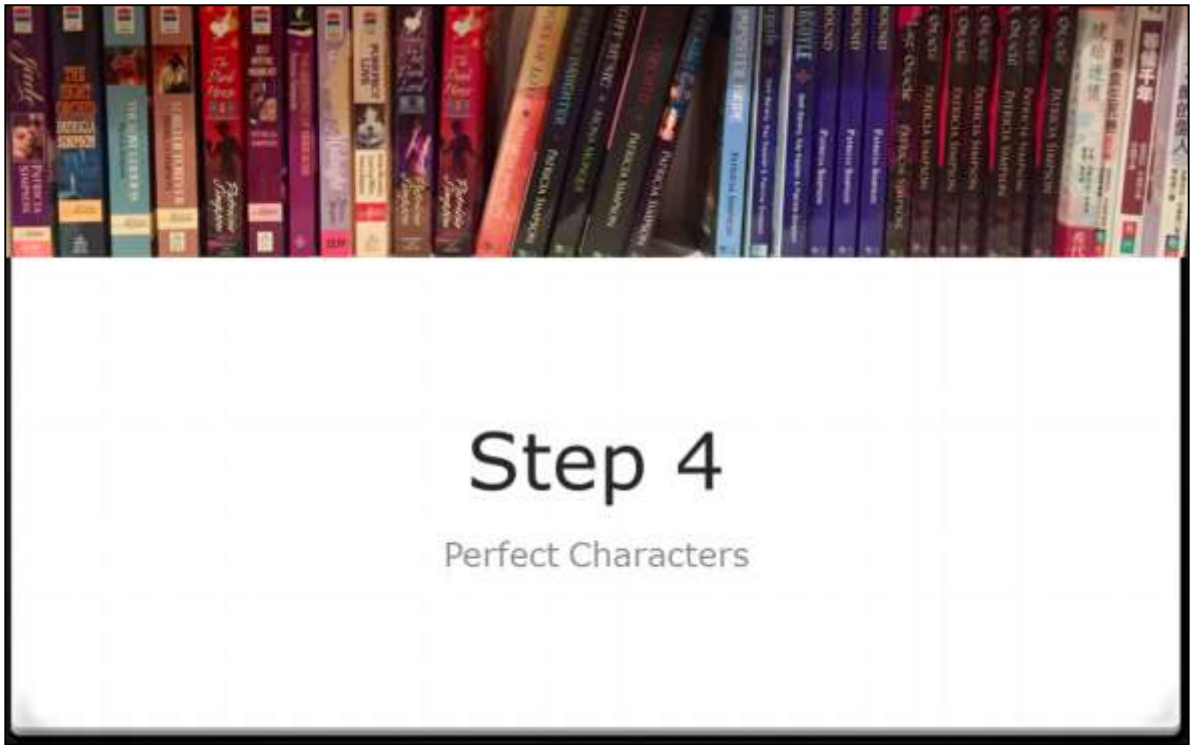




Welcome back to Start a Book in 5 Easy Steps.

I'm Patricia Simpson.



Now that you know what issue you are writing about and what you want to say about the issue, you can go on to my favorite step, which is designing perfect characters.

Goals of this lesson...

- Define what makes a perfect character.
- Develop character statements.
- Discover the secret weapon of conflict.

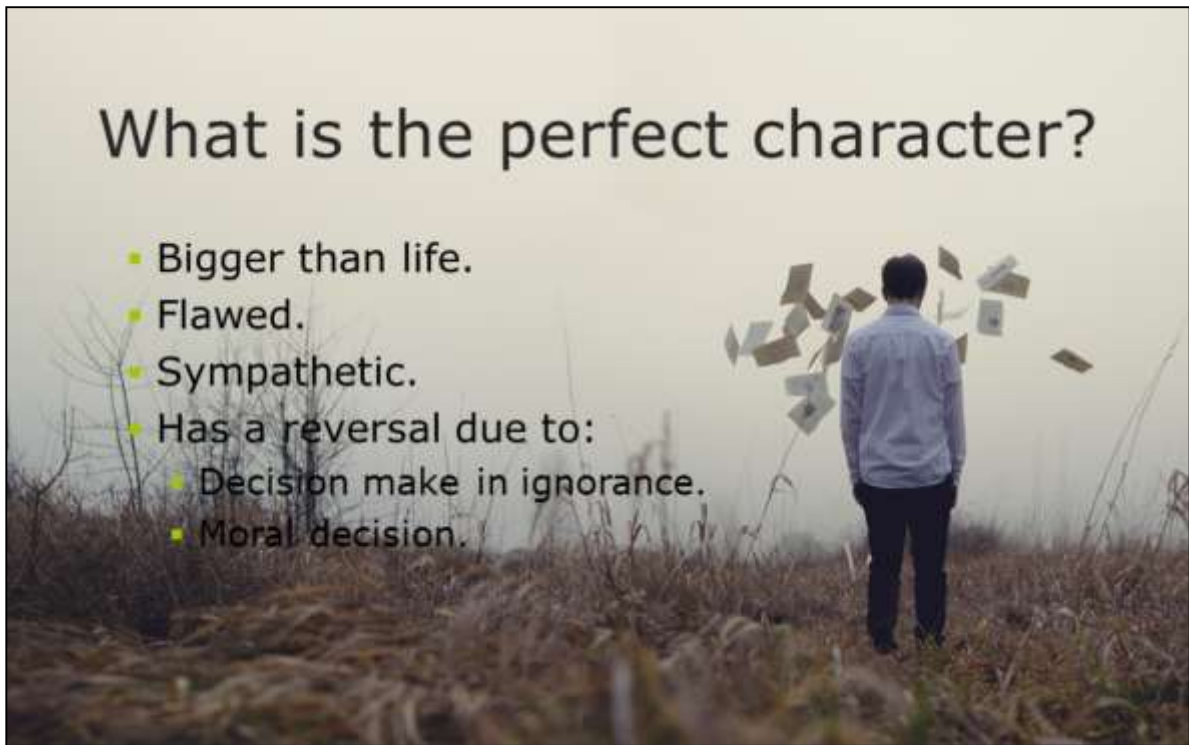


In this lesson, we'll...

Define what makes a perfect character.

Develop character statements.

Discover the secret weapon of conflict.



What is the perfect character?

- Bigger than life.
- Flawed.
- Sympathetic.
- Has a reversal due to:
 - Decision made in ignorance.
 - Moral decision.

What is the perfect character?

When you design the main character of your book, you should keep in mind that the best protagonists are bigger than life and are dealing with a big issue in a big way.

The best characters are flawed.

My husband is from Scotland, so we watch a lot of BBC detective shows. Have you ever noticed that TV detectives are riddled with issues: anger management, alcoholism, unresolved grief and guilt, as well as hiding the onset of dementia. A flaw makes the hero more human. A flaw gives the hero room to grow and change.

The best characters make the reader sympathize with them. This can be achieved by making the reader feel sorry for the character or making the character admirable in what they think and do.

Most heroes should suffer a reversal of some kind because of a decision they

made in ignorance, which is revealed to them at the end of the book or because of a moral decision they are forced to make that is detrimental to them or the people they care about.

Moral decisions make great plot elements because readers want to live vicariously through a courageous character who makes a moral decision and eventually triumphs. (But not after a LOT of conflict.)

Aristotle on Character*

- Must be good.
- Propriety.
- True to life.
- Consistent.

**Poetics by Aristotle*



Aristotle reminds us that in the best dramas, the main character must:

Be a good person.

A character must have elements of propriety. By that I mean they are honorable, valorous and are made of good moral fiber. They should be heroic, but in a believable way. They are true to life, with flaws and foibles.

A character should be consistent. If your heroine is kind to animals in chapter one, she will ALWAYS be kind to animals. If your hero is gruff and silent in chapter one, he will always be a man of few words.

Sometimes writers lose the thread when it comes to consistency of character, because the novel takes such a long time to write. A reader, however, may consume your book in one sitting. They will notice everything about your characters and remember everything. Inconsistencies will stand out like a red flag when experienced over a short period of time.

People tell you who they are.

- I'm a jerk.
- I'm a truth-teller.
- I know what I'm doing.
- I know what's best.
- I get the job done.

People tell you who they are, usually when you first meet them in fact. They will say things like:

I'm a jerk.

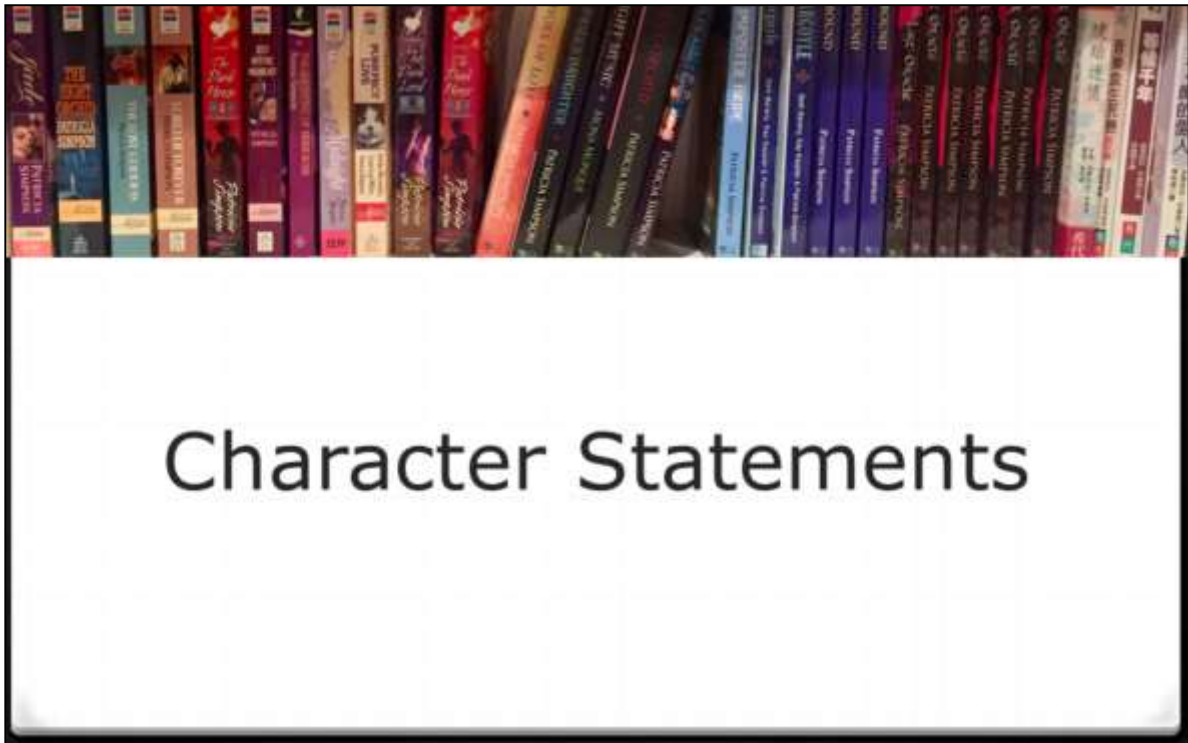
I'm a truth-teller.

I know what I'm doing.

I know what's best.

I get the job done.

What are these types of remarks?...



Character statements.

People have a fundamental way they think about themselves. It's their character statement. This statement can be a positive statement or negative. The statement colors the way a person makes decisions, interacts with others and lives their life.

Character Statement Examples

- I never win.
- I am unloveable.
- Nothing bothers me.
- I never give up.
- I am too old to change.

Here are some character statement examples:

- I never win.
- I am unloveable.
- Nothing bothers me.
- I never give up.
- I am too old to change.

Use Issue to Create the Character Statement

- Belonging
- Immigration
- Dissatisfaction

Use your issue to come up with the character statement of your protagonist. If your character will be dealing with the issue of belonging, what might they be thinking about themselves in relation to this issue? Lets look at that.

Issue: Belonging

Positive View



Negative View



In our story, the character will be dealing with the issue of belonging. She will either have a positive sense of belonging or she will have a negative sense. This personal view or statement will affect the plot, characterization and outcome of the story.

Belonging – Positive Statement

- I'm a team player.
- Everyone likes me.
- I fought hard for what I have.



What might a character think if they have a positive sense of belonging?

I'm a team player.

Everyone likes me.

I fought hard for what I have.

Belonging – Negative Statement



- I am not worthy.
- No one understands me.
- I didn't ask for this.

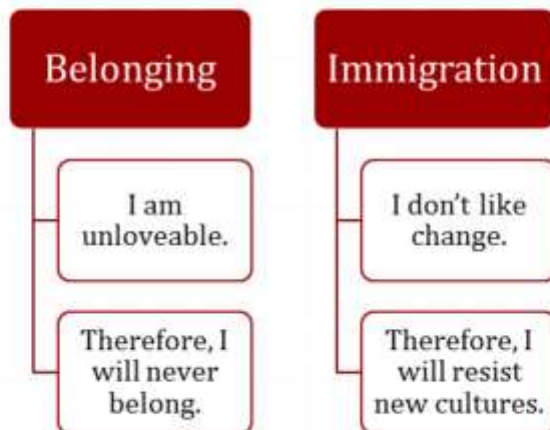
Now let's look at the negative side of belonging. What might a character say if she sensed that she DIDN'T belong?

I am not worthy.

No one understands me.

I didn't ask for this.

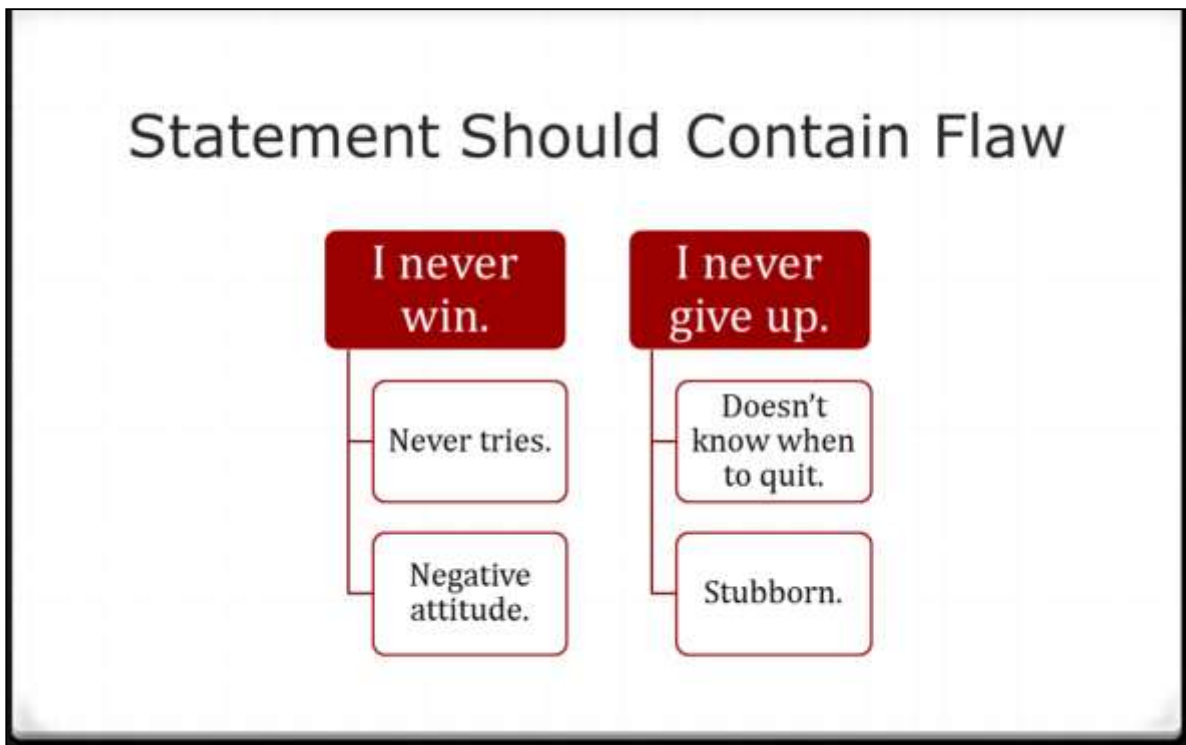
Statement Should Relate to Issue



For the best story, your character's statement should relate to the issue of your book.

In the examples above, you can see that the issue is belonging and the character statement might be "I am unloveable." Therefore, that character will spend a lot of time believing they will never belong. If the issue is immigration, your character's statement might be "I don't like change." This character will spend most of the book resisting the new culture and ideas.

At the end of the story, the character will probably start thinking differently about themselves and the world around them. Those are the best stories! Those are the stories we want to be writing!



Aristotle reminds us that the best characters are flawed characters. So the character statement you come up with for your protagonist should relate to their flaw as well as the issue.

In the case of the character statement of "I never win," the flaw might be that the person has no ambition. They never try anything because they expect to fail. Their attitude will be negative.

In the case of the character statement "I never give up," you might think this character statement doesn't contain a flaw. Isn't it admirable to NOT give up, you say? Yes, persistence is usually a good thing. But not not if the character keeps doing something long after it's practical or safe, especially if it's done at the expense of others. Sometimes a person has to LEARN to give up or give in. Sometimes a person has to learn to be soft.

Bad vs Good Characterization

NO!!!

"I'm going to write a story about Uncle Bob. He's such an interesting character." **NOT.**

YES!!!

"I'm going to design a character who exemplifies my theme."

If you want to be a good writer, you will NOT design a book around a character. You will design characters AROUND your book.




Test yourself about what you've learned so far.

Fill in the blank.
The best character has a _____ that he must overcome.

Character Statements

Quiz - 2 questions

Last Modified: Jun 01, 2017 at 07:18 AM



How did you do?

How did you do?

Let's move on to the secret weapon of great writers.



The secret weapon a great writer possesses is knowing how to develop opposing character statements to create conflict. So how do we do this?



Opposing statements

Design the antagonist character statement to oppose the protagonist character statement.

We design the antagonist character statement to exactly oppose the protagonist character statement.

Big words, confusing definition, you say? Let's look at a couple of examples.

Opposing Statements Examples

Protagonist	Antagonist
I am unloveable.	People always like me.
I'm too old to change.	I'll try anything once.
I am unlucky.	I win every time.

In our book, the protagonist's character statement might be "I am unloveable." So in this story, there should be another important character who says "People ALWAYS like me."

Another example is one character who believes they are too old to change and an opposing character who claims they will try anything once.

The third example shows a main character whose character statement is "I am unlucky," and the opposing statement of "I win every time. Come on!"

Because the protagonist thinks one way about himself and the antagonist thinks completely the opposite, they will see the world in vastly different ways, which creates...



Conflict!

Yeah, baby, yeah. That's what we want. Conflict. Natural conflict.

Am I having déjà vu... ☺ ???? I think I am. ☺

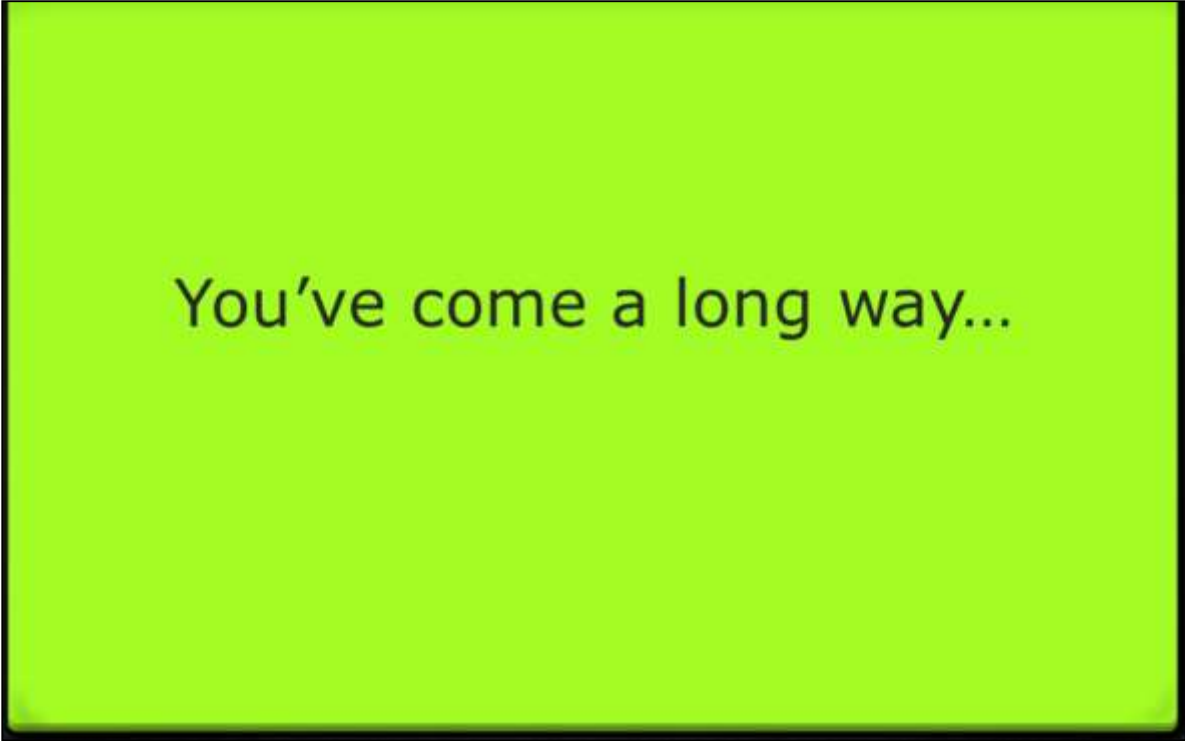
Multiple Character Viewpoints

- Heroine vs hero.
- Heroine vs villain.
- Heroine vs world.
- Heroine vs herself.



In summary, most stories will have more than two characters. So you will create character statements for all of your main characters. And they should relate to the issue as well as each other.

You will have opposing statements for your heroine and hero, your heroine and the villain, your heroine and the world, and even the heroine and herself.



You've come a long way...

You've come a long way, baby. You're almost done building your book! Take stock of the steps you have completed up to this point.

The screenshot shows a quiz interface with a light gray background. On the left, there is a white box containing the text: "Drag and drop the steps to writing a book into their proper order." Below this text is a list of four items, each with a small square icon and a horizontal line to its right, representing the steps to be ordered. To the right of this box, the title "Book Steps" is displayed in a bold, black font. Below the title, the text "Quiz - 1 question" is shown in a smaller, italicized font. At the bottom of this section, the text "Last Modified: Jun 01, 2017 at 07:19 AM" is visible.

Your Steps

1. Book type _____
2. Issue _____
3. Premise _____
4. Protagonist Character Statement:

Take note of YOUR steps:

Book type

Issue

Premise

Protagonist character statement

Write down your steps. You will need them in the 5th and final step to starting a book.

