

Make ‘em cry…

Adding emotional bang to your stories and characters

by

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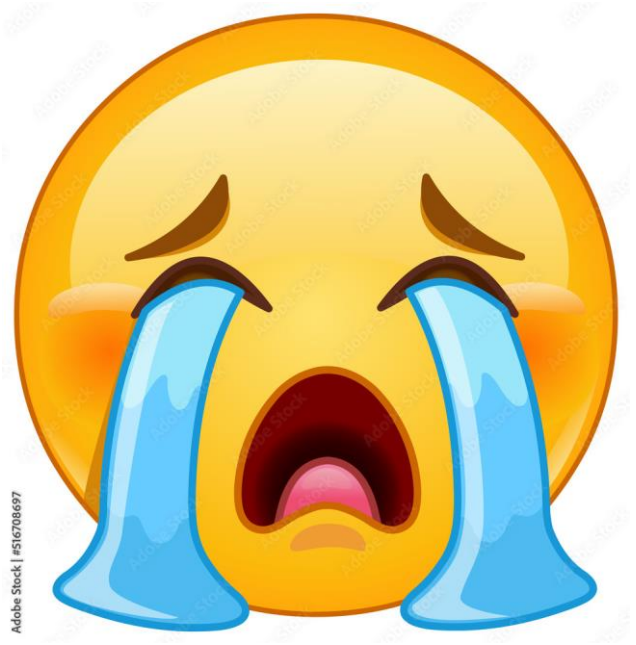
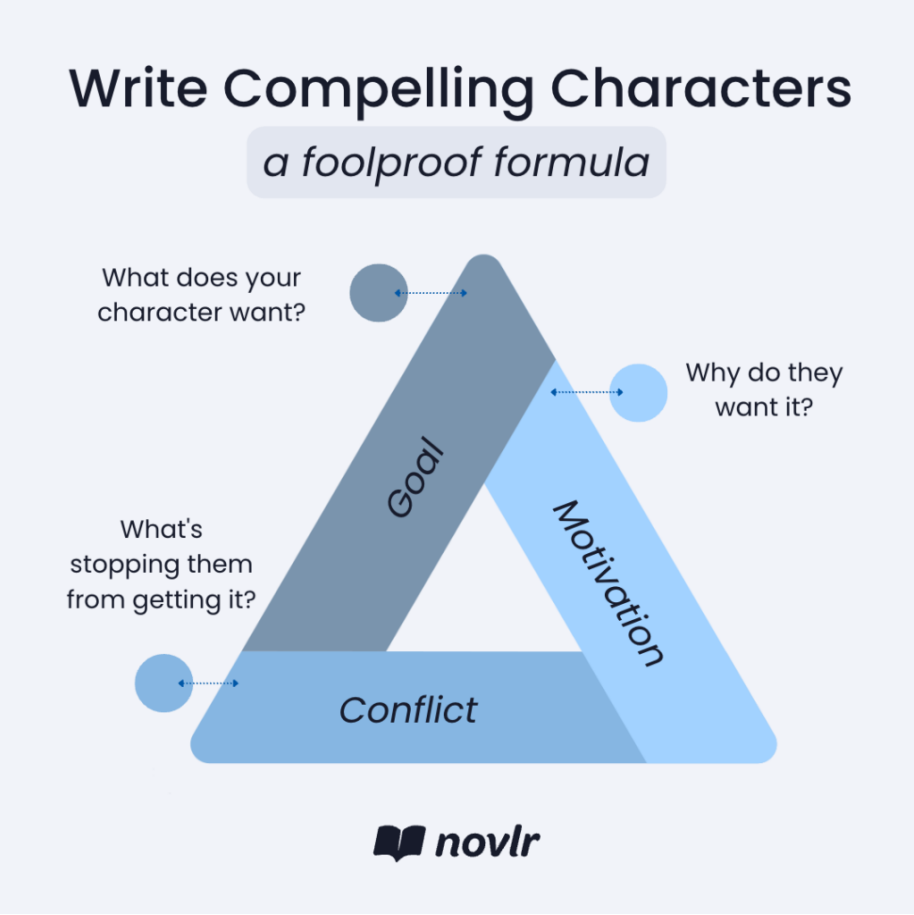
Tears sell books.



- Why do we read?
  - Fully immerse in the reality of the book
    - Requires emotional involvement
    - If not, the book gets put down…
    - “Walden Two”, “The Time Machine”
- Creating emotional impact = single most important (and perhaps most difficult!) aspect to writing fiction
  - This is a character-driven process
  - Your job as the author is to manipulate the reader into caring for your character(s)

Three-Pronged Approach to Creating Characters

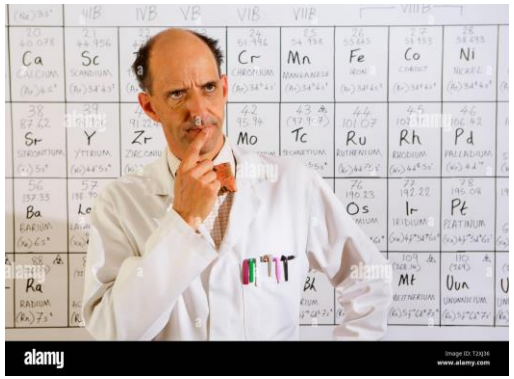
I’m a scientist, so I’m naturally drawn to a formula of any kind…



Formula 1: Creating a Compelling Character

CC = G + M + C

Adding Character Depth – Second Formula



EB = CC + EM

Emotional bang = *compelling character* + emotional manipulation

The Characters

- Normal, everyday people going through some kind of relatable life event
  - Average people with **flaws** and **weaknesses** that make them **vulnerable**
    - But our MC should show a **great strength of will**,
  - Make the good guys sympathetic and the bad guys unsympathetic
    - Or mixing in a little bit of “unsympathy” for the good guy and a little sympathy for the bad guy adds complexity to the characters and can create internal emotional conflicts within the reader! This is a good thing. ☺





Character Essentials

- A **sympathetic**, **round** character
  - More than one-dimension to their motivations and drives
  - They can even have conflicting emotions with uncertainty about what they really want
    - (don't we all have this?!)
- A **realistic** character
  - The average, everyday "Joe"
    - Often will not be extraordinary in any specific way, though they will have skills and talents.
    - Always exceptions – perhaps your character is a King or multi-billionaire. That's ok, too!
- A **relatable** character
  - One we can identify with, one we have things in common with
    - Life struggles, life joys, life goals, everyday frustrations, everyday routines, etc.



Character Challenge #1

- Find out what makes your characters tick! What drives your character to do what they are doing?
  - For each character, create a character bio that includes:
    - Habits
    - Intimacies
    - Greatest desires, fears, past wounds (physical/emotional), etc.
    - Friends
    - Family
  - Relevant aspects of this bio will then be subtly and purposefully revealed (or concealed) by you, the author



Character Challenge #2



- Identify your MC's one, greatest strength?
  - What drives the hard choices the character must make?
    - Amia (Lunar One) – her greatest strength was her tenacity, especially concerning her sense of morality
  - This greatest strength drives everything in the story
    - Plot, conflict, choices, resolution
- This greatest strength is the source of the driving conflict
  - Their greatest strength is also their greatest weakness
  - It's also empowers the MC to ultimately triumph
    - Amia's tenacity and morality effectively force her to work with the underground movement even though she really doesn't want to – she'd rather ignore the whole thing, but she can't. In the end, it's this same trait that empowers her to take lead and save others.

The Compelling Character on Page

- You need a couple of things
  - ***Scenes*** to **show** the major strength of your character
    - You can't tell us – your character's actions must speak for themselves
  - ***Compelling Dialogue*** to keep the reader intrigued
    - **Tension** – what's at stake in the scene?
    - **Subtext** – sometimes it's about what isn't said directly
    - **Idiosyncrasies** – unique voice for each character
- If you miss the target on either of these, you're missing opportunities to fully develop your character



The Character Arc

- The emotional journey and personal transformation that your character undergoes
  - ~4-7 major scenes (critical moments) that show this gradual progression
    - In each, there is a barrier to realization or change
    - Decision, desire, and drive are shown
  - These are the most important scenes in your book
    - Make them shine!
  - For each scene, ask:
    - What decision/realization does your character reach (consciously or otherwise)?
    - What does your character desire in this moment?
      - What's at stake?
    - What is motivating/driving your character?
      - What is influencing their choice?
    - What is the barrier to making the decision or realization?

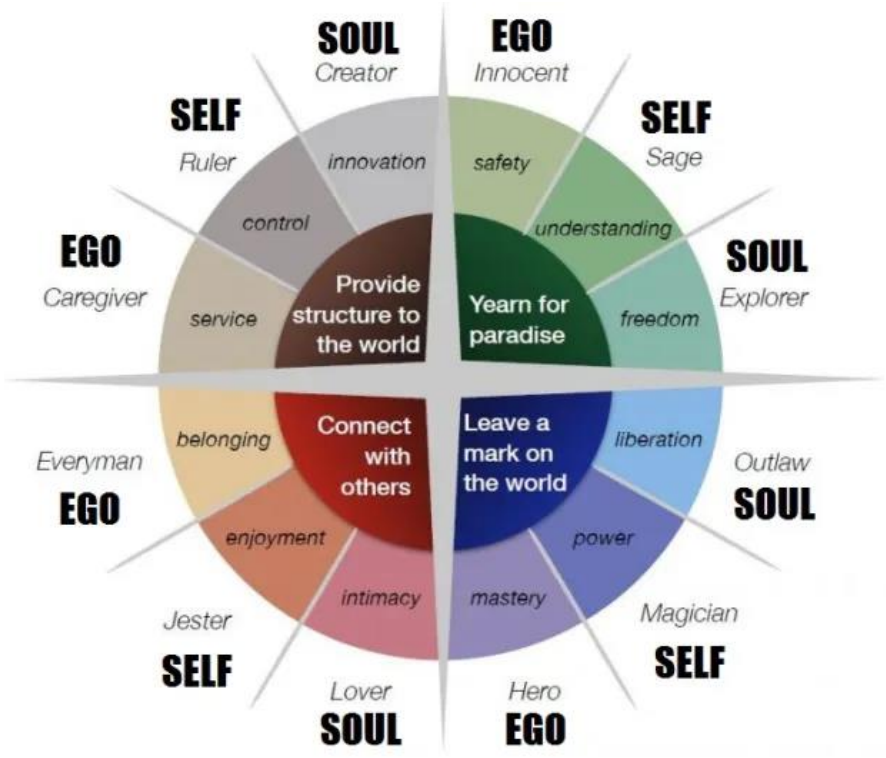


Character Challenge #3

- Take one of your character arc scenes and answer the questions from the prior slide **after** answering the following questions about your character:
  - What does the reader need to know, feel, or realize before getting to this moment?
  - What does the character need to know, feel, or realize prior to this moment?
  - What does my character need to encounter in order to know, feel, or realize that?
- Repeat this for each character arc scene
- These questions should
  - Put the information you need to reveal to the reader in the right sequence
  - Identify what parts are most essential
  - Identify any gaps

Bringing the character to life

- Now that we have compelling characters – congrats, it's time to bring them to life!
  - Emotions
  - Hero Archetypes (The Hero's Journey) are a decent place to begin
    - ID central emotion/motivation of character



Archetype	Motivation	Motto	Core Desire
Creator	Stability & Control	If it can be imagined, it can be created.	Create something of enduring value.
Caregiver	Stability & Control	Love your neighbor as yourself.	Protect people from harm.
Ruler	Stability & Control	Power isn't everything. It's the only thing.	Control
Jester	Belonging & enjoyment	If I can't dance I don't want to be part of your revolution.	To live in the moment with full enjoyment.
Regular Gal/Guy	Belonging & enjoyment	All mean and women are created equal.	Connection with others.
Lover	Belonging & enjoyment	I only have eyes for you.	Attain intimacy and experience sexual pleasure.
Hero	Risk & mastery	Where there's a will, there's a way.	To prove one's worth through courageous and difficult action.
Outlaw	Risk & mastery	Rules are meant to be broken.	Revenge or revolution.
Magician	Risk & mastery	It can happen!	Knowledge of the fundamental laws of how the world or universe works
Innocent	Independence & fulfillment	Free to be you and me.	To experience paradise.
Explorer	Independence & fulfillment	Don't Fence Me In.	The freedom to find out who you are through exploring the world.
Sage	Independence & fulfillment	The truth will set you free.	The discovery of truth.

Writing Exercise – Feel It!

- The Central Emotion
  - What is the central emotion that you want to evoke from your reader?
    - Evoke that emotion within yourself
      - Movie, documentary, poem, picture, object – anything that will evoke that same emotional response within you
      - Use this as an emotional trigger to get into this mindset before writing
    - Dig Deeper
      - Once you are fully immersed within this central emotion, explore this emotion fully
        - What other emotions are you feeling that compliment (or even conflict) with the primary emotion?
          - Are there tertiary emotions to these secondary emotions?
          - A scene where a scared character shoots an intruder can lead to feelings of shame or perhaps pride, and maybe even both!
      - Focus on evoking these underlying emotions in addition to the central emotion
        - Shows emotional depth
        - May be a source of internal conflict for your character



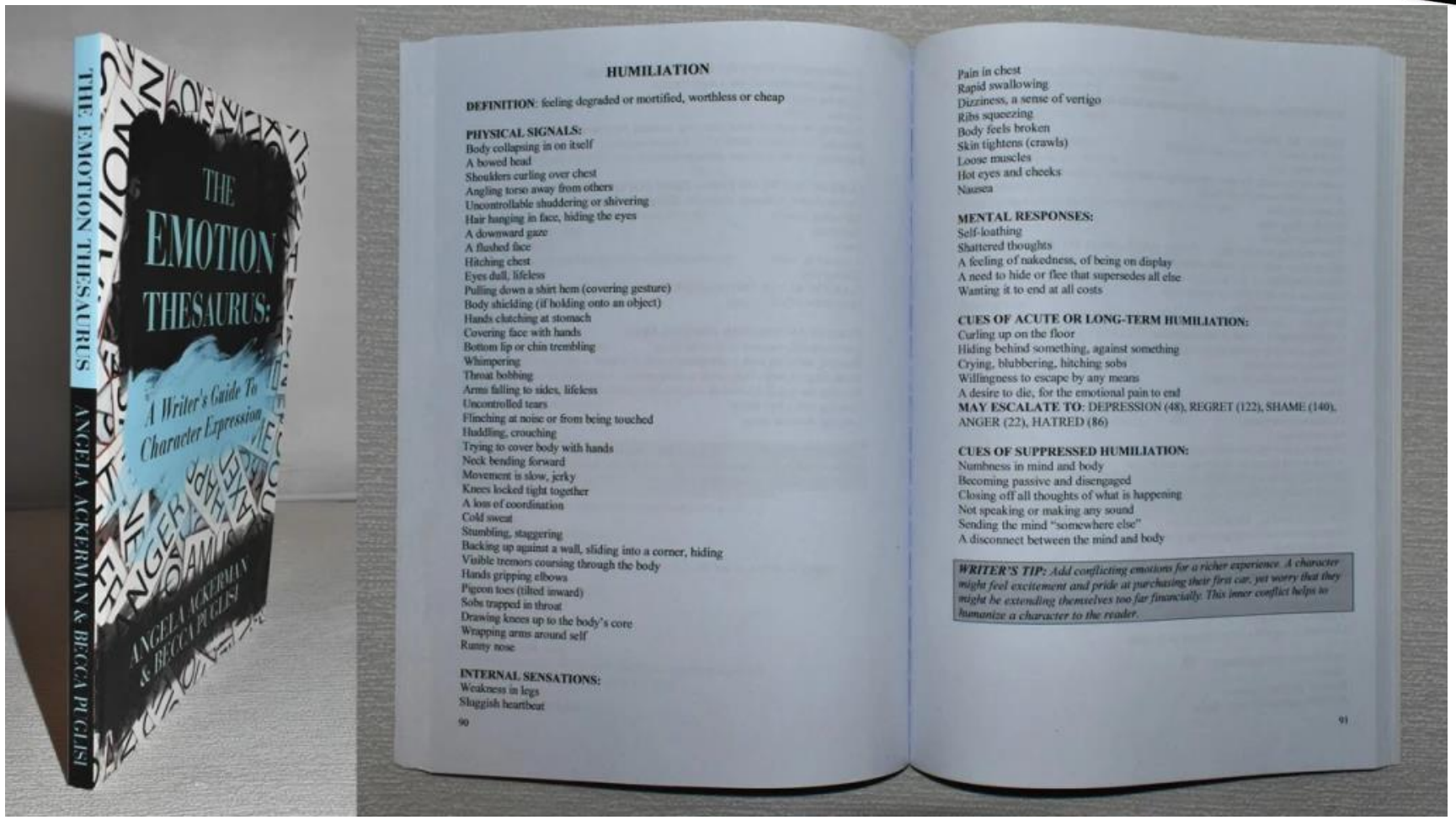
Writing (showing) Emotion



- Sensory Cues
  - “Weighted and dark, breath huddled in her lungs like heavy stones” (grief)
- Imagery Cues
  - “Her chest filled with effervescence, like bubbles in a glass of champagne.” (joy)
- Bodily Manifestations
  - Stomping, kicking, punching a wall, grinding teeth, shouting (frustration)
- Feeling Words
  - Despair, grief stricken, all is lost, devastated, crushed, done for (anguish)

I often “cheat”…

- **The Emotion Thesaurus**
  - Angela Ackerman & Becca Puglisi
  - There’s a whole series!





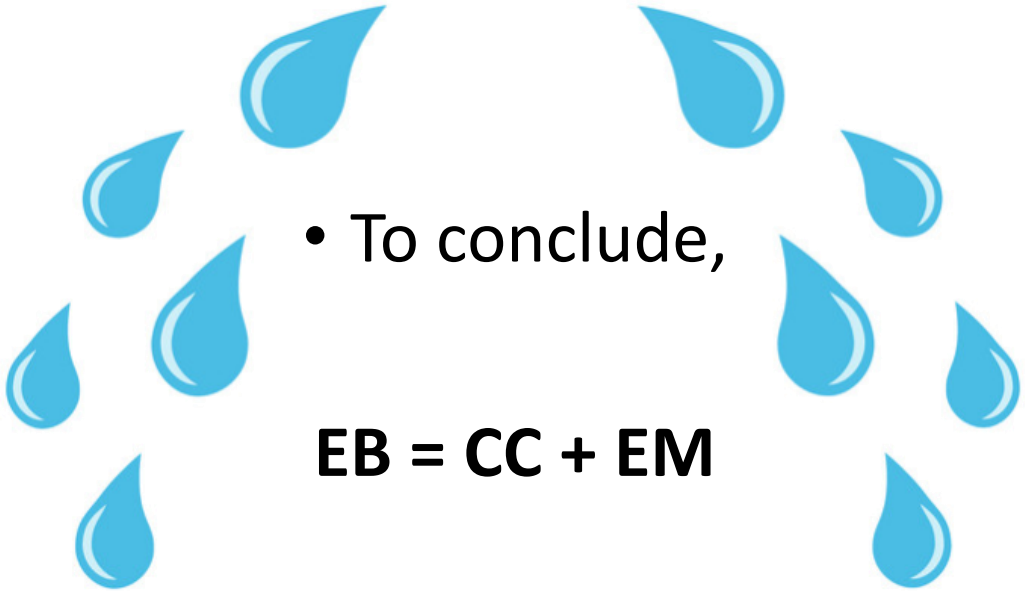
Tips for Adding Emotional Bang

- **Central Emotion**
  - What is the major emotion you wish to evoke from your reader? (We just did an exercise on this, remember?)
    - What are the secondary and tertiary emotions related to the central one?
    - Identify conflicting emotions and potentially exploit for internal conflict?
- **Perception**
  - Mood reflects reality
    - Good mood – I notice different things than when in a bad mood.
    - Your scene should reflect the mood you wish to evoke
      - If character notices something in scene, it should be something someone experiencing that emotion would notice
      - Being chased by a gunman, you won't notice a how beautiful, lovely, and/or serene a flower garden is as you plow through it.

Tips for Adding Emotional Bang

- **Show through Action & Response**
  - How is your character physically and mentally responding to an emotion? Write that.
  - Now, if present, describe how other characters are responding to your main character's actions rather than telling.
- **Anticipation**
  - Drop hints about the big, dramatic moment
    - We all know A and B will get together, but anticipation is what makes the tears flow when it happens
  - Build tension through antici……pation.
- **Pace**
  - Shorter paragraphs and sentences = actions and thrills, use to build intense emotions
  - Longer paragraphs and sentences = calm and relaxed scenes and associated moods
  - Balance between these two is crucial (especially for some genres)

The Formula



- To conclude,

EB = CC + EM

Emotional bang = *compelling character* + emotional manipulation

With this formula, you can now make any reader cry!

Assignment

- Create your characters!
  - Use this workshop to guide you
    - Also grab my Novel Guide for some useful worksheets
  - Compelling Characters
    - Flaws, strengths, weaknesses, quirks, routines, habits
    - Character arcs
  - Emotional Manipulation
    - Include relationships between characters
    - Include a list of bad things you can do to your MC
    - Include a list of things that might “humanize” your villain
  - Now, Complete the Character Challenges
- Add any new necessary scenes and modifications to your scene-by-scene breakdown of the plot

References

- **Write characters your readers won't forget**
  - Stant Litore
  - Short primer (highly recommend)
- **Writing the intimate character**
  - Jordan Rosenfield
  - In-depth subject matter
- **Characters & Viewpoint**
  - Orson Scott Card
  - In-depth subject matter
- **The Blob! Blog**
  - www.danieldelill.com/the-blob
  - I haven't posted anything new in a while, but there are plenty of great entries full of writing tips. ☺