

Character Sketch Details

The more you know about your characters, the stronger you'll be able to write them. Even though you won't actually spell out many of the details below into your stories, thoroughly establishing your characters' inner life and back story will greatly inform your writing. The better you know your characters, the more you will be able to make them believable.

Exercise: Respond to the items below with specific details about your main character. Feel free to add your own questions/comments to the list!

1. External/Physical

- a. Gender?
- b. Age? Physical details that reveal his or her age?
- c. Race/ethnicity?
- d. Hair (more than just color)—how does he/she feel about it? How does he/she usually wear it? Why?
- e. Eyes (more than just color)—does she squint when confused? How do his eyes look when he smiles? etc.
- f. Other facial features?
- g. Body type (incl. height, weight, etc.)—how does he/she feel about his/her body? Any impairments? Anything he/she particularly likes about it?
- h. How does he/she walk?
- i. How does he/she stand when someone else corrects or criticizes him/her? Why?
- j. What article is always on this person? What won't he/she leave home without?
- k. What are his/her favorite clothes? Shoes?
- l. What would he/she wear to a concert? What would he/she wear to the ballet?
- m. Give this character one particular physical trait or movement. A nervous habit, etc.
- n. What material possessions does this character have? Which does he/she value the highest?

2. Internal/Relational

- a. Describe this character's family of origin (mother, father, siblings).
- b. What kind of relationship does he/she have with each person. Give details! Explain why.
- c. Does this character have a "family of choice"? Why? Who are they?
- d. Who are this character's closest friends? Why?
- e. What kind of job does he/she have? Is it a just a job, or is it a vocation/career? Is it a passion?
- f. Is your character happy in that job? Why/why not? Is it what he/she envisioned or dreamed of doing?
- g. If not a job, what does your character do? What does he or she aspire to do? What's the dream?
- h. Is your character in a romantic or marital relationship? Describe his or her "significant other." What has drawn them together? What conflicts do they have? What do they have in common? What do they call each other?
- i. Does your character have any children? If so, describe each and his/her relationship with each one.
- j. Any fears, phobias, or obsessions?
- k. What dreams or goals?
- l. Identify three (3) virtues (character strengths).
- m. Identify three (3) defects or character deficiencies (weaknesses).

Next—

3. Write down five (5) different statements that directly characterize your protagonist.

Examples:

- She is meticulous about details.
- He loved his family.
- She was a musician.
- He was sentimental.
- She loves a good joke.
- He is skeptical.
- She never takes “no” for an answer.
- Being a mother, she’s learned patience is a virtue.
- She’s snooty.
- He’s paranoid.
- She is extremely poor.
- He’s afraid.
- She’s so quiet, one would barely know she was in the room.

4. Reveal your character through setting alone.

Character development not only enriches your story but can also lead to ideas for later. This exercise combines two of the biggest components of a story: character and setting. From these two components you can develop themes, plots and other components of a story.

- a. Create a list that describes in detail the place he or she lives. What kind of objects are in the bedroom? What kind of order is the room in? How is the room decorated? etc. Try to create a setting that gives insight into his or her character. Use the character you have been creating for your own story.
(Source: <http://skylarspring.hubpages.com/hub/Breaking-Through-Writers-Block>)
- b. Now write your room description and SHOW the ideas you stated above without ever using direct characterization.
- c. Trade your written description only (not your statements of direct characterization) with someone else. Read it carefully and write down conclusions you can draw about your peer’s character from the description.