

Meet your characters first... They're your story.

Join Best-selling, Romantic Times award-winning author Anna DeStefano to discuss how to plan your next story by researching and plotting character growth--BEFORE you write the first word

1. Where you come from is half the battle

Add more punch to a character's present. Motivate from the past.

While your story pacing thrives on the here and now, so much of a character's motivation is anchored in the past we never see.

Start with your inciting incident, map out your black moment, then create the backstory that will take your plot to a whole new level.

No one needs to understand your character's past as much as you.

Including too much of backstory is the kiss of death to any manuscript. But that doesn't let you off the hook as an author.

Researching a character's backstory frees them (and you) to move forward. Each scene must build on the last, and on the past.

2. Scenes (and characters) are built, they don't just happen

The best way to be a successful "organic" writer, whose characters rip the story out of your hands and run with it, is to have a game plan.

Your characters must change with each scene.

Always keep the beginning, middle, and end of their journeys in mind. Then torture them with your plot ;o)

Get good at recognizing your characters' turning points, and they'll surprise you every time.

3. Work hard for those surprises--revisions are good for your spontaneity

Your characters are reborn each time you learn a bit more about what they need.

Give yourself credit for learning as you go along. Bang out that first draft, then go back for some intuitive, spontaneous character revisions.

Interesting characters may emerge organically in your first draft. Character depth can take a trip or two back to the well to conquer.

If you say you don't like revisions, but your characters and stories aren't where you want them, it's time to bite the bullet.

Planning is great. Being an organic, spontaneous writer is an awesome gift. But there's work to be done in your stories, so get busy.

4. Get busy coming up with your own plan

Any of this sounding good? Then let's get specific.

Here's one of my character planning documents (see attached). Let's see what you can learn about one of your current projects.

Mapping your character and plot-threads through the beginning, middle, and end of your story highlights weak areas that need fleshing out.

Know where your characters are going--this frees them to get there in some amazing ways.

Use your planning tools to create your next pitch or synopsis.

This type of high-level character summary gives you a new command of exactly where your story is going. Get to know your characters, and your comfort level discussing your work with others will increase.

5. Commit to the Process of Understanding Your Characters Better

Plotting and charting may not be your thing, but understanding what works in your stories (and what doesn't) is required if you want to improve.

Where do your ideas and characters come from?

What brings your moments of inspiration to life?

What can you do to reproduce what's working for you now in your next project, not to mention improve what's not.

Know your patterns, know your weaknesses, then put them to good use in your next project.

Always play on your strengths--where your writing gifts thrive. But never forget that change is good. Always stretch a little with each new project.

Pick a new character type that you've never explored.

Break a story development rut.

Dare to explore a different direction in your character growth.

Suggested Reading

Character resources:

The Complete Writer's Guide to Heroes & Heroines; Sixteen Master Archetypes

Tami D. Cowden, Caro LaFever, Sue Vidars

Please Understand Me II: Temperament, Character, Intelligence

David Kiersey

Characters and Viewpoint (Orson Scott Card; part of the Writer's Digest)

Orson Scott Card (Writer's Digest)

Dynamic Characters

Nancy Kress

Creating Characters: How to Build Story People

Dwight Swain

You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation

Deborah Tanner

Plotting resources:

Goal, Motivation, and Conflict: The Building Blocks of Good Fiction

Debra Dixon

Story: Substance, Structure, Style, and Principles of Screenwriting

Robert McKee

Writing the Breakout Novel: Insider advice for taking your fiction to the next level

Donald Maass

The Screenwriter's Workbook

Syd Field

Techniques of the Selling Writer

Dwight V. Swain

Bio

Anna DeStefano

Nationally best-selling, award-winning romance author Anna DeStefano (www.annawrites.com) is the president of Georgia Romance Writers (GRW), a group of over 300 published authors and aspiring writers that meets monthly in Atlanta.

Anna has successfully channeled her skills as a Senior Tech Writer into the more creative field of writing contemporary fiction. A GA Tech honors graduate with 10 years of experience working in Corporate IT, Anna applies the more analytical side of her personality to the study of the craft of storytelling, but her imagination rules when it's time to let the planning go and write.

The result—four award-winning novels published since 2004, with three more to be released in 2007, and nearly half a million copies of her books in print in over 6 different languages. Her interactive workshops on the writing process—plotting through character, improvisation, and rewriting—regularly attract standing-room-only crowds wherever she speaks.

Visit Anna at www.annawrites.com for more information about her emotional, heartwarming books—she has three out this year and is launching a new Superromance series, Atlanta Heroes, in October. She's constantly giving away fun prizes—purses!—on her website and her blog, www.annadestefano.blogspot.com.

General issues:

-

Hero			Heroine		
Beginning	Middle	End	Beginning	Middle	End

Sample: Character Plotting

General issues:

- Up front, show each character securing their own "safe" place, through different, opposing means.

Hero			Heroine		
Beginning	Middle	End	Beginning	Middle	End
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chief 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chief with a big distraction at home. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chief using his success to make it possible for his family to be his priority. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nurturer and spunky kid (protecting herself). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nurturer who's failing. Can't give grandmother the security she needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • She's trusted again, and is burned. Will she fight back, or fight to believe?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In control of the world and his lost soul. He's a good provider/protector for those who are important to him. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He has to modify his approach to work and his job. His new world must accommodate Daniel. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • His money and success are now working for him, giving him the freedom to enjoy/discover the rest of his life. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has learned to hide her disappointment/personal dreams and goals behind laughter, hard work, and her sunny personality. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can't hide behind her sunny personality with Nick and Daniel. • They break through her defenses every time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daniel's schedule forces him to change (protective, rather than attaching). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He reasserted control, yet has found another part of life he wants/needs (for himself and Daniel?). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Control is not as important now as the happiness he finds as he lets go 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He begins to notice a yearning for his new life with Daniel, when he returns to his own "world" of business. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Admires/resents how natural nurturing is his for his neighbor(s). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He's learned to let himself nurture--not just provide and protect. • It's left him open to being hurt, but he's no longer closed off and alone. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •