

The Art of Story Writing: Crafting Multi-Dimensional Characters

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A. CHARACTER

WRITING PROMPTS FOR CHARACTER:

1. Exercise: Looking at images, write:
 - a) A description of their appearance
 - b) What their job is
 - c) What are they thinking of right now
 - d) What their friend thinks about them
 - e) If they could say something to you, what would it be?

2. Character Questionnaire (Appendix 1)

3. EXERCISE: For some reason, your character has suddenly become famous (won a reality show contest). All the media is going crazy about them. People want to know who they are, how they think and function.

A media organisation interviews your character.

List 5 Questions of what the media reporter would want to ask your character

Answer these questions as if your character is speaking. Give each question one or two paragraphs of answers.

B. POINT OF VIEW:

WRITING PROMPT FOR POINT OF VIEW

1. Your character goes to a job interview and thinks it goes great. The man who interviews him thinks it's a disaster. Spend ten minutes writing about the scene from the interviewee's point of view, and then another ten minutes rewriting the scene from the interviewer's point of view.

Write one paragraph of each.

2. Use first person to write scene with following requirements:
“I” character is home alone and vulnerable in some way – for eg, in the bath, in a bed, a child, paralysed, trapped in a windowless room, on a high floor in a housing estate.

“I” character hears the sound of someone trying to break into the house.

Begin: First hint of danger

End: The moment “I” character sees the intruder.

Show your character’s emotions and perceptions and create as much tension as possible through use of details.

PSYCHIC DISTANCE: HANDOUT

5 degrees of psychic distance (yes, really)

Consider the following sentences taken from *The Art of Fiction* by John Gardner:

It was winter of the year 1853. A large man stepped out of a doorway.

Henry J. Warburton had never much cared for snowstorms.

Henry hated snowstorms.

God how he hated these damn snowstorms.

Snow. Under your collar, down inside your shoes, freezing and plugging up your miserable soul...

With each sentence, all written with a third person point of view, the writer moves his camera lens closer and closer until he literally enters his character's head to voice his thoughts. Very concisely, these sentences demonstrate some of the amazing and important point of view choices open to the writer whenever he/she starts a story.

EXERCISE:

Think of a person and a place. Give your person a fear, a problem or a challenge to face. Write 5 opening sentences, modeled on Gardiner's, so that you begin the story at 5 different points of psychic distance. Then choose the one you like best and run with it.

OPTIONAL EXERCISE:

Revisit the intruder story written earlier.

REWRITE WHOLE SCENE FROM INTRUDER'S POV.

Use Psychic Distance to vary the zoom points of the intruder.

Character Questionnaire:

What is their.....?

1. Age
 2. Race
 3. Country
 4. Name
 5. 2nd Name
 6. Family Name
 7. Hair colour
 8. Eyes
 9. skin
 10. size
 11. distinguishing features
 12. distinguishing marks
 13. How do they carry themselves?
 14. Medical health
 15. How does the character describe themselves?
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1. Name
 2. Race
 3. Country
 4. Eye colour
 5. Body
 6. distinguishing features
 7. Health
 8. Physical characteristics inherited from mother
 9. What do they see about their father in them?
 10. how big is their family
 11. is it important that she gets on with her family?
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Childhood

12. Where grew up
 13. What childhood like
 14. events in childhood affected him deeply
 15. What sort of home did they grow up in
 16. what does father do for a living
 17. Father's skills
 18. what talent of their fathers would the character like to have had
 19. Mother's job
 20. skills of mother
 21. What about mother does the character admire most
 22. closer to mother or father
 23. when think of mother what does he/she think about
 24. What childhood pet
 25. what in childhood made him happy
 26. what made him angry in childhood
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Character as an adult:

1. where do they live now
2. what kind of place do they live in
3. what do they do for a living
4. how much money do they earn
5. what conditions do they work under
6. what friends do they have at work
7. is there something else they'd rather do
8. Hobbies
9. Last book they read
10. significant other?
11. happiest moment of their life recently
12. 3 famous people – alive or dead – they admire the most
13. 3 significant truths they believe

- 14.3 things about your character that they brag about
- 15.3 secrets they have
16. physical places they love to be
- 17.3 favourite possessions
- 18.3 things that stress them out
19. wake up in the morning the first three things they do
20. at a party 3 things they do
- 21.3 things values/virtues they esteem in others
- 22.3 things afraid of