



Character
Development



Story Characters Workbook



Grant P. Ferguson
WritingForEternity.com

The Trellis Method's

Story Characters Workbook

Grant P. Ferguson



Published by Writing For Eternity Media, 2026

WritingForEternity.com

Copyright © 2026 by Grant P. Ferguson.

While every precaution has been taken in preparing this workbook, the publisher assumes no responsibility for errors or omissions, or for damages resulting from the use of the information contained herein.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any form whatsoever without written permission, except in the case of brief quotations in critical articles or reviews.

Created and produced in the United States of America.

For more information, visit <https://writingforeternity.com>.

Workbook design by Grant P. Ferguson

Cover design by Grant P. Ferguson

First Edition: April 2026

CONTENTS

CHARACTERS: Give Readers the Emotions They Crave.....	1
Why Invest Time Developing Characters?	1
What Readers Want from Characters	1
Story Characters Development	4
What Is the Enneagram of Personality?	4
Five Character Development Steps	8
Start with the Most Important Characters.....	9
Character Profile Worksheet Tips	10
More Art Than Science.....	14
An Iterative Process	14
ENNEAGRAM: Infographics.....	15
Enneagram Types and Relationships	16
Enneagram Type Identification.....	17
Enneagram Details	18
Enneagram Development Levels	19
Enneagram Character Arc	20
Enneagram Character Development Matrix	21

CHARACTERS:

Give Readers the Emotions They Crave

Why Invest Time Developing Characters?

The comments from avid readers paint a picture of their desire and joy of living vicariously through characters. Dig deeper and you sense it's the emotions that capture and hold their attention. Writers have the potential to engage readers and shape the lives of young and old.

What Readers Want from Characters

There are no formulas or shortcuts to developing relatable characters that readers want to know better. However, there are traits, behaviors, and writing principles that endear characters to your target audience.

Bonding

Most readers want to bond with one or more of the characters early in a book. However, if this sense of bonding does not take place, many abandon further reading. Top writers subtly and consistently bond readers to their interesting characters.

Authenticity

When a character shows authenticity in their *thoughts*, *choices*, *speech*, and *actions*, readers want to know more about that person. They keep reading, and if it's a series, they look forward to getting to know even more about that character.

Relatable

No one is perfect, and that includes the characters in a novel. The audience wants to read about the *flaws*, *vulnerabilities*, and *fears* that shape characters' inner and outer lives.

Emotions

Audiences relate to characters who react emotionally to plot events. They want a front-row view of the progress through the process, the effect of the event on the inner person, and then the external outcome.

Code

Overcoming fear takes courage, and readers love characters who fight for what's right despite the odds. The character's code often becomes apparent when the hero solves the story's pressing problem after learning a lesson that leads to inner change.

Growth

Many readers like to see a pattern of growth the chief protagonist. If that person remains fixed, then growth in another featured character. If after the growth the person does not secure victory over an adversary or obstacle, then the audience wants to learn a valuable lesson from the cautionary tale.

Voice

Books written by top authors make characters' voices distinct. In the dialogue, it's easy to tell one voice from another even with fewer action beats (e.g., Dorothy said) that identify who is speaking.

Consistency

Audiences expect characters to think, decide, speak, and act consistently with their established personalities and motivations. When the people in the book do inconsistent things that don't support the overall storyline, many ditch that book and move on to a different author's works.

Story Characters Development

Readers demand believable *personalities, histories, and motivations*. Top writers go beyond physical appearances and delve into the inner person. They explore the attributes and backstories that drive realistic *thoughts, choices, speech, and actions*. However, character development is a balancing act. If you give readers too much or too little information, the audience may lose interest and start skimming. That's why many writers use the **Enneagram of Personality** to develop characters.

What Is the Enneagram of Personality?

The Enneagram of Personality (aka Enneagram) describes interconnected patterns of how people see the world and manage their emotions. Since the 1950s, theorists have tested the Enneagram and documented their theories. In fiction, you can use this body of knowledge to create essential characters (e.g., villains, heroes, and supporting cast members). Use the Enneagram to develop characters who react to people and events with relatable emotions, traits, and behavior.

Enneagram Foundation

The Enneagram offers a foundation of nine distinct personalities.

- Each Enneagram type can exhibit nine traits, and the related behaviors range from optimal to sub-optimal.
 - When a character is under stress, an individual's demeanor and reactions can emulate negative traits.
 - When a character feels secure, traits can shift toward the positive traits, opening up even more possibilities.
 - Each of the nine Enneagram types provides a solid foundation of rich details useful for character development.
-

Example of Type 1 Enneagram Traits and Models

The first Enneagram type is **The Perfectionist**. In reaction to life's events, people reveal a combination of positive and negative traits, behaviors, and emotions. Here is a sample of the characteristics of **The Perfection**.

- **Positive Traits:** Conscientious and ethical, with a strong sense of right and wrong. The Type 1 often serves as teachers, crusaders, and change advocates. Above all, they strive to improve.
- **Negative Traits:** The Type 1 is afraid of making a mistake. So, they try to maintain high standards. For instance, they can slip into being critical with perfectionistic tendencies.
- **Enneagram Models:** To understand how the Enneagram plays out in life and on film, you can find detailed examples.

- **Public Personalities:** Examples of choices, speech, and actions include Nelson Mandela, Hillary Clinton, Martha Stewart, and Al Gore.
 - **Film Characters:** Examples of choices, speech, and actions include Gregory Peck in *Moby Dick*, Jessica Tandy in *Driving Miss Daisy*, Kevin Costner in *The Untouchables*, Helen Mirren in *The Queen*, and Harrison Ford in *The Mosquito Coast*.
-

Example of a Type 1 Antagonist Character

In the animated film, *Toy Story 2*, Al McWhiggin filled the role of antagonist, and his character was introduced to the audience with **Type 1 traits at a Development Level 5**.

- Shoppers at Al's Toy Barn appreciate a shopkeeper who exercises self-control and makes orderly choices. However, Al needs money, and steals Woody from the Davis family's garage sale.
- His traits and skills are perfect for restoring Woody to near-new condition, completing the set of Woody's Roundup toys sought by a foreign investor. But because Buzz Lightyear, Mr. Potato Head, Slinky Dog, Rex, and Hamm saw Al's crime, they set about rescuing Woody, disrupting the

planned sale and shifting Al's traits from "average" toward "unhealthy" behavior.

- The Type 1 traits drove decisions and behaviors, but things could have gone differently. For example, had the sale gone through as planned and Al felt secure, his traits could have remained unchanged, or even progressed toward healthy.

Example of a Type 1 Protagonist Character

The protagonist in *Toy Story 2*, Mr. Potato Head, was introduced with **Type 1 traits at a Development Level 5**.

- Mr. Potato Head, an essential character, helped rescue Woody from Al McWhiggin. Potato fancies himself a leader, which leads to some missteps. Because he likes things orderly, the mistakes cause the character's traits to progress toward unhealthy, showing Mr. Potato Head's flaws.
- For example, Mr. Potato Head is moody while interacting with Andy's other toys. When Woody accidentally pushes Buzz Lightyear out the window, Potato becomes condemnatory, accusing Woody of doing it on purpose.
- Despite some negative traits, Mr. Potato Head progresses toward "healthy" as the story unfolds, showing himself committed and strives to become the leader he envisions.

Five Character Development Steps

This workbook and its worksheet uses the Enneagram theory to lay a solid foundation of traits and behaviors for the most important characters in your story. The Development Levels (1-9) give you the details to show how characters' behavior spiral downward when exposed to stress and rise upward when the characters feel secure. Whether you use the entire process is your choice, but please keep in mind the details readers want.

Step 1: Identify the Enneagram Character Type

Use the **Character Type Identification** to pair a traits description from **Table 1** with the adjacent description from **Table 2**. Then use that pairing of the *alpha code* (e.g., *a.*, *b.*, *c.*) and the *numeric code* (i.e., *i.*, *ii.*, *iii.*) to identify from **Table 3** the **Type Number**, **Type name**, and **General (+/-) Traits**.

Step 2: Review the Character Type Description

Turn to the Type Number in the Character Handout, **Type (1-9) Descriptions**, and read the *synopsis*, *public personalities*, *film characters*, *overview*, *positive traits*, *negative traits*, *best behaviors*, *worst behaviors*, *basic fear*, *basic desire*, *key motivations*, *under stress behavior*, *feeling secure behavior*, *addictions*, and *development levels*.

Step 3: Select a Character Development Level

Select a **Development Level (1-9)** that you feel best conveys to readers the character's current traits and behaviors. *Note: This initial Development Level introduces the character to readers, and the writer chooses how those traits and behaviors may shift toward optimal or suboptimal as the story progresses.*

Step 4: Record a Character's "Snapshot" Description

Record the initial description of this fictional person in the **Snapshot** section of the **Character Profile Worksheet**.

Step 5: Complete the Story Characters Worksheet

Based on what you know so far, complete as much as you can of the entire Character Profile Worksheet. *Note: Keep adding and editing each character profile as your story unfolds.*

Start with the Most Important Characters

Not all characters have an equal influence on your story. Thus, prioritize your time by focusing on your Chief Protagonist and Chief Antagonist. Then develop the characters that have the most potential to shape the trajectory of the story (e.g., Love Interest, Love rival, Sidekick, Mentor, etc.).

Character Profile Worksheet Tips

You're free to use the Story Characters Worksheet as you choose. Adopt and adapt what works best for you and your story.

Section 1: Character Snapshot

Prompts for quick-reference descriptions. For example:

• Hair (e.g., color/style)?	• Clothing (e.g., fancy/plain)?
• Eye color?	• Noticeable Mannerisms?
• Physical build/strength?	• Voice (e.g., tone/pitch)?
• Unique features (e.g., glasses)	• Profession/Vocation?
• Appearance (e.g., neat/disheveled)?	• Story role (i.e., contribution)?

Section 2: Plot and Theme Influences

Questions regarding how the plot and theme affect this character and vice versa.

- How does the story's external problem influence this character?
- How does the story's goal (i.e., the "resolution" of the story's external problem) affect this character?
- What are the story's basic external stakes, and how does the character's relationship to external forces block achieving the story goal?
- What's at stake within the character, and what motivates the person despite the obstacle of some inner need?
- What motivates the character philosophically besides the external and internal stakes?

Section 3: Obstacles and Conflicts

Prompts that help you determine what will make this character interesting to readers.

- What is the internal obstacle that holds this character back?
- What is the change required for this character to move forward?
- What is the false belief held by this character that keeps them from seeing what needs to change?
- What caused this psychological scar (aka emotional wound) that hinders the character from moving forward?
- What keeps the character's emotional wound from healing (aka shard of glass)?
- What is this character's chief desire (i.e., personal goal)?
- What's notable about this character's feelings?
- What inspires this character to take action?
- What besides the basic fear (see: type profile) is this character afraid of?
- What are the internal stumbling blocks and struggles that keep this character from moving forward, and how do they affect this person?
- What serves as the external obstacle and strife that blocks achieving the story's goal, and how do those roadblocks affect this character?
- What is the universal (i.e., philosophical) truth and resulting strife this character must recognize before accepting the need to change?

Section 4: Motivations

Questions to draw out what will motivate the character to overcome the conflict or obstacle.

- What drives a character toward achieving the story's goal despite the opposing external forces?

- What motivation will continue to drive a character toward the *want* despite the inner *need* for change?
 - What universal truth inspires the character to change?
-

Section 5: Backstory

Even though this is the fifth section, many writers start with the character backstory and use those details to answer the questions in other sections.

- Key events as a preteen?
 - Significant physical, emotional, and spiritual events as a teen?
 - Events that marked this character as an adult?
 - Which parts of these events will show up as the character's backstory, and how will the rest of those events help the writer choose what to share?
-

Section 6: Voice

Create samples of this character's voice to maintain consistency as the story unfolds.

- How does this character speak when feeling stressed? *Note: Characters in films are useful to see and hear their reactions to stress.*
 - How does this character speak when feeling secure? *Note: Researching public personalities, including videos and recordings, is helpful in understanding how Enneagram types come across when they feel secure.*
-

Section 7: Enneagram Type and Details

You can always refer to the Enneagram Overviews in the Characters Handout, but it's better to adapt and save the language to fit your story in the worksheets for each essential character.

• Synopsis	• Their Basic Fear
• Public Personalities	• Their Basic Desire
• Film Characters	• Key Motivation
• Positive Traits	• Behavior When Under Stress
• Negative Traits	• Behavior When Feeling Secure
• When They're at Their Best	• Addictions
• When They're at Their Worst	• Initial Development Level

Section 8: Character Arc

For characters that show behavioral growth or regression, use the Story Spine's beats to map the Development Levels Arc.

1. HOOK	5. PLUNGE INTO 3
2. TRIGGER	6. CLIMAX
3. THRUST INTO 2	7. RESOLUTION
4. MIDPOINT	

More Art Than Science

Reading about what readers want, answering dozens of profile questions, can make character development feel overwhelming. Keep it super simple by concentrating first on developing characters based on what you like to read. As your story unfolds, evaluate your essential characters to make sure you're giving readers what they want.

- | | |
|----------------|---------------|
| ✓ Bonding | ✓ Code |
| ✓ Authenticity | ✓ Growth |
| ✓ Relatable | ✓ Voice |
| ✓ Emotions | ✓ Consistency |

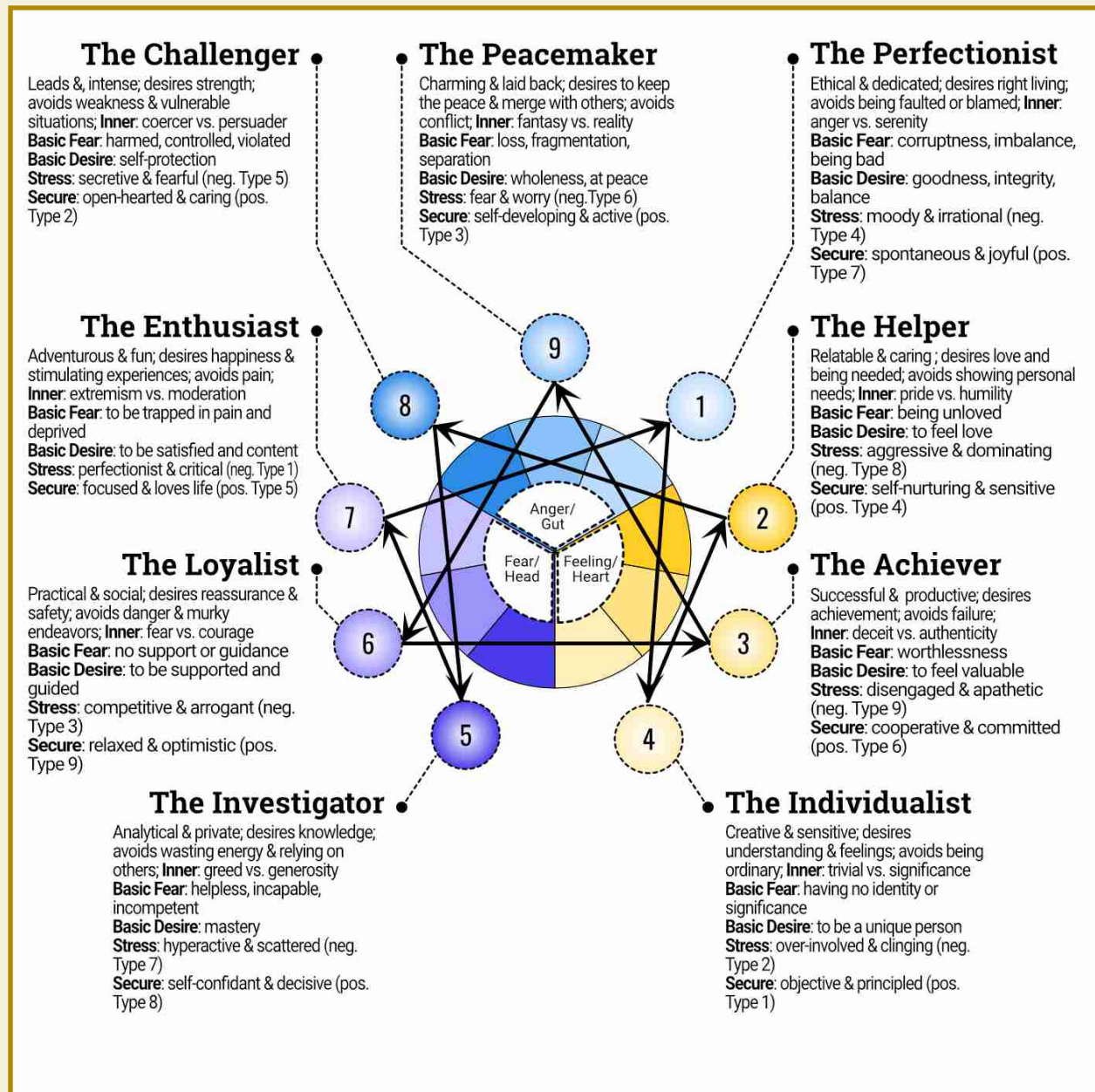
An Iterative Process

Character development is an iterative process. Like a first draft, writers hone character profiles as the story unfolds, and that's okay. Creating and updating a profile of your essential character means you change them as needed and refer to them to promote consistency. It's as if you have the personal diary of each character who will help shape your story. Taking the time to record and save updates will pay off as you edit your book.

ENNEAGRAM: Infographics

These illustrations provide a glimpse of how the Enneagram works. Full-sized images (8.5 x 11.0 inch) are shown in the infographics handout.

Enneagram Types and Relationships



Enneagram Type Identification

Identify Character Type in Table 3 based on paired descriptions from Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1

- a.** I'm fairly independent and assertive, taking on life directly as it comes. Making things happen is what I set goals for. I don't like to sit idle and instead, strive to accomplish big things with an impact. I don't seek confrontation, but won't shy away from conflict. Mostly, I know what I want and pursue it, working and playing hard.
- b.** I'm mostly quiet and don't mind being by myself. In social settings, I don't seek attention, and seldom assert myself. I'm more of a follower and prefer to contribute than compete. Those who know me say I'm a dreamer, and they're probably right because I get excited imagining life's possibilities. I'm comfortable being still rather than active all the time.
- c.** Being responsible and committed all the time is something I lean towards. I agonize over situations where I'm unable to carry out my commitments and fulfill expectations. I strive to let people know I'm available to help, and will do what I perceive as best for them. That includes making personal sacrifices, even if others don't realize what I've done for them. Because of my sense of responsibility and commitments, I do what needs to be done first before taking time for myself.

Table 2

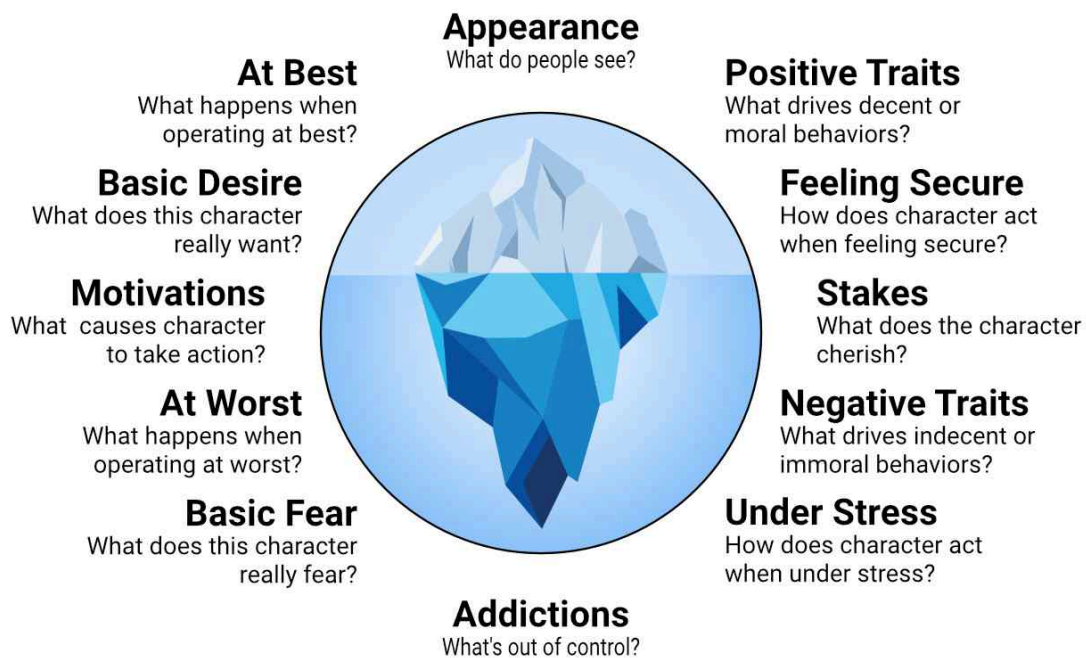
- i.** My general perspective is positive, believing things will work out and usually for the best. Mostly, I pursue life with enthusiasm, finding various ways to keep busy. I socialize and strive to make others happy, sharing my happiness even when I don't feel great. Because of striving for happiness, I delay dealing with issues, and that sometimes comes back to cause even bigger problems.
- ii.** No doubt about it, I have powerful feelings about things, and those around me know it. I can be guarded, but I'm actually more sensitive than others perceive. I seek to know how others see me and whether they stand with or against me. When things aren't going the way I planned, I want others around me to get riled up, too. I don't like to be told what to do, and I'll decide whether to follow or skirt the rules.
- iii.** I prefer self-control and logic rather than dealing with emotions. I strive for efficiency and perfection, so I prefer to work independently. When tackling problems and conflicts, I avoid letting my emotions influence the situation. People sometimes see me as too detached, but that's not quite accurate because I don't want emotions to steal my focus on what matters most to me. I tend to hide my feelings when someone gets the better of me.

Table 3

Pairing:	Type:	Type Name and General (+ / -) Traits:
a. + i.	7	The Enthusiast: (+) Upbeat, accomplished; (-) impulsive
a. + ii.	8	The Challenger: (+) Self-confident, decisive; (-) domineering
a. + iii.	3	The Achiever: (+) Adaptable, ambitious; (-) image-conscious
b. + i.	9	The Peacemaker: (+) Receptive, reassuring; (-) complacent
b. + ii.	4	The Individualist: (+) Intuitive, aesthetic; (-) self-absorbed
b. + iii.	5	The Investigator: (+) Perceptive, innovative; (-) detached
c. + i.	2	The Helper: (+) Caring, generous; (-) possessive
c. + ii.	6	The Loyalist: (+) Engaging, responsible; (-) defensive
c. + iii.	1	The Perfectionist: (+) Rational, principled; (-) self-controlled

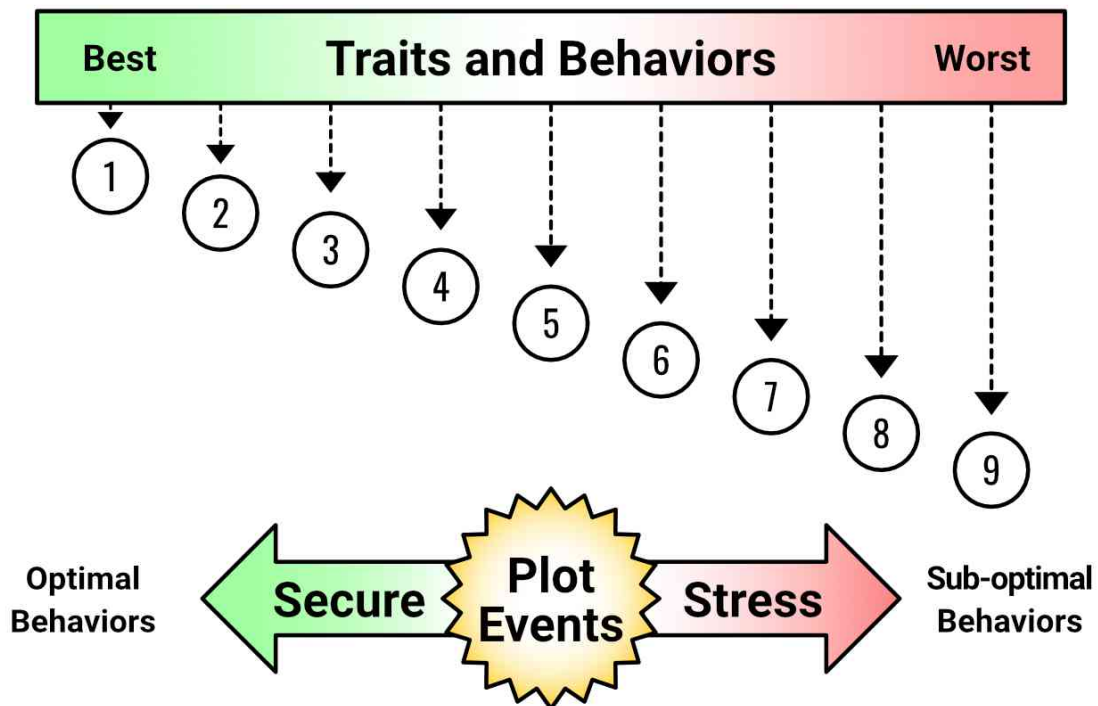
Enneagram Details

Go deep below the surface and
reveal the character's true nature.



Enneagram Development Levels

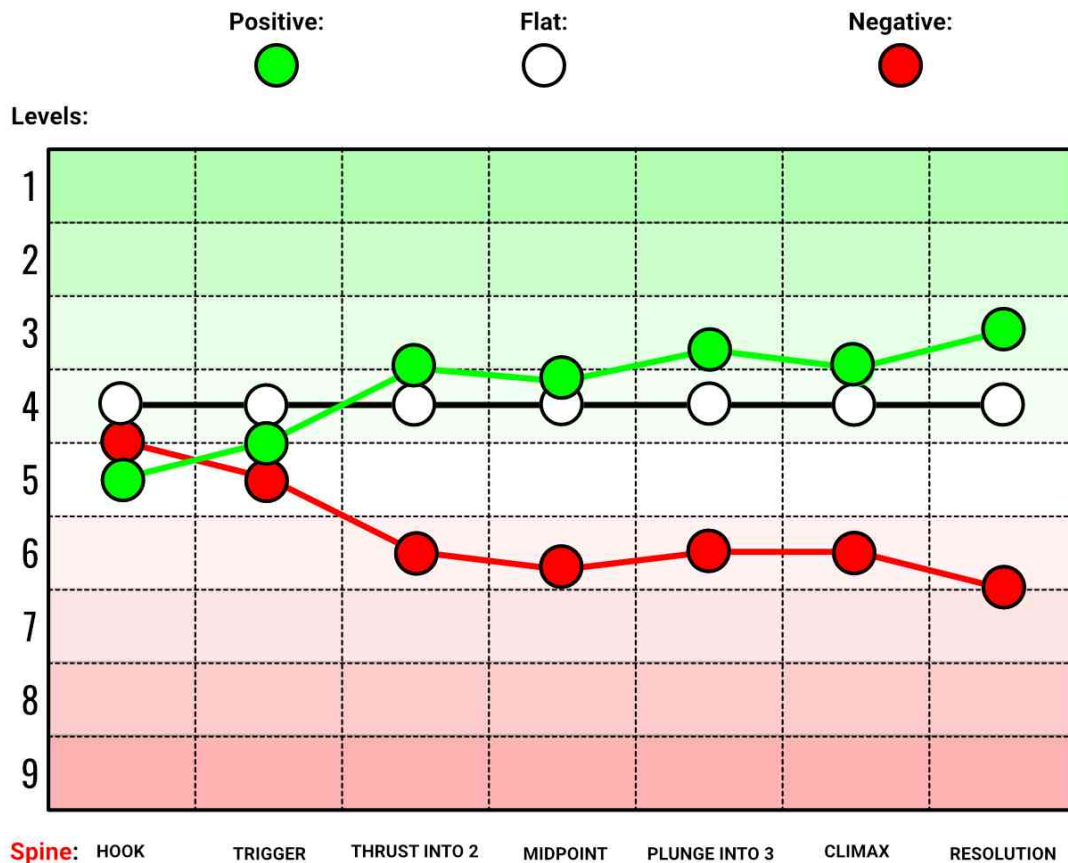
Pick a character's starting development level and show changes in "Best" and "Worse" Traits and Behaviors based on the plot events.



Stress can influence a character's *thoughts, choices, speech, and actions*. Use the Development Levels to describe the reactions to problems, conflicts, and obstacles.

Enneagram Character Arc

Plot events cause conflicts, and can motivate changes in characters' traits and behaviors.



Enneagram Character Development Matrix

		<- OPTIMAL			<- MIDRANGE ->		SUB-OPTIMAL ->			
Type:	Levels:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
G U T	8. THE CHALLENGER <i>Externalizes Anger</i> Stress: secretive/fearful Secure: open-hearted/caring	Self-restrained, magnanimous, merciful, forbearing	Self-assertive, self-confident, strong	Decisive, authoritative, commanding	Self-sufficient, enterprising, pragmatic,	Domineering, (environment & others), self-promoting	Combative, intimidating	Defiant, ruthless, dictatorial	Delusional, over-extended	Dangerous, destructive, vengeful, barbaric, murderous
	9. THE PEACEMAKER <i>Forgets Anger</i> Stress: anxious/worried Secure: self-developing/active	Indomitable and all-embracing	Deeply receptive, accepting, unselfconscious	Optimistic, reassuring, supportive	Fear conflicts, self-effacing, and accommodating	Active, but disengaged, unreflective, inattentive	Distant from problems, a people pleaser	Highly repressed, undeveloped, ineffectual	Dissociated, disoriented	Severely disoriented, catatonic
	1. THE PERFECTIONIST <i>Internalizes Anger</i> Stress: moody/irrational Secure: spontaneous/joyful	Extraordinarily wise, discerning, realistic, humane	Conscientious, highly moral, intensely aware of right and wrong	Extremely Principled, fair-minded, responsible	Idealistic, striving, dissatisfied with reality	Afraid of mistakes, consistent, orderly, rigid, workaholic	Critical, picky, judgmental, impatient	Dogmatic, self-righteous, inflexible	Obsessive, contradictory, hypocritical	Condemnatory, punitive, cruel
H A R	2. THE HELPER <i>Feels for Others</i> Stress: aggressive/domineering Secure: self-nurturing/sensitive	Deeply unselfish, humble, altruistic	Empathetic, compassionate, feeling for others	Encouraging, appreciative, nurturing	Well-intentioned, people-pleaser, overly friendly	Overly intimate, intrusive, needy, possessive	Increasingly self-important, self-satisfied, overbearing	Self-justifying, manipulative, self-serving	Entitled, coercive, demanding	Resentful, angry, victimized, a burden to others
	3. THE ACHIEVER <i>Unaware of Feelings</i> Stress: disengaged/apathetic Secure: cooperative/committed	Self-accepting, inner-directed, authentic	Self-assured, energetic, competent	Ambitious (self-improvement), motivated, effective	Success-oriented, driven, scornful of failure	Image-conscious, pragmatic, efficient, insincere	Self-promoting, narcissistic, arrogant	Fearful of failure and humiliation, jealous of others	Devious, duplicitous, opportunistic, untrustworthy	Vindictive, monomaniacal, relentless, destructive of others
	4. THE INDIVIDUALIST <i>Feels for Self</i> Stress: over-involved/clinging Secure: objective/principled	Profoundly creative, inspired, self-renewing, regenerating	Self-aware, introspective, intuitive, sensitive, tactful	Highly personal, individualistic, authentic	Focused on the romantic and artistic aspects of life, individualistic	Fixated on feelings, self-absorbed, introverted, temperamental	Self-indulgent, dreamer, decadent, disdainful	Self-inhibited, self-hatred, alienates self from others	Delusional, tormented by self-contempt, blameful	desperate, hopeless, self-destructive,
H E A D	5. THE INVESTIGATOR <i>Externalizes Fear</i> Stress: hyperactive/scattered Secure: self-confidant/decisive	Visionary, open-minded, pioneer	Perceptive, insightful, alert, curious, engrossed	Masterful, knowledgeable, innovative, independent, whimsical	Conceptual, modeler, builder, resourceful, specialized	Detached, preoccupied, detached, high strung, intense	Antagonistic, extreme, provocative, abrasive, cynical	Reclusive, isolated, eccentric, nihilistic	Threatened by competing ideas, horrified, delirious	Detached from reality, deranged, self-destructive
	6. THE LOYALIST <i>Internalizes Fear</i> Stress: competitive/ Secure: relaxed/optimistic	Self-reliant, trusting, cooperative, courageous	Engaging, appealing, endearing, lovable, reliable, affectionate,	Dedicated, builder of communities, responsible, trustworthy	Dutiful, loyal, vigilant, proactive	Ambivalent, self-diligent, passive-aggressive	Insecure, sarcastic, belligerent, blameful, authoritarian	Panicky, volatile, self-disparaging, unreliable	Paranoid, antagonistic, irrational, violence prone	Hysterical, self-abasing, self-destructive
	7. THE ENTHUSIAST <i>Forgets Fear</i> Stress: perfectionist/critical Secure: focused/loves life	Awed by life, joyful, ecstatic, satisfied	Responsive, excitable, cheerful, enthusiastic	Practical, realistic, productive, prolific	Restless, adventurous, worldly wise, somewhat unfocused	Hyperactive, uninhibited, flamboyant, witty	Excessive, unsatisfied, self-centered, materialistic, greedy	Anxious, impulsive, depraved, offensive, abusive	Flighty, impulsive, frustrated, moody, compulsive actions	Exhausted, overwhelmed, paralyzed, panic stricken