

# Comics

## You can do it too...

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**C**omics in principle, is a medium that exists because of its readership or fans. Without a vocal and highly active fan base the comic book industry would not function. Unlike other literary mediums, you cannot write to the publisher midway through the book to complain about plot points, or put forward theories of how the story might end, or at the very least complain about the writer's writing style. You can't take the book back for a refund if you don't like how the story is going. But if it's a comic, you can stop buying it. No problem. As a result comic books have to appeal to the masses. They have to please as much of the audience as possible and the audience in this case usually ranges from six to 60. Mass appeal is the key. This point alone should make comics prime library material.

Comic trade paperbacks are designed for people who have an interest in a character but have neither the time nor inclination to collect the individual comic books. Comic trade paperbacks usually contain the entire story arc or storyline of a particular comic book and is an excellent start for those who wish to become regular comic book readers.

Although a comic trade might read like a graphic novel, it is not a graphic novel.

### Establish your readership

You can't go wrong with the mainstream company book companies like DC, Marvel and to a lesser degree, Image. These comic trade paperbacks are aimed specifically at a wider audience.

### Choose the best format

A comic trade paperback would be the best format for your choice of comic material. Trades are self-contained stories dealing with a specific story arc, or series in the comic. The advantage of a comic trades in this respect is that anything you read in a trade has been published before and is thus

part of the comic continuity. It's an excellent starting point for new readers.

### Choosing a title

Let your readers be your guide. Favourites are usually those seen regularly at a book store, a movie, or on television. Your patrons will have seen Batman, Superman and X-Men on television. Get what they know and have seen.

### Should you consider graphic novels?

Graphic novels' content is usually geared towards a specific audience and they are less easily read. Unless you're expressly asked for a specific graphic novel, don't get them. They're not half as popular as comic trades and are much more expensive.

There is a clear preference for popular mainstream titles. Fish Hoek librarians prefer their stock to be mainly Marvel and DC. What little independent comic trade stock they have, is mostly by well-known mainstream authors and artists. Basically there is a consistency in the comic trade paperback stock that I'm sure is a reflection of the tastes of their patrons.

### Cataloguing

Besides having a special shelf list Id. and call number for comic trades (GN), the artist as well as the author are listed in their catalogue record. This is very helpful as artists play an important role in creation of the trade, sometimes more so than the writer.

### Maintenance

The choice to buy a comic book trade should not be taken lightly. The maintenance required to preserve the quality of the comic trade means a different set of guidelines for maintenance and public accessibility. Just like videos and CDs these guidelines allow for maximum shelf life with frequent use.

#### *Medium specific maintenance*

Some libraries prefer to store videos in a secure area, displaying only empty boxes for the public to see what is available whilst keeping the videos behind the desk or in a cabinet, et cetera. The same treatment is given to compact discs. These two mediums

are also maintained in specific ways: some libraries have automatic rewinding machines, others have head cleaning tools. Each library varies but the main thread is medium specific maintenance. Now although it might be considered a quantum leap, comic trades should be treated the same. Granted, though comic book trade is a literary medium, there is a precedent set by at least two libraries for a specific maintenance and cataloguing for comic book trades. Most libraries tend to put what little comic trades they have on the open shelves, where they are susceptible to wear and tear due to casual browsing and theft.

Fish Hoek Library has an easy way of maintaining their large number of comic trades (they are one of two libraries that have a comic book trade collection of more than 30 titles. (The other is Bellville Library)

#### *Practical maintenance*

Reinforcing the bindings is a good idea. The weaker areas are the covers (front and back) and first and last pages - thus reinforcing these areas with a strong book tape and of course covering the comic trade paperback with plastic ensures a longer shelf life. But to be safe, choose comic trades printed by the publishing company itself because the companies tend to use a better quality of paper, ink and even glue, you might pay a few rand more but in the end the comic trade will last longer than most. (Tape cannot make up for bad printing and binding, so buy wisely)

### Accessibility

To make these comic trades accessible to the public, the cover is copied, pasted on an unused periodical and then numbered. The corresponding comic book trade is stored at the desk. The 'dummy copy' is then displayed or if the corresponding comic trade is not available, stored in its place behind the desk.

Instead of creating a 'dummy copy' you could copy the front page and laminate it and then display. Whichever way you do it, storing your comic trade stock in a secure place enhances its shelf life and prevents it from being stolen.

So now you know how at least one library manages to maintain their comic trades. I hope it was surprising to find out that there was at least one library that did have comic book material for public consumption.

Now one has to say, 'If they can do it...'

