



Characters

Characters are at the heart of most stories. Whether you're writing sweeping fantasy, quiet literary fiction, or a tightly focused thriller, the people you create are what the reader connects with. This page is about where characters come from, how they form, and how to bring them to life without overthinking the process.

Where Characters Come From

Writers rarely lift a whole person from real life. More often, characters are a blend of:

- imagination
- fragments of people you've met
- traits you've observed
- voices you've heard
- experiences you've lived
- qualities you've invented

A character might have your neighbour's laugh, your cousin's stubbornness, a stranger's walk, and a completely fictional backstory. They're mosaics, not portraits.

Using Real People - Carefully

It's natural to draw inspiration from people you know, but it's rarely wise to recreate them exactly.

Instead, borrow:

- a gesture
- a habit
- a way of speaking
- a contradiction
- a flaw or strength

These small details make characters feel real without turning your book into a disguised biography.

Let Characters Grow Beyond the Template

Even if a character begins as “someone like X,” they will change as the story develops. As you write:

- they make choices you didn’t expect
- their voice becomes clearer
- their motivations sharpen
- their relationships shift

This is a good sign, it means the character is becoming their own person.

Give Them Wants, Fears, and Contradictions

A character becomes interesting when they have:

- something they want
- something they fear
- something they’re wrong about
- something they hide
- something they struggle with

These tensions create movement and make the character feel alive on the page.

Build From the Inside Out

You don’t need a full biography. A few strong anchors are enough:

- what they want
- what stands in their way
- how they see the world
- how they speak
- what they notice

These details shape how they behave in scenes.

A Quick Exercise

Write a short bio for a character, just a few lines.

Then write a couple of hundred words showing them doing something ordinary: walking to the station, waiting for a bus, watching a dripping tap, struggling to sleep. This brings them alive in your imagination long before they enter the story.