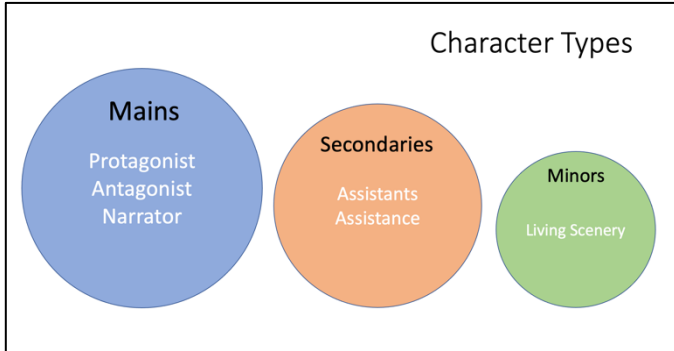


1000 Words on Character Creation

First, let's look at character types and their purposes very broadly. Then we'll look at building a character – basic at first, then enhancing them.



We have our main characters. Those are protagonists, antagonists, and narrators. So, Raskolnikov is the protag of *Crime & Punishment*. Jane Eyre is both the protag and the narrator of *Jane Eyre*. O'Brien is the antagonist of *1984*.

I think you could make the case for a broader definition of Mains – maybe. I struggled a little thinking through someone like Dr. Watson.

He's certainly got ink in the story, but in the end, I decided he was a Secondary. As an assistant. Secondaries also provide assistance – see what I did there? Characters who are not Mains, but help move things along. Helmholtz from *Brave New World*.

And then we jump down to the Minor characters who could be nameless, taking the protags order at a restaurant, driving her in a taxi, or filling a waiting room through which your antag runs.

So, I told you I was going to go broad, and I did. These are our very general types of characters, but there is, as is said, one thing that rules them all.



What Rules Them All?

- They Must All Serve the Story
 - Defining Other Characters
 - Coloring The World
 - Showing Us The Theme
 - Creating the Conflict for The Story

They must all serve the story by:

Defining Other Characters

Dr. Watson is an excellent foil for Holmes, allowing the detective to shine for us.

Coloring the World

O'Brien shows us a dystopian world of doublespeak and distrust.

Showing Us the Theme

Helmholtz illustrates the class barriers and inequality in the system, or

Creating the Conflict for the Story

And my boy Raskolnikov is nothing but conflict, racked by moral dilemma and conflict.

Of course, well done characters provide all these services and more – as is the case with the four examples I'm using here.

Okay, so, let's build some characters. What do we need?

Let's begin with basic anatomy. Literally.

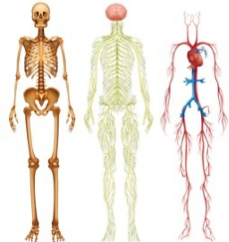
What is the character's physiology? You should consider knowing some or all of the following things about your character. The more important a role the character plays, the more you should know.

What is your character's: gender, age, height, weight, color of hair, eyes, and skin? How's her posture? Is he good looking? Overweight? Underweight? Clean, neat, pleasant, untidy? What is the shape of his head? Face? Limbs? Does she have any abnormalities, birthmarks, or diseases? And what of his heredity? What attributes did he inherit from his parents?

Moving on to societal factors.

Basic Anatomy of a Character

- Physical Appearance (Early please)
 - Tall, short, muscular, hairy, eye and hair color
- Societal
 - Class, occupation, married, children, siblings, parents, religion, politics, hobbies
- Name



What is her class: lower, middle, upper? What type of work does she do? What work hours does she keep and what is her income? Is it a union job? Safe or dangerous? Does she like the job? Her coworkers?

What kind of education does he have? What schools did he go to and what were his grades like? What were his favorite subjects? Does he keep current on them? How?

Let's talk home life. Are her parents alive? How often does she speak to them? Do they exchange birthday gifts? Are her parents still married? What were their habits and hobbies your character grew up around? What were her parents' vices?


Is your character married? Happily? For how long? What religion is he? Nationality? Is he a leader amongst his friend group? In any clubs? Does he play sports still? How often?

What are her political affiliations? What does she do to amuse herself? Hobbies? What's the last book she read? What magazine does she have a subscription to and does she read every issue?

If this seems like a lot, it is. And there's more coming. But as I said, you don't need to answer every question. And if you do, bravo, but whatever you do, don't tell the reader!

So why do this? Well, the more you know your characters inside and out and what makes them tick, the better you will write them. They will be fleshed out and it will be apparent.

If you've ever read or watched something and thought, "gosh, that character is so one-dimensional," I bet the writer doesn't know where that character grew up and what her least favorite subject was in high school.



Digging Deeper

- What is her sense of morality?
- What does he regret most?
- What's his darkest secret?
- If she could change one thing about the world, what would it be and why?

Again, do you need to do all this work for the unnamed barista who makes your protagonist's latte? No, you do not. But if you are procrastinating writing a tough scene and you want to pretend you are writing, go ahead. I won't tell. And while we're at it, let's dig a little deeper.

Let's put your character on an analyst's couch.

What is his sex life like? His moral standards? What are his ambitions? Frustrations and chief disappointments in life?

What's her temperament? Easy going, pessimistic, or optimistic? An extrovert or introvert?

Does he have any obsessions, inhibitions, phobias, or superstitions? (You can see where the thriller/mystery writer may need to spend some time on this area.)

What about her abilities? Languages? Talents? Does she have a good imagination? Sense of humor? Taste? Poise? What's her judgment like? Is she a good problem solver? Book smart but not street smart? The reverse?

If he could change one thing about the world, what would it be and why?

Let's do more still! Let's talk about leveling up characters.

What do we add, what do we take away?

Video and role playing games are good examples. You don't just get to add everything good you want, right? Your protagonist shouldn't be attractive, smart, fast, strong, and rich. How boring!

As the Creator of your universe, you can give and you can take away. And you should. Perhaps give your character a gift for languages, but also a stutter. Or money but low self-esteem. And on and on. Make your characters interesting!



Character Handouts

- Desires - Give more than one
- Weaknesses – Seemingly Insurmountable
- Strengths – Hidden
- Sense of self – either on....or off

Consider looking into Laurie Hutzler's "Character Map," and Elizabeth Boyle's tool for plotting character arc called DREAM.

I will close by encouraging you to spend as much time developing your characters as you can. The better you know them, the

stronger a foundation they will offer for you to build on and the more your characters will come to life for your readers.