

Character Types

<https://blog.reedsy.com/types-of-characters/>

Character Types by Role

1. Protagonist

The main character. Most of the action centers around them, and they're the one we're meant to care about the most. All other roles are defined in relation to the protagonist. In stories written with a first-person point of view, the protagonist is usually the narrator, but not always.

Examples: Harry Potter, Frodo Baggins, Katniss Everdeen, John McClane, Dorothy Gale, Hercule Poirot, Indiana Jones, Walter White (who is actually an anti-hero).

2. Antagonist

The antagonist undermines, thwarts, battles, or otherwise opposes one character: the protagonist.

Antagonist examples: Sauron, Voldemort, The White Witch, Count Olaf, Maleficent, Iago, Regina George

3. Deuteragonist

This is a character who's not exactly in the spotlight, but pretty close to it. The deuteragonist's comic book equivalent would probably be the sidekick.

Examples: Ron and Hermione, Samwise Gamgee, Jane Bennet, Dr. Watson, Mercutio

4. Tertiary characters

They flit in and out of the MC's life, perhaps only appearing in one or two scenes throughout the book. We all have them in real life — the barista you only see once a week, the random guy you sit next to in class.

Examples: Mr. Poe in A Series of Unfortunate Events, Radagast in the movie version of The Hobbit, Padma and Parvati Patil in Harry Potter, Calo and Fabrizio in The Godfather, Madame Stahl in Anna Karenina

5. Love interest

They might be part of the main plot, a subplot, or just a blip on the narrative. This love interest is typically a deuteragonist, but not exclusively (hence why this separate category).

Examples: Mr. Darcy, Daisy Buchanan, Romeo/Juliet, Peeta Mellark, Edward Cullen, Mary Jane Watson

6. Confidant

Confidants are often best friends, but they may also be a potential love interest or even a mentor. The protagonist shares their thoughts and emotions with this person, even when reluctant to share them with anyone else.

Examples: Horatio, Friar Laurence, Alfred Pennyworth, Mrs. Lovett, Jacob Black, Dumbledore, Hannibal Lecter

7. Foil character

Someone whose personality and values fundamentally clash with the protagonist's. This clash highlights the MC's defining attributes, giving us a better picture of who they truly are. Though these two often have an antagonistic relationship, the foil is not usually the primary antagonist.

Examples: Draco Malfoy, Effie Trinket, Lydia Bennet, George and Lennie, Kirk and Spock

Character Types by Quality

8. Dynamic/Changing Character

A character who changes over the course of story. They often evolve to become better or wiser, but sometimes they can also devolve — many villains are made through a shift from good to evil, like Anakin Skywalker and Harvey Dent. The protagonist of your story should always be dynamic, and most of the deuteragonists should be as well. However, you don't need to make the changes super obvious for your audience to catch on. During your narrative journey, these changes should come about subtly and naturally.

Examples: Elizabeth Bennet, Don Quixote, Ebenezer Scrooge, Neville Longbottom, Han Solo, Walter White

9. Static/Unchanging Character

A character who doesn't change. Many static characters are simply flat, and having too many is usually a symptom of lazy writing. However, certain kinds can serve a larger purpose in a story. They tend to be unlikable, such as Cinderella's stepsisters and Harry Potter's aunt and uncle — their ignorance to how they're mistreating our hero makes them people we "love to hate," and boosts our sympathy for the protagonist. They may also impart a lesson to the reader: you don't want to end up like me.

Examples: Mr. Collins, Miss Havisham, Harry and Zinnia Wormwood (Matilda's parents), Sherlock Holmes (a rare static protagonist), Karen Smith

10. Stock character

Stock characters aren't necessarily flat either, though you do have to be careful with them. Similar to archetypes, stock characters are those familiar figures that appear in stories time after time: the chosen one, the joker, the mentor. You don't want to overuse them, but they can really help round out your cast and make readers feel "at home" in your story.

Examples: Scout Finch (the child), Nick Bottom (the fool), Haymitch Abernathy (the mentor)

11. Symbolic character

A character is used to represent something larger and more important than themselves, which usually ties into the overall message of the book or series. This type must also be used sparingly — or at least subtly, so the reader doesn't feel like the symbolism is too heavy-handed. As a result, the true nature of a symbolic character may only be fully understood at the very end of a story.

Examples: Aslan (symbolizes God/Jesus in The Chronicles of Narnia), Jonas (symbolizes hope in The Giver), Gregor Samsa (symbolizes the difficulty of change/being different in The Metamorphosis)

12. Round character

A round character is very similar to a dynamic one, in that they both typically change throughout their character arc. The round character has a full backstory (though not always revealed in the narrative), complex emotions, and realistic motivations for what they do. This doesn't necessarily mean they're a good person — indeed, many of the best round characters are deeply flawed. But you should still be interested and excited to follow their arc because you can never be quite sure where they'll be led or how they'll change. Needless to say, the vast majority of great protagonists are not only dynamic but also round.

Examples: Amy Dunne, Atticus Finch, Humbert Humbert, Randle McMurphy, Michael Corleone