

## What is Character Development and Why Does It Matter?

Stories would be nothing without the characters in them. A masterful plot can provide exciting twists and turns, but well developed, strong characters help your readers identify with your story. Without a sense of who your characters are, readers will not appreciate the significance and the story holds no impact.

Think about it like this: Your main character's goal sets the stakes for your story, big or small. Many stories have a bad guy or antagonist who opposes the main character. The secondary characters complete the story. They help or oppose the main character, but either way, their greater goal is to help the reader understand the protagonist in a more profound way.

## How to Develop Characters (in a nutshell)

Character development is all about building unique, three-dimensional characters. They should have personality, clear motivations, and depth. Characters, like people, also change as the story progresses, so character development extends to refer to the changes they undergo throughout the story as a result of their experiences and actions.

To develop characters, especially the protagonist, give them:

- **An arc:** How does the character change throughout the story? The change they undergo is called a character arc.
- **Motivations and goals:** Characters are driven through the story by deep-seated reason. Their goals and motivations drive the story.
- **Flaws:** Heroes have weaknesses too. Your protagonist and characters don't have to be perfect examples of norms or ideals. They should emerge from their trials after struggling with their human flaws, which make them believable characters.
- **Interests:** Like people, each character should have their interests, skills, and hobbies.
- **A physical world:** Evoke additional details through each character to show the physical appearance of the world around them. Show their mannerisms and looks too. Quirky qualities can be memorable.
- **The perfect name:** If you are creating characters from other locations and ethnicities, make sure to use ethically accurate names. [World Almanacs](#) and [WorldAtlas.com](#) are excellent resources for information on any location, name, or other facts you may not have thought to include.

Secondary characters should both:

- **Compliment:** They should assist the protagonist with their skill sets or provide emotional support. Sometimes they get in trouble so the hero can save them or offer comedic relief.

- Oppose: The best sidekicks in literature history are oppositional. They undermine the protagonist, provide opposing views to explore a subject or setting deeper, widen the perspectives in your story, and add complexity for your readers' interest.

### Quick Tips for Character Development

- Pick your voice early. The first-person point of view (POV) often follows the main character, allowing them to narrate the story using "I" and "me." Third-person POV is outside the action. The narrator determines how information about the character reveals, controlling what the readers know.
- Try not to reveal too much about a character upon their introduction. Reveal information, like physical attributes and hobbies, bit by bit as the story goes. It's similar to the way people learn about each other in real life, so the story feels more authentic.
- Create conflict by introducing opposing forces or characters. Test your protagonist's resolve and reveal weaknesses through a struggle. Create a bad guy. Have a character go through an internal struggle and grapple with morals. Conflict creates tension and moves the story forward.
- Provide all essential characters with a backstory. Flesh out their histories, even if it doesn't make it onto the page.
- Research how your character's backstory would realistically craft their behavior and shape their psyche accurately.
- Never include any minor characters. Everyone you introduce to the story should have a purpose and a well-rounded personality.
- Make your characters realistically diverse, even if you don't know much about other cultures and backgrounds. Here are some tips:
  - <https://www.authormagazine.org/articles/2019-07-cordova>
  - <https://writingwithcolor.tumblr.com/post/130208550139/character-design-and-assigning-race-and-ethnicity>
  - <https://writingtheother.com/writing-characters-of-different-races/>
  - <https://curiosityneverkilledthewriter.com/yes-you-should-be-afraid-to-write-diverse-characters-4a6c482a7379>
- Avoid stereotypes at all costs.

## Character Development Writing Exercise #1: Interview Your Character

Use the following questions to help develop your characters and learn more about them. These questions can help you create characters, enrich their backstory, or add more uniqueness to their habits and gestures.

- What is your character's name?
- Why did their parents choose that name?
- What's their gender (at the moment)?
- When is their birthday? Age when the story starts?
- What's their ethnicity?
- What do they look like?
- Where do they live?
- What do they enjoy eating?
- How do they dress?
- Do they dress to impress?
- Do they appear younger or older than they are?
- What significant experiences have they been through in their lives?
- Have they had traumatic experiences?
- What was their childhood like?
- Or did they have a great childhood that was destroyed by a traumatic event in adulthood?
- What are their parents like?
- Any siblings? Older or younger?
- What are their siblings like?

- What are their hobbies and skills?
- What do they do when they're happy?
- What are their ruminations?
- Any obsessions?
- Do they have pets?
- Do they have close friends?
- Any medical conditions?
- What do they do in their spare time?
- What are they most embarrassed by?
- What's their worst habit?
- Biggest weakness?
- Where do they live?
- Did they go to school?
- What's their stress response?
- Are they religious?
- Are they introverted or extroverted?
- Do they know their life purpose?
- What's their favorite type of weather?
- What do they do when they're upset?
- What are their eating habits like? Sleeping?
- What would they change about the world if they could?
- What's their idea of a perfect life look like?

## Character Development Writing Exercise #2: One-Page Descriptions

For each character, write a one-page description of them. Dive into their personality in familiar terms and describe their physical appearance. View the character with your creativity.

### Character Development Writing Exercise #3: Interior Monologue

Head to a public place, where you can sit and observe people. Choose a person you see at random and imagine a few character details for them. What's their name? Mood? Favorite food? Why are they there? Write a one-page, interior monologue about them that reveals their internal thoughts. Use the first person to construct the world around them and how they interact with it.

## Fill-in-the-Blank Character Development Worksheet

Name

Age

Birthday

Hair color

Eye color

Height

Weight

Build

Identifiable feature(s)

Personality traits


Strengths



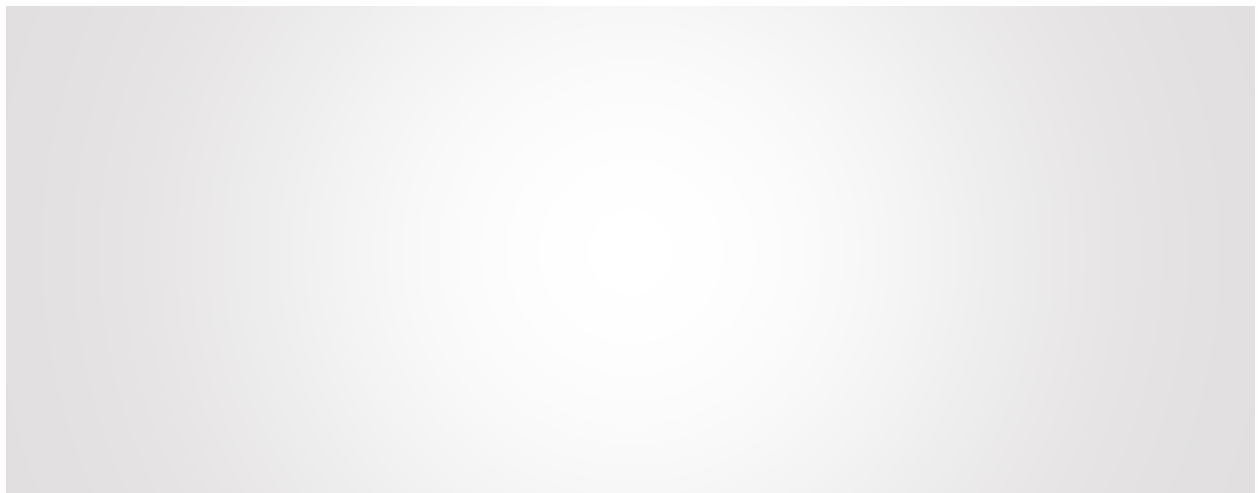
Weaknesses



Mannerisms and Habits



Backstory and Coping Mechanisms



**Bonus:** Try adding this information into a spreadsheet. If two of your characters spend a lot of time together in the story and look similar, consider altering their appearances and making them differentiable.