

The **WritesWithTools.com** Character Development Workbook

Hello!

Thank you for subscribing to **WritesWithTools.com**.

You're in for a treat. This document combines all of the **WritesWithTools.com** character tools into one master character development workbook.

Complete it, and you will be well on your way to a contradictory yet coherent, three-dimensional character with an intriguing backstory and surface characteristics that suggest layers and layers of depth.

I hope you find it helpful.

Now, go forth and [write something amazing](#) for us.

Wishing you the best in your writing,
WritesWithTools.com

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Tips

For making the most of this workbook.

Skip Around.

Don't feel like you have to answer every question in the order they're listed here. If nothing immediately comes to mind, skip it for now.

Take Several Passes.

Each section's answers will inform and fine-tune the answers in the other sections. To that end, you might want to use a pencil and keep a big eraser nearby.

Coherency is Your Goal.

You want your character's traits--as irreconcilable as they hopefully are--to possess a logical consistency. Character's backstory yields his flaw and personality, his flaw and his personality are reflected in his appearance, etc. It's all connected.

Embrace Overlap.

Overlap tends to indicate that the details you're coming up with are all logically connected. When you see it, celebrate that it's all coming together full circle.

WritesWithTools.com is here to help.

If you need more information or inspiration to answer some of the questions, remember that an explanation of the tool, how the masters use the tool, and our running examples of using the tool ourselves are all available at the site under *The Tools*.

Character Foundation

To start building a great character, it's helpful to decide a few things first.

Name:

Story Role:

What do you know about this character so far? Focus on what this story is going to ask of him and how you're expecting him to respond.

For example: Character is a human rights lawyer who will join a wealthy firm to help fund a case for someone meaningful to him.

What is Character going to **learn** as a result of living through the story events? We're poking at your theme here. (For more on theme, check out the theme tool at writewithtools.com)

For example: Story events will force Character to summon courage he didn't know he had, thus learning that he's far more capable than he thought he was.

Stated another way: courage leads to empowerment; cowardice leads to disempowerment.

In light of the above, what is Character's external **goal** for this story?

For example: To win his partner's wrongful termination case against the government.

What general emotional **want** will Character fulfill by achieving the external goal? (Character is usually conscious of this want.)

For example: Protecting someone he loves (because the case involves someone he loves).

What internal emotional **need** will Character fulfill by living through these story events? (Character is usually unconscious of this need, and it is often answered by the theme.)

For example: Self-Empowerment.

What is Character's active story **flaw**? (This is often answered by the theme.)

For example: Cowardice.

What are the surface traits--active and general appearance--that act as "**symptoms**" of Character's flaw? Come up with at least five.

For example: Taking back entrances to avoid people, hiding behind a big hat, throwing his wallet on the ground and running away when approached by strangers.

Make sure one or two of the above traits can serve as character **tags**. (For more on tags, see the tags tool post at writewithtools.com.)

Three Dimensions of Character

Use this questionnaire to begin your character development or as a checklist to ensure that your character has a coherent set of backstory, appearance, internal depth, defining choices and actions, and a future for readers to anticipate.

Physical Description, Surface Traits, Ticks and Habits

Present:

Past:

Future:

Personality Traits

Present:

Past:

Future:

Strengths

Present:

Past:

Future:

Weaknesses, Inner Demons, Internal Conflicts

Present:

Past:

Future:

Relationships: Family, Friends, Enemies, etc.

Present:

Past:

Future:

Skill Set: Occupations, Education, Hobbies, Interests, etc.

Present:

Past:

Future:

Internal and External Goals

Present:

Past:

Future:

Motivations for those Goals

Present:

Past:

Future:

External Conflict

Present:

Past:

Future:

Settings

Present:

Past:

Future:

Plot-Related Actions and Choices

Present:

Past:

Future:

Character Contradictions

Characters become more complex--and more intriguing to readers--when they want opposing, conflicting, mutually exclusive things, and when they embody paradoxical, irreconcilable traits.

The **Thematic Irreconcilable Self**: How might Character embody both his flaw and a negative version of the opposite of that flaw? Why is he like this?

For example: Character's flaw is cowardice. The opposite of cowardice might be courage. A negative version of courage could be aggression. He can embody both cowardice and aggression.

An **Irreconcilable Story Goal**: What is the opposite of the story goal? How might Character want both things? Come up with a few opposite options and pick the most coherent one.

For example: If the goal is to win the case, the opposite could be to lose the case. He might want this because winning would come with unwanted attention.

Surface-Level Contradictions: How might Character's appearance contradict itself? Or, how might Character appear one way and act the opposite? Why is he like this?

For example: Character is a lawyer, but he often appears in court in sweats.

Contradictions Arising From Serving **Multiple Social Roles**: How does Character act one way in certain situations or around certain people and act the opposite in other situations?

For example: At work, the lawyer is formal and deferent; at the gym, he's crass and aggressive.

Competing Morals: How might two of Character's guiding principles be mutually exclusive?

For example: Character's desire to do his best and win could compete with the desire to do everything he can to protect those he loves, which, in this case, could mean losing.

Contradictions That Arise From **Secrets and Deceit**: How might Character act the opposite of who we know him to normally be in order to deceive people or to protect a secret?

For example: Character is usually very chatty about his cases, but he doesn't say a word about one in particular and will change the subject if you bring it up.

Contradictions Based on **Conscious Versus Unconscious Traits**: How might Character's actions to achieve what he knowingly wants conflict with other behavior that arises from what he unknowingly needs?

For example: Character may take actions to win but also self-sabotage because he unknowingly needs to lose.

Character Backstory

Now that your character has story-relevant flaws, irreconcilable conflict, secrets and more, it's time to support how he got that way.

The **Flaw-Defining Event**: How did Character come to have the flaw he has? How might you condense this into a flaw-defining moment?

For example: Character's flaw of cowardice developed because his dad was always berating him. In one exemplary incident, Dad pushed a particularly sensitive button.

The **Goal-Defining Event**: At the beginning of the story, Character wants a goal. This may be the story goal, connected to a story goal, or just a bridging goal. What caused him to want the story-beginning goal?

For example: Character wants to win the case. The event that started this was when his partner was wrongfully terminated.

Support Character Choices: Character will make certain choices throughout the story. What type of backstory might Character need to support these choices?

For example: What makes Character keep secrets from, rather than confide in, his loved one?

Support Character Actions: Character may take certain actions that need to be set up in order to be believable. What type of backstory might Character need to setup these actions?
For example: Where did Character learn to use a gun so proficiently?

Character's Physicality: Does Character's body have any effect on his personality or capabilities? How so? Was this a condition of birth or a result of living life?
For example: Character broke his arm at 7 when he fell out of a tree saving a cat. The bone never grew and his brother made fun of it. He's self-conscious about it enough to avoid intimacy.

Motivate Character's Wants: Make a list of everything Character wants (relevant to the story). Why does he want these things?
For example: Character wants to win a big case to prove that his Dad was wrong about him.

Secrets: What does Character not want anyone to know about his backstory?
For example: Character cheated on the bar exam.

Guilt: What does Character feel most guilty for doing before the story started?

For example: He left his little brother alone with his Dad.

Happiness: What event in Character's backstory defined true happiness for him?

For example: A game of monopoly where the whole family played, even Dad.

The **Haunting Ghost:** What happened in Character's past that still haunts him today? Can you echo it in this story?

For example: Character once lost a friend's case and that friend committed suicide.

Support Conflicting Traits: Character Contradictions often need support to be believable. How might you support Character's various contradictions?

For example: Character's a coward thanks to his dad, but he's been boxing a long time now, and in that setting he has enough confidence to release pent up energy as aggression.

The Reader-Character Bond

If you want readers to care about your story enough to finish it, you need to get them to care about your Characters--right away.

Sympathy: What can happen when we first meet Character that would **make the reader feel sorry for him?**

For example: Harry lives in the cupboard under the stairs.

Jeopardy: How might you quickly put Character in a threatening situation that would **cause the reader to worry about him?**

For example: Harry has to go live with his nasty aunt and uncle.

Likable: How might you show Character being **kind** or **generous** in his first scene?

For example: Harry's kind to the spider he picks off his sock (as opposed to smashing it).

Fascinating: Can you show in Character's first scene that he is particularly **skilled, powerful, courageous** or **contradictory**?

For example: Harry's kind to the spider he picks off his sock (as opposed to smashing it).

Wish Fulfillment: Can you make Character's story activities attempt **the impossible, unattainable, forbidden** or **disastrous**?

For example: Harry goes to wizard school.

Familiarity: In what ways is Character **just like his readers**?

For example: In Alien, despite the wish-fulfilling job aboard a spaceship, Ripley and her co-workers complain about work, just like the rest of us.

Relatable Goal: How can you support Character's goal such that **readers can't help but root for him to succeed**--no matter what that goal is?

For example: Breaking Bad's Walter White needs to succeed at making and selling meth because he's a high school teacher with terminal cancer, a disabled son, and a daughter on the way.

Characterization

How can you describe Character in a way that makes readers believe that Character is a certain kind of person?

Dominant Impression: What **certain kind** of person is this character?

For example: Harry's a good-natured kid to whom strange things happen.

Dominant Traits: What aspects of character should you **focus on** to create that impression?

For example: Harry has witty comebacks; the vanishing glass.

Techniques: How might you **show** readers those aspects? (Action, dialogue, thoughts, etc.)

For example: Dialogue between Harry and Dudley; strange actions.

Credibility: How might you **help readers believe**? (Details, reactions, motivations, etc.)

For example: McGonagall is appalled at how horrible the Dursleys are.

Character Introductions - Part 1

A character's first appearance in a story is a big opportunity to characterize. Here are several ways to fulfill its potential. First, four things to consider including.

Physical Description: What physical traits are **significant to the story**?

For example: Harry has a scar on his forehead.

Characteristic Action: What action could Character take that is both pertinent to the story and **typical of who Character is**?

For example: Weird things happen when Harry's around, like vanishing glass.

Character's Want or Need: What's your character **trying to achieve** in this moment and/or in the course of the story, and what's **motivating** him?

For example: Harry wants a break from his aunt, uncle, cousin, and Mrs. Figg and her cats.

Foreshadowing: What traits will Character use later that might **need explaining now**?

For example: Harry can talk to snakes.

Character Introductions - Part 2

Next, consider how you want to introduce your character. To that end, here are 7 methods of character introduction.

Out-of-Viewpoint Description: What might the **narrator** want to say about Character?
For example: At this moment, people all over are toasting Harry Potter--the boy who lived.

Dialogue: What truths, lies, and opinions do **other characters** have about Character?
For example: Professor McGonagall doesn't think they should leave Harry with the Dursleys.

Physical Description: What's the **POV character's first impression** of this character?
For example: McGonogall and Dumbledore are first struck by the scar, knowing how he got it.

Environment: How does Character's **home/possessions** (or setting) betray who she is?
For example: Harry lives in a cupboard under the stairs, where he picks spiders off his socks.

Action: What can Character do that typifies who he is or the **problems he already has**?
For example: Harry follows the Dursley's orders without complaint.

Character's Dialogue: How does Character's **speech and word choice** typify who he is?
For example: Harry's first bit of dialogue is a joke that shows he's witty and bullied but not defeated.

Introspection: What's Character thinking about? Often **backstory, problems, or wants**.
For example: Harry tries to remember the good dream he had about a flyer motorbike.

Character Summary

Use this page like a reference sheet, to streamline and keep track of your **most pertinent** character details.

Name:

Goal:

Motivation:

Main Conflict:

Flaw:

Dominant Impression:

Tags:

Relationships:

Skills:

Backstory:

Other: