

**The Compass of Character:
Creating Complex Motivation for Compelling Characters
in Fiction and Non-Fiction
Thursday, October 25th, 2019
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OPENING EXERCISE: Types, Archetypes & Human Beings

Take one of the adjectives in the left column and match it with one of the common nouns in the right column (or make up your own such combination). Can you visualize the result? Does that image lend itself to a more complex impression?

JEALOUS	KIDNAPPER
AFFLUENT	GAME WARDEN
LASCIVIOUS	TAXIDERMIST
MANIPULATIVE	BABYSITTER
SANCTIMONIOUS	LIFEGUARD
ANOREXIC	BOOKWORM
HOMICIDAL	CHATTERBOX
SINISTER	POSTMAN
VICIOUS	ACCOUNTANT
SOFT-HEARTED	ASSASSIN
THRIFTY	BARFLY
EXUBERANT	MARINE

Compare to “Characters as Device” from TV Tropes:

Helpful Woodsman, Boy/Girl Next Door, Femme Fatale/Black Widow, Whiz Kid, Absent-Minded Professor, Mad Scientist, Gentleman Thief, Evil Twin, Evil Clown, Dirty Old Man, Recluse/Hermit, Holy Fool, Unholy Fool, Wise Child, Hooker with a Heart of Gold, Warrior Monk, Cannon Fodder (“Dead Meat”), Jailbait, Jewish Mother, Magical Ethnic, Monster-in-Law, Pompous Ass, Snooty Servant, Devoted Domestic.

What this exercise points to is the *power of personification*.

Now compare the foregoing to the 12 Jungian Archetypes:

The Innocent
The Orphan
The Hero
The Caregiver
The Explorer
The Rebel/Outlaw
The Lover
The Creator
The Joker/Trickster
The Sage
The Magician
The Ruler

Notice any difference? If so, why? If not, why not?

Characters often arise from the story idea. But this can often lead to characters based on other characters, with predictably derivative results.

Characters based on real people:

Near the end of his life, John Updike wrote a poem titled "Peggy Lutz, Fred Muth," in which he thanked his childhood friends and classmates—the beauty and bully, the fatso and others—"for providing a sufficiency of human types . . . all a writer needs."

STAGING THE CONFLICT

Part I: Three Levels of Character Struggle

- A. The three main areas of conflict in a main character:
 - a. *Internal questions*: Have to do with dignity, identity, purpose, self-worth: Who am I? What kind of person am I? What is my worth? What is my purpose?
 - b. *External struggles*: Have to do with tasks performed in pursuit of a goal: What am I capable of? What will test those capabilities?
 - c. *Interpersonal relationships*: Have to do with a connection with another person: Who do I love? How can I become closer to them? Who do I despise? How can I distance myself from them or break the bond altogether?
- B. Internal and Interpersonal struggles create *empathy*.
- C. External struggles create *curiosity*.
- D. Choosing Your Hero: Empathy vs. Admiration.

- a. If you want readers to *admire* your hero, skip or minimize the internal or interpersonal struggles and just show him overcoming great odds to accomplish some vital task. (Hercule Poirot, Jack Reacher, James Bond—Traveling Angels)
 - b. To move readers emotionally, weave in internal and interpersonal struggles.
 - c. If your character changes, you need internal and interpersonal struggles.
 - d. In contrast, in “traveling angel” stories, the protagonist doesn’t change, but his actions effect change in others.
 - e. Many of the most compelling stories present challenges on all three levels, and make resolution of one challenge interconnected with the other two.
- E. Interweaving Struggle Levels—Look to the Deeper Motivation at each Level:
1. Internal Questions
 - a. A need for a sense of truth, meaning, value, significance, purpose.
 - b. A need for identity, authenticity, integrity, dignity, honor.
 - c. A need for self-confidence, success, self-realization, fulfillment.
 2. External challenges
 - a. A need for safety, security, survival.
 - b. A need for justice, peace.
 - c. A need for adventure, challenge, freedom, power.
 3. Interpersonal relationships
 - a. A need to love and be loved.
 - b. A need for belonging, respect, acceptance.
 - c. A need for revenge or retribution.
 - d. A need to be forgiven and given a second chance.

Characters with Only One or Two Struggles

- Traveling Angel Stories: Mary Poppins, Toro-san, Jack Reacher
- Love Stories

What Do We Mean by Change in a Character—i.e., What Creates a Character Arc?

The issue of whether a character changes or not is often muddled due to a confusion over what we mean by “change” – a “Saul on the Road to Damascus” transformation or simply a “new normal.”

What we often refer to as change in a character normally points toward the internal questions. However, this often can’t help but influence or be influenced by the other levels of struggle. And almost all struggles affect an individual’s sense of self.

Example: Brick in *Cat On a Hot Tin Roof*. “Wouldn’t it be funny if that was true?” But though his words are the same, their meaning is not, for we have witnessed him forced to confess the truth about himself, his lies, and his homosexuality. Cynicism has been replaced by surrender.

Dramatica identifies what it defines as the Steadfast character:

- He refuses to sacrifice an ideal or give up on a goal he believes he cannot live without: Dr. Richard Kimble, Antigone, Romeo (and Juliet),
- He clings to the “pathological maneuvers” he uses to protect himself from the pain of life: Blanche DuBois.
- However, just because a character’s motivation or behavior doesn’t change doesn’t mean their understanding or attitude toward life doesn’t. To Learn is to Grow, to Grow is to Change. For most characters, the change = “the new normal”

Lajos Egri, in his seminal *The Art of Dramatic Writing*, put it this way:

"No man ever lived who could remain the same through a series of conflicts which affected his way of living. Of necessity he must change, and alter his attitude toward life... The only place where characters defy natural law and fail to change is in the realm of bad writing."

The Role of Failure in Change: Typically, real change only occurs after moments of extreme hardship or suffering, which prompt the individual to question his behavior, his understanding of himself, and the purpose of his life.

This need not happen in stories with only an external challenge. If the character never comes to doubt his capabilities, there is no need to jerry-rig change.

Part II: Developing the Internal Questions—The Four Elements of Longing

Lack

Yearning

Resistance: Weakness/Wound/Limitation/External Opposition/Flaw

Desire (Goal/Objective)

- The character begins the story in a state of **Lack**, of which he may not be totally aware. *Something important is missing from his life.*
- The Lack often speaks to an unfulfilled **Yearning** that may be equally vague or undefined. A character’s Yearning defines what he believes his life is truly about, i.e., **his dream of life: the way of life he wants to live, the kind of person he hopes to be.**

The Yearning ultimately defines the stakes for the character in the story. In struggling to achieve the exterior goal, and facing the prospect of failing, the character acquires a deeper awareness and understanding of the Yearning, and discovers that giving up on it represents a kind of living death (if not actual, physical annihilation).

Putting a simple verbal label on the Yearning—Home, Freedom, Love, Survival—tends to diminish it. Rather, it is often best imagined in non-verbal terms, such as through an image or even a piece of music, to get to the deeper, more intuitive and emotional levels of need at issue.

Interconnection between Lack & Yearning:

Yearning comes first in form of a Calling—something to live up to:

- Great people (Cecily Brown, Judy Garland, R.C. Collingwood, Josephine Baker, Golda Meir)
- Vocations (Saints and mere priests, soldiers, doctors, nurses)
- Myth stories
- Problem: can feel hokey

Lack comes first:

- Extreme vulnerability and dependence creates Ego & Connection with Others
- Specifically: those we admire and want to emulate; those we want to keep in our life—something to live up to.
- Problem: How to create deep motivation/willfulness in face of failure? (Solution: backstory + motivations generating struggle levels)

Symbolic Representation of the Lack/Yearning:

- Hester Prynne’s scarlet letter, representing both the sanctimonious hypocrisy in which she’s condemned to live and her subversive defiance of it.
 - The green light at the end of Daisy’s East Egg dock that Gatsby can see.
 - Blanche Dubois’s scarf-draped lampshades.
 - The ducks in Tony Sopranos pool.
- The reason that the Yearning is unfulfilled is because the character possesses a trait or traits that have held him back—his **Resistance**:
- *Weaknesses*: laziness, cowardice, lack of confidence, cynicism, despair;
 - *Wounds*: some loss or injury that has crippled the individual’s ability to love, heal, or act decisively;
 - *Limitations*: youth, old age, inexperience, lack of intelligence, poor health, poverty;
 - *Opposition*: a countering external force, normally embodied in another person—dream-killing father, over-protective mother, undermining teachers, slacker friends, a snobbish society, an oppressive community; or it may take the form of a demanding obligation, like the need to be a responsible parent, or a caretaker for someone in need;

- *Flaws*: selfishness, deceitfulness, indifference, cruelty, greed, a willingness to manipulate others.

**The Fundamental Interior Conflict:
Protecting Oneself from the Pain of Life vs. Pursuing the Promise of Life**

- Then *something happens*—the loved one appears, a body is found, the expedition is launched, the car breaks down in the middle of nowhere—and that opportunity or misfortune triggers the *Desire* to respond or to act.

It is the *desire to act* that is often easiest and simplest to identify and define.

As the character acts, he encounters conflict. Why continue? Why not surrender, compromise, turn back? The answer lies in the Yearning.

This awakens him to the stakes. He must accept the truth of his yearning, or die.

Part III: Using Backstory to Develop the Yearning and Resistance

Search out *a scene* of life-changing helplessness centered on:

Pain (Resistance)

Fear/Cowardice

Guilt/Sin

Shame/Failure

Betrayal

Death/Loss/Disconnection/Sorrow

Promise (Yearning)

Courage

Penance/Forgiveness

Pride/Success

Trust

Love/Connection/Joy

Key question #1: Where does the character's *willfulness* come from?

A Sense of Calling

A Compelling Incident or “Ghost” (caution: can feel reductionist)

Motivating Relationships

A Sense of Imminent Promise

Some Combination of the Above.

Key Question #2: What is the thematic thread connecting these key moments?

Backstory as Behavior: Pathological Maneuvers & Stubborn Virtues

The term Pathological Maneuvers is used to define the attitude toward life and the habitual behaviors created by the combined influence of the various forms of Resistance.

- i. The Resistance embodied in behavior
- ii. How the character is “ruining his life” on a day-to-day basis through denial, evasion, laziness, indifference, self-undermining, false modesty, manipulation, over-aggression, greed, cruelty. *Think in terms of scenes.*
- iii. Ask the question: What does the character *do* that “ruins his life.”
- iv. When and how does the character realize the destructive nature of this behavior?
- v. This is the behavior that must be rectified for the character to achieve his Desire and fulfill his Yearning, i.e., to “win” his inner struggle. (Discovery => Change)
- vi. By rooting backstory in behavior, you provide a dramatic means to portray the character's transformation: At the story's beginning he did *that*. After all his intensifying struggles and the discovery that they led to, he now does *this*.

IMPORTANT: A character's virtues—kindness, courage, understanding, etc.—are also embodied in his behavior and thus rooted in his backstory.

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Other Considerations:

Physical

It's not important to know how tall, how good-looking, how under-or- overweight a character is. The numbers are irrelevant. The questions to ask are:

- How does my character's appearance make her feel?
- How does it make others feel about her?
- How do these feelings translate into behavior?
- What Quirks, Tics, or Bad Habits help define his uniqueness?
- Also:
 - *Is Physical Description Necessary?*
 - *The Senses*
 - *Sex versus Gender*
 - *Sexual Attractiveness*
 - *Race*
 - *Health*
 - *Deportment and Fashion Sense*

Sociological

Look for significant moments that identify the character's connection to:

- Family (Who were his allies? Who were his enemies? Who took no side?)
- Friends (Oldest? Best? Still in his life—if not, why not?)
- Education (How has it helped him succeed or held him back?)
- Work (Does it define him? Is it “just a job”?)
- Class (How comfortable is he with people of higher station? Lower station?)
- Religion (What does he believe? What's a sin? What's the worst one he ever committed?)
- Geography (Where he comes from? Where he is now?)
- Home (Where does he feel he belongs? Why? Is he there now? If not, why not?)
- Tribe (Who are “his people”? Is there a code to the tribe? Has he ever violated it?)

Secrets

Automatically create depth: an inside and an outside, revealed vs hidden

Contradictions

1. *Contradictions Based on Physical, Ironic, or Comic Juxtaposition*
2. *Contradictions Based on Our Need to Serve Multiple Social Roles*
3. *Contradictions Based on Contrasting Influences*
4. *Contradictions Based on Competing Morals or Goals*
5. *Contradictions That Result from a Secret or Deceit*
6. *Contradictions Based on Conscious vs. Unconscious Traits*
7. *Dispositional Contradictions*

Vulnerability

- 1) *Existential (risk of physical harm)*
- 2) *Emotional (loss of hope, joy, meaning, etc.)*
- 3) *Relational (risk of loss/disconnection)*
- 4) *Moral (risk of judgment)*
- 5) *Situational (wrong place, wrong time)*

The Character Web: Secondary Characters

Types versus roles — Tropes versus Dramatic Function

Secondary characters allow you to reveal both conscious and unconscious aspects of the main characters' psychological, moral, and emotional makeup.

People form unusual alliances under duress. Which of your characters might be drawn closer together in tough times? Why? What conditions or circumstances might blow them apart?

The following roles are *not* mutually exclusive. There may be more than one character playing each role.

Ghost
Revenant
Counterweight character
Crucial ally
False ally/betrayer
Visitor/Stranger/Outsider
The Village

Four-Corner Conflict

The hero should face opposition from more than one direction. Though his principal source of conflict will be the opponent, secondary characters can also oppose him in different ways. This not only helps create moral complexity, it also helps generate suspense and creates opportunities for plot reversals and revelations.

Opponent: key adversary.

Revenant: Forces the hero to deal with his inner issues (Yearning); often a love interest.

Secondary Opponent/Competitor: Presents some other (usually more exterior) opposition.

Ideally, each of these characters also have conflicts with each other.

Building Tension Through Scene & Dialogue

SCENES

The Importance of Scene

Scenes externalize the conflicting emotions, values, and ideas in each of the characters, and by making the characters act on those emotions, values, and ideas, they make them more concrete.

Scenes strike us as more compelling because the conflict is overt, battled out right before our eyes. For each of the characters something crucial is at stake, someone stands to gain, someone stands to lose. How one withstands such a contest defines who he is.

Until our thoughts and emotions are acted upon, they remain mere possibilities. Once they exist in behavior and not just contemplation, they can't be taken back. Our actions anchor us once and for all, for better or worse, in the world.

The Mechanics of Scene

Structurally, each scene possesses three key elements, a beginning, a middle, and an end:

The Setup: This lays out the situation among the characters as the scene begins. It routinely poses a question, presents a dilemma, or otherwise sets out the groundwork for the conflict that defines the scene.

The Turning Point: This is an unexpected turn of events—an action, decision, or revelation—that in some way forces a significant change among the understanding, status, or power relationship among the characters.

The Payoff: The climax of the scene, cementing into fact the new state of affairs made possible by the Turning Point. This often creates the Setup for the following scene (or the next scene in this sequence or subplot).

Consider these examples:

Setup:

- 1) A group of Armenian separatists meet to plan the abduction of the American ambassador's teenage son in Istanbul.
- 2) A burglar needs to crack open a wall safe in a Hamptons beach house before the vacation home's occupants return.

Turning Point:

- 1) One of the conspirators, after weighing the risks and benefits and hearing the others out, refuses to agree to the kidnap plan.

- 2) The beach home's residents suddenly return home.

Payoff:

- 1) The abduction plan's naysayer is appeased by the group's leader in such a way he realizes he's been marked for assassination.
- 2) The burglar is forced to hide inside the house, rather than flee.

From the viewpoint of character, another three elements are crucial:

Objective: What the character wants in the scene.

- 1) The reluctant insurgent wants his companions to recognize the folly of their plan.
- 2) The burglar wants to get into the safe and out of the house undetected.

Obstacle: The force within the scene that stands between the character and his objective.

- 1) The insurgent leader is in favor of the abduction, and his rank, plus the command he holds over the others, makes ratification of the plan all but certain.
- 2) The burglar has only a small window of time before he risks being discovered.

Action: The tactic(s) the character employ(s) to overcome the obstacle and continue pursuing his objective.

- 1) The reluctant conspirator tries to convince the group's leader that the kidnap plan is reckless, or barbaric, or politically unwise. He hopes at least to delay it, thinking secretly that time will prompt caution, reflection, and reconsideration.
- 2) The burglar sledges a hole in the wall above the vault and hatchets in from the top, circumventing the time-consuming combination problem altogether.¹ (This of course prevents him, when he's surprised by the return of one of the residents, from simply closing the safe door before he hides, and the damage to the wall will reveal what he's done, creating the setup for the next scene.)

A character may employ several actions within a scene in his continuing attempt to overcome the obstacle—each such action/reaction is sometimes called a *beat*—and each failed attempt represents another turn, until the dilemma or question posed by the setup is somehow fulfilled or answered (the payoff).

More often than not, the scene concludes with the protagonist failing to accomplish his objective, succeeding only partially, or succeeding in such a way that other problems now present themselves, spurring him on to rethink his strategy or reassess his goal. This is how the protagonist becomes stronger, wiser, more resolute. (He “*succeeds by failing.*”)

¹ This was the strategy used by Ernie Mullins (Burt Reynolds) in the film *Breaking In*, script by John Sayles.

IMPORTANT POINT:

Transitions between scenes should be able to be worded as “But” or “Therefore.” If instead they can be worded as “And then...” you’re in trouble.

*Also: Each scene creates an **expectation** of what will follow. You should try as much as possible to betray that expectation with **a reveal or reversal** that creates **surprise**.*

THE READER’S PARADOX: All readers want to be able to predict where the story is going. And they always want to be wrong.

Sequel Scenes:

Often, after an extended scene or a sequence of linked scenes that end in some conclusive action, decision, or revelation, especially if the drama has been tense, violent, or rapidly paced, it’s finally time for more deliberate exploration of emotion and thought.

Such scenes are called sequel scenes, and they typically include three elements:

1. Processing of the emotion of what has just happened
2. Interpretation of the logic of what just happened
3. Revising the plan for how to proceed.

This is usually the best place to insert backstory.

DIALOGUE

“No one ever skips dialogue.” –Joshua Mohr

1. What Dialog is not

- a. Conversation
- b. A chance to discuss “off-stage” events
- c. Dueling monologues
- d. Verbal tennis

2. What Dialog is

- a. Action

Characters are not shooting the breeze in dialog, they’re doing things to each other: persuading, teasing, mocking, challenging, probing, flattering, badgering, begging, manipulating, pampering, scolding. In every line, the characters are jockeying for status, trying to be seen and heard on their own terms. They’re asserting or claiming or surrendering power. They’re stumbling through a haze of misunderstanding. They’re hiding from the truth. They’re peeling back a deception. They’re making sure, double-checking. They’re confiding a terrible secret, or blowing smoke.

- b. A contest of wills between or among characters: *a fight*
- c. A way to portray character through action and verbal style
- d. A way to portray the contrast between interior life and exterior events
- e. A way to *reveal through conflict*.

Instead of providing the reader information in what is commonly referred to as “an information dump,” dialogue supplies a way to present that information dramatically via an argument or some other discussion where the characters challenge, question, defy, doubt each other.

3. Dialog’s Basis in Character

Dialog must be rooted in character. It’s not about what the writer believes ought to be said or the reader or audience needs to know or what the story seems to require at this particular juncture, but what the characters want or need to say.

- a. The physical, psychological, and sociological roots of the character
- b. Determining how these roots affect speech patterns and behavior
- c. the use of objective and action to distinguish voices
—you can tell who’s talking by what they want and how they go about getting it
- d. The use of rhythm, syntax, grammar, word selection, slang
- e. Use a **Dialogue Grid** to keep track of what particular verbal tics, usages, etc., distinguish the speakers from each other.

Tics/usages to consider:

- Front-loaded vs back-loaded sentences
- Subject-less sentences
- Correct vs. incorrect grammar
- Long sentences vs. short ones
- The “serial interrogatory”
- Dialect
- Pet words or phrases (“persimmon” in Lisa Lutz’s *The Sparrows*)
- Curse words

- f. The importance of subtext:

Subtext is what the characters are unable or refuse to reveal as they act in pursuit of their objectives in the face of the obstacle. To one degree or another, all conversations contain subtext – conscious or unconscious assumptions, hidden agendas, or clandestine motives lying behind the speaker’s words.

This creates an element of intrigue and surprise to what is actually revealed. This actually enhances the emotional impact. The surprise allows the reader to discover the emotion for herself, rather than simply being told.

The inability or refusal to reveal the subtext can be motivated by:

- Lack of awareness: the subtext is unconscious or misunderstood.
- Deceit, discretion, or subterfuge: the submersion of the subtext is motivated by a need to conceal from others (especially the source(s) of conflict or opposition in the scene) what the character is actually thinking or feeling.
- Context: the subtext is clear – the characters and the reader all understand what’s motivating the action in the scene – and so stating it “on the nose” serves as needless repetition, undermining tension and believability. (For example, the characters know each other well—and perhaps have “issues.”)

5. Specific Techniques for Enhancing Realism—Verisimilitude and its limits

Where real speech can be most instructive, ironically, is in how it seems to break down.

- a) Skipping the answer, moving on: Characters must move the dialogue forward, and this is often done by assuming the answer to the preceding line and pushing on to the next point.
- b) Incomplete sentences: People cut each other off, they don't listen, they talk over each other. The result: truncated sentences, tangents, nonsequiturs. If used wisely, judiciously, and not too often, these tactics can provide a sense of realism. Used to excess, they quickly seem affected.
- c) Sometimes a speaker rushes ahead of herself and skips a section of what she meant to say. For example, instead of saying, "Don't talk to me about spending myself into the poorhouse. I won't take it, Jimmy, not from you," the speaker might say (especially if upset), "Don't talk to me about spending. No. Not from you." It seems angular, clipped, even wrong, but it clues us in to the character in a way the full sentences don't.
- d) One common sentence fragment heard in real speech and increasingly seen in written dialog is the subjectless sentence, especially in questions: *Going over to the school tonight? Like me to take that for you?* This is informal and can be used to suggest familiarity, terseness, or limited schooling. It can also be used for contrast if the other character speaks more formally: *Are you going to the school tonight? Would you like me to take that for you?*
- e) *Changing the subject*
- f) *Giving unsolicited advice*
- g) *Topping the other person's story*
- h) *Finishing the other character's sentences*
- i) *Asking a question, then not listening to the answer*

Put to good use, these techniques can add realism to dialog, but like anything else, they can also seem forced or overly clever if unmotivated.

6. Speech Tags

- a) He said, she said: use it trust it.

—If variety is needed, the words “replied” and “responded” are not too intrusive; “noted” gets close.

—Inverting the order—said he, said Mary—can be used for comic effect, but it quickly seems arched and false, very much so if overused.

—Words that describe the volume of the words are often more necessary at the lower decibels—whisper, murmur, mutter.

—Words such as “cried,” “stated,” “demanded,” “snarled,” “hissed,” “retorted,” “declared,” “enjoined,” “protested”—not to mention the infamous Ex Brothers: “exclaimed,” “expostulated,” “exhorted”—are considered archaic or the sign of a novice writer.

—Worse are words that slip an action into the mix—“jeered,” “chuckled,” “smiled,” “sneered.”

—A much better way to go about the whole business is to use beats—brief bits of action or setting or stage business—instead of attributions, as long as doing so doesn’t become clumsy or labored.

—**Adverbs:** American writers are routinely advised to avoid the use of adverbs in speech tags: she said caringly, he said sardonically. Whatever freight the adverb is carrying, the dialog itself should bear.

However: Even wise rules are meant to be broken, but the infraction must be equally wise. Some adverbs work better than others, for they get at relatively subtle or conflicted states of mind—wryly, smartly, blandly, wickedly—but even then I often go back and find I can do without them, *especially if the subtext is working*. Where they work best is when they convey what the dialog itself cannot:

“A perfect fit,” she said sadly.

“I found your presentation breathtaking,” he said blandly.

“My dear drunk mother has arrived,” he said brightly.

“I love you,” she said bitterly.

“Resume the crucifixion,” he said crossly.

Such adverbs will be necessary or not depending on how much context alone establishes the contradiction or irony. If so, cut. (My general rule: When in doubt, leave it out.) As much as possible, try not to *explain* your dialogue (which adverbs all too often do), but invite the reader in by using subtext to establish the contradiction or irony you're after.

7. Multiple Character Scenes

a. Distinguishing voices & determining who gets how much "air time"

In orchestrating how the speakers will vie for space on the page, remember what it is they're trying to get in the scene, and let them loose. What they're after will often crystalize their manner, even if they're trying hard to conceal it. This can often even eliminate the need for speech tags, because the characters will be so readily identifiable by what they want and how they're going about it through their speech.

Syntax, Word Choice, regional Dialect: These often automatically identify class, education, geographical background, etc.

Status: Another key consideration in distinguishing voices is to remember the relative status of the speakers. Every relationship involves an imbalance of power, if not several (and some of those will give the advantage to one character, some another).

Attitude: The character's vision of the world and her place in it. Is the world a safe place, a dangerous place, a confusing place? Is she capable, at a loss, stumbling through as best she can? How quickly does she act, how much heat does she generate when she does? How loud, how quiet, how bold, how considerate, how impulsive, how deliberate, etc., is she?

Attitude is one of the best tools for distinguishing characters from one another, especially those who might otherwise be similar (siblings, classmates, coworkers, etc.) If your characters seem too much alike, given them "an attitude adjustment."

SUBPLOTS

Like struggle levels, they need to be interwoven into main plot, or the story will lack unity.

Example 1: Peter Temple's *Black Tide* (Jack Irish series)

External:

Find Gary Connors (hired by father, Des Connors) => corporate corruption
Race Track story line: Harry Strang, Cam Delroy vs. Ricky Kirsch
Mirrored themes: corrupt men using violence to further their ends

Interpersonal:

Main (troubled) love interest: Linda Hiller
Opportunistic love interest: Lyall Cronin
Friend/Mentor relationship: Charlie Taub
Sidekick/Underling: Drew Greer (took over Jack's practice)
Police source/contact: Barry Tregear

Internal Questions:

Father: Dez Irish
Barfly chorus
Ghost: Wife's murder

Example 2: Michael Mann's *Heat*

Main plot, Lt. Vince Hanna vs. Neil McCauley
Subplot: Chris and Charlene Shiherlis
Common theme: holding onto love in the battle of law vs outlaw