

SHORE SCRIPTS

CREATING A CHARACTER

INTRODUCTION

This is really an exercise in getting to know your characters and it's especially helpful if you've got an exciting idea for a premise, such as 'What if a humanoid race of aliens arrived on earth claiming to be the original inhabitants of the planet?' or 'What if humans could suddenly understand all animals?', but you aren't quite sure about who your main character should be or which sort of person would help drive the story best.

Each of those ideas could end up being drastically different, depending on who the protagonist is, from altering the genre to attracting an entirely different target audience, so it might be worth knowing where and who your movie is going to be marketed towards first, which could help you pull focus on all the things your MC needs to have, but don't worry if you don't. If you're still at the exploratory stage, meaning you're open to brainstorming absolutely everything about your premise, there's still lots to get you thinking here.

CREATE BACKSTORY

Fleshing out a backstory for your characters can help you understand just what made them the people they are when the audience first meets them, what motivates them, and it can also give you ideas for adding in more conflicts into your plot too. You never know when you might need to use a mysterious character from your MC's past, or recount a traumatic event from your MC's childhood to help explain their actions etc.

Run through these short questions, filling out as much as you need, in order to start building a clearer picture of where your characters have come from. Don't worry if you don't know all of the answers just now. You're not going to need absolutely everything that you create in your characters backstory, the audience don't have to know your characters backstory, and anything can be changed at any time. It doesn't have to be set in stone, especially if it's not helping your story. And brainstorm! You can have multiple answers to the same question, allowing you to pick the best one at the end.

1. With the setting of your story in mind, where did your character grow up?

2. With the premise in mind, what occupation could your character have that would help or hinder them in this story?
3. With the skills and abilities that will be needed in this story in mind, what sports, hobbies, or interests could your character have that would help them in their journey?
4. With the type of conflict that's going to happen in your story in mind, what flaw would create the most problems for your character. Now write down the origin of that flaw.
5. What sort of relationship did your character have with their parents? How can that influence the way they act in their present relationships with other characters?
6. Will your character have to overcome a major fear in your story? If so, what caused them to have that fear in the first place?
7. What sort of education did your character have? How does that influence the decisions they make and how they solve problems?
8. How did finances effect your character? Did they grow up in a poor or affluent household? How did that chape their attitudes?
9. What was the happiest time for your character while growing up? Are they trying to replicate that in their present? Has it influenced their motivation?
10. What sort of love life has your character had? Successful or unsuccessful? Has having their heart broken left them scarred or having found the love of their life given them something to fight for etc?

MAKE CHARACTER RULES

Giving your characters some rules to operate to (and break) can help you quickly devise a character that works effectively in the story you create. It's a fun way to discover how your character might react in certain situations and it they can help add depth to a character too, making them feel realistic and flawed.

Create three rules for each of your characters:

1. Public life: What does your character always do when in public, at work, or out in the world?
2. Private life: What does your character always do when behind closed doors, when they think no one else is looking?
3. Personal life: What does your character always do in personal relationships?

You're using small actions to show a character is three very different areas of their life here. We all act differently depending on where we are and who we're with. How you talk to your boss is going to be very different to how you talk to your child, for example.

Looking at possible probable events in your story, write out a list of rules that your character will always do as well as rules that they'd never do in order to discover a bit more about who your character is and what scripted actions they could take that would add to the story.

While traveling, your character will always _____

While travelling, your character would never _____

While at a restaurant, your character will always _____

While at a restaurant, your character would never _____

When with their family, your character will always _____

When with their family, your character would never _____

When waiting in line, your character will always _____

When waiting in line, your character would never _____

While focusing on a difficult task, your character will always _____

While focusing on a difficult task, your character would never _____

You can change these up and list the scenarios that might happen in your own story here. The point is to get used to being able to read your characters mind, to pre-empt what actions they might take. That way, you can determine when to interrupt that pattern and give the viewers something unexpected.

Now think of ways that you can apply these rules in your story and use them to create conflict.

1. Public life: Your character always does _____ (rule) _____ in public, but it results in _____ (complication) _____.
2. Private life: Your character always does _____ (rule) _____ in private, but it results in _____ (complication) _____.
3. Personal life: Your character always does _____ (rule) _____ in a personal relationship, but it results in _____ (complication) _____.

You can also use these rules to help show character change or growth by breaking them as well as creating entertaining or dramatic moments for the audience. Brainstorm some ways that breaking their own rules can add even more conflict or result in unexpected consequences.

1. Public life: Your character always does _____ (rule) _____ in public, but they break it when _____ (event) _____, resulting in _____ (unexpected result) _____.
2. Private life: Your character always does _____ (rule) _____ in private, but they break it when _____ (event) _____, resulting in _____ (unexpected result) _____.
3. Personal life: Your character always does _____ (rule) _____ in a personal relationship, but they break it when _____ (event) _____, resulting in _____ (unexpected result) _____.

FINDING YOUR CHARACTERS VOICE

This is a fun exercise that takes your character out of your story for a moment and places them somewhere completely different. You're basically going to have a conversation with your character, (yes, I know your character is essentially you) which is something all writer's need to get used to. It's also a great way to improve your dialogue writing skills as well as finding a unique voice for your characters here too.

Presented with the following scenarios, write out a brief scene exploring how your character might present themselves.

1. Bumping into someone from high school
2. In a job interview
3. When pulled over for speeding
4. On a first date
5. In their Twitter bio
6. Giving a eulogy at a funeral
7. Flirting at a party
8. When asked for money by a beggar

We're also going to flip it here. How a character sees themselves might be completely different to how other characters see them. You can either use the supporting cast in your story to do this, or use these suggested fictional characters, but jot down a few lines that each might say when describing your protagonist.

1. The MC's mother
2. A former teacher
3. The MC's employee
4. A next door neighbor
5. The MC's boss
6. The MC's pet
7. A complete stranger
8. The antagonist of the story
9. The MC's romantic partner
10. The MC's best friend

CONCLUSION

You don't always have to know exactly how your characters will react in the scenario's that you create. Part of the fun is letting your characters surprise you along the way. Backstory can be created as an afterthought to help provide a believable explanation as to why your character is doing what they're doing, but knowing some of it before hand can also provide you with inspiration, allowing your characters act accordingly, and the more you know your characters, the faster you'll be able to write them.

Knowing who your character' are is complexly different to knowing how they sound, so exploring how your characters talk is a must here too. A character's voice can add a whole new layer to them and they way that they talk can reveal a whole lot of backstory on its own too. Upbringing, education, culture, prosperity all have a huge effect on the way a person talks, so practice translating past events into present speech for your characters as much as you can.

The nature of screenwriting is that characters are continually developing throughout each story regardless, so your characters don't need to be finite. They just need to be believable.