



## Character Interview Sheet

### *How to Use this Interview Sheet:*

Most writers run into trouble in creating 3-dimensional characters because they don't really *understand* the story people they have created.

They fashion a character in much the same way as you'd make a cut-out doll (sometimes I wonder if they're using Barbie as a model!). You know – tall girl, blond hair, coy smile, fashionable clothes. They give the character a name – um, let's say "Mary Jo Larsen" – and hey presto, they're ready for action. They plunk Mary Jo in the middle of a sticky situation... and a few days or a few weeks later, they wonder why MJ seems a bit... well... thin.

Hmmm. Well, if you create a paper doll, it's bound to be a bit on the thin side. If you want a well-rounded character, you have to start thinking personality and motivation and character traits and all that kind of stuff.

You *could* base a character on someone you know – and that's okay, as long as you remember that you're writing fiction. That means that your fictional character doesn't *have* to behave in a certain way just because the real person would do it. Tweak and add and subtract until your new character develops a personality of his or her own.

One of the best ways to understand your characters is to sit down and have a nice long talk with them (one at a time). Later, for fun, you could set up an interview with two at once just to see what happens. It's amazing what you can learn when you have a couple of characters interrupting each other and trying a bit of one-upmanship.

The easiest way to get to know your character is to conduct a character interview. You, the author, are going to develop a split personality here. (What fun. You can see what it's like to be crazy without being put away for it.)

You're going to wear two hats. As the author, you are going to start by asking the questions. Then you're going to slip into your character's skin to *answer* those questions.

When you're acting as the character, change your personality. Don't give the answers that YOU, the everyday-writer-you, would give. This is not about you; it's about a completely different person that you're creating.

### ***The Tone of the Interview***

The questions below are designed as a guide. You can either use them as a template and just type in your character's answers, or you can print out this

questionnaire and keep it beside you while you craft your own questions. At any time, you can go off on a tangent if that's where the interview takes you.

See what you learn about your characters! As the interviewer, you can ask leading questions, or you can let the character's answers take you into new territory. You can be tough and insist on answers... or you can try to 'win over' the character to get more info. (If you're interviewing your villain, you can expect that he or she might not give up information too easily.)

You are likely to find that this Author/Character interview technique gives you much more of an insight into your characters than if you'd just sat there thinking about them. You're sure to have a lot of fun, too! A few hours spent doing this can give you more information than weeks of 'wrestling' with characters and their motivation.

Add as many extra questions as you like, or leave out questions that don't seem to 'fit' your character. This is meant to be a tool – as useful a tool as possible.

There are two basic character interview sheets below: one for major characters and another for minor characters. Use whichever one you feel is appropriate. Skip over any questions that you don't feel ready to answer or that don't seem especially relevant.

And best of all, use it as a basis for your very own set of character interview questions that 'feel right' to you as the author. Interview questions that you can use over and over again, every time you write a story.

Ready?

Let's go!

*Marg* ☺

## Character Interview Questions Sheet 1 – Major Characters

Name of character:.....

Place of character in the story: (e.g. the lead, the confidante, the love interest, major secondary character, villain, secondary character.).....

Relationship to the lead if this person is not the lead.....

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- ❖ What's your name?
  
- ❖ How old are you?
  
- ❖ What do you look like? If you had to describe yourself as though you were talking about someone else, what would you say?
  
- ❖ What are your speech patterns like? Can you think of someone on TV or on radio that speaks in a similar way?
  
- ❖ Do you sometimes lie? "White lies" or significant lies? Can people usually tell when you're lying or are you a really accomplished liar? Is your whole life a lie? If so, why and how?
  
- ❖ What is your usual facial expression? Are people drawn to your warmth and cheerfulness, or are you seen as quiet / dour / grim / humourless / reserved / etc? Does your face reflect the 'inner you' or are looks deceiving?
  
- ❖ How do you handle anger? Are you slow to anger or easy to annoy? Are people afraid of you, and if so is this justified?
  
- ❖ How do you react to confrontation? Would you give anything for a quiet life or do you enjoy winning an argument or a fight?

- ❖ How much power do you wield at home, in the workplace, and in social situations? Are you the quiet “power behind the throne” type or do you wield obvious power? Or do you feel powerless? If so, why – and what might be the catalyst to make you change?
  
- ❖ What (in your opinion) would be the first impression most people get when they meet you?
  
- ❖ In your case, is ‘what you see is what you get’, or do people sometimes make the wrong judgement about you? If so, why would this be?
  
- ❖ What is your level of education? Has what you have been obtained by ‘street smarts’ or ‘book smarts’?
  
- ❖ Are you happy with what you have achieved since you left school (*\*\*\* if this is not a juvenile character*)
  
- ❖ Where do you live?
  
- ❖ Do you live alone, share a house, or...?
  
- ❖ Are you in a relationship, or part of a family?
  - If **yes**, are you happy or discontented in the relationship / this family? Tell me about it.
  
  - If **no**, would you like to be in a relationship / part of a different family? Tell me why/why not?
  
- ❖ Who is your best friend? (If you have one). When did this relationship start? What makes you friends?

- ❖ Who is your enemy / who do you dislike most? Why? When did this dislike start, and why?
  
- ❖ Who else is in your circle of acquaintances? Who would you turn to in times of trouble?
  
- ❖ If there is anyone in your circle that might betray you, who would it be?
  
- ❖ Is there anyone you would *not* expect to betray you? How would you feel/react if they did?
  
- ❖ How would you describe your personality? What are your best points & assets? What are your flaws or weaknesses?
  
- ❖ If there was one thing about your LOOKS that you could change, what would it be?
  
- ❖ If there was one thing about your PERSONALITY that you could change, what would it be?
  
- ❖ What makes you likeable? Are you likeable enough for people to want to spend extended periods of time with you?
  
- ❖ What makes you unlikeable? Is this a chronic problem or can you change?
  
- ❖ What type of people would like you, and who might not like you?
  
- ❖ Would you describe your life to this point as being generally happy, pretty average, or generally unhappy? Can you briefly explain why?

- ❖ What is the most traumatic thing that has ever happened to you?
  
- ❖ What is the best thing that has ever happened to you?
  
- ❖ How important are material possessions to you? Do you regard them as a symbol of your success, or a trap, or neither?
  
- ❖ How do your surroundings reflect your success (or lack of it) in life so far?
  
- ❖ What do your surroundings say about you? (Your house, your car, your kitchen, your bathroom, your workplace.)
  
- ❖ Do you feel that you have achieved all you are capable of in life? Or all that you want to achieve?
  
- ❖ Has your life changed in any way recently? If so, what brought on this change? Is it a change for the better or for worse?
  
- ❖ If your life has changed for the worse lately, what can you do to turn things around?
  
- ❖ Do you INTEND to change your life in the near future? If so, how and why?
  
- ❖ What is the most important goal in your life? (What do you really WANT?) And how do you plan to achieve it?
  
- ❖ What are the likely obstacles to your getting what you want? How do you plan to overcome these *foreseeable* obstacles? What might be the likely result of your actions?

- ❖ Have you faced any other obstacles to get to the point you are at now? How did you overcome them? What were the consequences of the actions you took?
  
- ❖ If something were to happen to deflect you from reaching your goal, how would you get back on track? Who would you call upon to help you?
  
- ❖ What particular talents or traits do you possess that will help you to get what you want? How might you influence others to help you?
  
- ❖ What is the biggest thing motivating you to achieve / get what you want?
  
- ❖ Name the character trait or personality weakness that is most likely to prevent you from getting what you want. How might you compensate for this?
  
- ❖ Who would you die to protect?
  
- ❖ Who would die to protect you?
  
- ❖ What is the thing you most fear losing in life? (This might be a person, a possession, or an abstract quality like 'respect', 'freedom' or 'credibility'.)
  
- ❖ What drives you to do things you might regret later?
  
- ❖ What are you about to do right now – today? How is this relevant to what is important to you?
  
- ❖ What will you do next?

❖ **Finish these sentences:**

“The most important thing in life is...”

“If there’s one thing that makes me mad it’s...”

“I would lose interest in life if...”

“I can usually get myself out of trouble by...”

“If I encounter a problem in life I work through it by...”

“I don’t like people who...”

“I like people who...”

“My most pressing need right now is...”

“One thing I’m determined to achieve in the next month is...”

“One thing I’m determined to achieve in the next year is...”

“My motto in life is: ...”

**Final question:**

“Is there anything else you can tell me about yourself that has a bearing on what you might do or say in any given situation?”

## Character Interview Questions Sheet 2 – Minor Characters

Name of character:.....

Relationship to the lead or to another major character

.....

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- ❖ What's your name?
  
- ❖ How old are you?
  
- ❖ What do you look like? If you had to describe yourself as though you were talking about someone else, what would you say?
  
- ❖ What are your speech patterns like? What is your usual facial expression?
  
- ❖ What (in your opinion) would be the first impression most people get when they meet you?
  
- ❖ Where do you fit in where the lead character is concerned – a direct link to that person, or through somebody else?
  
- ❖ Where do you live?
  
- ❖ Do you live alone, share a house, or...?
  
- ❖ Are you in a relationship, or part of a family?
  
- ❖ Who is your best friend? (If you have one). Who is your enemy / who do you dislike most? Why?

- ❖ Who else is in your circle of acquaintances?
  
- ❖ How would you describe your personality?
  
- ❖ What do your surroundings say about you? (Your house, your car, your kitchen, your bathroom, your workplace.)
  
- ❖ What do you want out of life?
  
- ❖ What particular talents or traits do you possess that will help you to get what you want? How might you influence others to help you?
  
- ❖ What is the biggest thing motivating you to achieve / get what you want?
  
- ❖ Name the character trait or personality weakness that is most likely to prevent you from getting what you want.
  
- ❖ What drives you to do things you might regret later?
  
- ❖ What are you about to do right now – today? How is this relevant to what is important to you?
  
- ❖ What will you do next?

❖ **Finish these sentences:**

“The most important thing in life is...”

“If there’s one thing that makes me mad it’s...”

“If I encounter a problem in life I work through it by...”

“I don’t like people who...”

“I like people who...”

“My most pressing need right now is...”

“My motto in life is: ...”

**Final question: Is there anything else you’d like me to know about you?**