

Character Sketch

Get inside your character's head

A character sketch is a quick rendering of a character. Writing a sketch is about asking and answering questions. To write a character sketch, ask yourself questions that only you, as the author, can answer

1) Who is your character physically?

- a) Physical characteristics are the first things we notice when we meet someone. Therefore, this is a good starting point when writing a character sketch. Questions such as, but not limited to: Is your character a woman or a man? Is he or she tall or short? Is your character bald? How old is your character? Does he or she have a disability? Any distinctive physical characteristics that will distinguish this character in such a way as to reflect their internal personality?

Often these very details lead to conflict or are the means through which we explore a character's psychology. Answering questions about your character's physicality is the first step in creating a fully realized character.

2) What is your character doing? This question brings into account other aspects of story writing such as **setting** and **time**.

- a) Is your character walking down the street? Is he or she sitting in a park? Is your character working on a boat?

Asking what your character is doing will not only help you understand your character, but also his or her relationship to the setting in your story (giving us ideas for setting, clothing, etc.)

Do not gloss over this part of characterization. Don't just say your character is at the movies, for example, but also consider all that there is to do at a movie theatre: Is the character waiting in line for tickets or at the concession stand? Is he or she waiting to talk to the manager? Perhaps the character is sitting impatiently waiting for the movie to begin. Getting as specific as you can when answering this question will not only help you define your character, but will also help to define the other elements of the fiction.

3) What is your character feeling?

- a) This is probably one of the more complex questions you can ask about your character. Is your character angry? Is he or she happy, sad, tired, or depressed? Does your character

love something or someone? Asking questions about your character's emotional life might evolve into the production of a **character history**. While this may be tempting, you have to focus on what your subject is feeling within the context of the story you are writing. Although the answers to these questions are important, they are rarely explicitly stated in the story.

Authors may be tempted to start with the emotional or psychological state of their characters and they may even explicitly state them. This can lead to one of the cardinal sins of fiction writing: telling instead of showing. Implicitly showing how your character is feeling by his or her interactions with other characters or the setting is more interesting to read than explicitly stating whether your character is happy, sad, elated, joyful, or miserable.

4) Building off your character sketch

- a) A sketch is a starting point. In the visual arts, artists carry around sketch pads to practice and develop the fundamental skills of their craft with the aim of producing paintings that seem to jump off the canvas, or sculptures that seem to move in just the right light. The same is true for authors who use character sketches. Writers use this tool to develop and rehearse one of the fundamental skills of their craft—characterization. However, the final goal is not to have a notepad full of character sketches. An author should get to know his or her character through this practice.

While not everything that an author writes in a character sketch must be included in the novel, the author should develop an in-depth and all-encompassing knowledge of every facet of the character's personality in order to create a consistent and engaging persona.

The ultimate goal of a writer is to take these character sketches and use them to craft a wonderfully engrossing, character-driven work of fiction.

Other questions to consider when building a *character arc*:

- What is the character's longing/need/desire:
- What wound (internal and/or external) does the character carry:
- What are the character's central beliefs:
- What does the character fear:
- What does the character see as their own identity:
- What is the true essence of the character (those central psychological/emotional/ethical traits that they carry and may or may not recognize in themselves):