



# Characters and conflicts



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Any good story always contains a few mandatory elements. And the first one is **The Main Character**. The main character is the one around whom the story is being developed. It doesn't have to be a person or even a creature. A conditional character might be a problem, for example, air pollution, the problem of terrorism or domestic violence.

The next elements are the **Turning Point and Decision**. Something happens in the life of the main character and he/she is forced to make a decision. This will suddenly change the plot. For example, Red Riding Hood decided to carry pies for her sick Grandma even through the scary forest. If she'd stayed at home – the story would never happen.

The next element is the **Obstacle** on the way to a decision. This is what prevents the main character to carry out his/her intention. In the case of Red Riding Hood – it's a meeting with The Gray Wolf, who is trying to eat her up. As you see, this situation is not regular.

The next element is **Success or Failure**. The main character overcomes the obstacle and becomes a winner or a loser. In the case of Red Riding Hood, we are waiting for a happy ending: the character overcame the obstacle and was not eaten.

Different obstacles and overcomings can be repeated one by one, and there might be a number of stories of successes or losses.

And the final piece of the story is the **Output**. It is, in a way, the Main Idea. In the case of Red Riding Hood, the output is “do not tell much about yourself to strangers”. Based on this output the reader, viewer or listener is up to perform the selected Targeted action. In the case of this tale, the main goal is to tell the story to the children so that they are more .

## HOW TO CHOOSE THE CHARACTER

The main character is the most important link, as they are in the center of the story, and **the plot develops around them**. Your story can include one character or a number of them.

Sometimes the character can be **unspecific** – for example, a problem or phenomenon. The difficulty is that the ephemeral hero is more difficult to perceive. Therefore, if you can put a real hero to your story – we advise you not to miss this opportunity. It is always more exciting to learn something about a human than about an abstract problem.

Try to show your problem through the prism of a person, his life and real circumstances. Your spectator will be willing to study it to the end. For example, let's consider the text about the dangers of plastic. You can turn a reader into a character if you connect the problem to them personally (for instance, like in this article: [How microplastics are infiltrating the food you eat](#)).

You also can start the story using another character. For the mentioned above example, it might be a turtle that had entangled in plastic bags and barely escaped death. Or you can start with the story of an ordinary sailor who lives on that seashore. The main thing is to think about **who might be the emotional character** of your story. There are lots of options, and they always make the story more breathtaking.

What if there is no character? The first thing to do is to look for an example illustrating the conflict. Maybe there are opinion leaders who you can talk with. But there is an important nuance! Be careful with sensitive issues. Make sure that the character does not make the story frivolous. It can reduce the value of the problem or the human experience. In such stories, it's better to look for real people as examples.

One more tip to do if there is no real character – to create **a fictional character**. This is more relevant for cultural and educational projects, but can work for CSOs as well.

The next important step is to **make your character familiar to the people**. You need to fill them with emotions and experiences – some human features. Describe their personality and the circumstances of life in a way so that the reader can vividly imagine your character. Think about what you can use to make your character closer to your target audience.

Maybe the spectator of your story will be close to the emotions of the hero – fear, anger, feeling of injustice. Maybe it is the situation they find themselves in or the specific place. Think about what could be the connection and pay attention to it in your story.

## HOW TO CREATE A CONFLICT

The conflict is a clash of opposite interests. That's what makes the story bright. If the Grey Wolf met up with a Red Riding Hood and accompanied her to share the cakes with the Grandma – you'd never heard about that story.

The conflict can be internal or external. **Internal** conflict is a struggle within the hero or fighting old attitudes with new ones. It might be a struggle between the formal experience and the new reality.

**External** conflict puts a character against something or someone they can't control (for instance, nature or a villain).

An important nuance: you have to **make the conflict visible**. You should sharpen the confrontation. Add some details to the description to make the conflict obvious to the viewer.

Between what sides can there be a conflict?

- The first type is old versus new.
- The second option is the opposition of ignorance and enlightenment.
- And the third option is the confrontation of risk and security.

In general, **conflict can appear between anything and anything.**

For sure, you can talk about the problem without any conflict. But the conflict, firstly, illustrates the situation and allows us to imagine it. The audience immerses into the story and this pushes it to the target action we'd distinguished at the very start.

And secondly, the conflict works as a hook that catches the attention of the spectator. In the end, every person seeing our story is dying to know which side eventually won.