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# 4

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## The Mentor

Obi-wan to Luke, Gandalf to Frodo, Professor Xavier to Wolverine, Albus to Harry; all famous mentors we are familiar with. If the hero has something to learn, he must learn it from somewhere. Events may teach the hero lessons, but typically in an adventure story, it is a person that comes alongside and teaches the hero about his situation, himself, and life. That person is the mentor.

The mentor is a character specifically created to prepare the hero for the mental, physical, or emotional hurdles he will face in his journey. He helps the hero overcome an inner conflict to achieve the story goal. He will help unlock the new world to your hero and therefore, can be an integral character in your story.

If your hero doesn't already have the knowledge, skills, or determination needed to complete his mission, creating a mentor can be a great way to keep your story moving forward and make the hero's ultimate success more plausible. It helps the reader believe the simple country farm hand really can turn around to save the kingdom from the evil prince in less than 12 chapters.

Please note, this is your story and you do not have to include a mentor in it. There are many stories where the hero can plausibly achieve the story goal without an experienced guiding hand. That being said, if you decide to include one, make sure that the mentor truly serves a purpose.

Author Kristin Keifer shares her ideas for ways mentors can assist the hero and further the story goal:

- **THEY CAN SHARE A LITTLE WISDOM.**

Making mistakes is a hallmark of any hero's journey. Fortunately for your protagonist, it's likely the mentor has been in his shoes before and can offer a little wisdom to help him better navigate his struggles.

- **THEY CAN SAVE THE DAY.**

Your protagonist will probably find himself in a tough situation more than once throughout your story. To give him the tools he needs to overcome, a mentor can lead by example, helping your protagonist out of a bind early in your story's plot.

(Note: Try to avoid using this technique later in your story, however. A mentor should

never serve as the savior at the story's climax, saving your protagonist from a situation he can't get out of himself.)

- **THEY CAN PROVE THE VILLAIN'S EVIL.**

To showcase the consequences of the villain's abilities and desires, a mentor can serve as a story's sacrificial lamb, prompting the protagonist to actively engage in overcoming the villain. Think Aslan in the *Chronicles of Narnia*.

- **THEY CAN SERVE AS A ROLE MODEL.**

Whether your protagonist finds himself a fish out of water or in desperate need of a little maturity, a mentor can teach the protagonist how to better acclimate to the life he'd like or need, to live.

- **THEY CAN GUIDE THE WAY.**

If your protagonist finds himself on new terrain, who better to serve as a physical guide than one with knowledge and experience of the landscape? Allow your mentor to lead the way!

- **THEY CAN TEACH THE HERO NEW SKILLS.**

Whether it be a physical skill or a new body of knowledge, let your story's mentor be the one to teach the protagonist exactly what he needs to know to keep moving forward.

- **THEY CAN DISH OUT SOME HUMILITY.**

Your protagonist will win some and lose some, but early success can poison his perspective. Fortunately, a mentor can pop your protagonist's ego bubble and put him in the proper mindset to tackle any obstacles to come in his journey.

- **THEY CAN PROVIDE HEALTHY ENCOURAGEMENT.**

With wisdom and experience on his side, a mentor can offer the kind of grounded encouragement that has the power to push through your protagonist's mental roadblocks and set him back on the path to success.

Use the following worksheet to brainstorm the mentor character if you think you will be using one. Skip this step if you are absolutely certain you will not have a mentor.

# CHARACTER WORKSHEET

Character Name \_\_\_\_\_

Sketch or Paste Image



NickName \_\_\_\_\_

Physical Description

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

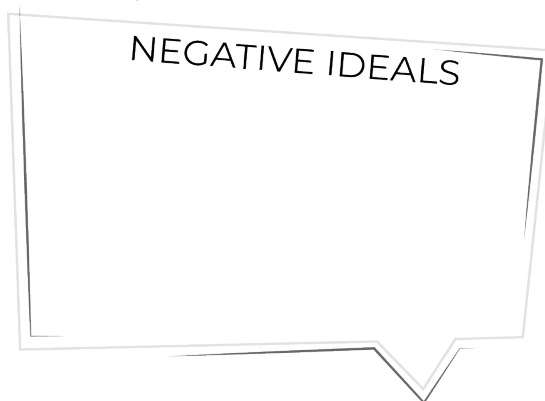
POSITIVE IDEALS



Personality

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
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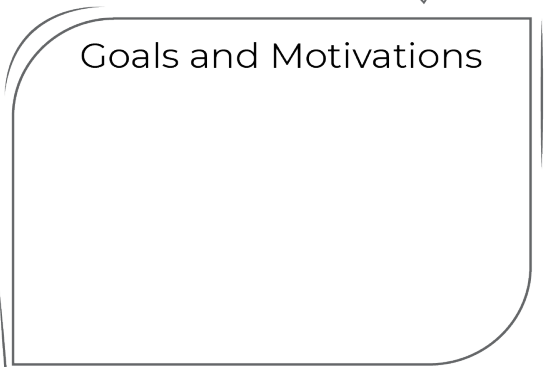
NEGATIVE IDEALS



Habits / Quirks

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Goals and Motivations



Background

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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# Ideals & Character Arc

As part of the lesson, let's talk about ideals and the character arc. An ideal is a goal or trait that signifies some greater meaning. It's what the character believes in and what motivates him. Ideals matter substantially to your story and they inform the actions of your characters. A character arc is the transformation or inner journey of a character over the course of a story. Some would even say Character Arc = Theme.

Ideals can be both positive or negative. Remember, they signify greater meaning and that can be good or bad. Here are some examples...

Positive Ideals: Life, Beauty, Love, Charity, Forgiveness, Protection, Humility.

List more positive ideals here:

List more negative ideals here:

As mentioned before, ideals inform the actions of your characters but they also define the conflict between them. Conflict occurs when a positive and a negative ideal collide. One will overcome the other and that is the contributing factor to the theme of your story.

Your hero should embody a positive ideal such as love, honesty, courage, wisdom, etc... Most heroes also have a negative ideal. Nobody is perfect after all. Remember, a character needs to be relatable. Some might even have a lot of negative ideals. Most of us know about Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol*. A negative ideal is commonly referred to as a character flaw. Everyone has a character flaw of some kind, however, negative ideals should never outweigh positive ones in your hero for him to attain the story goal.

In some circumstances, the negative outweighs the positive in the beginning and this is the foundation for your character arc. Your hero can start out with a negative ideal(s) and through circumstances and plot twists, end in a positive ideal. Change happens. Think about Han Solo in *Star Wars* Episode IV. He started out as a selfish, unreliable gambler who only cared about what would benefit him. That is dramatically different from the Han Solo we knew in later episodes. He became a hero who would sacrifice his own life for those of his friends.

Below are some classic examples of famous character arcs:

***Emma* by Jane Austin**

Character - Emma

Start - Determinedly single, interfere in others' lives, a bit of a snob

Finish - Humbled by love and repentant for matchmaking attempts that caused harm to others

***It's a Wonderful Life* by Philip Van Doren Stern originally a short story titled *The Greatest Gift***

Character - George Bailey

Start - Restless in small town, wants more out of life, thinks there is bigger and better out there

Finish - Realizes the importance of accomplishments; friends, and family are the most important thing.

A character's change does not always mean moving from bad (negative) to good (positive) but can be from foolish (negative) to wise (positive) or ignorant (negative) to enlightened (positive). Remember George Bailey from *It's a Wonderful Life*? He was likable from the very start, he's a good person and is loved and respected. His problem, his negative ideal, is that he is ignorant of his value and true circumstances. He believes that everyone would be better off without him so he attempts suicide. A hapless angel named Clarence intervenes in a different way than one would think, and grants George his wish; he was never born.

Through his experiences as a non-existent person, Henry sees the chain of events that resulted from his never having been born. He never was able to save his brother Harry from falling through the ice or save all the soldiers whose ship the Japanese attacked because he was not the heroic war pilot anymore. The changes in the world around him mount up to show George his true value, even to the point of life and death. The character arc comes when George rejects the lie and is enlightened to his purpose in life. George did not go from bad to good but from ignorant to enlightened.

It is time for you to brainstorm some positive and negative ideals that may inspire your character arc, inform your villain's behaviors, and create conflict. Remember that ideals occur in every person, whether positive or negative, and they present themselves within oneself (internal conflict), or between two characters (external conflict).

These ideals will contribute to your lesson, story goal, and conflict (suffering). Brainstorm every potential ideal for your hero as well as your villain. There is enough space in the chart for the ideals of the additional supporting cast and you can come back later and fill these in after you complete Unit 3, The Others.



Fill in the chart below.

Character	Positive Ideals	Negative Ideals

Positive ideals are often a result of personality and upbringing. Those are pretty straight forward and we will not enter into a deep discussion of why people are essentially “good” or “bad” with relation to ideals.

We will discuss an integral part of the character arc. Remember, a character arc is the transformation or inner journey of a character over the course of a story, typically from negative to positive. When it comes to understanding negative ideals, none are quite as formative as the wounding event. **A wounding event is a negative event or season in life that creates an identity struggle within your character.** It hurts him and causes conflict in his identity for the greater scope of the world around him. This can be a death, accident, an attack or injury. It can also be sickness or loss of love. A wounding event can and often is systematic abuse of a person’s identity and can come from a parent or loved one and especially, an authority figure of any kind.

## Here are some common wound themes from Writers Helping Writers:

**A Physical Wound.** A defect, scar or condition causes real life complication, doubt, low self-esteem and can make it difficult to feel like one fits in. Handicaps are real and can alter a character's path, limiting him and hurting his confidence.

**An Injustice.** Being a victim of crime, witnessing a traumatic social injustice or living in a time period or reality that is unbalanced or full of corruption will all leave a mark.

**Failure or Mistakes.** People are naturally hard on themselves when things don't happen as expected. The guilt associated with a failure or mistake (even if it is only a perceived failure) can paralyze a person, and send him on an alternative life path.

**Misplaced Trust/Betrayal.** Trusting or relying on someone and feeling let down in some way can cause deep hurt. This could be a parent/child dynamic, a friendship that goes sideways or even a deep betrayal of a loved one (infidelity, etc.)

**Isolation.** If the character felt left out or isolated in the past, it has lasting effects. Isolation might be relationship-related (a mother who favored a sibling over the protagonist), power imbalance (educational or social "status" barriers) or even simple economics (living in poverty, etc.) that restricted opportunity, achievement and fulfillment.

**Neglect/Abandonment/Rejection.** Some relationships are cardinal when it comes to care giving: a parent and child, siblings, partners in a marriage, and to a lesser degree, a citizen and his government, parishioner and his minister, or a doctor and his patient. When the person in the caregiving role neglects or rejects the other party, this can cause deep feelings of abandonment to form.

**Disillusionment.** Believing one thing to be true and then discovering it is a lie can shake a character to his core. This might be a world view or political belief (discovering leaders that one has supported have been negligent or corrupt), a revelation in religious or spiritual belief, or uncovering immoral behavior. It could also be something closer and more intimate like a role model who was not who she pretended to be, or personal (like finding out one is adopted, for example.)

Brainstorm the hero's potential wounding event and subsequent ideals:

# CONFLICT WORKSHEET

Who is the conflict between?

Why are they having this conflict?

How does the character react internally?

How does the character react externally?

How is the conflict resolved?

How does the character change from this conflict?

How does the conflict affect the story?

# DISASTER MIND MAP

When does disaster strike? \_\_\_\_\_

What is the disaster?

Who is affected and how?

What is their new course of action?

How do they resolve it?

Positive / Negative Ideas Displayed

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Notes

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# DILEMMA MIND MAP

When is the dilemma presented?

What is the dilemma?

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What precedes the dilemma?

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What decision is made?

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Positive / Negative Ideas Displayed

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Who is affected by the dilemma?

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What changes as a result of the decision?

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Notes

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