



# School of Plot



# Character Workbook

GUIDED & FILLABLE



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*CHARACTER WORKBOOK*

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# FOUNDATIONS

# WHAT MAKES A WELL-WRITTEN CHARACTER?

Although broad questions like this are highly subjective, a good starting place would be:

- They're driven by a clear, strong 'want'.
- They go through a **story arc**.
- They have **depth**: flaws, fears, history.

The character's "want" will drive the story.

Being clear on this makes your story easier to write, as it guides your character's choices.



# WHAT IS A CHARACTER ARC?

A character arc is the journey a character takes over the course of a story. It involves opposition, challenges, and changes to the character. It ultimately leads to resolution.

They can be:

1. **Transformational arc:** the main character changes throughout the story, usually from a regular person to a hero.
2. **Positive change arc:** The character changes for the better over the course of a story. (e.g. *A Christmas Carol*)
3. **Negative change arc:** The character changes for the worse over the course of a story. (e.g. *Breaking Bad*)
4. **Flat or static character arc:** Less common. A character stays the same, but the world changes.

You can choose which one you want, there's no right or wrong choice here. We'll dive deeper into this towards the end.

# BRAINSTORMING A CHARACTER ARC

What is your character like at the start of the novel?

How do you want them to be at the end? Stronger, weaker, meaner, nicer, etc.?

Brainstorm things that could happen to get them from A to B. We will put more work into this at the end but it can be nice to go into the workbook with a rough idea.

# WHAT DRIVES CHARACTERS?

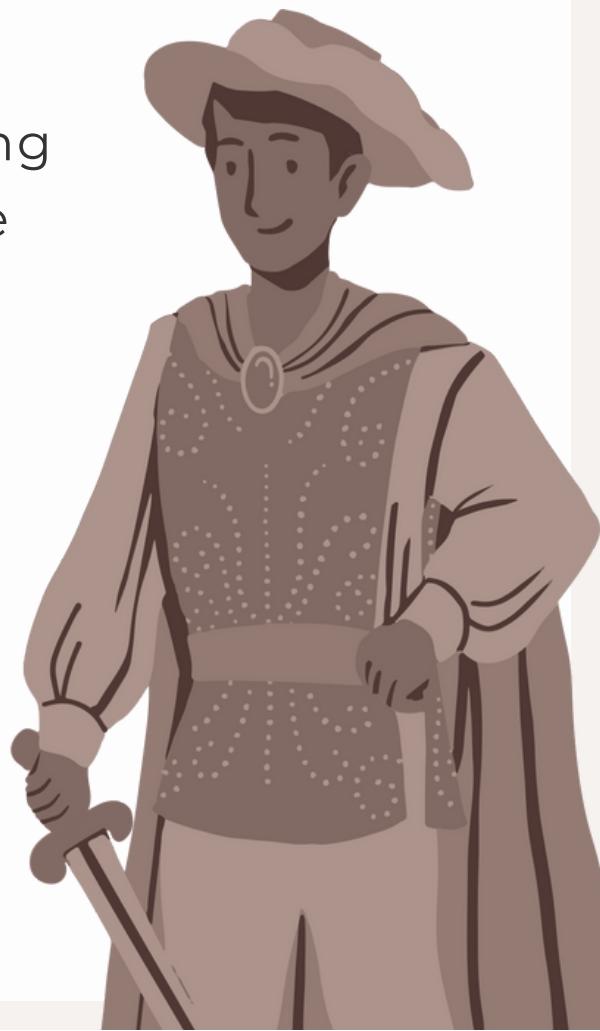
Every choice your character makes is influenced by something that has happened prior.

Just like a real person, your character has fears, goals, motivations, and needs.

For example, a character who grew up in a poor, dangerous environment might have the following:

- **Fear:** getting attacked, losing what little money they have
- **Goals:** become a knight
- **Motivation:** the desire for power and prosperity
- **Need:** safety and financial security

Let's talk about what this means in a little more detail...





# WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MOTIVATION & GOAL?

If you want to dye your hair, that's a goal you can write on your to-do list. But what motivates you? **Something internal.** The desire for change, or to look more beautiful.

In broad strokes:

- Motivations ('wants') are **internal**
- Goals are **external & actionable**

MOTIVATION	GOAL
Keep their loved ones safe from the Evil Wizard	Go to the castle and kill the Evil Wizard
Feel popular and loved	Host the biggest party of the summer
Never want to go hungry ever again	Win £20000000 in a singing competition

You need a goal to propel the story, and this goal is driven by an internal motivation.



# HOW TO FIND YOUR CHARACTER'S MOTIVATION

*Their motivations may change throughout the book as they learn new things, but we're working on the start.*

**What does your character think would make them happy?**

This is often different to what would actually make your character happy. (E.g. fame, money, the love of a prince, power...)

**What has your character been told to want?**

Did they have a pushy parent or mentor? Are they burdened by duty? Did they receive societal messaging that told them what to want ("get married" etc)?

**What does your character absolutely not want?**

What are they running away from, spending all their energy trying to avoid? What are they scared of? Is this justified?



# HOW DO I CREATE INTERNAL CONFLICT?

Often a character's motivation changes as the story goes on and they learn more things about the world and about themselves.

This is often because what a character wants at the start of the story doesn't align with what they need.

For example:

GOAL	To kill the evil Duke who murdered your mother.
MOTIVATION	You want revenge. You witnessed the murder as a child, and grew up angry and traumatised.
NEED	Closure, and emotional recovery. To acknowledge that this murder hurt you, in order to heal.

What the character wants and needs are different, allowing them to learn and grow.



# BRAINSTORMING INTERNAL CONFLICT



# BACKSTORY

# HOW TO WRITE BACKSTORY

Your character now has a motivation, but what made them this way?

Perhaps they crave riches because they were once poor. Perhaps they crave the love of a prince because they saw their mother lose everything by marrying a peasant.

Their backstory should explain their motive, but can also explain some of their traits.

If they are defensive and angry, perhaps someone hurt them in the past?

If they are vain, perhaps they're used to people (such as their parents) only valuing them for their looks.

Let's workshop it.





# HOW TO FIND YOUR CHARACTER'S BACKSTORY

Summarise your character's main motivation:

Write down some reasons why they may have acquired such a motivation. What events or lessons shaped their priorities to be this way?

# BACKSTORY RELATIONSHIPS

If it is relevant to your story, consider how the relationships in a character's past have shaped who they are today.

For example, getting left at the altar might lead a character to be closed-off in love. Being neglected by their parents might make a character fear abandonment or become hyper-independent.

Although you may not choose to reveal the relationships from your character's past in your novel, you might benefit from knowing about them. This is because it may inform your characters' views and choices throughout the story.



It's up to you!



# WRITING THEIR UPBRINGING

A person's upbringing can shape who they grow up to become. For example...

Upbringing	Traits Acquired
Competitive siblings	Ambition, determination, drive
Nurturing parents	Empathy, compassion, emotional intelligence
Strict parents	Discipline, responsibility, putting pressure on oneself
Lack of resources	Perseverance, resourcefulness, resilience, street smarts
Overprotective parents	Caution, risk-aversion, need for security OR rebellious
Absent parents	Independence, self-reliance, possible attachment issues

These are just examples of how upbringing might shape someone, not rules to follow or universal truths.

Think about what sort of experiences shaped your character.



# UPBRINGING & BACKSTORY

Describe (in as much detail as you'd like) your character's upbringing. Did they grow up rich, poor, smothered, neglected, pressured etc.?

How did this impact their present-day personality?

# FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

Describe your character's relationship with their family

How (if at all) did these relationships shape their present-day personality?



# FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

What were the parents' criteria for approval? (E.g. achievements, gender, personality, etc.)	
Who was the favourite child in the family?	
Family's socioeconomic background	
Key family values	
What key lessons did the parents (or parent-figures) pass on?	
Did the family have any unique traditions or rules?	

# PAST ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

How does your character feel about love?

Which experiences shaped their view of love to be that way?

# HOW TO UTILISE THEIR BACKSTORY

Now that you know their **backstory** and how this affects their **motivation** (which drive their **goals**), you should also consider how your character's past affects their...

- **Speech** (e.g. someone who once commanded an army might have a loud, booming voice)
- **Relationships** (How fast are they to open up to people? Are they hostile? Naive?)
- **Habits** (e.g. a surgeon might compulsively wash their hands, or someone who lived in a dangerous area might hold their belongings close and habitually check behind their shoulders while walking at night.)



# RELATIONSHIPS

# WRITING THEIR RELATIONSHIPS

We learn a lot about a character from the way they interact with others. For example, if a character sucks up to their boss but treats their subordinates with contempt, readers will see them as fake, unlikeable, and perhaps a bit of a boot-licker.

Relationships can also be a great source of juicy conflict. It doesn't just have to be a romantic. A friendship betrayal, a disappointed parent, or a back-stabbing colleague can provide plenty of drama.

Relationships a character may have had throughout their life could have turned them into the person they are today. A betrayal could have made them slow to trust. A talented older sibling might make them insecure or desperate to prove themselves.

Let's dive deeper.

# WHEN WRITING A RELATIONSHIP...

- Convey nuances through dialogue and body language (e.g. a jealous glance, a forced smile, belly-laughter).
- Reflect on the ways in which one relationship contrasts or parallels another in the story.
- Consider the character's needs and desires within the context of the relationship. Are these needs being met?
- Plan how the relationship changes as the characters evolve & develop.
- Consider the ultimate resolution or trajectory of the relationship& whether it will evolve, deepen, or break apart.
- Know which "off-screen" relationships shaped your character (e.g. parents or an ex-lover who may not feature in the story)

Remember that key relationships should serve a purpose in the overall narrative and contribute to character development.

# PLATONIC RELATIONSHIPS

Describe your character's closest friend

What role do they play in each other's lives?

Describe their dynamic



# ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

Describe your character's love interest

What role do they play in each other's lives?

Describe their dynamic

(If you have the Romance Workbook, perhaps have a flick through it at this point to get some ideas)

# WRITING RELATIONSHIPS

Which person's loss would cause your character to fall apart? Why?

Who is the most important person in their lives?  
Is this importance justified?

Is there someone that they misjudge? How did this come to be?

# WRITING THEIR CULTURE

Whether you're talking about a fantasy kingdom or your local suburb, every place has its own unique set of customs, norms, and traditions. Although your character might not be aware of it, they will be influenced in some way by their culture.

Your character most likely interacts with the world around them. They probably have some idea of what is expected of them in their culture.



Whether your character is a proud outsider or desperate to fit in, spend some time exploring their relationship with their culture and the people around them.

TIP: If you're also using the Worldbuilding Workbook, now might be an ideal time to have a peek at the Culture section.

# WRITING THEIR CULTURE

**Describe your character's culture(s)**

Give information about norms, customs, expectations, & taboos, were relevant.

**In which ways (if any) does your character conform to their culture? Do they enjoy doing this?**

**In which ways (if any) does your character stray from their culture? Why do they do this?**

# TRAITS



# SHOWING THEIR TRAITS

Pick a nice mix of good and bad traits, and think how you can demonstrate these traits. Think of actions your character might do that demonstrate these traits (e.g. clumsy characters might trip often, break things, spill food down their clothes, etc.)

Even if you don't end up using all these in your story, it can be helpful to have a bank of action beats you can pull from as you're writing.

Remember, it's more convincing to **show** a trait than to just insist "she was really kind/clumsy/shallow" etc.



# BANK OF GOOD TRAITS

Accessible	Clean	Efficient
Active	Clear-headed	Elegant
Adaptable	Clever	Eloquent
Admirable	Compassionate	Empathetic
Adventurous	Confident	Energetic
Agreeable	Considerate	Enthusiastic
Alert	Cooperative	Faithful
Amiable	Courageous	Farsighted
Appreciative	Creative	Firm
Aspiring	Cultured	Flexible
Athletic	Curious	Focused
Attractive	Daring	Forgiving
Balanced	Debonair	Forthright
Benevolent	Dedicated	Freethinking
Brilliant	Dignified	Friendly
Calm	Direct	Fun-loving
Capable	Disciplined	Gallant
Caring	Discreet	Generous
Charismatic	Dutiful	Gentle
Charming	Earnest	Genuine
Cheerful	Educated	Hardworking

# BANK OF GOOD TRAITS

Helpful	Objective	Rational
Heroic	Observant	Realistic
Honest	Open	Reflective
Humble	Optimistic	Relaxed
Humorous	Organised	Reliable
Idealistic	Original	Resourceful
Imaginative	Passionate	Respectful
Incorruptible	Patient	Responsible
Independent	Peaceful	Romantic
Insightful	Perceptive	Scholarly
Intelligent	Persuasive	Scrupulous
Intuitive	Playful	Secure
Inventive	Polished	Selfless
Invulnerable	Popular	Self-reliant
Kind	Practical	Self-sufficient
Logical	Precise	Sensitive
Lovable	Principled	Shrewd
Loyal	Profound	Skilful
Mature	Protective	Sociable
Modest	Punctual	Sophisticated
Neat	Purposeful	Spontaneous

# BANK OF GOOD TRAITS

Steadfast	Tasteful	Vivacious
Stoic	Teacherly	Warm
Strong	Thorough	Well-read
Studioius	Tidy	Wise
Suave	Tolerant	Witty
Subtle	Trusting	
Sweet	Upright	
Sympathetic	Urbane	

Choose carefully, and try to balance these out with your negative traits - nobody is all good or all bad. Even your villain should have good traits and your heroes should have some flaws. This makes them more realistic and (more importantly) more interesting.

The traits you display can depend on the people you're with. Some people are warm with their partner but otherwise very aloof.

# BANK OF NEUTRAL TRAITS

Ambitious	High-spirited	Solitary
Artful	Impressionable	Stern
Boyish	Intense	Strict
Breezy	Maternal	Stylish
Businesslike	Mellow	Subjective
Casual	Modern	Surprising
Cerebral	Moralistic	Soft
Chummy	Mystical	Solemn
Competitive	Noncommittal	Tough
Cute	Obedient	Unaggressive
Dreamy	Old-fashioned	Unambitious
Droll	Outspoken	Unchanging
Dry	Paternalistic	Undemanding
Earthy	Political	Unfathomable
Effeminate	Private	Unhurried
Emotional	Proud	Uninhibited
Enigmatic	Pure	Unpatriotic
Experimental	Religious	Unreligious
Formal	Sarcastic	Unsentimental
Frugal	Self-conscious	Whimsical
Glamorous	Solemn	

# BANK OF BAD TRAITS

Abrasive	Coarse	Difficult
Abrupt	Cold	Dirty
Aimless	Complacent	Discourteous
Aloof	Conceited	Dishonest
Amoral	Condemnatory	Disloyal
Angry	Conformist	Disorderly
Anxious	Contemptible	Disorganised
Apathetic	Cowardly	Disrespectful
Arrogant	Crafty	Disruptive
Artificial	Crass	Dogmatic
Barbaric	Criminal	Domineering
Bland	Critical	Dull
Blunt	Crude	Egocentric
Boisterous	Cruel	Envious
Brutal	Cynical	Erratic
Calculating	Deceitful	Expedient
Callous	Demanding	Extreme
Cantankerous	Dependent	Faithless
Careless	Desperate	Fanatical
Childish	Destructive	Fatalistic
Clumsy	Devious	Fawning



# BANK OF BAD TRAITS

Fearful	Inconsiderate	Moody
Fickle	Indecisive	Morbid
Fiery	Indulgent	Naive
Foolish	Inhibited	Narcissistic
Forgetful	Insecure	Neglectful
Frightening	Insensitive	Neurotic
Frivolous	Insincere	Nihilistic
Gloomy	Insulting	Obnoxious
Graceless	Intolerant	Obsessive
Greedy	Irrational	Opportunistic
Grim	Irresponsible	Paranoid
Gullible	Irritable	Passive
Hateful	Lazy	Pedantic
Haughty	Malicious	Perverse
Hedonistic	Mannerless	Petty
Hesitant	Meddlesome	Phlegmatic
Hostile	Melancholic	Pompous
Ignorant	Messy	Possessive
Impatient	Miserable	Power-hungry
Impractical	Miserly	Predatory
Imprudent	Misguided	Prejudiced

# BANK OF BAD TRAITS

Presumptuous	Sloppy	Aggressive
Pretentious	Sly	Bigoted
Prim	Sordid	Bitter
Procrastinating	Stupid	Bullying
Puritanical	Submissive	Chaotic
Reactionary	Superficial	Clingy
Regimental	Suspicious	Condescending
Repressed	Tactless	Corrupt
Resentful	Tasteless	Delusional
Rigid	Tense	Dismissive
Rowdy	Thieving	Envious
Sadistic	Thoughtless	Harsh
Sanctimonious	Timid	Hypocritical
Scheming	Treacherous	Impulsive
Scornful	Troublesome	Incompetent
Secretive	Unappreciative	Inflexible
Sedentary	Uncaring	Ruthless
Selfish	Uncharitable	Lethargic
Self-indulgent	Undisciplined	Corrupt
Shallow	Unstable	Self-destructive
Single-minded	Weak-willed	Whiny

# SHOWING THEIR TRAITS

# WRITING THEIR FLAWS

Flaws create internal and external conflicts within the character's journey and allow them to develop.

You can think about flaws in two key ways:

- **Weakness:** The conventional types of thing you may think of when you hear the word 'flaw' (e.g. greed, jealousy, rudeness)
- **Virtue gone too far:** For example, confidence is great but it can easily tip into arrogance. Other examples include assertiveness vs. aggression, honesty vs. brutal harshness, independence vs. self-isolating behaviour.

With the latter, characters may not even realise that these traits are flaws. This means part of their arc might be realising that something is wrong and needs to change.

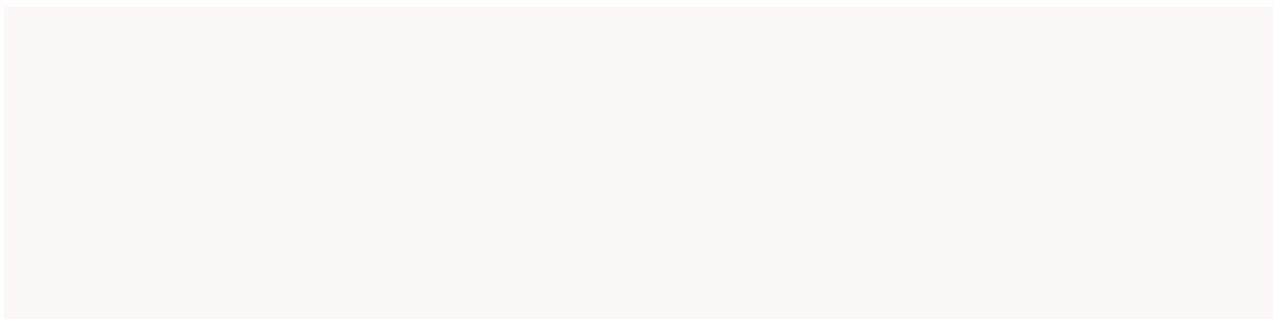
# WRITING THEIR FLAWS

FLAW	HOW DOES IT HOLD THEM BACK?

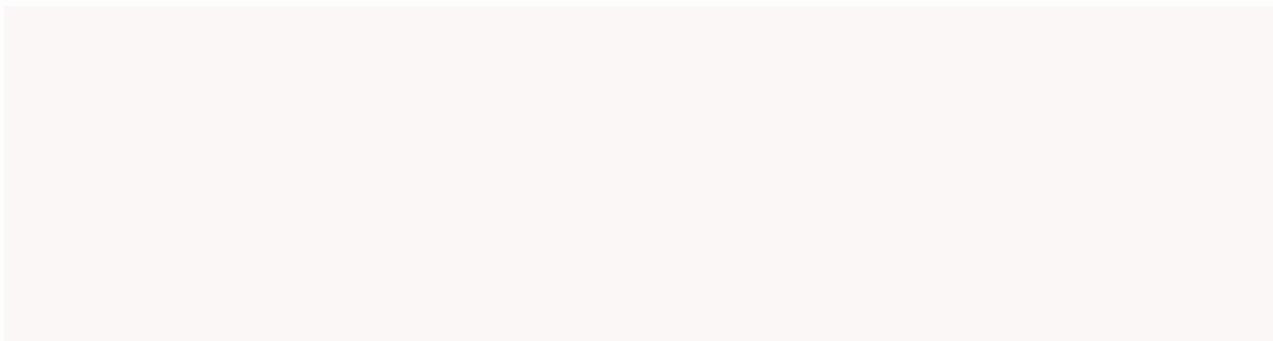


# WRITING THEIR FLAWS

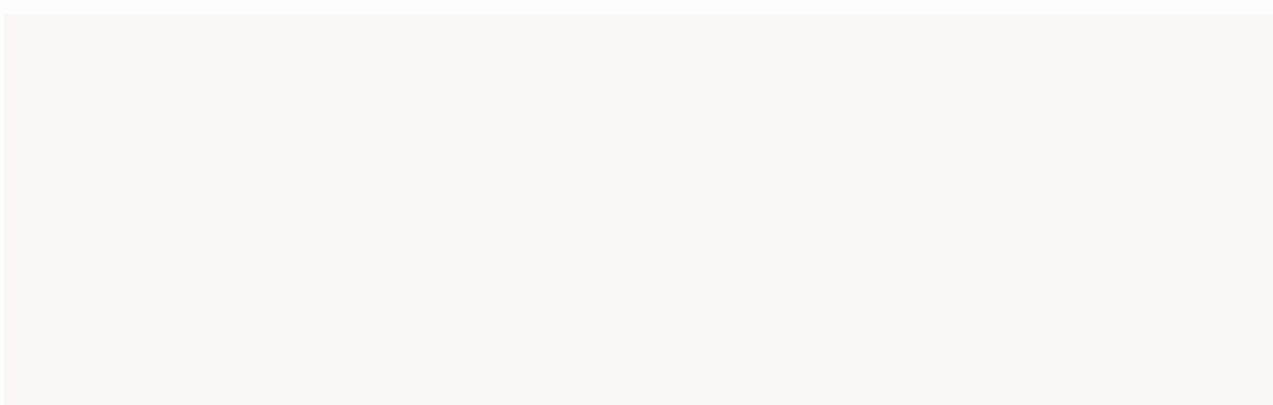
Are there any flaws they have that they don't see or refuse to acknowledge?



How do their flaws affect their relationships with those around them?



How do their flaws affect their ability to get what they want?



# APPEARANCE

# HOW TO DESCRIBE THEIR APPEARANCE

Which one of these girls do you think is vain?



You can't judge a book by its cover, but based on appearance alone, the first girl has more traits that could indicate vanity.

- Her hair is long and flowing, indicating she **spends time** caring for it
- Her dress is more **complicated**, hinting that she might know or care about style
- The excessive detailing on the dress could even mirror a **frivolous** personality

# HOW TO DECIDE THEIR APPEARANCE

Certain physical traits can be used to communicate things about your character.

Someone round-faced and wide-eyed would read as more innocent and naive than someone with beady eyes and thin lips.

This is because readers tend to make assumptions about characters based on their looks.



You can use this as **quick shorthand** to describe side-characters efficiently, or you could **subvert this** by making readers think a character is one way and then revealing their true nature to be very different.

Let's explore these techniques...



# CHOOSING THEIR APPEARANCE

Remember, this is just guidance for visual shorthand.

You can play with expectations or subvert them.

TRAIT	VISUAL SHORTHAND
Cold	Distant gaze, minimalistic and sleek clothing, an air of detachment. monochromatic, sharp and structured silhouettes, a restrained and composed approach to hair and clothes, smile does not reach the eyes.
Warm	Earthy colours, cosy fabrics (e.g. wool cardigan), inviting smile, open and welcoming body language with big gestures, wide/sparkling eyes
Bookish	Intense and focused gaze, comfortable and practical clothing, unpretentious approach to fashion and hair, can be tidy or dishevelled, hunched posture
Dreamy	Flowing clothing, eccentric jewellery (like charms, whimsical earrings, etc.), whimsical patterns such as stars, moons, or floral motifs, ethereal fabrics (organza, silk), whistful gaze



# CHOOSING THEIR APPEARANCE

Remember, this is just guidance for visual shorthand.  
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TRAIT	VISUAL SHORTHAND
Fretful	Chronically furrowed brow, disheveled clothing, fidgety and restless movements, messy and unkempt hair, dark circles under the eyes, gaunt
Adventurous	Practical clothing, sturdy footwear, tan or weather-beaten skin, possibly scars from adventurers, rugged, sun-bleached or windblown hair, or hair worn in a practical style (e.g. buzzed, ponytail) calloused and strong hands.
Seductive	Slow movements, form-fitting or well-cut clothing, deep and rich colours, fabrics that drape or cling, intense gaze, may sit languidly
Conniving	Shrewd and calculating eyes, sleek clothing and hair, clean lines, neutral or dark colours, well-groomed, an air of poise, structured clothing



# CHOOSING THEIR APPEARANCE

Remember, this is just guidance for visual shorthand.  
You can play fo expectations or subvert them.

TRAIT	VISUAL SHORTHAND
Naive, sweet, childlike	Round face, rosy cheeks, doe eyes, rosebud lips, short stature, impish, may wear pastels, ribbons, or florals
Serious, grim	Thin lips, wears dark/simple clothing, stiff-backed, pallid complexion
Introverted, shy	Hunched posture, plain clothes, dark hair, sunless skin, sheepish smile, hesitant or fumbling gestures, hairstyle partially covers face
Artistic, ditzy, airheaded	Long/thin fingers, poor posture, chaotic sense of dress, messy hair from absent-minded habits, trimmed nails, paint/ink-stained clothes
Wealthy	Tailored/expensive clothes, well-nourished, manicured nails, expensive clothes, tan if travel is a display of wealth like in the modern day UK and US or pale in cultures where tans indicate field labour.

# HOW TO DECIDE THEIR APPEARANCE

Your character's lifestyle and circumstances impact their appearance. Here are some examples of how to convey this:

PREVIOUS LIFE EXPERIENCE	VISUAL SHORTHAND
Courtesan, cares a lot about maintaining appearance	Perfectly filed nails, rouged lips/cheeks, nice clothes, immaculate hair
Farmer, lived a rough life filled with harsh outdoor labour	Calloused hands, a tan that ends above the elbows, muscled from working

Discrepancy in appearance can show a bit about their history too. A knight can have some physical traits of a farmer to show a humble background. A pauper can wear threadbare but once-expensive clothes to show they were once rich, or perhaps a thief.



# EXAMPLES OF JOBS AFFECTING APPEARANCE

Remember, this is just guidance for visual shorthand. Of course, it shouldn't be used to generalise real people.

JOB (MODERN)	VISUAL SHORTHAND
Teacher	At work they may wear comfortable and practical clothing that allows them to move freely.
Surf Instructor	May have a tan and/or freckles from working outdoors. May have saltwater curls or developed muscles from doing such a physical job.
Soldier	May wear patriotic symbols, good posture, may have cropped or practical hair and a strong body.
Writer	May have hunched posture due to typing, or spectacles due to screen use. May be pallid from time spent working indoors.

Use these examples as guidance when it comes to considering how **your** character's job influences their appearance, if at all. They're quite specific in order to give a wide spread of examples.



# EXAMPLES OF JOBS AFFECTING APPEARANCE

Remember, this is just guidance for visual shorthand.  
You can play with expectations or subvert them.

JOB (HISTORICAL)	VISUAL SHORTHAND
Royal / Nobleman	Regal attire coloured with rare, expensive dyes (e.g. purple), ornate jewellery, dignified posture, graceful and deliberate movements, well- nourished, often pale from lack of working outdoors
Peasant	Worn clothing, made from coarse and practical fabrics with inexpensive dyes (earthy colours). Clothes may show signs of being mended many times. Calloused hands, tan & stooped posture from outdoor work.
Warrior	Armour or battle-worn clothing, confident posture, well-built and muscular physique, battle scars, calloused hands, alert gaze, powerful and purposeful movements
Rouge / Thief	Quick and agile movements, nimble physique, observant gaze, clothing that can conceal weapons/loot

# WORDS TO DESCRIBE THEIR APPEARANCE

Beautiful	Radiant	Lithe
Handsome	Glowing	Lanky
Attractive	Sleek	Graceful
Stunning	Spiky	Wispy
Elegant	Tousled	Willowy
Striking	Disheveled	Thin
Radiant	Unkempt	Delicate
Angelic	Neat	Sturdy
Alluring	Groomed	Hardy
Dazzling	Well-kept	Firm
Glamorous	Stylish	Unyielding
Sophisticated	Athletic	Gritty
Exquisite	Muscular	Rough
Delicate	Powerful	Harsh
Tempting	Fit	Weathered
Magnetic	Brawny	Aged
Dreamy	Burly	Mature
Ethereal	Rugged	Youthful
Heavenly	Strong	Fresh
Breathtaking	Lean	Lively
Captivating	Toned	Vibrant
Irresistible	Shapely	Healthy
Flawless	Curvaceous	Spry
Impeccable	Petite	Toothy
Pristine	Scrawny	Doe-eyed



# WORDS TO DESCRIBE THEIR APPEARANCE

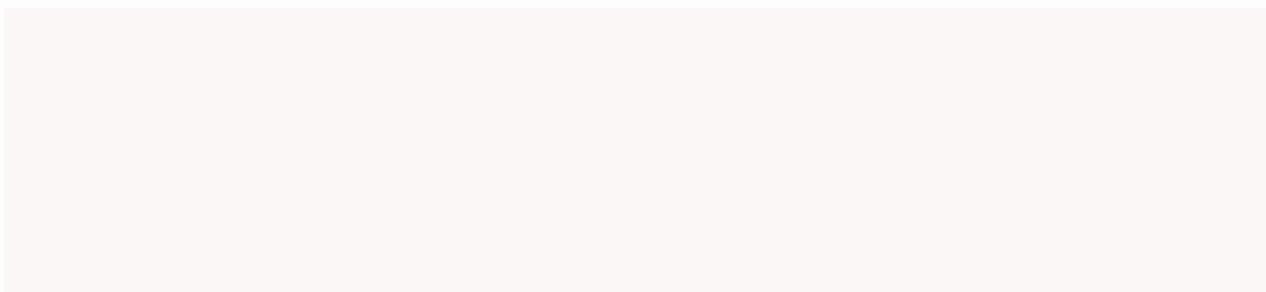
Blemished	Wiry	Weather-beaten
Blotchy	Balding	Grizzled
Bulbous	Chiseled	Scarred
Crooked	Clean-shaven	Rough-hewn
Gnarled	Cleft-chinned	Stocky
Greasy	Cowlicked	Broad
Haggard	Freckled	Svelte
Stubby	Sunburnt	Opulent
Sunken	Sunkissed	Refined
Taut	Gaunt	Decadent
Angular	Ashen	Flashy
Bony	Pallid	Dapper
Bulky	Ghostly	Ornate
Dimpled	Ghostly	Lavish
Fleshy	Tanned	Brutish
Gaunt	Glowing	Hulking
Hunched	Stubbled	Mighty
Slouched	Button-nosed	Herculean
Jowly	Wide-eyed	Robust
Knobbly	Stately	Arthritic
Portly	Towering	Grisly
Rail-thin	Statuesque	Brutish
Squat	Waxen	Auburn
Stout	Ruddy	Gleaming
Thickset	Fair	Flaxen



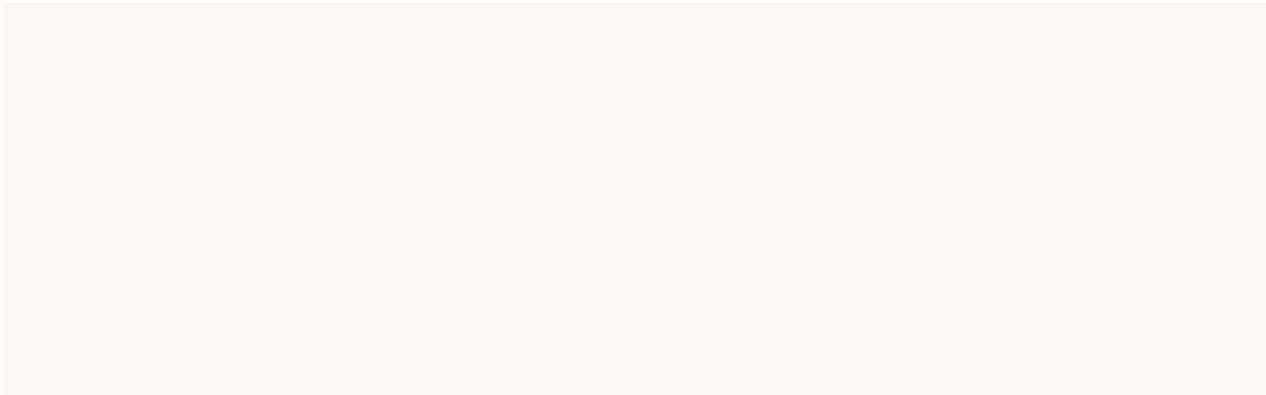
# HOW TO DECIDE THEIR APPEARANCE

What sort of job does your character do, and what does that involve? How does it impact their appearance?

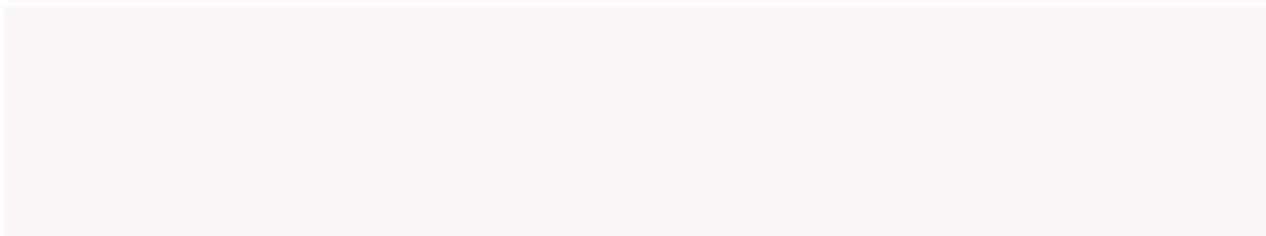
Think about the daily tasks your character does. (E.g. An executioner may have strong arms from the axe, and a pale face from wearing his hood.)



How might your character's personality be conveyed through their appearance?



Will their appearance make the audience think something about this character that isn't true?





# DECIDING THEIR STYLE

Using what we've learned about how appearance can be used as visual shorthand, we can distinguish our characters by giving them a sense of style.

Your character may not have much control over their physical features, but they can **choose** what they wear. This means clothing choices can be used to reveal character information to the audience.

Someone who prioritises function over style might wear comfortable shoes to a party.

Someone who wants to blend in might consciously avoid ostentatious colour or cuts.

You don't have to spend a whole paragraph describing an outfit, but a few key style details can communicate a lot of information to your readers.





# TIPS TO DESCRIBE CLOTHES

## Use Sensory Language

If a scene calls for it, you can bring attention to a clothing choice by evoking the senses (e.g. the rustle of tulle skirts, the smell of old leather boots, the scratchiness / warmth of tweed, etc.)

## Use Movement

Call attention to a clothing choice via movement (e.g. the swish of skirts, or someone loosening a silk tie, or an impractically long coat's hem dragging in the mud)

## Use Context

A natural way to mention clothing is via context. Is someone overdressed for a party in their massive ballgown? Is it too hot for their favourite overalls and work boots?



## Use Colour

Symbolism can be a great way to convey character traits or plot information.



# HOW TO USE COLOUR SYMBOLISM

Of course a character isn't going to think, "Hm I'm going to wear a green dress today because I'm feeling envious." Colour symbolism is for your readers' benefit.

By using colour symbolism, you can provide subtle hints about a character's personality, emotions, or story arc.

The use of colour symbolism in clothing is an additional layer of character-building that can be used to complement all the other techniques you're using. While it's optional, it can evoke specific emotions in readers, causing them to make certain assumptions about a character's personality or current emotional state. You can also use it to create and subvert expectations of a character.

Remember that colour associations vary between cultures and countries. For example, in some countries white is the popular mourning colour, whereas many Western countries associate black with mourning instead.



# HOW TO USE COLOUR **SYMBOLISM**

COLOUR	SYMBOLISM	CHARACTER TRAITS
Red	Passion, power, energy, anger, lust	Assertive, passionate, aggressive,
Blue	Calmness, trust, sadness	Introspective, serene, melancholy, intellectual
Yellow	Happiness, optimism	Cheerful, creative, bubbly, eccentric, warm
Green	Nature, growth, greed, envy	Earthy, nurturing, OR envious, conniving
Black	Mystery, elegance, death, grief	Authoritative, evil, sophisticated, brooding
White	Purity, innocence, clean/sterile	Pure, honest, naive, uncreative
Purple	Royalty, ambition	Regal, powerful, rich
Pink	Love, gentleness, femininity	Affectionate, youthful, kind, playful/silly
Orange	Enthusiasm, warmth	Energetic, extroverted, adventurous, fiery



# DECIDING THEIR STYLE

Describe your character's style in the following situations and occasions...

Everyday Clothing

Work / Academic  
Clothing

Formal Clothing

Other

Key items they  
never take off /  
comfort items

# VOICE

# HOW SHOULD THEY SPEAK?

The way your character speaks can communicate a lot about them.

- Do they use **contractions**? Most people do, when speaking naturally. By avoiding them (can't → cannot) you can create a stiff, unnatural, formal air, such as that of a **robot**, or an **ancient spirit**.
- Do they use **slang**? A high-born lady might not even know what slang words mean, whereas a soldier or a dockworker might use rude words.
- Are they **eloquent**? Do they word themselves well and use a wide vocabulary? This could show that they are **well-educated**.
- Are there words would that they **would never use**? Why?





# HOW SHOULD THEY SPEAK? \*

The words your character uses can show their beliefs and histories.

- Do they **blaspheme**? If they curse the gods, they might not be very pious.
- Do they use **terminology** specific to a field? A soldier might still be stuck using militaristic terms after they leave the arms. (Be reasonable with this though, don't have a doctor going "My diagnosis is that it's teatime.")
- Are they **prejudiced**? Do they use gendered insults, or use in-universe slurs such as Mudblood in Harry Potter? (**Be careful** with this one, and do some research).

Use this to answer the following:

# HOW TO DESCRIBE THEIR VOICE

You can use a character's voice to emphasise their traits, as certain types of voices are often associated with certain traits. For example...

Voice	Associated Traits
Booming	Boisterous, authoritative, powerful
Shrill	Annoying, high-strung, dramatic
Gravelly	Gritty, weathered, experienced
Monotone	Boring, unemotional, detached
Nasal	Nerdy, fussy, stuffy
Hushed	Secretive, mysterious, cautious
Squeaky	Childlike, fearful
Quiet	Reserved, introspective, shy, nervous
Deep	Commanding, authoritative
Smooth	Charming, persuasive, seductive
Melodious	Enchanting, musical, enchanting



# HOW TO DESCRIBE THEIR VOICE

You can use a character's voice to emphasise their traits, as certain types of voices are often associated with certain traits. For example...

Voice	Associated Traits
Whiny	Complaining, needy, annoying
Hoarse	Tired, strained, sick
Lilted	Energetic, cheerful, optimistic
Quivering	Nervous, anxious, insecure
Gruff	Rough, tough, no-nonsense
Silky	Sophisticated, elegant, alluring
Giggly	Flirty, lighthearted, immature
Delicate	Elegant, soft-spoken, vulnerable
Jittery	Nervous, restless, easily startled
Crisp	To-the-point, curt, blunt
Velvety	Charming, seductive, luxurious

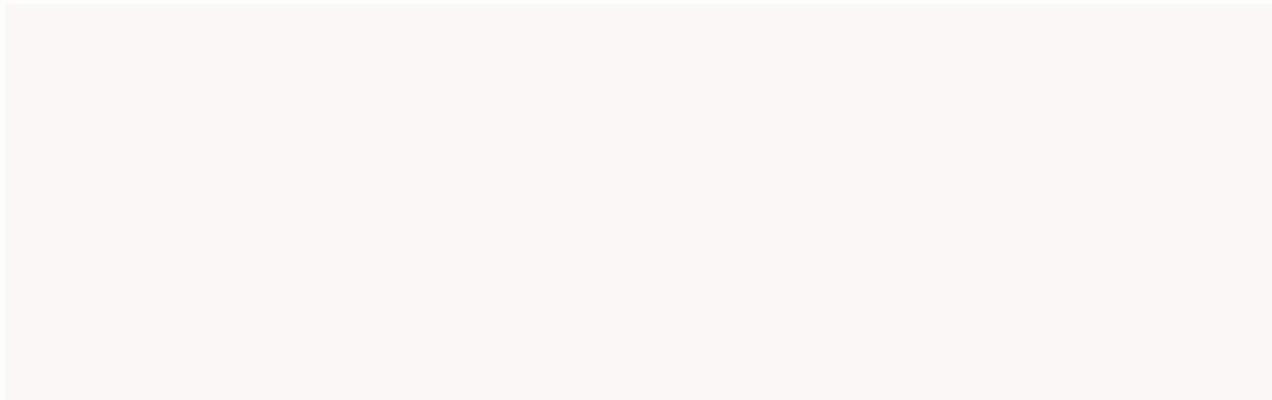
# WORDS TO DESCRIBE THEIR VOICE

Alluring	Engaging	Persuasive
Angelic	Enthralling	Polished
Appealing	Enticing	Powerful
Assured	Ethereal	Precise
Authoritative	Evocative	Profound
Beguiling	Expressive	Pure
Bold	Firm	Refined
Booming	Flowing	Resonant
Calming	Gentle	Robust
Captivating	Graceful	Seductive
Charismatic	Gracious	Silky
Cheerful	Honeyed	Smooth
Clear	Inspiring	Soothing
Commanding	Inviting	Sophisticated
Compelling	Joyful	Spirited
Confident	Lively	Striking
Convincing	Luxurious	Strong
Crisp	Magnetic	Stylish
Deep	Melodic	Suave
Delicate	Mellow	Sweet
Disarming	Mesmerising	Tender
Eloquent	Musical	Thrilling
Enchanting	Nurturing	Trustworthy
Endearing	Passionate	Vibrant
Energising	Peaceful	Warm



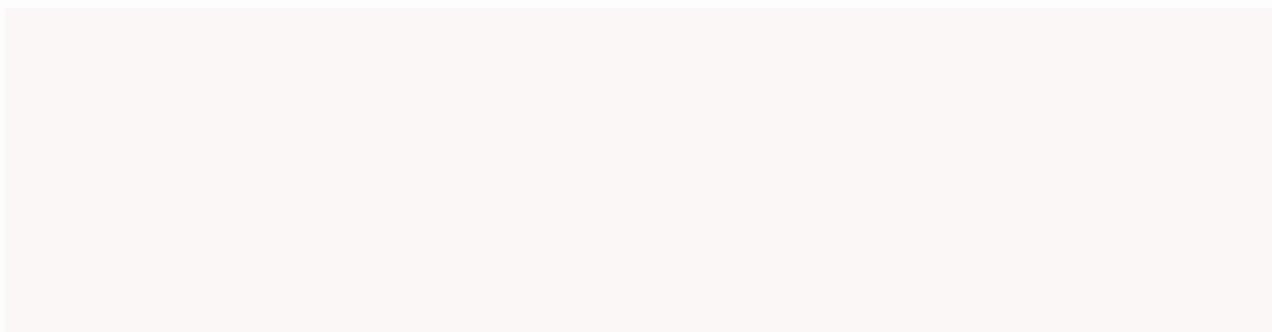
# DEVELOPING A VOICE

How can your character's personality be shown in their speech?

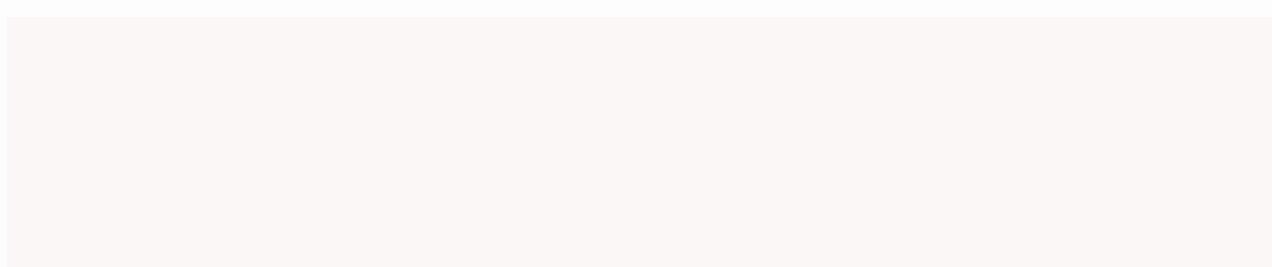


How can your character's history be shown in the way their speech and mannerisms?

Are they educated? Do they use a lot of slang? Do they use medical or military terms in daily life? What's their upbringing?



How does their speech change when they are stressed vs relaxed?



# HABITS & MANNERISMS

# WRITING HABITS & MANNERISMS

The way your character carries themselves will depend based on their emotion and situations.

However, some people are more prone to calm, languid motions, and walk at a leisurely pace, and speak slowly. Others may make chaotic, unpredictable movements, and speak in a fast, excited way.



Even if a character is extremely patient and measured, they might be jumpy and nervous when afraid.

When we decide the mannerisms of a character, we're usually talking about them at their most neutral or comfortable state.

# BANK OF HABITS & MANNERISMS

Tilt head	Flip hair	Squirm in chair
Twirl hair	Swallow often	Stretch often
Jiggle leg	Zone out	Critique others
Play with ring	Chew hair	Nervous laugh
Whistle	Mumbling	Organise items
Smoke	Darting eyes	Yawn
Stutter	Flare nostrils	Check watch
Crack knuckle	Clasp hands	Glance at door
Apologise	Look down	Scratch beard
Salute	Yawn	Rub eyes
Fix hair	Apologise	Pull up socks
Crack neck	Take nightcap	Blow nose
Roll a coin	Read newspaper	Perch
Drum fingers	Switch language	Tug braid
Smooth skirt	Sigh loudly	Fake smile
Cross legs	Jingle keys	Sneer
Squint	Lick lips	Pick at threads
Fix posture	Hum	Stand tall
Pick nails	Pace in thought	Shrink small
Chew lip	Snort-laugh	Chew mints
Gesture lots	Slouch	Always snack

# MANNERISMS & HABITS

Habits can be linked to specific personality traits. For example, a character with a habit of always being punctual may be seen as organised and reliable, perhaps even a bit fussy and high-maintenance. A frequent nail-biter may be read as nervous.

Habits can serve as emotional coping mechanisms. For instance, a character may have a habit of doodling or pacing when feeling stressed. You can use this habit to signal when this character is stressed without having to spell it out.

Habits can evolve, appear, or disappear over time, reflecting a character's (positive or negative) growth. As a character goes through transformative experiences, their habits may shift or new habits may form. For example, a character may develop a soothing habit after a scary experience rattled them.

# WRITING MANNERISMS & HABITS

Here are some ideas and examples of how you can use character habits in your writing...

Habit	Associated Traits/Circumstance
Pacing	Restlessness, anxiety, planning
Nail-biting	Nervousness, stress, insecurity
Organising items	Orderliness, need for control
Checking Phone	Boredom, distraction, loneliness
Biting Lips	Nervousness, anxiety, deep thought
Collecting	Sentimentality, nostalgia
Repeating Phrases	Comfort, anxiety reduction, self-soothing
Fidgeting	Restlessness, agitation, boredom
Cracking Knuckles	Nervousness, tension release
Checking Mirror	Self-consciousness, grooming

# WRITING MANNERISMS & HABITS

What are the recurring habits of the character?

What circumstances or emotions trigger these habits?

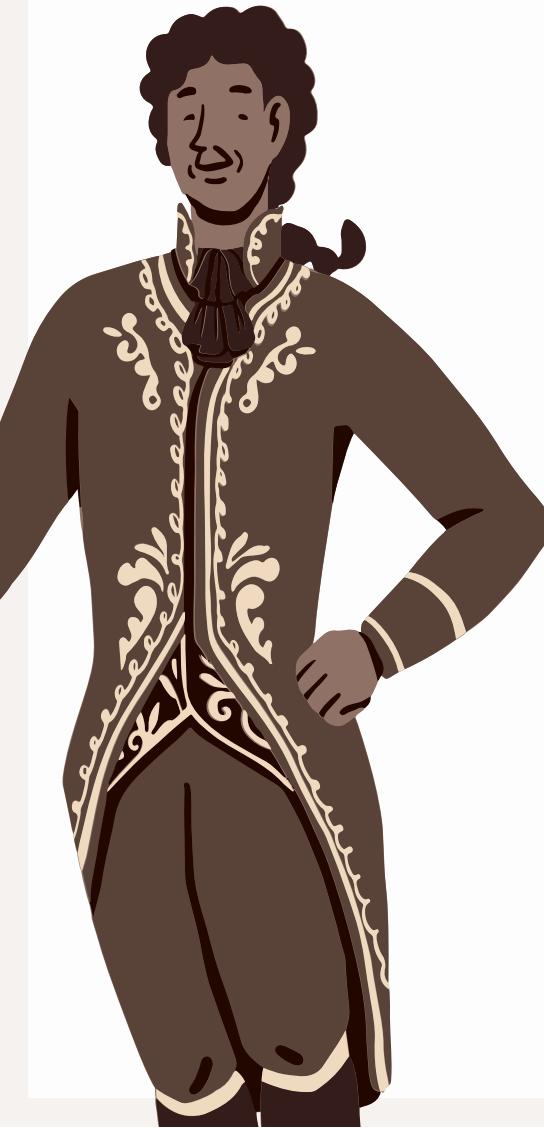
Do the character's habits change over time? How?

# NAMES

# HOW TO CHOOSE NAMES

Before you name your characters, consider the setting.

Your characters names need to reflect the setting. If your book is set in a fantasy world based heavily on 5th century China, you might not want to call your main character Brittany Flowerbomb.



If you're inventing names from scratch, use sounds that mirror the language the characters speak in-universe, if you have one.

Also consider readers' expectations of the time period. For example, Tiffany might be an accurate medieval name but your readers could find it jarring.

# HOW TO CHOOSE NAMES

If you have more than one character, consider giving them names that start with different letters.

Your names need to be distinguishable by people who like to read quickly. It's not a rule, but it can make reading your book a bit smoother.

For example, if you have three characters called Joan, Juan, and John in a scene together, it can get very confusing.

You don't need to do this, but it can reduce any confusion.

Also, if the characters are never in a scene together, this really doesn't even come into play.



# ASSOCIATIONS WITH NAMES

Name associations can help reinforce a character's traits.

Readers might associate a name like Griffin with the characteristics of a griffin (strength, might, etc.) whereas a name like Fey might be associated with their namesake, fairies (daintiness, etc.).

You can use these associations to give readers certain expectations about characters. These expectations may be subverted later, if you wish.

A name like Luna (meaning moon) might be mysterious or magical, traits we associate with the moon. Naming a character Minerva draws an association with the Ancient Roman goddess of war strategy and wisdom. The options are endless.

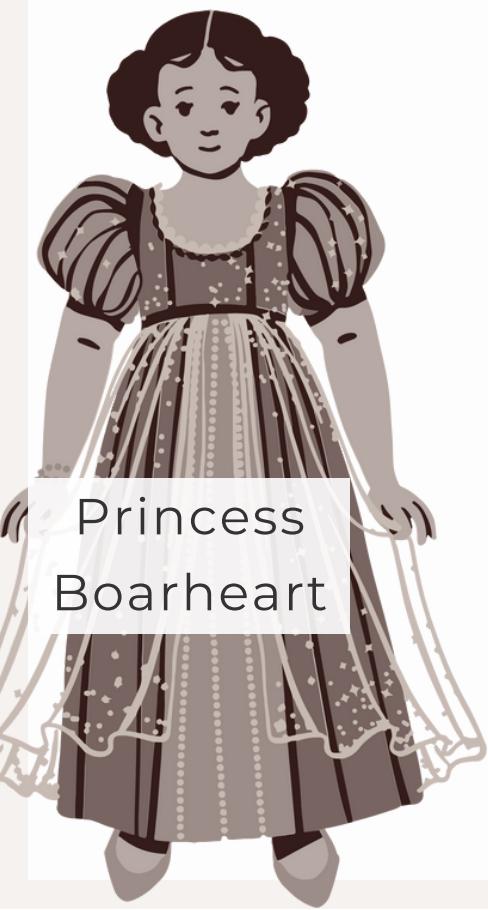
For example, you can draw associations to:

Literary characters	Mythological beasts
Elements	Virtues
Mythological figures	Animals
Bodies of nature	Historical figures
Colours	Weather

# HOW TO CHOOSE NAMES

Names can be used to emphasise traits of a character (by matching them - i.e. a gruff warrior called Boarheart) or they can contrast the character for comedic effect (like giving that same name to a Princess).

This comedic technique works better for side-characters, or in more lighthearted stories. You may want to avoid this for the menacing villain in a serious drama.



Name generators may be best avoided by those looking to name their characters with intention.

Instead, have a look at **censuses**, **baby name websites**, or these resources:

- <https://www.pinterest.co.uk/schoolofplot/character-names-for-writers/>
- [s-gabriel.org/names/index.shtml](http://s-gabriel.org/names/index.shtml)

# CHOOSING NICKNAMES

Depending on how well people know your character, they might call them a different name. Colleagues might use their surname, for example, or they might use a nickname.

In real life, people may have 10s of nicknames. However, for the sake of your readers you might want to maintain some consistency and use nicknames sparingly.

What nicknames (if any) does your character have, and who calls them by this nickname?

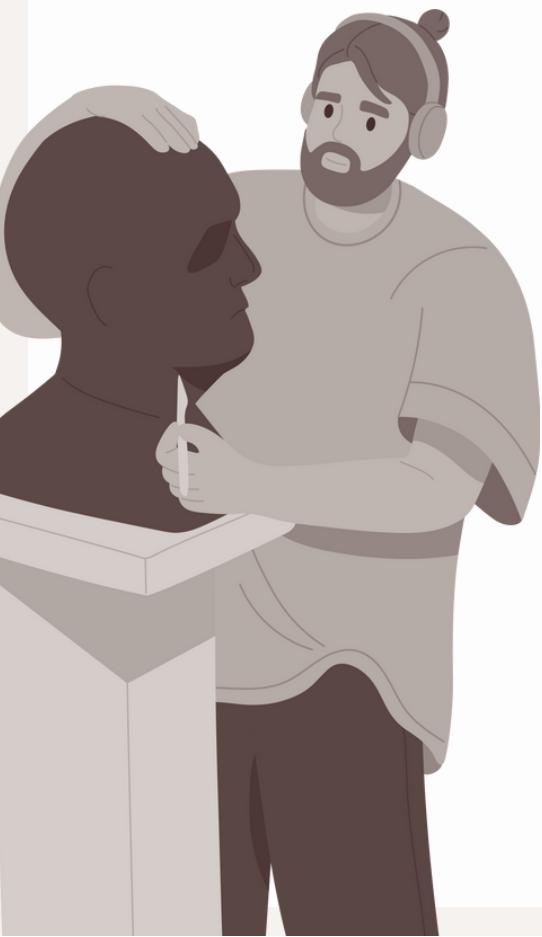
How does your character feel about their nickname?

# OCCUPATION

# CHOOSING THEIR OCCUPATION

Your character's line of work will give them skills, opportunities, and perspectives that make them unique.

Jobs can also affect how you look (e.g. a lumberjack might have calloused hands or a dentist might have poor posture), how you act (e.g. as mentioned before, surgeons might compulsively wash their hands or keep their nails short), and the sort of information you would know.



Think about what your character does for a living (or if they're a student, focus on their aspirations and the tasks involved in their daily studies). Think about which traits and societal pressures might lead people into certain fields.

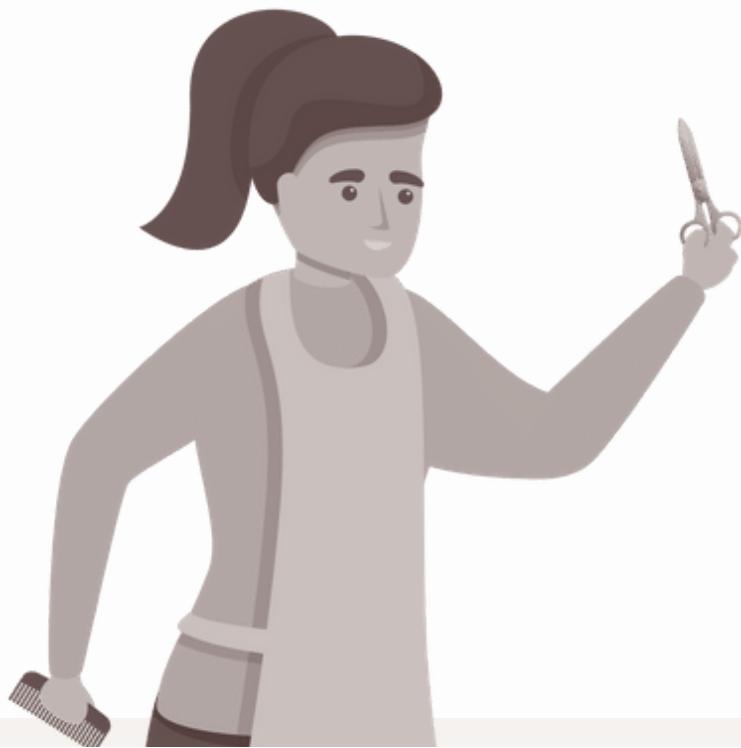
# BANK OF JOB IDEAS

Writer	Psychologist
Graphic Designer	Research Scientist
Proofreader	Statistician
Translator	Surgeon
Web Developer	Epidemiologist
Audio Editor	Neurologist
Animator	Robotics Engineer
Virtual Assistant	Dental nurse
Researcher	Tattoo Artist
Photographer	Piercer
Archivist	Bodyguard
Librarian	Private Investigator
Museum Curator	
Tax Preparer	
Accountant	
Technical Writer	
Financial Analyst	
Spiritualist	
Bookshop owner	
Investment Banker	



# BANK OF JOB IDEAS

Bounty Hunter	Magazine Columnist
Stunt Double	Interior Designer
Barista	Hairstylist
Bouncer	Chef
Hostage Negotiator	Perfumer
Toy Designer	Jewellery Designer
Illustrator	Attorney
Cake Decorator	Diplomat
Florist	Real Estate Agent
Pet Groomer	Fashion Designer
Wedding planner	Art Curator
Makeup Artist	Wealth Manager
	Sommelier
	Yacht Captain
	Rancher
	Forester
	Fisherman
	Park Ranger
	Wildlife Biologist
	Horse Trainer



# BANK OF JOB IDEAS

- |                      |                     |
|----------------------|---------------------|
| Logger               | Actor/Actress       |
| Carpenter            | Film Director       |
| Blacksmith           | Screenwriter        |
| Weaver               | Cinematographer     |
| Potter               | Film Editor         |
| Beekeeper            | Costume Designer    |
| Cheese Maker         | Animal trainer      |
| Baker                | Hair Stylist        |
| Winemaker            | Production Designer |
| Cider Maker          | Casting Director    |
| Herbalist            | Publicist           |
| Locksmith            | Red carpet host     |
| Fast Food Worker     |                     |
| Mail Carrier         |                     |
| Brewer               |                     |
| Housekeeper          |                     |
| Call Centre Operator |                     |
| Delivery Driver      |                     |
| Bartender            |                     |
| Waiter/Waitress      |                     |
| Bank teller          |                     |



# BANK OF JOB IDEAS

Fashion model	Welder
Ghostwriter	Miner
Ethical hacker	Construction worker
Art therapist	Boxer
Barista	Police detective
Paramedic	Undercover agent
Ironworker	Safe cracker
Demolition Expert	Steelworker
Plumber	Electrician



TIP: If you're writing a story set in a real location, look on local job pages for ideas!



# HISTORICAL OR FANTASY JOBS

Fisherman	Blacksmith
Cook	Alchemist
Baker	Midwife
Candlemaker	Leatherworker
Spinner	Miller
Potter	Butcher
Glassblower	Brewer
Armorer	Innkeeper
Tinker	Carpenter
Seamstress	Mason
Advisor	Scribe
Stablehand	Herald
Dragon tamer	Herbalist
Apprentice	Merchant
Enchantress	Cartographer
Beast hunter	Falconer
Necromancer	Jester
Conjurer	Troubadour
Gatekeeper	Knight
Chronomancer	Memory Keeper
Curse-breaker	Archer



# WRITING THEIR OCCUPATION

What do they do?	
Why did they choose this job?	
Their opinion of their job	
Would they change their job? To what?	
What unique knowledge does their job give them?	
What would they sacrifice for a career boost?	
Which traits help them in this job?	
Does it affect their appearance?	
Does it affect their vocab?	

# CHARACTER ARC

# CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

Your protagonist starts off wanting something (their goal). Then they face external and internal challenges that stand in the way of their goal. These conflicts should be significant and force the character to confront their flaws and limitations.

This change should be gradual. The growth should feel authentic and consistent with their established personality and experiences.

Conclude the character arc by showing how your character has changed and how they have achieved (or adjusted) their initial goal. Ensure that their growth feels earned and satisfying to the reader.

When you are filling in this section, you may benefit from referring back to the first chapter from time to time.

# CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

Describe your character at the start of the story

Describe your character at the end of the story



# CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

What could have caused this change? Which events?

How do you demonstrate this change? How does it manifest in the character and affect them?

# CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

What are the consequences of their change?

What are some consistent parts of your character that do not change throughout the story? (e.g. humour)

# TIPS TO WRITE A CHARACTER ARC

- Whether the character achieves their original goal or finds a new purpose, the **resolution should feel earned**. This means they need to work (and maybe suffer a bit) to get their happy ending, if they get one.
- Show **incremental changes** so the transformation doesn't feel too jarring and convenient.
- You **don't need** to conclude the arc with a character turning into a perfect person.
- Let them make decisions and take risks throughout the story. Then when they mess up **it'll be their own fault**, pushing them to change and develop.
- Put them in situations that force them to **confront** their weaknesses and try to overcome them, or situations that force them to confront a fundamental mistruth that they harbour.
- **Supporting characters** can provide guidance, challenge the protagonist, and serve as mirrors on this journey.

# CHARACTER SHEETS

Now that you have explored your character, fill in these character sheets for easy reference. If you get stuck while writing, you can look back at these sheets to see what your character wants, and what their next move might be. Skip any questions you want, and repeat this section for as many characters as you want.

*CHARACTER NAME*

Role in story	
Name Meaning	
Nickname	
Age	
Ethnicity/Race	
Birthplace	
Place of upbringing	
Current residence	
Religion	
Relationship status	
Wealth status	
Closest friend	
Languages spoken	
Health status	

<p><b>Goal</b></p>	
<p><b>Motivation /</b> <b>'Want'</b></p>	
<p><b>Need</b></p>	

Build / Muscles	
Height	
Hair	
Posture	
Face shape	
Eyes	
Scars	
Skin / Tan	
Grooming	
Prominent features	
Cleanliness	
Clothes	
Dress to be noticed?	
Significant jewellery?	

Accent / Dialect	
Tone of voice (shrill, booming, soft, etc...)	
Mannerisms	
Often-used Slang	
Contractions?	
Vocabulary (limited, eloquent, etc...)	
Walk (measured, quick, etc...)	
Habits	
How carefully do they spend their money?	
Skills	
What are they very bad at?	
Hobbies	

Describe their home	
How does their home/decor reflect their character / circumstances?	
Did they like where they were raised?	
Do they like where they live?	
Job	
Do they like their job? Why/ why not?	

<p>What was their childhood like?</p>	
<p>Do they resent anyone? Why?</p>	

Happiest  
memory

Saddest  
memory

Do they  
feel  
defined by  
any  
specific  
event?

<p>How do they feel about themselves?</p>	
<p>What would they change about themselves, and why don't they?</p>	
<p>How do they think others perceive them? Why?</p>	
<p>What is their biggest regret?</p>	
<p>What is their darkest secret? Would they ever tell anyone?</p>	
<p>What is their biggest fear, and what motivated this fear?</p>	

# HOW ARE THEY PERCEIVED BY...

Their preferred sex	
Other sex (if applicable)	
Friends	
Ex-lovers	
Their parents	
Their children	
Their siblings	
Law enforcers	
Their superiors	
Their underlings	
Religious folk	
Their enemies	
Ex-friends	
The monarchy	

# HOW DO THEY PERCEIVE...

Their preferred sex	
Other sex (if applicable)	
Friends	
Ex-lovers	
Their parents	
Their children	
Their siblings	
Law enforcers	
Their superiors	
Their underlings	
Religious folk	
Their enemies	
Ex-friends	
The monarchy	

## HOW DO THEY REACT TO...

Danger

Surprises

Betrayal

Criticism

Abandonment

# HOW DO THEY REACT TO...

Being offered  
help

Being offered  
forgiveness

Being taken  
care of

Being  
defended

Being told "I  
love you"

## HOW DO THEY REACT TO...

Blackmail

Injustice

Uncertainty

Embarrassment

Temptation

## HOW DO THEY REACT TO...

A bad gift

Unwanted advice

Romantic  
rejection

Workplace/  
academic  
rejection

# HOW DO THEY REACT TO...

Untrue rumours  
about themselves

Compliments  
from strangers

Compliments  
from friends

Compliments  
from family

Compliments  
from someone  
they dislike/hate

# QUICK FACTS

*CHARACTER NAME*

Plays safe

Risk Taker



Analytical

Creative



Rational

Emotional



Organised

Chaotic



Insecure

Confident



Fragile

Resilient



Solitary

Sociable



Honest

Deceptive



Hesitant

Decisive



Sceptical

Trusting



Diligent

Relaxed



Thrifty

Generous



If this workbook was helpful,  
please consider leaving a review!

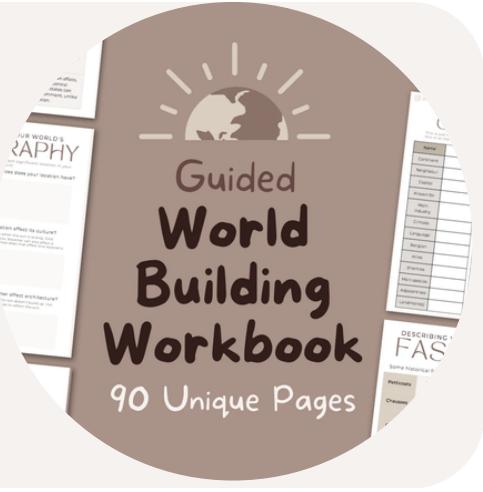


## MORE RESOURCES...

By the end of this 90-page workbook, you will have created a brand new world from scratch, including its history, folklore, traditions, nature, culture, place names, and geography.

Build Worlds

Guided  
**World  
Building  
Workbook**  
90 Unique Pages



Guided  
**Plot Outline  
Workbook**  
Turn your idea into a  
structured outline  
85 unique pages

By the end, of this 85-page workbook, you'll be able to turn your story idea into a structured outline. This workbook guides you through every step of a story, including the messy middle!.

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