Graphic Novel Basics

A comic artist's process from idea to finished book.

Idea - The story starts with a spark. It's something the artist remembers, imagines, or wants to explore. It might begin with a picture or a sentence.
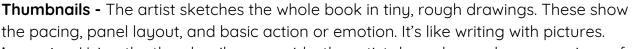
Pitch - The artist writes a short summary of the story and draws the main characters. This helps others understand the idea and decide if it should be published.

"Someone's goal is to own an entire room of books."

Outline - A detailed plan is written, showing what happens in each scene. Some parts get added, changed, or removed to make the story stronger.

<Write all the details out with how the story will flow>

Thumbnails - The artist sketches the whole book in tiny, rough drawings. These show the pacing, panel layout, and basic action or emotion. It's like writing with pictures.

Layouts - Using the thumbnails as a guide, the artist draws larger, looser versions of each page. This step focuses on energy, movement, and composition.

Pencils - The artist refines the drawings, adding details like faces, hands, backgrounds, and clothing. These are the clean versions of the art.

Inks - The artist goes over the pencil drawings with ink, using brushes and pens to make the lines bold and expressive.

Scanning - The finished pages are scanned into a computer so they can be cleaned up and prepared for printing.

Cleanup - Mistakes and messy lines are fixed digitally. Panel borders are added, and the pages are made ready for color.

Color - A colorist adds color to each page using digital tools. The artist reviews the colors and makes changes if needed.

Lettering - The words are typed and placed into speech bubbles. A letterer helps make sure everything fits and reads clearly.

Cover Design - The artist and editors choose a cover idea, sketch it out, and create the final art. The publisher adds the title and design features.

Printing and Publishing - The book is printed, bound, and shipped to stores. The artist gets a copy and celebrates seeing their work in the world.

References: Telgemeier, Raina. "GoRaina!" GoRaina!, 8 Aug. 2013, goraina.com/blog/2013/08/how-a-graphic-novel-is-born-and-raised?rq=Graphic%20Novel%20Born%20. Accessed 20 Aug. 2025.

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