

## ***How Well Do You Know Your Character?***

### **Fiction Writing and Characterization**

(adapted from <http://www.webcom.com/wordings/artofwrite/feature.html>)

Uncertain about how to begin fleshing out your character? Try starting with these questions — choose one of the options given or create your own unique answer. This shouldn't feel like a test — have fun with it!

#### **1. What would your character say if she suspected someone had just lied to her?**

- a. "That's a pile of horse manure."
- b. "Bullsh\*t!"
- c. "Liar!"
- d. "I beg your pardon, but I believe you've spoken falsely. Why, prey tell, are you attempting to deceive me?"
- e. "Wait a minute. Are you sure you've got your facts straight?"
- f. "You don't say?"
- g. ?

#### **2. What makes your character laugh?**

- a. slapstick
- b. sarcasm
- c. limericks, dirty jokes
- d. Monty Python movies
- e. his own foibles
- f. others' misfortunes
- g. ?

#### **3. Whom does your character respect the most?**

- a. Albert Einstein
- b. Princess Diana
- c. Walt Disney
- d. Michael Jordon
- e. Oprah Winfrey
- f. The Pope
- g. ?

#### **4. What sort of movies does your character watch?**

- a. romantic comedies
- b. horror movies
- c. action thrillers
- d. alternative/foreign
- e. Kung Fu
- f. black and white
- g. ?

#### **5. Whom does your character most closely resemble?**

- a. her parent
- b. her sibling
- c. her grandparent
- d. the family pet
- e. her favorite movie star
- f. a cousin
- g. ?

#### **6. When taking a long road trip, your character prefers to be:**

- a. in the driver's seat
- b. in the passenger's seat, navigating
- c. in the passenger's seat, daydreaming
- d. in the back seat, sleeping
- e. on a bus
- f. hitchhiking
- g. ?

#### **7. What smell evokes the strongest memory for your character?**

- a. hospital antiseptic
- b. warm oatmeal cookies
- c. Obsession by Calvin Klein
- d. moldy leaves
- e. shoe polish
- f. hot asphalt
- g. ?

#### **8. What's the last piece of clothing your character bought for himself/herself?**

- a. an expensive suit/dress
- b. rubber boots
- c. a terrycloth bathrobe
- d. silk underwear
- e. a sombrero
- f. a ski mask
- g. ?

#### **9. What trivial fault is your character most ashamed of in herself?**

- a. an addiction to marshmallows
- b. an ugly tattoo on her butt
- c. an unpaid library fine
- d. an insect phobia
- e. a speech impediment
- f. stealing a toy from her best friend when she was seven
- g. ?

***Writing technique: character development***

**The most important element of any work of fiction is character development. Use this technique to get to know your characters.**

(adapted from [http://sdsd.essortment.com/characterdevelo\\_rucc.htm](http://sdsd.essortment.com/characterdevelo_rucc.htm))

In simplest terms, to build a believable character you must know your character. He/she must become like a real person.

One technique I always use to get to know my characters is called the, “Interview Exercise”. You do exactly as the title suggests – you interview your characters. To do this properly you must use rapid writing – where you write without stopping to think or edit. You just put down whatever comes to mind without censoring. This exercise will make your characters suddenly come alive – talking and acting in a way that is uniquely their own.

To start this exercise, take out a blank piece of paper or start a new computer file. Write this exercise in the first person viewpoint of the interviewer. Start by having yourself going to the interview and then just write. Where is the interview? Where are your characters waiting for you? Why are you interviewing them? Don’t stop or correct, just write whatever comes to mind.

Sometimes you will find that your interview turns into a story of its own. I had this happen with two of my characters in a book series I was working on “The gentleman bandits” The two characters were Brady – a mid thirties high class English bandit and his young rouge side-kick Rodney. I started the interview with me getting off a boat to the port town of Victoria (Brady’s hometown) and walking towards the inn that they stayed at. Using rapid writing I came up with the scenario that the two bandits were notorious throughout the country and this was the first time that anyone ever had a chance to interview them. Brady was the one who arranged the interview and Rodney didn’t think it was a good idea. Throughout the interview they argued with each other and showed their differences in personality much clearer than I ever could have by just stating it. By doing this exercise I came to understand the motivation behind my two characters so much better than before.

When you do this with your own characters, don’t prepare any questions in advance. Just write and see where it takes you. Ask whatever questions come to your mind and let your characters answer however they want. If they want to give you the cold shoulder and not answer at all, then let them – or maybe they get so irate that they storm out (a tip: if they do this, chase after them and see how they react). Don’t take this exercise seriously; you’re not writing a great work of literature, you’re just getting to know your characters. Have fun!