

Your Cast of Characters – Assignments

Module 2: Character Motivation

Assignment: Write down five characters in your novel or ones you are currently developing. What do you know about them so far? List each one's core need, the lie they believe about themselves, and their deep fear. State what will happen—what will they do—if their core need isn't met. State what extremes they will go to to get that need met. Start drilling into one of your characters by asking why. Start with an important action she will do in your story. Ask why she is doing that. Keep asking until you get to the bottom of her motivation.

Assignment: Make a list of all your characters and group them into secondary and incidental characters. Note what key role and moments they have (or will have) in your story. Now consider: Can you combine any two characters into one? Can you merge their actions under one character type and one motivation (to help, hinder, enlighten, aggravate, or uplift your protagonist)?

Assignment: Make a simple scene outline that briefly lays out the action and setting for each scene. Make a list of every character you can think of that you'll need in that scene, including characters seen in the background (you don't need to name them or even count them all—for instance, if your character is standing in a hotel lobby, think of those extras that might be around, like employees at the registration desk or a bellhop or concierge, guests checking in and hauling luggage, etc.). If you can fully picture your setting the way it would naturally be populated while the action plays out, it will help you write each scene cinematically and believably.

Assignment: Watch a favorite movie and jot down every character's name and what they're like. Note what role they play in the story, particularly in relation to the protagonist. Try to describe each character's motivation. What does he want more than anything? How does this drive his actions? What makes him engaging and unique? What specific quality or quirk stands out to you, setting him apart from any other character?