



# Presence

global entertainment

# The Character Profile Template

**A Writer's template for profiling your characters and their journey** by [David Steinhoff](#) – Head of Development – [Presence Global Entertainment](#)

This template is designed for your protagonist but can be applied to any character. It guides the writer through their character's choices to shape story structure then explores their character's unique personality.

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- **Introduction** – The questions you must ask
- **Character profile** – The complete guide to defining your characters and their journey
- **The Writer-researcher IP tracking form** – A simple system for tallying hours credited to team for writing and development

## CREATE DISTINCT CHARACTERS

Create distinct, well-defined characters with a sense of power, clear objectives, strong motivations and values.

The audience should be able to see that even if those attributes are hidden from other characters.

### **WHO IS YOUR PROTAGONIST?**

Your protagonist should be the perfect choice to explore the theme of your story.

### **WHAT IS THEIR GHOST?**

Provide a summary of the events leading up to the inciting incident that may be haunting your protagonist.

### **THE INCITING INCIDENT**

The inciting incident throws the protagonist's life out of kilter. They seek to restore balance.

**Story question: What is your inciting incident and what does it propel the protagonist to do?**

\*If possible, employ an ironic incident that exposes a fatal flaw in the protagonist.

### **THE PROTAGONIST CAN ONLY BE AS GREAT AS THE CHALLENGE THEY FACE FROM THE NEMESIS**

Create a significant nemesis. Make the challenge they pose, great. Make the nemesis' motivation strong. Make their values and position valid. Make the stakes high and ensure the nemesis pushes the protagonist to the limit and beyond.

**Story question: What does the nemesis want?**

### **CREATE A STRONG EXTERNAL WANT**

The Protagonist wants something, normally born of the inciting incident.

The stronger the desire, the greater the motivation, the better.

**Story question: What does the protagonist want?**

## **CREATE A STRONG EMOTIONAL NEED**

The protagonist will face an external conflict posed by a nemesis.

They will also face an internal conflict that is in conflict with their external want.

For example; An alcoholic wants a drink but they need to sober up.

The course of action, the protagonist chooses is often the wrong one.

What the protagonist wants is in conflict with what the protagonist needs, (to grow as a human being).

It is a fatal character flaw in their character, causing them to hurt other people and stopping them from achieving their goal.

Story question: What is the character's fatal flaw and how is it harming others and stopping them from achieving their goal?

## **THE NEMESIS MUST TARGET THE PROTAGONIST'S INTERNAL FLAW, FORCING THEM TO FACE IT**

Once you have identified the protagonist's flaw, ensure your nemesis targets it. By doing so, you will force the protagonist to deal with it and grow as a human being.

Story question: How does the nemesis target their flaw? What does the protagonist have to learn to beat the nemesis as well as change and grow as a human being?

## **THE ULTIMATE CRISIS**

Within the plot, the protagonist must face a crisis that forces the main character to finally and fully confront and overcome his flaw in order to resolve the conflict and ultimately attain his personal goal. This will likely be brought on by the nemesis.

Story question: What is that crisis?

## ARC

The nemesis forces the hero to face their inner demons in order to overcome the external threat. This creates a character arc and an **emotional through-line** that glues audiences to the journey.

Create and define their arc – Remember the greater the arc the more engaging the story.

Story question: What is the track of that arc? What story elements take place that lead the protagonist to complete that arc?

## THEME

The theme or issue of the story will be explored through the protagonist and nemesis' **opposing values**. Traditionally, the protagonist learns, changes or adapts. The nemesis does not.

Story question: What is the theme and how is it explored?

## MESSAGE

The Author's message is revealed by the final decision or reveal to the protagonist. It is the third path the protagonist takes after resolving their external and internal conflict. It is the way the Author believes we should live our lives.

Story question: What is the message? What is the reveal? How should we live?

## CREATE A SYMPHONY

Characters create a symphony. The protagonist sets the tone. The nemesis creates the threat then each other character plays a role based on the genre requirements.

The note each characters strikes supports the story but the dominant themes are determined by the protagonist and the nemesis.

## STRUCTURE NOT DIALOGUE

Express the story through the structure not the dialogue. The structure will be the journey the protagonist takes, (an excellent example of structure is Truby's [Seven steps](#)).

Creating [Great dialogue](#) is important but it is not the foundation of your story.

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| <b>Image</b>  | <b>Name</b> |
| <b>What is their ghost?</b><br>Provide a summary of the events leading up to the inciting incident that may be haunting your protagonist. |             |

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| <p><b>I believe...</b></p> <p><b>If the character could speak directly to the reader, what would they say?</b></p> <p>Focus their statements on the inciting incident and the course of action they would choose to take to address it.</p>                                 |  |
| <p><b>What is the inciting incident that propels the protagonist to take action?</b></p>  |  |
| <p><b>What does the protagonist want to do, based on that inciting incident?</b></p>  |  |
| <p><b>Does the incident expose a fatal flaw in their character? If so what is it?</b></p> <p><b>How is that fatal flaw harming others?</b></p> <p><b>How is that flaw stopping them from achieving their goal? *A fatal flaw is always a blindspot for a character.</b></p> |  |

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| <p><b>What is their need / Internal need?</b></p> <p><b>What do they need to learn and grow that will enable them to defeat their nemesis?</b></p>  |  |
| <p><b>How does the nemesis test the protagonist to make them face their flaw/weakness?</b></p> <p>If they protagonist can face this and overcome they can achieve their want, need or both.</p> |  |
| <p><b>Who challenges the real motivation of the character and why?</b></p>  |  |
| <p><b>What is the ultimate crisis or choice that will force the character to face their fatal flaw?</b></p>   |  |

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| <p><b>After facing their fatal flaw they come into their own and display resolve and power to correct the situation. What does that look like?</b></p> <p><b>How do they lay down the gauntlet?</b></p> |  |
| <p><b>What are the opposing values?</b></p> <p>What does this character believe in and potentially stand for? How does this oppose the nemesis?</p>   |  |
| <p><b>What is the theme?</b></p>  |  |
| <p><b>What is the Author's message?</b></p> <p>Revealed by the third way, a ground between the opposing values of the protagonist and nemesis and the lesson that the protagonist has learnt.</p>       |  |
| <p><b>Describe the track of the character arc?</b></p>  |  |

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| <p>What are the lessons they need to learn?</p> <p>What are the experiences that will force them to learn these lessons?</p> <p>What is the structure of our story expressed as an arc of the protagonist?</p> |  |
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### THE BASICS

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| <p><b>Handle:</b><br/>By what name are they known by and to whom?</p> <p>Different groups and people may use unique names for the character.</p> |  |
| <p><b>Description:</b><br/>What does this character look like?<br/>What distinguishes them from others?</p>                                      |  |

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| <b>Born:</b> (When, where, ethnicity)  |  |
| <b>Location:</b> (Where are they now)  |  |
| <b>Age range:</b>  |  |
| <b>State of health?</b>  |  |
| <b>Mentor or influences inc family:</b>  |  |
| <b>Tag:</b> (Something they say that defines them or their journey)  |  |
| <b>Star sign / enegram / etc</b>   |  |
| <p><b>How do we first meet them and what does that reveal about them?</b></p> <p>How you introduce your character immediately introduces their archetype or their dilemma.</p> |  |

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| <p><b>Post inciting incident they may experience some emotional and / or physical paralysis. What does that look like and what snaps them out of it?</b></p>  |  |
| <p><b>Post snapping out of it they will determine a course of action, a plan and an objective. Describe it and what is motivating them to take this course of action.</b></p> <p>It will address their external want but be the wrong choice and fail to address their internal need.</p> |  |
| <p><b>Who does the character align with to achieve their goals?</b></p> <p>(Individuals, organizations or tribe)</p>  |  |

**PERSONALITY, BACKGROUND and DETAILS**

| <b>CULTURE</b>   |  |
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| Class?   |  |
| Race?  |  |
| Education?   |  |
| Job or career?   |  |
| Religion?  |  |
| What tribe do they belong to?<br>For example: Teen Emos, working class tradesperson, explorer or creatives etc |  |
| What does their tribe believe in or what unique values do they hold that in part defines them?                 |  |
| What are their beliefs about how the world is and how it operates?   |  |
| What are their traditions?   |  |
| What are the societal values they must appear to live up to?   |  |
| How formal are they and towards who and in what situations?  |  |

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| <b>FAMILY</b>  |  |
| What is their role in their family? (For example, first son, husband/wife, partner, home-father, father-breadwinner, mother, Career woman, single-mother-parent etc) |  |
| How does their role in the family affect them in this situation?   |  |
| <b>HISTORY</b>   |  |
| Define this with unique events in their timeline   |  |
| Childhood  |  |
| Education  |  |
| Military service   |  |
| Career   |  |
| Family   |  |
| Relationships  |  |
| Greatest successes   |  |
| Greatest failures  |  |

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| <b>WHAT IS THEIR FOCUS?</b>   |  |
| <p>What is their focus?</p> <p>Some people's lives are focused on local gossip at the hairdressers and others of global politics.</p> <p>Some see the world through a religion.</p> |  |

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| <p>Some see it through a defining event that has happened such as the holocaust or that will happen such as a return of a deity.</p> <p>Are they a global – big thinker – philosopher, uninterested in small issues or perhaps details?</p> <p><b>Through to...</b><br/>Only interested in trivial issues OR</p> <p>Completely focused on one specialty or interest to the exclusion of all else for example a great scientist or a musician</p> |  |
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| <b>IQ?</b>                       |  |
| Dumb as a rock?<br>Bright-spark? |  |

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| <b>EQ - Level of consciousness</b>  |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Not conscious - instinctual, follower</li> <li>○ Subconscious - habitual, robotic, reactive</li> <li>○ Conscious - aware, intelligent, conceptual, reflective</li> <li>○ Super-conscious - intuitive,</li> </ul> |  |

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| <p>guiding, truthful, loving, universal <b>or</b> the alternative version of that, intuitive, manipulative/politically savy, capable of mixing truth with lies, a sociopath devoid of empathy but highly capable</p> |  |
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| <p><b>BAD BEHAVIOR</b></p>  |  |
| <p>Give them bad behavior, a trait that constantly causes them problems.</p> <p>Vanity, a compulsion, sexism etc.</p> |  |

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| <p><b>EGO</b></p>                         |  |
| <p>Where does it manifest?</p>            |  |
| <p>How does it alter their decisions?</p> |  |

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| <p><b>POSTIVE / NEGATIVE THINKER</b></p> <p>In what areas are they true believers and in what are they cynical?</p> |  |
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| <p><b>HOW DO THEY RELATE?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emotionally</li> <li>• Logically</li> </ul> |  |
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| <p><b>WHAT IS THEIR IDEOLOGY?</b></p> <p>If they were to write a manifesto on how we should live our life, what would it say?</p>  |  |
| <p><b>PRESUMPTION OF CHARACTER?</b></p> <p>Do they presume the best or worst of people?</p>  |  |
| <p><b>WHAT ARE THEIR PREJUDICES?</b></p>   |  |
| <p><b>WHAT ARE THEIR SKILLS?</b></p>   |  |
| <p><b>WHAT ARE THEIR DAILY RITUALS?</b></p>  |  |
| <p><b>WHAT FASCINATES THEM?</b><br/>Do they have hobbies? Even if we don't see those hobbies, what would they be? What do these hobbies reveal of their personality?</p> |  |
| <p>Hobbies</p>   |  |
| <p>Interests</p>   |  |
| <p><b>WHAT IS THEIR TASTE IN MUSIC?</b></p>  |  |
| <p><b>WHAT GAMES DO THEY PLAY?</b></p> <p>That might be Xbox, netball, infidelity, relationship sabotage, sibling torment?</p>   |  |

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| <b>PETS AND THE RELATIONSHIP?</b> |  |
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| <b>HOBBIES</b> |  |
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| <b>SEXUALITY</b>                              |  |
| Hetro/ Gay/ Lesbian / Closet / Other          |  |
| What floats their boat? / What is their bent? |  |
| How does it affect their journey in life?     |  |

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| <b>DRESS SENSE</b>                   |  |
| What do they wear for what occasion? |  |

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| <b>HOME</b>   |  |
| What does their place look like? How do they decorate? What does that say about them? |  |

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| <b>WHAT IS THEIR PRESENTATION TO THE WORLD?</b>  |  |
| What <b>masks</b> do they wear? / What is their pretense?<br>(See also Personas below) |  |
| Who do they think they are?  |  |

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| Who are they really?          |  |
| How do other people see them? |  |
| How do they communicate?      |  |

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| <p><b>TACTICS</b><br/>         Create a list of verb-tactics they employ to get what they want?</p> <p><b>For example:</b><br/>         To compliment<br/>         To threaten<br/>         To intimidate<br/>         To entice/tease<br/>         To confuse/mislead<br/>         To bamboozle<br/>         Etc</p> | <p>*In many cases a character will mix and mash hot and cold techniques, charming another character to disarm them then threatening them to get what they want.</p> |
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| <p><b>LEXICON</b><br/>         Their language and sayings<br/>         Unique dialogue you might expect to hear from them or quotes.</p> |  |
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| <b>PERSONAS / MASKS</b><br>People have different personas around work, family, club, other. How they behave is different in these situations? |  |
| Family  |  |
| Work  |  |
| Partner   |  |
| Other   |  |

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| <b>CIRCLES OF ASSOCIATION</b>                    |  |
| Who do they associate with and why?              |  |
| Inner circle                                     |  |
| Outer circle                                     |  |
| Who do they align with during the story and why? |  |

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| <b>WHAT MOMENT DO THEY LIVE IN?</b><br>Is anyone home? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ In the moment</li> <li>○ Focused on the past</li> <li>○ Focused on the future</li> </ul> |  |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(Something ahead of them)</li> <li>○ Focused on the contact person or focused on others (Multiple actions) or not focused on them at all</li> <li>○ What events in the script snap them into a different moment or focus them into the present?</li> </ul> |  |
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| <b>PSYCHOLOGY</b>  |              |
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| What do they take pride in?  |              |
| What do they fear?   |              |
| What is their greatest fear?   |              |
| What are they insecure about?  |              |
| What behavior threatens them?  |              |
| What is their weak spot?   |              |
| What will trigger them to act?   |              |
| What mask do they wear?  | See personas |
| What are they afraid people will discover about them/ about who they really are? |              |
| What do they believe their future to be?   |              |
| Where do their loyalties lie?  |              |

| <b>ABSTRACT</b>   |  |
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| If they were an animal what kind of animal would they be? |  |
| If they were weather what kind of weather would they be?  |  |

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| If they were water, what state or body of water would they be? (This may describe their state of mind) |  |
| What triggers them?  |  |
| What do they see and hear? For example: Someone says or does something they interpret in another way   |  |

| DEFENSE POSTURE   |  |
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| Note also that a character may adopt a defense posture when attacked or threatened. Freud created a list of these. See below:   |  |
| <p><b>Repression:</b><br/>An active defence process pushes anxiety arousing impulses or memories into the unconscious mind.</p>   | A person was sexually abused in childhood develops amnesia for the event                               |
| <p><b>Denial:</b><br/>A person refuses to acknowledge anxiety arousing aspects of the environment. The denial may involve either the emotions connected with the event or the event itself.</p> | A man who is told he has terminal cancer refuses to consider the possibility that he will not recover  |
| <p><b>Displacement:</b><br/>An unacceptable or dangerous impulse is repressed then directed at a safer substitute target.</p>   | A man who is harassed by his boss experiences no anger at work but then goes home and abuses his wife. |

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| <p><b>Projection:</b><br/>An unacceptable impulse is repressed then attributed to other people.</p>  | <p>A woman with a strong repressed desire to have an affair continually accuses her husband of being unfaithful to her.</p>                                       |
| <p><b>Rationalization:</b><br/>A person constructs a false but plausible explanation or excuse for an anxiety arousing behaviour or event that has already occurred.</p>   | <p>A student caught cheating on an exam justifies the act by pointing out that the professors tests are unfair and, besides, everybody else was cheating too.</p> |
| <p><b>Reaction formation:</b><br/>An anxiety arousing impulse is repressed and its psychic energy finds release in an exaggerated expression of the opposite behaviour</p> | <p>A mother who harbours feelings of resentment toward her child represses them and becomes overprotective of the child.</p>                                      |
| <p><b>Sublimation:</b><br/>A repressed impulse is released in the form of a socially acceptable or even admired behaviour.</p>   | <p>A man with strong hostile impulses becomes an investigative reporter who ruins political careers with his stories.</p>   |

| <b>COOL versus WET</b>   |  |
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| <p>A character should not be histrionic unless by design. An element of 'cool', is the sparkle for a character where as 'wet', histrionic creates powerless people that are not engaging.</p> <p><b>Q: What is their 'Cool' and how does in manifest</b></p> |  |

| <b>CHARACTER TRAITS</b>                                  |   |
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| <b>What are their personality traits?</b>                |   |
| <b>Examples - Negative</b>                               | <b>Examples - Positive</b>                          |
| Tight  | Orderly   |
| Tardy  | On time   |
| Righteous  | Tolerant  |
| Arrogant   | Moderate/modest                                     |
| Pretentious  | Moderate/modest                                     |
| Treacherous  | Loyal   |
| Lazy   | Diligent  |
| Easily angered- misconstrues meaning even in good things | Listener  |
| Suspicious - Paranoid                                    | Open - observant                                    |
| Devoid of empathy - sociopath                            | Possesses empathy – participates in social contract |

| <b>CHARACTER TRAITS</b> |                 |
|-------------------------|-----------------|
| <b>Negative</b>         | <b>Positive</b> |
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| <p><b>COLOR PALETTE</b></p> <p>What are the colors that define them and their personality?</p> <p>*This will be considered for production design of costume and locations etc.</p> |  |
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| <p><b>FOUR INTERVIEWS</b></p> <p>This technique has the character speak to the interviewer and answer Qs about them and their plans and expectations before the inciting incident, after, and at the very end of the story.</p> | <p><b>LETTER TO A FRIEND OF LOVED ONE</b></p> <p>Four interviews can also be written as a letter or journal for a friend loved one.</p> |
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| <p><b>BEFORE THE INCITING INCIDENT:</b></p> <p>What are your expectations of life, dreams and ambitions?</p>  |  |
| <p><b>POST THE INCITING INCIDENT:</b></p> <p>What is their reaction to the event?<br/>How have they tried to recover?<br/>What is their plan of action?</p> |  |
| <p><b>WHAT I LEARNED</b> of my opponent and what surprised me:</p>  |  |
| <p><b>END OF STORY</b></p> <p>What I learned and how I changed.</p>   |  |

*'The movie camera hates acting, but loves behaviour.'* (Dustin Hoffman).



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