

## How to Write a Character Sketch

When you prepare to write a story, it is important for you to create realistic characters. Creating a character sketch, which is an outline for your protagonist or other characters, will benefit you, because you will know your protagonist's outward appearance and his or her personality.



On the left you see a picture of a woman. A character sketch is like a visual picture. You have to create it so your readers can visualise your protagonist. By looking at the character sketch, your readers will see him or her as if they were seeing the actual picture.

When you write a character sketch, you are trying to introduce the reader to someone. You want the reader to have a strong mental image of the person, to know how the person talks, to know the person's characteristic ways of doing things and to know something about the person's value system. Character sketches only give snap shots of people; therefore, you should not try to write a history of the person.

A good way to write a character sketch is to place the character in a setting, telling about an encounter with him or her. If you do that, you could describe the place briefly, hopefully a place that belongs to the person you are describing, focusing on things in the scene that are somehow representative of the person you are describing. Describe how the person is dressed and tell what the person is doing. From time to time, describe the person's gestures or facial expressions. It is important to put words into the person's mouth in direct quotations.

As you work, you should decide what kind of emotional reaction you want the reader to have in relationship to this person. What kind of details can you select to create that emotional reaction? Avoid making broad characterising statements; instead, let the details you give suggest general characteristics. Let the reader draw her own conclusions. Show rather than tell. Showing how your character is feeling by his or her interactions with other characters or the setting is infinitely more interesting to read than explicitly stating whether your character is happy, sad, elated, joyful, or miserable.

While not everything that an author writes in a character sketch must be included in the novel, the author should develop an in-depth and all-encompassing knowledge of every facet of the character's personality in order to create a consistent and engaging persona.

# Here Are The Steps...

## Step 1: Choose Your Person

- Sometimes the people in our lives are the greatest inspiration for new characters or even stories. The first step in writing a character sketch is to pick a person you know, used to know or have observed while you were out and about. You can make a list of interesting people and use that to make your choice. Once you've chosen you can change the names. Also think about their traits and what makes them stand out in your mind. What is your first impression of them? Think of some general impressions of the person.



## Step 2: Collect Details

- Think about the person's physical features and their personality. Think about their style of dress, facial features, voice, the way he or she stands or smiles, gestures they do frequently, etc. Write down all these impressions for the future. As you write these impressions down, think about everything in terms of sensory details (sight, sound, smell and touch). Sight can include things like style of dress, hairstyle, etc. Sounds can include phrases they often use or the sound of their voice. Smell can be a list of smells you associate with the person. And touch can be anything from their soft hair, warm hugs or callused fingertips. Be specific, don't generalize. Also think of action details like how this person walks or gestures he or she uses often. You can use gestures and actions to reveal things about your character. And finally add dialogue. The way a person speaks also reveals a lot about a character's personality. Think of phrases your chosen person uses a lot or show them talking to another person.

## Step 3: Your Character's Dominant Trait

- From your notes, think of your character's dominant trait. Think of an overall impression of your character. Do all the details add up to him or her being shy, flamboyant, nervous, etc.?

## Step 4: Think of Your Chosen Person's Background

- When you're writing a character sketch you can show a lot about the person by choosing an appropriate background. Think of background details like a setting. For example, if the person is a workaholic, you might consider showing them in an office; if they're a body builder, you can show them in the gym; or if they're fond of shopping you can show them in a mall or clothing store. Pick a setting that reveals something about your character.

## Step 5: Use A Character Sketch Plan

- Organize your notes with a character sketch plan you can look at later. You can pull details and bits of information you think are important to show from it. It can also be used as a guide.



# Character Sketch Plan

1. Name:
2. Age:
3. Height:
4. Eye color:
5. Physical appearance:
6. Strange or unique physical appearance:
7. Hobbies/interests:
8. Where does he or she live? What is it like there?
9. Special skills/abilities:
10. Family (describe):
11. Description of his or her house:
12. Description of his or her bedroom:
13. Favorite bands/songs/type of music:
14. Favorite movies:
15. Favorite TV shows:
16. Favorite books:
17. Favorite foods:
18. Favorite sports/sports teams:
19. Political views:
20. Any interesting philosophies on life?
21. Religion:
22. Physical health:
23. Pet peeves:

- 24. Favorite clothing style/outfit:**
- 25. Special gestures/movements (i.e always keeping his or her eyes on the ground, etc.):**
- 26. Things about his or her appearance he or she would most like to change:**
- 27. Speaking style (fast, talkative, monotone, etc.):**
- 28. Fondest memory:**
- 29. Insecurities:**
- 30. Quirks:**
- 31. Temperament (easygoing, easily angered, etc.):**
- 32. Negative traits:**
- 33. Things that upset him or her:**
- 34. Things that embarrass him or her:**
- 35. This character really cares about:**
- 36. Things that make him or her happy:**
- 37. Deepest, darkest secret:**
- 38. Reason he or she kept this secret for so long:**
- 39. Other people's opinions of this character (What do people like about this character?  
What do they dislike about this character?):**
- 40. Dream vacation:**
- 41. Any pets?**
- 42. Best thing that has ever happened to this character:**
- 43. Worst thing that has ever happened to this character:**
- 44. Superstitions:**
- 45. Three words to describe this character:**
- 46. If a song played every time this character walked into the room, what song would it be?**
- 47. Other ideas:**