

Edit to Excellence Session 2

Craft Compelling Character Arcs

What we'll cover today:

What a character arc is

Why having a compelling character arc is so important

Examples of character arcs

Exercises to get us writing



Let's begin by understanding character arcs.

What is a character arc?

A character arc is the transformation or inner journey of a character over the course of a story.

Types of Arcs:

Positive Arc: Character grows and improves.

Negative Arc: Character deteriorates or fails.

Flat Arc: Character remains consistent, but changes the world around them.

Why character arcs are important

Engagement: Dynamic characters keep readers invested.

Relatability: Realistic journeys make characters relatable and memorable.

Theme Development: Character arcs can underscore the story's themes.

Example: Walter White in *Breaking Bad* transforms from a mild-mannered teacher to a ruthless drug lord, highlighting themes of power and corruption.

Examples of character arcs in romance

Excerpt from *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen:

Elizabeth Bennet: Learns to overcome her prejudices and grows in self-awareness and maturity.

Excerpt from *The Notebook* by Nicholas Sparks:

Noah Calhoun: Shows enduring love and devotion, growing in patience and resilience.

Examples of character arcs in fantasy writing

Excerpt from *Harry Potter* by J.K. Rowling:

Harry Potter: Transforms from a neglected child to a brave and self-sacrificing hero.

Excerpt from *The Name of the Wind* by Patrick Rothfuss:

Kvothe: Evolves from a gifted but arrogant youth to a more mature and reflective individual.

Examples of character arcs in crime writing

Excerpt from *Gone Girl* by Gillian Flynn:

Nick Dunne: Moves from an unsuspecting husband to someone who becomes deeply entangled in his wife's manipulative games.

Excerpt from *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* by Stieg Larsson:

Lisbeth Salander: Grows from a reclusive hacker to someone who starts to open up and seek justice.

How to craft compelling character arcs

Start with a Strong Backstory: Understand your character's past to inform their journey.

Example: A traumatic event that shapes their worldview.

Set Clear Goals and Motivations: Know what your character wants and why.

Example: Revenge, love, redemption.

How to craft compelling character arcs

Introduce Conflict and Challenges: Use obstacles to drive character growth.

Example: Moral dilemmas, personal losses.

Show Incremental Change: Let your character evolve gradually through experiences.

Example: Small victories and setbacks that shape their development.

How to craft compelling character arcs

Reflect Internal and External Changes: Ensure that inner growth is mirrored by actions and decisions.

Example: A character becomes more compassionate and starts helping others.

Avoid Clichés: Strive for unique and nuanced transformations.

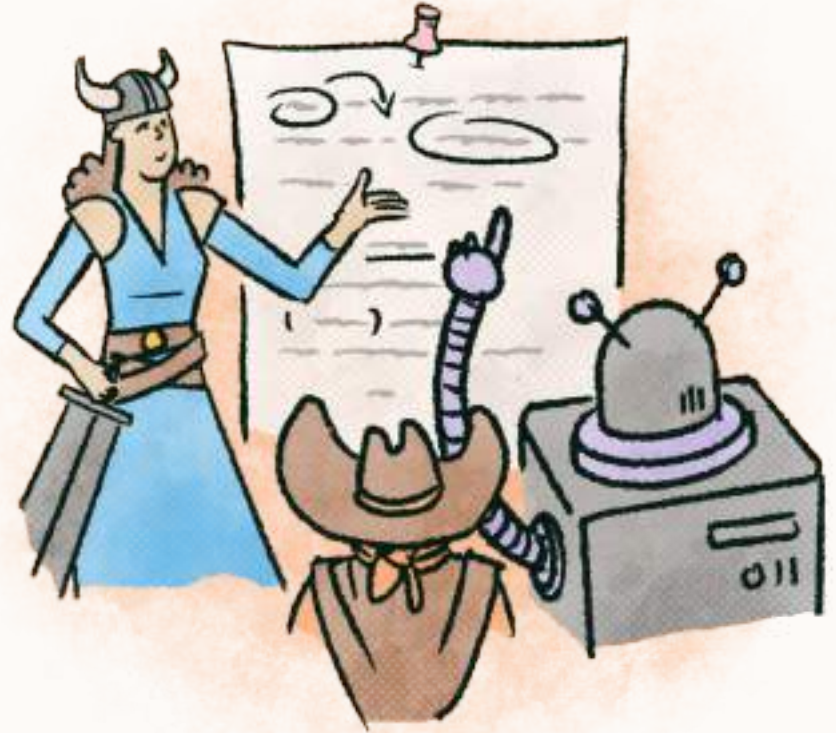
Example: Instead of a stereotypical redemption arc, explore a more complex journey of self-acceptance.

Now it's time to practice!

Here's how this works:

We will now proceed through four prompts. For each prompt, you will have a set of instructions, then a certain amount of time to complete the prompt.

At the end of the timer, you can paste your work into the chat to share and have it read out, if you're comfortable.



Exercise 1:

Defining Your Character's Goal

Take a moment to think about your protagonist or antagonist and define the primary goal driving their actions in the story. This exercise will help in establishing a clear motivation.



Exercise 2:

Identifying strengths + flaws

List 3 strengths and flaws of your chosen character. This will help in creating a balanced and believable character. Then, describe how these affect their relationships and interactions.



Exercise 3:

Creating a character arc outline

Create a basic outline of your character's arc, from their initial state to their final state, highlighting key moments of change.



Exercise 4:

Emotional beats

Map out the key emotional beats of your character's journey to ensure a compelling and emotionally resonant arc.



Thank you! See you at the next two webinars:

21st August

28th August

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