

# Character Development

Who are your characters and how do you and your reader get to know them?

You should be able to describe a well-conceived character in many ways. You should know their physical description, including hair color and style, eye color and shape, and skin color and perhaps texture, as well as height, physique, posture and any physical ticks or skin blemishes the character may have. What are their secondary attributes; like their personal scent, the timbre and pitch of their voice, or favorite color palettes for clothing or makeup?

Physical description is just a minimal base of your character. You should also be able to describe the character's temperament, vocal accent, what kind of language they use, formal or informal, coarse or polished, and what kinds of expletives they tend to use. Is your character likely to be calm or hyper or agitated or nervous or reserved in a given situation? What kind of education does your character have and what kind of upbringing?

Many things about your character's background will influence how they behave. Did they grow up in a nuclear family; in the city or the suburbs? Did they always have a lot of friends or is this person a solitary and closed-off loner? Are they from a single-parent home? Are they an orphan or a run-away? If they ran away, why?

Many stories revolve around a romance or love interest. We are familiar with the hetero-, homo-, or bi-sexual labels for sexual preference. There are many asexual people, with no drive for a sexual relationship, even if they still desire the closeness and companionship of a serious relationship of a different kind. And there are, of course, people with all kinds of preferences in between. Some people have dysfunctional understandings of their own sexual preferences based on trauma they may have experienced; sometimes once, sometimes repeatedly.



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You should be able to answer all or at least most of these points about your main characters. Being able to answer a few key points about supporting characters will help to round out your story and give depth to the interactions between your characters.

Before you begin writing your story, try writing a few character development exercises. By putting your characters in the scenes and requiring them to react, you will be able to get a feel for who they are and what in their life experiences may have influenced them to make them this way. You may discover the characters you thought were the most interesting are not, and those you weren't as interested in may have more to say than you initially thought they might.

There are a few scenarios that I like to use. Don't forget to set up the scene, the space in which the scene is occurring; time of day, weather, time of year, etc.

The easiest is sometimes the Job Interview. Relatively self-explanatory, choose a job that would fit the occupation of the character that you are writing; secretary, barista, janitor, attorney, doctor, teacher, etc. You are the interviewer. Run your character through a series of interview questions appropriate to the job.

Another that I like to use is the Police Interrogation. Again, you are the interrogator. Choose a character appropriate sequence of questions. Is your character a witness, a victim, a perpetrator?

Ultimately it is up to you what kind of questioning or interaction you write for your characters. I typically choose something that will be relevant in the long run to the story in which they will play a role. These are not meant to be part of the story but they will help you develop a

deeper understanding of the character you are writing, what motivates them and the logical progression of their lives that made them who they are.



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The following is a list of scenes that you might choose from:

Job Interview  
Police Interrogation  
I've Been Robbed  
Discussing a Movie/Book/Play  
First Date  
Training a Puppy  
Holiday With the In-Laws  
Dinner Party  
Formal Reprimand at Work  
Fight With a Spouse/Partner  
Relationship Break-Up  
I Think You Are My Mom/Dad  
Good/Bad News at the Doctor  
Sport Team Try-Outs  
Tourist in a New City  
Shopping at a Yard Sale  
Placing an Order at a Restaurant  
Car Accident; serious/not serious  
Giving an Expert Presentation  
Care for Sick Friend/Spouse/Partner/Child  
Visit a Museum  
Take a Dance Lesson

