



Characterization: Buroway/Stuckley-French

Summary from *Writing Fiction* by Janet Burroway and Ned Stuckley-French

<https://www.amazon.com/Writing-Fiction-Guide>

NarrativeCraft/dp/0321923162/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1519585615&sr=81&keywords=writing+fiction+by+janet+burroway

Character Journal

- Know everything about a character—
sleeps, eats, buys, bills, working/playing hours, evenings and weekends, memories of
pets, parents, cities, snow, school
Gestures: how/why
- Note observations of people in journal. Cluster impressions of particular people. Capture
a gesture or message that physical features and clothing send. Invent reasons for traits
and a past.

Anne Lamott, *Bird by Bird*: Bad things happen to good characters because actions have consequences, and we're not perfect. Find out characters' interiors and exteriors: first impressions, secrets, movement, smell—find out how they feel, think, talk, survive...even faults. Don't protect them; listen to them. The villain has a heart, and the hero has great flaws. Make each character's words unique to him. Good dialogue encompasses both what is said and what is not said. Good dialogue can nail the characters.

Credibility—the reader needs to know *soon* the character's gender, age, race or nationality, class, period, region, profession, marital status. Why? Because the reader can't deal with confusion. Information can be implied through appearance, tone, action, or detail. (examples 122/123)

Purpose—the desire that impels the character to action. It determines our degree of identification and sympathy or judgment.

Complexity—Characters must exhibit enough conflict and contradiction to be human. A shift of power in the plot should produce a shift of purpose or morality. Characters need to be capable of change. Conflict is at the core of character (and the plot); therefore characters need to be complex.

Triangle: A writer works from her own personality plus observation and imagination. Need all three to be good.

Change—John L’Heureux: “A story is about a single moment in a character’s life when a definitive choice is made, after which nothing is the same.” Steven Fischer: Friction is necessary for change to occur...without change, there is no story.”

Credibility, purpose, complexity, and the drive toward (or away from) change form the *skeleton* of a character. The direct methods of character presentation especially make the character a real person to the reader.

Six Methods of Character Presentation:

Four Direct—appearance, action, speech, and thought

Two Indirect—authorial and interpretation by another character

Indirect methods tell us all. Reader gets lots of information in a short time. Drawback is that it can be monotonous. (130)

1. Appearance

- Since we receive more info by sight than any other sense, appearance prompts our first reaction, and everything they wear and own says something about them.
- Sense impressions other than sight are still part of appearance—a limp handshake or a soft cheek; an odor of Old Spice or sweat.
- Sound—timbre, tenor, or quality of noise and speech, gruffness or kind of laughter.
- Physical movement (different from action)—the way she crosses her legs or moves her eyes...

2. Action

- The significant characters of a fiction must be both capable of causing an action and being changed by it.
- A character driven by desire takes an action with an expected result, but something intervenes which causes him to either take action or deliberately not take action, involving readers in the tension—*and then what happens?*
- Build action by making your characters discover and decide. Make sure that what happens is action and not mere event or movement, that is, that it contains the possibility for human change.

3. Dialogue

Speech represents an effort to externalize the internal and manifest taste, preference, and internal thought. Dialogue attempts to marry logic to emotion.

4. Thought

Thought, like speech, reveals more than information. It can also set mood, reveal or betray desires, develop theme, etc.

Summary: *He hated the way she ate.*

Indirect thought: *Why did she hold her fork like that?*

Directly, as if we are overhearing the character's own mind: *My God, she's going to drop the yolk!*

Conflict Between Methods of Presentation

Dramatic tension will be produced if the writer sets one of the methods (often *thought*) at odds with the others, making the character more interesting. *She moved elegantly through the evening while her mind was in complete distress.*

Identify, heighten, and dramatize consistent inconsistencies. What does your character want that is at odds with whatever else the character wants? What patterns of thought and behavior work against the primary goal?

Reinventing Character

- If the character is based on a real model, including yourself, make a dramatic external alteration.
- If the character is imaginary or alien to you, identify a mental or emotional point of contact.