**Single Panel Cartooning Tips**

***by Brad J. Guigar***

Since single-panel cartoons focus so strongly on the gag, it's extremely important to view your writing with a critical eye. Your writing needs to be crisp and concise — and funny. You will not be able to rely on your character's personality to carry a joke. Instead, you must craft the joke, hone it, and perfect it. Otherwise, the cartoon will fail.

The Quantity of Words

Reading a single-panel cartoon is a lightning-fast process. It's that quick jolt that adds energy to the humor. Your goal is to speed the reader along to the punch line as quickly as possible. Of course, this is useless if the punch line itself is clogged with verbiage.

In general, single-panel cartoons should be written using as few words as possible — in both the setup and the punch line. Often, you can decrease your total word count by choosing words that need fewer modifiers to convey their meanings. For example, choose “omniscient” instead of “knowing all things.” The more fine-tuned your words, the fewer you will need to use. Follow the “less is more” adage. Edit your cartoon carefully to determine if it could be written in fewer words — or if words are superfluous entirely.

The Quality of Words

Since you're editing so closely, the words you choose must do double duty. Obviously, they must set up and execute the joke clearly and quickly. But further, they must carry the voice and the attitude necessary to give the gag added punch.

It pays to strengthen your vocabulary. Since you may be writing in the voice of a mad scientist today and a pirate tomorrow, it will behoove you to study how different people speak. Watch movies, read books, and attend plays with an ear cocked to noticing how different people use language. Pay particular attention to the words people from different backgrounds use. A great single-panel cartoonist has an ear that is finely tuned to the ways people use language.

The Absence of Words

Following the “less is more” theory to its logical conclusion, there will be some instances in which no words at all are needed. Sometimes the drawing itself is sufficient to carry the humor. There's no need to shoehorn a witty line into these cartoons; simply allow your drawing to convey the point unhindered.

Don't discount the use of a simple thesaurus as a humor-writing tool. Sometimes a good punch line can be made terrific if the words are tweaked to reflect the “voice” of the characters. A thesaurus can help you find words that more closely model the personality of the character.

*Editor’s Note: Bowling publications are always looking for fun and witty cartoons relating to our sport. Pay scales vary from $10. to $50. per cartoon. You won’t get rich but you will get published! Check with your local bowling news for their submission criteria.*