

EXPLORING THE ART OF CHARACTER

BY

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Advanced Characterization Sketch

Note to Writer: Although this is a guide for characterization, learning about your character through writing scenes will produce more authenticity than laboring over traits and what-if situations. However, the prompts will help the writer understand what is valuable in the story process. If the answers are unclear now, by the end of the story, they should be obvious.

Why do I want to write this story? _____

One sentence describing the story _____

Moral premise of story _____

Story title _____

Genre _____

Time frame _____

Setting _____

<u>Character Name</u>	<u>Meaning</u>	<u>Temperament Type</u>
_____	_____	_____

Temperament type and explanation - <http://www.humanmetrics.com/cgi-win/jtypes2.asp>

Why this character? _____

What is the character's goal? _____

How is the character's goal unique? _____

Character's Outer Landscape

Age _____ Birth date _____ Nickname _____

Height _____ Weight _____

Complexion _____ Race _____

Nose _____ Ears _____

Eye color and shape _____

Face shape _____ Hair type and color _____

Body type _____

Right-handed or left-handed _____

Positive distinguishing features _____

Imperfections _____

How does character view his/her body? _____

Physical illnesses or afflictions _____

Characteristic gestures/body language _____

Home - where and describe _____

Education and where received _____

Occupation _____ Salary _____

Vocabulary _____

Skills, abilities, and talents _____

Interests/Hobbies _____

How does the character's interests/hobbies stem from his/her personality?

Is the character's interests/hobbies part of the story? _____ How? _____

Social status _____

Sense of humor _____

Joys _____

Pets _____

Favorite meal _____

What does your character have in his/her pocket or purse? _____

Establishing Character Motivation

Family background/birth order/lineage including ethnicity _____

Political views _____

Religious affiliation if any _____

How does faith play into the character's life? _____

According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs: physiological, safety, love/belonging/esteem, and self-actualization, what is missing in your character's life?

How is your character filling that need(s)? _____

Character's physical story problem _____

Character's psychological/inner problem _____

What is the character's moral or spiritual turmoil? _____

Type and number of close friends _____

Best friend? _____

How do the character's family and friends view him/her? _____

What about life does the character appreciate? _____

What about life does the character detest? _____

What one phrase shows what the character ultimately wants from life? _____

If the character could be/do anything in life, what would it be? _____

What is the character's ideal vacation? _____

What person(s) does the character admire and why? _____

Things that make the characters uncomfortable or embarrassed _____

Traumas or scars from the past _____

What makes the character angry? _____

How does the character handle anger? _____

What is the character's worst fear that is natural part of the story? _____

How is the worst fear stated above related to the character's inability to handle painful situations? _____

How will the character face his/her worst fear as related to the story? _____

What is the character's most painful experience? (Donald Maass) _____

What lie does your character believe. Can be more than one. See here for ideas: http://theraponiversity.org/lies/lies_menu.html

How will the lie be revealed in the story? _____

What is the character's biggest triumph? _____

What is/are the character's inner strength(s)? _____

What are the character's flaws/weaknesses? _____

How does the character contradict him/herself? _____

What is your character's secret? _____

What is the character's love language? <http://www.5lovelanguages.com/profile/>

_____ Words of Affirmation Quality Time _____ Receiving Gifts _____
_____ Acts of Service Physical Touch _____

Meyers-Briggs Love Languages: <https://personalitygrowth.com/how-each-myers-briggs-type-responds-to-the-love-languages/>

How does the character respond to betrayal?

How does your character view self-preservation? <https://personalitygrowth.com/the-importance-of-self-preservation-for-each-personality-type/>

What promises will the character make to the reader? _____

As a child, was the character popular? Why or why not? _____

When and with whom was the character's first kiss? _____

Is the character a virgin? If not, when and with whom did he/she lose his/her virginity? _____

With what is known about the character, what can go wrong? _____

What is your character's blind spot? _____

With what is known about the character, how are problems processed? _____

What makes the character feel safe? _____

What is in your character's memory box that is good? _____

What is your character's memory box that haunts him/her? _____

How did the character's mother comfort him/her as a child? _____

How did the character's father comfort him/her as child? _____

Why readers care/worry about the character? _____

How do you want the reader to feel/react to the character? _____

How will the character change? _____

According to James Scott Bell, every character faces a type of death physical, psychological, or professional. One is always prominent. What kind of death(s) is the character facing? _____

What crisis or change of events pushes the character into action? _____

What revelations will the character experience? _____

What is the one thing for which the character would most like to be remembered after his/her death? _____

What is the one thing the character wants more than anything? _____

What is the one thing the antagonist wants more than anything? _____

What is lost if the character is unsuccessful? _____

What is the one thing that is stopping the protagonist from getting what he wants? _____

What is the one thing that is stopping the antagonist from getting what he wants? _____

What is the character's greatest regret? _____

What is the most evil thing the character has ever done? _____

Does your character have a criminal record? What did he/she do? _____

If your character knew he/she was going to die in 24 hours, name three things the character would do in the time left? _____

What will be the character's eulogy? _____

How does your character feel about:

Love _____

Death _____

Children _____

Money _____

Home _____

What is life about? _____

How do I live a good life? _____

What is my life's purpose? _____

Backstory - Exercises

The following is an exercise from Donald Maass - *Writing the Breakout Novel* and *Writing the Breakout Novel Workbook*.

1. What happened in your character's life from birth to age 12 that affected who he/she is today— Emotionally, Physically, Mentally, and Spiritually?

2. What happened in your character's life from ages 13 - 20 that affected who he/she is today— Emotionally, Physically, Mentally, and Spiritually?

3. What happened in your character's life from ages 21 - 30 that affected who he/she is today— Emotionally, Physically, Mentally, and Spiritually?

4. What happened in your character's life 1 year before the story opens— Emotionally, Physically, Mentally, and Spiritually?

5. 6 months?

6. 6 weeks?

7. 24 hours?

8. 1 hour?

9. 10 minutes?

Final Thoughts

Who is your character? _____

Are you ready to plot your story? _____

What is your initial story disturbance? _____

What questions are not answered about character? _____

How will you address the above? _____

What research needs to be completed? _____

Characterization - the Key to Great Novel Writing Resource Guide

Online Tools

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

<https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html>

Myers-Briggs Love Languages

<https://personalitygrowth.com/how-each-myers-briggs-type-responds-to-the-love-languages/>

Myers-Briggs Personality Testing

<http://www.humanmetrics.com/>

The Lies We Believe

http://theraponiversity.org/lies/lies_menu.html

Websites and Blogs

Blue Ridge Conference

<https://www.blueridgeconference.com/>

Jane Friedman

<https://www.janefriedman.com/>

Jerry Jenkins

<https://jerryjenkins.com/>

Live, Write, Thrive

<https://www.livewritethrive.com/>

The Write Conversation

<http://thewriteconversation.blogspot.com/>

Helping Writers Become Authors

<https://www.helpingwritersbecomeauthors.com/>

Writer Unboxed

<http://writerunboxed.com/>

Writers Digest Editor Blogs

<http://www.writersdigest.com/editor-blogs>

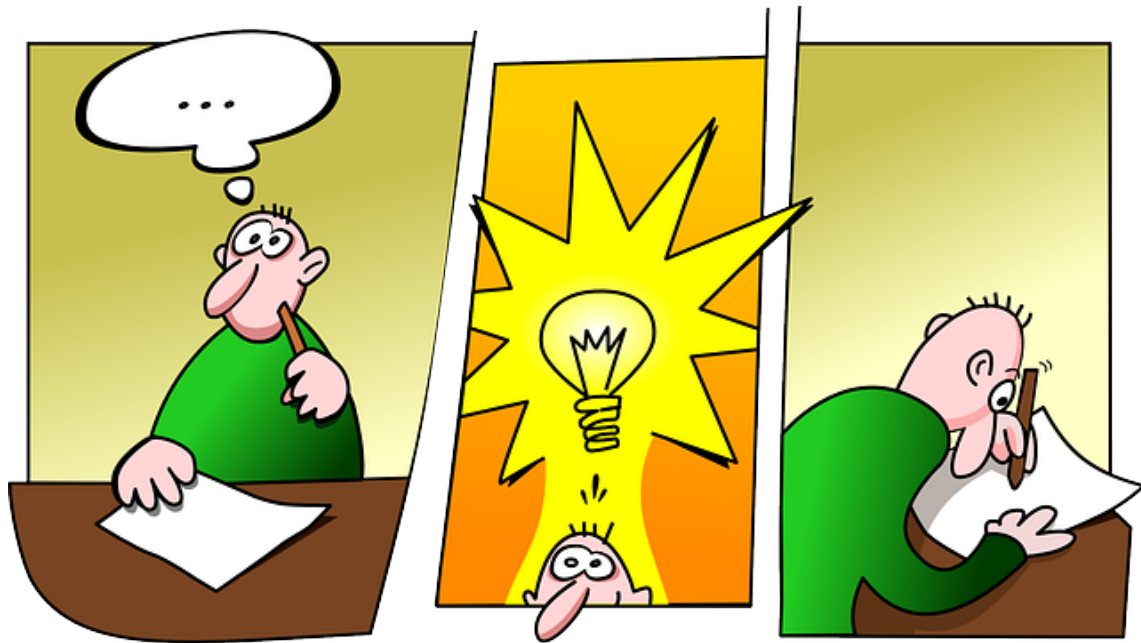
Writers Helping Writers

<http://writershelpingwriters.net/author/angela/>

EXPLORING THE ART OF PLOTTING

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The Dynamic Plotter

1. What is the POV character's goal or problem?
2. What does the POV character learn that he/she didn't know before?
3. What backstory is revealed? Avoid backstory and character flaws in the first approximately 50 pages.
4. How are the stakes raised?

Point of View

The scene is to be written from the point of view of the one who has the most to lose. You choose and write the scene! Ensure the setting is antagonistic for each POV character.

The setting is a bank and a robbery is about to take place.

Character A is the robber. He's lost his job and is about to have his home and car repossessed. There's no food in the house, and his wife plans to leave tonight with their two children if he doesn't have the cash to buy groceries.

Character B is the police officer. He has a job to do—protect lives and property. His entire life is wrapped up in his career. A month ago, he was diagnosed with stage 4 cancer. He's determined to leave his family a heroic legacy.

Character C is the bank teller. She is disturbed with the amount of errors made lately in her drawer. In fact, if her drawer doesn't balance tonight, she'll lose her job. She's a single mother with two small children and doesn't receive child support.

Character D is a contractor. He has to make a deposit before noon or he'll have several thousand dollars bounce from employee paychecks. He's an alcoholic and needs a drink badly. He's nervous, irritable, and fearful of losing everything he has. A week ago his only son was killed in Afghanistan.

Writer Exercise for Plots

A man is hurrying to his car. He's late leaving the office, and he's due to see his son play soccer. Suddenly he feels a tug on his arm. He's swung around and realizes two teenage boys are attempting to snatch his wallet. Ensure the setting is antagonistic for each POV character.

The man is an:

- Off duty cop
- A lawyer
- A pastor
- In the middle of a panic attack

Now write a short scene from your favorite point of view.

**Hint: There isn't a wrong answer.*

The Antagonistic Setting Handout

Chooses at least one of the following scenarios to create a story setting with visceral impact:

- Man vs. man
- Man vs. animal
- Man vs. nature
- Man vs. society
- Man vs. survival
- Man vs. technology
- Man vs. God

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The Antagonistic Setting Handout contd.

Exercises

1. List your protagonist's fears and weaknesses.
2. Now incorporate the items in #1 into various settings that follow your storyline. List those settings.
3. How do the above settings appeal to the protagonist?
4. How do those settings act against the protagonist?
5. Are any of these settings in unfamiliar territory?
6. How do those settings force the protagonist to deal with his/her shortcomings?
7. How can your setting cause your protagonist to grow?

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EXPLORING THE ART OF EMOTIONS & SYMBOLS

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1. How well do you know your character?
2. What is your character's personality?
3. What is the opening hook to your story?
4. How do you end the first scene?
5. How does your character show surprise?
6. How does your character show fear?
7. How does your character show anger?
8. How does your character show sadness?
9. How does your character show disgust?
10. How does your character show happiness?
11. How does your character show contempt?
12. In your story, how are you controlling emotive conflict through POV?
13. Write a scene in which your story benefits from a distant emotive POV?
14. Write a scene in which your story benefits from a mid-point emotive POV?
15. Write a scene in which your story benefits from a close emotive POV?
16. Write a scene in which your character wants what he/she has been told is impossible.
17. Show your character dealing with surprise, fear, anger, sadness, disgust, happiness, and contempt.
18. How can you show emotive conflict with the five senses in your story?

19. Ensure every hook sentence, beginning and ending of each scene, contains powerful emotions.
20. How does your character react to various colors?
21. What is your genre?
22. What specifics apply to your genre that applies to emotions?

Emotion Writing Tips

1. **The depth of every story focuses on emotion.** Our readers open a book to experience an adventure through an entertaining novel entertainment. They want to feel the story, and that requires a writer incorporating credible emotion.
2. **Emotive conflict, emotions in conflict within a character, keeps the reader turning pages.** Writers strive to have some type of emotional controversy in every sentence.
3. **Not every character processes the seven universal emotions alike.** We are all unique according to our genetic makeup, life experiences, and the choices we make. Strive for the unpredictable response that adds credibility to the character's traits.
4. **Sensory perception allows the character to internalize feelings through memory and specific language.** A character relies on one or more of the five and sometimes six senses to process the how and way of what's been presented to them.
5. **Our ears are trained to receive words positively or negatively according to the consonant or vowel sounds and the manner in which they are presented.** Characters receive the word choice based on the speaker's communication skills and how the character has experienced the word or sound in the past.
6. **We associate emotions with symbols, a tangible item that represents something entirely different.** Not every object in our stories have a psychological meaning. For a symbol to have a valid impact to the story, it must must resonate with the character.
7. **Color influences emotion according to the character's personality, mood, and understanding of the world around him/her.** Use color wisely to show individual psychological interpretation of what is happening in the story.
8. **For a writer to write effective character emotions, he/she must first have experienced the same feelings and worked through the pain.**

Exploring the Art of Dialogue Handout

Dialogue Writing Tips

1. **Dynamic dialogue is emotive, explosive, ambiguous, and always builds conflict.**
2. **Characterization** – Who is your character? What makes them tick? What is their story in this journey called life? Your role as a writer is to take the time to write the back story so you will know what influences the way the character speaks.
3. **Dialogue must be written in character**
4. **Be a good wordsmith** – This means showing and not telling. Avoid *ly* words that reveal the writer hasn't mastered powerful and vivid nouns and verbs.
5. **Genre** – Romance, sci-fi, suspense, western, fantasy, mystery, historical, and contemporary use dialogue to reflect the genre and theme of the story.
6. **Conflict and Tension** – Conflict and tension pace the dialogue through believable conversations that show different personalities reacting and responding to what is going on around them. Dialogue's purpose is to build tension.
7. **Dialogue Tags and Beats** – Stick to the tag “said” when writing dialogue. Use it sparingly, only to denote who is speaking and when necessary for clarification. Said is an invisible word. Beats are those actions that surround dialogue. A tag is not necessary when a beat shows the reader who is speaking. The goal of writing witty dialogue is for the reader to know who is speaking by the character's choice of words, emotions, and body language without the use of a tag or a beat.
8. **Clear, Concise, and Credible** – These three C's of writing tight dialogue is applicable for writing not only dynamic dialogue but any type of fiction and nonfiction.
9. **Body Language** – 80% of our communication is through body language. Use this valuable tool to show the reader's internal dialogue.
10. **Emotive Conflict** – A reader is engaged in reading when emotions are in turmoil. The reader expects the protagonist and antagonist to have heated conversations, but use this tool to show that friends also have conflicting emotions.

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11. **Picky Punctuation and Gritty Grammar** – How to punctuate dialogue may make the difference between a sale and a rejection. Each speaker gets his/her own paragraph. No editor wants to be blinded by errors. Pick up a grammar and punctuation guide and use it.
12. **Silence** - Silence is an effective technique in dialogue. Use gestures and body language to relate what the silent character is feeling. What counts isn't what's said but the effect of what's meant.
13. **Subtext** - What does the character really mean? The reader does not want functional dialogue – that which says what the character means and nothing else. It's boring.
14. **Panning for Gold** - Writing witty dialogue is like panning for gold. The writer has to sift through the words, actions, and body language to find the rich nuggets that keep the reader turning pages—and the sales up!
15. **Warnings** - Avoid the overuse of the character's name. Eliminate speech patterns that aren't realistic. We don't state the person's name each time we address them in conversation.

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Self-Editing the 2023 Novel

Accuracy

Research all facts.

Active Voice

Strive to make sentences active. Remember “as” and “ing” words tend to make a sentence passive.

Often the word “as” indicates a sentence is not in chronological order.

Adverbs

Use sparingly and not with dialogue tags.

Do a global search in your manuscript for:

- “ly” with a space after it
- “ly” with a period after it.

Avoid Clichés

Create your own metaphors and similes.

Beginnings

Strong hook.

Does your story begin with the lead character’s name and his/her current situation?

Chapter and Scene Hooks

Does every chapter and scene begin and end with a hook?

Characterization

Hero, heroine or protagonist:

What is it about them that you like or dislike?

Is there a positive and negative trait that is not yours?

If you were to spend a vacation with the hero or heroine, what about them would appeal to you?

Villain or antagonists:

Is the character truly evil or badly behaved?

What is the one trait that gives the antagonist redeeming quality?

Sol Stein states that no villain can attract victims unless he has charm, charisma, position, or wealth.

Chronology

Use a calendar to keep track of your chapters’ timeline.

<http://calendarhome.com/tyc/#calendars>

Conflict and Tension

Include in every sentence.

Consistency

Spelling Numbers - written or spelled.

Cut Extra Words

Be clear and concise.

Never use two words when one will do.

Dialogue

Clear and tight
Punctuated correctly.
Do you need a tag?
Do you need a beat?

Emotional Conflict

Have you made it your goal to have emotional conflict in every paragraph?
Every line?
Show emotions.

Examine Plot

Have you asked the four crucial questions about every chapter?
1. What is the POV character's goal or problem to solve?
2. What does the POV character learn that is new information.
3. What backstory is revealed?
4. How are the stakes raised?

Genre

Have you written with a clear genre in mind?
How do you want the story to "feel" to the reader (creepy, brooding, inspirational etc.)?

Grammar

Invest in a grammar guide or English book.
Eliminate dangling participles.

Hyphen, En-Dash, and Em-Dash

Learn the differences, application, and correctly type the proper punctuation.
Consult publisher guidelines or *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

Online Resources:

[Calendar](#)
[Grammarly](#)
[Scrivener](#)
[ProWritingAid](#)
[The Chicago Manual of Style](#)
[Word and Phrase Frequency Counter](#)

Plot

Is it tight?
Are there no holes?
Loose threads?

Premise

Is the writing project true to its premise?

Pronoun Preference

Make sure the reader knows which noun the pronoun stands for.

Redundancy

Avoid repeated phrases.
Don't insult the reader by telling more than once.

Research

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Keep a works cited list.

Always research more than is needed.

Interview persons living in the area who are knowledgeable in your subject matter.

Scenes

Rate every scene in your book. Each one should propel the story forward, constantly building conflict and tension.

Make sure the first and last lines in each scene are strong.

Smooth transitions

Sensory Perception

Does each scene use all the senses?

Sentence Order

Count the number of syllables: beans, cabbage, and tomatoes instead of huckleberries, pear, and a banana.

Count the number of words. He enjoyed green beans, deep-fried onion rings, and buttered corn-on-the cob.

If all the items have the same number of syllables, then consider their position in the alphabet.

An exception to this is chronological order, obvious sequence, familiar sequence, and unintended modifiers.

Sometimes the way we are accustomed to hearing items in a list contradicts the above guidelines. If the items in your list do not sound appropriate when you adhere to the above rule, change them so they are acceptable.

Tea with lunch, dinner, and breakfast should be tea with breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

Cream and peaches should be peaches and cream.

The bees and the birds (alphabetical sequence) should be the birds and the bees.

Gold, myrrh, and frankincense should be gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Setting

Research more than you think you will ever use.

Fictitious towns are best.

Map out your town ahead of time, filling in street names, residential, business, etc.

Ensure setting is antagonistic.

Telling Words

Think

Know

Understand

Realize

Believe

Want

Remember

Imagine

Desire

Need

Text to Voice Software

Research software for what works best for you.

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Scrivener has text to voice
Ghost reader is a text to voice app

Transitions

Does each chapter or scene flow into the next?

Vary Sentence Length

Do the sentences have rhythm?

Weasel Words and Phrases

Absolutely
Actually
All of
All right
As a matter of fact
As being
As yet
At all times
Basically, essentially
Beginning sentences with “There” or “It”
Being that
Cell phone cliches: pull out, scroll across, hang up
Completely
Definitely
During the course of
Each and every
Extremely
For all intents and purposes
For the most part
Hopefully
I mean
In order
In the process of
Just
Literally
Okay
Of course
Point in time
Pretty
Quite
Rather
Really
Shrugged
Simply
Smiled
So

Some
Somebody
Somehow
Someone
Something
Sometimes
Somewhat
Somewhere
Suddenly
Thankfully
That
Then
Thing
This
Totally
Up, down
Very
Which

Word Choice

William Shakespeare said: "Suit the action to the word, the word to the action."

Word Frequency Finder and Phrase Frequency Finder.

http://www.writewords.org.uk/word_count.asp

Unintended Modifiers

Make sure all modifiers modify what is intended.

Final notes: print the writing project and read line by line. Send to a beta reader(s). This isn't the writer's mother, sister, or close friend but a person who can give honest feedback. Read the project one last time before sending it to an agent or editor.

Recommended Writing Books

<i>The Conflict Thesaurus</i>	Angela Ackerman & Becca Puglisi
<i>The Emotion Thesaurus</i>	Angela Ackerman & Becca Puglisi
<i>The Emotional Wound Thesaurus</i>	Angela Ackerman & Becca Puglisi
<i>Plot and Structure</i>	James Scott Bell
<i>Revisions and Edits</i>	James Scott Bell
<i>The Five Love Languages</i>	Gary Chapman
<i>The Art of Character</i>	David Corbett
<i>Wired for Story</i>	Lisa Chron
<i>On Becoming a Novelist</i>	John Gardner
<i>I Know What You're Thinking</i>	Lillian Glass, Ph. D
<i>On Writing</i>	Stephen King
<i>Dialogue</i>	Gloria Kempton
<i>Characters, Emotion & Viewpoint</i>	Nancy Kress
<i>Story Trumps Structure</i>	Steven James
<i>Troubleshooting Your Novel</i>	Steven James
<i>The 12 Pillars of Novel Construction</i>	C.S.Lakin
<i>The Fire in Fiction</i>	Donald Maass
<i>The Emotional Craft of Fiction</i>	Donald Maass
<i>The Emotional Craft of Writing</i>	Donald Maass
<i>Writing the Breakout Novel</i>	Donald Maass
<i>Writing the Breakout Novel Workbook</i>	Donald Maass
<i>Writing 21st Century Fiction</i>	Donald Maass
<i>Story</i>	Robert McKee

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<i>Exploring the Art of Character</i>	DiAnn Mills
<i>Exploring the Art of Plotting</i>	DiAnn Mills
<i>Exploring the Art of Emotion & Dialogue</i>	DiAnn Mills
<i>Painted Paragraphs</i>	Donald Newlove
<i>The Power of Body Language</i>	Tonya Reiman
<i>Creating Character Arcs</i>	K.M. Weiland