

Remember Me: Creating Characters That Stand Out

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The overarching theme: We remember characters that make us **FEEL**
Any feeling. The stronger the feeling, the stronger the memory.

Not all characters are memorable right away.

While one character might be memorable from the moment they are introduced, another might not be interesting until we learn something about them later in the story. All major characters should have layers that the audience is made aware of, one piece at a time.

What makes a character memorable

These qualities can be used for both protagonists and antagonists.

1. The Unexpected (*Surprise*)

Characters who surprise us.

- A character who is not what we expected
- A character who acts unpredictably
- A character who reacts to situations differently than one would expect
- Something we never anticipated is revealed about a character we already know
- Contrasts. The unexpected hero: the one least likely to succeed

For the unexpected hero, take the reason why they are ill-equipped to handle the situation and push it further. Make them even more incapable.

2. Mystery (*Curiosity*)

Characters who make us think.

- When we don't know a character's intentions or alliances
- When we know they are keeping secrets or not being entirely truthful or forthcoming
- When we don't know what they will do or choose when faced with a difficult decision or moral dilemma

The mystery **must** be revealed at some point in the story—the bigger and more vital the secret, the longer the build-up to it.

3. Cool Factor (*Wonder*)

Wish fulfillment. Characters with something we wish we had or just love to see/read about.

- A superpower or ability
- A character who is a prodigy or has an extraordinary talent
- A lifestyle, wealth, or trait we would like ourselves
- Naturally cool, confident, or endearing personality

4. Humor (*Happiness*)

Characters who make us laugh.

Funny characters expert in

- Jokes and puns
- Pranks
- Sarcasm
- Dark humor
- Clever wit

Characters in funny situations

- A character experiencing Karma
- Unlucky or naive characters landing in humorous situations

Karma can be satisfying and funny because we like to see justice served.

When using karma, make sure that we see them earn their just desserts and that the result is not more extreme than their action; otherwise, it's just sad.

You will usually want a character with bad luck to come out on top in the end, and they must never give up no matter what comes their way.

Everyone has a different sense of humor, so jokes can be hard to land. Avoid making a character solely for comic relief. The character should have layers and another vital role in the story.

5. Vulnerability (*Sympathy*)

Hurt, weak, or trapped characters we want to save, protect, or enact justice for.

- Tragic backstory with lasting repercussions
- Currently stuck in a bad situation or toxic relationship
- Outcast, misunderstood, unappreciated, or forgotten
- Characters who are treated cruelly or unfairly by fate or other people
- Injured, sick, cursed, or seen as a disadvantage

Vulnerability only works as long as the character is actively trying to adapt and accept, heal, or change things for the better. We dislike characters who do nothing but complain and cry about their misfortune.

Be respectful and accurate for people who will relate to the character's ordeal. Talk to someone with personal experience.

6. Relationships (*Connection or Anger*)

How a character influences and interacts with another character for better or worse.

- Why a character likes another character
- What a character does -or is willing to do- for another
- Tension between characters with conflicting traits, personalities, beliefs, or lifestyles
- Discovering an unexpected connection, ally, or enemy
- When a character is especially cruel to another character, openly or in secret

Villians:

There will always be someone who likes and/or supports your antagonist; tell us why.

Feelings are personal, so the more personal and intimate the relationship or the actions between the antagonist and protagonist, the stronger our reaction is to them.

7. Change and Perseverance (*Encouragement or thought*)

Characters who are determined and willing to change, work, and sacrifice to reach their goals.

- Worthy goals: characters we root for and want to see succeed
- Dealing with a vice, temptation, regret, or guilt
- Characters who change who they are for better or worse

A character can strive to change for the better and become a redemption character, or they can change for the worse and be seen as a villain or at least questionable, invoking psychological discussion.

This quality only works if it's drawn out over the course of the story. This is the power of character arcs. Change stands out.

8. Physical Appearance and Speech (*Attraction or Repulsion*)

How a character looks and how they talk

- Looking sexy, frightening, cool, or adorable. Having a unique, eye-catching design
- Physical Attributes that stand out or are missing
- Dress or fashion, accessories, and possessions
- Speech pattern, voice, or accent
- Catchphrase

Like humor, opinions on beauty, fear, or cuteness vary, so don't use this quality alone.

9. Quirks (*Included or Insightful*)

A strong, uncommon, or unexpected signature that makes the character stand out.

- Excessive personality trait
- Habit
- Hobby
- Likes or dislikes
- Beliefs or superstitions
- Fears and phobias

Using Qualities

It is common for a memorable character to have several of these qualities, but don't use all of them on one character. Each character should have different traits that endear them to us.

Entrances

The importance of first impressions.

What is this character doing when we first meet them, and what does it say about them?

Useful trick: Give the character a small victory closely followed by a small defeat. Or visa-versa.

Spotlight moment

A character's big moment. When they become the most important person in the room.

At what point(s) in the story does the spotlight shift to this character? How do they impact the main character or enhance the plot? Look at the trait(s) you gave them and discover the most impactful way you could show it.

Ways you DON'T want your characters remembered

- Characters who are written badly
- Characters who are annoying or unimportant to the plot
- Dropping the ball by acting out of character or losing qualities that made them likable or interesting
- Shock factor: a sudden death or gruesome experience for no reason than to sucker punch the audience