Q. What is a "graphic novel"?
A. Graphic novels have a few defining characteristics. But first and most importantly, they are long comic books. (I’ll get back to the rest.)

Q. What is a “comic book”?
A. You may think you know the answer to this one, but stick with me a few minutes.
A comic book is a magazine or bound book that contains "comic" (also known as "comi"). Comix is a medium for expressing information and/or artistic ideas that is defined by

images used in a sequence...

...and that’s it. However, comics also often feature such things as:
- word balloons...
- ...and sometimes "thought" balloons.

These techniques aren’t necessary to make comics, but they are quite common. There are other common, familiar, but even more optional elements of many comics, such as certain kinds of characters, like funny animals or superheroes. But I’ll get to that in a minute.

Here’s how to read a comic:
1. Just as in our written language, you read the elements of a comic starting with...
2. ...the upper left corner of a page, and then you read across to the right...
3. ...before proceeding down to the next row...
4. ...and then the next.

Comics are a nested system.

You apply the same left-to-right, top-to-bottom reading order...

You even use the same rule for action lines within a panel...

Comics is like that. It’s a container for ideas.

Not a lot of vitamins in this kind, but you get a taste for it.

You think you’re funny, huh?

Wait a minute, you may be saying, "What ABOUT those superheroes?"

Ahem.

OK. "Comics" is the name of a medium, like "film" or "painting".

You don’t think "film" means movies about gangsters or cowboys, do you? Film is a way to express ideas. Any ideas you want to express.

Wait. What is a "graphic novel" besides a comic book?

Well, "graphic" means "tell in images," not "naughty" pictures...

But "novel" is used less precisely. The term "graphic novel" is often applied to short-story collections as well. I don’t know why.

I think "novel" is just used to mean "long book."

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