

# SCREENWRITING

## THE CREATION OF CHARACTER

Screenplays are usually about a key incident, and the story is the character acting and reacting to it. It is the major source of all action and all character.

Events in a screenplay are specifically designed to bring out the truth about the character. Meaning that the incidents you create for your characters are the best way to illuminate who they are. Action is character; a person is what they do, not what they say. Film is behavior. Film is visual.

### CHARACTER

#### Interior

#### Exterior

Emotional Life  
(Forms Character)

Physical Life  
(Reveals Character)

Develop through  
the character  
biography

Define the need

Action is character

Either:

Professional (work)

Personal  
(marital or social)

Private (alone)

## 1. WHO IS YOUR MAIN CHARACTER

Who is your story about? Separate the components of their life into interior and exterior. The **interior life** of your character takes place from birth up until your story begins. This process *forms* character. The **exterior life** of your character takes place from the moment your film begins to the conclusion of the story. It is a process that *reveals* character.

## 2. THE CHARACTER BIOGRAPHY

You must find ways to reveal your character's conflicts visually. But you cannot reveal what you do not know. *The Character Biography* is an exercise that reveals your character's interior life, the emotional forces working from birth. When you begin formulating your character from birth, you see your character build. (See next page for question guide.)

This is a free-writing exercise. Choose a character. Free-associate. Trace your character's life until the story begins. Examine their upbringing, family, career, relationships, dreams, hopes. Just throw down ideas. Don't be worried of punctuation. Break your character's life down into the first ten years, the second ten years, third ten years, and so on. Skip around if you have to, let your consciousness dictate the flow of character.

Note: It's important to phrase your creative questions to begin with the word *what*, not *why*. *What* implies a specific response. *What* causes my character to react like this versus *why* does my character do this.

## 3. ACTION IS CHARACTER

Now you can move onto the exterior life of your character. Here you focus on the relationships that occur during the screenplay. We do this by separating your character's lives into three basic components--their **professional** (what does your character do for a living), **personal** (marital or social relationships), and **private life** (what does your character like to do when they are alone).

What's so beneficial about knowing your character's external life is that you can go into the professional, personal, or private aspects of your character's life and find something to move the story forward. Your character has to be active, has to be doing things, causing things to happen, not just reacting all the time. *Form* your characters by creating a character biography, then *reveal* them by showing aspects of who they are in the professional, personal, and private aspects of their lives.

Remember, you are not your character. The time frame of events you want to write about may have to be modified to gain greater insight into the character. Writing is the ability to ask your self questions and wait for answers.