

Introduction

This worksheet started out as part of a writing post, 102-05 Writing Different Characters. Someone asked me “How do I write characters who are from different cultures, who are older than me, etc.?”

I started with personality, reducing it to a series of universal attributes: strengths, weaknesses, goals, and desires, each with a list of possibilities to choose from. Throughout history there have been the curious, the industrious, the quiet, the talkative, etc. Then I considered culture, the ways in which many of us conform and adapt to the time and place where we happen to be born. It’s a little oversimplified for a protagonist or major character, but a good way to prevent minor characters from falling into simple stereotypes.

Creating Minor Characters-From Personality to Culture

Step 1: Goals, Dreams, & Values

Choose 1 goal, one desire, and how they regard people.

Goal:

Build/protect something stable that endures

Explore new places, learn new knowledge, gain new experiences

Have fun/enjoy life

Desire:

Love

Power

Knowledge

Fun

Safety/Security/Stability

People:

Do they focus on the good of:

the large group (a town, city, or the world)

a small group (3+ people they know personally)

the individual

the self

Step 2: Strengths & Weaknesses

Choose 1-2 lines that define how they are strong and how they are weak.

Optional: Choose 3-6 words that the character “wishes/believes” accurately describe them, when in fact that is not the case.

Are they strong in:

1. Energetic, competitive, self-confident
2. Dependable, patient, practical
3. Adaptation, curious, kind
4. Emotion/intuition, protective, determined
5. Humorous, confident, generous
6. Practical, detailed, ready to serve/help
7. impartial, diplomatic, social
8. determined, resourceful, believes in absolute truth, competitive,
9. inquisitive, wanderer, open-minded, idealist, generous, humorous, values freedom/individual
10. professional, traditional, conventional, serious, disciplined, dark humor
11. intellectual, logical, independent, can be shy or forward
12. understanding, kind, relaxed, accepting

Do they struggle with:

1. Impatience, weakness
2. Stubborn, uncompromising, resistant to change
3. Fickle, nervous, too much multi-tasking
4. Insecure, struggle to adapt to change
5. Arrogant, stubborn, lazy, unrealistic
6. Worrier, shy, overly critical, struggles to stop working and have fun
7. uncomfortable alone, indecisive, avoids conflict
8. Jealous, distrustful, secretive, can appear cold
9. blunt, not realistic, impatient/rude, not detail oriented, avoids deep connections with others
10. show off, arrogant, condescending, pessimist
11. avoids emotion, distant, uncompromising, uncomfortable alone
12. overly trusting, fearful, not realistic, prefers solitude

Step 3: Culture

What culture(s) dominate this region? What traditions exist?

What are the archetype life-paths of a child growing up in this community?

What roles exist within this community for children, adults, and the elderly?

Start with the 8 stages of Life, and map out how the culture of the community affects these stages.

How do these change the character's personality over time?

Try to write at least 1 paragraph for each stage, including 2 or more significant roles and how they affected the character.

8 Stages of Life

Part 1-What is done to them

*In the beginning characters need to know that they are loved, wanted, and welcomed. They need to learn that parents/guardians are “here”

1. 0-18 months

Through the family relationship, how they are raised by their parents or guardians, the character develops a level of optimism/pessimism, trust/distrust, confidence/self-doubt, and security/insecurity.

2. 18 months-3 years

Character learns about independence/dependence, basic moral values, self-reliance, achievement, and a greater understanding of self-worth through pride/shame. Learning, success/failure, defiance, anger, and determination or stubbornness vs acceptance/submission come into play.

3. 3-5 years

Characters emulate others, take initiative, be creative, create stories for toys/characters, play out roles, and ask “why”. Guilt can become part of the success/failure process.

4. 6-12 years

Characters learn what they are capable of, gaining new skills and knowledge. Social interaction becomes more complex. These social years become a main factor in shaping a character’s understanding of their own competency and self-worth/esteem.

The character’s understanding of the world expands. As new relationships form, parents become less monolithic, less absolute in power and competency.

Part 2-What they choose to do

5. 12-18 years

Character struggles to find and understand their own identity. Struggles with social interaction, finding their place in the social structure, fitting in, developing their own sense of what is right and wrong, which may align with or contrast against the cultural moral compass.

Characters develop a greater passion for an ideal, cause, or person.

Some may try to postpone adulthood.

6. 18-35 years

As they distance themselves from their parents and other mentors, characters begin building their own community from their peers, a community of friends and family who perceive them as equals. Those who cannot form strong peer relationships become isolationists.

7. 35-55 years

The character builds their new life, developing greater strength and taking on more responsibility, as they achieve a long term rhythm and stability via patterns and routines. The absence of activity, meaning, purpose, and value are common fears in this stage.

Major changes will test the character, making the existing relationships even stronger.

Examples of major changes include the loss of a relationship (moving away, growing apart, or through death), loss of a major role (job, team, extracurricular), or the loss of status (inability to perform a skill, or a change in the setting/world that devalues the skill).

8. 55-75 and beyond

*When this stage begins is heavily subjective.

Characters often look back at what they have done, reflecting to find that they are either satisfied or unsatisfied. Those who are satisfied will gradually accept the slowdown of their lives, focusing on savoring the simple pleasures and rewards of their work. Those who feel dissatisfied, may try to change, or believe it is too late, becoming bitter hedonists, or turn to escapism.