

Write That Novel

A Writer's Quick Reference Guide

[back](#)

Characters

Characters can make or break a book.

An interesting or complex character will keep the reader turning the pages even when the plot slows down. A boring character can make the reader drop the book, no matter how action-driven the plot may be.

Whatever the genre you write, the character should fit the story or grow or change to become the hero or heroine who is needed to help resolve the plot. When you start to develop your main character, the first element you need to decide is whose story is it? Will your book star a hero or a heroine? It's all up to you. No longer do women have to take the passive role in a book. Today's heroine is going to get the job done, while the hero might just as easily be the homebody who only wants a happy family. The choice is yours. The only criteria is to make the leading character match the story.

Once you have decided on the sex of the leading character, you should decide on a few specific details such as age, and physical appearance. Next comes the personality. In this category decisions are not permanent, as they may change as the story/plot evolves.

To keep track of your character a quick reference is available for your use. The character outline allows you to fill it in as you write or to write it out ahead of time so that you know exactly who your character is as you travel through the story. You can print this out and use it for all of your main characters. Forms are also provided to help you keep track of secondary characters.

Start by penciling (or typing) in some of the characteristics that you feel your character will need. For example, will he need to be a computer expert, or will she need to know how to cook? Will he be the strong, silent type, or is she spunky and full of life?

One of the most important factors will be how this character will grow or change during the course of the tale. For example, if your hero is an everyday kind-of-Joe, but because of the plot, needs to develop leadership qualities, what hidden attributes will you need to give him?

If your heroine has just lost her brutal husband through death or divorce, what abilities will she need to develop so she can get on with her life and eventually find true love or just survive in the every day world?

Does your character need some hidden skill or talent that will play an important part later in the novel? Will this person need a flaw to overcome? Or perhaps his or her strong beliefs will propel the plot?

Not all your characters need to be fully developed at your begin writing but it greatly helps if you have some idea of what their crusade or goal is in the story. They need a purpose, a reason for the story to begin and a reason for the story to continue.

One of the greatest parts about being a writer is that you can create these wonderful people from your imagination and experience. Did you have an interesting relative that you always thought of as great guy or did you want to kill this person off in any number of ways?

The best part of writing fiction is that you can put your own fears, secrets and talents into these make-believe stories.

Visit the Character Form page for forms you can print and use to develop your characters. Visit the Character Diamond page for a way to develop plot and character and then use the Character Diamond form. Check out the [Articles](#) page for more information on how to develop characters and how to make them work with your plot.

Exercises for developing characters:

- Write down the characters you are considering for your story
- Make a list of character traits or talents you feel are important for your characters
- Write down a story idea based on your character
- Make a list of fictional characters you consider unforgettable
- Write down why they are intriguing, including personality, history, talents, etc
- Write down a list of people you know who might make good characters in a story

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**&**  
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