

Breathing Life into Your Characters

By Marion Mike

May 2, 2026

NLAPW Inter-active Presentation

For those of us who have been writing our stories for a while, have you ever asked yourself, **“At what point did I breathe life into my characters?”** Some might say:

1. As I wrote the story, the characters gained life on their own.
2. I developed my cast of characters before the story began.
3. I had one main character, then others presented themselves as they were needed to support the story.
4. I outlined my story then created characters to move the story forward.
5. They just evolved.

HOW/WHEN DO YOU DEVELOP YOUR CHARACTERS? (SHARE)

WHAT DO YOU DO TO CONTRAST YOUR CHARACTERS?

1. Physical Appearance: 5 senses

- a. Height, weight, hair color, cultural appearance, physical anomaly,
- b. Hygiene: beard, well groomed
- c. Smell:
- d. Touch
- e. Sound (the shuffling of shoes, the way he laughs etc.)
- f. Taste (her strawberry lipstick)

Which descriptive words would/could you use to make the descriptions “pop”? *(Do not just use the above words.) e.g. “As he entered the room, the strong scent of his pungent cheap cologne announced his presence ten feet ahead of him.” MM*

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2. Voice/speech

- a. Vocal quality: hoarse, strident, breathy, loud, whisper,
- b. Speech: stutterer, sounds mispronounced (wabbit/rabbit), hesitant, slurred.
lisp
- c. Facial tics when talking, eye blinks
- d. Squeaky , high pitch,

Which descriptive words would/could you use to describe voice or speech? *(Do not just use the above words.) e.g. “tolerating her annoying voice was like listening to fingernails screeching across a chalkboard.” MM*

3. Personality Type

- a. Passive/aggressive
- b. Bitchy
- c. Bossy
- d. Complacent
- e. Leader/take charge
- f. “yes man” just follows “like a lemming”

Which descriptive words would/could you use to describe voice or speech? *(Do not just use the above words.) e.g. “Every time she barked another order at me, I felt like I had to salute her and say, ‘Yes Sarge!’” MM*

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4. Character traits

- a. Ethical or not
- b. Moral or not
- c. Responsible or not
- d. Decisive or not
- e. Organized or not
- f. Betrayer
- g. Criminal mind
- h. Deceitful
- i. Pompous
- j. Egotistical
- k. Humble
- l. Kind
- m. Helpful
- n. Ungrateful

Which descriptive words would/could you use to describe character traits? *(Do not just use the above words.) e.g “Working with her was like raking leaves in the midst of a windstorm. She was never satisfied.” MM*

Personification of inanimate objects: if time allows