

Character Development Worksheet

Build characters from the inside out

Memorable characters are shaped less by lists of traits than by what they want, what they fear, what they believe and what they choose when those forces come into conflict.

Use this worksheet to move beyond surface description and examine the pressures that drive a character through a story. The aim is to understand not only who the character is, but why they act as they do and how the consequences of those actions can create story.

You can use the worksheet for a protagonist, antagonist or any major supporting character whose decisions materially affect the narrative.

Character at a Glance

Character Name:

Role in the Story:

What does this character want most?

Why does it matter to them?

What are they afraid of losing, facing or becoming?

What stands between them and what they want?

The Forces Beneath the Character

Motivation, Contradiction and Internal Conflict

A character becomes more convincing when their behaviour grows from interacting pressures rather than a single defining trait. Use these areas to identify the forces that shape choices and create contradiction.

Motivation

What underlying need, experience, belief or desire drives the character's behaviour?

Goal

What concrete outcome are they actively trying to achieve in the story?

Flaw or Limitation

What habit, weakness, assumption or behaviour repeatedly makes success more difficult?

Contradiction

Which qualities, beliefs or behaviours appear to conflict with one another?

Internal Conflict

What two needs, values, loyalties or fears pull the character in different directions?

Hidden Pressure

What truth, secret, guilt, obligation or vulnerability influences choices even when it is not openly discussed?

Which internal pressure most strongly influences the character's decisions?

Which contradiction could create the most interesting behaviour under pressure?

Character Pressure Tracker

Discover Character Through Decisions

Use this tracker for important moments in the story. Character is revealed most clearly when circumstances force a choice, particularly when every available option carries a cost.

Scene / Moment	What Does the Character Want?	Pressure / Obstacle	Choice Made	Why This Choice?	Consequence

After completing the tracker, ask:

- Do the character's choices arise from established motivations, fears and beliefs?
- Does pressure expose qualities that ordinary circumstances would keep hidden?
- Are difficult choices producing consequences rather than being quickly forgotten?
- Does the character sometimes make understandable but damaging decisions?
- Do relationships influence choices in different ways?
- Can you see evidence of change, resistance to change or increasing self-awareness?

Most revealing decision:

What does that decision show the reader?

The Character Audit

Test the Character as a Whole

Use this final check to assess whether the character is functioning as an active part of the story. Complexity does not require endless backstory; it comes from meaningful wants, pressures, contradictions, relationships and choices.

- The character wants something specific enough to influence behaviour.
- Their motivation explains why that goal matters.
- They possess strengths as well as limitations.
- Their flaws or assumptions create genuine consequences.
- They contain at least one meaningful contradiction.
- Internal conflict complicates important decisions.
- Relationships reveal different sides of the character.
- The character has a distinctive way of interpreting events.
- Pressure changes how the character behaves.
- Important choices affect what happens next.
- The character is capable of surprising the reader without acting inconsistently.
- By the end, the character has changed, resisted change or paid a meaningful price for remaining the same.

What does this character believe about themselves that may not be entirely true?

What situation would place the greatest pressure on that belief?

What single change would make this character more active, distinctive or consequential?

Remember: Backstory can explain a character, but decisions reveal them. The most useful character details are the ones that affect what the character does when something important is at stake.

Designed to complement *Character Creation Mastery* by Jim Moore.

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