Mangakapedia

Turning your manga pages into a typographical file.

Once you have completed your pages and are ready to send them to the jury of a competition, to an editor for preliminary evaluation or to the printer, you are 95% of the way there.
It would be a real shame to throw everything all away because of a badly done 5%, wouldn't it?
So let's see **what you ought to pay attention to**.

First of all, a simple yet important point: there is no 'best' format in which to draw manga.
There are basically two typographical formats in the world: A and B. Manga artists tend to use the B4 format for the stories they send to publishers and the A4 format for those they produce for fun or as self-publications. This is not a dogma dictated by the holy spirit of Japanese manga... as always, there is a very practical explanation.

Format	Size	Frequent uses
B6	128 mm x 182 mm	Comics, light novels
A5	148 mm x 210 mm	Books, comics, diaries
B5	182 mm x 257 mm	Periodicals, manuals, art books
A4	210 mm x 297 mm	Art books, fashion magazines, picture books, sketchbooks, printer sheets, manga sheets
B4	257 mm x 364 mm	Manga sheets
A3	297 mm x 420 mm	Drawing sheets

B Format

In Japan, printers work with B-size sheets (slightly different to the international B-size); in fact, technical manuals and periodical comic magazines are preferably B5-size, while manga volumes are often B6-size. This makes it possible to optimise the use of paper and to reduce waste and costs at the same time.
Likewise, the drawing sheets, folders, light-boards, etc. found in art shops are in B4 format.
For a product to be published, the professional manga artist prefers to work on large sheets of paper. This way they can take better care of the details and hide any small imperfections.

A Format

Technical tools such as printers and scanners normally stick to A formats. A very good A4 scanner can cost less than 100 euros while a professional A3 scanner costs more than 10 thousand.

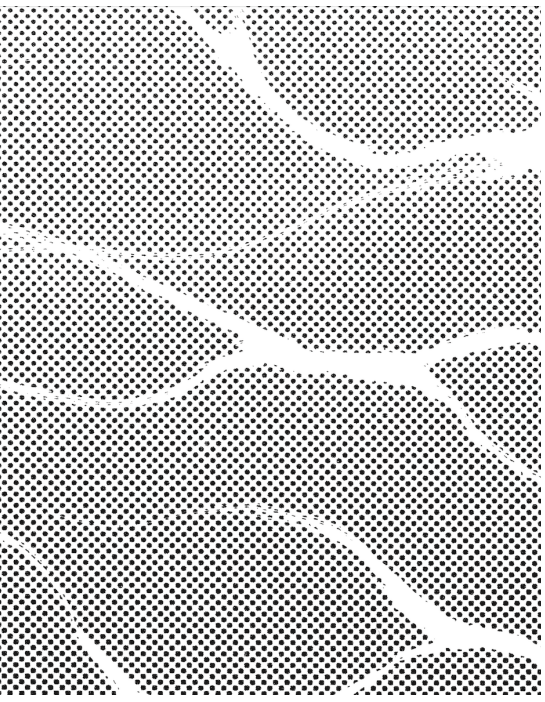
When publishing a manga volume, scanning will be handled by the publisher or printer. If they are professionals, they will both have an A3 scanner equipped to scan 1200 ppp in BN without interpolation. Manga artists will generally have an A4 scanner at home and will prefer A4 sheets of paper for any work where they need to be autonomous.

Resizing

Keep in mind that the pages will be resized to be published as a volume! Dialogue and onomatopoeia must remain readable even when the pages are halway their original size.
It is a good idea to do some tests with a resized copy of a few pages before proceeding to ink them.

General Notions

Black and white



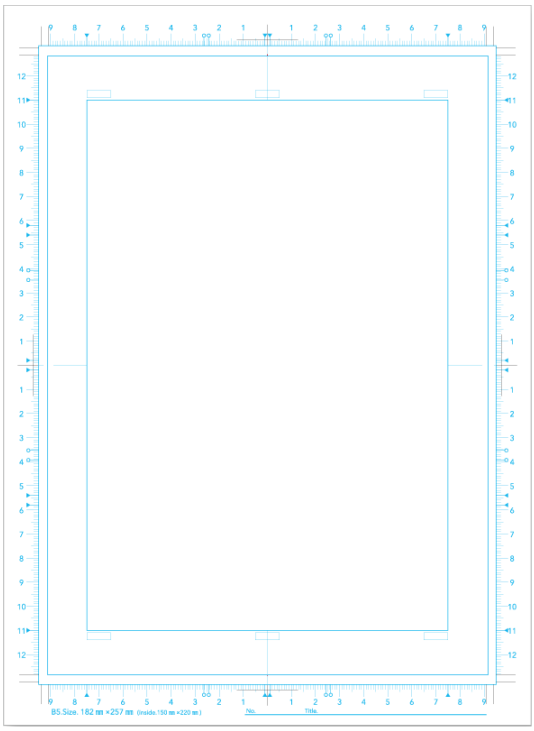
This is a fundamental element to understand.
A "black and white" file contains only white pixels and black pixels. No colour and no greys. Greys are achieved with screen toness, which are transparent adhesive sheets dotted with black dots of different sizes and distribution.

Although everything may look fine on the screen, one must check that the files are not actually 'greyscale'. A 'greyscale' file is subject to two possible sad fates:

- the printing technician prints it as is and hopes that the result will look like the one you produced;
- the printing technician turns it into 'black and white' by applying a threshold. What is below the threshold becomes white and what is above it becomes black.

In the first case the grey will be 'dithered' by the printing software, which at this point might as well be mentioned as a co-author, while in the second case the pages will be profoundly different from what you have produced.

Tachikiri



Manga sheets usually come with a series of guides and graduated rulers on all sides. The cyan rectangle inside the page is called a 'tachikiri', which literally means 'cutting area'.

What is it?
The cutting frame is, roughly speaking, the boundary of the printed sheet.

How is it used?
Rather than how "it is used", it is actually important to understand how "it should **not** be used": since it is the outline that the typographer will follow to cut the printed sheets, you must avoid placing important elements too close to it or even beyond it; they would risk being cut out completely or partially.

This does not mean that you should interrupt your artworks before the cutting frame... quite the contrary! Most manga panels go full bleed and therefore authors continue drawing at least 5 mm beyond the frame. They are aware that part of their drawing will end up being cut, but the image will printed all the way to the edge of the page.

Drawing precisely up to the edge of the tachikiri is a daunting mistake. The typographer, in this case, must choose between two options:
• leave a little white border between the end of the drawing and the edge of the sheet;
• "eat up" a few millimetres of the drawing.

Usually, a reliable typographer chooses the third option: they phone you and tell you that the file is not correct because it lacks a bleed area.

Crop marks

In addition to the cutting frame, ruler and other marks, manga sheets also show crop marks. They are located on the outside of the frame as extensions of the frame itself. All these guides are printed in cyan (light blue) so as not to be detected by the scanner on a **black-and-white** scan.

Once the page file has been resized to fit the print format, it must be printed on paper so that it can be cut to the desired height. To be sure that the printer cuts in the right place, the author can (and it is always best to) mark the crop marks on the page. That means tracing over the cyan crop marks with a black

felt-tip pen from the outside of the sheet to within a couple of mm of the crop mark.

As a result, the black-and-white scan will include these marks as well as the inked lines and screen-tones, and provide important guidance to the typographer.

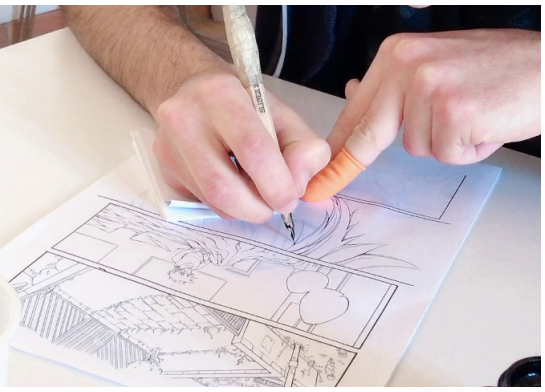
Image resolution and moiré effect

Japanese comics are in **black and white**. This is due to the cost of printing, much lower for black and white printing compared to colour printing.
The resolution of printing plates is 1200 dots per inch (PPP or DPI). If the file has a lower resolution, the printer's software that generates the plate will 'make up' what it lacks using, if necessary, its own 'screen-tones'.

Not only will a page scanned at too low a resolution be lacking in definition, it will also risk showing a pattern known as the 'Moiré effect' due to the overlapping of the two screen-tones. Therefore, you should ideally output black-and-white files with a resolution of 1200 PPP. Given that the printed version will be smaller in size than the original page, even 600 PPP delivers a good result. Especially if you are working on B4 pages.

Hand-drawn pages

Keep 'em clean!

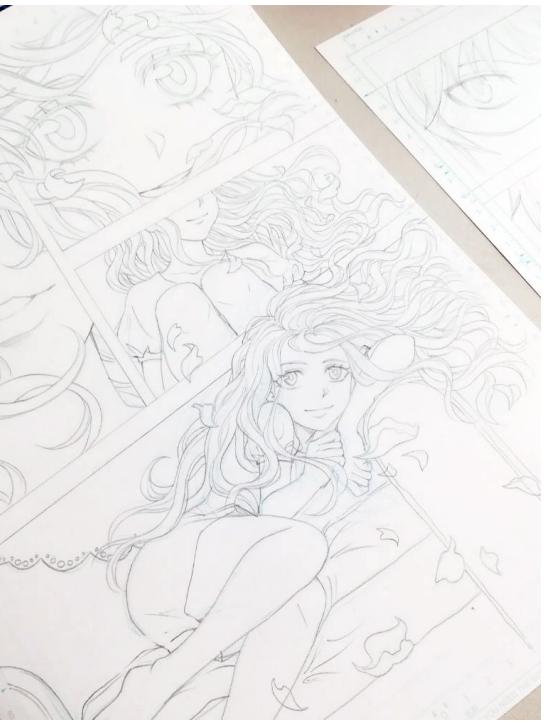


If you draw in the traditional way, i.e. with pencil and paper, your pages will be full of 'regrets': a series of light strokes that led to the final stage of the drawings. If you plan ahead a little, the pages will show perspective lines and perhaps even guides for where to add shadows and screen-tones.

This is not only allowed, it is absolutely necessary! A page without uncertainties is almost always graphically unsatisfactory. The important thing is to erase the pencil strokes and to wipe the page clean before adding screen-tones. Don't forget to let the correction fluid dry before doing that!

The page does not need to be perfect, but you must make sure that what shows in scanlation is what you meant to show the readers. A fingerprint mixed with cherry jam hardly is. So keep your snacks away from the desk and keep the page as clean as you can! Many Japanese authors use a tracing table and ink directly onto a separate sheet. It is more expensive (since you end up using two sheets of paper for each page) but it takes less time and the final result is a cleaner page.

Quality paper



Remember that your pages will be scanlated and printed. They will not be displayed in a museum or bought by an art collector.

Paper is extremely important, but perhaps not for the reason many people think of. Cyan rulers are very convenient for professionals and make even an amateur's pages look more professional. The most important feature of inking paper, however, is the pulp of the paper itself.
A beautiful manga page has a smooth, modulated and steady inking. Nibs are not brushes and need a surface on which to glide effortlessly while still retaining Indian ink properly.
The paper most widely used in Japan by manga professionals is produced by I-C inc., which also produces the professional screen-tones used by all the publishing companies on the market.

A few years ago I-C inc. was acquired by Too Marker Products (TMP) inc., manufacturer of Copic markers, which then released a paper essentially identical to that of I-C inc. The bleaching process causes the paper to weaken as a side effect. Therefore, the less white the paper, the better its quality.
However, although both I-C and TMP produce both white and ivory paper, the white one sells much more, especially in the U.S. and in Europe. This is because most aspiring manga artists focus more on the look the page would have when displayed or photographed rather than its scanning or printing quality.
So, since completing a manga page takes a long time, spending a few more cents on quality paper is worth the investment.

Scanning threshold

Scanning a manga page with thicker and finer strokes, backgrounds and screen-tones of different densities placed around is not as easy as making a photocopy.

When scanning in black and white, even the professional typography scanners apply a threshold to distinguish black dots from white ones. This results in a partially different digital image compared to the original page, especially if it has areas with very light and thin lines and other spots that look very dark in comparison. Unfortunately, this is unavoidable. So the manga artist, or the publisher, has to do several tests and make a decision. The goal is always to be able to print the best quality product you can get. Creating a beautiful page and scanning it poorly is a bit like making a great chocolate cake batter and then keeping it in the oven at 240 degrees for six hours.

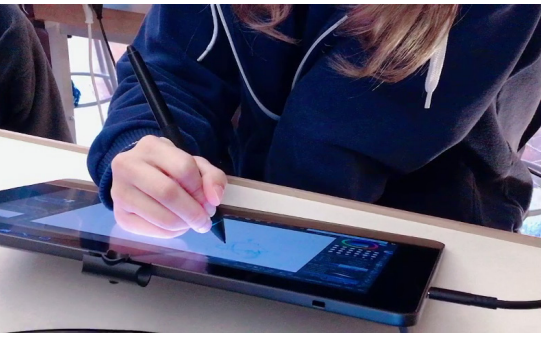
Texts need space

As soon as you finish the first page, you realise that you neet to pay better attention to the size of the balloons. The most common mistake is to draw balloons that are just large enough to fit the intented text written in a font size that matches the original paper size. When the scanlated page is then resized for printing, the text no longer fits or can no longer be read.
A 10-point font becomes 6 points upon resizing and, depending on the font you used, may not be readable by the human eye at all.

How do you fix this? If you're hand-drawing your pages, there is not much you can do... if you find that the space you need for the text of a line is larger than the balloon you have dedicated to it, consider cutting the text itself. It's better to have fewer words than to have to struggle reading them.

Digital artworks

Image resolution



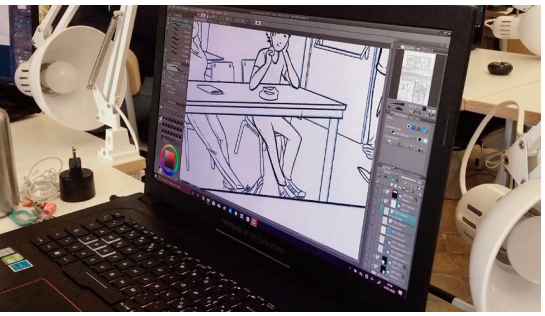
Drawing digitally is convenient; you can correct a mistake with a simple Ctrl+Z, there are no problems with fingerprints or dirt on the page, and even if you don't know the technique well, the software helps present something that looks somewhat decent. Plus, you don't spend money on buying paper, inks, nibs and screentones. More and more manga artists are shifting to digital softwares for these reasons and more.

As is often the case, when something is convenient we tend to leave our brains on the bedside table and no longer pay attention to detail. One of the most common mistakes among those who work digitally is to get the resolution wrong.
The amateur world is full of aspiring artists who work for months on pages at resolutions that are completely unsuitable for printing. It is not uncommon to find A5 pages at 150 dpi that, when printed, look like the pixelated screens of an old 1980s videogame.

Working in black and white at 1200 dpi is heavy on the program and the computer, of course, but you have to consider that the file you work on will be the only product of the ENTIRE process. Even 600 dpi pages, especially if consistently resized, can deliver a good quality; going below this threshold, however, is the equivalent of carving an ornament with a hatchet and hoping the result will look smooth.

So, before deciding on working digitally for a specific jpb request, consider carefully the intended use of the product. If it needs to be printed as a volume, set a file of at least A4 size at 600 dpi. And if you work in greyscale, remember to export the files in monochrome.

Libraries



Every software has its automatisms and supporting libraries. Lots of nice little pre-made things that can help those who cannot draw with their own hands. Clip Studio Paint has a community of developers who upload hundreds of quality models and drawings to the Celsys server every day. Again, as with all things, it is important to use it intelligently and, above all, for what is indispensable. There are three main reasons for this:

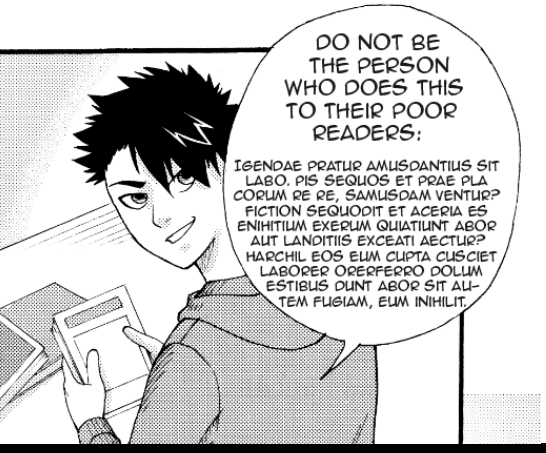
• **Originality**: you are (or aiming to be) artists, and as such you should be encouraged to seek your own originality. If you want readers to distinguish *your* way of drawing manga, you cannot just copy and paste other people's works as if they were pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. A manga page cannot be a list of elements of a software library. Remember that a particularly beautiful library element will be used by many users, and will soon become uninteresting to the reader, while a little-used element will perhaps not be very interesting to begin with...

• **Skill**: you are only an artist if you are able to continuously improve. Drawing pages is a process needed to produce volumes, but also to grow professionally. Softwares change, but a hand used to 'moving' elements on a screen, or letting the program take care of perspective and backgrounds, can only hope to become faster at moving and loading.

• **Satisfaction**: if you are an artist, you are not an artist for money. You are drawing manga pages because you enjoy it, because it gives you satisfaction, because it is an activity you would not delegate to anyone. Least of all to a software.

This does not mean that drawing pages digitally is not educational. It does mean, however, that **before** using a digital tool, it is necessary to know how to draw, ink, apply screentones and create a layout with one's own two hands. Softwares such as Clip Studio Paint make it possible to draw parallel lines without having to shift a ruler every time, to draw a building according to a perspective scheme without messing up the angle of a window frame, and to simplify a thousand other operations that can make the life of a manga artist a bit of a hassle.

Texts need space



Just because you're working on a digital support, it doesn't mean that you can't get the balloon size wrong.
The difference between making a mistake like this on a hand-drawn sheet of paper is that there really are no excuses not to fix it digitally. Balloons can be resized and the texts inside them have to fit before you finalise the pages.

That is not an invitation to try and squeeze the whole *Lord of the Rings* in four balloons just to fill up space with text and draw as little as possible, of course... Those who read manga do so because they want to read manga. A book surrounded by a balloon-shaped frame is still a book.

Previous editions

2017

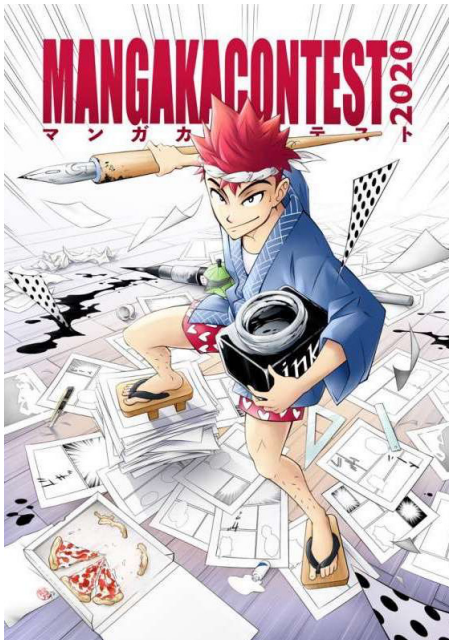
Theme: –
Winner: Virginia Nordio

2018

Theme: –
Winner: Federico Brunetti

2019

Theme: –
Winner: Veronica Zumerle
Illustration by: Virginia Nordio



2020

Theme: Daily life
Winner: Nicole Porcellana
Illustration by: Federico Brunetti

mangaka contest

Last but not least...

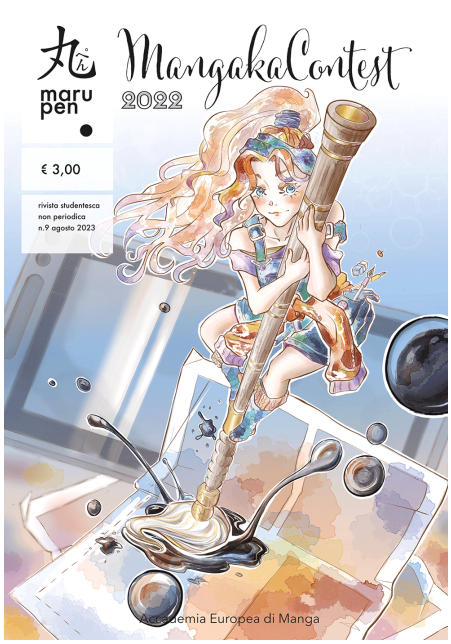
As stated across all the printed editions of this contest, *please* avoid using Japanese onomatopoeia. If you have not been raised in Japan with Japanese as your mother tongue, you are bound to get them wrong and give a bad impression to the Japanese members of the jury.

The same goes with Japanese settings and characters: we have all read the same manga your own ideas of how a Japanese would act come from and are not interested in a copy of that. Regardless of how well you think you know and understand Japanese people, the interactions always read as fake and there are a number of errors in the setting that take the jury's attention away from the plot. So try not to limit your imagination to what you've read and seen in manga and animation; be original with your work and let your **own** inner world shine through.

And don't forget to fill out the application form with your *real* name! Good luck!

2021

Theme: Competition
Winner: Arianna Peserico
Illustration by: Veronica Zumerle



2022

Theme: Memory
Winner: Valentina Thi Trang Alerta
Illustration by: Nicole Porcellana

2023

Theme: Luck
Winner: Elvia Maria di Benedetto
Illustration by: Arianna Peserico