

# Fun and Inspiring Character Writing Ideas

Posted by [Melissa Donovan](#) on May 28, 2015 ·



Where do you get your character writing ideas?

One of the most difficult things to execute well in a piece of fiction is a realistic character. We've all read stories in which the characters were dull or hollow; they come across like clones of the same characters we've met in dozens of stories before.

Readers want characters who are as unique and complex as real people.

Are we, as writers, obligated to deliver such characters?

Not necessarily. Plenty of stories are plot-driven or centered around theme rather than character. But the stories that resonate the most have vivid, layered characters.

Readers and writers often sing the praises of character-driven fiction. So the single best way to intrigue readers is to give them characters they can't forget.

## ***Character Writing Ideas***

You can spend hours, days, weeks, or months developing character ideas. Whether you launch into your story with little knowledge of your characters or create full sketches and backstories for each one before you begin drafting the narrative, there

are plenty of tricks and techniques you can use to inspire characters and breathe life into them.

1. Use real people as models for your characters. Think of all the people you know intimately, people you love as well as people you despise. Take their strongest and most interesting traits and qualities and give them to your characters.
2. Need a face for your character? You can use people you know for this too, but you can also use celebrities and other public figures. Some writers find that putting a face to a character brings out a more robust personality. Try it!
3. Baby name dictionaries are a great starting place for names, and names can help you generate ideas for your character sketches. Think about how names influence our perceptions of people and sketch a character that fits his or her name.
4. Start with a predicament. Then, you may need to create characters who have the skills to get out of that predicament. Thieves, for example, can pick locks, so if your characters need to get something out of a locked room or building, one of your characters may have some experience in burgling.
5. Live out your dreams. When you were a kid, did you want to be a rock star or an astronaut? Well, now you can live vicariously through your characters!
6. Turn to fiction. Books, movies, and TV shows are packed with incredible characters that audiences have already fallen for. Don't try to copy these characters, but by all means, use them for inspiration. Ask yourself what made your favorite characters so compelling.
7. We all have quirks, so it makes sense for characters to have quirks too. Freckles, bitten fingernails, a limp, or a lisp are all ways you can set one character apart from the others.
8. Family and friends make us who we are. Draft sketches for your characters' family and friends (even if they're not going to appear in the story) and you may learn a thing or two about your character.
9. Have some style! From a modern urban princess to a bum on the street, every person has his or her own style. Your characters should too! What do they wear? How does she make up her face? Does he wear cologne?
10. Most people have interests, hobbies, and passions. Even if your character's personal interests aren't tied directly to the plot, they could enrich it, and they'll certainly make your character more believable.
11. I've always found mannerisms and gestures fascinating. You often see the same mannerisms mirrored throughout a family or group of friends. In fiction, give each

character his or her own unique gestures – biting the bottom lip, scratching one’s forehead, and tapping one’s toe on the floor are all good options.

12. Have you ever noticed that everyone you know has their own special way of talking? We each have a unique voice comprised of how we string words together, expressions we frequently use, and our intonation. You can make a character more realistic by simply giving the character a unique voice through dialogue.
13. Some of the best characters are extreme or over the top. Think of Luke Skywalker, Robin Hood, and Indiana Jones. These characters have strong personalities and are deeply driven by higher values and personal desires. Think about how your characters’ philosophies and goals shape their personalities.
14. Not all characters are human! Stories can be enriched with pets; they may not be necessary to the plot, but they can add to the emotional value of a story.
15. Do you write science fiction or fantasy? Forget non-human pets. Try creating characters who are not of this earth: androids, aliens, and mythological or fantastical creatures.
16. When you’re fresh out of good character writing ideas, try taking your characters out of the story altogether. Write a scene from a character’s backstory or draft a monologue in your character’s voice.
17. Spend some down time with your characters. What do they do when they’re not struggling with conflict or saving the world? Where do your characters eat, how do they organize their closets, and what do they listen to while working out? Sometimes taking a peek at your characters’ most normal moments will give you insight to who they are.
18. Balancing traits among a group of characters means that each character brings something different to the table. Harry Potter was a hero, but where would he have been without Hermione’s smarts and Ron’s loyalty? Distribute different strengths and weaknesses among your characters, especially if you’re writing an ensemble piece.
19. The literary canon is full of ancient and archetypal characters. From the herald and the hero to the trickster and the villain, myths, legends, and fairy tales can inspire and inform your characters. Put a new twist on these old favorites by forming (rather than copying) your characters from these proven standards from storytelling.
20. What about you? It’s the oldest trick in the book: base a character on yourself.