

# **CREATIVE LETTERING**

Text is all around us. It comes in many different shapes and sizes. Why not try to develop your skill and use the following pages to explore different ways of using text.

Whatever you make be sure to send images to your Art teacher via your class Showbie group.

Good luck and happy writing!  
The Art Department

# CARTOON, COMIC, & GRAFFITI

**L**ettering doesn't just have to be serious and rule-bound; it can be fun, creative, and zany! Discover the alternative world of hand-lettering for comics, cartoons, and graffiti, where pretty much anything can happen! These hugely popular styles can be seen all over the place: in comic strips, in cartoons, or in street-art murals.

## Cartoon

Animated cartoons were developed in the early 1900s and a matching lettering style soon followed: first in the silent era to describe the action and then later in speech bubbles. Cartoon lettering plays with shapes and the meanings of words in funny and novel ways, something that comic lettering also does. In the late 1980s, computerized digital fonts arrived. They became popular but are not as versatile as the original hand-lettering. Cartoon and comic lettering are both perfect for any sort of project where you want a fun or amusing look!

## Comic

Comic lettering is much older than the familiar comics of today. The style dates back hundreds of years to when it was used inside the speech bubbles of political cartoons and advertisements. Until the 1980s, most cartoonists drew lettering directly onto the pencil-sketched pages of a comic book prior to inking! Because comics are a moving story, their lettering developed to express the narrative: for example, "speedy" could be drawn in long, stretched-out italics, while "fat" could look short and squishy. Today, most comic lettering is done digitally. But you can use that original personalized comic and cartoon lettering to give a special and original touch to birthday cards, folders, and book covers, and, of course, in comics!

## GRAFFITI

Graffiti is as old as writing, with examples even found back in ancient Egypt and Rome! This originally unlawful lettering style has grown in popularity and acceptability, and has become commercialized. In New York City in the late 1960s, graffiti appeared on subway cars, bridges, buildings, walls, and industrial wastelands: in fact, pretty much everywhere! This art style became into a symbol of modern urban living. Now it's often commissioned as art for public walls and for businesses, like cafes. As an art form, graffiti is an unrestricted form of expression and appears in a variety of genre styles that are often a mystery to the uninitiated. The graffiti style contributes sheer excitement and exuberance to lettering, and a distinct lack of rules. It's a great lettering style to use if you're creating your own posters or making labels for your books.

These awesome alternative styles are bursting with fun and exciting new hand-lettering techniques—so let's get started!



# BUBBLE

Here is a full cartoon-style bubble alphabet that you can copy or trace. There is space provided on the opposite page to practice.

A B C D E F G

H I J K L M N

O P Q R S T U

V W X Y Z

& ! ?



# FLOAT AWAY

If the look and feel of your letters reflect the meaning of the words, they almost become a picture of your message! In true cartoon style, the lettering for "FLOAT AWAY" is drawn to resemble balloons drifting off into the air.



1. This airy project doesn't need guidelines; it has a looser structure. The letters start at two different baselines and are all at slightly different angles. This helps give the impression that the letters are floating! Lightly sketch the letter skeletons, making sure you leave enough space between each letter to then add their bulging bubble letterforms. You may need to shift letters over slightly as you go, but leave a little of each letter overlapping with its surrounding letters.



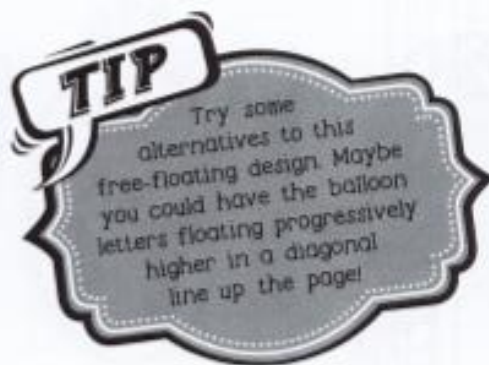
2. Erase the skeleton letters and any overlapping letter outlines, allowing some letters to come to the front and others to sit behind. This helps to create a sense of depth by making it look as if some 3-D balloons are floating in front of others.

3. Add accent lines and dots around the bulging curves of the letters, as shown in the example. This creates the effect of light reflecting off a shiny balloon surface. You can also make the letters look more like balloons by adding balloon knots and trailing strings to the letters. You don't need to do this for every letter if the bottom of that letter is covered by another.





4. Ink in your letters and erase any pencil lines when dry. Alternatively, copy them onto tracing paper (something you can do for all the projects in this section if you want to create a template or to transfer the design to another piece of paper). If you want to take your artwork to the next level, use markers or colored pencils to add dots, stripes, and shading to the balloons!



Now it's your turn to float some lettering ideas around!





## ULTRA AVENGER

Not all comics are based around funny cartoons: many tell exciting adventure stories, which can variously include superheroes, detectives, or spaceships battling across the galaxy. These comics have a completely different mood to a humorous comic and so require a stronger, more forceful style of lettering.

1. Lightly sketch two slightly arched, skewed rectangles as guides to fit your lettering inside.



2. Start by drawing your letter skeletons, and then form each superhero-style letter around them. Notice how this lettering style is a bold, which means it is heavy looking with thick letter-widths. Remember to stay within your frame guidelines and ensure the lettering stands up straight. Once you are happy with your work, carefully erase the letter skeletons.

3. You can now make the block letters look 3-D, which will add a further sense of bulk and overall impact to the composition. Draw diagonal lines and sides to all the letters, making sure you use the same angle for each so that the depth is consistent. You can also sketch in another curved rectangular line parallel to "ULTRA" and above "AVENGER" to help you keep the letters the same size.



4. To make "ULTRA" stand out more, add an inline (a line of contrasting color to the main letter outline that runs around the inside edge of a letter). Color in or shade the three-dimensional sides of the letters, leaving the top area white for variation. Adding stylized stripes for the shading on the sides of "ULTRA" creates a cool superhero-styled look!



5. Using pens or markers, ink over your sketch with the suggested shading contrasts below to finalize your drawing, then erase any pencil marks when dry. To make the artwork pop even more, add some color to the words, using a light shade so that it still reads clearly. Maybe choose the costume colors of your favorite superhero!

## TIP

Don't forget to make your counters (the holes in letters such as A and R) in block style or to shade them when making them 3-D. Otherwise your composition will look off.

**ULTRA  
AVENGER**

Up, up, and away, superheroes! Let's get lettering!

## SOUNDS AND BURSTS

One of the most fun parts of comic lettering is creating novelty lettering that uses flourishes to convey the meaning or mood of the words themselves. Let's explore and practice some fun comic effects.

### Adding Special Effects

You can add drips under, around, and inside your lettering to add interest. Don't go too crazy though: adding too many drips can get very messy. Less is more!



### Creating Depth

Add emphasis to your lettering by creating some depth around the letters: it looks great with basically every style! Play around with the direction of the shadow and with how exaggerated the shadow is (how deep it extends or how dark it is) to see what different looks you can create. Adding depth to the bubble lettering, for instance, makes it look more inflated and friendly!





## Motion Blur Lines

Motion blur lines are a great way to give the illusion of movement to your lettering. Decide which direction you want your letterforms to move, then add some motion lines behind them in the opposite direction. This is a great way to suggest a superhero moving very fast!



## Radiating Shapes

If you want to accentuate a word, try adding some shapes or lines radiating out around it, like these lightning bolts. To push it even further, add a shape behind the artwork as well, like this pointy sound bubble. This all works to suggest the crackle, energy, and electricity of a superhero laser blast!



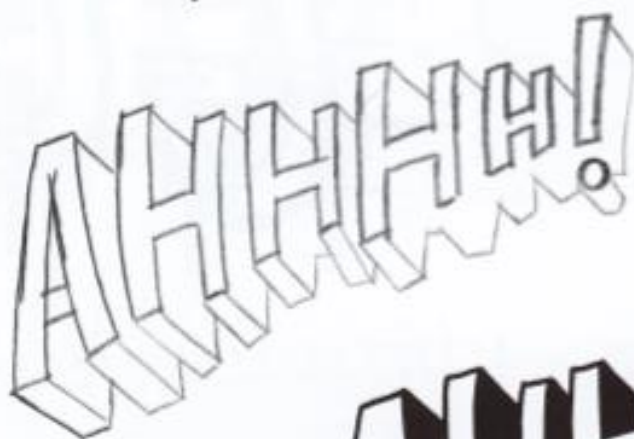
## COMIC EFFECTS

Sound effects are staples of cartoon and comic scripts! Their importance is often overlooked, but they offer letterers a great opportunity to get creative with expression and are super fun to add to your drawings and designs.

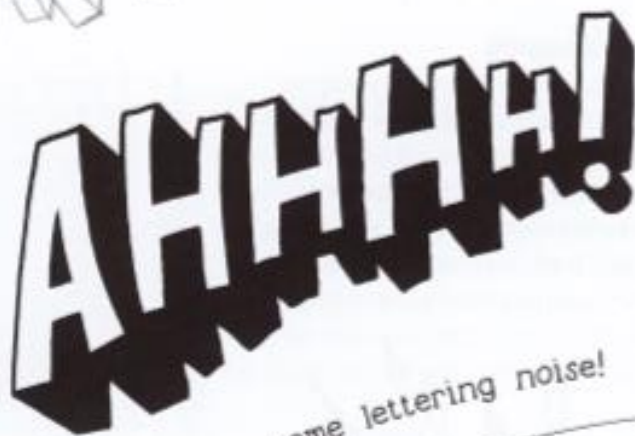
1. Lightly draw a skewed rectangle with a slight arc as a guide for your lettering. Sketch the phrase "AHHHHH!" as a skeleton frame, leaving adequate space between each letter. When you're happy with the composition, add bold letterforms around your frame.



2. Erase the letter skeletons, any overlapping lines, and the arced rectangular guide. Add dimension to the letters by sketching in their sides and tops, making sure you to use the same perspective throughout.



3. Finalize your drawing by inking over your sketch with a pen or marker and erasing any pencil lines once it dries.



Now it's your turn to make some lettering noise!



# GRAFFITI

Here is a full graffiti-style alphabet that you can copy or trace.  
There is space provided on the opposite page to practice.

A B C D E F

G H I J K L

M N O P Q R

S T U V W X

Y Z & ? !



# FRESH

Graffiti script is a fun, wild, totally expressive style of lettering. It's ideal for creating an exciting statement message to display!

1. Lightly sketch out your lettering skeleton, then start to build up each graffiti letterform around it. Overlap each character, as this creates a dynamic look.



2. Erase the letter skeletons and any bottom-layer overlapping lines. To help give the letters the appearance of depth, add a shadow (known as a drop shadow) behind them, then color or shade it in.

3. Add a stroke outline around the entire word following the contour of each character. Layer in more effects, like a speckled pattern inside the letters. Start the shading at the bottom of the letterforms and gradually fade it out as you move up to the top.



## CARTOON, COMIC, & GRAFFITI

4. Finalize your drawing by inking over your sketch with pens or markers, paying attention to the different shades of contrast that you can see. Then erase any remaining pencil lines after the ink has dried. Use markers or colored pencils to layer in more depth by coloring in the outer stroke. You can always transfer this design and scale it up on a poster page to stick on your bedroom wall.



Now it's your turn to keep it fresh!



### TIP

Give your graffiti lettering more punch by coloring it with the brightest, on-trend colors you can find!



# FREESTYLE

In this project, the letters dance around each other in an almost three-dimensional way. It may look a little daunting, but follow each stage carefully and you'll soon succeed.



1. Lightly sketch your letter skeletons, overlapping some of the letters. Add arrows and accents around the letters to add interest and movement.



2. Add some thin blocks around the letter skeletons, including the arrow flourishes on some of the terminals and the surrounding decorations. For the overlapping letters, it looks extra cool if you make them interlock, like you can see with the T overlapping like a hook over the Y's ascender.

3. Erase the skeletons inside each character, then add a three-dimensional drop-shadow shape behind each of the letterforms. This can get a bit confusing, so sketch lightly and try to maintain the same angle throughout.



## TIP

Create a street-style effect by mixing uppercase and lowercase letters in the same word within your lettering.





4. Ink over your sketch with pens or markers, then erase any pencil marks when dry. Alternatively, copy it onto tracing paper. Color in the drop shadow in a darker shade and try adding a shape behind the lettering. In this case there is a computer-graphic-like pixel effect. Use markers or pencils to add a pop of color!

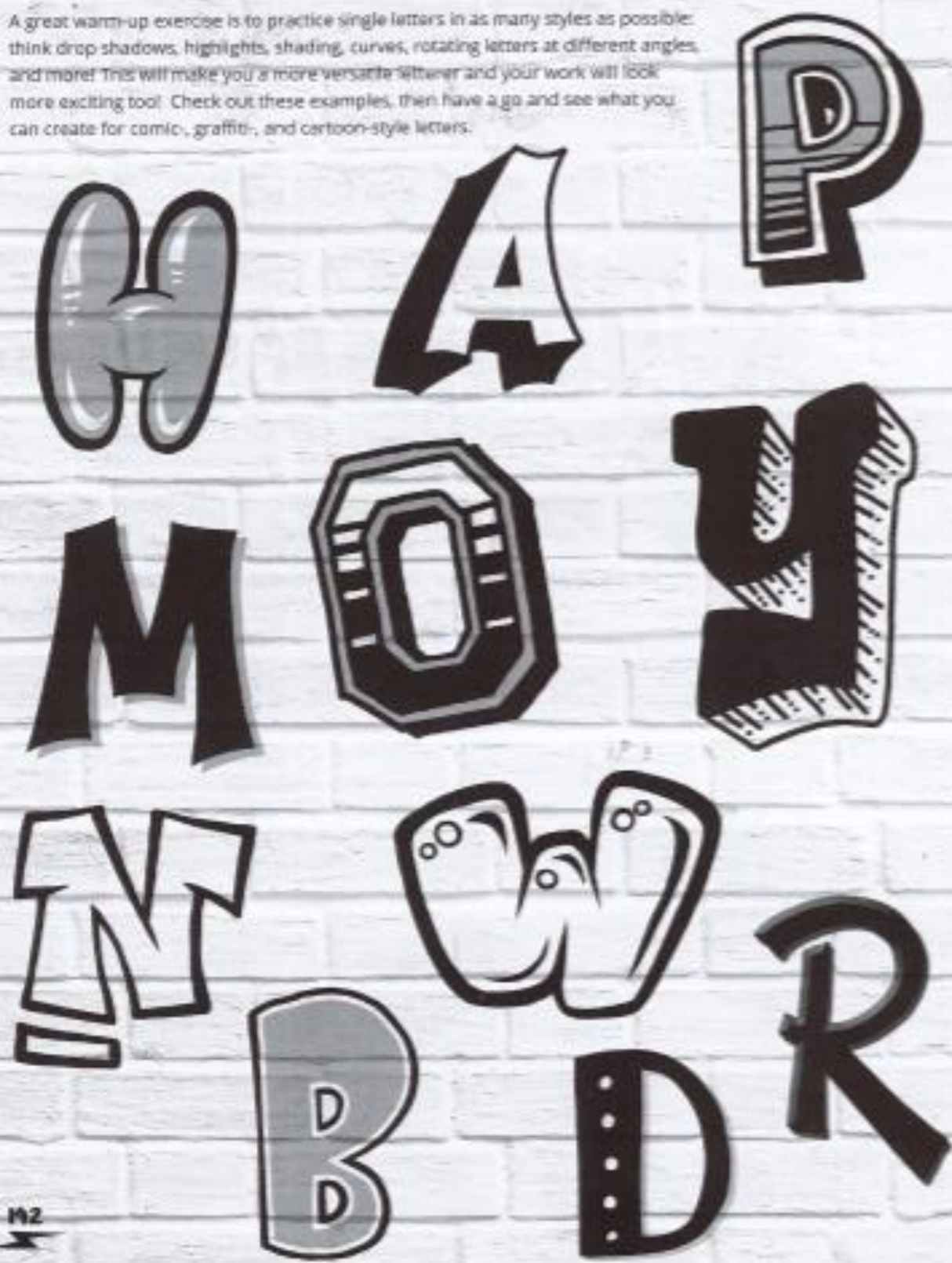
**FREESTYLE**

Break the rules and create your own graffiti-style lettering!



## LET'S GET CREATIVE!

A great warm-up exercise is to practice single letters in as many styles as possible: think drop shadows, highlights, shading, curves, rotating letters at different angles, and more! This will make you a more versatile letterer and your work will look more exciting too! Check out these examples, then have a go and see what you can create for comic, graffiti, and cartoon-style letters.



CARTOON, COMIC, & GRAFFITI

FREEDOM  
IS A PIECE  
BLANK\* OF PAPER