

Creating and Writing Great Characters Worksheet

This is the worksheet for October's seminar, which you can find in audio and transcript forms at: www.writershuddle.com/seminars/oct2012

Key Points from the Seminar

Great characters don't come from a checklist of things like birthday or quirky habits – you need to think about deeper questions than that.

Character and Plot

Characters influence the plot; the plot influences characters. Good characters grow and develop throughout a novel. They also earn their happy ending. Don't let your characters act stupidly just to further the plot.

Your characters should have goals (which could be anything from “survive” to “change career” to “get my life back to the way it was before”). By thwarting their progress toward these goals, you push the plot along.

Great Questions to Ask

Ask questions about your characters like:

- What would they lie about?
- Under what circumstances would they kill someone?
- What's the worst thing they've done (or will do during your novel)?
- What's the best thing they've done (or will do)?

Sympathetic Characters

Regular people (as opposed to literary critics) want to read about characters who they can engage with. Make your characters interesting and larger-than-

life – but also human. We might love to boo villains, but we also want to understand why they are the way they are – this is where backstory comes in.

You'll find that you need to put a lot of yourself into your characters. That might be your habits (good or bad) or your personal history or backstory. It can be tough to draw on your own experience – but also very powerful.

Writing About Your Characters

You should always aim to:

- Get something of your character's voice into the narrative (even if you're writing in the third person).
- Show rather than tell – e.g. create a scene that shows a character's anger and irritability, don't just tell us that he's an angry person.

Exercise

If you're at the creating characters stage:

Ask yourself some deep questions about your characters (see Great Questions to Ask, above, or try Holly Lisle's *Create a Character Clinic*, in the Further Reading below).

If you're part-way through a short story or novel:

Make life harder for your characters. Don't be afraid to put them under pressure, or even hurt them (physically or emotionally).

Further Reading

Create a Character Clinic, Holly Lisle – [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) / [Amazon.co.uk](https://www.amazon.co.uk)

Lots of great questions for developing interesting, rounded characters.