

MAJIK PRESS / FREE WRITING WORKBOOK

BEAUTIFULLY FLAWED

The Character Contradictions Workbook

Because perfect characters are boring.
Complicated characters are unforgettable.

10 guided exercises • Reusable worksheets • Real character depth

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START HERE

A Character Is Not a Checklist

An interesting character can be generous and jealous, brave and avoidant, loyal and dishonest. The key is not to assign random opposing traits. It is to understand why both are true.

THE WORKING PRINCIPLE

A contradiction becomes believable when it grows from a need, fear, value, history, or relationship. Show it through choices - especially when those choices cost something.

HOW TO USE THIS WORKBOOK

- Choose one character from a work in progress, or invent one as you go.
- Answer with specific behavior rather than adjectives.
- Look for moments where two genuine needs collide.
- Turn at least one answer into a scene, not just a biography.

YOUR CHARACTER

Name / role in the story

One-sentence description of their central conflict

EXERCISE 01

The Face They Show

Most characters have a public version of themselves. That version may be sincere, carefully performed, or both.

EXAMPLE

Mara is the friend who always has a joke ready. She wants everyone to believe she is impossible to hurt, so she changes the subject whenever someone asks if she is okay.

What three words would strangers use to describe this character?

Which of those impressions does the character deliberately encourage?

What do they do when someone gets too close to the truth?

Write a line of dialogue that sounds confident but hides insecurity.

EXERCISE 02

The Truth Beneath

A private truth is more compelling when it affects decisions. A secret that never changes behavior is just trivia.

TRY THIS

Instead of writing "He is secretly lonely," identify the action loneliness produces: he keeps the group chat alive long after everyone else wants to sleep.

What does your character privately fear people would think if they knew the truth?

What everyday habit reveals that fear without explaining it?

Who has noticed the truth? Why have they stayed silent?

What situation could make the secret impossible to hide?

EXERCISE 03

Wants vs. Needs

A want drives action. A need creates the possibility of change. They often pull a character in opposite directions.

EXAMPLE

Jonah wants to win the scholarship and leave town. He needs to accept that depending on others is not the same as being weak. His obsession with independence threatens the friendships that might help him succeed.

Visible goal: What does the character say they want?

Emotional need: What truth or skill would help them grow?

What are they willing to sacrifice to get the want?

How does pursuing the want keep them from meeting the need?

EXERCISE 04

The Contradiction Matrix

Choose two traits that appear to clash. Then identify the conditions that bring out each one.

EXAMPLE

Protective / controlling: Lena protects her younger brother when he is in danger, but also tries to control his harmless choices because she cannot tolerate uncertainty.

Trait A: What quality does the character genuinely possess?

Trait B: What apparently opposite quality is also true?

When does Trait A appear? Name a specific trigger.

When does Trait B appear? Name a different trigger.

What shared fear or value explains BOTH traits?

EXERCISE 05

The Lie They Believe

Characters often protect themselves with a belief that once made sense but no longer serves them.

EXAMPLE

"If I ask for help, I will owe someone forever." This belief makes Nia fiercely capable and unnecessarily isolated. Her strength and her weakness share the same root.

Complete the sentence: "I must never _____ because _____."

What experience taught the character this belief?

How does the belief help them survive or succeed?

How does the same belief hurt them or someone they love?

What evidence could finally challenge the belief?

EXERCISE 06

The Hypocrisy Test

Here is where characters get gloriously messy. Find a behavior your character condemns in others but excuses in themselves.

EXAMPLE

Drew hates being lied to. Yet he withholds information "for everyone's protection." He sees his silence as responsibility and everyone else's silence as betrayal.

What behavior does your character judge harshly in others?

When do they do something similar?

What justification do they use for their own behavior?

Who is most likely to call them out?

Write the moment they are confronted. Do they deny, deflect, or admit it?

EXERCISE 07

Relationships as Mirrors

A character does not need to act identically with every person. Different relationships expose different parts of the same personality.

EXAMPLE

Ari is blunt with her best friend, careful around her father, and unusually gentle with the classmate everyone else avoids. None of those versions is fake.

With someone they trust: What do they allow themselves to show?

With someone they fear disappointing: What do they conceal?

With someone they resent: What trait becomes exaggerated?

Who brings out their best quality AND their worst?

Write the same request as dialogue to two different people.

EXERCISE 08

The Breaking Point

Pressure reveals priorities. A strong stress test forces your character to choose between two things they genuinely value.

THE TEST

Your character can keep a promise or protect someone they love - but not both. Neither choice is harmless. Make the consequences concrete.

Value one: What would the character hate to betray?

Value two: What matters just as much?

What event makes it impossible to preserve both?

What do they choose, and what does it cost?

EXERCISE 09

Put It on the Page

Readers do not experience your character profile. They experience scenes. Choose one prompt below and write 150-300 words.

1. Your character gives excellent advice they refuse to follow.
2. They receive the apology they always wanted - and cannot accept it.
3. They defend someone publicly, then criticize that person in private.
4. They must ask for help from the person they least want to need.
5. Someone praises them for a quality they know has a darker side.

SCENE DRAFT / NOTES

EXERCISE 10

Character Profile + Next Steps

Use this one-page summary for any character. The goal is not to fill every blank perfectly; it is to discover what creates believable choices.

Character name / story

Public persona vs. private truth

Want vs. need

Two conflicting traits + their shared root

The lie they believe

The hypocrisy they justify

The relationship that exposes them

The choice that will change them
