

Journalism/Creative Writing Extended Project Fiction Track

Step Three: Character Outlines

Now that we've got the basics of your outline down, we need to develop and create your characters.

On this page, I'll give you questions to help walk you through the thought process of creating a fully-developed character. On the second and subsequent pages you'll find a list of character archetypes (which your character(s) may fit into) and a list of typical villain/antagonist motives.

Some basic questions you can start with answering about each character:

- Basic appearance & wardrobe style?
- Notable features/markings?
- Notable habits/speech features?
- Notable assets/belongings?
- What is the character good at?
- What is the character bad at?
- What the character wants/is after?
- What the character fears/does not want?
- Core drives/motives?
- Fateful/formative backstory events?
- Future development/lessons to be learned?
- Intended endpoint for this character?

When it's all said and done, a well-developed character should be able to fill out these five points:

1. Your character's psyche—His/her personality, attitude, ambitions, hopes, and fears, as well as *why* your character thinks and feels the way s/he does (which would include your character's history, upbringing, and all that).
2. The challenges your character will have to overcome, and the flaws or difficulties that will set him/her at odds with others.
3. What makes your character desirable to have around? Why would others choose to associate with your character (*excluding* your character's special powers, talents, or physical appearance)? What your character is without being in a position of power or having super/magical powers?
4. Your character's talents and skills, and how s/he uses them
5. Your character's physical appearance.

Character Archetypes:

- **Analyst:** Can explain anything rationally. Ex: Mr. Spock
- **Anti-hero:** The hero who didn't ask to get involved but does. Ex: Wolverine
- **Benefactor:** Has a whole lot of something he wants to share.
- **Bully:** Has no tolerance for weakness, especially in himself.
- **Bureaucrat:** Follows the rules no matter what. Ex: Hermione Granger
- **Caretaker:** Cares for others.
- **Catalyst:** Makes things happen.
- **Child:** Could be a literal child or just living like one. Ex: Peter Pan
- **Coward:** Afraid of everything, controlled by fear. Ex: Adrian Monk, Cowardly Lion
- **Curmudgeon:** Irritable and cynical and proud of it. Ex: Ebenezer Scrooge
- **Dreamer:** Longs to be something else. Ex: Orphan Annie
- **Elder/mentor/teacher/parent:** Been around long enough to know some vital information. Ex: Ben Kenobi, Mufassa
- **Explorer/wanderer:** Wants to see the world—could be running from something.
- **Extraordinary man:** The guy who can do anything. Ex: Indiana Jones, James Bond
- **Gossip:** Must be the first to know everything and the one to pass it on. Guardian: Protects the weak.
- **Hedonist/thrill-seeker:** Lives for today in case tomorrow never comes.
- **Herald/messenger:** The bringer of news, good, bad, or necessary.
- **Hermit/loner:** Just wants to be left alone. Ex: Phil (Hercules)
- **Hunter/predator:** Can catch or kill anything. Ex: Terminator
- **Innocent:** An inexperienced individual exposed to the evils in the world. Ex: Dorothy from Wizard of OZ
- **Introvert:** Lives inside his shell to prevent anyone from seeing the real him. Investigator: Thrives on puzzles and riddles. Ex: Nancy Drew, Sherlock Holmes
- **Judge/mediator:** The arbitrator or peacemaker in a conflict.
- **Leader:** Always knows the best thing to do—and the people follow him.
- **Magician/wizard/superhero:** Has special powers or abilities. Ex: Superman
- **Manipulator:** Plays with people and situations to get what he wants. Ex: Scarlett O'Hara
- **Martyr:** Willing to suffer or die for others or a cause.
- **Masochist:** Finds pleasure in torturing himself, denying himself—may take on too much.
- **Masquerader:** Pretends to be something he's not.
- **Monster:** A depraved beast. Ex: Gollum
- **Ordinary man:** Average Joe like you or me or your neighbor. Ex: Frodo Baggins.
- **Penitent:** Lives to atone for his sin.
- **Perfectionist:** Every action and word must be flawless.
- **Pleaser/show-off:** Craves approval from anyone and may do anything to get it.
- **Poet:** Life is art, be that through story, song, painting, or sculpture.
- **Rebel/revolutionary:** Stands opposed to the status quo and fights for his cause.
- **Rogue:** Looks out for himself and no one else. Ex: Han Solo
- **Saboteur/betrayer:** For whatever reason, he will make sure something fails.

- **Samaritan:** Does good deeds wherever he goes.
 - **Scholar:** Wants to learn.
 - **Sensualist:** Addicted to feeling good about himself.
 - **Slave:** Does not belong to himself. Ex: Dobby the house elf
 - **Survivor:** Pulls through no matter what happens, doesn't give up.
 - **Sycophant:** Self-seeking, flatterer, who works to please those in power. Ex: Smee (Hook)
 - **Temptress:** Uses power (intellect, magic, beauty) to make others weak. Ex: Meg (Hercules)
 - **Thief:** Takes what he wants or needs.
 - **Trickster/jester:** Always looking for the humor in a situation. Ex: Fred/George Weasley
 - **Tyrant:** Must be in control at all times. Ex: Captain Hook
 - **Victim:** Was hurt by someone or lives in fear that someone will hurt him.
 - **Villain:** Seeks to destroy/trap the hero. Ex: Evil Queen in Snow White, Lex Luthor
 - **Waif:** Appears innocent and weak and often relies on the pity of others.
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Villain Motives Made Easy

Villains are some of the hardest characters to write. Most of us aren't that well-acquainted with many people who are actual villain material, so we don't really have a good frame of reference. Sure, we know plenty *about* people who were villainous (pick any dictator or serial killer, for example) but at the end of the day, many of us fail to comprehend what was going on in their heads.

In lieu of a real answer, many people end up defaulting to "because they were just evil." While this explanation can ease our minds in real life, if we try to write villains like this we're going to end up with some very shallow, even nonsensical characters. This doesn't really make for an interesting or scary villain.

Another trap writers fall into sometimes is writing the same kind of villain over and over. It's not long before things start getting stale and predictable. But it's not always easy to change things up, as one might only be fluent in one type of villain. This leads to issues such as every villain being exactly the same, or only a small handful of villains actually being any good.

So to help you avoid these problems yourself, here's a breakdown of the whys and hows behind just about any act of evil that ever was, which will hopefully help you build up and map out better villains of your own.

The Four Basic Motives Behind Acts of Evil

Pretty much every act of evil, or willful act of harm upon someone else outside of taking action necessary to protect oneself or others from imminent harm, comes down to one of four reasons, or some combination thereof:

1. Personal attention entitlement.

Where people believe they deserve personal attention of some kind regardless of whether the other party wants to give it. Personal attention can include sex, ego stroking, personal care, personal tutoring, or just serving as human punching bag whenever they want to vent some stress. When they fail to get what they want, they may resort to verbal or physical abuse, stalking, slandering, or even murdering whomever they felt owed them something. They tend to write their victims off as cold, uncaring, selfish, and/or unable to appreciate how needy they are.

2. Social Power entitlement

Where people believe they deserve to hold power or sway over one or more people and treat them as inferior or subservient and generally kick them around however they will. This can include bullying or threatening others into submission, sabotaging perceived rivals, public acts of vandalism, or murdering those whom they feel never gave them the respect and admiration they deserve. They tend to write their victims off as rude, disrespectful, and/or stupid.

3. Material entitlement

Where people believe they are entitled to have money, goods, or property at the expense of others. This can include burglary, mugging, fraud, embezzlement, human trafficking, cutting workers' wages to unlivable levels so to have more money for oneself, land grabs, and monopolization. They tend to write their victims off as lazy, immoral, spoiled, and/or unworthy.

4. Personal ideal realization entitlement.

Where people believe that they are entitled to make their dreams and ideals into reality at any cost, and without anyone's consent. This can include verbally abusing anyone who doesn't agree with them, outright forcing people to live according to their personal ideas, and stalking, harassing, or even murdering those who get in their way. They tend to write their victims off as ignorant, small-minded, selfish, and/or lazy.

Of course, wanting personal attention, social power, material goods, or to make the world a better place are not inherently evil. What makes an action evil is being readily willing to worsen and/or end someone else's life over it.

The first three tend to be the most common in real life. The fourth seems to be much rarer, and it very commonly overlaps with the second, though not always. And while they may look very similar to the untrained eye, the difference is that the second, in its pure

form, has no vision beyond bossing others around and keeping them inferior. The fourth, in its pure form, doesn't want to be in charge of anything per se; it just wants things to be *better*. It's less of a need to be in control and more of a need to correct something that feels wrong or broken. Those with this motive don't necessarily want to be in charge; it's just that they see being in charge as the best way to see their goals through.

Three reasons why people fall into evil patterns of behavior

There are three reasons why anyone engages in any given pattern of behavior, good or bad. These reasons, which can and often do overlap, are:

1. An inherent trait.

For example, some people are born more with submissive personalities, while some are born with more aggressive personalities. Highly aggressive types who do not learn to accept that too much aggressiveness is a bad thing, and do not learn how to rein in their aggressive impulses and handle them in an acceptable and healthy way, can end up becoming bullies and violent offenders.

2. A habit developed in response to pressure

Someone who grew up in a violent environment may have learned through experience that it's kill or be killed, and thereby adapted to the environment by adopting more aggressive behaviors. At some point these behaviors became second nature. If this person does not acknowledge that there are scenarios in which this type of behavior is inappropriate and unnecessary and fails to make necessary adjustments, trouble can arise.

3. A behavior learned and adopted from another

Someone may have grown up with parents or a sibling who frequently bullied others into compliance, and thereby came to see bullying is an acceptable means to get one's way. The parents or sibling may have also deliberately encouraged this person to bully others, perhaps claiming that it's the only way to get ahead in life and keep people from walking all over oneself. Alternatively, this person may have read a book claiming that such behavior was the only way to get ahead in life, and took that message to heart. If this person does not realize and care that this is an unfair and cruel way to treat people, the behavior will continue.

When you're writing your villains, you can stop and ask yourself what's going on with them that they think their behaviors are acceptable. Maybe your villain started life with a highly aggressive temperament and was surrounded by people who encouraged violent and cruel behavior. Maybe the social environment encouraged your villain's meanest and cruelest personality traits to flourish. Or maybe your villain was just born mean and had no one to teach any better behaviors, or had such a low regard for others that any attempts to teach better behavior were actively resisted.