

# Character Development

## Knowing Your Character

Know your character like a best friend, so you will be sure what he will say and do in any given situation. You need to be clear about what your character wants, why he wants it and the obstacles he will face along the way, so that you can define them for the reader.

## Dialogue

The way your character behaves and speaks is a powerful way to show the reader what kind of person he is. To do this you will need to ask yourself questions and walk in the character's shoes, so to speak.

Some writers do a lot of this thinking in their heads and put little onto paper. At the other end of the spectrum, some writers have detailed bios for each character, photos and flesh-out their background in full.

I'm going to offer a few techniques for character development and you can use as much or as little as suits your writing style. If nothing else, I hope to provide triggers for your imagination. The idea being that the more you understand your character, the more convincingly you can portray them.

Also see my 'Character Profile' template. Of course, you don't need to break it down this far, but it pays to at least consider these things.

## Relating to the Reader

The reader needs to care about what happens to your main characters. This doesn't mean they have to like them, but need to at least identify with them. Even unlikeable characters must have an endearing quality.

It doesn't matter what type of personality you've created for a character, he must behave consistently throughout the story to be believable. Never violate what a character would normally do, or what they believe.

## Purposeful

Every character needs a function in the story. Get rid of clingers-on. The role of minor characters may simply be to reveal more about the main character, or to promote friction. The victims in the story often provide motivation for the main character. Others are known as 'shape-shifters', because they appear to be one thing, but turn out to be another.

Remember that villains often see themselves as right and have a purpose.

Never try to force your characters to fit the plot. If your main character takes on a life of his own, then adjust the plot to fit that personality, not vice versa.

## Growth

It's important for characters to grow during the story. Watching a character overcome a series of conflicts, makes him worthy of the final challenge.

Show what kind of person the character is emotionally, through his actions and the way he interacts with others.

### **Motivation**

You need to be clear about what your characters want (their goal) and why (their motivation). The motivation must be strong enough to keep them moving forward through the story, even when the going gets tough. It's what makes the reader root for them to succeed.

**Comment [M1]:** Can I flesh this out a bit from my GMC series of blogs?

### **Internal Conflict**

It is important that your main characters have inner conflicts that they struggle against, which bring them to rock bottom. Only then will they be ready to accept change and finally set themselves free from these inner demons. This journey and revelation result in self change by the end of the story.

### **Point of View**

Point of view is a powerful tool. As a rule, you should be in the head of the character that has the most to lose. Being inside a character's head is a great way to make the reader privy to their thoughts and inner turmoil. It helps the reader sympathise with their plight and understand their motivations.

I'm not going to go into the different types of POV and how to use them here, because it's a complex subject worth an individual discussion.

## **Character Development Tools**

### **Interviewing Characters**

You may like to interview your main characters, using a checklist to gather information about their past and present, hopes and fears. You could take the process one step further and interview other characters about them. It's a great way to profile how other people see them and may reveal hidden bonds and tensions between.

#### *Examples*

Your character might consider himself to be insightful, brave and authoritative, but his sister thinks he's bossy, opinionated and unreliable.

A husband may think his wife is supportive and loyal, while she has a lover who believes she wants her husband dead.

A man's boss may think of him as the hard-working backbone of the company, but his own children think he's a jerk.

Also see my 'Character Profile' template.