

The Golden Age of Comics

Superhero comic books got their start in the late 1930s, ushering in the Golden Age of comics that lasted until the early 1950s. Iconic characters such as Superman and Wonder Woman were introduced during this time, although many others came and went as comic creators experimented with characters, formats, and themes.

Producing comics was a collaborative effort—it generally took five or more artists to bring a story from idea to finished art. Here’s how the process worked:

- A *writer* generated an idea for the comic, then wrote a script.
- A *penciler*—who was generally a skilled illustrator with strong storytelling abilities—drew the artwork frame by frame, roughing in the space needed for speech balloons, narration, and sound effects.
- The penciler handed the art off to a *letterer*, who hand-lettered all the speech balloons, captions, and narration.

- An *inker* then used a pen or brush to go over the penciled art in ink, adding depth and shading.
- A *colorist* added color to every frame. Only then could the artwork go to the printer.

Although comic superheroes declined in popularity in the 1990s, they have rebounded since then, and the comic book and graphic novel industry—in print and online—is thriving today. Perhaps surprisingly, little has changed in a comic book’s initial creation processes: it’s still a hands-on, team-oriented industry. Although much of the work is now digitized, illustration is still at the heart of it.

Fig. 3-X. In addition to comic books, *Captain Midnight* appeared in a radio serial, short films, newspaper strips, and a television show.

Dan Barry (penciler and inker), Fawcett Publications, Inc., *Captain Midnight in the Cross-Country Crime*, from *Captain Midnight*, Vol. 10, No. 57, November 1947.

