Comic Life

Creating Photo Comics

Classroom Course Manual

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Introduction

About Comic Life

Comic Life is an application by plasq for creating comics through use of an intuitive interface and many different design tools. It has a version for both Mac and Windows, and there is also a version for iPad and iPhone devices.

Prerequisites

- Basic computer literacy.

Create a Comic

Immediately after you open Comic Life, you will be presented with a Template Chooser window. Comic Life comes with a number of templates for both scripts and comics. For the purposes of this class, start with a blank comic and begin from scratch.

Under the Comics section on the left panel, Select Blank, and then the Blank (with styles) template. Click Choose, and the main Comic Life interface will open.
Menu and Preferences

Notice that the main working area (the Page Editor), in the middle of the interface has rulers along the top and left sides. These rulers can display in a number of different measurement units, you must make sure ours is set to display in inches. Navigate to Comic Life in the top left of the Menu Bar and Choose Preferences from the menu.

Click the Rulers tab, and Set Ruler Units to Inches.
In this window you can also turn off the interactive sounds that Comic Life makes while editing. Click the General tab in the Preferences window and Deselect the box next to "Play sounds while editing".

### Workspace Elements

#### Toolbar

The Comic Life interface is built with the Page Editor in the center, and other panels surrounding it. These panels can all be hidden or shown by using the View button in the toolbar at the top of the Comic Life window.

- Clicking this button will reveal a menu of the various panels. From here you can click each to hide or show in your workspace. Make sure that everything except the Script Editor is shown.
- Also available in the toolbar are the zoom tools. You can use these to change the size of the pages in the Page Editor.
- The toolbar contains a variety of other useful tools, such as buttons for Exporting, Saving, Printing, and creating new pages. To create new pages, Click the New Page button and Select Blank from the menu that appears.

#### Pages and Page Editor

The Pages panel, to the left of the Page Editor, is used for editing the order of pages, as well as adding and deleting pages. If you want to add or delete a page, Click the small black triangle in the bottom right corner of one of the pages, and Choose your preferred option from the menu.

If you choose to create a new page, it will be inserted into the comic after the page you originally selected.

To edit the order of the pages, Click the page you want to move, and Drag and Drop it where you want it to be placed.

#### Styles

The Styles panel, also to the left of the Page Editor, is used for styling most of the components of the comic, depending on what you have selected. Different style options will pop up for pages, speech bubbles, panels, and images. Click on one of the pages either in the Pages panel or Page Editor, and Select a page style from the Styles panel.
Format Bar

The Format Bar, located directly above the Page Editor, contains more options for styling and colors. If you want to modify the style of your page without choosing a pre-made style, Click the Fill button and Choose either Show Colors or Show Gradients for more customizing options.

Layouts

The Layout panel, to the right of the Page Editor, is used to add panel layouts to the pages. You can choose from an extensive selection of different layouts by using the drop-down menu at the top of the panel. There are a number of different era and genre layouts available, but you can also make your own edits to the panels.
To add a layout to a page, Drag and Drop it from here into the Page Editor.

To edit a panel, Select it in the Page Editor. From here, you can use Styles to edit the panel.

You can also edit the size, shape, and orientation of the panel by hovering over the boxes that appear around the perimeter of the selected panel, Clicking and Dragging them to change the width and height of the panel. If you Click the small circle that appears at the top of the panel, you can use it to rotate the panel.

If you want to have panels overlap, use the Front and Back buttons in the top toolbar to arrange them.
Pictures

In the Pictures panel, also to the right of the Page Editor, you can access images to use in your comic. Use the panel to Navigate to the location of your image on your computer, and Drag and Drop the image into a panel in the Page Editor.

There are Styles available for images as well. To select an image, Double-Click on it in the Page Editor and edit using the Styles panel.

To change the size, shape, and orientation of the image, Click and Drag the boxes around the perimeter of the selected image to change the width and height of the image, and use the small circle at the top of the image to rotate.

Elements Well

The Elements Well contains the various different options for adding text to your comic. These include many styles of speech and thought bubbles, a basic panel, lettering, and caption boxes. To use these, Drag and Drop them into the comic. You can then style them using the Styles panel, and edit them using the boxes around the perimeter of the selected element.

With the speech and thought bubbles, you can also change the length and configuration of the tail. Click and Drag on the red circle near the bubble itself or blue circle at the end of the tail. When a speech or thought bubble first
appears, you'll also see a Variety slider which will change the variation of the shape. This can also be accessed under Form in the Inspector.

To edit fonts and text colors, Highlight the text you want to edit and use the buttons in the toolbar for Text and Colors to bring up windows where you can make more selections. The toolbar also includes buttons for adjusting the font size.

While the panel layouts are already very customizable, you may want to add more panels to a layout you are constructing. You can add panels through the Elements Well, just Click and Drag from the New Panel button.
Comic Life features a Script Editor, which is an interface for constructing your text material in a script format, before putting it into the comic. You can find it and use it like a basic text editor by Navigating to the View button in the toolbar and Choosing Show Script Editor.

The Inspector window has several tabs that target areas of the comic layout and composition for more specific and thorough editing and customization. To reveal the Inspector window, Click the Inspector button in the top toolbar.

Script

Info

The Script section of the Inspector has two tabs. The first is for storing information about the comic: author, title, issue, series, and copyright.
Keywords

- The other tab controls Keywords. These are used in the script editor to indicate the type of text or content on each line. For example, if you want to note that you are using a thought balloon for a certain piece of text, you would use the ‘THOUGHT’ keyword. You must use a colon after your keyword to apply the command to the script content. The character after the colon does not contribute to the content.
- If you use these keywords to mark up the script editor, you can Drag and Drop the small symbols to the left of each line into your comic, and the correct type of element will appear with the text inside it in your comic.

- You will see a number of presets available to you in the Inspector, but you can also create your own keywords with specific styles attached to them. If you want to know what each Balloon Type looks like, just mouse over each in the Elements Well.

Document and Page

In the Document section of the Inspector, you can define both margin and page size, as well as set the Image Filter Resolution.
Page

The Page section of the Inspector allows you to set page number specifications, as well as save whatever layout you are using as a new layout (this is especially useful if you have added or removed panels and would like to use the same layout configuration in the future). You can also add a texture to the page from this section.

Graphic

In the Graphic section of the Inspector, there are several different edits you can make to the styling and look of the elements of your comic. You can format a different stroke around the panel frames, change the drop shadow on panels, edit fill colors, change opacity, and customize your comic aesthetic.
Form

The Form section of the Inspector lets you make specific edits to the speech balloon design, and the text elements in your comic.

Image

In the Image section of the Inspector, you can make some edits to the images in the comic themselves, such as adjust brightness, contrast, and saturation, as well as apply stylistic filters. While these adjustments are useful, major image edits should be made in a photo or image editing program, such as Adobe Photoshop or Illustrator.
Lettering

The Lettering section of the Inspector is used specifically for the Lettering text style, and offers a large range of modifications you can make to the text, including 3D options, and a number of skewing and staggering type design changes you can make.

Metrics

In the Metrics section of the Inspector, you can make some more specific edits to the alignment of the elements of the comic, such as choosing specific sizes and rotation angles.
Text

The Text section of the Inspector lets you make basic changes to text color, alignment, and spacing.

Saving and Exporting

When finishing a project in Comic Life, you will both Save and Export. Ideally, you would also be saving frequently as you work on the project, but in essence, Saving a Comic Life project saves it as a Comic Life file. You can print from this file, but if you want to change your Comic to another file format, you will need to Export it.
Both Save and Export are buttons found in the toolbar.

Clicking Export will bring up an Export window, where you can choose the format you would like to export your comic as. The PDF will show options for exporting as a PDF, and Images will let you export it as other image file formats, such as TIFF, JPEG, GIF, and PNG. You can also export it directly to Facebook or iPhoto.