



Building Characters

To create a fictional character, you will need to know a) their backstory and b) their future story.

BACKSTORY

When you arrive in a room, you arrive with a full physical presence on the outside and an entire history of decisions, actions, likes and dislikes on the inside. As a writer, you need to know your character's outside and inside like you know your self. To achieve this, there are two fundamental approaches to consider:

Create your character based on people you know.

There is no reason to invent a new character (that is very hard work!) when you are surrounded by so many interesting characters already. Look around you: who fascinates you? Who do you know on their inside? Use that information to create a new character. For example, take the picky food eating habits of one friend; the spacey, flighty language patterns of another; the piercing, see-through-to-your-soul stare of another; and the love the of the saxophone of a fourth friend, mix them all together...and you have the start of a really interesting character.

1. Consider mixing just two people that you or your team knows well. This may make for a clearer, cleaner portrait.

Enhance your knowledge of that character through questions

The next step is to ask questions of your character so that you can begin to fill this person out. These include questions relating to the economic class of the character; their dress habits; likes and dislikes; top skills; biggest fears;

optimistic or pessimistic outlook, etc. It can be helpful as a team to come up with a list of character questions – think of questions that you would want to ask a celebrity, for example, or someone on whom you have a deep crush – and then discuss and write down the answers.

In the end, your goal is to know that character on the outside and the inside. That does not mean that you have a list of character traits. A list is just a list; not a representation of a character. A character is someone whom you know nearly like yourself.

FUTURE STORY

This part is very, very straightforward.

A character is based on the decisions he or she makes.

Will he lie or not? Will she study or not? Will he hate or forgive? Will she try harder or give up? Will he cry or keep it all in? Will she yell and scream, or whisper? Will he dress up or dress down?

As you look into your story or scene, what decisions will your character make? If they don't make any decisions, then the audience won't really learn anything about them.

You know the character's past and present; their outside and inside. As you locate them into your plot, you now need to choose what decisions they will make. These include the big decisions – to tell the truth or not – and the small decisions -- what to wear or what to text.

In the end, you want someone believable and engaging; someone who can help to drive your story forward in unusual and fascinating ways. To achieve that, work with what you know; with personalities in your world that fascinate and intrigue you. And then invent their futures by making their choices for them...and see where they end up.