

## Create a Comic Character: Making a Character Sheet



What You'll Be Creating

The inspiration behind a comic can come from many sources. It can be anything from a story idea to a certain setting, or perhaps a character. This tutorial won't go into how to write a comic script or well-rounded characters, but it will guide you through the process of visualizing your character ideas through research, experiment and refining.

By creating a character sheet, you will be properly prepared before you start drawing your comic, and you'll have a reference to help you keep the character's look consistent.

# 1. Figuring Out Who Your Character Is

Before we start to draw any characters, some early preparation work can help us a great deal. Figure out what your character will be about (Stoic vampire hunter? Ditzzy high-school student?) and try to imagine the situations the character will be in. An action comic will probably feature the character's body in motion, while a romantic drama might focus more on the facial expressions.

## Step 1

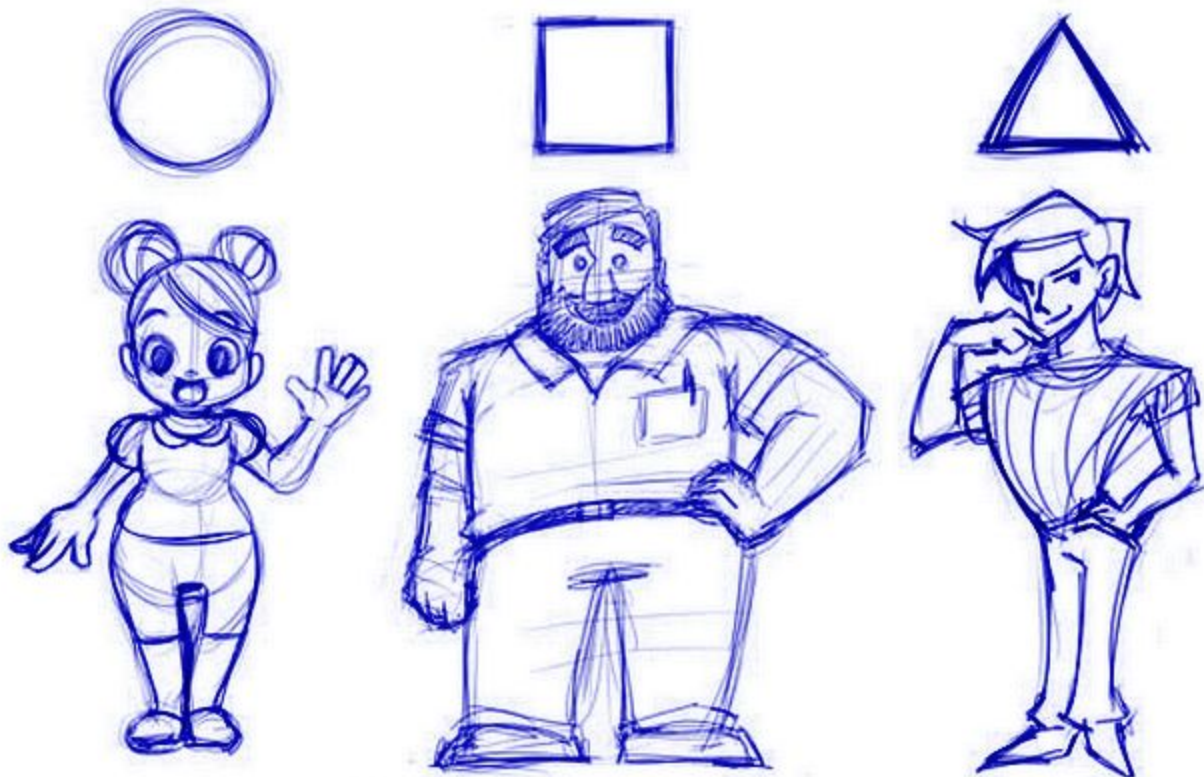
I've decided that I want to make a simple slapstick comic about cooking, so my character will be some sort of chef. I'm keeping my options open when searching online for reference images. For my purposes with the comic, I don't really need an accurate depiction of real garments worn by chefs, but picking up little details here and there gets the imagination going a lot better than if I were to come up with everything on my own.



Alright, I've found several elements I can incorporate into the look. Now for the person who is going to be wearing that look: who am I going to be drawing?

## Step 2

When designing characters, it's a good idea to use the three basic shapes: circle, square and triangle. We tend to perceive characters that have a lot of roundness and circle elements in their design as friendly, while characters composed with square shapes emit a sense of stability. Characters with sharp and triangular shapes have an active look, and can also look dangerous.



By mixing these shapes into one design, even more concepts can be expressed, so try out a couple of combinations for yourself. While these are not set rules, it can be a fun exercise to draw and also to analyze what shapes are mostly used to portray heroic or villainous characters for example.

### Step 3

When making the initial sketches, I try out all that comes to mind, even things I think might not work. Try playing with both stereotypes and their complete opposites. When you find something you like—whether that is an entire character sketch or just a minor detail—carry it over to the next round of sketches, and keep going until you've gotten something you want to base your character on.



I prefer to sketch digitally in Adobe Photoshop, but you can use whichever medium feels best for you, be it another software program or sketching traditionally with pen and paper. To follow along later on, it might be good to have access to a scanner if you sketch traditionally, since we're going to duplicate, move around and mirror some of the sketches.

## 2. Create a Look

Now that we've used some of our earlier research and sketching methods, we've got a whole bunch of character concepts to choose from. When seeing these different ideas together like this, it can be a lot easier to discover what you want and don't want the character to be. Go with your gut feeling, or have others give you feedback if you feel unsure, and choose the character concept which we will now develop into a proper design.

### Step 1

Since this character is not supposed to be the object of a single illustration, but rather an actor of sorts in the comic, it's important that it communicates emotions and actions well through facial expressions and body movement.

The key here is exaggeration. As a rule, it's often better to go over the top than to hold back, and then perhaps pull back a little if it gets too crazy.

Of course a lot depends on the style too, but even for more realistic comics, I'd suggest pushing the expression a bit more than you think you need to. The intensity of a sketch often gets softened after inking, coloring, adding backgrounds, effects and so on.



After we've come up with a decent-looking base design, we need to try it out from different angles as well. Try drawing the character from the back and side, and consider if you should make any changes to it.

## Step 2

After drawing the character from the front, looking forward, we're going to save ourselves some time by making a copy of the sketch as a base for drawing the back.

If you're using Photoshop you can copy your sketch by holding the **Alt** key while dragging the image to the side, then mirroring it by pressing **Command-T** for the **Transform Tool**, and **right-clicking** and choosing **Flip Horizontal** from the drop-down menu. You now have a base to draw the back view drawing. The same method can be applied when creating the profile.



### 3. Express Your Character's Emotions

Once you feel pleased with how the character looks, it's time to focus on facial expressions and body language. Just like when we did the initial character sketching, I suggest making a lot of sketches.

Don't just draw the faces for happy, sad, angry and so on, but think of different kinds of happiness, sadness and anger. Our faces can change a lot with the intensity of emotions, and the reasons behind them. When drawing in a cartoon or manga style, there are not a lot of details, but it can help a lot to have a mirror beside you and make the faces yourself. You may catch some details you haven't thought about before.



When drawing in a more comic style, which I will be doing with my character, it can be fun to push the character's facial expression further by extending it to things like hair and clothing. Notice how the character's chef hat is "emoting" along with the character, as well as her bangs and braid.

## 6. Turn Gesture Drawings Into Action Poses

Of course, we communicate a lot using body language as well, so try out some different poses for the character too. The same thinking can be applied here: how would this character's stance show that he/she is sad or angry? How would it differ across a range of emotions, from being slightly disappointed to being devastated?

While there are a lot of resources online for both poses and expressions, it can be pretty fun to create them yourself with a mirror or a camera, or with a friend to model for you.



Return once more to the basic shapes building up your character and make some simple stick figures in various poses. Focus on creating movement in the gesture, and don't worry about accuracy right now. Lower the opacity of the stick figure layer, and create a new one above it where you flesh out the sketches into proper pose drawings. Testing out the character like this is a good way to see if the design holds up as well in action as when you first drew it.