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# Comic Life 3 – How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Digital Lettering Again

*Comic Life is created by Plasq (http://www.plasq.com). It costs less than two average video games and will save a lot of time and aggravation that we might experience with Manga Studio and other apps in which we draw our comics. Not only can we letter with Comic Life, but we can export the pages as images (with transparency!) or as a PDF, CBZ, or epub. We can post pages from Comic Life to Facebook or e-mail the comic to others. Mac users can even export the images to iPhoto.*

This online chapter will cover the following topics:

- Using Comic Life for the first time
- The different kinds of lettering elements in Comic Life
- How styles work in Comic Life and how to make our own styles
- A workflow that incorporates Comic Life and your choice of comic-drawing app (here, it's Manga Studio 5)
- Exporting comics from Comic Life

Go to `www.plasq.com/downloads/` and follow the links to download a trail copy for your operating system. Follow the instructions on installing Plasq from the downloaded file. The trial version starts ticking away the first time you run Comic Life. The app provides you with a 30-day trial, so make sure you set aside time to make the most of learning the features of this application.

# Why use Comic Life?

Once we're used to this app, we'll find that it saves us loads of time and allows us to create templates, where specific styles and individual page templates can be set for our comic series, web comics, and even photo albums.

For comic artists, Comic Life can import scripts that we can then drag-and-drop from individual dialog, captions, or special effects right onto our page. We can use the text editor in Comic Life to edit or even create our comic scripts. Manga Studio 4 EX had a story editor; however, this feature was dropped in Manga Studio 5 EX. I will disclose that I never got the story editor to work in a productive manner in Version 4 and didn't miss it when it wasn't in Manga Studio 5 EX. The script editor in Comic Life works in an intuitive and logical manner, and the templates come with files that have scripts as part of them. Check them out and learn a lot about how to use scripts in Comic Life.

What's more, Comic Life comes with over a dozen fonts that we can use for dialog and dozens more for captions, titles, and sound effects. Buying some of these fonts separately would cost more than the price of this app. Speaking of fonts, if we have open type fonts, Comic Life can make use of them very well, from automatic ligatures (how two letters interact when they are together) to alternate characters for fonts that have different characters; for example, if there's a double *o* (like in M*oo*n), the second *o* is different from the first. This makes things look more hand drawn. Manga Studio does not utilize any open type features. We can also set up what Comic Life calls an inset margin. This will add padding between our text and the balloon's stroke.

The best feature is that Comic Life brings styles, much like word processor styles, to comics. Unlike Manga Studio, Photoshop, and most other graphic apps, when a style is applied to a word balloon, caption, or lettering element (called as objects in Comic Life), and if the text is changed to another font, resized, or given a color, we can opt to update this style, and all the elements that have the style applied to them will change. You need not go to the balloons one by one and change each and every balloon caption anymore.

While it's always a good practice to have parameters such as fonts, size, and colors planned out in advance, sometimes unexpected happens; a new, better font is obtained, a different size is needed for the comic but it's half-way done already, and so on. In Manga Studio, this would eat up a lot of our time. In Comic Life, it's just as simple as changing one element that has the style and then updating the style; everything is updated and changed at once. In Manga Studio, styles are just how the text looks; there's nothing linking the text objects together as styles do in Comic Life.

Then, there's the issue that sometimes we delete fonts and add them again. Most modern apps won't blink at that. They'll know that the font is the same, and we can continue working as if nothing happened.

However, this is not the case with Manga Studio.

The following is a true story about one of my own experiences:

I wanted to export a short eight-page story from a comic that I created using Manga Studio. I had lettered it all in Manga Studio and thought that I'd have an easy export. Well, when I opened the Manga Studio file, it didn't recognize the fonts I had used (because I had removed the fonts and reinstalled them) and substituted not only a generic sans serif font but also increased the font size—to match the font size of every single word balloon and caption in the 30-page story!

The only fix for this was to select each individual text object, one by one, choose the correct font, and move on to the next one. It took me about an hour just to redo over a page. Hence, I thought of alternatives. That's when I fired up Comic Life Version 2.

I quickly set up a page template and created some styles for dialog and caption boxes. Then, in Manga Studio, I hid all the text and exported the pages I wanted to letter.

As I had exported to a folder that Comic Life was watching in its media panel, I just dragged-and-dropped the pages into the Comic Life pages.

Then, I copied parts of the script text from a text editor and pasted it into dialog balloons, captions, and sound effect elements in Comic Life.

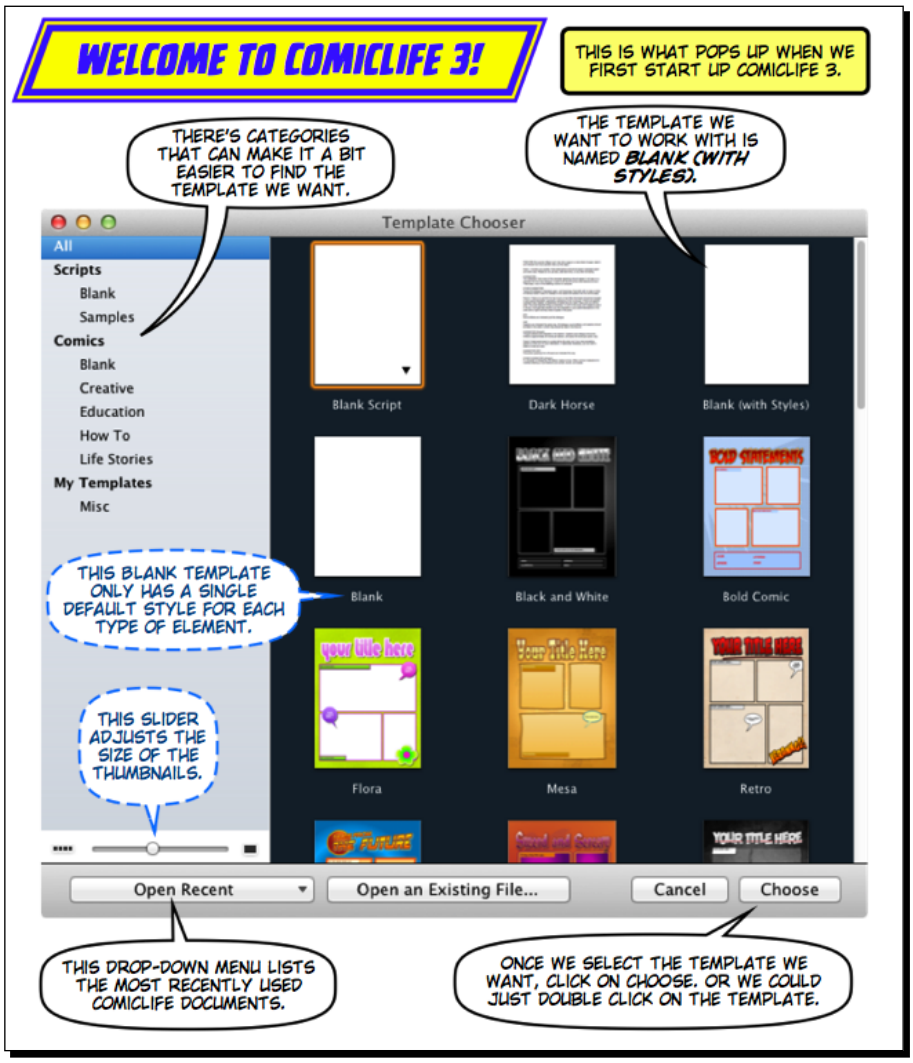
In time less than what it would have taken me to do two pages of lettering using Manga Studio, I had finished it in Comic Life and had all the pages exported and uploaded on my website. Now that Comic Life 3 can import scripts, this story would've been done even faster!

From that day onward, Comic Life became my go-to app for comic lettering.

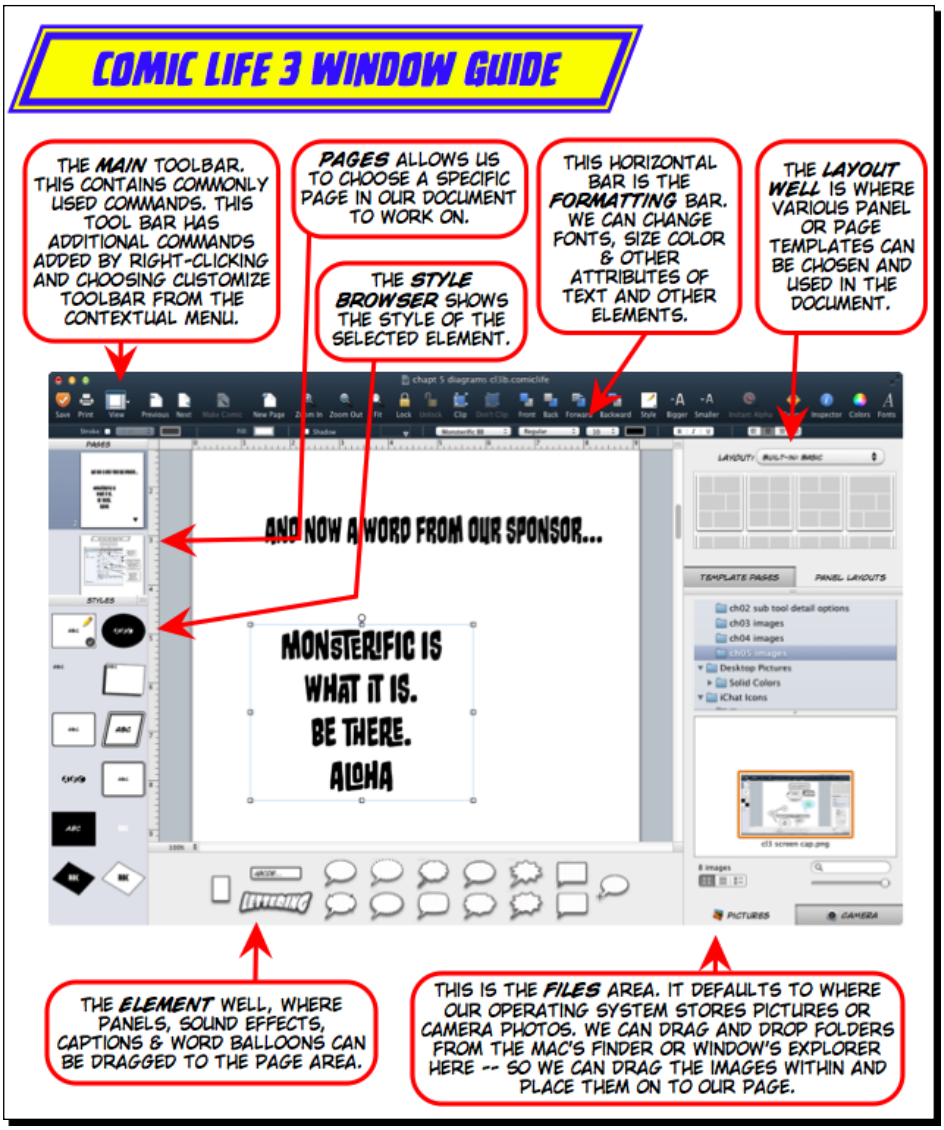
In case anybody's wondering, images in this online chapter and in the printed book, *Manga Studio 5 for Beginners*, which has text callouts, were created using Comic Life.

# Introducing Comic Life 3

When Comic Life is opened, we're greeted by a dialog that has a number of templates to choose from. Each of these templates is created for various uses, and all have styles for various elements. Let's start out by locating the **Blank (with Styles)** template.




Once we've chosen the **Blank (with Styles)** template and clicked on the **Choose** button, a new document opens. The main Comic Life window can be a bit intimidating. Just hang in there and things will make sense. The following screenshot is a capture of the window with some callouts to what the various areas are called:




The topmost area is the main toolbar. The preceding screenshot is from my installed copy of Comic Life. Your toolbar may not have as many icons as shown here. To add to the toolbar on a Mac, right-click on the toolbar and select the **Customize Toolbar** option from the contextual menu. The way to modify a toolbar in Comic Life is similar to other programs that offer toolbar customization; drag the icon from the icon area onto where you want it to be on the toolbar. We want to keep the names visible, as we're learning this app and some help is always welcome. Throughout the course of this chapter, we'll refer to menus, so don't worry about the toolbar.

Right below the toolbar is a thin toolbar; this is the formatting bar. Here, we can change the font used in the balloons or captions, add filters to images, and adjust colors for strokes and fills. It's a dynamic bar that changes according to what's selected. While a number of settings can be adjusted from the formatting bar, the inspector palette has settings that aren't on the formatting bar. We can use the formatting bar to make basic changes to the selected element and the inspector palette to make deeper changes to elements.

On the left-hand side of the window, there are two wells (as they are called in Comic Life; other apps call them **Panes**; Manga Studio calls them **Palettes** or **Drawers**—this is a sad fact of the computer world; the same thing is often called differently by different apps). The top well shows the pages in the current document, and the bottom one shows graphical representations of the styles that the document currently has; this is called the **style browser**. Styles in Comic Life are like word processor styles. In addition to the font and size information, we can set what kind of word balloon, caption, sound effect, panel, image, or page we want. The content of this well reflects what is currently selected. So, if it's empty or is showing stuff you don't want to work with, make sure you have the correct option selected in the work area. In the default options of Comic Life, these wells may not be shown. Navigate to **View** | **Show Pages and Styles** (or press *command/control* + *1*) to make them visible. We'll be making extensive use of the style browser, so make sure it's visible.

The **Layout** well and the **Files** well are on the other side of the app window . The **Layout** well is where page templates and panel templates are stored. Custom templates can be made and accessed through this well; we'll be getting to them later.

The bottom well is the **Photo** well. This is where we'll be getting image files to letters. It defaults to where your operating system stores your photos. We can drag-and-drop the folder that contains our images onto the folder labeled `Folders`, and Comic Life will show the contents of that folder when it's selected in this well. JPGs, TIFF, and PNG files are all recognized. We just drag the thumbnail image from the lower part of this well to the page in the work area to store the image in our document. There are buttons at the bottom of the window that affect how the images are shown and a slider to determine the thumbnail's size.

The **Element** well, framed by the wells on the right and left, is at the bottom of the window. These icons can be dragged-and-dropped on our page, and you must be ready to type in words. We'll be getting to these in a few moments.

Before we start messing around with stuff, let's get a handle on how Comic Life works.

A typical workflow could be:

1. Open a premade or custom document template.
2. Import a TXT or RTF script into Comic Life.
3. From the **Script** window, drag dialog or captions to the page's work area.
4. Give the object an appropriate style.

5. Move the balloon/caption around so it's where we want it to be.
6. Adjust the size of the balloon/caption.
7. Save our new document.
8. Move on to the next page and repeat.

Originally, Comic Life could have been called a "novelty app" in the sense that it was designed primarily to add text balloons and captions to photos. Then, some teachers started using it for lessons. Later, a few indie comic artists started using it for their comics. Now, with Version 3, Comic Life really can be used for excellent comic book lettering quickly and easily, with professional results. For a price that is less than four movie tickets, it's a great deal.

This is brought up because there are still reminders of Comic Life's origin. Go to the preferences. On Mac, navigate to **Comic Life** | **Preferences**. On Windows, navigate to **Edit** | **Options**. In the **General** tab under **Editing**, make sure **Play sounds while editing** is turned off. Someone must've liked it, but after working for more than an hour, the sounds that Comic Life plays get to be real annoying. It's enough to make one quote Samuel Jackson from Snakes on a Plane.

As long as we're in the **Preferences/Options** dialog box, there are three more things to adjust in the **New Document** section. They are as follows:

- Make the radio button for **Show template chooser** active. If we create our own templates, we'll want to be able to open them, and having this option set makes it easy for us to do so. The other option, by navigating to **Use Template** | **Blank**, will open a new document without any styles and the default (standard letter) page.
- For Mac OS users, check the **Save as package** box. This is required if we're to select **Keep images external to the document**.
- The box for **Keep images external to the document** should be checked for what we'll be doing in this chapter. This is because if it's not checked, Comic Life will store a copy of the image in the document. This makes the Comic Life document larger in size, and the images are frozen. They can't be updated except by deleting the images and reimporting the changed ones. So, by checking this box, we can then make changes to the images in another program, such as Manga Studio. Then, when we open up a Comic Life document, the images are updated. We just have to remember not to move the directory that these source image files are in. If this happens, Comic Life won't know where the image files are. Then, we'll have to either move the files back to where they were or drag the new folder into Comic Life and redo the processes of dragging, positioning, and resizing the images. Windows users will be prompted by a message that says the images can't be moved unless the **File** | **Consolidate** comic command is run. We don't want to do this unless we're sharing the Comic Life file with a collaborator or when the comic is finished.

- Check the **Show script editor at right** box. Doing this will make the pane of the document window for the script appear on the right-hand side of the window and not at the top. This way, we can see the entire page that we're working on instead of a portion of it. When we get to importing the script, the value of this setting will be clear.
- The last preference option to set is in the **Editing** section. We want the **Clip new non-image elements to panel** checkbox to be checked. This will save us a lot of work when we add dialog and captions to panels.

# Lettering the page in Comic Life

The best way to get our head around this app is to use it. The following *Time for action* sections will cover aspects of a Comic Life workflow, and we'll get a good overall feel about using this program. We're not going to go too deep, though. If you do see something in the interface or various panels, please take the time to see what it does. Comic Life does come with a pretty good help system, so consult it for issues. Alternatively, you can go to the Plasq website and see if it's covered there in the support section.

Proceed with the following steps to letter a page:

1. Export an image from our choice of graphic app. We'll be using Manga Studio 5 here; any app that can export a TIFF file will do just as well.
2. Create a Comic Life document that we can use for lettering our comic.
3. Place an image file of our to-be-lettered page into the Comic Life document.
4. Import the script of our page into Comic Life.
5. Letter the page by placing panels, dialog, captions, and sound effects.
6. Export only the lettering as an image file with transparency.
7. Import the lettering image file into Manga Studio (or the graphic app of your choice), refine the pencils and ink, and color the page.
8. Export the finished page.
9. In Comic Life, refresh the image and mull over the export options we have in this app.

Along the way, we'll be learning the intricacies of Comic Life, from setting page options to choosing fonts and more. We'll be using the prepared files that came with this online chapter; for the images and instructions in this online chapter, you can substitute your own work if you wish. Keep in mind that the instructions are specific to the prepared files, so your needs may be different.

Comic Life should be able to be used concurrently with most other graphic apps, provided there's enough RAM on the system being used. If not, the instructions in the following *Time for action* sections are clear when we're switching apps, so quit and restart the apps accordingly.

## Preparing files and documents

The first time we prepare files and documents, it'll be a bit rocky and time consuming. After all, we're learning a new app and getting our bearings within it. In this chapter, we'll be preparing our rough pencil art for importing into Comic Life, creating a new Comic Life document that's suited for comic work, creating a text file that will be imported into Comic Life, and finally, importing our rough pencils into Comic Life.

Before we begin, make sure that an inspector palette is open and visible. Click on the blue circle with a white "**i**" within it. This will make the inspector palette visible. We'll be making a few changes to elements, so having this palette open will be a big time saver.

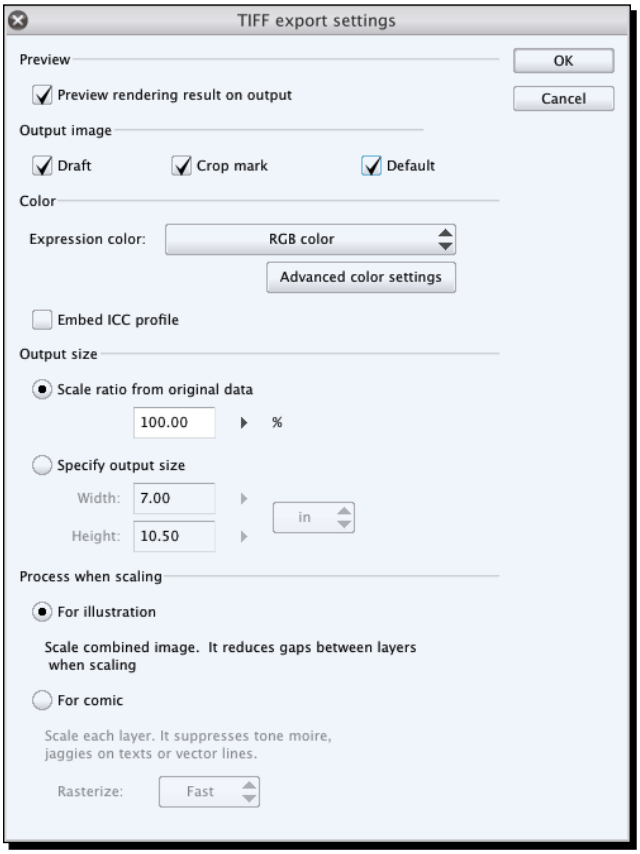
## Time for action – exporting images for use in Comic Life

Comic Life can import images in JPG, GIF, TIFF, or PNG formats. Mostly, any pixel resolution can be used, from 72 ppi to well over 300 ppi. In this *Time for action – exporting images for use in Comic Life* section, we'll be exporting an image from Manga Studio 5 as a TIFF file. It's important to have a directory structure in place to save the exported image into and a naming format that makes sense to us. This is important as we can work on a page that's been exported, re-export it with the same file name, and then refresh the image in Comic Life without having to fiddle with settings and such:

1. In Manga Studio, open the `dialogPage.lip` file (or your page file). Make sure that what we see is what we want to export. Export just the basic pencils; no roughs or red panel line roughs.
2. Make sure that the **Layer Color** option (on the layer properties palette) is on and that our pencils are blue. This is so that when we letter the page in Comic Life, it'll be clear what pencils and lettering are.
3. Navigate to **File** | **Export (Single Layer)** and choose **TIFF** from the hierarchical menu.
4. This brings up a dialog box. Here, we can choose the file name and where the TIFF will be saved.

One way to prepare for saving files and using them in other programs is to set up our folder structure beforehand. Sometimes, like in this example, we'll be using features of the operating system to navigate to folders and create our structure within the dialog box. One advantage of creating our folder structure in this way is that we'll see what it looks like in the **Save** dialog box, which is very similar to the **Open** dialog box. So, now we'll have a visual memory of what the folder structure looks like.

5. We should be within the `Comic Life_online_chapter` folder. Let's create a new folder and call it `ch_05_CL_images`.
6. Let's give our file a name, for example, `DialogPage_01.tiff`.
7. Click on the **OK** button.
8. This will bring up the export settings dialog box:




9. This is a dialog box users of Manga Studio are familiar with. We'll just set our export like in the preceding screenshot:

- The **Preview** section should have **Preview rendering result on output** checked. This gives us a look at what the export file will look like and a last chance to cancel out our export.
- The **Output image** section has three or more options, depending on the version of Manga Studio being used. In our case, all three should be checked. If there are options for **Text**, **Story Information**, and **Folio**, uncheck them, as they're not needed for the purposes of this exercise. We're lettering the page, and we want to see our pencils (which are in draft layers) and the active area for our lettering (the default), for example.
- The **Color** section is just set for the basic **RBG color** without a color profile.
- The **Output size** section is set to scale the image by 100 percent. As we've done our Manga Studio art at 600 dpi, we could set the scale to 50 percent and only export what would amount to a 300 dpi page file.
- The **Process when scaling** section is set to **For illustration**. This merges the layers quite nicely without any visual anomalies.

10. Click on **OK**.
11. It may take a few seconds (and sometimes, it seems like hours) for Manga Studio to prepare the preview render. When it does appear, it may look grainy and rough. That's okay. Manga Studio scales the image to fit the window and doesn't alias the image well. The exported image is still good. What we're concerned with is our pencils showing up, the panel borders appearing, and the red rectangle that is our active area—where all the lettering must be. If the preview is displaying all of this, click on **OK**. If not, click on **Cancel**, repeat this exercise, and double-check your Manga Studio file to make sure that the layers we want to see are visible and that the **Settings** dialog is set up as per the previous screenshot.
12. We're back in the main Manga Studio interface. We're done here for the time being. Now, we turn our attention to Comic Life.

## What just happened?

We prepared our page by turning on the **Layer Color** feature that makes our pencils blue and easier to see when lettering our page. Other adjustments were made in the export dialog to give us a good image to use for reference. We also set up a directory structure that we'll be using throughout this online chapter. Although we gave our exported file a specific name, it wasn't too specific. This way, we can export our finished page (inked and either toned or colored) and overwrite the existing one. Then, when we reopen the Comic Life file, the images will be refreshed to show the new versions. Pay attention to the name we gave to the exported image. As we make changes to the original art file, we'll be exporting the changed file with the new name overwriting the old file in order to use the refresh image abilities of Comic Life.

# Exporting images from other apps for use in Comic Life

If Manga Studio isn't used, we can still export images that Comic Life can use just as well. Just export the images as TIFF or PNG files. There are other ways of setting attributes that sort of work, such as adding a color-overlay kind of effect for images from within Comic Life, but we won't be covering image effects in Comic Life in this online chapter.

If we desire, we could do the following for a few specific graphic apps.

## Photoshop and other apps that have layer effects

We could set a layer effect for a color overlay that would change our black pencil drawing to a nonphoto blue color. The RGB values (just to get you started) are Red: 62, Green: 140, and Blue: 236.

## Apps without layer effects

Most apps have a way to lock transparency. If yours does, then the following method will work:

1. Lock the transparency on the layer our pencils are on. This way, we're only changing pixels that have color.
2. Set the main color (it may be called something else) to the RGB values mentioned earlier, Red: 62, Green: 140, and Blue: 236.
3. Use the fill tool to fill the pencils layer with the nonphoto blue color.
4. After exporting, close the document without saving. This is so that the changes we made aren't saved. Unlike Layer Effects, the procedure here is a destructive one—the pixels get changed. If our workflow requires black pencils, then not saving the changes will keep things in line with the way we're used to working.

As we get used to this export-import-to-Comic-Life routine, we can adjust our workflow to fit better with our way of working.

## Why use TIFF or PNG files?

Although we could export GIF or JPG files and use them just fine with Comic Life, the reason behind using TIFF or PNG files is that both have Lossy formats. The information is tossed out; GIF is limited to just 256 colors, and JPG will compress the image data. In cases of high compression, the image will look blocky. TIFF and PNG formats are better to use as they have lossless compression and can print out very well. Also, both TIFF and PNG can make use of Alpha Masks, which are areas that are transparent. This way, for special situations, we can have one image on top of another, stacking panels, for example, and have some room to play around with the layout within Comic Life rather than go back into our graphic app, make the changes, re-export, refresh the image in Comic Life, and hope it works.

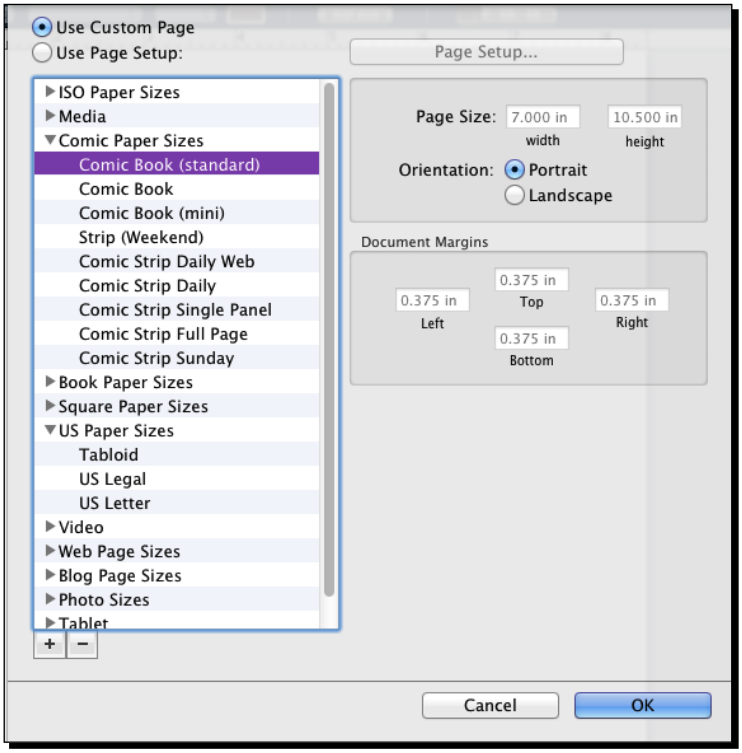
Of course, if JPG or GIF files work fine for your purposes, then go ahead and use them.

## Time for action – setting up a document and using images in Comic Life

Now that we have our exported image, we can begin work using Comic Life to letter it. We'll be creating a Comic Life document, setting it up for comics, and placing our image files on the page:

1. If Comic Life's not running, launch it.
2. The first step is to look at the **Template Chooser** dialog box. This dialog box should appear when we first launch Comic Life. If Comic Life's already running, go to **File** and choose the **New** option from the **Template Chooser** menu item.
3. We've already discussed the **Template Chooser** dialog box. The bottom of this dialog box are four buttons that allow us to open a recently opened document. Open an existing document, click on **Cancel** to cancel the dialog box, and click on **Choose**. This will create a new blank document based on the template we've chosen.
4. On the left-hand side of the dialog box is a list of the kinds of templates that we can select. Select the **All** entry so we can see all of the templates. We can select any one of these templates and modify it. Then, we can save our modified template, and it'll appear within the **My Templates** entry or at the very bottom of the **All** entry.
5. Each template comes with a set of styles for any element that we can place into a document page. We'll be importing a script and creating our own styles for elements. This is a good use of the **Blank (with Styles)** template, which contains no styles other than a single default style for each kind of element (dialog balloon, caption, panel, page, and so on). As we'll be starting out, choose the **Blank (with Styles)** template we used earlier.
6. We can either double-click on the **Blank (with Styles)** thumbnail or click once on it and then click on the **Choose** button. Notice that when we select a template, it gets an orange outline.
7. The **Template Chooser** dialog box disappears, and we have the standard **Comic Life Document** window.
8. Now, we change the page layout to fit with our comic page.

***9.*** Go to **File** and choose the **Page Setup...** menu item.




***10.*** Click on the disclosure triangle for **Comic Paper Sizes**.

***11.*** Choose **Comic Book (standard)** from the list (as shown in the previous screenshot).

Astute readers will notice that the options for **Comic Book (Standard)** are the same as what we used for presets in Manga Studio. If you see points or millimeters, do your best to convert inches to the unit of measurement that's shown in the dialog.

***12.*** Click on **OK**. Now, we have a brand spanking new document in which we can place our comic art and begin to letter it.

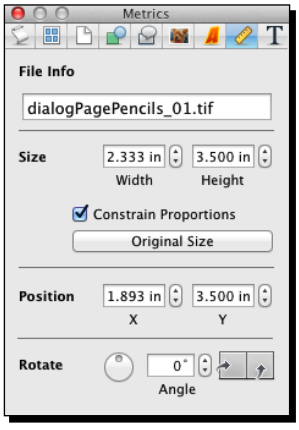
## What just happened?

We created a new document for lettering our comics. We navigated to the **Template Chooser** dialog box and selected a template that has predefined styles. Now, we can begin placing our rough page sketch onto the page.

# Time for action – placing the art onto the page

We want to get our folder of images into the files area. The display of folders and their contents will be familiar to Mac OS users:

1. When the **Page Layout** dialog box is gone, our document is now resized to the comic page dimensions we specified. We need to place our comic page graphic on the page.
2. In the lower-right corner of the window, there are two tabs labeled **Pictures** and **Camera**.
3. Click on **Pictures**. Notice how the contents of the well above the tab change.
4. In the **Pictures** area, as we've seen in a previous screenshot, there are three sections: **Libraries**, **Folders**, and **Internet**. We want to right-click on **Folders** itself and not on anything below it.
5. Select the **Add contextual** menu item.
6. An **Open** dialog box opens. Navigate to where the folder that contains our exported page TIFF file is.
7. Once the folder is selected, click on the **Open** button.
8. In the **Files** area, we now see the folder's name.
9. Click on the disclosure triangle next to the folder to display the contents of the folder if it's not already opened.
10. Locate the file (in our example, it's the only file in the folder).
11. Click on the file and drag it onto the page area.
12. The image is really small. This can be fixed using the following steps:
    - If the inspector palette isn't visible, click on the icon for the inspector palette (it's a blue circle with a white '**i**' inside it located on the toolbar).
    - In the inspector palette, click on the **Metrics** button; the one with a ruler icon.



- The **Metrics** section of the inspector palette shows us the filename of the selected image.
- In the **Size** section, make sure that **Constrain Proportions** is checked.
- We want our image to fill the page, so for **Width**, enter `7` and press *Enter*. Now, our image is the size of our page. If we had clicked on the **Original Size** button, the image would be enormous, because we exported it as 600 dpi, and Comic Life measures images in pixels and not dpi.
- In the **Position** section, enter `0` for both **X** and **Y**. This puts the upper-left corner of the image right at the upper-left corner of the page.

13. We have our image all sized and placed the way we want it. In case your image was done with a different set of dimensions, you may have to adjust the image or page size.
14. Now, to save us from accidentally moving the image, right-click on the image and choose **Lock** from the contextual menu.

### What just happened?

We placed our rough pencil image on a page. Then, we resized the image to fit the page. Finally, we locked the image so that we don't move it by accident.

The current file only has a single page in it. This is good for the purposes of this exercise, but in practice, we'll want to have a document with many pages. We can navigate to **Insert** | **New Blank Page** and create a new page. There are additional ways to create new pages; we'll get to them in due time. Right now, we're just getting a good overview of how we can work in Comic Life, and we can expand our knowledge once we get a good understanding of Comic Life.

## Scripting conventions to observe

Comic Life uses what it calls SmartScript™ for text files that are imported or created within the script panel in the app. What this means to us comic creators is that there are a few things we need to observe when writing out a script.

First, most of the basic ways that comic book scripts are written are just fine to import into Comic Life. We just need to make sure that the text is saved in RTF (Rich Text Format) or TXT (plain text). We can also continue to edit and create scripts within Comic Life's script editor.

When writing a script to import into Comic Life, doing the following will make things a bit easier for us:

1. Left-align everything; the page, panel, and other elements of the script.
2. For dialog, captions, and Special Effects Lettering (SFX), put the name of the character and the type of lettering (Caption or SFX) followed by a colon or line break.
3. Use empty lines to space panels and pages.
4. If our characters yell, whisper, or have thought balloons, put the type of balloon in parentheses after the name and before the colon:

   ```
   Mark (WHISPER): Too late. It's over.

   Alice (EXCLAIM): Nooo!
   ```

5. Note that there are no line breaks (carriage returns) after the colon. We could add line breaks if we want, but in my experience, these line breaks make the script longer than need be and don't add clarity. If line breaks are needed, then add them.
6. Pages, panels, SFX, and captions can be referred to by the same names. As they aren't dialogs, anything within parentheses will be ignored.

## Time for action – importing our script into Comic Life

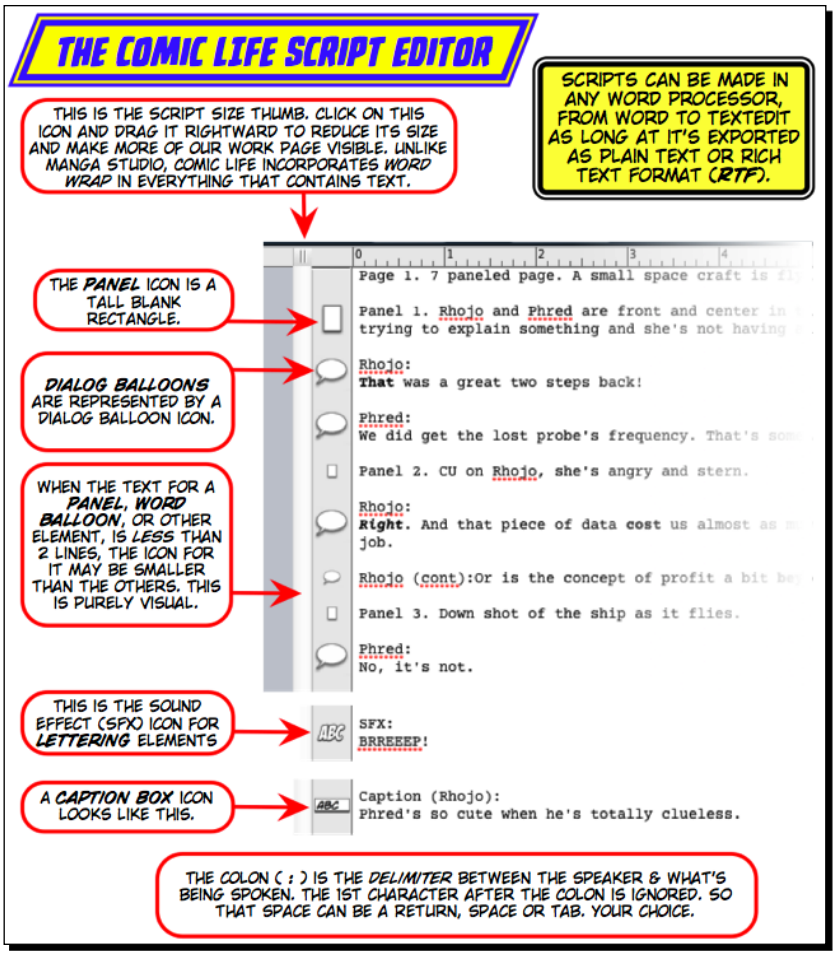
Importing our script into Comic Life is a new feature in Version 3. It may appear to be quite simple, but it is really big. We want to make sure that our script file is either a plain text TXT file or a rich text RTF file. Any word processor or text editor (Text Edit, Notepad, Celtx, and others) should allow us to use the **Save As** or **Export** options for either of these formats.

If we've saved our files as RTF, then we can have bold and italicized text. The import process in Comic Life will bring in text that contains either. It may be quicker not to have styled text, as when we change element styles, we lose all text styling, so why do the work twice? This is because if we lose the formatting in the balloon, we can look back at the script editor and see how the text was originally formatted with bold, italics, and so on.

In this section, we'll be importing the `Dialog Page Script.rtf` file (which would be in the Zip file that we downloaded and unzipped earlier). If you're following along with your own script file, then make changes as your script requires:

1. In Comic Life, with the document that has our penciled page on it open, go to the **File** menu and choose the **Import Script...** menu item.
2. This brings up an **Open File** dialog box. Navigate to where the `script.rtf` dialog page is. Select that file and click on the **OK** button.
3. Now that we've imported the script, we need to see it.
4. Go to the **View** menu and choose the **Show Script Editor** menu item.

***5.*** Now, the **Script** dialog box is visible; if your script editor is taking up the entire work area, the following screenshot will help us in reducing its size and explains some icons that the script editor has:

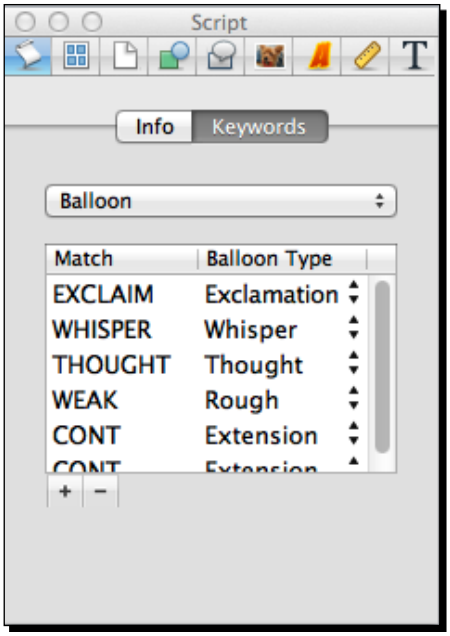



***6.*** From the previous screenshot, we can see that there are a number of words flagged as misspellings by the red-dashed underlining. We can right-click on these words and either find the correct spelling (if they are there in the spell check dictionary and if **Edit**, **Spelling**, and **Check spelling as you type** are active) or select the **Learn Spelling** menu item from the contextual menu.

***7.*** If we want, we can edit the text in the script editor. It may be a visual thing, but let's just put the dialog itself (after the Speaker's name and colon) on its own line. This will increase the size of the icon on the left-hand side.

## What just happened?

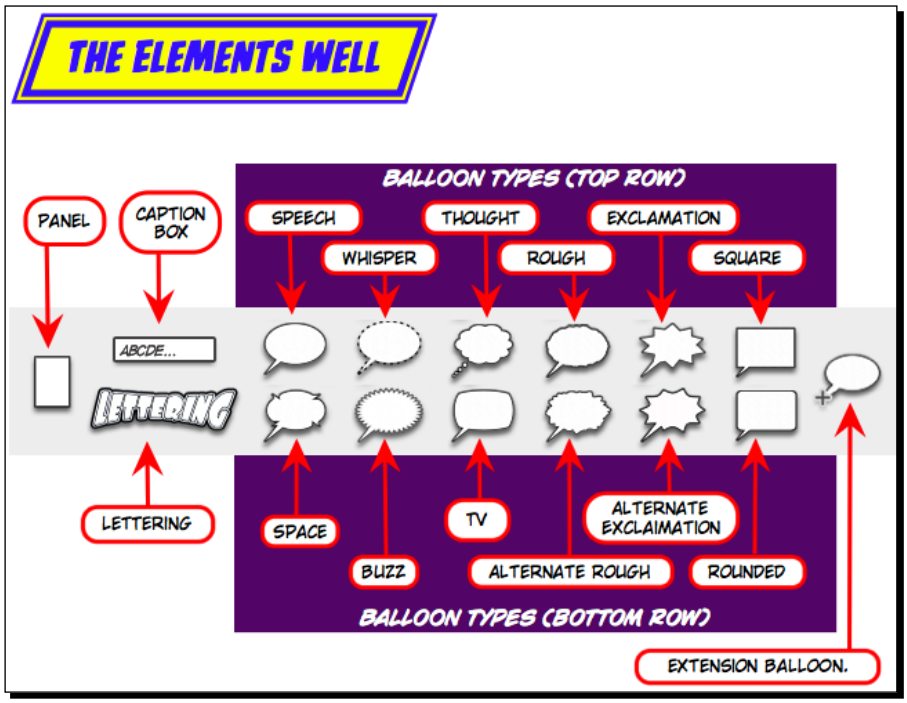
When we imported **Script** into Comic Life, the app processed the text and associated speakers with the **Balloons** dialog. Captions, panels, and SFX got processed in the same manner. If we go to the inspector palette and click on the first icon (the one that looks like a curved page) and then on the **Keywords** tab, we see that there's a drop-down menu that has a number of options. Pull it down and select the **Balloon** item.




Here, we can see that there are options for dialog balloons to be different depending on what's inside the parentheses after the speaker's name, but before the colon. The **+** and **–** button at the bottom of this area is for adding new parenthetical descriptions and a balloon type to match. Do note that **Match** comprises descriptions that are all uppercase!

However, we've not covered what a **Balloon Type** is. It's time to remedy that right now.

If we hover our mouse over each of the different element icons, we'll see what kind of element it is via a tooltip that'll appear. The following screenshot has callouts for each element:



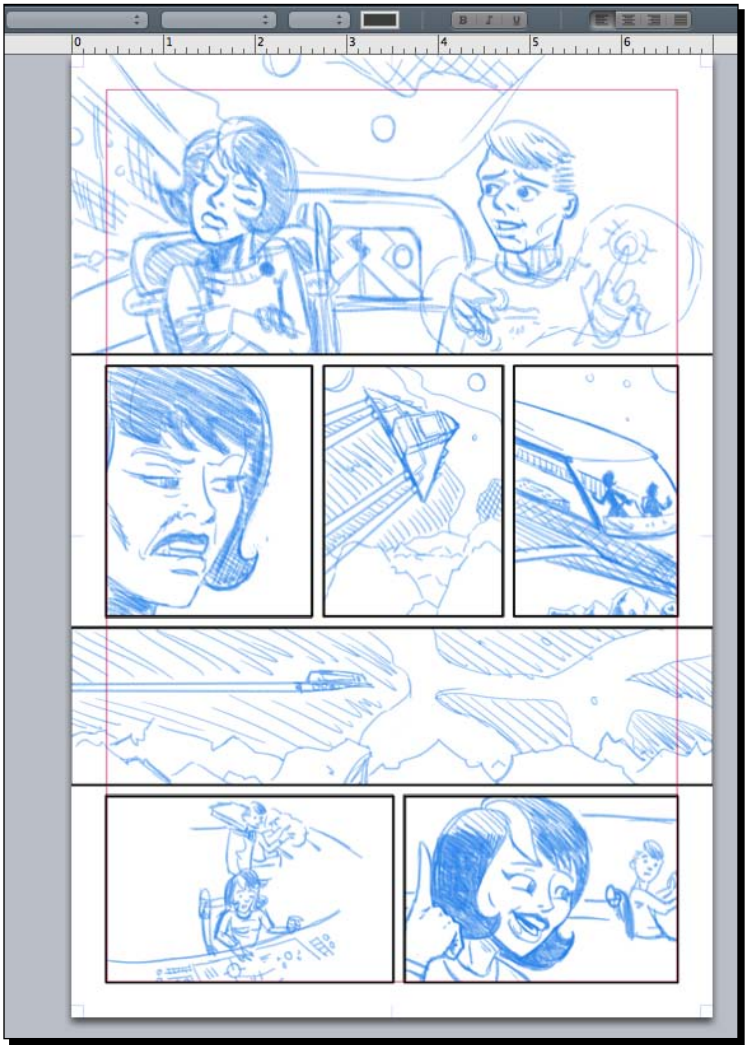

So, we can use TV as a **Balloon Type**, for example, to indicate sound from a television or monitor, as follows:

```
Announcer (TV): breaking news…
```

When we drag out the dialog for the preceding line, it will have the TV balloon style automatically applied to it.

These are just the default balloons. We can adjust the stroke thickness, fill color, text color, and a number of other attributes. Before we can do this, we need to create some panels and dialog balloons.

Our example page should look like the following screenshot:

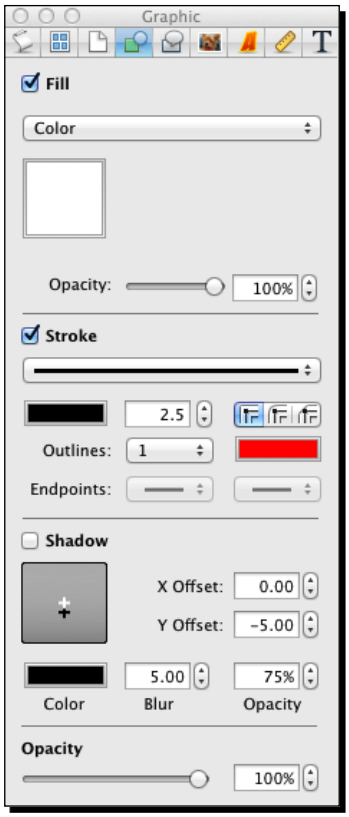


The black lines are part of the image and not of the panels in Comic Life. We'll get to the process of creating the panels next.

## Time for action – adding panels to the page

What we'll be doing here is creating the panels to put our word balloons in. Some may create the lettering first. This is a workflow thing. Try creating the panels first and then the lettering for one page; then, reverse the order in the next page. See which works best for you. The order in which things are done doesn't matter; it's all about how it looks afterwards. However, first things first, the document should be saved.

1. Click on the **Save** button at the left-hand side of the top toolbar; it's the orange shield with a white check mark inside it. *Command/control + S* also works.
2. Navigate to where we want the Comic Life file to be. In this instance, we want it inside the `MS4B/Chapt 05` folder with **Dialog Page CL** as it's name. The `Comic Life` extension will be automatically added to the filename.
3. Click on the **Save** button.
4. In our example page, the first and fifth panels are **Full bleed** panels. They're called **Full bleed** panels because they extend to the very edge of the page; parts of the panel along the page edge will be trimmed in printing. We'll treat both in different ways.
5. Looking at the first page, we'll work on the panel element for panel one in a bit. First, let's make a panel element for panel two.
6. If we were creating the panels and lettering from a hand-written script, then we could drag a panel element from the element well onto our workspace. As we have imported a script, we can drag the element from there.
7. From **Script** in the **Comic Life Script Editor** area, we can drag a panel icon from the left-hand side column onto our page workspace.
8. We now have a panel on the page. It has a white fill to it. As our goal is to export just the lettering and panel borders, we need not have a visible fill for the panel.
9. To change the fill, we need to go to the inspector palette and look at the **Graphic** tab.

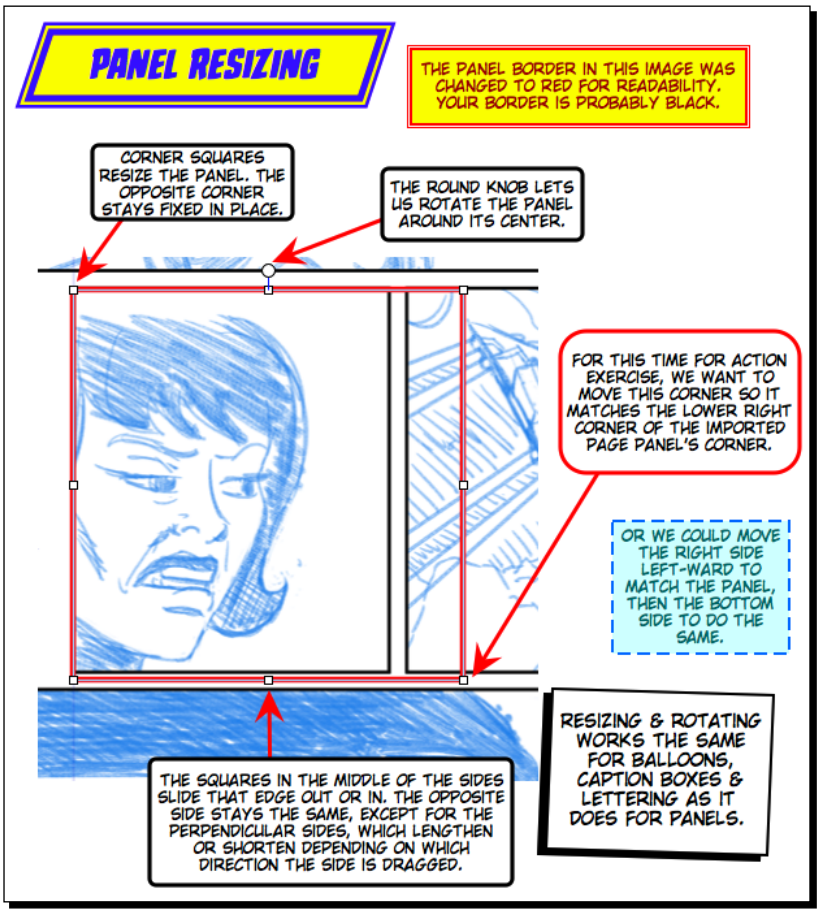



***10.*** We can either uncheck the **Fill** box or set the **Opacity** to **0**. Both will do the same thing visually. The difference is that if we recheck the **Fill** setting, the **Opacity** will be visible to whatever we set it to. With the **Opacity** set to **0**, we need to go and reset the **Opacity** to **100%** if we want to see the fill.

***11.*** It has been my experience that setting the **Opacity** to **0** is a better choice. Sometimes, with the **Fill** box unchecked, if we delete something within the panel, we lose our stroke until we turn the fill back on and then off again. As we gain experience with Comic Life, we'll develop ways that work best for us.

***12.*** We want a thick border. In the **Stroke** area, there's an up/down triangle button. Click on the triangle pointing upwards until the number **3** appears in the entry area. Alternatively, we can double-click inside the border entry area to select it all and then type `3`. If we want to enter in an amount such as 2.5, the latter is the only way we can do so.

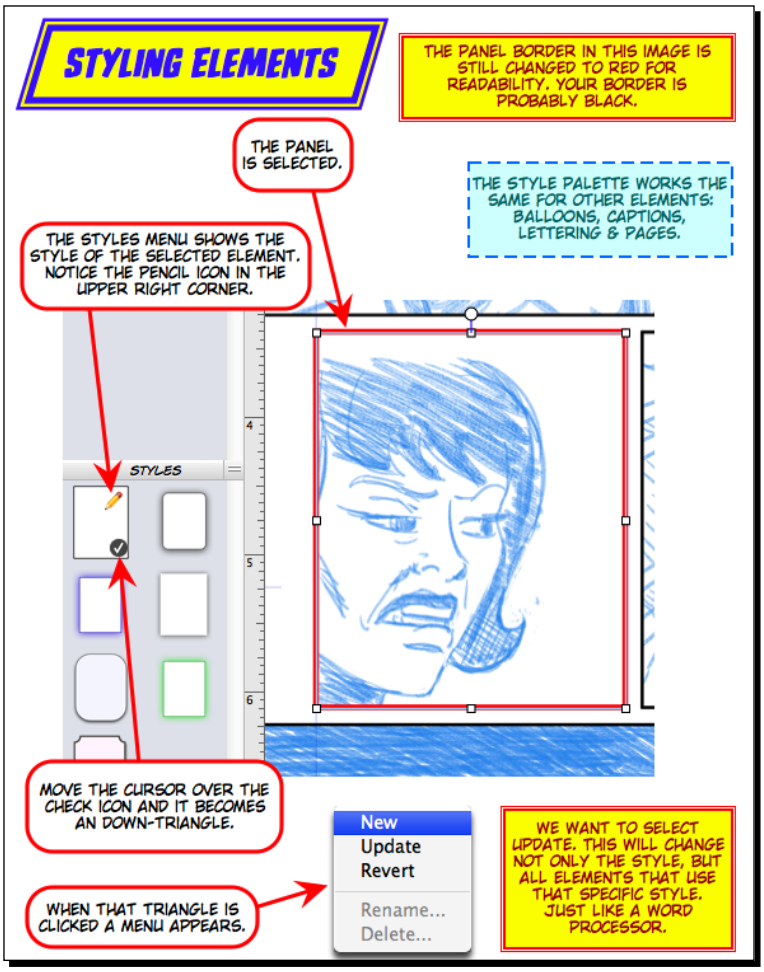
***13.*** Now, use the resizing squares to fit the panel element to panel two. As we locked the artwork, we can click inside the panel element and move it around without worrying about moving the following screenshot:




***14.*** Working at **100%** may be a bit of a task, so look at the main window. In the lower-right corner is a pop-up menu where we can select a zoom view. Usually, **150%** or **200%** will be good.

**15.** Skipping panels three and four, fit a panel element to panel six. We can extend the left and right sides of the panel beyond the edges of the page. Don't adjust the **Opacity** of this panel. It won't be necessary after the next step.

**16.** If we look at the styles well, with the new opaque panel element selected, notice that the icon is just a white filled rectangle with a gray circle with a check mark in it. This checked circle tells us that this is the style for the selected object.



***17.*** Now, click on the first panel element we made. In the styles palette, we see a new icon—a pencil on the right-hand side of the icon. This icon tells us that we made changes to an element that uses that style. If we move our cursor over the checkmark, it changes to a down triangle. Click and hold on the down triangle and a menu pops up. We can call this the **style menu**. It contains the following options:

- **New**: This will create a new style using the settings of the selected element.
- **Update**: This will update or overwrite the current style with the settings of the selected element.
- **Revert**: This will restore the original settings of the style for the selected element.
- **Rename**: This brings up a dialog that we can rename. The styles rename and delete are grayed out, as the current style is the default style for panel elements and cannot be renamed or deleted.
- **Delete**: If this wasn't the default/only style, choosing this would delete this style and elements using it would use the default style.

***18.*** We want to choose **Update**, as this is the look we want for all panels.

***19.*** Notice that once we chose **Update**, we lost the **Pencil** icon, and the second panel element we created now has a transparent background and a thicker stroke around it.

***20.*** Now, we want to create panel elements for the rest of the panels, except for panel one:

- In the lower-left corner of the workspace, there's a drop-down menu that we can use to zoom in and out. We can also navigate to **View** | **Zoom** to **Zoom in**, **Zoom out**, **View actual size**, **Fit to window**, or **Fit to width**.
- Holding down the space bar brings up a grabber hand, so we can drag it around and move our view of the workspace.
- A good method is to move the panel so that it is centered over the panel in the artwork. Then, drag a side at a time to match up with the artwork. Move on to the parallel side and match that with the artwork. Now, the perpendicular sides can be matched with the artwork in the same way.
- Notice that when you make changes to the horizontal sides of the panel elements for panels three and four, the blue lines appear when the side seems to snap into place. This is Comic Life's auto-align feature. Navigate to **View** | **Show Alignment Guides** to see if it's checked. The keyboard shortcut is *Command/ALT + ;* (semicolon) to toggle this setting.

***21.*** Don't worry about the black panel lines on the artwork; we'll turn them off in Manga Studio when we modify the artwork to better fit the text.

22. Now, for panel one, we'll be creating a panel and resizing it so that it's larger than the page it's on.
23. Drag the panel so that the bottom edge lines up with the bottom of panel one.
24. Pull out the left and right sides beyond the size of the page. Notice how the borders get grayed out. This is how Comic Life shows us what's outside the page. We can get clever and use the outside areas as a temporary storage for elements we're not ready to place on the page or for customized elements that we haven't assigned a style to (or choose **New** from the styles pop-up menu).
25. The top side can be dragged up. As this is the first page (and our only page), we can pull up the side beyond what Comic Life can show us.
26. Now, repeat this process for panel five.
27. Create panels for panels three, four, and seven. Use the alignment guides to help us position the bottom and top of the panels and for spacing the panels evenly. The alignment guides are cyan and can be hard to see in some contexts, especially the spacing guides. Don't hesitate to move the panel way off and then back in place to see the guides. It'll be worth it, as the guides are very useful—they show top, bottom, and middle alignments, and whether the spacing is even between elements. Yes, guides work for all elements in Comic Life.
28. When all the panels are done, take a break. This has just been the warm-up. The real fun's coming right up when we begin to letter our comic!

## What just happened?

Not only did we create panels, we learned how to resize them, move them around, and create new styles. All this knowledge can be applied to balloons, captions, lettering, and page elements within Comic Life. This is one of the strengths of Comic Life; it's not afraid to reuse ways of doing things for all elements.

We may want to lock our panels so that we don't accidentally move them. Navigate to **Arrange** | **Lock** to do this. You can also use *command/control* + *L*. Multiple objects can be selected by holding down *Shift* and clicking on the other panels one at a time. Alternatively, you can just drag from one corner of the page to the opposite one and lock all objects when everything is selected. Clicking on *Shift* can deselect selected objects. We can navigate to **Edit** | **Select All** to select everything on the current page of the comic. Going to **Edit** | **Select all in Comic** will select everything in the comic. Perform the last action with caution, as it's oh-so-easy to really mess things up. Fortunately, we can undo our changes (*command/Ctrl* + *Z* or navigate to **Edit** | **Undo**) if the unthinkable happens.

## Have a go hero

One of the best things about Comic Life is the fact that its styles are so flexible and changes to one element can be transferred to all elements that use the same style quickly using the update menu command. This can be a very handy thing to do, especially when dealing with imported artwork. In the example pages, the border of all the panels in the imported rough page is black and the line art is blue. This can make placing the panels in Comic Life a bit challenging, as the panel borders are black also. The way around this is to set the border color of the Comic Life panels to a color other than black. In the images, the border was changed to red. Change one panel to have dark red (or any other color; not orange, as that's the color cue Comic Life uses to indicate that an object is being clipped by a panel) borders, and then in the style browser, click on the down triangle to get the style menu and choose **Update styles**. Now, we can place the Comic Life panels with more ease, and clearly see the artwork borders and comic life borders.

Just remember to change the color back to black before we export the lettered page(s).

Why not just change the color of the panel borders in Manga Studio before exporting the rough penciled page? Simple, Manga Studio has nothing like styles that allow a change to one to be a change to all. Changing the border of frames (what Manga Studio insists on calling panels) has to be done one panel at a time. With Comic Life, choose **Update** from the style menu to change one element and all the panels that use this style change.

If you're wondering just why we're creating panels in Comic Life when there are panels already created in Manga Studio, it's because we can make use of Comic Life's word wrap. When a balloon or caption box is clipped by a panel, the margins of the text will respect not only the border of the balloon or caption box, but also the inner border of the panel. Manga Studio will just mask anything outside the panel/frame borders, and this includes text.

If we make changes to a style but want to keep the original, go to the style thumbnail, click on the **Menu** button, and select **New** from the pop-up menu. This creates a new style with a default name, such as `UserStyleXXXX` (where XXXX is a series of numbers). Go to this new style, click on the menu button, and choose **Rename** from the menu. Give the style a meaningful name so we'll know what it's to be used for. Notice that the style then moves to a different location. This is because styles are arranged in alphabetical order. Now, all we have to do is reselect the original element (the one that we made all the changes to) and then click on the new style in the style browser. Remember that if this is a text element (balloon or caption), all bold, font, and size formatting will be lost.

# Let's letter better!

Finally! This is the part that all the preparation we've done so far has been leading us to. What we've been doing is laying the foundation for our page. We exported the rough page so that we can place it within a new Comic Life document. We then imported a script so we don't have to do any more typing than we need to. Finally, we created panels so we'll have something to put our balloons and captions in.

We'll be going into some detail with the inspector palette and seeing the fonts that come with Comic Life. There's going to be a lot of information coming at us, so we need to just relax and play around a bit, and in not much time at all, we'll get it. This is how Comic Life works.

Don't hesitate to just delete elements that aren't working and try them anew. Just select the element and hit the *Delete* key. Bam! It's gone. It's difficult to anticipate where things can go wrong; wherever possible, solutions are offered for difficult situations. If something does go wrong for you and if trying again gives the same wrong results, the best thing to do is move on to the next step (if possible). Problem solving is like mixing cornstarch with water. If you try to stir it too fast, the spoon will break or bend. If you move it slowly, the stirring is easy and smooth. Approach the problem just like that; slowly look things over. Compare what you see on your screen and what's presented in this online chapter. Chances are it's just a minor thing that can be easily corrected, or it may be a difference that doesn't matter.

If all else fails, then visit the Comic Life forum at `www.plasq.com`. The help given on the forum is good, and the author lurks there often.

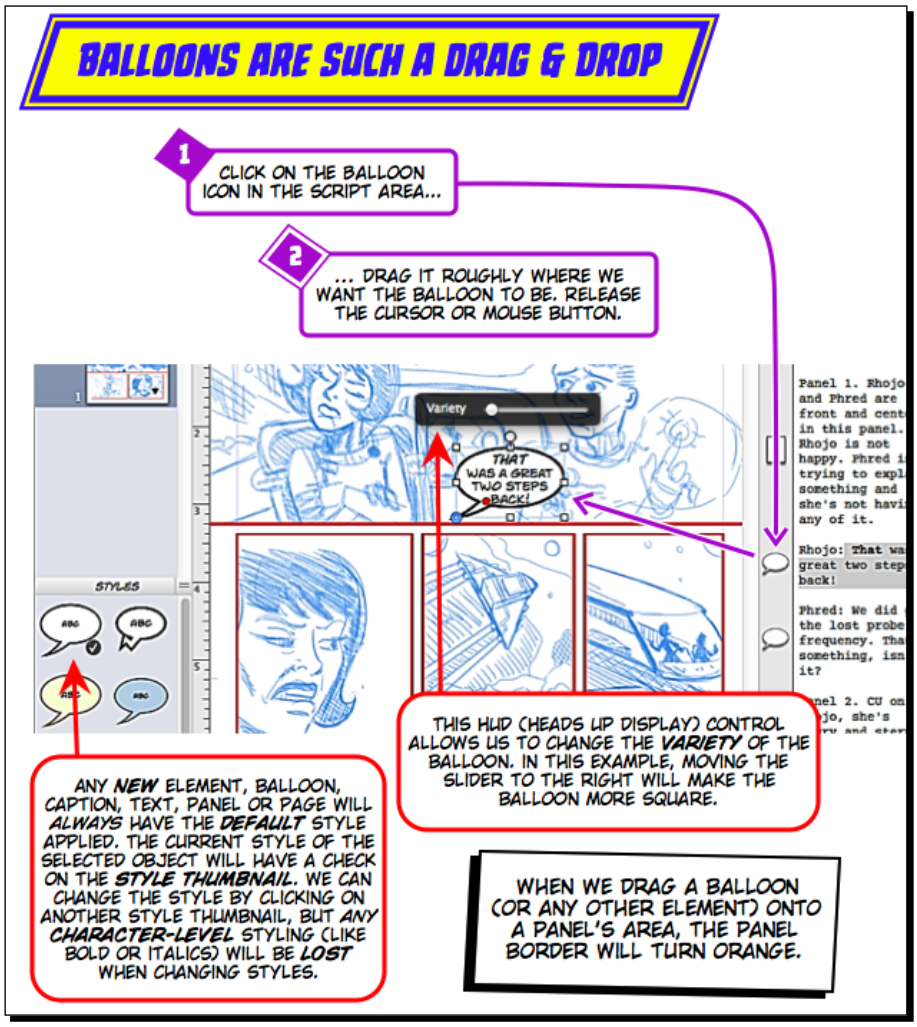
Okay, let's letter!

## Time for action – making our first word balloon

Lettering a comic page isn't just slapping a word balloon inside a panel; it's thinking where the balloon should go to aid in the composition and readability of the panel and page. Then, slap that puppy in the panel. We'll be doing this along with considering what fonts would be best to use for our dialog and captions. During this journey, we'll be creating new styles and modifying others. This is a piece of cake. Let's do it, okay?

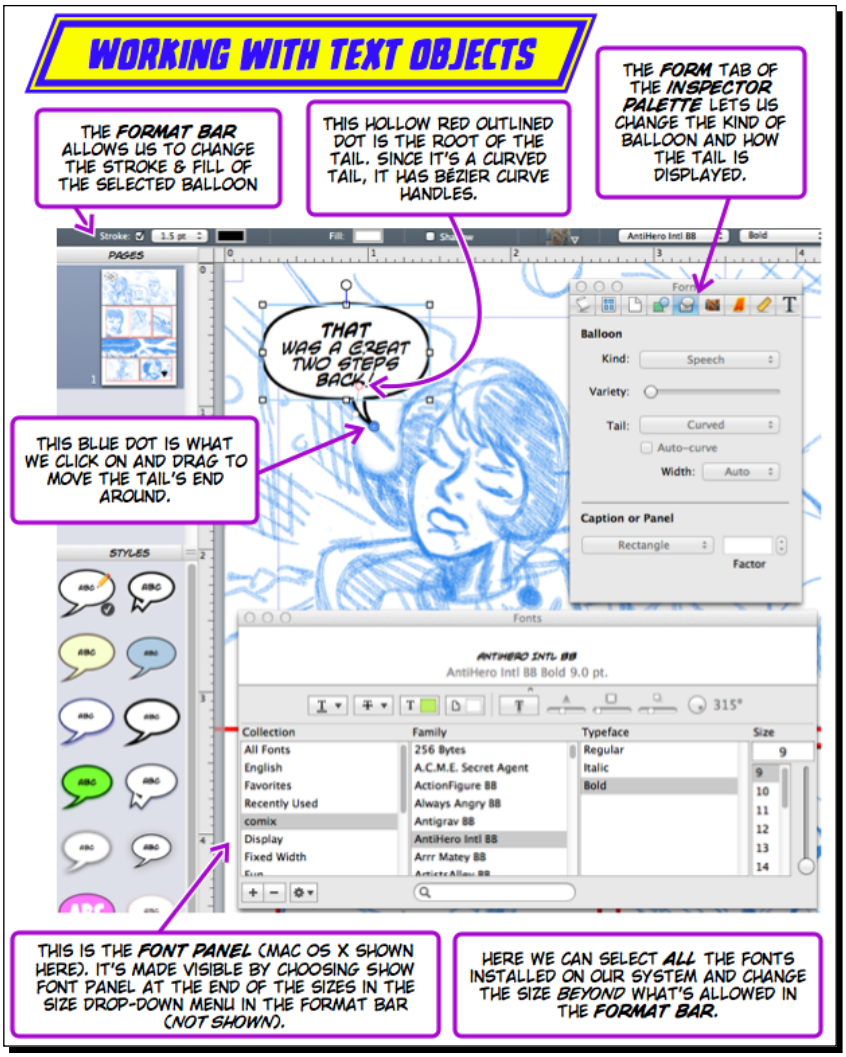
1. Make sure that the pages and style browser pane (**View** | **Show Pages and Styles**) and the **Script** pane are visible (**View** | **Show Script Editor**). We'll be making extensive use of both these interface elements. Thankfully, Comic Life will leave these visible until we hide them.

**2.** Drag out the balloon icon near the first bit of dialog in the script editor that begins with `Rhojo: That was...` as shown in the following screenshot:




**3.** We cannot drag the balloon where we want it. As it's the first bit of dialog, the upper-left corner is a good place for it. Drag it to that corner.

**4.** Much like how we resized the panels, we can resize the balloon. Something's not quite right—the text is awfully large. According to various sources, the size should be somewhere between six and seven points. The main thing is that the text is readable when printed or displayed on a device.



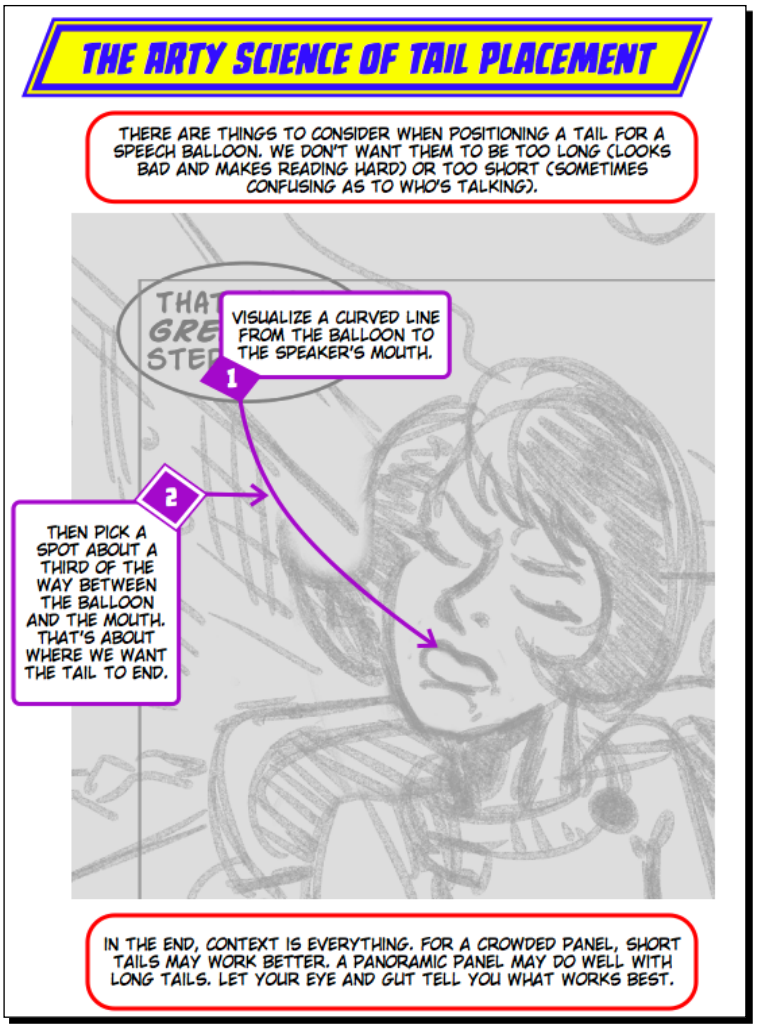

**5.** The previous screenshot shows us a few aspects of working with text objects. Currently, we're working with a balloon, but the same applies for caption boxes.

The previous screenshot shows us what we'll be ending up with, so don't worry about the balloon's tail or such until we get to it in the following steps. Also, the various panels and palettes are crammed together so they can be in the same image.

6. First, we'll change the font itself. We can click on the **Font** button in the format bar, and we can choose the **AntiHero Intl BB** font in the drop-down menu.
7. Now, we need to adjust the size of the point. Usually, the **Size** drop-down menu would be what we would use, but a click on it shows us that the smallest size is nine points. That's two points larger than we want. If we look at the **Size** drop-down menu closely, we'll notice a final menu item: **Show Font Panel**. Select it.
8. A font panel appears; what it looks like and can do depends on your operating system. What's shown in the preceding screenshot is from a Mac OS X system.

The font panel is great to use, as the font menu within Comic Life only shows (and therefore, only allows us to choose) fonts that come with the app. The font panel shows us all the fonts installed on our system. The Mac OS font panel allows the user to create font groups, which is a great time-saver. Consult your OS manual (or search the Internet) for more information on this.

9. In the font panel, we can set the size from nine to seven by double-clicking in the entry box and typing in `7`.
10. Now, we can adjust the thickness of the balloon's stroke. It's way too thick. Click on the **Stroke** drop-down menu and choose 1.5 point. Much better. Notice that there's a checkbox between the word **Stroke** and the drop-down menu button. This controls whether the stroke's visible or not.
11. Okay, we have the font and its size all sassed out. Now let's resize it so that there's enough space between the text and the stroke. The text will reflow as the balloon's size is changed (too bad that Manga Studio's text can't). The reflowing isn't perfect; sometimes, words will get split across two lines. The only cure for this is to readjust the balloon so that the text flows the way you want it to.
12. We can adjust the balloon's tail now by clicking on the blue dot and dragging it around. The following screenshot has some things to keep in mind when dragging the tail around:




***13.*** The hollow red-outlined dot, in most cases, needs to be within the balloon. We can call this the tail root dot. As our tail is set to be curved, the root will have bézier handles on it. If the form tab of the inspector palette has the selected balloon's tail set to straight, no tail root dot will be visible.

14. We've made some changes to the default balloon style. If we want all balloons to use these specific settings, we can click on the **Style Thumbnail** menu button (the check mark/downward pointing triangle) and choose **Update Styles** from the pop-up menu.
15. Now, drag-and-drop the next balloon; notice the font and size now and compare it to the ones we set earlier. Place the balloon where you think it should go. (If you are following the example, Rhojo is the female and Phred is the guy.)
16. If we want to change the text in another balloon or caption box, just double-click on it. All the text will be selected, so press the cursor arrows and then edit the text.
17. Now, finish up the page's lettering. Remember that caption boxes work in much the same way as **Balloons**. As captions are Rhojo's narrations, try using the Blambot casual font for it.

### *What just happened?*

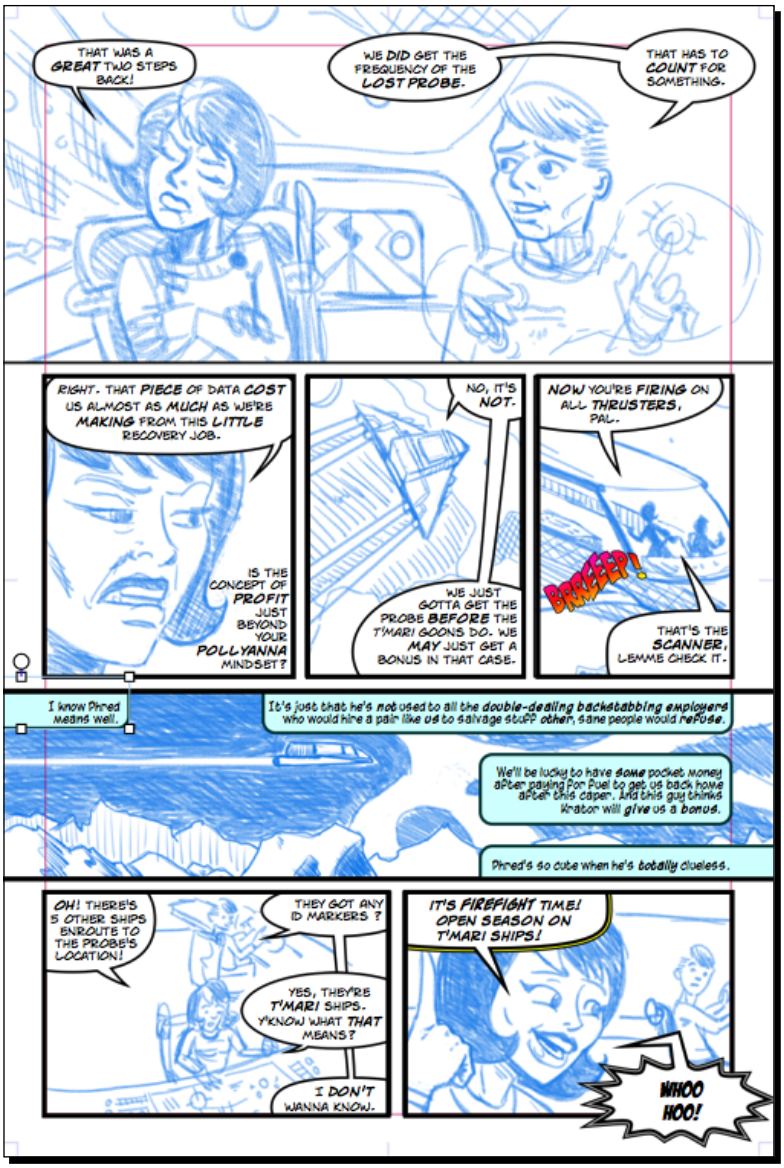
We began using Comic Life to letter our page. While dragging-and-dropping a balloon from the script editor was simple enough, adjusting the font and its size was a bit more involved.

### Have a go hero

In most word processors, we have a ruler that measures how wide our page is and where the margins and tabs are. When we have an active cursor or all the text selected, and we have a ruler just for the object we're editing. So, what we want to do is extend past the edges of the page for the caption boxes for Panel 5, but have the margins (left for the first caption box, and right for the second) begin or end at the border of the active area. The active area is marked out in the page art we placed in the document way back. This can be tricky; keep in mind that anything past the page's edge won't be exported, so make the caption box real long and work from there. For balloons and caption boxes, what effect does changing the **Outline** setting in the **Stroke** section of the **Graphic** tab in the inspector palette bring? Alternatively, what effect does changing the type of stroke from the long drop-down menu have (it's right below the **Stroke** name)? Don't forget that all elements have options in the **Form** tab in the inspector. Balloons have Kind, Caption boxes can be rectangular, oval, rounded, scroll, and more kinds of shapes. Experiment. Have Fun!

## Exporting the lettered page from Comic Life

Okay, the page is lettered. Here's what I came up with:




The last bit of dialog, "WHOO HOO!", was selected and then the **Don't clip** button on the tool bar was clicked. We can navigate to **Arrange** | **Don't Clip** for the same effect.

What we want to do is export just the lettering as a PNG file and import that PNG file into Manga Studio (or the graphic app of your choice).

# The process so far

The workflow that we're going through in this online chapter is as follows:

1. Create a story with a typed script.
2. Layout the page in Manga Studio or another graphic app. The pencils can be rough or somewhat refined.
3. Export the artwork as a TIFF or PNG file.
4. Create a Comic Life file and set the page to be like the comic page we created.
5. Import the rough pencils and script into Comic Life.
6. Create panels, balloons, captions, and special effect lettering in Comic Life.
7. Export the lettering—but not the artwork—as a PNG file from Comic Life.
8. Import the lettering file into Manga Studio.
9. Use the imported lettering file as a reference, as the page is fully penciled, inked, and colored/toned.
10. Export the finished page using either of the following:
    - Save the lettering layer as a PNG or TIFF file with the same file name as the original rough page
    - With the lettering layer
11. If the first bullet point is done, then open the Comic Life file and refresh the placed image so that the finished page is in place.

It looks like a whole lot more work when every step is laid out, doesn't it? As we work on more stories, this process will become quite quick and reflexive. At this point, we're already at step 7, so most of the lettering work is done.

# Exporting the lettered page

One of the reasons why we're lettering the page from roughs is that if we need to rearrange the elements on the rough page, we can do it better if we're just working from roughs. We can be a bit flexible, because the page hasn't been worked on as much as a page that had finished pencils.

## Time for action – exporting just the lettering

Now, here's the trick; we want to export just the lettering as a comic page in the PNG format. However, we still want to be able to have the image in the file so that we can reopen this Comic Life file and refresh the image when the time comes for it. However, we can't adjust transparency on images in Comic Life. What to do?

1. If we're planning on exporting our page from our graphic app and not from Comic Life, change the panel border colors to black (or the color you want them to be). If we're going to be finishing our page in the graphic app and then export the finished page with the same file name (overwriting) as the original, go on to step 2.
2. In Comic Life, click on the grey part of the window, outside the page.
3. This makes the style browser show styles for pages. Just what we want.
4. Remember that when we set the **Opacity** of the panel to **0**, we could see the artwork below it. The same thing works here. Go to the inspector palette and then to the **Graphic** tab; in the fill section, set the **Opacity** to **0**.
5. Now comes the trick. Click on the gutters in the page. This should select the placed image of our rough page. If it's locked (we'll see an X instead of handles on the edges), right-click and choose **Unlock** from the contextual menu.
6. Go to the **Metrics** tab of the inspector palette (it has a ruler icon). Towards the bottom are two fields labeled **X** and **Y**. **X** is horizontal and **Y** is vertical in this instance. Enter **11** in the field above **Y**. Press the **Enter** key.
7. Our placed image is now lowered 11 inches from the top. As our page is only 10 and a half inches tall, the placed image is out of view. When we export our lettered page, only the lettering and panel borders get exported. As our panels and page both have a fill with zero opacity, only the caption boxes and balloons will have an opaque fill.
8. Give the page a last look, and see if there are any typos or anything wrong.
9. Navigate to **File** | **Export** | **Export as Image(s)...**.
10. In the dialog box, make sure that the format is PNG and the resolution is the same as the Manga Studio/graphic app page file. In this case, it's 600 dpi.
11. In your graphic app of choice, import the graphic file into the comic page.
12. If needed, scale and position the lettered page so that it overlays the page exactly.

***13.*** Now, all we have to do is finish the pencils, ink, and color/tone the page. This is a piece of cake.

***14.*** In Manga Studio, in order to make changes to the imported image, we need to select the layer the imported lettering is on and right-click and choose **Rasterize** from the contextual menu.

***15.*** The lettering layer is now a plain raster layer, so we can erase and add lines, use different blending modes, or do many other things. If we mess it up, we can always reimport the original layer.

***16.*** If we want to export the finished page into Comic Life and make use of its many export options (PDF, ePub, Images, upload to social media, and other formats), then either hide the lettering layer before exporting, or if we're using Manga Studio, set the lettering layer as a Draft Layer (see the book for details on that) and all layers we want exported to be visible and not set as Draft. Then, when we export the page, make sure that the **Draft** setting in the **Output image** section is unchecked. Finally, no matter what app we use, make sure that the exported file is in the same format (TIFF or PNG) and has the same file name. If we get an `This file already exists` error message, we're doing it right, in this case.

While this seems counter intuitive, we only need the lettering layer in Manga Studio for reference, to make sure that the lettering and art work with each other. As we're working with a roughly sketched page, making changes is easier than on a finished page. As we'll be exporting this page back into Comic Life, we don't need the lettering layer, especially if we want to have some text elements with some transparency.

***17.*** Open the Comic Life lettering file for this page. Select and move the image back to zero on the *y* axis by navigating to **Palette** | **Metrics**. Then, right-click on the image and select **Refresh Image** from the contextual menu. If Comic Life crashes when you attempt this, quit and restart Comic Life. Make sure that the image is unlocked. If it's still crashing, then note the size of the image and its X and Y locations. Select the old image and delete it. Then, place the new image onto the page and use the **Send to Back** toolbar button or navigate to **Arrange** | **Send to Back**.

***18.*** Violá! Now we can see the image of our shiny completed page with nice lettering!

### What just happened?

We used some trickery to make our placed image in Comic Life invisible to the export process, adjusted the **Opacity** of the page to **0**, and exported the lettered page as a PNG file. We then imported this file into Manga Studio/an other graphic app and used it as a reference as we finished penciling the page. Then, the page was inked and toned or colored. Once more, we exported the artwork without the lettering exactly as we did at the beginning of this tome, with the same file format and name (for the first time, hoping we'll get an error message, no less!). When we opened the Comic Life file, we moved the placed image back up and right-clicked and chose Refresh. We ended up with a finished page that's all lettered!

## Quick tips and hints

Think of this section as a springboard to learn more about Comic Life. This is intended as a practical introduction to using Comic Life to letter comics and is not an exhaustive manual. There's a lot still uncovered in this app, such as making templates, adding overlays to captions and balloons, and creating new pages.

Got to leave something for the spirit of exploration, right?

So, to get us all started on that exploration, here are some short little exercises and tidbits about Comic Life that should get us started.

### Lettering elements

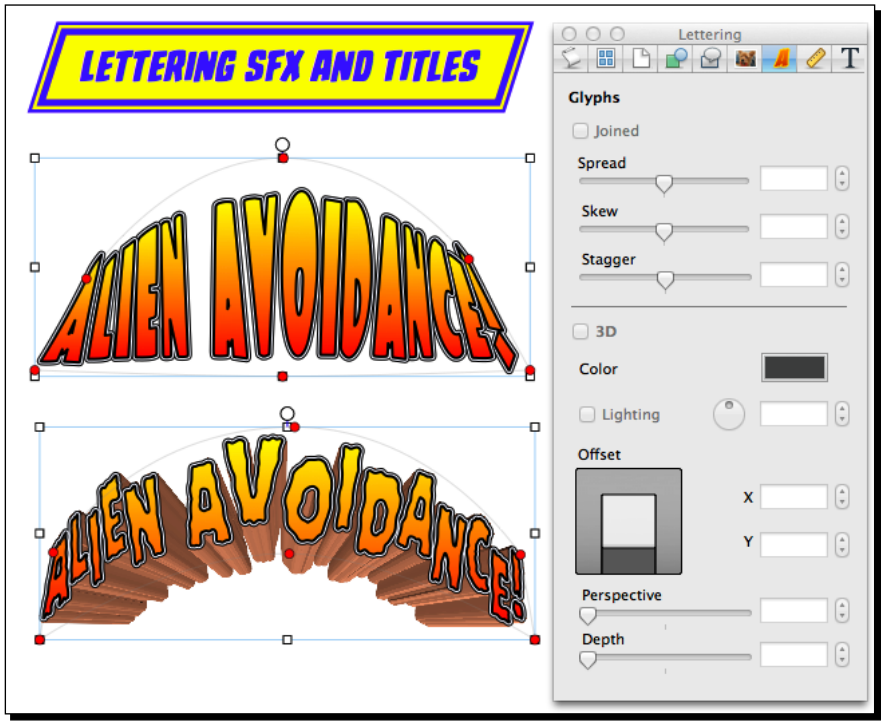
The **Lettering** elements are great for sound effects and titles. They work best for single-line titles or short phrases and the occasional ZAP, KA-ZING, and BRRAAP!

Create a new Comic Life document. Choose a `blank page(With Styles)` template from the **Template Chooser**. We can name this file anything we want; it'll be like a scratchpad that we'll be using to record experiments that we'll be doing in Comic Life.

In the element well at the bottom of the window, there's an icon that reads **Lettering** in a stretched-out font. Drag it up to the page. A little object with lettering selected will appear. Type in something; I used `Alien Avoidance!`

Then, press the *Enter* key. The lettering has a default style applied to it. To adjust it, use the **Lettering** tab on the inspector palette. Be sure to mess around with the 3D section; don't forget to check the box so that it is visible.

Save the document. This will deselect everything. Now, click once on the lettering element. Notice how we get the square handles for resizing and the circle at the top-center to rotate it. Now, click once again on the lettering. We now see red dots. Click on the top-center one and drag it up a bit. Notice how the lettering gets distorted? If we're really observant, we notice that the center, top, and bottom red dots have bézier handles on them! They can be rotated and pulled in or out. The four dots at each corner are just corner points; they aren't fancy, but they can be moved pretty much any where. Here's an example:

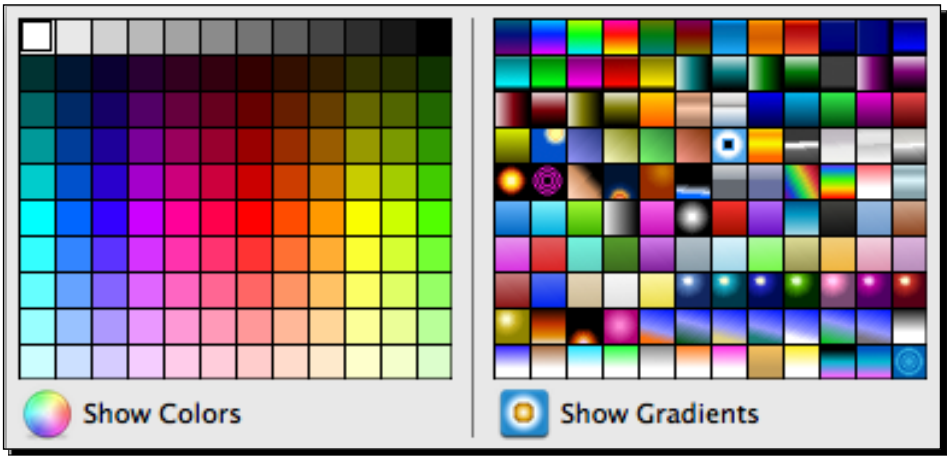



In the previous screenshot, for the top image, I used the default **Foo** font and only the red dots were moved for the effect. For the bottom image, I used the **Rugged Rock** font from ComiCraft. **Stagger** is set to **2** for the bottom image. **3D** is checked. The **Lighting color** is a light orange and the **Lighting angle** is at 178 degrees. The offset is **0** on the **X** box and **100** on the **Y** box. **Perspective** is **0.55** and **Depth** is **0.25**.

If we want to use a two-line title, then create two separate lettering elements. If we want one word in the middle to be in a different color/style/font, then we'll have to create three lettering elements: one for the left-hand side, one for the middle, and one for the right-hand side. We can create a lettering element on the left-hand side, then use the **Option** key or the *Alt* key, drag it over, and type in the right-hand side text. To edit text in a lettering object, double-click on it. Then, drag out one more lettering element for the middle, type in the text, and make changes to it.

## Colors and gradients

Whenever we see a color swatch (in the graphic, lettering (3D area), and text), we can call up the Comic Life color palette.




The **Gradient** palette only shows in the **Graphic** tab. Clicking on **Show Colors** will bring up the operating system's color chooser, and **Show Gradients** will bring up the Comic Life gradient editor. The gradient editor works much like other gradient editors. Comic Life's gradient editor can use opacity as a modifier. So, there can be a gradient between solid green and a transparent yellow, for example.

## Adding pages

Adding pages can be done by going to the **Insert** menu and choosing the option we want (new blank page or duplicate page).

In the pages well, we can drag-and-drop pages around, and when we hover our mouse over a page, we see the down-pointing triangle. If we click on it, we'll see the pages menu. It contains commands to add, duplicate, and delete pages, and other options.

When nothing's selected, the page is active. We can go to the **Page** tab in the inspector palette, and there we can set how the pages are numbered and the texture of the page (or pages, if we make a style of this page). One thing to note about using textures is that they are an overlay, so they will be seen through all art and lettering.

## Master pages and page numbering

Master pages work similar to how they work in desktop publishing apps. To edit the master page, navigate to **Arrange** | **Edit Master Page**. The other option that can be used is **Move Object to Master Page**; it is pretty obvious what this option does.

Notice that the master page is blank. Well, we have to change that, don't we?

Drag up a caption element. With the default `Your Words Here` text selected, go to **Insert** | **Page Number**. Change the fill color to red and the text color to yellow. Resize the caption box to be a square and move it to the bottom of the page in the center.

Navigate to **Insert** | **Edit Master Page** (which is checked). Selecting it will bring us back to the regular edit mode. Now, go to the pages well and make a few pages. Notice that each page has the page number updated.

Anything we add to the master page will be at the bottom of the stacking order. That is, it will always be under everything else, and the only way to select it is to navigate back to **Insert** | **Edit Master Page**.

# Now have some fun!

There's a lot to this unassuming niche app that would entail twice of what is here already. As stated earlier, that's left for exploration.

There's a lot we covered here, from importing and exporting arts and scripts, setting up documents and page sizes, modifying styles and making new ones, to creating panels and marvels of zero opacity. When you downloaded the app from Plasq, there should be a `Getting Started` PDF file. Read it for more information.

Again, do check out `www.plasq.com` and lurk about in the Comic Life forum. The people there are friendly and helpful. The moderators are quick to answer questions and help resolve problems pertaining to Comic Life.