

The Write Life

Handling Characters:

Believable Characters

Breaking the Mold

**When Characters
Turn On You**

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The Write Life

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About Us:

This magazine provides writing prompts and inspiration to craft new ideas; articles on how to better your writing skills, overcome writer's block, survive the life of a writer; and short stories.

Visit <http://www.FCWriters.com> for other offerings from FCWG.

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Muse Food

My Own Worst Enemy

If a person lives long enough, they eventually obtain a nemesis of some sort.

Whether it's an evil-villain who always has some sort of shenanigans going on, or a weird hobo who looks at you weird from across the street. An enemy can turn a boring day into a fight-for-your-life scenario.

Your characters will obtain foes and nemeses if they live long enough. Will you have them do battle, in whatever form that may take? Will there be a victor, or does every-

one lose once the curtain is drawn?

Are there henchmen and sidekicks involved? Innocent bystanders? Not-so-innocent bystanders? Collateral damage? Post-event cleanup?

A lot can be decided between a meeting of the hero and the villain.

If you have such a meeting, make it momentous and memorable.

One Words

Try basing a story with one of the below words:

Shenanigans

Pork

Formal

Crossword

Subway

Thwart

Crisis

Palace

Surrounding

Sketch

One Liners

Try starting a story with one of the below sentences:

Let's swing life away.

I'll show you my scars if you show me yours.

One lump or two?

For the last time, you are not the walrus.

I'm asking you nicely, put the banana down.

It's the end of the beginning.

There were five of them.

This isn't what you would call the normal progression of things.

Someone needs to discover the power of decaf.

I want the green notebook.

Photographic Inspiration



Use an image as a starting point for a new story or to help jumpstart a sluggish scene.

Muse Food

Sparklers & Streamers

Most people enjoy a good party. Some more than others.

A lot can be told about a character in how they handle social situations. Are they wallflowers, clinging to the shadows? Do they cut a proverbial rug out on the dance floor? Are they attempting a world record for finishing that keg in one gulp?

I'm a fan of the awkward mumbler. They try to hold a conversation, but no one can quite make out what they said over the din of music, conversations, and drunken

dares. Then it's even more awkward when a halfhearted agreement over some mumbled comments turns out to be a binding contract to become the guardian of a queen.

A character may reveal something he or she would otherwise hold back, when under the influence of alcohol and social pressure. Whether it be a secret, a flaw, or the ability to balance sharp objects on their heads while juggling ping pong balls.

One Worders

Try basing a story with one of the below words:

Night
Scored
Peasant
Tune
Run
Amidst
Partial
Normality
Obscurity
Syntax

One Liners

Try starting a story with one of the below sentences:

Would you like some fudge?

The choice is yours.

My name is Sir Frederick Percival Wesley XII, but you can call me Mr. Fuzzles.

You're crushing my plushy Cthulhu!

Your heart is radioactive?

I can see you, even without the moon.

Someone call Dial-A-Day about this bad weather.

Who calls at 3:30 in the morning on a Tuesday?

Everyone always focuses on the tattoo when I first meet them.

I'm locking the door and going back to my waterbed now.

Photographic Inspiration



Use an image as a starting point for a new story or to help jumpstart a sluggish scene.

First Class

Believable Characters

We've all read stories where the main character is this super-human, god-like creature that the author tries to write off as simply human. Or where a secondary character is that way, even with the excuse that they aren't actually human – but the other non-humans in the story don't even come close to their perfection. These characters can crop up quite easily if you are writing from the first person point of view, and therefore are locked into one character's idea of the others. Unless the main character is psychic and can pick the thoughts out of the others' heads.

The skeletons in our closets are what change our day-to-day interactions with others.

Faults. Every human in the real world has them, and way more than one. A place where they fail. For the vampire character, drinking human blood can be a major fault, particularly if there is a human love-interest (falling in love with the human in the first place may be seen

as a even bigger fault in the first place). Perhaps the main character is a big, strong war hero who can't sleep at night without the lights on and the television blazing. Or a police officer is haunted by their past as an abused child.

Whatever it is, be sure that you know it and that it comes into play during the story. Not just a passing conversation between the war hero and another character about how he can't sleep without the television on. Perhaps have a love interest end up staying the night, and have him wake up in a panic. Sobbing to his love about the whole television thing will draw out that fault even more. After that, the love interest can help him to heal so he won't need the television on any longer.

Of course, a good character will have more than just the fear of sleeping in the dark and silence as a fault. They might not be able to mow the law without risking chopping off their foot. Their parents could be drug addicts, alcoholics or have died while they were away. The skeletons in our closets are what change our day-to-day interactions with others. So should the skeletons in the closets of our characters.

This is where writing in third person can come in handy. In our example of the war hero, writing in third person can let out readers know that she too, is terribly afraid of the dark. That she is glad he told her because now she doesn't have to admit it to him. Or that she thinks sleeping with the lights on is completely stupid and that she resolves to 'fix' him whether he wants her to or not.

Writing in first person with changing points of views is a lot like writing in third person. You see into different characters' minds throughout the story. Unlike third, you can't plunge into their minds at any given moment. The characters' reactions to the unveiling of the faults may take time. With good timing, you could plan the reveal of the war hero's bedroom secret at the very end of a chapter. The reader turns the page, and boom – new chapter from the love's point of view.

I do not suggest, however, randomly sticking another characters point of view in there just for the heck of it. This can very easily throw off the flow of your story. Consistency between points of view is very important if you want people to read the story and to recommend them to their friends. Additionally, don't just mention the television-at-night thing once or twice. Have the love try to heal him so it comes up over and over.

If you decide that a fear of your characters needs to be overcome as part of one of the subplots to the story, then by all means, spend half of the novel trying to fix it. When fixing one aspect of a character throughout the course of the book, be sure to reveal one or two other fears, other habits that the story's society may not approve of to keep the character well rounded.

Perfect is boring, and unbelievable. Perfect love interest are even more so, even if seen solely from the eyes of the person who loves them. Though who knows, if you do write that in and your books become insanely popular, you might get a movie contract with screaming teenagers. But for the sake of your muse's integrity, don't write a perfect character just to market him to the teenage girls.

By Lauren Welch

First Class

Build A Character

When I start writing, I usually have a rough idea of what the main characters look like. Or at least, what the view-point character looks like. Sometimes I have an idea of a name, or a back-ground. Other times, I let the character take me by the seat of the pants and drag me through the bushes.

It's good to have an idea of what your character's back-ground is before you start writing. That way, if you hit a slow part in your story and want to speed things up, you will have a list of scary things in their past that you can drag into the light.

There are expensive character worksheet things online that you can adapt to work for what you need. These are great for working out some aspects of the characters, though some might have parts missing – like allergies, or information on the parents.

If the parents are dead and won't be playing a role in the story, not trying to work those bits out can be perfectly fine. Until your character decides that she or he needs to visit their parents' graves and turns into a puddle of tears and has to be dragged away by someone else. Or you suddenly learn that the parents are alive when you thought they were dead and they are going to be showing up in the very next scene.

There is a lot of overlap between the various worksheets, and at times it is easier to use several for one character. Trying to force certain traits onto a character – being able to read minds when there is no use for that in the story for example – can turn into quite a mess.

When starting to work on a character worksheet, or even just throwing random character history ideas into a blank document, you need to know a few things – first of all, their looks. It could be good to know them, particularly if the hair color or eye color is going to become a key part of the story.

Knowing age is probably one of the most important aspects of a character that you need to know – even if it is just 'early-twenties'. Someone who is 23 usually acts a lot

different than someone who is 13. They have a bigger vocabulary; can have job-issues and, usually, much steamier ro-

mance-scenes. Their age can give you a ball-park range of how much background story you need to build, if they could possibly be married, or divorced, or widowed.

The next step would be figuring out family, friends, and other people who the character has a relationship. Knowing these relationships can smooth out aspects of the story – if it is a war based novel, then you would know how they would act if their lover was killed. Not that a lover could be killed in a shiny-fluffy-bunny story too.

You will need to know the character's occupation, their goals, dreams, and fears. Their allergies can play a big role, and could move a boring picnic scene into a terrifying visit to the hospital where the main character finally reconnects with their father who happens to be the attending ER doctor.

It's good to have an idea of what your character's back-ground is before you start writing.

Possibly more important than occupation and fears would be the past. Their skeletons, so to speak. Did their father die when they were seven? How? Did the character blame him/herself for their parent's death? If they spent the last 20 years feeling as though it was their fault that their parent died, even if they know that is not logically true, you have a character-fault, a skeleton that can be used to create drama. Mmm... Drama.

The worksheets can be a great way to find out all these things. But there are other way to dig deeper, to figure out character reactions before they happen so you can use them against rebellious characters. Make a list of questions, things that you want to know about your character that aren't on the worksheets, like how would they react if a rock fell, killing everyone in the town but them and the one person they wouldn't want to be trapped in an elevator with.

By Lauren Welch

Writer's Sphere

Sculpting 3-D Characters

How do you sculpt a fully-fleshed out character, when all you have is year-old play-doh you found under the couch, next to the dog's lost chew toy?

It's not easy, even when you have premium clay from that fancy art store. You know, the one with that snooty college-kid behind the register, the one with a napoleon complex and more piercings than a jewelry store.

Characters are more than just a shell, to hold witty banter and the occasional plot-progressing action. Characters are in fact living souls, brought to life in your mind's eye, and the minds of your readers.

Take that rock-hard play-doh and smush it together with your premium clay. The colorful flaky bits are the character's quirks, fears, strengths, weaknesses, and closet-skeletons. Whatever helps bring him/her to life.

The rest of the clay helps form the character and keep him/her from flying off in a dozen different directions when they try to take a step.

Characters are more than just a shell, to hold witty banter and the occasional plot-progressing action.

Now take that new-found character and toss it in the flower-bed outside to get roughed up a bit. Unless your story is about fluffy bunnies and gumdrops made out of sunshine, your characters are going to face drama, hardships, pointed sticks, and whatever else you can toss their way.

Characters are just like real people. We don't have easy lives. It's not a cake walk, there's no cheat codes or walkthrough guides we can sneak a peek at to figure out what to do next. You're welcome to skip parts of the character's story for the sake of time, length, and sanity - but for the most part your characters will need to live full, and dramatic lives.

One of my favorite t-shirts has a quote "Scars are tattoos with better stories" and that holds just as true when talking about characters.

They don't have to be physical scars, although a mark here or there can tell whole volumes about a person. There are also mental scars from a traumatic childhood. Psychological scars from all those weird berries your character picked up back in chapter two. Emotional scars from a bad break-up. And even theological scars, if your character's deity of choice is too distracted by shiny objects to provide any valuable help.

I'm not telling you to bury your character alive with scorpions in their boots just to see what happens. But insert a bad experience here and there to learn how your characters deal with challenges, change, opposition, resistance, bad weather, spontaneously combusting pants, and whatever else you feel like tossing at them.

If it makes it any easier on you, your characters have to rights and cannot take any legal action against you. Nor can they haunt you from their graves or send any fictional monsters after you if you break them into little bits.

Not all characters survive life, in fact very few survive life. Those select few tend to become so warped, they're as good as dead.

It's a fine line to walk - keeping your characters sane enough to progress through the plot, while providing enough scar tissue to make them worth caring about.

A character who's omnipresent, omnipotent, indestructible, immortal, and emotionless would make for an incredibly boring person, devoid of anything to attach to or associate with.

If all else fails, give your character a puppy. Your character can be allergic to dogs, or be a cat person, or be able to speak to the dog. Characters can act very differently around pets than humans

Try it out, and see if your characters grow an extra dimension or two.

Not all characters survive life, in fact very few survive life.

By Charles Muir

Writer's Sphere

Breaking The Mold

We've all come across them from time to time. A character so cliché, so two-dimensional, so predictable, so boring.

A "Mary Sue", or the male equivalent, "Gary Stu". We've also all created one at some point or another.

Don't be embarrassed, it happens to all of us. As long as you realize it and accept it, you can move beyond it.

How can you tell if you have such a character? There's dozens of online tests you could use to find out.

I've always felt that if I'm bored with my own character, it's a good sign that I need to start breaking some psyches, or at least bruising some egos.

Give your characters enough of a foundation and they'll build themselves up the way *they* want.

I also need to take out the red pen if I can easily determine just who my character is modeled after. Did I inadvertently channel a medieval Bruce Wayne? Whoops, time to change things up a bit. If it takes less than six degrees of separation to determine my character's origins, I'm not satisfied.

Six degrees of separation has always felt like a solid enough distance between inspirational sources for characters and what I end up with.

It's also enough of a separation for your character to start growing a life of its own, which will further separate it from the throngs of similar characters out there in the literary universe.

Once your character starts acting on their own accord, separate from your various pokings and proddings, run with it and see what comes out.

Give your characters enough of a foundation and they'll build themselves up the way they want. Just like with a house. Sure you could use a pre-fabricated building, but there wouldn't be any heart or soul in it.

A real construction has a few bent nails hidden beneath the plaster, and the walls aren't quite squared off, and don't forget that slight dip in the family room floor.

Even Gods are flawed, so don't exempt them from this little exercise. Hubris, laziness, corruption, old age, manipulation - there are all sorts of ways for even gods to fall short of their perfect image.

No one nor no thing should ever be perfect. If it is, toss a brick at it. It can be a golden brick, scented with expensive fragrances if need be, but toss it nonetheless.

"All the unique characters are already created." you may say, trying to excuse your five-eyed Abraham Lincoln characters. To that I say, "Give him a napoleon complex, a pet weasel, and a position at a ballet school and you'll have a unique character.

It'll be up to you to make him or her worth reading about, but never hold yourself up short thinking that all the characters that are ever to be created have already been thought up by someone else.

Never settle for the status quo, otherwise any readers you may happen to get will rebel and come after you with torches and pitchforks. Well maybe not with torches and pitchforks, but do you really want to take a chance?

I know it's not easy to break out of the molds of characters that have become before yours. People will always try to make connections with your characters and those of other writers and stories. The trick is to make it difficult for them.

Figure out what molds your characters are fitting into and work towards breaking them out, or at the least cracking the mold in several places. You never know, your new character could create a new mold, that other writers will one day try to break out of. But you'll never know, until you get writing.

Never settle for the status quo, otherwise readers will rebel and come after you...

By Charles Muir

Write Life

When Characters Turn on You

It's happened to all of us. We're writing along, and suddenly, instead of popping into the hayloft for a tryst with a buxom wench, our prince is trotting down to the wine cellar for a snuggle with the steward. And we go "...bwuh?" and-

Well, all right, perhaps that hasn't happened to you exactly. But I'll bet you've had a similar problem at some point. You wrote in that pretty mage with the crystal in her navel, and your ranger prefers fascinating arguments with the hunchbacked priestess. You put the handsome foreign gentleman on the subway next to your plucky heroine, but she's too busy making faces at the ragamuffin across the car to notice him.

Congratulations! Your character is alive. Well done. Write on. Wait, why are you still here? Don't you have an entire plot to re-work? Okay, fine. How to get control of those characters. I'll warn you, though--there's a lot of compromise in this.

First, realize that characters are like kids. You may think they spread jelly all over the outside of the toaster while waiting for their toast simply to drive you mad, but they actually do things for a reason--it's just one you don't comprehend. That's okay. You don't have to understand; you just have to work with it.

Take the suddenly-gay prince in our first example. *Can* you go with that? It's certainly a bit of a twist, and that's rarely a bad thing. Unless you meant the buxom wench to be a major character, the gender of our prince's snugglee doesn't need to be a big deal. Depending on his society, his orientation doesn't have to change anything at all.

No, you say. He needs to be straight. All right. Maybe he's just not into busty wenches. What about a slim, earnest brunette who is better at archery than he is, and wears boys clothes because it's easier? What about making the steward female--older than he is, knowledgeable and interesting? These options add depth to the secondary character. Our prince might not be gay at all--maybe he just wanted to es-

cape the dull-as-dirt stereotypical brainless booby. So, what if we take the buxom wench out of the hayloft and put her in a tavern *as the owner* who has seen about a thousand handsome nobles come and go and wants no truck with this feckless prince?

Poke about, change things, add and subtract and rearrange until your character starts cooperating. He didn't go after the steward to annoy you--there's something about his personality that you're not getting. If he's alive enough to head for the wrong stairs, he's alive enough to help you find what's right for him and your story both.

What if you have the opposite problem? What if your MC is completely and wonderfully compliant, but his sidekick keeps trying to take over the story? It's a common problem. First question--are you sure the book isn't about the sidekick?

All right, all right. Well...maybe your sidekick is just fine, and in the right place. I don't suggest toning down a character strong enough to take over your book--that's working in the wrong direction, in my opinion. Go the other way--alter the MC. Add depth. Let him smart-mouth back at the sidekick

If adding Awesome doesn't work, you might need to do the opposite. Apply the "Mary Sue test" (there are dozens online) and think about it. Let me say that again--*think about it*. Every test I've found will point up a strong character as a Mary Sue at least half the time. **It's not gospel--it's a guideline.**

That said, it can be a very useful guideline. If your MC is too perfect--a common problem--the test will help you spot it. Believe me, perfect is *boring*. Mouthy? Impulsive? Terrified? Vengeful, both when it's justified and when it's not? Now that stuff is interesting. Interesting isn't the entire goal, but if you don't make your characters interesting, your story isn't likely to go far enough to do anything else.

If all else fails, give your characters some duct tape. Hey, it works for kid-problems.

By KD Crotwell

Write Life

Character Theft: For Fun and Profit

Characters come easy to me. Sometimes they just show up, jumping up and down on my brain until I give in and write them. Other times I have to make my own. Doing it from scratch is hard, though, so I'll tell you a secret-I often steal characters.

"Good writers borrow from other writers. Great writers steal from them outright." (Aaron Sorkin) The first time I read that, I was confused. Did that mean don't just nab a bit of the plot, steal the whole book? No. It means that when you borrow something, it's not yours. To accomplish that-you've got to steal. And then you've got to hide that theft. Make some changes. Make what you stole yours.

How do you do that? Well, it's not by taking Malcolm Reynolds off *Serenity* and putting him in a blue coat at the helm of a beat-up but still-sailing pirate ship called *Firefly*. Even if you make his love interest a blond French courtesan. That's borrowing. That's putting your neighbor's lawnmower in your garage and stacking holiday decorations on it to make it look yours.

Maybe you're not comfortable with the idea of theft. Try thinking of a Jello-mold. Every jiggy dessert from that mold will have one thing in common-it will be three-dimensional. Every other facet depends on what you add.

Are you with me? Let's see how it goes. First, I need a character-mold. Someone who grabs my attention, someone I care about. My child discovered *Karate Kid* (the first one) last night, so the first person to pop into my head is Mr. Miyagi. I'm fine with that-he's awesome.

IMDB tell me his first name is Kisuke. Short, quiet, badass. His home is secretly beautiful. His backstory holds tragedy, sorrow, and sacrifice-at least, if you've paid attention and also possibly read the novelizations of the movies.

That's what catches my eye about Mr. Miyagi. His quiet strength, uncomplaining perseverance, and usually-subtle badassery. I also love his house-I love that he finds joy and beauty and nurtures it just as quietly as he fixes screen doors and things. That's what I need to know-what makes me care about him. I want a character with that emotional core. I want my own Mr. Miyagi to play with.

However, I don't necessarily want to write a book about a Japanese immigrant, about martial arts, about bonsai-keeping. So this

is where the changes come in. What don't you care about? What things are just trappings? What is very cool, but won't fit with what you want to do?

First thing-the accent. My character isn't Japanese, or even pseudo-Japanese with all the meaning stripped out (that's called appropriation.) Let's move him off Earth altogether. And even make him a her. Kisa, for now.

So. Kisa. She's badass, but not in martial arts. Not fencing or anything like that either--lots of martial arts focus on weapons. How about magic? That can be a quiet power-and one other characters can be astonished to find someone holding close. What? How can she be a mage? Mages are loud, showy and rich! Kisa...she tends the chickens! Yes. Kisa lives on a small farm, a barely-gets-by farm.

Kisa. Thin and wizened and perhaps twisted-up-but there's strength in those bird arms. An outsider-she wasn't born in this small farming village. She came when her daughter married a local man. He ran away for adventure, came home with wife and mom-in-law in tow. Kisa's daughter and son-in-law have died, and she's left caring for her granddaughter, who dreams of adventure.

From Mr. Miyagi, Japanese immigrant, apartment maintenance man and martial arts badass, I've gone to Kisa, mysterious immigrant, subsistence farmer and hidden mage. Mr. Miyagi tends bonsai. Kisa paints eggs in long winter evenings. ([Egg painting](#) is an old and venerable art-type.) With this hobby, she also makes a bit of much-needed cash when the traders come.

There's a pitfall here-of following your mold-character's original story too closely. I'll just squash those ideas of Kisa teaching her granddaughter to farm in odd and seemingly meaningless ways so granddaughter can whip up a pile of Whoopass at just the right time in my story.

There it is. I took a three-dimensional character, kept what I cared about, switched things out trait for trait, and Kisa is now pattering in the back of my brain. No reader will ever think "OMG, she stole Mr. Miyagi!" But when one day I mention Miyagi-san as the inspiration for Kisa, readers will nod their heads and go "I can see it!"

Your turn. Who will you steal?

By KD Crotwell

New News:

We're in the process of migrating the magazine into a new software setup, not to mention an evolution in names, structure, and offerings.

We'll be migrating The Write Life over to a to-be-formed company under the name of Full Coverage Writers. The legalities and funding are still being formed, but we're compiling the new website, logo, and look as you read this.

We'll also be rolling out new series of articles and worksheets that'll be revealed in the future.

Fairfield County Writers Group will still exist, albeit at a reduced capacity due to budgetary and staffing limitations.

Stay tuned.

Brought To You By:

The FCWG is managed, maintained, and run by **Charles Muir** of New Canaan, CT. As Literary Director, he oversees the day to day operations of the writing group, produces this magazine, and schedules local events throughout the year.

The back-end, behind the scenes work is done by our Technical Director, **Calvin Williams** of Brooklyn, NY. Calvin single-handedly ensures that the website and all its components run as smoothly as possible.

Contributing Writer **Lauren Welch** is currently a college student in Indiana. When she isn't slaving over class work, Lauren enjoys tormenting her muse to try and get something written.

Contributing Writer **KD Crotwell** has held some twenty jobs so far, most having nothing to do with writing. This has given her great motivation to complete some nine novels in draft. In the Great Game of Publishing, she has achieved the status of "Agent Passed for Market Reasons." She is actively working towards "Agent Fainted With Joy."

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Next Month:

Next month's issue focuses on the topic of **Shaping Scenery**. We'll also have new writing prompts, articles, and more.

Expense Sheet

Below is a summary of our monthly financials for not only producing this magazine, but running the online writing group throughout the course of the year.

Our expenses include webhosting fees, magazine submissions, local event materials, and general group maintenance.

How To Subscribe:

To subscribe, register on our website at:

<http://www.FCWriters.com>

to receive future issues, and read through our back issues, all available in .PDF format.

Annual Donations to Date: **\$575**

Annual Expenses to Date: **\$580**

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