

CHARACTER SKETCH TEMPLATE

Part One: Get to Know Them

Use the questions below to establish the five components of your character's appearance.

The Faults // Notes:

What do I not like about my body?

Is my hair difficult to tame?

Am I sick or injured?

Do I have any scars?

Does my body seem disproportioned?

Do I have acne or other skin issues?

Do I smell bad or bite my nails?

Do I consider myself too skinny or too fat?

Do people make fun of any part of my body?

CHARACTER SKETCH TEMPLATE

Part One: Get to Know Them

Use the questions below to establish the five components of your character's appearance.

The Body Language // Notes:

Do I have poor posture?

Am I clumsy or graceful?

Do I look people in the eye when I talk to them?

Describe my walking gait.

What do I do with my hands?

Do I smile freely or am I reserved?

Am I courteous in public (i.e. hold doors, etc.)?

Do I have any nervous ticks?

What do I do when I am bored?

CHARACTER SKETCH TEMPLATE

Part Two: How to Write Them

Use the tips below to help establish how you'll reveal your character's appearance in your novel.

Remember // Be Subtle.

By now, you should have a self-perception and several external perceptions for each of your characters. Each perception is probably about a paragraph long and jam-packed with visual information. So how do you work all that information into your story?

Slowly. Subtly. Sparingly. Don't ever copy and paste that paragraph right into your story, or you're doomed.

Readers don't like to deviate from the action to read infodumps on character appearances. They want the information to flow naturally, so much so that they remain entirely connected to the rising action of the story.

You can easily slip in small hints about your character's appearance when two characters meet, when one character is describing another in conversation, or when the movement of the body is mentioned in the narrative.

And remember: adjectives are your friend, but use them with care or your descriptions will sound contrived.

Remember // Avoid Clichés

Infodumps are just one of many appearance clichés. Avoid having your character describe their appearance while looking at their reflection. This technique sounds contrived when read and only serves to pull the reader out of the magic of your story.

Also, stay away from glory moments. That's what I like to call the moment when a character spots someone they don't know in a crowd and is suddenly overwhelmed by the gloriousness of their presence. Is there anything more melodramatic than that?

When it comes to the character descriptions themselves, flee from traditional character tropes. The tall, dark, and mysterious charmer; the bleach-blonde, curvy seductress; the wise old man with a beard and a limp...they've been done time and time again, so unless you're bringing something new to the trope, it's time to turn and run.