

Structuring Characters for A Deeper Conflict

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Some writers plot each scene of their story in their head before they ever put pen to paper. Other writers fly by the seat of their pants, letting the creative muse carry them where it will. Whether Plotter or Pantster, structuring characters can help avoid lifeless, one-dimensional characters, too little or too much conflict, and even the dreaded “Writer’s Block.” This class will talk about how to structure memorable, one-of-a-kind characters that readers never forget.

In my early days as a writer, I received many rejections with the comment, “Not enough spark. Just doesn’t stand out.” In my first manuscript, editors had my heroine pegged as an early environmentalist or a grumpy recluse. I didn’t intend her to be either. Another manuscript was rejected because the villainess was more memorable than the heroine. All of these problems stemmed from the fact that I didn’t know my main characters as well as I should.

Structuring my characters has helped eliminate most of those problems without putting restrictions on my creative flow. In fact, knowing my characters has freed me to follow the story—or where the characters lead me—without worry!

This class will cover several methods a writer can use to help them delve deep into the character. The methods are taken from *Structuring Your Novel from Beginning to End* by Robert C. Meredith and John D. Fitzgerald; *Goals Motivation and Conflict* by Debra Dixon; and *Discovering Story Magic* by Laura Baker and Robin Perrini. These were the basic methods I learned. They provide good solid methods for building characters. They will help develop a character’s long term and short-term goals, weaknesses, relationship barriers, dark moment and resurrection. After we cover the basics, we’re going to take a look at Michael Hauge’s *Story Questions*, Susan May Warren’s *The Story Equation*, and *The Psychology Workbook for Writers* by Darian Smith. These methods provide tips and tools that can help take your characters beyond the basic characterizations to a deeper, more impacting conflict.

For Pantsters, structuring characters ahead of writing establishes important character traits and allows creativity to fly during the process. For Plotters, some of these tips even provide checklists and scene-by-scene methods to make sure each trait gets into the book. Plotters and Pantsters alike will find these methods useful in avoiding the pitfalls of lackluster characters, and sagging middle syndrome. To quote Susan May Warren, “An improperly motivated character loses power in the middle of the story.”

Elements of Characterization:

Visual –What does your character look like?

Short Term Goals - What action-oriented challenges must your character meet?

Long Term Goals – What deep-seated emotions drive your character?

Black Moment – When all is lost.

Resolution –What steps does your character take to solve the problem?

Techniques for Deeper Conflict

Michael Hauge's - Story Questions

Susan May Warren – *The Story Equation*

4-Act Story Structure – Visualizing your story differently

Circles –Building characters from the Black Moment

Darian Smith - *The Psychology Workbook for Writers*

Villains – Reverse techniques to create realistic bad guys

Creating Secondary Characters and Mirroring

Gary Chapman's *The Five Love Languages*

Resources

Structuring Your Novel from Beginning to End by Robert C. Meredith and John D. Fitzgerald, [Amazon](#)

Goals Motivation and Conflict by Debra Dixon, [Amazon](#)

Discovering Story Magic by Laura Baker and Robin Perrini, <http://www.discoveringstorymagic.com>

Michael Hauge, <http://www.storymastery.com>

Susan May Warren, *The Story Equation*, [Amazon](#)

Darian Smith, *The Psychology Workbook for Writers*, [Amazon](#)