Types of Characters

Round Character: A character who is very detailed and the reader is able to see and visualize all sides of this character. Round characters are usually protagonists and antagonists but exceptions do occur. An example of a round character would be Frodo Baggins of The Lord of the Rings by JRR Tolkien. In the books and movies all sides and personalities to Frodo is seen.

Flat Character: A character who is not very detailed and the reader usually only sees a few sides to a character. A flat character usually appears in the background. A flat characters' appearance may be detailed but its character is not and usually proceeds on one characteristic. Whitney from The Most Dangerous Game is a flat character as the reader only gets the chance to see a few sides of him.

Stock Character: Often known as a stereotypical character, the stock character relies on cultural stereotypes for its character, appearance, language and manners of speech. A few examples of stereotypical characters are the country hillbilly and the urban street thug/gangster.

Dynamic Character: A dynamic character is one that under goes change during the course of the plot. Change that applies to allow the character to be dynamic are changes in insight or understanding, changes in commitment, and changes in values. Changes in circumstance do not apply unless the change has caused the character to change within itself. An example of a dynamic character is Rainsford from The Most Dangerous Game. He classifies as a dynamic character because after his hunt with General Zaroff he now cares for those that are the hunted because he was one and it nearly cost him his life. He has changed insights and changed values because he now cares for those who are unfortunate enough to be the hunted. Dynamic characters are very usually the protagonists. Another example of a dynamic character is Gandalf from the Lord of the Rings. He changes physically but also within himself making himself more powerful. Gimli quotes that "the new Gandalf is more grumpy than the old one" in the extended edition of The Two Towers. Gandalf also tells them that he is Saruman as Saruman should have been. But antagonists are known to be dynamic.

Static Character: A static character is one that no change is applied to during the course of the story. Static characters are usually background or secondary characters so that they can serve as thematic or plot elements. However, sometimes static characters can be the main ones such as Tom and Daisy from The Great Gatsby do not change their qualities of carelessness but move away from their problems as they did before.

Fiction writers employ a variety of characters while weaving their tales. Beyond the standard definitions of protagonist (the main character in a literary work) and antagonist (the main character or force that opposes the protagonist in a literary work), recognizing the types of characters and the parts they play while reading an interesting story can add to the experience. In addition, a fuller understanding of the character types and their uses can increase a writer’s effectiveness in weaving his own fictional tales.
Below is a list of common character types, followed by an explanation and short example.

**Confidante**- someone in whom the central character confides, thus revealing the main character’s personality, thoughts, and intentions. The confidante does not need to be a person.

Example: In a story, Melvin Sanders is a detective on the trail of a serial killer. He travels with his pet dog, a pug named Chops. Instead of listening to the radio, Melvin talks to Chops, telling him his theories about the serial killer and his concern he may never discover the killer’s identity.

In this example Chops is a confidante.

**Dynamic Character** - a character who changes during the course of a story or novel. The change in outlook or character is permanent. Sometimes a dynamic character is called a developing character.

Example: Ebenezer Scrooge, in A Christmas Carol by Dickens, was very stingy with his money. He worked his employees very very hard for little pay. After his experiences with the ghosts that visited him, he changed his ways, paying his employees a more than fair wage, providing days off work and actually giving gifts.

In this example Ebenezer Scrooge is a dynamic character.

**Flat Character** - a character who reveals only one, maybe two, personality traits in a story or novel, and the trait(s) do not change.

Example: In a story about a friendly teacher named Sandra Smith, Louis Drud is a janitor in her building. Louis is always tired and grumpy whenever Sandra runs across him and says hello.

In this example Louis Drud is a flat character.

**Foil** - a character that is used to enhance another character through contrast. Cinderella’s grace and beauty as opposed to her nasty, self-centered stepsisters is one clear illustration of a foil many may recall from childhood.

Example: The main character in a story, a teenager named Sally, is a very honest person. She always tries to tell the truth and consider everyone’s feelings. The teacher assigns Betty to be Sally’s science lab partner. Betty enjoys gossip and likes to see people’s reactions, especially if it involves hurt or embarrassment.

In this example Betty is a foil.

**Round Character** - a well developed character who demonstrates varied and sometimes contradictory traits. Round characters are usually dynamic (change in some way over the course of a story).

**Example**: A character in a story named Elaine never cuts anybody a break. She tells her friends and coworkers that charity and compassion have no place in society. On the other hand, Elaine can never pass up feeding a stray kitten or puppy, and always tries to find a good home for lost or abandoned pets.

In this example Elaine is a round character.

**Static Character** – a character that remains primarily the same throughout a story or novel. Events in the story do not alter a static character’s outlook, personality, motivation, perception, habits, etc.

Example: Bert, a bumbling salesman, never takes the time to organize his files, properly record his sales, or follow up with customers. Finally, his boss gets fed up and fires him. Bert struggles for two months to find a new sales position. During that time, his car is repossessed for nonpayment and he maxes out his credit cards. Bert finally finds a new sales position but, before a week passes, he is called into a conference with his new boss. Bert is informed he must get organized or he’ll be fired. A week later the new boss fires Bert after he fails to follow up with an important customer.

In this example Bert is a static character.

**Stock Character** - a special kind of flat character who is instantly recognizable to most readers. Possible examples include the “ruthless businessman”, “shushing old librarian” or “dumb jock.” They are not the focus nor developed in the story.

Example: The main character in a story, Bernard, is hired by a computer company. His secretary is a blonde named Gidget, who is cute but forgetful and never gets a joke.

In this example Gidget is a stock character.

Although the character types are listed separately, characters may be (and often are) a combination. A foil, for example, could also be a round, flat, or even a stock character. While most protagonists in novels are dynamic (change over the course of the novel) and round, they don’t have to be, especially if the novel is plot driven as opposed to character driven. It’s not unheard of for a short story to feature a static protagonist.

Some character types are, by definition, opposite and cannot be considered. For example, one cannot have a character that is both flat and round, or a character that is both static and dynamic.

The terms are useful for understanding a character and his place within the story. But, in the end, it is not about how a character can be named and classified (except maybe within the confines of a literature course). As a writer, it’s all about understanding the characters as you create and bring life to them for the reader.