



Writing a Character Sketch

When you are writing a Character Sketch, want to look for qualities of character and/or personality traits that you see in the person you want to write about. The main goal of this is to be able to tell something about the person you are researching. Think of it like an introduction. In essence, you are introducing the reader to the person you are writing about.

Be sure to use strong visual words in your writing. You want to provide a lasting mental image of the person or character you are writing about. The use of quality adjectives and feeling in your writing, using words that relate to the five senses, elicit an emotional response from your reader. This will allow your reader to not only connect with you and the character but will show how you felt when reading a piece or spending time with the person you are writing about.

This type of writing only requires you to give a brief glimpse of the individual. When you are preparing to write make a list of the traits or details you want to include. It is possible to assign the number of traits equal to the # of paragraphs or supporting topics needed. Or you can categorize the subjects into a broader spectrum which allows you to have multiple supporting points for each topic. It is always best to outline your writing material first so you have a good idea what you are writing.

Your outline should include descriptions on the following details:

- Tell about their physical features. (hair color, height, etc.)
- Tell about the character's personality. (are they funny, serious, quiet, etc.?)
- Their likes or dislikes (What you know about their preferences and why?)
- Talk about their family (siblings, family history, etc.)
- What are their beliefs or hobbies?
- Include anything that makes us see "who" they are.
- What do you like or dislike about them?
- Why are you drawn to them?

Sample Outline

Here is a sample outline for you to follow. It is a basic 5 paragraph (approximately 500-word essay outline) Feel free to take this and make it your own or make your own outline using this as a guide.

Introduction:

This section will introduce the character and is typically the first paragraph in your paper. It should include the following:

- Your thesis statement (the overall theme of the paper or the main idea of what you are writing). The Thesis statement should include the most important character traits.
- The subtopics (these become the topic sentence in your body paragraphs) should be included in this paragraph as well. For example: use 1-2 sentences to list the traits that you are going to talk about. End with a transition sentence that ties into the 2nd paragraph.

Body:

This is paragraphs 2-4 or the in between paragraphs. The body comes between the Introduction and the Conclusion. These paragraphs detail the traits listed as the subtopics from the Introduction. Those subtopics should be the topic sentences in each body paragraph.

- Always try to include the most important trait 1st, the second most important detail next, and so on. Each paragraph has 1 trait which is discussed in detail. Include information about experiences that support the trait which is being discussed.

Remember! You want to pull your reader in so include details that will connect them to your main character.

Conclusion:

This is the last paragraph in your paper. Try to conclude with a final comment, pointed and well-expressed, that highlights the traits discussed in the paper.

- Restate your thesis statement.
- Remind the reader of your most important points.
- Close with a solid statement which finalizes all you are trying to communicate to the reader.

Another Approach Recommended by Editors

Who is your character physically?

Physical characteristics are the first things we notice when we meet someone. Therefore, this is a good starting point when writing a character sketch. Is your character a woman or a man? Is he or she tall or short? Is your character bald? How old is your character? Does he or she have a disability?

Authors, eager to explore the in-depth psychology of their written subjects, might discount these details as unimportant and base. But it is often these very details that lead to conflict or are the means through which we explore a character's psychology. As an example of this, we recommend reading Flannery O'Connor's *Good Country People*; in this short story, the physical details of the main character are representations of her internal state. Without a vivid description of this character's physicality, a critical dimension of the plot would be lost and the central conflict would be nonexistent. Answering questions about your character's physicality is the first step in creating a fully realized character.

What is your character doing?

This is the next question to ask because it brings into account other aspects of story writing such as setting and time. The answer to this question will also affect other aspects of your sketch, such as what your character is wearing or how he or she is feeling. Is your character walking down the street? Is he or she sitting in a park? Is your character working on a boat? Asking what your character is doing will not only help you understand your character, but also his or her relationship to the setting in your story.

Authors may be tempted to gloss over this part of characterization. When asked what his or her character is doing, an author might give a cursory answer; he or she may answer that the subject is at the movies, for example. But consider all that there is to do at a movie theatre: Is the character waiting in line for tickets or at the concession stand? Is he or she waiting to talk to the manager? Perhaps the

character is sitting impatiently waiting for the movie to begin. Getting as specific as you can when answering this question will not only help you define your character, but will also help to define the other elements of fiction.

What is your character feeling?

This is probably one of the more complex questions you can ask about your character. Is your character angry? Is he or she happy, sad, tired, or depressed? Does your character love something or someone? Asking questions about your character's emotional life might evolve into the production of a character history. While this may be tempting, you have to focus on what your subject is feeling within the context of the story you are writing. Although the answers to these questions are important, they are rarely explicitly stated in the story.

Authors may be tempted to start with the emotional or psychological state of their characters and they may even explicitly state them. This can lead to one of the cardinal sins of fiction writing: telling instead of showing. Implicitly showing how your character is feeling by his or her interactions with other characters or the setting is infinitely more interesting to read than explicitly stating whether your character is happy, sad, elated, joyful, or miserable.