

A Checklist for Creating Characters the Badass Way

- What is the character's name?
- What is their age?
- What is their race? I'd love to say that race doesn't matter, but it does. Usually. It is one of the first things we notice about someone, along with gender and age. Don't be afraid to assign a specific race to a character, and it doesn't have to be *your* race. (See my blog post on the worst writing advice ever.)
- What is their gender? Or are they gender fluid, or nonbinary, or transitioning from one to the other, or...?
- Describe their physical appearance and the way they present themselves. I added that latter part to keep this as broad as possible. The things you note here can be permanent or temporary, such as short, thin, loves colorful clothes, fat, appears uncertain, balding, voluptuous, has a limp, smiles incessantly, tall, energetic, soft-spoken, confident, weary, etc. Don't limit yourself to the obvious. (Read my blog post on Badass Character Descriptions That Will Inspire You.)
- Family background: Did the character grow up with a single mom, or in a two-parent household, or with two same-sex parents, or with parents of different races/cultures/religions so there were clashes? Were they raised by a grandparent, an only child, a twin, one of many siblings, a middle child, the baby of the family, the oldest one? Did the family moved around a lot, stay in the same house for decades, have lots of stability, have no stability because of...? (Mental illness, substance abuse, etc.) Did they grow up working class, middle class, poor, wealthy? Our childhoods have a profound effect on how we are as adults. Give some thought to the familiar circumstances that shaped your character's character.
- What are some major events in their lives that have affected them? There will be some overlap here with the family background section, and that's ok. Did a parent die young? Did they adopt a child? Get molested as a child? Win the lottery? Lose the big game? Witness a murder? Get featured on a sports arena jumbotron with a person who was *not* their spouse? Spend time in prison? Spend time as a caregiver for a loved one? Win a nationwide singing competition? Were they in a car accident that changed the trajectory of their life? Did they do something heroic? Something cowardly?
- Where is the character from? What country, or state or region; a big city, a suburb, a small town, a rural area, a remote village. Did they start out in one place and move to another at an impressionable age?
- What are they passionate about (if anything)? Hobbies? Interests? Are there activities they've always wanted to try, but haven't yet? Are there things that *broke* them? Are they passionate about *nothing*? If so, why? Did an early disappointment in life teach them that embracing things enthusiastically is risky?
- What do they love? Who do they love? *Why* do they love?
- What do they fear? What do they dream of?
- Who do they admire? Who do they despise? Who do they feel close to?
- What are their political or religious beliefs? Do those differ from those of the people in their lives – people who are close to them or who they work with or deal with? Are they contrarians, or do they go along with the crowd?
- What do they hope to achieve in life? (Or have they already achieved it?)

- What do they regard as their biggest failure? Their biggest success?
- How would you describe a character's relationships with the other characters in your story?
Yeah, this gets complicated. Relationships, though, are the beating heart of fiction and drama, so give them plenty of attention. They can be simple, tangled, tortured, dysfunctional, bitter, loving or fractious. They will also change, or be revealed, during the tale you're telling. Think about the relationships in your own life. The closer you are to someone, the likelier that your relationship with them has many layers, some healthy and supportive, some negative and frustrating.