

## Sample Bio

I have pages of notes on a character named *Russell Prentice*. The bio I've placed here should be enough to give you an idea of how to use your interview notes to touch on each of the categories discussed earlier.

Russell Prentice is the low-key family law attorney in a quiet midwestern town. He's on a first-name-basis with every adult for miles around, most of whom would never think to call him "Russ." Rumor has it that he married his high-school sweetheart, who was killed by a drunk driver two years later, but he's a closed book when it comes to his past or personal life—at least with most people. Now in his mid-50s, he is confident, occasionally stubborn, intuitive by nature, analytical by training, always slightly on guard. His mobile phone is always on—even in bed with Marybeth, who has been his housekeeper and companion for the last ten years. She is the only one who knows the internal shadow he covers with his bright smile and hearty handshake. People think they know what he means when they see the sign on his law firm door that reads: "Laws will be broken, and that's why we're here."

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She is Past President of Detroit Working Writers, and an avid member of Toastmasters International.

Linda founded The Write Concept, Inc., a marketing communications & publishing company, in 2000. Her business clients have included Chrysler Corporation, Valeo Corporation, The Crittenton Hospital Medical Center Foundation, HAVEN, Demp Coaching, Integration Systems Management, The Royal Park Hotel, Golson Books Ltd, and hundreds of small businesses throughout Michigan.

# Interviewing Your Characters

an exploratory workshop  
for writers of fiction

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## Identity Questions

Establish the stereotypical persona. The answers are details that may or may not be stated in your story, but will help you, as a writer, portray them with greater depth.

1. What is your full name? Is there significance to the name?
2. Does you have a nickname? Do you like it or detest it? How did you come to be called by this nickname?
3. Heritage / religion / political affiliation / social class/ education?
4. What is your Birthdate, Birth place, hair color, eye color, height, weight, sexual identity, and are you active or celibate?
5. Identifying marks such as birthmarks or tattoos. If tats, what, where on the body, when done, and why?
6. What family traits do you carry?
7. Describe the space and the town/city in which you live. What do you love and hate about it?

## Psychological Questions

Establish a baseline psychological profile that can be of great benefit at various plot points. Remember that you can go back and re-interview your character if you find them changing behind your back!

1. List three adjectives that describe you.
2. What is your greatest flaw and greatest strength?
3. What part of yourself do you want to change?
4. Idiosyncrasies / unusual habits / dominant traits / repetitive phrases
5. How do you handle stress and pressure?
6. What emotions do you suppress?
7. What is your greatest fear?

## Relationship Questions

If your character has a “history” that relates to the way he or she shows up in your story, do a second full profile of them in that situation.

As you proceed to build each of your characters, you will have to refer back to these questions. You may find that one character defines their relationship with another as “Completely honest and supportive,” while the other says “I wouldn’t trust her if my life depended on it.”

1. Parents names and occupations. Describe your relationship with them.
2. Sibling names and occupations. Describe your relationship with them.
3. Marital status. How many times married, divorced, etc. Why?
4. Name and describe your three best friends.
5. What is your relationship to the other characters in the story, and how do you feel about each of them?
6. Who is your hero, and why?
7. Describe “the one that got away”

## Occupational Questions

Work can define or deny a person’s identity, psychology, and relationships. What does your character “do”? Is this what they love to do, or are they stuck in a job they hate and have no hope of leaving? How does their employment—or lack of employment—play into the story line and relationships with other characters?

1. Current occupation & salary.
2. Where do you stand in the hierarchy of your company?
3. What do you love, like, dislike, hate about your work?
4. What is your relationship with your managers and co-workers?
5. (OR) What is your relationship with your employees?
6. What is your “dream job”?
7. How does your occupation fit into the story?

## Life Experience Questions

Does your character have a favorite beer, or a “go to” food when things get tough? What happy events shaped their life and attitude, or were they horrid events? What do these life experiences have to do with their psychological profile and their relationships?

1. Favorite Food or drink
2. First Love / Worst Love
3. Most exciting life experience
4. Most traumatic life experience
5. Most significant life experience
6. Favorite film or book (and why)
7. Describe your life in elementary school, high school, college