

# Writing for Stage

We looked at Character development in Writing Fiction workshop. Here we take this a little further.

## THE ANTAGONIST

This is the character who drive the hero of our stories. As said previously it need not necessarily be another person. But who- or whatever the antagonist might be it needs to be developed.

### The 4 Types of Antagonists

In genre writing—especially in thrillers—antagonists are usually arch-villains, but they don't have to be people; they can be any oppositional element that thwarts your character's main desire. Of course, many stories include more than one antagonist: Lord Voldemort is the primary antagonist in J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, but other characters, such as Draco Malfoy, act as secondary antagonists. Broadly speaking, there are four different types of antagonists:

1. **Villains:** The traditional definition of antagonist is a villain—a “bad guy” in the story, often working for evil purposes to destroy a heroic protagonist. While there can be villainous protagonists, villains are antagonists when they're not the main character of the story but instead are the main source of conflict for the main characters. There are different types of villains within the category: the mastermind, the anti-villain, the evil villain, the minion or henchman, and the supervillain, to name a few. Examples of classic villain protagonists include Darth Vader from *Star Wars*, the Joker from the Batman comics, and Captain Ahab from *Moby Dick*.
2. **Conflict-creators:** An antagonist doesn't have to be a “bad guy.” Sometimes, they're just a character whose goals are in direct conflict with the protagonist's, like Mr. Darcy in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, who is constantly at odds with the main character Elizabeth Bennet. Another example of this type of antagonist: Javert, who works to arrest Valjean in Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*.
3. **Inanimate forces:** An antagonist doesn't have to be human—the main antagonist can sometimes be a force, like nature. A good example of an antagonistic force is the sea in *Robinson Crusoe*.
4. **The protagonist themselves:** The main source of conflict in a story can be from within the main character's own self—their shortcomings or insecurities are keeping them from reaching their goal. A prime example of an internal antagonist is Holden Caulfield in J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*. While Holden comes into conflict with many characters in the novel, the ever-present antagonizing conflict comes from his own obsessions and insecurities. If a story doesn't have an external antagonizing force but rather seats the conflict within the protagonist, a strong backstory is useful for fueling that inner conflict.

### How to Develop an Antagonist

Some guidelines for developing an antagonist include:

- 1. **Give the antagonist morality.** A villain's motivations should create a crisis for your protagonist. Every villain needs to have their own morality, however warped. If a villain spends part of the novel killing people, you need to give him or her believable reasons for doing so. Make the reader understand exactly what desperate need or twisted belief has driven the villain to commit their crimes, and make those motivations personal to their history and upbringing.
- 2. **Make the antagonist powerful.** Readers want to see your main character succeed—but they don't want it to be easy. Your villain should not only be a match for your hero: they should be even more powerful. This forces your protagonist to collect the skills, items, and allies they'll need to defeat your antagonist, which creates further opportunity for character development.

### How to Develop Secondary Characters

Some guidelines for developing secondary characters include:

- 1. **Make them complementary.** Secondary characters serve the vital functions of assisting the protagonist with alternate skill sets, giving them a sounding board or emotional support, getting themselves into trouble so that the protagonist can help them, and even providing comic relief.
- 2. **Make them oppositional.** Some of the best sidekicks in literature are oppositional, and will even undermine the protagonist. Think of Dr. Watson chastising Sherlock Holmes for his drug use. Giving secondary characters opposing points of view allows you to explore your subjects, settings, and moral gray areas from a wider variety of perspectives, which sustains complexity and keeps the reader interested.

### Tips for Writing Great Characters

Characters, like people, are imperfect. They don't need to be likeable, but they must be interesting. Here are some tips for effective character development.

1. **Develop characters who reflect your interests.** You're going to be spending a lot of time with your characters, so the fiction rule "write what you want to know" applies to them as well. Don't be afraid to invest your protagonist with familiar qualities, but prioritize your passions and make sure that your main characters emerge from the setting and topics you've developed so far.
2. **Reveal their physical world through detail.** Different writers focus on different details to evoke character, whether deliberately or not. Balzac focused on his characters' physical appearance. Dashiell Hammett never fed his characters, while Charles Dickens fed his extravagantly. Some writers are interested in revealing character via clothing, as Flaubert did, while others attend to mannerisms or physical appearance. Whatever details you choose,

it's important for you to know your characters' physical world intimately, and how they relate to it.

3. **3. Give them the right skills.** Your characters should have skills that will allow them to function in your setting. If you've chosen to set your novel on the moon, then make sure your character has a space suit or learns how to use one.
4. **4. Create memorable characters.** When creating important characters that the reader is going to meet more than once, be sure that they're memorable in some way. Try to give each one a quirk or quality that can be used later to help readers recall who they are. This could be a title like "chief of police" or a physical attribute like "ginger-haired."
5. **5. Give the reader access to their inner conflict.** One way to create intimacy with your reader—and to get them to care about your main character—is to use internal monologue. This means letting the reader see a character's thoughts as they happen, which exposes that person's inner conflict, motivations, opinions, and personality. Internal monologue not only reveals character: it's a neat way to convey information about your setting, events, and other characters.
6. **6. Subvert your reader's expectations.** The most interesting characters will surprise your readers. Think about it: We don't have to pay attention to things that are stable. But when something unexpected happens—a wolf comes out of the woods, for instance—we pay attention.