



What Would Your Character Do?

Eric Maisel

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Get Inside Your Character's Head Just how well do you know your characters?

Test yourself—and your characters—with 30 interactive pop quizzes designed to help you discover exactly what makes your characters tick.

Noted author Eric Maisel draws on his technical knowledge of the craft and his background in psychology to show you how to combine character traits, character psychology, and character development to create realistic, memorable, and mutable characters.

The 30 real-life scenarios include questions and answers that provide you with a window into your characters' souls. For example:

What would motivate your character to tell a lie—a big lie that may have unintended consequences?

Is your character the type who would blow the whistle on a corporate cover-up or would she quietly toe the line?

How would your character cope with the loss of a parent with whom he was exceptionally close?

How likely would your character be to flirt with an attractive stranger in a hotel bar?

Is your character the type who would drop everything—and everyone—for a spontaneous road trip?

Plus, find out how to develop each scenario further using corresponding prompts and specific psychological insight into areas such as the role friendship plays in a person's mental and physical health, conflict resolution in intimate relationships, and the connection between time-impatience and free-floating hostility.

With "What Would Your Character Do?," you don't have to guess at your character's responses to the important decisions and unexpected challenges he's sure to encounter in your story. Use and reuse these scenarios on each of your characters until you've got a nuanced, distinct cast that readers will never be able to forget!

What Would Your Character Do? Details

Date : Published June 1st 2006 by Writer's Digest Books (first published January 1st 2006)

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Author : Eric Maisel

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From Reader Review What Would Your Character Do? for online ebook

Lily says

It was fine. It didn't work for me though. And it is definately for adult or older teenage characters.

M.G. Harry says

Fun, but not worth the price. Save your money and search for character prompts on Tumblr or Google.

Abigail Singer says

This book is greate for fiction writing. It gives personality quizzes for your characters so you can get to know about them better.

Rose says

Quick review for a quick read. Oh wow, this turned out much better than I expected. A practical guide to character personality that tests your character in a series of 30 scenarios with extended questions. Granted, it takes a little bit of creative stretching because the scenarios may not fit your characters (I tried three of my protagonists and side characters from the YA projects I'm working on, and suffice to say I had to skip a few descriptors/questions because they didn't really apply.)

This text made me think about how my characters would answer if put into a certain situation, and the Maisel's do a fine job of allowing the reader to come up with their own frame of the scenarios, but also following up with some possible choices and meanings for each question. I found it quite helpful overall and see myself trying these series of "What ifs" for crafting a narrative in the future. Note that I would say this is a supplemental personality text. This won't give you any distinct foundations on how to shape your characters, but rather provide an eye into how they would react in a given situation and allow the free-range of the writer's mind to expand upon that as they would like.

Recommended.

Overall score: 3.5/5 stars

LEVI says

I was pretty excited to find that my university carries this book. But the book itself wasn't as good as I had hoped. I read it from front to back, and there were 5 situations I particularly liked for the protagonist of the

novel I'm currently working on. Mostly the others just weren't relevant, but I liked the amount of detail Maisel put into all of them.

There are 6 questions expanding every scenario, and then 5 options for each question. Each option is then given a brief relation to personality as to how a character who reacts like that would generally come across. It is limited in its scope, but at the same time there is a fair bit of accuracy behind it--going through the exercise as my protagonist, some of the personality briefs described him to a T.

Each scenario is also related to the real world in some way, usually through research. Some are experiments and some are case studies, and some are checklists for things like PTSD or bad ways to fight. I found some of them useful, but several of them I am already very familiar with; anyone who has taken an intro psych course would know of them. It's a good basis point if you want something to write with your novel characters that isn't your novel that potentially gets you out of a slump, but it's not really what I was looking for.

Heidi says

I expected more. I should have spent more time looking through this at the bookstore - I was just so excited about the idea of "personality tests" for the characters in my novel. But it was more a series of questions - "What would your character be doing at a funeral?" Not something I couldn't think up on my own.

Crystal says

Excited to get to this book. I think it will help me flesh out characters and their story and back stories too.

Simplyliv803 says

I love Eric Maisel's take on creativity. His book "A Writer's Paris" is really wonderful, whether or not you're a Paris fanatic or not.

This book offers a lot of different ways to examine your character and get to know him or her in a more in depth way. It's a pretty quick read and very useful.

Liz Alexander says

I'm a big fan of Eric Meisel and recently dug this book out of a batch I'd bought several years ago when thinking about writing a novel--but never, until just now, thought of using.

It's proven hugely helpful as I begin to reflect and refine the characters I've dreamed up.

This is a genius resource for novelists. Meisel--a licensed family therapist, creativity coach and trainer--offers 30 different scenarios in which your main characters might find themselves. Then he provides quizzes to identify how each character might respond. Followed by a sense of the psychology of your character, depending on each choice. And, at the end of each of these scenarios, the author provides lists of other, similar situations, some fascinating "Did you know?" relevant insights, and Food for Thought.

Since I already knew my main protagonist fairly well, I was able to dive deeper into her psyche by using the insights from this book.

I highly recommend this for first-time (or even experienced) novelists, like me, that want to provide readers with deep, authentic, complex characters. Thank you, Mr. Meisel!

Lynne Favreau says

The first chapter of this book is so interesting I'm finding it hard not to quote the whole thing. Maisel, who holds degrees in philosophy (B.S.), psychology (B.A.), creative writing (M.A.), counseling (M.S.), and counseling psychology (PhD) discusses what a personality is, the traditional psychologist's theories, clinicians and experimenters, and how little is actually known or provable from a scientific stand point about personality.

He asserts "Fiction writers have a leg up on psychologist when it comes to understanding personality and character. To put it differently: Fiction writers are our real psychologist." I love this perspective and after reading Maisel's take on the failing of psychologist to actually define a personality theory, I'm fascinated.

Writers get to make up characters, defining who they are, what motivates them, how those characters interpret and respond to their world. And while what the writer creates is artificial, it is a depth of understanding human motivation and personality that rivals what psychologist have tried to understand and theorize about because we get to be inside the characters head.

Though there are plenty of theories of personality, they don't hold up to the real scientific rigor of analysis. A real theory is provable and results reproducible, human personality theories are not. Freud, the father of psychoanalysis in the late nineteenth century, led the psychology movement down the path to experiments which led to a plethora of theorist. "...Gustave, Jung, Adler, Horney, Kelly Erikson..." their major ideas have not led to any one conclusive theory. In fact, "...no psychologist, psychiatrist, family therapist, or clinical social worker, could say, except guess, what caused depression, anxiety addiction psychosis or any of the other ailments that befall people."

Without a concrete theory that explains why we suffer from these psychological maladies, "...health care professionals are left with three ways of dealing with our emotional health." Medication, clinical methods(psychoanalysis), or behavioral changes. "Or they could do what natural philosophers have done for thousands of years, use their common sense and their understanding of human nature— and a lot of wit and warmth— to affect behavior changes."

There are plenty of health professional who work this way. "There turned to be all the difference in the world between standing behind a theory and having insight into human nature. The first could be called pseudo-science: the second, wisdom." To me, it this wisdom of noticing and being in touch with humanity that gives writers the basis for building characters that are alive and real on the page.

Maisel goes to discuss academia, the problems with diagnosis, and testing. Basically he wants you, the writer, to realize that professional psychologist are no more an expert on why humans do the things they do than you are. In fact writer have the advantage of being able to get inside the subjects head and know why a character is behaving the way they do, what exactly is motivating them and their secret wishes and desires. No therapist can do that.

The majority of the book is Maisel's "personality quizzes for analyzing your characters." Scenarios are proposed, such as "At the Airport" and questions asked with answers provided. The answer you pick for your character have a small synopsis explaining what that might reveal about your character. The first question about the airport is about waiting, if you chose the answer, "A. Restless?" you'd find out "Waiting restlessly is consistent with type A character whose appetites, ambitions and high energy level make it impossible for him to relax." While I found them interesting, they ended up not serve a purpose for me in this study. I was more intrigued by his ideas of personality and the writer than any of the exercises. Though I wouldn't hesitate to try out the exercise if I ever feel stuck or wanted to do character building exercises for practice.

Deirdre Cloke says

While the concept of this book is one that I really enjoy; and is the reason I bought it in the first place, I found there were almost more things I disliked about it than things I liked. However I will start with the pros of this book, and end with the cons.

Pros:

Provides thirty different scenarios each with handful of questions in relation to said scenario. I feel thirty is a simply a a fair number of scenarios to include.

Gives info about what your character's thought process and personality may be like depending on the answer you have chosen.

The formatting of the book is very easy to follow along with, and each scenario has a cute little picture drawn on the first page.

Does in fact help with getting a writer to think more about a character and their actions, or thought process.

Cons:

Has absolute zero answers that could pertain to a character in a magical setting; not even an urban fantasy setting which is absolutely needed. I could understand if there were no high fantasy or historical based answers, or informaiton, but no urban fantasy whatsoever? No options for using magic or supernatural abilities at all? Nope. None.

There are very few mystery, or crime based scenarios. Off the top of my head I can only think of one from the book that was about being cryptically told to leave town.

There are not enough options per question, and frankly some of the options are very weird or repetitive. There were quite a few options where my main and even side characters would absolutely do none of the things mentions because some of the options were such awkward and frankly confusing things for someone to do. There was also no options of "fight the person" or "kill the person" or even "threaten the person" or anything of that sort, there was barely any options for action based characters, because and this is another con: Everything is very average modern day fiction.

A lot of the scenarios and questions weren't anything someone writing the genre wouldn't automatically be

able to think of. While there are some good ones, I found myself spending a good amount of time laughing and being utterly amused and perplexed at how vague, boring, and yet somehow hilariously awkward some of the scenarios and options were.

That said, I do think at least 9-10 scenarios will work even in by urban fantasy book, and maybe 17-18 of them would work in my next book which will be modern romance.

It needs more than thirty scenarios. Like I said it's a fair number, but it's not a great one for the price of the book. I paid \$3 for my copy because it's a used copy from thriftbooks, however for \$18 new, the book needs at least fifty scenarios.

Over all I want to give this book the benefit of the doubt that I will find it more useful in the future. I do like the format, and while some scenarios are ridiculous they are at least good for a laugh.

I would buy this book again if it came out in a second addition, IF the second addition had thirty more scenarios, and there were questions and answers that fit into urban fantasy.

Tricia says

Obviously, any book written with the intention of guiding a creative writer is limited to just that - guidance. This book acknowledges what it is and remains modest, loose and flexible in assisting writers with character development. Each scenario provides six questions with five options each, so there's plenty of variety and scope. It must, however, be taken with a pinch of salt and an open mind - no writer can rely solely on books like these, though their use in developing characters and scenarios is nonetheless inspirational. I'd strongly recommend this to anyone who wants to create a set of characters, or explore the ones they already have in mind. Use the scenarios to place your characters in unlikely situations, and push yourself to think of how they'd react. Above all, the exercises are great fun as well as very useful. Just don't let books like these control or limit your imagination. It's there to encourage originality rather than dictate what should and shouldn't be written.

Jane says

This was a fun book to mess around with, and it delivers on its title with several exercises designed to explore your character's actions. Each exercise proposes a situation, then follows up with questions about what your character would do in the given circumstances.

But I kept thinking the exercises were just a little light. If you really want to get the most out of this book, it seems you'll use the questions withing as a jumping off point, and brainstorm a lot more of your own. For me, it wasn't illuminating enough to become a staple resource.
