From Panels to Products: What Comics Can Teach Us About UX

From a comic book fan's point of view

Photo by Canva.
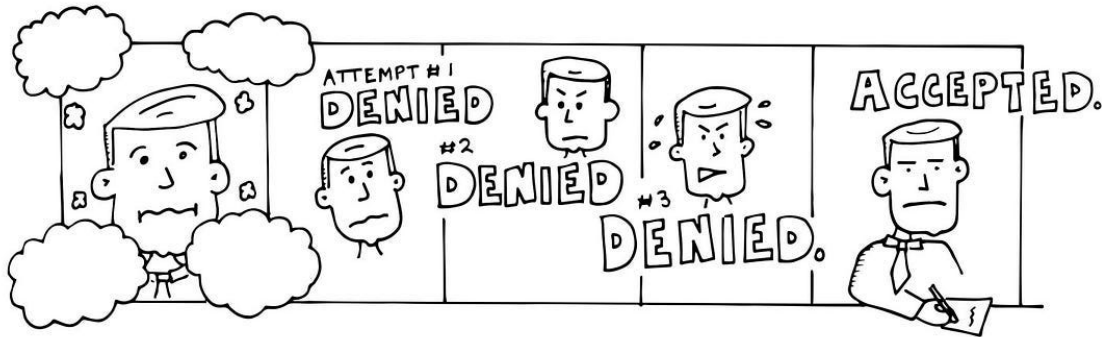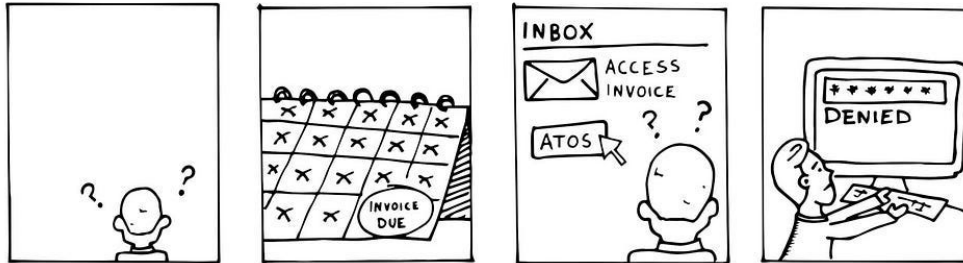
When I first read *Understanding Comics* by Scott McCloud, I was in a Visual Storytelling class at University of Washington, geeking out over pacing, panel transitions, and character expressions. I was fully focused on storytelling. UX? Not on my radar.

But then I read the book again, months later — this time while diving into UX writing and content design — and everything clicked differently.

As someone who's still new to the UX world, being a longtime comic book fan actually helped me **understand my role in the user experience journey**— making sure it feels clear, thoughtful, and easy for people to move through. **Maybe comics can help you see it that way too.**

So here are **3 lessons that comics taught me about UX:**

1. **Users, Like Readers, Fill in the Blanks**

Source: Chris Spalton

In comics, McCloud talks about the **"gutter"** — the space between panels where the reader makes sense of what's happening. You don't always *see* the action, but your brain connects the dots. Think of each screen like a panel in a comic. The meaning isn't just in the words — it's in the transitions.

In UX, that's our user flow. We don't always explain every step, but we design **with trust** that the user will move from A to B to C — and it's our job to **guide that path** clearly.

One app that we could use as a easy interactive example is **Duolingo**. From the moment you open it, everything feels intuitive — you're guided step by step, from picking a language to setting daily goals to jumping into your first lesson. There's no confusion, no overwhelming screens — just smooth transitions that make learning feel easy and even fun.
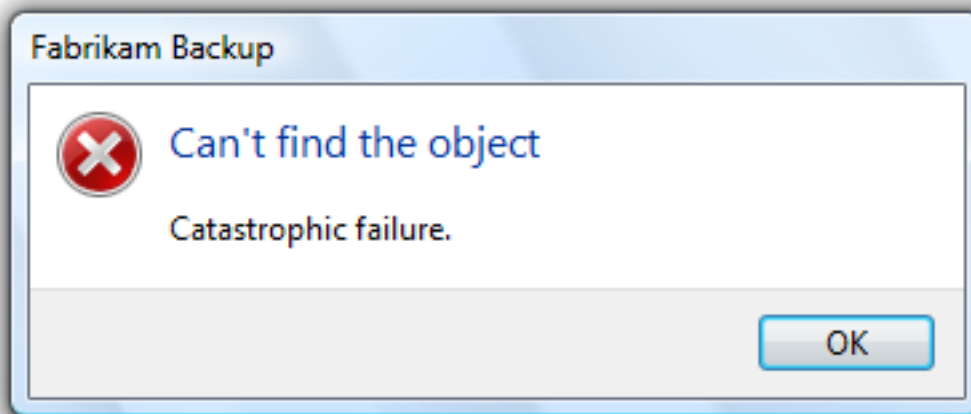
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2. Every Word (and Image) Counts

One of the most iconic lines in comic book history comes from Spider-Man:*"With great power comes great responsibility".*

It's simple. It's short. But it carries the weight of Peter Parker's entire story — and honestly, they shaped generations of readers.

[Great UX writing does the same](). When an app crashes, when a form doesn't go through, or when a user makes a mistake — **words are what guide people back on track** especially in **error messages, empty states, or success moments**. In those moments, copy can either make someone feel supported… or completely lost.

UX writing isn't just about sounding nice — it's about **reducing friction and building trust**, especially when things break. Be careful with words are also important in those alert messages, often considered "annoying", to get the user's attention and bring them back to using the application.

An app that stands out for its thoughtful use of words is **Headspace**. When you miss a day or fall out of your routine, it doesn't guilt-trip you or flash red warnings. Instead, it gently says something
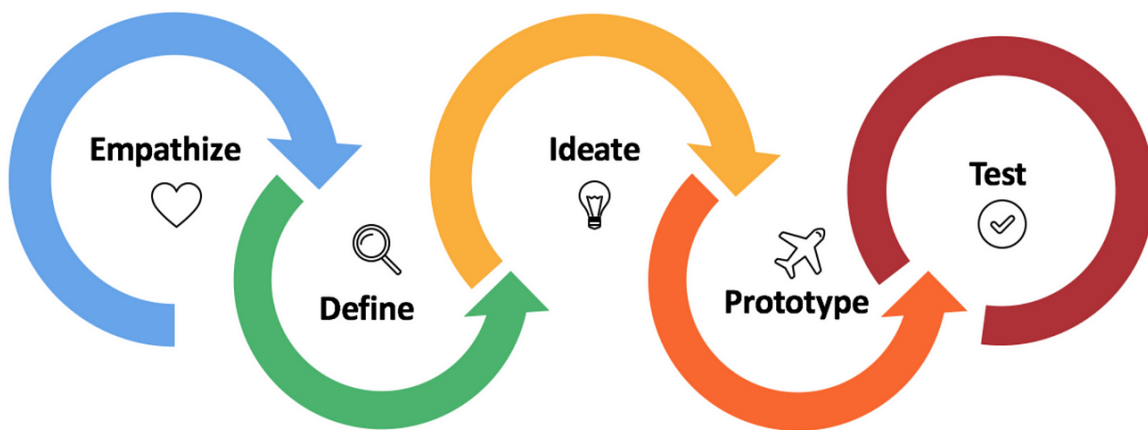
like: *"It's okay to take a break. Let's pick it back up tomorrow."* It's kind, calm, and understanding — exactly the tone you want when someone's feeling off track.

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3. **Structure Tells the Story**

In one of the most mind-opening sections of *Understanding Comics*, Scott McCloud breaks down the **six steps** that every comic (or any creative work, really) goes through: **Idea, Form, Idiom, Structure and Surface.**

You may not agree, but there is a similarity and we can relate what McCloud presents in his book with the 5 steps of Design Thinking: **Empathize, Define, Ideate, Prototype, and Test.**
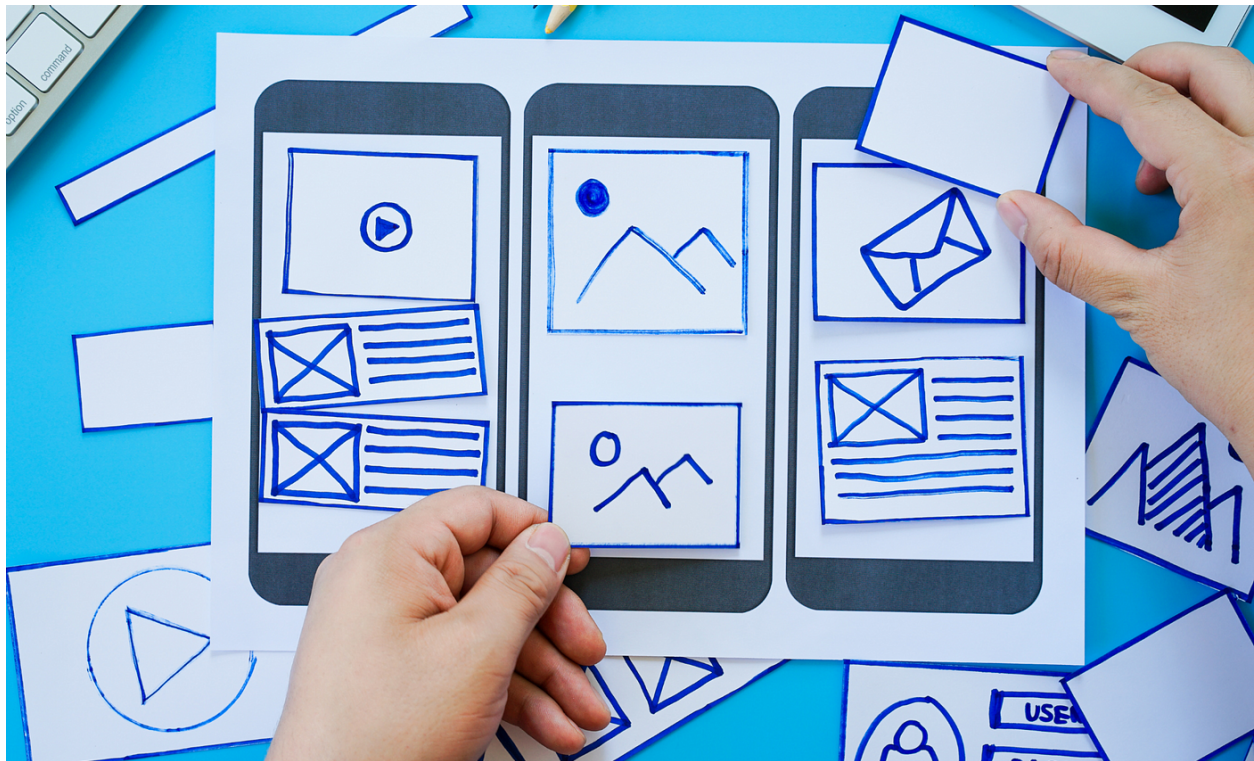

Source: [Rural Handmade](#)

- **Idea/Purpose** is all about the *why* — the core intention behind the work. That aligns with the **Empathize** and **Define** stages in Design Thinking, where we work to understand the user's needs or pain points.

- Then comes **Form** and **Idiom**, which are about choosing the medium and the style. That's not far from the **Ideate** phase in UX — when we explore different creative directions to solve a problem.

- **Structure** and **Craft** in McCloud's framework match well with the **Prototype** phase, where the idea starts to take shape and functionality becomes key.

- Finally, **Surface**, which is all about polish and production value, aligns with the **Implement/Test** stage in design — the final delivery that users actually experience.

Even though they come from different worlds, both comics and UX show that creating something meaningful takes thoughtful, step-by-step work. Whether it's a comic page or a product screen, it only works when each layer is built with intention.

Photo by Canva.

Getting into UX writing can feel overwhelming at first — there are frameworks to learn, tools to master, and tons of voices telling you how things *should* be done. But if there's one thing comics have reminded me, it's that **there's power in starting with curiosity and creativity**. You don't have to know everything to begin. If you've ever told a story, noticed how something made you

feel, or helped someone through clear communication — you're already on the right track. So whether you're writing for users or turning pages in a graphic novel, remember: **every word, every step, and every detail matters.** And the more you observe, experiment, and care about the people on the other side of the screen, the better your work will be.