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**Character Creation**

**By Jeff Heisler**

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Character Creation

Creating believable characters is an essential element of fiction. The story rest on your characters shoulders. If they don't hold up then your story collapses. So how do you make believable characters? First recognize that different genres of fiction have different needs. A tightly plotted action or suspense thriller may not need characters fleshed out in detail as much as a literary novel. Also be aware that the more outlandish your plot is, the more important character believability becomes. Read any Steven King book and you'll see this. The reason he can take us on these journeys through strange and unusual events is his power to create realistic characters. When we believe the character, we believe what's happening to them.

The process of creating characters is so varied I suspect there are as many methods as there are authors. As always, take these tips as guidelines– not law. Every writer must do what works for him or her. These ideas will hopefully serve as a springboard to get you on your way.

Here's how I create my characters:

Step 1– Consider the story. In general the more my emphasis rest on the plot of the book, the more my characters need to serve that plot. If the story focus is more character based then my plot needs to serve the character.

If I need a character that will chase down a killer then I better design someone who's able to do that. Everything from their build to their psychology must help them get to the killer. Now it's important not to make the character a perfect fit. No one is perfect, that's what makes life interesting. Your characters should have flaws that make it uncomfortable for them to reach their goal. For example the character chasing the killer might have a wife and family that worry about his safety. This creates tension– tension drives story.

When constructing a more literary work then the character should be in mind already, and the plot forms around them. For example– a coming of age story requires a young character who will experience events that will shape their life. If you don't have those elements you don't have a coming of age story– so your plot must support your character.

Step 2– Get to know your character. I like to use a form that looks like an extensive dossier when I create my characters. For supporting characters the dossier is smaller, but still quite detailed. Design

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one for yourself and be sure to include details about:

- The character's appearance.
- Their habits and mannerisms.
- Their motivations.
- Their past.
- How the character will change in the course of the story.

Don't make the mistake of assuming the bad guys don't need as much character detail— they do, particularly in motivation. Sure a story about a killer is suspenseful and scary, but if you have a killer who murders because he sees his abusive father in every victim, well— that's a little richer. Remember— the bad guys have motivations that seem good to them. Hitler thought he was a nice guy— your bad guy should too.

When you finish your dossier you may want to get creative with it. I've spent time leafing through old

magazines until I find a picture of someone who reminds me of my character. I cut the picture out and paste it to the dossier. Somehow this makes the person seem real in my mind. I can think of them as a human rather than a construction when I see an actual face.

Step 3— Interview your character. Don't let your family see you do this or they'll call the guys with the butterfly nets. You need to sit down at the keyboard or with your notepad and interview these characters. Ask them all kinds of questions about the story and their lives. Why do you need to do this? Because it helps you iron out the wrinkles in your character's construction. If you interview your character and they reveal a motivation that just seems weak to you— great. Now you have a chance to fix it before writing hundreds of pages.

Step 4— Introducing your character. When you finally sit down to write you'll wonder how you go about introducing your character. A few points to consider:

- Introduce them at a moment of change in their lives. Don't show how your character was born and raised in intricate detail— jump into their lives at the moment something dramatic happens. Instead of beginning your story "He was born at 2:34am in Lakeview hospital," you can begin like this— "Marvin had never killed anyone before. Looking down at the body at his feet he wondered if it would be the last time." Whoa! Much more interesting, eh?
- "Show, don't tell," still applies. Try to show your character's nature rather than tell about it. The exception is minor characters. You can use some short exposition to explain your minor characters just to get them moving fast. You don't want to spend a large chunk of text describing the Boy Scout who helps Granny walk across the street— and your reader doesn't either. Just give enough information about the kid to get Granny across the street— then go back to Granny's life.
- Some authors go for the bullet approach. Decide if it's right for you. The bullet approach works like this— when a character is introduced the story stops briefly and the author spends some time writing expository information that gives the reader everything they need to know about the character. This works for some writers— but I don't recommend it. For one thing fiction has to be hyper—realistic. In real life we don't get to know people all at once like that. It's a gradual discovery. Consider your story and consider what other authors in your genre are doing and decide for yourself.

That's the basic recipe for character creation. I hope it helps you get your characters off the ground and running. Remember— characters are the building blocks of story— don't forget to spend time on them before you dive into your first draft. You'll be glad you did.

Jeff Heisler is a freelance writer and novelist. You can read more of his tips at

<http://www.heislerink.com/writeaway.htm>

## **If The Viewpoint Character Is A Secondary Character, Have You Established Who He is?**

**By Nick Vernon**

Creative Writing Tips -

I have said above that if a secondary character tells the story of the main character, then the spotlight should be kept on the main character.

This shouldn't be taken to the extreme though.

In other words, you don't just write the story of the main character without telling your readers a bit about your secondary character.

Unless the reader understands the reason a secondary character is telling the story, it will seem peculiar that the main character isn't telling it himself. It is, after all, the main character's story.

So, the following have to be answered... Who is this secondary character? Why is he telling the story instead of the main character? What is his connection with the main character?

Weave in some information about the secondary character so we can gain a better understanding of his role in the story.

Besides his passion for writing, Nick Vernon runs an online gift site where you will find gift information, articles and readers' funny stories. Visit

If The Viewpoint Character Is A Secondary Character, Have You Established Who He is?

The FR ( Flawed Reason ) Theory

Creative Writing Tips – Have You Established Your Main Character At The Start?

Character or Reputation

Do You Plot With Your Character In Mind?

Character Counter Software

Blogging Made Easy

Ezine Filter and Format software

Affiliate Diamond

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