

How to create a successful story for your screenplay

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE STORY (How to Create the Story for Your Screenplay)

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THE CHARACTERS

Chapter Six

How to Create a Constellation of Characters That's Right For Your Story

Musing upon constellations

If you have an affinity for the night sky, you've likely had the experience of struggling to make out the shape of a constellation you're looking for.

Oh, yeah, we can pick up the most familiar ones (*The Big Dipper*, *Orion*) quickly, but others yield their shapes only after some neck-cracking staring into the cosmos.

The fun of it, for many of us, is the satisfaction of seeing the pattern emerge from the millions of points of light up there.

It's an intriguing metaphor for story-making. In fact the two activities are connected.

They both reach back into the dim recesses of the history of the human race. And most of the constellations have their own mythology, their own tales told by successive generations of skyward-looking humans.

Seeing the patterns

Think about building your story by "seeing" the emergence of the characters in a pattern. A pattern of their own, distinct from all the other patterns of human beings that exist. Unique, yet composed of types that are common to many other stories.

If you study movies long enough, you'll see certain typical patterns of characters cropping up repeatedly.

As a storytelling form, the feature-length movie tends to be more structured than other forms. Specific patterns are followed more frequently than in other looser forms such as the novel, the short story, the biography, etc.

Trust me that the room for creativity and invention within the boundaries of the patterns is almost infinite, so set aside the fear that knowing and using the convention and its patterns will somehow stunt your creativity or board up your muse.

The Hero — then what?

When you've decided on your Hero, where do you go next?

You have multiple options, but it might be useful to have some type of guide.

How many of you remember reading a story by [Ray Bradbury](#) named *A Sound of Thunder*?

It's the classic sci-fi story about a time-traveler who visits a site in the ancient past, steps on a butterfly, and returns to find his own world utterly, irretrievably changed.

I can still remember the frisson that story gave me—the excitement of the idea that the fate of all things in the world rested somehow on the nature of their *connection* to each other.

Fast-forward a few years.

I'm now a working writer. But I'm struggling to create satisfactory connections between my Heroes and the other characters in my stories.

Why was I struggling? Because I was thinking about story and characters in a literary way, a "straight line" way—the way print goes across a page, one element after another. HERO— INCITING INCIDENT— GOAL— RISING ACTION— etc., etc.

Even worse, I just assumed that drama consisted mainly of "conflict" between *two entities*: Protagonist and Antagonist (Hero and Villain).

That's okay for Literature and stage.

Not for movies.

Sometimes my scripts seemed to have rich characters, compelling themes, and surprising plot twists, but they didn't always work, and so I struggled.

One day, after enough years of this writer's angst, and after studying enough movies, the light dawned.

I discovered that the essential appeal of the screen story, unlike many literary forms, was *not to be found* in the conflict the villain created.

Surprise!

Of course the villain is important, but in my analysis of movies, I learned that the villain often got less screen time than another secondary character who had a lot of scenes with the Hero.

Movies as we know them have been in existence for less than a hundred years. In that time, though, they've evolved into a methodical storytelling form.

Several generations of professional screenwriters have come to learn what pleases and what displeases their audience, and they have come to structure their stories accordingly.

So the structured form of storytelling we see at the movies is the result of writers responding to the desires of the audience.

In a way, writing a movie is like writing a sonnet — there exists an evolved convention within a writer is expected to work.

Of course the movie convention is much more complex and complicated than the simple Octet and Sextet of the sonnet with its abba-abba-etc. rhymes, but the relationship of the writer to the form has similarities, the most significant of which is that the form is both a blessing and a curse.

A blessing because the writer doesn't have to invent the wheel, and a curse because the creative process is never unfettered.

The good news is that, as in most other endeavors, knowledge and understanding is power.

In this chapter, I intend to impart what I know of the convention of the movie form in such a way that you will be able to use it to build a successful story from your screenplay ideas.

So let's do some stargazing into the galaxy of screenplay characters to find the patterns of the screenplay convention.



Not all Hollywood movies parade their constellation of characters as blatantly as [American Graffiti](#) did, but most advertising displays the two main characters, and sometimes a third character as well.

© [Universal Pictures](#)

One final comparison and I'll spare you any further extension of this metaphor.

Think of the Hero as the Pole Star — He or she is the character around whom all the other characters revolve.

Bear in mind that, as I carry on this discussion about screenplay characters, I'm not prescribing a recipe. Rather I'm describing the nature of 90% of successful movies.

You're the writer. You can choose to work within the patterns I'm describing or not. But to make that choice intelligently, you need to *know* what the patterns are.

Look at these movie posters.

Two characters are prominently depicted on each poster.

Neither character is the Villain.

What does that tell you?



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Certainly, this idea of the "second character" intrigued me, because I'd been giving the second largest chunk of screen time to the Antagonist.

Then I rationalized that, well, this other secondary character existed because the Hero had a romantic interest, or else a Buddy.

But that didn't prove out either, because I found many movies where the character who got second most screen time was neither a lover or a buddy.

When I was preparing to lead seminars on screenplay writing, I did a deeper analysis of the character layout of successful movies.

I started by studying the role of Heroes and Antagonists in hundreds of movies, and even though I was reluctant to accept the fact at first, I discovered that the typical movie story is dominated by a personal relationship between two *other* characters—the Hero and what I called at the time the "second most important character."

That's all. Just those two characters. When I first explored this principle, there wasn't any information about screenplay writing that dealt satisfactorily with this "second most important character."

I named this character the BONDING CHARACTER. And then by studying movies further, I deduced four things about the audience's response to the Bonding Character that truly surprised me:

Defining the Bonding Character

1. The more *unlike* the Hero and Bonding Character are, the *better* the audience likes them and gets involved in their relationship.

These examples show two popular unlike pairings:

ERIN BROCKOVICH



Julia Roberts and **Albert Finney** in [Universal Pictures](#) *Erin Brockovich*.

Roberts plays a young single mom struggling to make ends meet.

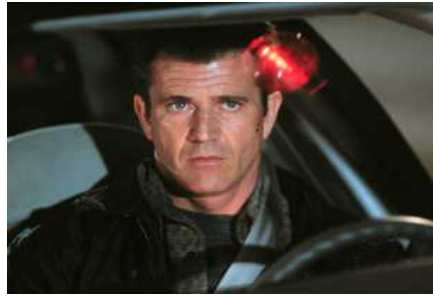
Her Bonding Character is Albert Finney, a modestly successful lawyer winding down his career. Not *like* each other at all.

LETHAL WEAPON

Mel Gibson and Danny Glover



Studio Stills © [Warner Brothers](#)



Gibson's a widowed, suicidal cop paired with Glover, the conservative family man.

And...how many lines do I have?

The second principle that emerged for me was one that stemmed from my stop-watch studies of which characters had how much screen time. This is what I concluded:

2. The audience expects the Bonding Character to have at least as much, if not more, screen time than the Villain.

This idea isn't a tablet toted down from the mountain, but if you give the Villain too much screen time, the audience could feel cheated because the Hero/Bonding Character relationship will necessarily be weakened.

But amount of screen time is partly a technical issue, and easy to solve if it gets out of balance. The third principle I learned, however, is right at the core of what makes a successful screenplay:

3. The audience invests its positive emotion in the *relationship* between the Bonding Character and the Hero.

Quite often this relationship grows throughout the movie to become a romantic involvement, but if you study the function of Bonding Characters in many different movies, you discover that the Hero/Bonding Character relationship has a number of consistent qualities, which do not necessitate that the relationship be romantic.

In a later chapter I'll go into detail about these qualities. The important thing to understand is that an audience follows a screen story not just with eyes and ears, but with emotions.

Using the emotional attachment of the audience

The consequence of this audience interaction with that central relationship is the following fact:

To write a successful screenplay story, you need to exploit the fact that the dominant *emotional* attachment of an audience is to the *Hero/Bonding Character Relationship*.

What is the best way to do that?

You make the relationship the instrument to defeat the Villain.

In the typical movie, the Hero and the Bonding Character are *forced into contact* with each other. This event usually occurs somewhere during the first thirty pages.

In [Ghost](#), for example, the Hero, Sam Wheat is murdered in the early part of the movie, and as a ghost, desperately seeks a means to contact his girlfriend, Molly.

GHOST



Studio stills
© [Paramount Pictures](#)

Hero:

Sam Wheat
(Patrick Swayze)

Bonding Character :

Oda-Mae Brown
(Whoopi Goldberg)



He visits a medium named Oda-Mae Brown, and even though she thinks she's faking being a medium, she discovers that she can hear Sam when he speaks to her. The subsequent scene is a welcome piece of comic relief after the intense drama of the beginning.

Now we come to the fourth principle — a key component of good story making, which is dictated by the moviegoing audience:

4. As part of their involvement in the central character relationship, the audience expects the Hero to use the Bonding Character's qualities to help defeat the villain.

In the case of *Ghost*, the Villain is a co-worker of Sam's named Carl Bruner, and Sam determines that, by using Oda-Mae to carry out his plans, he will be able to expose Carl as the thief and murderer he is.

During a movie, the audience "tracks" the progress of the Hero/Bonding Character relationship and yearns for the Hero to "get together" with the Bonding Character in some way.

When you are writing your screenplay, you need to satisfy this audience desire. Sometimes the only way to do that is to have the Hero and Bonding character part at the end.

This is the case with such movies as [Casablanca](#), *Ghost*, [Witness](#), *Minority Report*, and many others.

In [Minority Report](#), Tom Cruise hooks up with Agatha, the precog, in order to defeat the villain, and in so doing, they rescue each other, and go on to reclaim the lives they had almost lost.

An immensely satisfying ending for the audience.

MINORITY REPORT

Photo: David James

Bonding Character :

Agatha
(Samantha Morton)

Studio still
[© 20th Century Fox](#)



Hero:

John Anderton
(Tom Cruise)

The film that I use extensively in my seminars is *Witness*, starring Harrison Ford and Kelly McGillis.

This movie contains one of the most unusual *unlike* character pairings: A hard-bitten, inner city cop bonds with an Amish widow to bring a rogue police officer to justice.

The interesting twist is that the Hero, John Book, adopts his Bonding Character's pacifism in order to finally defeat the homicidal villain.

WITNESS

[© Paramount Pictures Corp.](#)



Wounded, and on the run from his would-be killers, John Book takes refuge in Rachel Lapp's Amish community.

Their growing attraction to each other is one of the most skillfully written, and sensitively directed, romances in movies.

The success of this movie illustrates the effectiveness of using **an extremely unlikely pairing** when creating your Hero/Bonding Character relationship.

When you understand the working dynamic of the Hero/Bonding Character relationship and apply it to crafting your story, you'll be preparing a solid foundation for the creation of the other characters in your story, particularly the Opposing/Attacking Force (Villain).

The antagonist

Paradoxically, the Antagonist, or the Villain, as he or she is popularly called, seems to be a more well-understood character type than the Hero or the Bonding Character. Even so, I'll be dealing with this character later in a chapter on its own.

Most movies have Villains. Some do not.

Or, I should say, some movies don't use a Villain as a separate third character.

For years, screenwriters have been writing at least two genres that combine the persona of the Villain as part of the Bonding Character.

These two genres are:

1. **The Romantic Comedy**, in which the struggle is between the Hero and the Bonding Character solely. A favorite example is [When Harry Met Sally](#), but there are numerous others, since the genre is extremely popular.
2. **The Person-in-Peril**, in which the Hero's Bonding Character is a person whose purpose becomes to destroy the Hero.

Nevertheless, the audience, while fearing that the Bonding Character/Nemesis will destroy the hero, at the same time secretly desires that the Hero will "get together" with this Bonding Character in order to destroy him or her.

Three of the best examples of this genre are [Sleeping With The Enemy](#), a taut thriller starring Julia Roberts, [The Net](#), starring Sandra Bullock, and [Marathon Man](#), with Dustin Hoffman.

So, when you select your genre, it usually determines whether your Antagonist is to be a separate third character or combined with the Bonding Character.

Supporting cast

You might bridle at the next notion I'm about to present, simply because on the face of it, it seems as if it will lead to formula writing and will handcuff your creativity.

Movie stories, like people, have needs.

Somewhere along the way, **character types** evolved that best satisfied those needs.

Within the "types" is wide scope for creating individuality and uniqueness. The concept of creating a new type can be an attractive idea for a writer. You need to know what types are available, so that the unique characters you try to create can be placed properly in relationship to the Hero, the Bonding Character, and the Antagonist.

Most of these types are self explanatory, and we'll come back to them from time to time, so here they are:

The Confidant(e) or Buddy. Often, you need to create this character just so that your Hero, Bonding Character, or Villain will have someone to talk to. This character can be of almost any personality stripe, as long as he or she is willing to listen to and "advise" the dominant character.

The Romantic Interest. Usually a stronger element in stories where there is no possibility that the Hero and Bonding Character could develop a romantic interest in each other. A good example of this principle occurs in *Minority Report*, in which John Anderton is obsessed with reuniting with his estranged wife (the Romantic Interest).

The writers used needed the Romantic Interest, otherwise, the audience would be yearning to see Anderton develop a closer relationship with the precog, which would have thrown the story askew.

But even if your Hero is going to end up marrying the Bonding Character in the end, the story complexity might benefit from some romantic competition (see the next category).

The Rival. Usually this character competes with the Hero or the Bonding Character for the attentions of the loved one. Sometimes the Rival competes with the Hero for a prize of some sort.

The False Friend, or Treacherous Ally. A fascinating character type. Here you build an opportunity to "create with mendacity" because this character is always hiding something. In addition you create an automatic surprise, and emotional heat when the character is unmasked. Charlotte Rampling is the False Friend in the Paul Newman picture [The Verdict](#).

The Minion. A term generally applied to those who are allied with, or who work for, the Villain. A story sometimes needs several of these, so that the forces arrayed against the hero are formidable. In the case of [Working Girl](#), the Melanie Griffith picture, Sigourney Weaver was enough of a nemesis all on her own, but in a picture like [The Godfather](#), minions abound.

The Clown. This is the role that often gets played by a stand-up comic. It can be a cameo role, a meld with the Buddy role, or a featured bit that's just good entertainment by itself, but which is nevertheless woven into the plot.

The Mentor. Oftentimes your story requires that your Hero learn a skill that will help defeat the Villain, or gain the love of a desired person, so you need a mentor.

The Mentor type figures big in Star Wars, and many other movies. A good example is the role of the hotel manager, played by Hector Elizondo in [Pretty Woman](#). The Mentor can be a pivotal character in his or her effect upon the other characters. Look, for example, at the before and after of Vivian (Julia Roberts) after some couturier assistance from her Mentor.



Studio Stills © Buena Vista Pictures

The Loyal Retainer. This type might also be a Confidant, but often is employed by the Hero, and acts as a contrast to the Hero to impress upon the audience the stature and heroic qualities of the hero.

The Wise Old Man or Woman. A good example of this type is of course, Yoda. But also the Oracle in [The Matrix](#).

The purpose of this character is to give the Hero a character to seek wisdom from. Then the audience will see the subsequent actions of the Hero in the light of whether or not he has embraced this wisdom.

This character also is used as a mechanism by which suspense is generated, and believability is sustained, so the audience won't say, "How could (the Hero) possibly have known how to (do x,y,z.)"

The Wise Old Man or Woman is quite often one of the Hero's family members.

Points to remember

Think of the Hero as the Pole Star — He or she is the character around whom all the other characters revolve.

The more *unlike* the Hero and Bonding Character are, the *better* the audience likes them and gets involved in their relationship. The audience invests its positive emotion in the *relationship* between the Bonding Character and the Hero.

To write a successful screenplay story, you need to exploit the fact that the dominant *emotional* attachment of an audience is to the *Hero/Bonding Character Relationship*.

As part of their involvement in the central character relationship, the audience expects the Hero to use the Bonding Character's qualities to help defeat the villain.

There are two genres that combine the persona of the Villain as part of the Bonding Character: The Romantic Comedy, and The Person-In-Peril.

The genre you choose usually determines whether your Antagonist is to be a separate third character or combined with the Bonding Character.

Major character types available to choose from for supporting characters are: The Confidant or Buddy, The Romantic Interest, The Rival, The False Friend or Treacherous Ally, The Minion, The Clown, The Mentor, The Loyal Retainer, The Wise Old Man or Woman.

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THE CHARACTERS

Chapter Nine

Building the Best Bonding Character for Your Hero

The unlikely pairing

No matter which character you create first, you'll want to have the best possible Bonding Character for your Hero.

The key to matching up these characters is to work on their *unlikeness* to each other.

The more unlikely the pairing between the Hero and the Bonding character, the more energy your story idea will have.

The problem with a weak Hero/Bonding Character Dynamic

[Girlfight](#), an appealing movie with a lot of good moments, written and directed by Karyn Kusama, could have been stronger had the two major characters been more *unlike* each other.

Both are teenagers, both are Hispanic, both are from poor families in the projects, both train at the same gym, both are avid boxers.



Hero (Michelle Rodriguez) and Bonding Character (Jaime Tirelli) in *Girlfight*.

Two extremely winsome actors anchor this low-budget movie.

If you had been given the assignment, how could you have rewritten the Bonding Character to give the central relationship more bite and drive?

Studio Still
Screen Gems Inc. (© [Sony Pictures](#))

When you create your Bonding Character with too many similarities to the Hero, you encounter writing problems all the way through the script.

If your characters are too much alike, you will have to work to create necessary tension, and through the middle part of the movie the energy will sag— all because of the weak dynamic between Hero and Bonding Character.

The time to make sure your screenplay will have drama and energy is at the beginning when you are laying out the major characters.

Might be a good idea to rent *Girlfight* and see how you think you could have written it better.

Challenges and benefits of the unlikely pairing

The more unlikely the pairing, the more energy, creativity and skill you will need to expend to create the Bonding Event to bring these two unlikely characters together.

On the other hand, you will find it much easier to create conflict and drama between two very *unlike* characters.

Contrast the pairing in *Girlfight* with the pairing in the Tom Clancy spy thriller [*The Sum of All Fears*](#):



Bonding Character William Cabo (Morgan Freeman) showing Hero Jack Ryan (Ben Affleck) the ropes at the CIA.

Try counting how many ways these two characters are unlike each other. About the only similarity is that they are both male CIA agents.

Studio Still © [Paramount Pictures](#)

In this movie although both characters are employed by the CIA, the Hero is a new recruit, and the Bonding Character a seasoned veteran. They come from unlike backgrounds, and have unlike attitudes.

[*The Road to Perdition*](#) tells a gripping story using a Hero (Tyler Hoechlin) who Bonds with his own father (Tom Hanks).

Although they are father and son, the characters are profoundly unlike each other; the son, innocent, honest, and naïve, the father steeped in the sins of criminality.

The Hero (Tyler Hoechlin), taught by the Bonding Character (Tom Hanks), learns to drive.

Every scene between them vibrates with dramatic energy because of their deep differences, and because of the opposite tension of their love for each other.

Studio Still © [20th Century Fox](#)



Test your creativity at pairing Heroes with Bonding Characters

To illustrate how you might begin to brainstorm about your Hero and Bonding Character, try playing with the pairings from the following lists.

Try to match them up, A's with B's.

Just for fun, try inventing Bonding Events for a few pairings.

Although you will find hidden in these lists some pairings from produced movies, bear in mind that there are no "right" answers for you in your screenplay, there are only creative choices that work for you.

If you wish, you can match up the samples that fit produced movies— the answers are in the pop-up menu.

But it is more important for you to imagine which pairings you think are the most dynamic, and how you would invent characters with those basic patterns.

HEROES AND BONDING CHARACTERS

"A" List (both male and female)

1. A nun
2. A Russian male diplomat
3. An impoverished male artist
4. A shy female computer programmer
5. A downsized suburban family man
6. A male ghost
7. An aggressive female FBI trainee
8. A street smart hooker
9. A male talk show host
10. An ambitious female secretary

"B" List (both male and female)

11. A transsexual
12. A condemned male criminal
13. A workaholic male corporate analyst
14. A psychotic male serial killer
15. A married teacher, mother of three
16. A tough female street cop
17. A ruthless upscale hit man
18. A high school cheerleader
19. A bogus female psychic
20. A squeegee girl

Finished? Check bottom of the page for pairings in real movies.

Learn to understand the dynamic between the Hero/Bonding Character and the Bonding Event

The relationship between the Hero and the Bonding Character is the human core of most movies.

Spend as much time as you possibly can on this part of the process.

The event you use to bond your Hero to the Bonding Character will determine the plot of your story. And that's a good thing, because the plot automatically becomes the right one for your characters.

Some examples follow to help you understand the dynamic of the **Hero, the Bonding Character** and **The Bonding Event**:

Okay, to start with how about pairing up **an unshaven, drinking and smoking tramp steamer captain**, and **a prissy and proper missionary spinster**?

Is that different enough for your Hero and your Bonding character?

It was good enough for Hollywood, and the film they made from it was good enough to rank #17 in the [American Film Institute's Top 100](#).



[The African Queen](#)

Humphrey Bogart (Hero)
and Katharine Hepburn
(Bonding Character)

An unlikely pair of river rats in
the 1951 UA movie.

The question is how did the
writers of the novel and the
screenplay get these two
characters together, given how
unlike each other they appear to
be?

Image courtesy [MPTV.net](#)

How did the writers create their magic?

They used the villains of the piece -- German soldiers who burn the village in which Rose (Hepburn) and her brother have established a mission. In the course of the altercation that occurs, they injure Rose's brother, which leads to his physical and mental breakdown and subsequent death.

When Charlie Allnut (Bogart) returns, Rose, angry, determined, and seeking revenge, persuades him, for the good of his country, to embark on a scheme to turn the African Queen into a floating torpedo and blow up the German ship that controls this section of Africa.

Notice that the Hero and the Bonding Character are virtually welded together by the Opposing Force of the movie, the "enemy."

What are the best kinds of differences for *your* characters?

The ways in which characters can be unlike is obviously unique to each pairing a writer creates.

But I'll suggest some general aspects to look at:

Gender

It's typical of Romantic Comedies that the Hero and Bonding Character are opposite sexes, and it's typical of "Buddy" movies that they are the same sex, but it's not a law. Sometimes switching the typical genders is exactly the right thing to do.

Look at [Lara Croft, Tomb Raider](#), and [Charlie's Angels](#), action pictures that switched the usual male action hero from a man to a female.

Consider what are the best genders for your Hero and Bonding Character.

Age

Tom Clancy's *The Sum of All Fears* makes thorough use of this aspect to explore the unlikeness of the Hero, Jack Ryan, and the Bonding Character, William Cabot.

Because people's outlook, attitudes, interests, capabilities, and personalities change with age, writers are prone to use age as one of the unlike qualities that distinguish Hero and Bonding Character.

Ethnic Origin/Racial Difference

Although we note this difference nowadays as an outgrowth of the increasing tolerance of our democratic society, it's been a staple of drama for centuries, even farther back than Shakespeare's [Merchant of Venice](#) or Euripides [Medea](#).

In [Changing Lanes](#) Gavin Banek, the Hero, played by Ben Affleck, and Doyle Gipson, the Bonding Character, played by Samuel L. Jackson, carry on their struggle with little mention of the fact that one is white and one black, but visually their unlikeness in this respect is a powerful reminder of how different their life-attitudes are.



Studio Still
© Paramount Pictures

Socioeconomic Status

This is the "rich man, poor man" or "prince and the pauper" syndrome. Although in the movies, it more often tends to be "rich girl, poor man" or vice-versa.

The Romantic Comedy, [Pretty Woman](#), written by J.F. Lawton is the quintessential modern Cinderella story. [Click here for interesting review.](#)



Pretty Woman pairs up a nearly penniless Hero, played by Julia Roberts, with Richard Gere's Bonding Character, a multi million dollar investment banker with a ton of psychological damage and a neat case of acrophobia.

You don't need to stick with this model. Mix up the genders or ages however you like, and go for it.

Studio Still

© [Buena Vista Pictures](#)

Political Orientation

Opposed political beliefs can provide an emotionally charged atmosphere for drama, comedy, or tragedy.

One of my favorite oldies is [The Way We Were](#), which uses the liberal/conservative, left/right polarity as its central difference between the Hero and Bonding Character.

This Robert Redford/Barbra Streisand pairing not only gets energy from the political polarity between the characters, but also from their Rich Boy, Poor Girl status.

Written by [Arthur Laurents](#) with uncredited story participation by [Alvin Sargent](#), *The Way We Were* derives its whole punch not from the *events* but from the differences between the characters. And it also has an edge because this is a movie in which the characters do okay for themselves, but they don't grab the brass ring, and they don't live happily ever after.



© [Columbia Pictures](#)

Personality/Character Traits

You don't need a degree in psychology to realize that this is the arena in which the battles are fought to determine who is the greatest writer of them all.

It's also the arena where the most fun is.

Shaping the character of your Hero and your Bonding Character will determine the destiny of your movie.

Your first task is to invent their character traits, and your second task is to invent the actions and situations in which your Hero and Bonding Character will say and do things that reveal who they are.

A tall order.

You'll be dealing in strengths and frailties, ethics and temptations, grit and gas, loyalty and perfidy, courage and cowardice, generosity and meanness, honesty and dishonesty, and thousands of others.

Simply put, you'll need to shape the differences in this area with care, because audiences (and

Readers) have a radar detector for inconsistency and falseness in character portrayals.

Character portrayal is study all on its own, much too large to cover in detail in the scope of this discussion. In Chapter Eight, I dealt with the audience's need for their hero to have certain personality and character traits, to behave in ways that would maintain their empathy for the Hero, and their identification with him. When you write a screenplay, you're asking the audience, for two hours of their life to "be" your Hero, to share the triumph and tragedy, the exaltation and despair.

Just as you need to know how to make your Hero "please" the audience, you need to create a Bonding Character that makes them yearn for the Hero and Bonding Character to get together at the end of the movie.

At the beginning of the movie their characters ought to be in a state that makes them *unworthy* of each other. Therefore their characters need to develop, grow, and change, so that at the end of the movie, they deserve a closer relationship.

This is the delicate shift of polarity you need to be deft at portraying throughout your screenplay.

A good movie to study for this effect is [Changing Lanes](#), mentioned above.

I recommend renting the movie to compare who these two people are at the beginning of the movie, and who they are at the end.

When you have done that, try to discern where the changes occurred, where they *learned* to transform their attitudes, where they *learned* to see the world in a different light, where they mustered the self-discipline to alter their behavior.

If you can succeed at creating two unlike characters and force them to undergo real character change, you'll have a successful story.

Points to remember

The more unlike the Hero and Bonding Character, the more energy your story will have.

The relationship between the Hero and the Bonding Character is the human core of most movies.

Sometimes switching the typical genders of Hero and/or Bonding Character is exactly the right thing to do.

Differences in ethnic origin or race and in socioeconomic status can energize your Hero/Bonding Character relationship.

Opposed political beliefs can provide an emotionally charged atmosphere for drama, comedy, or tragedy.

At the beginning of the movie the character traits and personality of the Hero and Bonding Character ought to be in a state that makes them *unworthy* of each other, so that they must grow and change in order to "get together" at the end.

Hero/Bonding Character pairings from list above:

1/12 Dead Man Walking

4/17 The Net

5/18 American Beauty

6/19 Ghost

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