



Dawn Lesley Stewart



NAME THAT CHARACTER

by Dawn Lesley Stewart

Here are few points to consider while pondering the perfect names for your characters.

SYLLABLES

Don't use the same number of syllables in the first and last name. The ear prefers variety, and the tongue needs to wrap easily around the words. Combine a short first name with a long last name: Susan Nickerson. Pair a long first name with a short last name: Worthington Clark. If the character demands a long first name and last name, separate the two with a short middle name such as Nicholas Luke Shannahan (after introducing the character, call him Nick Shannahan).

PRONUNCIATION

Make sure the reader knows how to pronounce the character's name. This dilemma has happened to more than one author, and if the character is a series character, the mispronounced name may haunt the author for a long time. One way to inform the reader about a character's name is to write something like this, "Jun Ho stumbled through the long lines in the unemployment office and, for the fourth time that day, informed the clerk that Jun sounded like June. He didn't tell the clerk his Chinese name meant 'truth' because he was about to lie." This narrative informs the reader of the character's gender, name, name pronunciation, origin and meaning.

INITIALS

When creating a character with a first, middle and last name, make sure the initials don't spell an embarrassing word or acronym-unless the spelling is intentional. For instance, Douglas Ulyses Dolan spells DUD. Maybe the fellow is a dud, but unless you want to call attention to the fact, change the name. Review initials to make sure they don't spell an acronym with unpleasant associations, such as the name Daisy Deerfield Tellings, which spells DDT, a harmful pesticide. I hope Daisy isn't operating a garden center.

RHYMING & ALLITERATION

Avoid rhyming and alliteration when choosing a name. Cute names like these can quickly become annoying. Some examples: Sally MacNally and Betty Barbara Bruckley. An exception to this rule is to use rhyming names in children's stories, which is

acceptable and sometimes expected. Also in this category are the "playful" names that authors love to create but wouldn't want to live with as their lifelong names. Some of these witticisms might include Lily Padd or Nick L. Odeon. Of course, your story might need a character with a quirky name, but evaluate whether using a word-play name actually strengthens the character and/or the story.

FAMOUS NAMES

Unless a well-known name is mandatory to the story's development, choose original names for your characters. Abraham Lincoln, Davey Crockett, Amelia Earhart all served history and are fine names; however, let your character carve his own place in the reader's mind through action and dialogue.

A CROWDED ROOM

When writing a story populated with a cast of characters, make sure the names differ. It will confuse the reader if several characters have names beginning with the same letter of the alphabet, or if character names begin with the same first and last letters, such as Jack Tyler and Jake Trask. Also, names that sound alike such as Molly and Holly may bewilder the reader. If similar names are used in a story, make sure strong character traits are assigned to each person so the reader can easily identify each character.

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