

Writing Real Characters: 15 Prompts to Explore Their Fears, Flaws, and Dreams

15 writing prompt questions designed to help you build well-rounded, three-dimensional characters in creative fiction. These key elements help develop your character's psychology, background, desires, fears, and contradictions to make them believable and engaging.

1. What does your character want more than anything and what are they willing to do to get it?

Explore how their ambition drives their decisions, and what moral lines they might cross.

2. What is your character's greatest fear, and where did it come from?

Dig into their past to understand how this fear affects their behavior or relationships today.

3. How does your character present themselves publicly and how does that differ from who they are privately?

This reveals inner conflict and gives depth to their personality.

4. What moment in their past changed the course of their life forever?

Could be a loss, success, betrayal, or a decision they regret or treasure.

5. What does your character believe is their greatest strength and what do others see as their biggest flaw?

Play with the gap between self-perception and how others view them.

6. Who does your character love most, and how far would they go to protect them?

This tests their loyalty and reveals emotional depth.

7. What personal code or moral rule does your character live by and what would make them break it?

A great setup for internal conflict and high-stakes drama.

8. What secret does your character keep hidden from everyone and what would happen if it came out?

Secrets drive tension and create vulnerability.

9. What is your character's biggest regret, and how do they cope with it or avoid it?

Regrets shape motivation, guilt, and even redemption arcs.

10. In a crisis, does your character choose themselves, others, or the "greater good"? Why?

This helps you define their core values and possibly reveal their flaws.

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11. What would your character lie about, even to themselves?

This reveals blind spots, self-deception, or buried shame that can shape their arc in surprising ways.

12. What seemingly small choice did your character make that had unexpectedly huge consequences?

This focuses on the ripple effect of ordinary moments, showing how fate and personality collide.

13. If your character had to relive one day of their life over and over, which day would they choose and why?

Their choice exposes what they value most: joy, revenge, redemption, or maybe closure.

14. What/who does your character envy and how does that envy quietly shape their actions or relationships?

Envy is a powerful, often hidden motivator that can lead to passive aggression, sabotage, or ambition.

15. What belief or opinion does your character hold that would deeply offend or alienate others?

This introduces tension, internal bias, or cultural conflict and tests how likable or flawed you're willing to let them be.

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