

How to Breathe Life into Your Characters

By [Gail Pruszkowski](#)

A clever plot will draw readers to your book but if they don't care about your characters you will soon lose them. The most exciting stories, the ones you remember long after the book is closed are those with a cast that's larger than life. It's important to make the people in your story jump off the page.

The protagonist, sometimes called the hero or heroine, is the main character. There may be more than one star in your story. The antagonist is an opponent, a person who stands in the protagonist's way. He creates obstacles that the protagonist must overcome in order to reach his goals but he is not always evil. Some antagonists create conflict out of misunderstanding or jealousy. There may be more than one. The villain or villainess is the bad guy or gal, a character who acts with evil and malicious intent. The villain may be the antagonist or he may be an additional character. Your secondary cast may make fleeting appearances or they may interact with the main characters in some way.

The people in your story should be just as real to you as your friends or the members of your family. They should have their own history, feelings, needs and opinions. One way to develop a history for your characters is to use a character chart. Make a list of physical attributes, career, likes, dislikes, family members and childhood background.

Then breathe life into the personalities in your story. Look deep inside yourself. Think about the times in your life when your feelings were intense. Regrets, guilt, failure, success - how did it make you feel? List the emotions you have experienced in yourself that you can transfer to the people in your novel - courage, love, hate, guilt, patience, fear, hysteria. Remember the most interesting characters have flaws and imperfections that humanize them. Traits that people can identify with will bring your cast to life for your readers. Use dialogue, inner dialogue and body language to express feelings and thoughts.

Now look around you. Good writers are good observers. Listen to the people around you, what they're saying, their mannerisms and personality. Notice their style of dress and how they walk. Carry a notepad and pen so you can jot down your impressions. Create a file so you can save and organize your mental images to use later.

Your characters will soon become so well-developed and real, you'll find they'll be taking your story in new directions.

Gail Pruszkowski reviews for "Romantic Times BOOKreviews" magazine and her work has been published in the "Cup of Comfort" Anthologies. [Take a look](#)

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