

How to Create a Character Profile: Complete Guide with Template

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One of the greatest challenges of writing a novel is getting your characters into three-dimensional form.

When you read a book and the characters are realistic, you can almost feel as if you know them in real life. On the other hand, we have trouble relating to characters that have not been developed well (which may make them less likable, even if they're a "good guy").

Creating fictional characters who are memorable and multi-faceted usually doesn't happen overnight.

It's a process that requires quite a bit of planning and thought if you want your characters to resonate with readers. One thing that can help you through that process is creating a profile.

What Is a Character Profile?

A character profile is a collection of information that you gather about your character before you begin writing.

You will explore different aspects of each main character, including their external appearances, habits, internal thought processes, and feelings, among others.

As you go begin writing, you might add more details to the profile, but generally, you should brainstorm the different aspects of your character's personality at the start of the writing process.

Why Should You Create a Character Profile?

Do you have to make a character profile every time you write? The short answer is no, you don't. It might happen that you're taking a shower one morning and suddenly get an idea for a dynamic, fully developed character who has a secret past and commitment issues.

The problem is, not everyone is capable of developing a character fully and effectively without having a guide, or at least doing so might be harder for certain stories. In that case, a character profile can come in very handy.

So here are the top three reasons creating a character profile can be beneficial:

1. You'll get to know your characters before the story begins.

Just like people in real life, your characters already have their own personalities before the story begins. It's your job to figure out what these are, including their idiosyncrasies, habits, fears, and wants.

2. You'll develop your character's motives.

Thinking back on your character's past will help you understand how they got to be the person they are now, which will make it easier to understand why they behave the way they do.

This can also include their motivations for why he wants to reach a certain goal, and what beliefs, true or otherwise, are helping or hindering him from reaching that goal.

3. Character profiles save you time.

Like it or not, sometimes it's hard to keep details straight in your mind once you're 100 pages deep. What if you decide that a character's long-lost brother suddenly shows up, and you forget his name or how much older he was? Having a character profile handy will save you a lot of time.

What Should a Character Profile Include?

Before you start writing your novel, create a character profile for each of your main characters. Clearly, you will not need a detailed profile for characters who appear in a scene or two; but pay extra attention especially to your protagonist and antagonist, and all other supporting roles.

So what should you include to make a detailed character profile?

1. Name

While a name may seem like a very basic element to your character, it can actually play a key role in how your readers perceive them. You should dedicate some careful thought when it comes to choosing the right name for your characters.

You might choose names whose meanings and origins are symbolic and represent your characters in some way. Or, you might simply find that a certain name has either positive or negative connotations, and assign it to characters who feel appropriate for that name.

The geographic region where your character lives can also influence the names you choose. Elisabetta might be a fabulous name for a protagonist from Italy, whereas you might make a different choice for a character from India.

Also, remember to note down nicknames that you use throughout the book. For example, Cassandra's friends call her Sandy, but her family may call her Cassie, and her father's pet name for her may even be Cassandy. Knowing how to use nicknames to show endearment can add color to your story.

2. Age

Picking the right age for your characters also plays an important role in the creation of your story. Clearly, a 9-year-old main character will have a different perspective than a 30-year-old. Age will also affect your dialogue, and even the commentaries inside your narrative.

Also, pay attention to how long your story spans. If your story covers a 10-year-period, or several generations (as in the case of family sagas), you will need to write a character profile for different stages in the person's life.

For example, if the first part of the book covers your character's childhood, and in the next part he's suddenly a grown adult with two kids, you will need detailed descriptions of his personality in both periods of his life.

3. Appearance

Even if a book isn't as visual a medium as film, looks still matter! Paint a vivid image for your reader so they can really picture your characters.

Here are some details you should consider when it comes to a character's physical appearance:

- Are they fat or thin? Short or tall?
- What is their hair color and eye color? Is their hair straight or wavy? Always in place or often disheveled? Are their eyes big and dreamy or small and beady?
- How do they like to dress? Snazzy or casual? Always coordinated, or always mismatched?
- How do they smell? Are they doused in cologne or usually sweaty?
- Do they have glasses? A hearing aid? A limp?

You can write down these details in your character profile, but also remember that some descriptions might come out later in your scenes, even if you weren't planning on them.

You don't have to reveal these details explicitly. They might reveal themselves through certain scenes.

For example, an old lady with a tremor in her hand due to a stroke might be described in more detail by showing how, when she eats cereal, she can't hold the spoon steady so she always ends up with cereal in her lap.

4. Speech

People from different regions in the world speak in many different ways. These region-specific ways of speaking are called dialects or colloquialisms.

You'll need to decide which dialects to assign your characters. It might also help to answer some of these questions:

- Is the character educated or uneducated?
- Do they use certain words over and over, such as “you know” or “like”?
- Do they speak with hanging consonants, such as “likin’,” “movin’”?
- Is their grammar precise, poor, or somewhere in between?
- Do they use swear words, and if so, when?
- Is their voice high pitched or low?
- Do they normally speak loudly or softly?
- Do they stutter?
- Are they talkative, or laconic?
- How do they laugh?

5. Personality Traits

Although it’s not possible to summarize an entire personality in one sheet of paper, your character profile will at least help you see an overall glimpse of who your character is. For example,

- Are they an introvert or an extrovert?
- Are they normally happy, or usually sad and brooding?
- Are they sensitive or happy-go-lucky?
- What are their religious beliefs?
- What are their political inclinations?
- Are they generous, or stingy?
- What are their fears?
- What are their greatest failures?
- What do they like and dislike?

Remember, these are just guiding questions to help you think through the different aspects of your character’s life.

6. Relationships

Your character profile should also include important relationships in your character’s life. Note down the names of their spouse, children, parents, siblings, grandparents, lovers, close friends, neighbors, colleagues, rivals, and pets.

Other details you might want to consider include

- Is their marriage and family life happy? Strained? Are they divorced?
- How they as a parent or as a child?
- How is their work environment? Are they laidback or a workaholic?
- Do their colleagues respect them?
- Do they have any pets?

7. Location

The setting of your story also determines a lot of the details that go into it. You can list down the general location, but if you want to be more specific, you can also envision your characters' living quarters.

- Do they live in a house with a yard in the suburbs? In a one-bedroom apartment? In a farmhouse with acres and acres of land?
- How long have they lived there? Have they moved every 6 months, or is this their home for the last 20 years?
- Is their house cluttered and chaotic, or organized and pristine?

Remember, though, that you will probably only need these details if their homes factor into the story. But even if the entire novel takes place away from their homes, this section can still help you to better envision your character as a “real” person.

8. Profession

Adults typically spend 8–10 of their day at their workplace, so it's crucial to think about this when drafting your novel. Things to look out for include:

- What does your character do for a living, and do they earn enough?
- How does he feel about his job? Are they good at it? Are they satisfied, or looking for other opportunities?
- What other things does he like doing apart from his job? Is he involved in community work? Or what recreation activities does he enjoy?

9. Key Events from their Past

Your character's past is just as important as their current interests. Write down details from your character's past, such as any traumatic experiences, major changes, or events that helped shaped their personality.

- Were they loved as a child?
- Were their parents together or divorced?
- Did they grow up in a nurturing environment, or an atmosphere of abuse and neglect?
- Who was their childhood best friend? Are they still friends?
- Were they bullied in school? Or extremely popular?
- What was their overall experience in school?

10. Their Significance in the Story

Last but not the least, you will need to plan out the role your character plays in the story. Other details to watch out for include:

- What is their primary goal, and why?
- Who are they for, or who are they against?
- What happens to challenge their goal, and how do they change, if ever?

