



Creating Characters

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Flawed characters are far more realistic and interesting than perfect characters. Both Declan and Sinead talk about identifying a character's motivation - what has happened in their past that makes them behave in a particular way? What dark secrets does your protagonist hide? What do they *want*?

What do you need to know?

When you are creating characters, it is important that you understand their backstory, their age, name, occupation, and how they became who they are. You do not need to tell the reader all about their background, but as a writer you need to know it. Carlo discusses this when he talks about 'sublimated text' in the editing segment of *Revising, Rewriting and Overcoming Obstacles*.

No Clichés

If you are creating believable, solid, REAL characters, it's essential to avoid clichés – the dim blonde secretary, the evil sadistic killer. Every character has good and bad points, every character has a soft spot and something that drives them mad.

Under the Skin

Try to think in three dimensions, getting under your character's skin. It is essential that your reader is interested in your protagonist (lead character), that they WANT to know what happens to them next. If your character is a spoiled brat, or an irritating corporate executive, will we want to know what happens to him? Your reader needs to CARE about your characters in order to stick with them and keep turning the pages.

Does your character take sugar in his tea or does he prefer an espresso? What would he order at a deli? What does your character have in his pockets? Make a chart detailing your character's appearance, birthday, favourite food, the car he/she drives, his/her favourite music. As more characters are added to the story, add them to your chart, mapping their interconnections, and your plot will emerge.

One of the best ways to get to know your characters is to ask questions about them. Start with the basics:

- What is your character's name? Does he/she have a nickname?
- What is your character's hair color? Eye color? How tall are they? Do they like how they look? Do they care?
- Does your character have any distinguishing features? A broken nose, a tattoo, a piercing?
- Who are your character's friends and family? Who is his/her best friend? Who does he wish he were closest to? Why?
- Where was your character born? Where has he/she lived since then? Where did he/she go to school? Where does he/she call home?
- What is his/her biggest fear? Who has he/she told this to? Who would she never tell this to? Why?
- Does he/she have a secret?
- What makes your character laugh?
- Has your character ever been in love? Had a broken heart?

Naming Names

Avoid confusion for the reader by ensuring that all your characters have different initials and first names. If there is an Annabel and an Anne Marie or a Mark and a Martin, the reader will confuse them and may give up reading. Make each character distinctive – Virginia Woolf's characters all had personal peculiarities that made them stick in the reader's mind.

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