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## Characters In A Romance Novel

By Patty Apostolides

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Before you even begin writing your novel, you need to know who your characters will be. Minimally, you would want two major characters, the hero and the heroine. They will interact mostly with each other throughout the novel. How they interact with each other will determine the outcome of the story. Will they resist each other in the beginning of the story and by the end, fall in love? Or will they fall in love in the beginning of the story and then be driven apart by conflict? Once you've chosen them, then you need to decide what age they are, their personality traits, and their names.

### AGE

Age-appropriate actions are paramount to development of the character. If the heroine is in her teens, she will react differently to situations than if she is in her late twenties. The same goes with the hero. In a romance novel, the typical heroine is in her early twenties, while the hero is older. If he is in his twenties, he shouldn't be shown as a tycoon, unless of course, he inherited the wealth. If he is in his thirties, he shouldn't be shown doing activities that are immature for his age.

### PERSONALITY TRAITS

A character in your novel needs to have distinct personality traits that make them unique. By distinguishing them from the other persons in the novel, you can create all kinds of situations based on those traits. Personality traits are typically revealed in the story through actions, dialogue with other people in the story, and sometimes through flashbacks that may reveal how that person became the way they are.

If you are not familiar with personality traits, you can begin by studying the psychology books that describe them. Some examples of personality traits are introvert/extrovert, obsessive-compulsive, Type "A"/Type "B" personalities, etc. For example, an introverted person would appear shy, doesn't speak much, and shuns being in social situations, whereas an extroverted person would be gregarious,

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out-going, and usually a partygoer.

There are many types of personalities that you can choose from for your heroine, but typically, a "romantic" female would include the following: kind, young, nurturing, loving, warm, single, sensual, doesn't fool around, and attractive. For your hero, the characteristics could vary even more, and usually include being: older, decisive, powerful, kind, caring, single, gentle, and handsome.

Typically, you should have well-rounded characters. However, beware of making them too perfect. Readers prefer reading about realistic people, and yet at the same time, want to escape a little. Leave some room for improvement to allow character development to take place. As a writer, you will have to do some mental gymnastics to allow this to happen. Maybe she is stubborn and headstrong, and doesn't listen to other people's advice. Maybe he doesn't trust anyone, so he is wary and cautious. That's fine. Once you decide on the traits of each character, then the next step would be to envision how they would react to certain situations. For example, an impulsive person would probably react

differently than a cautious person to the same situation. Be prepared to get into the shoes of your character and feel what they would feel. When a hero and heroine get together, they may help each other overcome their character flaws by the end of the story. Through their love for each other, they help each other grow as human beings, and at the same time, accept each other's flaws and imperfections. Of course, there will be some type of conflict in attaining their love. What story exists without conflict? But by the end of the story, they realize the importance of each other in their life and cannot live without the other, no matter what the price. Ahhh, true love!

### NAMES

Once you have the age and personality trait of each character, then you need to give them a name that fits them. If the male character is a warrior or has a tough-minded personality, you wouldn't want to give him a name that sounds feminine, like Jean or Francis. Also, be sensitive to the setting, locale, and the time period, when deciding upon names. In addition, the names of your other characters should not overpower the hero/heroine's names.

### OTHER CHARACTERS

Once you have your main characters, then think about whom else will be in the novel. What role will these other players maintain to help the hero or heroine go forth? If you just add someone in the novel because you like him or her, but they don't help the story, then rethink on how they could be useful to the story. Maybe they know something that might be useful to the hero or heroine, then add that into the story.

Cardboard characters are a result of focusing on one dimension of a character. The cardboard character can be either totally evil, good, funny, sad, etc. They don't waver much from that description. Sometimes they are added in the novel to prove someone's character. For example, an evil cardboard character makes the hero look good by battling with him. That's the only purpose the evil character has, to show the hero's good side. We don't try to develop the evil person's character so that he/she is less evil. However, in recent literature, one sees more sympathetic looking evil people doing their bad

deeds, yet somehow managing to make the reader feel sorry about them. Those complex types are not considered cardboard characters.

### BALANCING ACT

No matter how well you think you are writing, always go back and double check your work for consistency. Make sure that if your hero has blue eyes in the beginning of the story, that he still has blue eyes by the end of the story, etc. Also, make sure you know your characters before you write. If you don't, it will show up in your writing. Throughout the story, you have to carefully describe the real person in all their glory, as well as their character flaws. When I went back and read the first draft of my romance novel "Lipsi's Daughter, I found that I tended to lean more towards making my characters too good. I then went in and deliberately inserted a fault or two. Those faults also help with the conflict. Conflict drives the story forward.

The final balancing act will come at the end, where you will have created, or synthesized a whole new person that has evolved into a better human being from the lessons they learned in the story. So now that you've read this section, go ahead, write your characters. Make them come alive!

Patty Apostolides is the author of the novel Lipsi's Daughter. She is in the process of writing a poetry book and a second novel. For more information, visit her website:

### **How to Create Incredible Characters Easily**

**By Caterina Christakos**

Creating incredible characters can be easy if you know of a few simple rules:

Each character should have his own voice. If your character is from Brooklyn, give him brooklyn accent and mannerisms.

Before you write, decide on his or her background and outline it thoroughly. If she is supposed to be from a high profile Georgia family, know what her parents do for a living. Is she trying to live up to their standards or does she move to California in rebellion? Why?

Know your character's motivations. If he is a serial killer, what about his upbringing or his mind created him into the pathological criminal that he is.

The lesson is know your characters. Know what makes them tick. Know what drives them wild and what drives them crazy. Know them as well as you know yourself otherwise your audience never will.

By creating a thorough outline on each characters before you begin writing, the decisions are made for you. You will know your characters well enough to know what they would and wouldn't say and how they would say it. More importantly, your readers will believe in them and in you.

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Caterina Christakos is the author of *How to Write a Children's Book in 30 Days or Less*. For more writing tips go to:

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