

## *Pepping up Your Characters*

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*It's your characters who make the story!* You can have as many characters as you need to develop your story but for initial plotting purposes, just focus on the main players. The more personality you give them, the easier it is to write about them. As a general rule, you should have at least 3 main characters:

### **Main Characters**

- A. The protagonist(s). The main lead, also the good guy. If a romance novel, the Hero and Heroine
- B. The antagonist(s): The bad guy or problem causer.
- C. The super helpers. The confidants or catalysts who assist each of the other main characters.

The main characters need to be interesting and believable enough for people to want to read about them. The minor characters are used to advance the story, twist it, relieve tension or convey information.

Sketch out a few things about them using the idea joggers below:

- Name (first/last)
- Sex/ Race
- Age/birth date/birth place
- Height/weight/body shape/ ethnic background
- Married/Single/Sexual Orientation
- Religion/Nationality
- Economic status
- Children/Siblings
- How he or she dresses
- Hair, face, mouth
- Gestures
- Habits
- Mannerisms
- Hobbies, job and education
- Speech patterns
- Personality: Funny, intense, driven, self-deprecating, etc.
- Favorite food/color/sports/drinks/music/art
- Home or Living Space: color schemes/grounds/furnishings/pool, etc.
- Vehicles

If it helps, design a 5X8 Character card on which you can fill in the blanks. Use the ideas below as a guide.

Character Name:	Male	Female
Role:	Main	Minor
<u>Physical</u>	<u>Pertinent Information</u>	
Age:	Career/Education:	
Height/Weight:	Family:	
Race/Skin:	Hobbies:	
Build:	Home:	
Face:	Religion:	
Distinguishing Marks:		
Striking Feature:		
Personality Flaw: (Likes/Dislikes)		
Favorites:		

BOOK RECOMMENDATION: Consider reading the book *Building Believable Characters* by Marc McCutcheon.

### **Character's G-M-C**

Author Debra Dixon gives a wonderful workshop and has written a "how to" book, *GMC: Goal, Motivation and Conflict* that helps with outlining a character's purpose. I can't start a novel without using the G-M-C diagram that she teaches. What is it, you ask? Each character has a purpose in life, (therefore your novel). It's the GOAL. This is charged by the character's MOTIVATION or reasons to accomplish the goal. As with most worthwhile things in life there is a problem reaching the goal, CONFLICT.

The protagonist(s) and antagonist(s) you have outlined above in Main Characters should all have:

- I. Internal goals, motivations and conflicts (such as hopes, dreams, fears, fame, desires, anxieties, etc.).
- II. External goals, motivations and conflicts (job, life mission, social organizations, lack of talent, competitors, etc.).

Your Protagonist (lead character) major goal is to remove the crisis presented by the CONFLICT and return his/or her life to normal. Throughout your novel, the lead character set mini-goals to return their life to normal, however you add tension to the story by making the goals impossible to reach. Your Antagonist always has success with mini-goals, but in the end of the novel he/she loses to the lead character.

GOALS cause the characters to *gain possession* of something (person, thing, or information) or gain relief from something (pain, suffering, fears, oppression, etc.). Your Protagonist (lead

character- Hero or Heroine) is pursuing the novel's main plot's goal and your Antagonist is pursuing a goal that hinders your lead character.

Your character's MOTIVATION must be worthy. Your characters do not only need to resolve the conflict or deal with the crisis that disrupted their lives, but the motivation must also be worthy in nature. The lead characters should be motivated by: Duty, Love, Honor, Justice, Dignity, Integrity, Redemption or Self Respect. Negative motivations should not be strong drivers (ie. hatred, anger, lust, envy, greed) unless it is the motivation of the antagonist.

CONFLICT adds the necessary tension to make the story line interesting and engaging.

**EXAMPLE:** In my romance novel, *And Then Came You*, the hero, Parker Ryan, witnesses the death of his fiancée two days before the wedding. Because of it, he fears loving again. He throws himself into his business as a form of escape. Below is an example of how I used the G-M-C diagram to build on my plot.

Parker's G-M-C	Internal	External
<b>G</b>	To heal his pain of loss with the help of the beautiful Doctor Chi Adams.	To make his restaurant-bars the most successful in Atlanta.
<b>M</b>	Every time he's around her, he seems to forget the misery of his past pain.	The second restaurant, opened a year ago, is booming.
<b>C</b>	She has an accident that rekindles his fear of loss and pain.	He works long hours at the restaurant with a manager who has a crush on Parker. She secretly sabotages his affair with Chi.

Throughout my novel, "*And Then Came You*," the reader experiences how Parker's G-M-C affects his life, how he interacts with Chi, how Chi positively affects him, the way he manages his restaurants, and his attempts to overlook his manager's flirtation because she has been a part of the success of his businesses.

Understand how the diagram works now? Great! You need to create a diagram for each of your main characters. Use a blank 5x8 card to create your Character G-M-C diagram or draw on a plain old piece of paper and fill in the blanks.