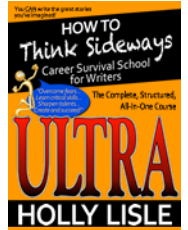


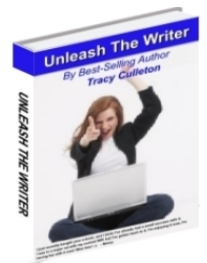


If you're serious about your fiction writing, you definitely owe it to yourself to check out Holly Lisle's

[How to Think Sideways ULTRA: Career Survival School for Writers](#)



Beat Writers' Block Forever
(click image)



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Writing Character Sketches

I recommend writing character sketches as a super way to practise your character creation skills.

First of all check out the [list of character traits](#) and play around with it, picking possible traits that appeal to you.

Or, even better, pick three random numbers between 1 and 447, and look up which trait is allocated to which number, and write a sketch based on a character with those three traits.

If this random selection gives you what appear to be contradictory character traits (such as *organised* and *scatty*), you can still use them, because after all, real people can hold mutually contradictory traits at the same time.

Once you have your traits picked, the next step is to write a character sketch using them - having your character display these traits in action.

So, for example, I'm picking at random the numbers 47, 93, and 333. So the three traits are: *careless*, *demanding* and *repulsive*. Oh dear!

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Oh well, here goes:

Shelly wedged her bulk more firmly into her armchair and yelled for Joan. "Joan! Where are you? I need you *now*."

Joan ran into the room, drying her hands on a towel. "Sorry Shelly, I'm here now. Did you want me to take your tray? Oh, did you spill the soup again?"

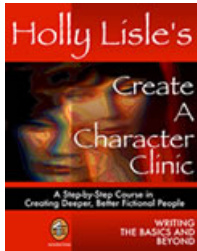
She began to dab at Shelly's chest with the towel, but Shelly pushed her hand away.

"Stop that," she snapped, "I don't care about soup on my clothes, don't you understand? If it doesn't bother me, why should it bother you? Anyway, what I wanted to know was, have you seen my glasses? I can't find them anywhere?"

"Where did you leave them?"

"Well I don't know, do I, you stupid girl. If I knew, I wouldn't be asking you, would I?" Shelly gave a God-give-me-patience sigh, crossed her plump arms with difficulty over her soup-stained chest, and waited for Joan to conjure up the glasses.

Actually, that was quite fun to write in the end!



If you're serious about getting your characters right, then you absolutely need Holly Lisle's [Create A Character Clinic](#). Nearly 200 pages of specific, easy-to-follow tools and techniques on coming up with fully rounded and intriguing characters - all for only \$9.95. I also absolutely recommend her [Create A Plot Clinic](#), also only \$9.95.

Or buy them both, along with Create A Language Clinic and Create A Culture Clinic, as [Holly Lisle's Writing Clinics Bundle](#) for a discounted \$34.95.

But the main point is this: I started with absolutely no idea of the characters I was going to write about, nor the situation in which they found themselves. But by giving myself characteristics it was easy to write that character sketch.

Also, did you note that I didn't use the words *demanding*, *careless* or *repulsive*? This is a good example of [indirect characterization](#).

So, I'm pleased with that. What would have made it more interesting, however, is if I had done the same exercise for Joan, and written her based on that (as it is, she's pretty much just a cipher).

Say Joan turned out to be, let's say, 200, 300, 301: *hospitable*, *perverse* and *pessimistic*, then there would have been a depth and complexity to the character sketch which is lacking in the example above.

It'll be challenging, because *hospitable* doesn't seem to go with the other two traits. However, it'll be good practice in creating complex characters.

So, I'll have a go here:

Shelly wedged her bulk more firmly into her armchair and yelled for Joan. "Joan! Where are you? I need you *now*."

Joan ran into the room, drying her hands on a towel. "Sorry Shelly, I'm here now. I knew you'd need me the minute I started washing up - the story of my life! Did you want me to take your tray? Oh, did you spill the soup again? I thought you would!"

She began to dab at Shelly's chest with the towel, but Shelly pushed her hand away.

"Stop that," she snapped, "I don't care about soup on my clothes, don't you understand? If it doesn't bother me, why should it bother you?"

"Well, it *does* bother me. You're my guest here, I want you to feel well, and you can't feel well unless you look well!"

"Well, if you insist."

"I do. Although you'll probably spill something else in two minutes! Oh well ... Anyway, what did you want?"

"Oh yes, you're *finally* thinking about what *I* want. " Shelly snorted. "What I wanted to know is, have you seen my glasses? I can't find them anywhere?"

"Oh, I knew you'd lose them again! I was just thinking that as I was washing up. Where did you leave them?"

"Well I don't know, do I, you stupid girl. If I knew, I wouldn't be asking you, would I?" Shelly gave a God-give-me-patience sigh, crossed her plump arms with difficulty over her soup-stained chest, and waited for Joan to conjure up the glasses.

I decided to use the word *perverse* in its sense of *going against what's expected*, rather than its normally understood meaning of: cantankerous or awkward. Cheating? Perhaps.

So, do you think I succeeded in writing a good character sketch?

I think the character sketch is definitely richer and more layered. You get a sense of both women, and the dynamic between them. I don't think, though, that fitting in the various character traits was entirely successful - it's a bit strained and contrived.

However ...

when writing character sketches as practice it's **essential** to give yourself permission to

When writing character sketches as practice, it's essential to give yourself permission to get it wrong. This is just practice, it's just playing and experimenting, and it's doing this in an artificial randomly-generated way. Of course it won't be perfect.

But that's okay. It's nearly the point - we learn far more from our so-called mistakes than we do from our successes, and *that's* the point of this exercise.

(I explore this further in the page on [writing your first draft](#).)

So, have I inspired you to give this a go? Like everything else, the more you do it, the better you'll get at writing character sketches. I absolutely recommend it!

[Return from Writing Character Sketches to Character Creation](#)

[Return from Writing Character Sketches to Home](#)

If you've got value out of this website, I'd so appreciate if you'd help me by spreading the word about it. Thanks! Tracy

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