

Building Realistic Characters, Settings, and Plots

List of basic questions to ask yourself about your Main Character(s) before you begin to write a story:

Character's name _____ Boy or Girl Age ____

Physical description _____ Hair style & color _____ Eyes _____

Other defining physical traits _____

Personality (3 traits) _____

Clothing style _____

Mother (describe in 3 words) _____

Father (describe in 3 words) _____

Siblings (if any) (describe in 3 words) _____

Name of Best friend _____

Name of Antagonist/enemy/object of conflict _____

Favorite activities _____

Favorite things he/she owns _____

Favorite foods _____

Favorite Music _____

Favorite TV show: _____ Favorite Book _____

Handles problems by _____

Greatest love _____

Bad Habits/weaknesses _____

What does your character want more than anything? _____

HOW TO CREATE A REALISTIC SETTING:

1. Imagine yourself in the setting, then close your eyes and slowly swivel your head from left to right, picturing everything you “see” as you mentally envision the setting around you. Then write down the things that jumped out at you. (Just a few word description of them, for example, if the scene is a bedroom, you might see: sneakers on the floor, books on a crowded bookshelf, yellow walls, open window, striped blanket.)
2. Add movement (have something race past, float, bounce, flutter, etc)
3. When you’re creating a setting, keep the five senses in mind (taste, touch, sound, sight, smell) and try to put at least two of them in each descriptive passage to bring the scene to life.

TIPS & TRICKS ON PLOTTING & DIALOGUE

- Keep a notebook to write down you story ideas when they hit you. Overheard conversations, news stories, art, anything can inspire an idea. Keep lists of your experiences, both good and bad, and your observations about the world.
- Write the story *you* would want to read. Find things that interest you, and assume they will interest others, too.
- Every plotline is essentially all about conflict and resolution. Remember this analogy: *take a boy, stick him up a tree, throw rocks at him, and help him get down*. All that means is to introduce your main character, let us know what they want, then give him or her a big problem, make that problem worse, help him or her overcome it and achieve whatever goal you set for them at the beginning.
- For a short story, write down a list of 15 things you want to happen in your story. Use this to build a short outline. Feel free to go to my website (wendymass.com) and print out a more detailed article on outlining a story, found in the Resources section.
- Consider writing the last paragraph of the story first—that way you’ll always be heading toward something.
- Any scene that doesn’t directly move the story forward isn’t necessary.
- In dialogue, no need to get too creative with how a character “says” something at the end of a sentence...like, he sputtered, she shouted, he revealed, she requested. Usually just saying “she said” or “he asked” is fine.
- Read your dialogue aloud to make sure it sounds realistic.