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# COMIC ARTIST'S

essential photo reference

People + Poses

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# Comic Artist's Essential Photo Reference

People + Poses

**Buddy Scalera**



***IMPACT***

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# Dedication

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To Janet: You are my favorite.

To Danielle and Nicole: Always stick together.

To Mom and Dad: Thank you for a lifetime of support and encouragement.

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BY SEAN CHEN

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# Introduction

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If you're reading this book, you're probably one of the following:

- a. a working comic professional
- b. an aspiring or soon-to-be comics professional
- c. just personally motivated to improve your craft.

Books aren't cheap, and this one is no exception. That said, you need to invest in yourself. As they say, you have to spend money to make money.

If you are planning to be any of the a, b or c people noted above, you're not alone. There are a lot of people trying to be a, b or c. At one time, creators lived and worked in New York City. They had to be close enough to submit art on a deadline, and this was before FedEx and UPS. The Internet has made it possible for comic creators to emerge from any corner of the earth. These days, you can submit your pages electronically.

What does this mean to you? Well, if you are a creator, you can live anywhere and be a successful pro artist. That's the good news. The not-so-good news is that the competition is tougher than ever before, and it's just going to get more intense.

If you want to be artist a, b or c, you need to bring your A game. There's no room for subpar creators, because there are so many exceptional artists available. Just look at the pages of modern mainstream comics and you will see some amazing visual storytelling by new and established talent from every corner of the globe.

I've been a comic book educator for almost twenty years now, and the landscape has changed dramatically since I started. You now have higher-education opportunities, online courses and the emergence of epic-proportioned comic book conventions. There are a lot of ways that you can improve your craft to remain competitive.

That brings me back to this book. My book. The book that you need to buy and use.

If you've invested time, money and energy into your education, congratulations. But learning isn't static, and you need to constantly hone your skills. In short, you need to invest in yourself.

Yeah, you can probably sit in front of your computer and hunt for free images on the Internet. But is that a good use of your time? Or does it make more sense to invest a few bucks in your own professional creative tools—including photo reference—so you can focus on your art? How many hours of Googling do you need to do to save the cover price of this book, which is equivalent to a couple of Caramel Macchiatos at Starbucks?

Eliminate distractions and focus on your craft, no matter what your personal motivation might be for doing that. Consider the amount you will spend on this book or any professionally relevant tool and then compare it to the other things you spend money on that don't necessarily progress your goal.

My father always taught me that a craftsman needs good tools. Save money in other places, but



never scrimp on your tools. You risk having a negative impact on your work, and the cost savings are rarely worth the long-term cost to your career.

If you're focused on improving your craft as a comic artist, consider the tools and resources you use. This book is an essential starting point and a foundational tool for your personal and professional growth.

Invest in yourself. Be the artist you want to be.

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Buddell". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends downwards and to the right.



# How to Use a Photo Reference

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BY SEAN CHEN

You'd think that looking at photo reference would be a simple and straightforward process. But it isn't. Photographs and comic book pages are two-dimensional representations of three-dimensional objects.

An experienced artist can trick the viewer into seeing 3-D people, places or things by leveraging art techniques such as foreshortening, shading and perspective. A good photograph can help you add weight, depth and realism to your illustrations. But first you need to know how to look beyond the flat image of the photo to see form and motion.

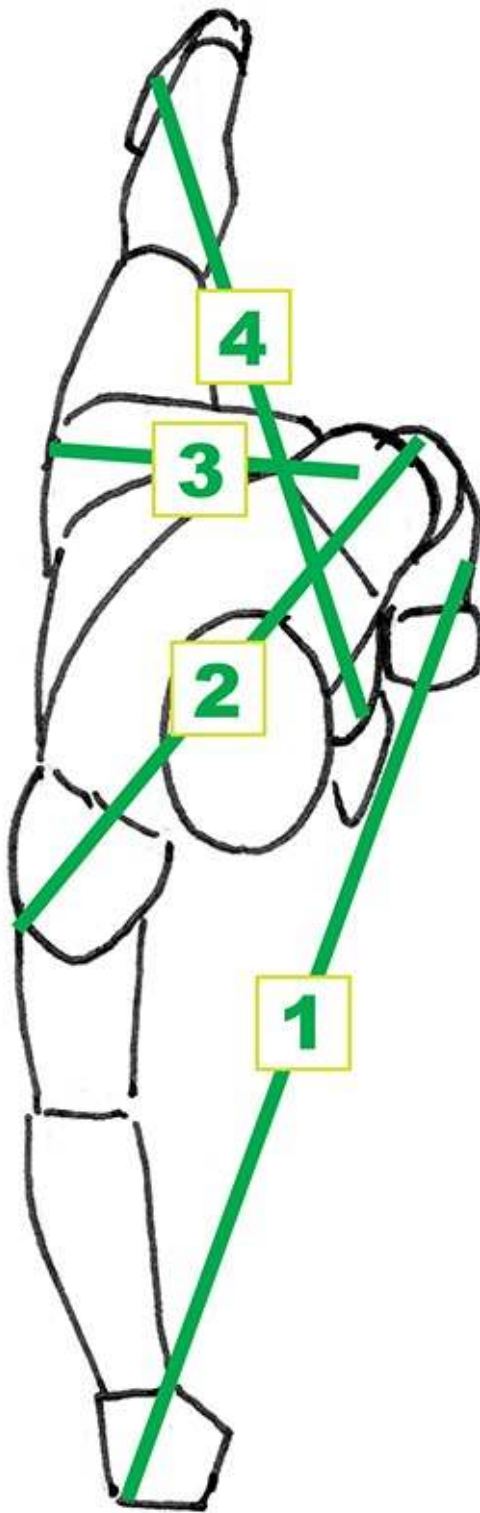


*From an emotional standpoint, a reference photo with two light sources adds drama, depth and feeling to the figure.*

### **STEP 1: Find Your Photo**

Look for a photo that gives you the pose you need to tell your story. There are only so many ways that the body can move and twist, but there are infinite ways to draw it. As an artist, you can move your mental “camera” in any possible angle to create a fresh and exciting illustration. Choose a photograph that closely approximates the picture you want to draw. It may not match perfectly, but as an artist you can borrow gestures and expressions from other photographs or something that you envision in your head.

This photograph shows a tall, physically powerful man throwing a punch. The low angle of the shot makes him seem even taller and more imposing.



## STEP 2: Understand Three-Dimensional Space

The model in this photo exists in the real world, in 3-D space. But the photograph shows only a 2-D representation of this person. Our minds allow us to use visual cues to perceive depth and distance in a flat image.

Try to move the mental camera I mentioned in step 1 to a vantage point directly above the figure and then draw what the model is doing in the 3-D space. This will allow you to see how the body is moving in the real world. You can see that this model's body is moving forward while one of the legs remains firmly behind. Most of his body weight is on the left leg. All the other body parts fan out from this point.

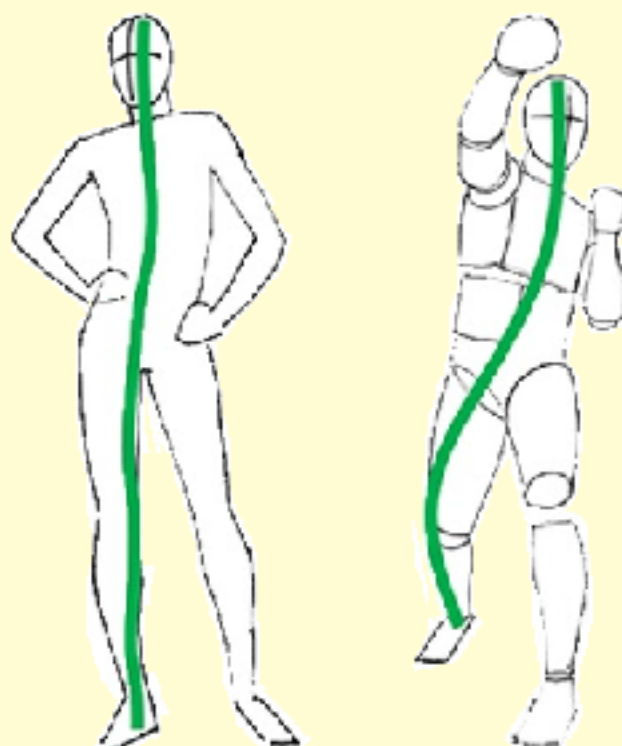
When the figure is standing at rest, it is completely balanced. When the body begins to move, there is a new dynamic as the figure stretches and expands in the 3-D plane. The figure in this position is out of balance. One side is compressed and bears most of the weight. The other side is delivering energy by pushing weight into a punch. Notice how the punch leads the body with forward momentum. It looks almost like a spiral staircase, which gives you a sense of how this shape exists in the real world.

These are important details that will make your final drawing breathe with depth, weight and motion.

1. The fist is the part of the body that has travelled farthest from its original position.
2. The head and shoulders lead the torso. Because of the outstretched arm, the shoulders are angled from their original position. Notice how the angle differs from that of the hips.
3. The hips remain straight and close to their starting position. In the starting position, the hips bear the body's weight, but here the weight has shifted to the model's left upper thigh and left knee.
4. The model's right foot remains in its original position. It anchors the figure and gives him something to push and launch against. If this model were standing on ice, he would not have the power and thrust shown in this pose.

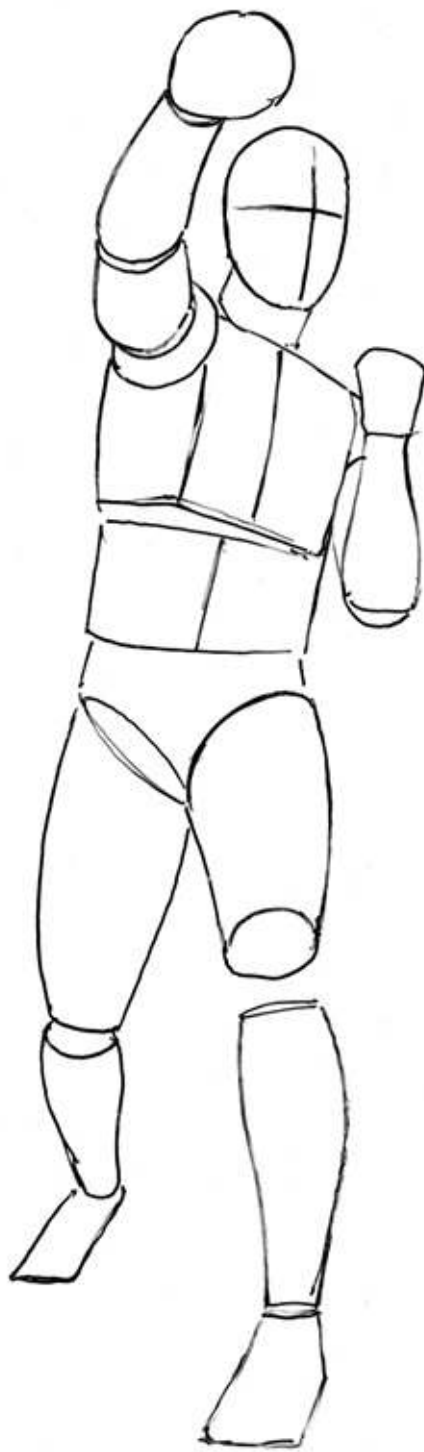
Ultimately this is a body out of balance. This pose suggests a figure in motion and delivering energy, which is something that comic artists must be able to draw.

### Throw Off the Balance



The natural, at-rest state of the body is standing up straight (near right). That's when the body is most balanced. Running and punching (far right) put the body out of balance. In comics, the action will often make the body look like it's about to tip over. Use this to your advantage to heighten the sense of motion.

These figures are approximately the same height, weight and body type, but notice the subtle visual cues that tell the reader that the body on the far right is in motion. Notice also how the pose on the near right is very relaxed, compared to the picture on the far right. Both are effective poses that convey different messages to the reader.



### STEP 3: Break Down the Body Into Sections

Every part of the body has weight and volume. Start your drawing by sketching the figure with simple lines. When you draw the hips and shoulders, imagine the 3-D space. Notice how the body torques and spirals, as we discussed in step 2. Look for other anatomy clues, such as the way the back leg and the hip pivot together. The hip and the leg can bend and move, but the anatomy and mechanics will stay relatively consistent in all figures. That is, there are only so many ways the leg can move within the bony structure of the hip.

Imagine each body part to be a cylinder stacked on top of another cylinder and then draw the cylinders.



## It's All Connected



Remember that the parts of the body are interconnected. When one part moves, it affects other parts.

When the body is stable and straight (above left), the spine is straight and perpendicular to the shoulders and hips. When the spine bends (above right), other aspects change too: The spine's angle to the shoulders and hips changes, and the shoulder and hip lines go from parallel to angled.



1. Primary light source

## 2. Secondary, weaker light source

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### STEP 4: Add Shading

Two light sources reveal the contours and volume of the figure in this photo. The bones add structure, but the musculature creates complex shadows. You can illustrate about 70 percent of the shadows just by knowing the direction of the light. But to get the core tonality right, you must analyze the peaks and valleys created by the muscles. Remember, also, that bones are not perfectly straight, the bone naturally curves. Use this knowledge to create a more realistic shadow.

### Look for the Subtleties



Notice that the shin bone is not perfectly straight; there is a slight natural curve to it. This causes the shading to curve as well. Paying attention to details such as this will take your art to a new level of realism.

# Norman: African-American Man

## *Model Stats*

**NAME:** Norman A. Kellyman

**ETHNICITY:** Jamaican

**HEIGHT:** 5'11" (1.8m)

**WEIGHT:** 178 lbs. (81kg)

**AGE:** 32 years old

















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