PAGE XX" in your script to avoid big gaps and weird line breaks.

Comics scripts are a dialogue with your editor/artist. Use hyperlinks/pictures/etc to get your point across if you need to. "

That last perfectly explains how the process works. What we did with Freds becomes your job, there are many eyes that see each script at each stage.

The editor becomes your best friend, the person carrying the vaccine through the lines!

I want to thank the guest faculty for these tips. I promise ALL of these will come into play if you end up writing for a publisher.

Thanks Chris, Desiree, Kevin and Shelly!

I have two little tips I would like you to think about. We are nearing the end of our session, but here are a couple little tricks that really work well that you might learn to use in your PERSONAL toolbox as a writer. Not every time, but consider them.

The first is one I learned from Chuck Dixon, writer of Birds of Prey, Robin and much more.

He has a little cliffhanger at the end of every page. Not necessarily DANGER to the protagonist, just a little, "What happens next?" moment that makes you turn the page.

It's a great little skill to hone, and when you can do it flawlessly, you create a little tickle of suspense through the entire story.

I use this tip a LOT, but Chuck is the master.

The last tip of the lessons is from me directly. I tend to get a lot of credit as a dialog writer, I try to make each character sound very distinct.

I have a bit of a process for this. It's three steps.

Step One: Have I heard this before?

It doesn't matter much on bit players passing through. But if my hero says a phrase or sentence that I saw in three movies already, I strike it down like Odin strikes down pie. Take it out. It's useless.

Step Two: Look for the PERFECT word. Take a risk. If you're writing Wonder Woman, give her something Amazonian to say. It's better to overreach and cut back than be dull and predictable. Take a chance. Let them speak from CHARACTER.

And finally, Step Three, SOUND IT OUT.

It is OKAY for you to say the dialog out loud. I highly recommend it. If you can't say it, the reader can't HEAR it.

Make sense?

Also, advice for dealing with editors? Don't spell their last name wrong, like I did, with Kevin KETNER, or [@electricdracula](#).

Sorry, Kev! :)

All right, we are almost done. As I said in the video, this doesn't have to be the end of your journey.

You did it once. You crushed it.

Now you know you CAN.

So what I am hoping is, you will think, not necessarily of your FINAL DREAM GIG, but what your NEXT story will be, what your next step is.

And then you do it.

Remember your Roadblock Box? Open it up if you have it nearby.

Take out the paper inside, the reasons why we thought we couldn't DO this.

It doesn't matter what you wrote on that paper. It's not important.

You wanted to do this and you did it.

Throw the paper away. Don't be your own roadblock ever again.
Many of you were SURE you couldn't do this.

But you DID.

That is the best part of this job.

And it gets better the more you do it, the more you try, the better you get, the more you accomplish.
Nobody is born a writer. We are ALL either drafted or fought our way in. The wonderful faculty here were sitting in your chair not that long ago. Now they write comics and movies and tv.

There is NO REASON that you shouldn't keep going.
So, a couple final notes.

There's a LOT these lessons didn't cover. We didn't talk about finding artists or editors or any of those things.

Because the focus was on ONE story.

But we're not completely done.
First, the Discord server is staying up. People can read past lessons, see others' homework, be a Fred or look for a Fred, and I and other faculty will pop in when we can, to try to answer next step questions.

Second, we are working on a resource page for people who want to keep working on this during Summer.

You built a community, let's use it!

Also, we have put the entire script for the Wonder Woman story from Day Four's lesson up on the Discord server archives for free. Feel free to check it out, check it against the actual art. It's there as a resource.

And finally, we are going to have short spot exercises and Q&A occasionally, right here on twitter, sometimes with special guests. You graduated, fly free, but we are still up for some fun in the future.

:)

I have one last thing I would like you to do.

Save the notebook you have been using. Let it be your armory. You have a lot of information in it, but let's go further.

Let's put ideas in it.

Feel free to use the genre generator from Day One. But use your notebook for springboards to yourself.

Keep it where you know where it is.

I promise, nothing is as precious as a notebook full of ideas. It's like the future is knocking. :)

That's it, everyone. I had a spectacular time. I am so grateful to the faculty who popped in to help, and to the students for taking the shot, and especially to the Freds who just became the best community ever.

All I ask is that as you make progress, as you tell stories, as you get published, you let us know with the @comicsschool tag.

I know I'm going to be hearing from a BUNCH of you.
Thanks, everyone. It's been a joy.

CLASS DISMISSED!