

Writing Diverse Characters

In the spirit of Pride Month and celebrating diverse content, we wanted to equip you with some helpful tips for researching and developing diverse characters. This post was written by esteemed Wattpad writer [audreyhornesheart](#), who wanted to share some personal tips with our Wattpad Stars!

Written by [audreyhornesheart](#)

If plot is the bones of a story, then character is its heart. Twists make a reader turn the pages to find out what happens next, but it's characters that stay with a reader and make them want to return to a story again and again. My favorite books feature characters who come to life and leap off the page, characters who feel so real I want to spend time with them, love them, hate them or love to hate them. In order to make readers feel invested in the characters of my Watty-winning story *Victorian Boy*, I tried to make them as real as possible. What makes a character feel real?

1) Flaws.

And I don't mean bad hair or a quirky personality. Whether they are the protagonist, the villain or everyone in between, characters should have moral failings, make mistakes, do and say the wrong thing. In *Victorian Boy* the protagonist Harry betrays someone out of moment of pettiness and pride only to realize his mistake when it's too late and he's hurt the person he loves most. Louis, the person he loves, betrays and humiliates him for revenge. Both behave badly and I think that's what makes them sympathetic to the reader. Everyone has done or said something that they regret.

2) Contradictions.

We contain multitudes. Realistic characters like real people never fail to surprise us. One trick to creating dynamic characters is to give them conflicting personality traits to keep the reader on their toes. The villain in my story is charitable and fights for equality for the poor but is willing to use violence as a means to an end, while another character is a classist but peaceful and a loving brother and friend. Contradictions are a key way to add complexity to a character and avoid making them one-dimensional.

3) Backstory.

The reader doesn't necessarily need to know where your characters come from, how they were raised and all of their previous life experiences but you as the author should have some sense of their backstory. Whether you weave these details into the narrative or not you should know the answers to these questions and they should inform the way you write your characters. I never mentioned the fact that one of my characters, Louis, had a close relationship with his mother growing up but I knew this in the back of my mind and expressed it in his friendships with women as an adult.

When building diversity into your story, try to avoid predictable or 'stereotypical' backstories. Yes, we need to ensure our character backstories are believable but not at the expense of generalizing our characters.

4) Research.

The devil is in the details. Be specific about who your characters are. Their interests and obsessions should become your interests and obsessions while you're writing. My protagonist, Harry, is a coin collector, so I researched the terminology that collectors use and the coins themselves. Knowing the difference between a Hadrian 119AD ancient Roman gold coin and Byzantine solidus of Justinian II lends a sense of credibility to the character and the story.

Research is especially important when incorporating diverse characters. It's not enough to describe their diversity to your audience, it needs to be believable. It's difficult to pull this off in an effective and authentic way without conducting enough research.

5) Dialogue.

More revealing than any mood board or description is what your characters say and how they say it. Diction, cadence, verbal tics can reveal a character's social class, personality and how they think. One character in my story, a wealthy viscount speaks in short, cutting barbs that establish him as a quick-witted snob. A chancery lawyer delivers long-winded political speeches reflecting his stodginess. Dialogue gives your characters a chance to play off of each other too, accentuating their differences and what makes them unique. It speaks volumes!

Once again, when building characters with diversity in mind, dialogue can play a major role in establishing their unique traits and backstories for your readers.

6) Physicality.

Again I don't just mean what your characters look like but how they move in the world. What are the mannerisms specific to each character? Appearance gives the reader some information about a character but it's static. What the character does with their body makes them come to life in any given scene. The snobby viscount in Victorian Boy gesticulates with a cigarette when making a point and perches on the arm of the duke's chair "like an exotic pet". In another scene, the pompous duke buffs his nails on his lapel of his red tailcoat, while the self-conscious duke anxiously flattens his curls.

***Check out this [Writing With Color Guide](#) for helpful prompts and online resources to use while developing diverse characters to help ensure it's done authentically and sensitively.*

Characters should never be pawns in the plot of your story. Their flaws, contradictions, backstories, interests, words, and actions should be the driving engine of the story, propelling the plot forward. In fiction, like in life, events don't occur in a vacuum they are spurred on by people. Creating believable characters is the cornerstone of any great story.

[This interview](#) with author Alex Anders provides a great example of how writers leverage these methods when writing their own stories, while also keeping the importance of diversity at the helm.