

Crafting Fiction

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Week 1

Day 1: Characters

In this course, we're going to write fiction narratives. A narrative is simply a story, and most stories share some basic elements that we will cover as you begin to put together your own story.

Every story is about at least one person, a character. Interesting characters don't have to be super mysterious or from another time period or world. In fact, some of the most interesting characters could be based upon people you've met during your life. The elderly lady who works as a cashier at the grocery store. The man who sells balloons at the fair. The teenage girl who works at a local ice cream shop. The middle-aged man who spends hours working in his garden.

Stories can and usually do have more than one character, but if you look carefully, they often have one **main** character. This character should have a problem (the conflict) that needs to be solved (we'll get into conflict later), and by the end of the story, the main character should usually change or grow somehow, even if that change is to learn something.

Characters that change in a story are called dynamic characters. Characters that don't change or change very little are called static characters.

But before we jump too far ahead, I want you to come up with some of your own characters. To come up with characters, start by considering what you know. However, because we're going to be working with fiction, don't come up with a character that is exactly like someone you know. Branch out a little and be creative.

Answer the following questions about yourself to help you think of some characters:

1. Who are some people you see every day or almost every day? _____

2. Who are some people you have some things in common with? _____

3. What do you have in common? _____

4. Is there anyone you would like to be more like? _____

5. How would you like to be more like that person? _____

6. What are some problems that kids you know could have? _____

Now make a list in the space given of possible characters that are similar, but not the same (definitely not the same name!) to the people you thought of. Feel free to add other characters that might be inspired by places you've been or even places you've wanted to visit. The list could include kids or adults. Here's an example:

1. A boy who plays soccer
2. A girl who wants to do gymnastics
3. A Sunday school teacher who won't stop teaching
4. A nanny who gets hired to watch three spoiled kids
5. A baker
6. A woman who wants to travel but doesn't have the money
7. A girl who is going to camp
8. A boy who is going to a piano competition

Your list:

1.	_____
2.	_____
3.	_____
4.	_____
5.	_____
6.	_____
7.	_____
8.	_____

Day 2: Round Characters vs. Flat Characters

You should now have some possible characters, but you'll need to narrow your options to a main character, someone who can be the star of your story. One key to a good main character is having a character that is round. In other words, you need a character that is not only believable and realistic, but also interesting, with room for the character to develop or change. You don't want a main character that is flat, in other words, a character that is stereotypical and doesn't have much depth.

To help you choose your main character, go through your previous list and underline the ones that interest you the most. Here's the example list with some underlined.

1. A boy who plays soccer
2. A girl who wants to do gymnastics
3. A Sunday school teacher who won't stop teaching
4. A nanny who gets hired to watch three spoiled kids
5. A baker
6. A woman who wants to travel but doesn't have the money
7. A girl who is going to camp
8. A boy who is going to a piano competition

Now, write your three favorites here:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

From my list, all the underlined characters have the potential to be round, but notice that one of my characters is rather vague. A baker has room for a lot of good personality, yet it would also be easy to stereotype a baker since the baker doesn't yet seem to want anything in particular.

Read the following two paragraphs about a baker named Henry and label one as flat and one as round. Notice in the paragraph with the flat character that the writing focuses more on general descriptions rather than on facts that show personality, desires, and motivation.

Henry was a baker. He had brown hair and green eyes, and he was six feet tall. He had a wife and two children. They all worked at the bakery. They even had a dog named Scout. Henry was a good baker; his best dessert was a seven-layer chocolate cake. _____

Henry looked at his seven-layer chocolate cake and sighed. *This is a true work of art*, he thought. He had worked to perfect the cake ever since he had started the Third Street Bakery ten years ago. Then, he was by himself; now, he had a wife and two small children to support. Oh, and his dog, Scout, a gift from his wife, Selena. _____

If you labeled the first paragraph as flat, you are correct. In this paragraph, Henry doesn't seem to have much depth. The second paragraph, however, gives hints at Henry's personality (dedicated and faithful) as well as to his desires and motivations (be the best he can be at baking and taking care of his family).

SAMPLE

Day 3: Brainstorming Characters

Part of pre-writing is coming up with lists, charts, and so on before you actually start writing. This step is important in both fiction and nonfiction writing. To be able to write about believable, realistic characters, you need to know a lot of information about them yourself. So today, we're going to work on writing a character summary.

A character summary is a paragraph (or two or three) about one of your characters. It should include more information than just physical features (like red hair and freckles); if you know only what a character looks like, you probably don't know them very well. You'll want to include things about the character's family life, daily habits, personality, goals, fears, and quirks.

To help you come up with characters, feel free to use the following questions. Answer the questions for as many different characters as you want. Together, your answers will form a character summary. You can write your answers into one paragraph or leave them in this list form.

1. What is your character's name? _____
2. What is your character's age? _____
3. What is your character's family like? _____

4. Where does your character live? _____
5. What does your character do for fun? _____

6. What are some things your character doesn't like to do? _____

7. What does your character want to accomplish? _____

8. What is your character afraid of? _____

9. Who is your character's best friend? _____