**MAKING GOOD CHARACTERS GREAT**

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**1. KNOW YOUR CHARACTER**

“It begins with a character, usually, and once he stands up on his feet and begins to move, all I can do is trot along behind him with a paper and pencil trying to keep up long enough to put down what he says and does.”   
― [**William Faulkner**](https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/3535.William_Faulkner)

**Iceberg theory of character**

Essentially consider your character like an iceberg, where your reader sees the tip (10-20%), and you as the author see and know 100% about the character. Because you see and know the hidden depths of each character. You know how they will act in EVERY situation.

How do get to know your character?

**A.** **START WITH THE FACTS.**

Spend time with your character.

Ask questions.

Fill out a Character Bible.

***Name:***

***Physical Description:***

***Goals:***

***Motivations:***

***Background:***

***Personality:***

***Strengths:***

***Weaknesses:***

***Talents:***

***Habits:***

***Stereotypes:***

***Favorite phrases:***

**B.** ***GO BEYOND THE SURFACE QUESTIONS AND DIG DEEPER.***

What motivates your character?

What topics are they afraid to talk about with anyone?

What is their deepest darkest secret?

What are they afraid to tell their partner, their parents?

**WHY DON’T WE DIG DEEPER INTO OUR CHARACTERS?**

Worried it will take too much time.

Too focused on the storyline.

Maybe we’ve asked the questions and we don’t know the answers, so we move on and hope the reader won’t notice our characters are shallow.

Under a deadline.

When we dig deeper into a character’s background, motivations, goals, behaviors, etc. it helps us to understand them. It gives them depth, life, richness of character and helps us to predict how they will act under varying circumstances.

<http://crystalstranaghan.com/interview-your-characters/>

Tons of links to interview questions:

<http://theathleticnerd.com/screenwriting/getting-to-know-your-characters>

***C. IMAGINE THEM UNDER DIFFERENT CIRCUMSTANCES*.**

We act differently with different people, in different places at different times. We have varying roles in our lives. For example, I’m a mother, a sister, a daughter, a nursery leader, a friend, a writer.

What do our characters act like in different situations?

How will they act when they’re under stress? Do they rise to the task or fall apart?

What would your character do if pushed to their limits or put in a difficult situation, something that’s life or death?

What would he or she do in an impossible situation with high stakes? What would their choice be and what would the consequences of that choice be?

In order to know what your character would do you, you’d have to know them really well.

**2. KNOW THE FINER DETAILS**

As a reader I’m asking, **WHO CARES?** Why should I care about this character? As a writer you’re answering this question.

What is unique/interesting about your character? What makes them stand out? What are they good/bad at?

Uniqueness doesn’t have to be physical, it could be personality/character trait.

Why is the reader going to invest their time and emotion in this character?

**Examples:**

*Harry Potter.* What’s unique: scar on his forehead. Who cares? He’s the “boy who lived”—only one to survive Voldemort’s attack.

*The cat in the hat.* What’s unique: has his striped hat. Who cares? A mischievous talking cat who wrecks the house then cleans it up before mother gets back.

*Tigger.* What’s unique: bounces really high. Who cares? He’s always really happy, and gets into mischief.

<http://www.novel-writing-help.com/creating-fictional-characters.html>

**USE OF SYMBOLS/LOGOS**

Consider while you’re writing how you might be able to use symbols or logos to help strengthen a character or an idea in your story. And to later use those symbols or logos in your book marketing.

In Hunger Games, Katniss Everdeen is given a mockingjay pin. This mockingjay ends up becoming a symbol of hope and rebellion.

Marvel & DC characters are also paired up well with their logos.

S for Superman is actually the Kryptonian symbol for hope.

Captain America’s shield, with the red, white and blue symbolizing America and patriotism.

<http://thewritepractice.com/use-symbolism/>

**3. KNOW HOW YOUR CHARACTER INTERACTS WITH OTHERS**

“Relationships—how people interact with others—reveal character. They're also excuses for [dialogue](https://www.thebalance.com/dialogue-creative-writing-1277045), which break up exposition, offering another way of providing necessary information. Think about who will best help you convey this information, and what kinds of people would realistically be in your character's world in the first place.”

Character Interactions Reveal:

* Character (what are they really like)
* Thoughts
* Motives
* Fears
* Act/React
* Conflict

Try doing a character interaction chart to discover what different characters think of each other. It helps you to know how characters will act/react/speak and it can be useful to see if you have enough conflict in your story.

[**http://writeonsisters.com/writing-craft/character-development-the-interaction-chart/**](http://writeonsisters.com/writing-craft/character-development-the-interaction-chart/)

**4. KNOW WHAT YOUR CHARACTER VALUES**

Knowing what your character values can help you understand his/her motives.

Examples of things you might value:

* Money / Wealth
* Friends/friendship
* Siblings/family
* Getting good grades
* Organization
* Justice
* Compassion
* Ferraris
* The Environment
* Productivity
* Power
* Integrity

Do any of his/her values potentially conflict?

What is your character’s character (how is it revealed) when the things they value or feel passionate about are taken away or threatened?

Placing your character in a situation that forces him to go against his morals, or from achieving the thing they feel most passionate about is one of the best ways to create conflict.

**5. KNOW YOUR CHARACTER’S JOURNEY**

**Character Arc:**

* The way he/she changes/grows, or fails to grow.
* An outline made of 4-7 scenes containing the critical moments along your character’s journey.
* How the character changes physically, emotionally, socially (rule of threes).

**Types of Character Arcs:**

* *Change Arc* *(hero’s journey):* protagonist changes from an unlikely fellow into a savior/hero
* *Growth Arc:* protagonist faces internal opposition (weakness, fear, the past, etc) while facing external opposition and becomes a better person
* *The Fall Arc:* protagonist dooms himself and others as he declines into insanity, immorality or death

Why does the reader care?

<http://www.thecreativepenn.com/2012/10/01/characters/>

<http://blog.janicehardy.com/2013/06/10-traits-of-great-protagonist.html>

**6. KNOW THE TRUTH**

Readers fall in love with your characters because they recognize truth. It’s the truth of their own journey which creates a connection.

When we draw on our own life experiences and emotions, infusing these into our characters and their journeys, our characters become more realistic and believable.

Even if we haven’t exactly experienced what our character is experiencing, we can find parallel events/emotions in our life that we can draw from.

Pay close attention to people, how they act, how they talk, how they move in the world. Sometimes as writers there’s a tendency to retract inside ourselves.

<http://menwithpens.ca/fiction-writing-what-makes-readers-care-about-your-characters/>