

Write realistic blind characters in fiction, poetry and prose.

33 Worst Mistakes Writers Make About Blind Characters

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Stephanie Green

The **33** Worst Mistakes Writers Make About...

BLIND CHARACTERS

The Secrets Only Insiders Know



- Your your blind character probably does not live in darkness. Know why?
- Your blind cellist does NOT magically remember every note he hears. Know why?
- Your guide-dog led character stopped to ask directions. Know why?
- Your blind character loves skiing, fencing, or archery, not sitting in her room. Know why?
- Your blind character can become a chef, an editor, or a CEO. Know why?

Writer's Rescue #12

You Need To Know

STEPHANIE GREEN

The 33 Worst Mistakes Writers Make About Blind Characters

The Secrets Only Insiders Know

WRITE IT RIGHT #[LEAVE BLANK]

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Introduction

I don't read many books about blind characters. This is in part because there aren't that many around and partly because the ones I have read just weren't that good. I have enough problems dealing with misinformed opinions and well intentioned 'help' in real life that reading about them in my leisure time makes me angry.

I know these authors don't intend to make me angry. Many of them read the books that came before theirs and thought they'd done their research. Many of them observed colleagues or relatives who are blind, and thought they understood blindness. Some of them are blind themselves, but their stories are still affected by the ignorance of the sighted world.

In the process of writing this ebook I searched writing forums all over the internet, where amateurs and professionals converge to discuss, support and inspire each other. I came across numerous discussions about writing blind characters.

The advice people gave was extraordinary in its misguidance and ignorance. 'Blindfold yourself and walk around the house,' they would say "Blind people see darkness" or, my favourite; "colour-blind people only mix up one or two colours. There's no such thing as complete colour-blindness."

Not one of these writers intended to lead the others astray. Writers are an emphatic bunch; you truly care about getting things right. You just didn't know any better. You didn't have a place to go for information.

I wanted to be that place.

I've lived with vision impairment for my entire life. I've survived horrific bullying, assault, rejection and depression. I've made the most amazing friends and married the most wonderful man. I've overcome obstacles from moving out of home and living on my own,

to solo traveling, to dealing with stalkers and discrimination in the workplace. I've loved every minute of my life and wouldn't change a single thing.

For the last couple of years I've moved from my original job as an archeologist to working in the disability sector. At the University of Auckland I facilitated exams for students with disabilities. I moved from that job to my current position as an Accessible Formats Producer at the Royal New Zealand Foundation of the Blind.

Did you know only 5% of reading material that sighted people have is available to the blind? We work every day to change this.

I create Braille books and resources for schoolchildren, for adults, for staff members. We make Braille menus for restaurants in our area and signs for businesses that employ our members. We make tactile diagrams and large print maps. We're trialing a system of downloadable digital textbooks which use large print and synthesized speech. We petition local authorities and work with businesses and other organisations to make the world a better place for people who are blind.

It's the best job in the world.

Though my work at the RNZFB I've learnt even more about life for blind person. And what we experience inevitably affects our writing. I've begun to include more and more characters with vision impairments in my stories, and new ideas and conflicts spring from the characters I encounter in my workplace.

But since not everyone can have this kind of exposure, I've written this ebook to pay my experience forward. Holly Lisle offers a great example to writers of how to take what you learnt from those who've come before you and pass it on to those who don't yet know. It's an important thing to do, and she's right – it brings so much joy to all involved.

I really hope you enjoy **33 Mistakes Writers Make About Blind Characters**. Hopefully you find material to inform your writing, or discover new ideas, personalities or situations that resonate with you.

If you have any further questions about blindness or vision impairment, or you want to discuss any of the material below, please send me an email or visit my website. I'd love to talk to you.

Sincerely

Steff

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