

Character Interviews

By Jenai May

You know that coworker who only ever talks about herself, never asks you a single question, yet always seems to have opinions ready for you? After several years, and countless talking sessions, she assumes that she knows you. But how far can assumptions carry anyone? Not very far, and certainly not with much accuracy.

That's why I don't just create my characters; I get to know them. I ask questions, and most importantly, I listen.

These conversations aren't about me. I'm not trying to figure out what I want. Instead, I'm discovering my characters' own truths. When I trust my characters to be vulnerable and honest, they offer candid gems in return, making my storytelling far richer.

Their passions, moods, fears, talents, quirks, faults, and habits all tickle their way into my story. These qualities are far more valuable to character development than any details I could simply make up.

I usually conduct character interviews alone. But when a friend runs the interview, I don't know the questions ahead of time — and I love that!

Below are several questions that you can ask your characters. Your task is to step into your character's head and become your character, then write the answers through their voice.

Jenai's Favorite 10 Character Interview Questions

1. What is one undesirable habit you wish you could overcome? How might you do it?
2. What is the most common compliment you receive? Do you agree? Why or why not?
3. What about yourself makes you feel the most embarrassed or self-conscious?
4. Who or what do you fear losing the most? Why?
5. What is your greatest worry for your future or the future of the world?
6. What is your comfort food? What do you eat when you're stressed, sick, depressed, or bored? How did these foods become sources of comfort? Do you have access to them when you need them?

7. What does your perfect day look like?
8. What if you got everything you thought you wanted, but then discovered you didn't want it at all?
9. What is something that truly matters to you that you worry others will think is silly?
10. What is one thing you would never do, think, or say? (answer for all three)

5 Questions to Determine Your Character's Age

As we discover more about our character, details we assume we know about them sometimes shift and change. Even their age might change. So, to prevent a mid-story crisis, I sometimes ask my character a few extra questions to confirm their age and stage in life. For these questions, I refer to the timespan of your story as the "journey."

1. What skills and wisdom might your journey demand from you? Are you well-equipped? Why or why not?
2. Are you struggling to relate to someone because of their age? If so, were they older or younger than you? By how many years?
3. At the very beginning of your journey, how much baggage and/or trauma will you be carrying? What kind? How long has it taken you to acquire it?
4. What might you learn for the very first time over the course of your journey?
5. Can your body readily meet the demands of the journey? Why or why not?