

# How Do Writers Introduce You to Their Characters?

## Feature Menu

### Characterization

Creating Characters

Direct Characterization

Indirect Characterization

Motivation

Your Turn

< Back

Next >

Feature Menu

Main 

# Characterization

Have you ever gotten to know a character so well that you were a little sad when the story was over?



< Back

Next >

Feature Menu

Main 

# Characterization

How is it that a writer can create a character on a page and make readers feel as if they have met a real person? ▾



He rushed down the courthouse stairs, glancing anxiously at his watch and worrying about his missed appointment with the new client.

< Back

Next >

Feature Menu

Main 

# Characterization

The way a writer reveals character is called **characterization**. ▾

Poor characterization can make a character uninteresting, because that character may lack focus and clarity.



< Back

Next >

Feature Menu

Main 



# Characterization

Good characterization creates a clear picture in the reader's mind.



Dressed in a colorful blue and yellow costume, the matador prepared his satin cape for the charging bull.



< Back

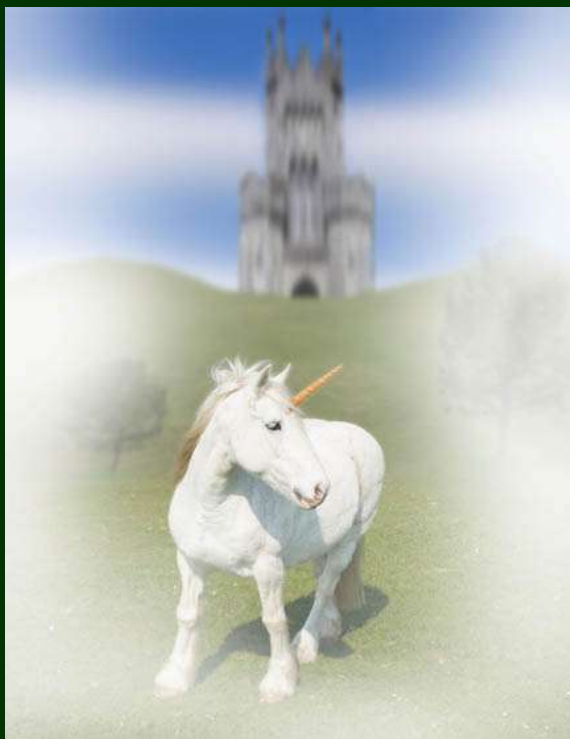
Next >

Feature Menu

Main 

# Characterization

Good characterization can make readers feel that even fantasy characters live and breathe. ▾



The majestic white unicorn looked unsure of her next step. She had escaped from her brutal master at the castle, but where should she go now?

< Back

Next >

Feature Menu

Main 

# Characterization

## Quick Check

Tommy McSweeney really hated being the tallest boy in the eighth grade. Everyone assumed he was a good basketball player, but he had no athletic interest or skill.

Instead, his talent emerged far from a court or ball field. No one beyond Tommy's family knew that the pale, muscular kid with curly hair and freckles was a classical pianist—and Tommy intended to keep it that way.

Which words create characterization to clarify your image of Tommy?

**Answer**

[End of Section]

< Back

Next >

Feature Menu

Main 

# Characterization: Creating Characters

The two types of characterization are **direct characterization** and **indirect characterization**. ▾

If a writer *tells* you what a character is like, the method is called **direct characterization**. ▾

If a writer prefers to *show* characters in action, the method is called **indirect characterization**. ▾



She scowled at us, frowning a rude and frightening frown.

< Back

Next >

Feature Menu

Main 



# Characterization: Direct Characterization

The two types of characterization are **direct characterization** and **indirect characterization**. ▾

If a writer tells you that a character is *mean-tempered* or *friendly*, that is **direct characterization**. ▾

When a writer uses **direct characterization**, you don't have to do any detective work to figure out the character.



< Back

Next >

Feature Menu

Main 

## Characterization: Direct Characterization

Read the following passage. Which words directly show you Amaya's qualities?



When Amaya brought home a pet rabbit, her mother did not object. She knew Amaya was a caring, responsible girl who would take excellent care of the animal.

Direct characterization gives you exact information.

< Back

Next >

Feature Menu

Main 

# Characterization: Direct Characterization

## Quick Check

Dr. Chang was the best dentist in the practice. He had a charming smile, a gentle manner, and a warm personality. He made a trip to the dentist a pleasant experience—despite the discomfort.

What words give you direct information about Dr. Chang's character?

**Answer**

[End of Section]

< Back

Next >

Feature Menu

Main 

# Characterization: Indirect Characterization

Writers generally prefer to use **indirect characterization**. ▾

When writers use **indirect characterization**, they *show* their characters in action, giving readers the chance to decide for themselves what a character is like.



< Back

Next >

Feature Menu

Main 



# Characterization: Indirect Characterization

A writer can show **indirect characterization** through



words



character relationships



appearance



actions



thoughts and feelings

< Back

Next >

Feature Menu

Main 

# Characterization: Indirect Characterization

Writers create a character's **appearance** carefully.

Through exact physical details, a writer can imply, or suggest, a character's personality. ▼

- How is the character dressed? ▼
- What is the character's posture? ▼
- What is the character's facial expression?



< Back

Next >

Feature Menu

Main 

# Characterization: Indirect Characterization

By clinging to her mother, the child appears to be shy and unsure. ▼



By wearing his Scout uniform, this boy appears to be proud of the badges he has earned.

< Back

Next >

Feature Menu

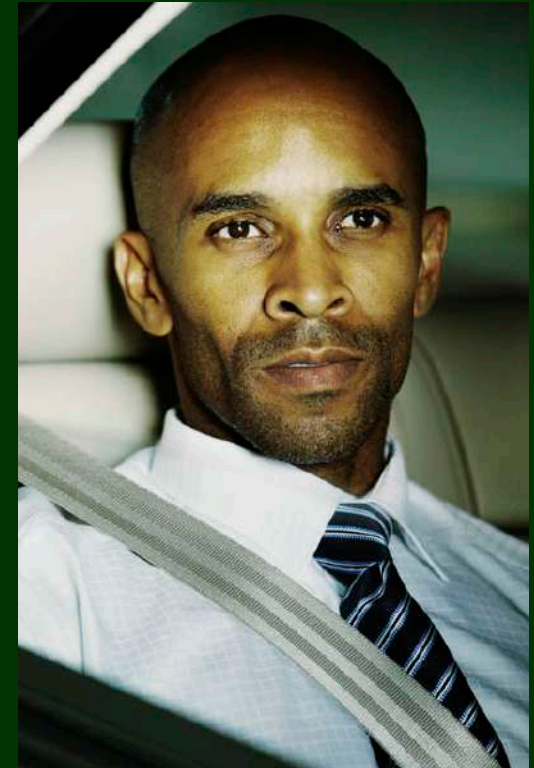
Main 



## Characterization: Indirect Characterization

Read the following text. What might this character's **appearance** say about his personality?

The man seated in the parked limousine had short hair, piercing eyes, and a serious gaze. He was dressed neatly in a starched white shirt and striped tie.



Based on the man's appearance, you might conclude that he is a serious, focused businessman.

< Back

Next >

Feature Menu

Main 



# Characterization: Indirect Characterization

Read the following passage, paying attention to the character's appearance.

The girl in the fancy dress and high-heeled shoes squirmed uncomfortably on the hard wooden bench. Her eyes, lips, and hands were clenched. Her head drooped and her chin hung low. A tear slid down her face.

How does this girl feel? What details suggest this feeling? ▾

She feels sad.

< Back

Next >

Feature Menu

Main 

# Characterization: Indirect Characterization

**Actions** reveal a great deal about people. For example, people's actions can show whether they're



helpful and encouraging

or



mean and mocking

In stories, characters' **actions** can also reveal their personalities.

< Back

Next >

Feature Menu

Main 

# Characterization: Indirect Characterization

Characters' **actions** reveal ▾

- personality, ▾
- motivation, ▾
- and situation.

I love  
competition.

We 8<sup>th</sup>  
graders  
can't lose to  
the 7<sup>th</sup>  
graders.

We *have*  
to win  
this  
round.



< Back

Next >

Feature Menu

Main 

## Characterization: Indirect Characterization

Read the following passage, paying close attention to the character's actions.

It was a cold October day when Karisti's alarm buzzed at 6:00 a.m. She pulled on her clothes and headed for the door. She carefully adjusted her headphones; then she pulled the sleeves of her turtleneck over her hands to keep out the cold. *Here goes 10 miles,* she thought as she began her run. *I have to be ready for the spring marathon.*

What actions does Karisti take? ▾

< Back

Next >

Feature Menu

Main 



## Characterization: Indirect Characterization

What do Karisti's actions imply about her character?

It was a cold October day when Karisti's alarm buzzed at 6:00 a.m. She pulled on her clothes and headed for the door. She carefully adjusted her headphones; then she pulled the sleeves of her turtleneck over her hands to keep out the cold. *Here goes 10 miles,* she thought as she began her run. *I have to be ready for the spring marathon.*

Karisti is getting up early to run on a cold morning as she prepares for a marathon. She's probably a dedicated athlete.

< Back

Next >

Feature Menu

Main 

# Characterization: Indirect Characterization

A character's **words** are important, because the exact words of a speaker reveal insight into personality.



"My player did not step over the line!" shouted the coach. "I demand you review the tapes!"

Secretly, though, he was sure the official had made the right call.

< Back

Next >

Feature Menu

Main 

# Characterization: Indirect Characterization



What do the character's **words** and tone reveal about his personality?

"Harry, show your talents," barked the impatient instructor. "Don't hold back this time!"

The instructor pushes his students to work to the best of their ability.

< Back

Next >

Feature Menu

Main 

# Characterization: Indirect Characterization

Characters' **thoughts and feelings** also reveal information about what they're like. ▼

I thought I wouldn't like summer camp, but it's been a lot of fun.

Read carefully to learn what characters are like on the *inside*.



< Back

Next >

Feature Menu

Main 



# Characterization: Indirect Characterization

Read the following passage, paying attention to the character's thoughts and feelings.

Frank insisted that he wasn't tired or hungry, but really he was both. The long plane trip, with two delays, had left his patience in shreds. However, he didn't want Aunt Judy to go to any trouble.

What kind of person do you think Frank is?  
How do you know? ▼

Frank seems caring and considerate of others.

< Back

Next >

Feature Menu

Main 

# Characterization: Indirect Characterization

Writers also give readers a view of their characters from another angle: through **characters' relationships** with each other.

How one character reacts to another character often reveals qualities of both characters. ▼

As you read, note carefully

- *what* characters say to each other and ▼
- *how* characters act toward each other.



< Back

Next >

Feature Menu

Main 

## Characterization: Indirect Characterization

Read the following passage, paying attention to the characters' words and how they're said.

Michael hugged Annie before he got out of the car. "I'll call you tomorrow," he said.

She smiled and replied, "You always say that, and you never do!"

He laughed. "Okay, I'll e-mail, then."

"You'd better!" Annie grinned, but her eyes were sad.

What does the conversation suggest about each character's personality? ▾

**Michael** is friendly but unreliable. **Annie** is unsure about her feelings for Michael.

< Back

Next >

Feature Menu

Main 

# Characterization: Indirect Characterization

## Quick Check

I'm tired of being ignored, Maura thought. When I walk into a room, it's like no one sees me. No more—I'm going to get noticed at the dance.

When the big night came, though, nothing went right. Maura's dress didn't fit correctly, and her shawl had a hole in it. Worst of all, as she walked into the gym, the heel broke on her right shoe, sending her sprawling across the floor.

Which three methods of indirect characterization appear in this passage?

Answer

[End of Section]

< Back

Next >

Feature Menu

Main 



# Motivation

**Motivation** is the reason why people do the things they do. In real life, we may never know why people act in certain ways. ▾



What could possibly have made your brother think he could dance? ▾

Why did your best friend suddenly find a new best friend?



< Back

Next >

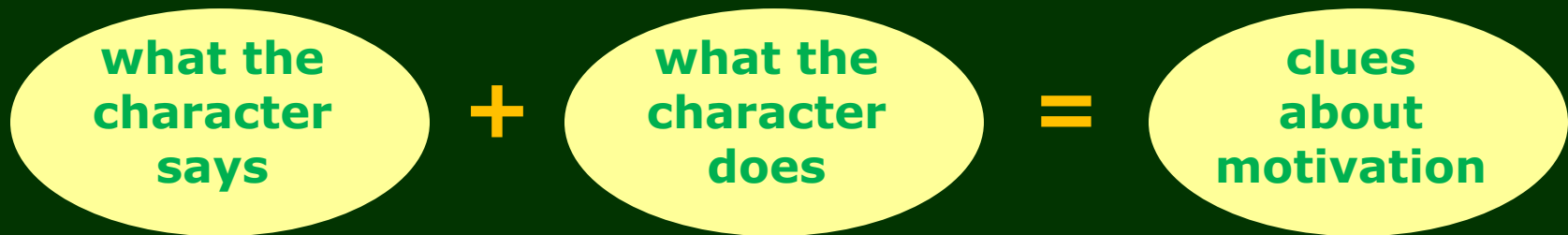
Feature Menu

Main 

# Motivation

In literature, you will find plenty of clues to characters' motivations. Use the clues to find out what makes a character tick. ▾

Uncover a character's motivations by paying attention to



Then, think about the outcome of the character's actions.

< Back

Next >

Feature Menu

Main 

# Motivation

## Quick Check

"Hey Sheila," said Jesuka. "I haven't seen you at the mall all week. Where have you been?"

Sheila shrugged. "I'm babysitting for Mrs. Davies."

"Babysitting? Why are wasting your time with some crying kid? You should be with your friends."

"My parents said that if I want to take ballet lessons, I have to pay for them myself."

Which words reveal Sheila's motivation for working after school?

**Answer**

[End of Section]

< Back

Next >

Feature Menu

Main 

# Analyze a Character

## Your Turn

Choose a character from a story you have read recently, and fill in a chart like the one below.

Character profile of:

| Method of Characterization       | Details in Story |
|----------------------------------|------------------|
| <b>Indirect Characterization</b> |                  |
| Appearance                       |                  |
| Actions                          |                  |
| Words                            |                  |
| Thoughts                         |                  |
| Relationships with Others        |                  |
| <b>Direct Characterization</b>   |                  |
| What the writer says             |                  |

< Back

Next >

Feature Menu

Main 



**The End**

[< Back](#)

[Next >](#)

[Feature Menu](#)

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