



EMOTION AMPLIFIERS

*A Companion to The Emotion Thesaurus:
A Writer's Guide to Character Expression*

**ANGELA ACKERMAN
& BECCA PUGLISI**

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Angela Ackerman and Becca Puglisi are bestselling authors, writing coaches, and international speakers. Their books are available in five languages, are sourced by US universities, and are used by novelists, screenwriters, editors, and psychologists around the world. Angela and Becca also co-founded the popular Writers Helping Writers[®] site, a hub for writers to hone their craft, as well as One Stop for Writers, an innovative online library built to help writers elevate their storytelling.

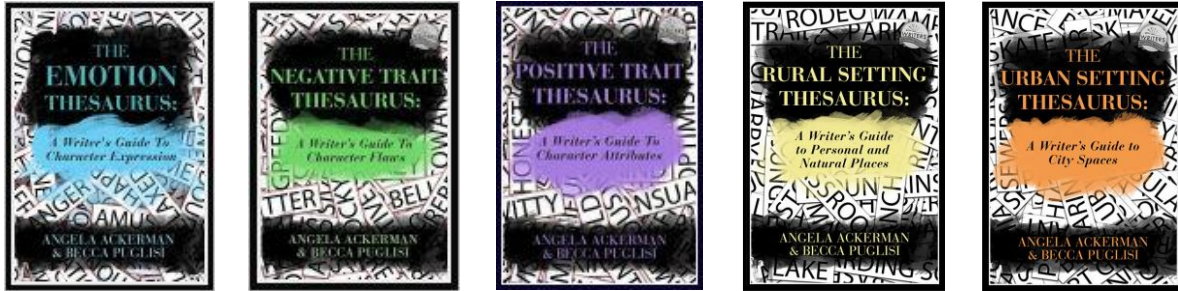


Wish you had a powerhouse writing resource at your fingertips that could save you valuable time while elevating your storytelling? One Stop for Writers[™] might just be the answer. Brought to you by Becca and Angela, the authors of this and other bestselling writing books, along with Lee Powell, the creator of Scrivener for Windows, the One Stop online library is the resource you've been searching for.

Our unique thesaurus collection covers emotions, settings, weather, characterization, symbolism, and other elements of description, and will help set your book apart by bringing the fresh imagery and deeper meaning that your readers crave. Along with an array of unique tools, tutorials, structure maps, timelines, and generators, you can also plan and organize your writing like never before.

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MORE WRITERS HELPING WRITERS BOOKS



THE EMOTION THESAURUS is a tool for writers who want to convey character emotion effectively. It spotlights seventy-five emotions and the body language cues, thoughts, and visceral responses for each. Also addressed are common emotion-related writing problems and methods to overcome them. This brainstorming resource encourages writers to show, not tell, emotion to create exceptional fiction.

THE NEGATIVE TRAIT THESAURUS is a flaw-centric exploration of your character's arc, motivation, emotional wounds, and basic needs. Its vast collection of flaws will help writers to explore the possible causes, attitudes, behaviors, thoughts, and related emotions behind their characters' weaknesses so they can be written effectively and realistically.

THE POSITIVE TRAIT THESAURUS is brimming with ideas to help authors develop one-of-a-kind, dynamic characters that readers will love. Through an exploration of morals, basic needs, environment, relationships, and past events, this book helps authors to determine which attributes make sense for their characters, and how those traits might manifest.

THE RURAL SETTING THESAURUS helps writers like never before by exploring over 100 school, home, and natural locations, providing the sensory details for each along with possible sources of conflict that can be found there. Also covered are many figurative language techniques that can be used to convey emotion and bring the setting to life, creating a vibrant, one-of-a kind experience for readers.

THE URBAN SETTING THESAURUS is the key to creating stronger, more powerful descriptions by showing writers how multisensory details can draw readers in and enhance the story. Not only will writers learn how to choose the right location for each scene, they'll also see how the setting can be used to characterize, reveal backstory, and provide triggers that can amplify character emotions and drive behavior. Through its sensory exploration of over 120 urban settings, this book will help writers create a realistic, textured world readers will long to return to, even after the book closes.

For more information including purchasing options, please visit our [bookstore](#).

PRAISE FOR THE EMOTION THESAURUS

“One of the challenges a fiction writer faces, especially when prolific, is coming up with fresh ways to describe emotions. This handy compendium fills that need. It is both a reference and a brainstorming tool, and one of the resources I’ll be turning to most often as I write my own books.”

~ **James Scott Bell**, best-selling author of *Deceived* and *Plot & Structure*

PRAISE FOR THE POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE TRAIT THESAURUS BOOKS

“In these brilliantly conceived, superbly organized and astonishingly thorough volumes, Angela Ackerman and Becca Puglisi have created an invaluable resource for writers and storytellers.

Whether you are searching for new and unique ways to add and define characters, or brainstorming methods for revealing those characters without resorting to clichés, it is hard to imagine two more powerful tools for adding depth and dimension to your screenplays, novels or plays.”

~ **Michael Hauge**, Hollywood script consultant and story expert, author of *Writing Screenplays That Sell*

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AMPLIFIERS AS EMOTION BOOSTERS

As writers, our job is to create a meaningful emotional experience for readers. One of the best ways to do this is to convey the quality and depth of our characters' feelings through their thoughts, body language, and visceral reactions. This is the primary focus of *The Emotion Thesaurus: A Writer's Guide to Character Expression* and is at the root of the "show don't tell" principle. When readers are pulled in by emotional intensity, they can't help but fall in love with our characters and their stories.

But the writer's bag of tricks is never full. There's always another device, another method to help us achieve our goals. Enter *Emotion Amplifiers*, a collection of fifteen states that naturally galvanize emotion and make a character more volatile.

The beauty of emotion is that it can be manipulated by internal and external stimuli—circumstances that amplify what a character is feeling. Hunger or extreme heat can increase strain and deplete the body to the point where goals seem insurmountable. Stress can unbalance the most stable of characters, opening them up to raw emotion, rash decisions and, ultimately, mistakes that send them on a crash course with disaster.

Amplifiers also can evoke memory for the reader because of their commonality. At some point, every person has felt a burst of energy that propels him to tackle a task; he has experienced pain that sends a jarring throb through flesh and bone. Universal experiences like these help forge a link between reader and character.

Written thoughtfully, the difficulties that arise from an amplifier will trigger a stronger emotional response that reads as authentic and credible. Compromising your character's physical and mental state also creates tension, planting doubt in the reader's mind about the hero's ability to succeed.

THE EMOTION—TENSION CONNECTION

Emotion and tension often go hand in hand. If emotion is low, chances are that story tension is also waning. When emotion is high and it's written effectively, tension will most likely be on the rise. Tension is important in a story because it increases reader interest. When the hero's outlook is grim, readers worry over his success. This worry translates into empathy with the character and a desire to keep reading in order to find out what happens.

As an example, let's consider *The Hunger Games*. Tension is high throughout the story because of what's at stake. But Collins doesn't let it stay at that level. Instead, she ramps it up by adding stressors to Katniss's situation. At the start of the games, Collins removes fresh water from the arena, thereby threatening dehydration and adding another life-or-death scenario for the hero to worry about. She introduces the tracker jackers and their hallucinatory stings, increasing tension and the reader's fear over the hero's well being. After Rue's death, Katniss slips into a period of lethargy that is almost as worrying to readers as her debilitating illness, because anything could happen to her in such a vulnerable state.

Like a sadistic Head Gamemaker, Collins never lets the hero off the hook. She continues to throw Katniss new and more alarming problems that make it more and

more difficult to survive an already impossible situation. And the torture pays off. With each new amplifier, two important things are accomplished.

First, Katniss herself experiences heightened stress. Each amplifier makes it more difficult for her to think clearly and make good decisions. Poor decisions lead to more problems, which lead to heightened stress...it's a continuing cycle that keeps the reader riveted as tension inches upward across the pages.

Secondly, these amplifiers heighten the hero's emotions. With each new stressor, Katniss becomes more afraid, paranoid, angry, or depressed. As readers, we feel those emotions right along with her. We're drawn into her story and begin to root for her success in a way that guarantees we'll keep reading the book until the very end.

AMPLIFIERS AND SECONDARY CHARACTERS

The interesting thing about amplifiers is that they can be just as effective in crippling the hero when they're used peripherally with a secondary character.

In *The Fellowship of the Ring*, the company is stuck outside of the mines of Moria while Gandalf tries to open the magical gates. Pippin, bored and antsy, throws a rock into the nearby stagnant pool of water, waking the Guardian who lives beneath. The entire company is nearly destroyed before they're able to escape into the mines. Pippin's thrown rock, a result of his boredom, results in them being trapped inside, overrun by orcs, and eventually losing Gandalf. As the hero of the story, Frodo did nothing to cause these events. But the ripple effects of his sidekick's careless decision directly impact Frodo, heightening tension and both reader and character emotion.

Applying an amplifier to a secondary character doesn't always have to immediately result a catastrophic event. Sometimes, like the tightening of a screw, it simply increases stress for the main character, which leads to poor decision-making. In *It's a Wonderful Life*, George Bailey comes home from the worst day to end all worst days and finds his youngest daughter sick with a simple cold. Though her illness is nothing to worry about, it's the final straw for poor George, causing him to fly off the handle and act in a way that he never would have under normal circumstances. The effects of that poor decision lead to him standing on a bridge in a snowstorm, contemplating suicide.

Clearly amplifiers are incredibly useful for increasing tension and heightening emotion. Inflicting them upon the supporting cast is just one more way for authors to mix things up and keep the story complications fresh.

HOW TO USE AMPLIFIERS

When you sense the need for higher emotion or more tension, read the list of amplifiers in this booklet to see if any of them fit with your character's current circumstance. Often the setting will naturally favor certain amplifier types over others, so choose something organic to the scene and events. Pacing is important, so consider carefully if the amplifier truly adds complication and tension rather than simply providing a delaying tactic to keep the hero from his goal. Add one to the mix and see what new conflict, insecurity, or difficult decision arises because of it.

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If you're a planner, amplifiers can be added during the pre-writing stage. As you plan your story, look for areas where tension or emotions are low. Add an amplifier to ramp up the stress.

Amplifiers can also be utilized during the revision process. When revising, be aware of ho-hum areas where the pacing seems to flag. Listen to critique partners who complain about boring stretches or places where they feel disconnected. Examine these scenes and see if an amplifier might give the story a much-needed jolt in the right direction.

A PRACTICAL NOTE

Each emotion amplifier will provide you with ideas on how different stressors might affect your characters, priming them—and, therefore, the reader—for a more intense emotional experience. Like *The Emotion Thesaurus*, these entries list the physical signals, internal sensations, and mental responses associated with each amplifier. Simply decide which stressor to deploy, then browse the selection of cues to help you create a fresh response that fits your character perfectly. Just as characters show emotion uniquely, they should also respond in their own way to the different amplifiers.

Ready to crank up the stress and force a bigger emotional reaction? Let's see how discomfort and inconvenience can create a more poignant opportunity to show your character's true feelings.

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ADDICTION

DEFINITION: the compulsive need for a substance, marked by acute physiological symptoms upon the source's withdrawal

NOTE: Though people can be addicted to any number of things, for clarity, this entry has been limited to cues associated with substance addictions.

Physical Signals:

Poor hygiene (yellowing teeth, chipped nails)
Sallow skin
Bloodshot, glassy, dull, or red eyes
Dilated or contracted pupils
Impaired coordination
Manic activity
Sudden weight loss or gain
Suspicious odors on the breath, clothing, or skin
Tremors
Slurred speech
Not showing up to appointments or social engagements
Financial difficulties (not making rent, having a car repossessed)
Asking others for money
Stealing
Neglecting responsibilities at work or school
Broken relationships
Leaving old friends and clinging to new groups of people
Difficulty keeping a job
Evasive speech
A spaced-out appearance
Spending unusually long periods of time asleep or awake
Decreased eye contact
Delinquent or criminal activity
Driving under the influence
Manipulating others to get what one wants
A life categorized by high drama

Internal Sensations:

Feeling hyper or jumpy
Lethargy or fatigue
Impaired vision
Dry mouth
Twitchy nerves and muscles
Increased sensitivity to sound, texture, taste, and smells

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Mental Responses:

Fixating on the source
Counting the minutes until the next hit
A sense of euphoria upon using
A need to use more to get the same experience a lesser amount used to provide
A lack of motivation
Mood swings or aggression
Memory loss
Impaired judgment
An inability to account for large chunks of time
Guilt or regret
Self pity and self loathing
Suicidal thoughts

Cues of Suppressed Addiction:

Denial
Making excuses for absences or tardiness
Lying
Misdirection; blaming others and deploying guilt tactics with loved ones
Hiding track marks by wearing long sleeves
Using eye drops, mints, or mouthwash to mask odors and telltale signs
Demanding more privacy (locking doors, withdrawing from others)
Evasive behavior (sneaking out, hiding substances around the house)

Withdrawal Symptoms:

Tremors in the extremities
A racing heart or heart palpitations
Shortness of breath
Nausea and vomiting
Hallucinations or paranoia
Anxiety
Extreme sweating
Poor concentration
Restlessness
Headaches
Sleeplessness
Irritability or depression
Seizures

Writer's Tip: *When writing about a situation that is outside of one's experience, consult the experts. Textbooks, professionals in the field, or friends with personal knowledge can provide the details needed to write credibly about the event.*

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ATTRACTION

DEFINITION: Feeling a compelling sense of curiosity or pleasure in regards to a specific person

NOTE: a milder source of interest may come from an object of desire (such as seeing a coveted vintage car), but true attraction is usually between people. Thus, most suggestions here focus on human interactions.

Physical Signals:

Eyes that follow the source of attraction
Staring
The body going still
Dilated pupils
Touching the mouth, drawing attention to the lips
Mirroring the other person's movements, gestures, and posture
Stealing furtive glances
Asking questions about the other person
Flirting
Eyes that smolder with intensity
Angling the body towards the other person
Giving a little wave
Finding opportunities for "accidental" touches
Touching the hair, smoothing one's clothes, straightening a collar
Playing hard-to-get (feigning disinterest)
Paying compliments
Thrusting out one's chest
Eyes widening slightly
Exposing one's neck to the source
Licking one's lips
Playfully asking double entendre questions
Asking questions that grow more personal in nature
Affectionate touches (bumping knees, squeezing a hand)
Sitting side-by-side so the legs or shoulders touch
Offering one's undivided attention
Asking questions out of true fascination and a desire to know more
An open gaze; directly meeting the other person's eyes
Talking to friends about the other person
Losing interest in everything else when the other person enters the room
Giving a low whistle or mumbling an exclamation
Becoming tongue-tied; fumbling for words
Grasping at any attempt to make conversation

Internal Sensations:

A fluttering in the belly
Knees that wobble, tremble, or feel weak

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The mouth flooding with moisture
An overall tingling
Feeling energized
Breath stopping or catching in one's throat
An almost electrical feeling upon meeting the other person's eyes
Feeling an emotional or spiritual connection with the other person
An increase in body temperature

Mental Responses:

A willingness to leave one's comfort zone to obtain the object of one's attraction
Boldness or forwardness
A desire to touch
Viewing everything the source does as highly interesting
Only seeing the positive in the other person
Striving to be witty or charming
Dreaming of the other person at night
Daydreaming or fantasizing about them
Seeking out opportunities to meet or be with the other person
Difficulty forming thoughts into speech
Excitement
Optimism
Sexual thoughts

Cues of Suppressed Attraction:

Finding ways to be near the person but not engaging with them
Denial of any feelings
Ramping up an existing relationship to support the idea that one is not interested
Asking subtle questions about the other person
Flushed cheeks
Avoiding the other person
Dismissive gestures and comments
Avoiding eye contact
Befriending the other person's friends in order to obtain access
Subtly watching the other person
Fiddling with things when the other person is around; jumpiness
The voice cracking or rising in pitch
Sweating

Writer's Tip: *With a strong reactive state like attraction, be aware that one's expressions will vary according to sex, age, and experience.*

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BOREDOM

DEFINITION: a state of weariness brought about by dullness or a lack of stimulation

Physical Signals:

Resting the chin in the hand
Staring off into space
Half-closed eyes
Sleeping or dozing
The chin resting on the chest
Head thrown back, eyes staring at the ceiling
Limp posture
Slouching in a chair with one's arms dangling
Restless movements (rolling the neck, foot-tapping)
Engaging in small talk with people nearby
People watching
Eating or drinking out of a desire to do something
Flipping through brochures or other reading material at hand
Frequent trips outside or to the bathroom
Flipping through TV channels
Aimless wandering or pacing
Texting or web surfing on the phone
Quick laughter
Complaining
Whining
Yawning
Doodling
Wandering attention
Participating in mundane activities out of desperation
Becoming productive out of a desire to do something
Jumping at any opportunity that arises
List-making
Indulging in habits (picking at nails, scratching)
Passive destructiveness (shredding paper, bending paperclips)
Sighing or mumbling under the breath

Internal Sensations:

Lethargy
Heaviness in the muscles
A jittery feeling in the extremities
Feeling antsy
Hyperactivity

Mental Responses:

The mind cycling through options of what to do

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Daydreaming

Seeking out others, even people one normally wouldn't pursue

Negative thoughts

Feeling as if time has slowed down

Difficulty concentrating

Cues of Acute or Long-Term Boredom:

Purposely irritating others as a way to entertain oneself

Pulling pranks

Getting into trouble at school

Throwing oneself into a new hobby or project

Increased exercise

Frustration

Impatience

Apathy

Depression

Sitting or staying in one place for long periods of time

Self-pity

A feeling of worthlessness

A desire for purpose

Cues of Suppressed Boredom:

Overcommitting

Being in constant motion

Being determined to have a good time

Adhering to a strict routine so there will always be something to do

Jumping to a new activity at the first sign of boredom

Talkativeness; incessantly calling others just to chat

Writer's Tip: *No one likes to be bored, but this trait doesn't have to be a negative one. Turn it into a positive by using it as a catalyst that pushes your character into uncovering a truth, discovering a new passion, or mending an existing fault in society.*

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COLD

DEFINITION: a sudden or ongoing exposure to uncomfortably low temperatures

Physical Signals:

Shivering
Blue lips
Yawning
Eyes that tear up
Chattering teeth
Tingling extremities
Stuttering speech
Skin that's uncomfortably cold to the touch
Dry, cracked lips
A stiff jaw that makes speech difficult
Numbness in one's extremities
A burning sensation in the skin
Clumsiness
Slow, shallow breaths
Lips that tremble
Poor dexterity or increased clumsiness
Wrapping the arms around the torso
Jumping, shuffling, or dancing to get the blood flowing
Clapping one's hands or stamping one's feet
Shoving the hands deep into the pockets
Red and swollen patches on the skin (chilblains)
Pulling the limbs tightly into the core
Slurred speech
Rubbing one's hands together
Tucking one's hands into one's armpits
Pulling a collar or scarf up over the face
Huddling inside a jacket
Rounded shoulders, the chin dropped down to the chest
Cringing and squeezing one's eyes shut
Turning one's back to the wind or source of cold
Pulling down one's sleeves to cover the hands
Curling and uncurling one's toes to get the blood flowing
Rubbing one's legs; using friction to create warmth
Quivering breaths
Slapping oneself
Shaking out the arms and legs
Flexing the fingers
Taking deep breaths in an effort to wake up
Curling into a ball; making oneself small
Sharing body heat with others
Blowing into cupped hands to warm them

Internal Sensations:

Low energy
Fatigue or drowsiness
The feeling of even one's insides being cold
A weakened pulse
Nausea
Loss of appetite
A burning sensation in the lungs when inhaling
A voice that loses strength

Mental Responses:

Confusion
Muddled thinking
Impaired decision-making
A desire to sleep
Apathy

Cues of Acute or Long-Term Cold Exposure:

Frostbite
Hypothermia
Gangrene
Limb amputation
Coma
Heart failure
Death

Writer's Tip: *Emotional attitude makes a difference when dealing with the cold. A person who can maintain mental acuity and focus will withstand the elements much better than someone whose mental condition is compromised by negativity.*

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DEHYDRATION

DEFINITION: an abnormal depletion of water from the body, often as a result of sickness or physical activity

Physical Signals:

Dry or sticky mouth
Crying without tears
Dry skin
Cracked lips
Hair that is fragile and breaks easily
Sunken eyes
Weak muscles
Pale “stringy” veins that are hard to see under the skin
Poor balance
Weaving when walking
Searching out sources of water
Gulping water when it becomes available
Shortness of breath
Decreased muscle coordination
Trembling extremities
Decreased productivity
A slower work pace
The inability to physically do what one used to be able to do
Taking more rest breaks
Stooped posture
A shorter stride
Arms that hang loosely at the sides

Internal Sensations:

Thirst
Decreased urine production or output
Constipation
The need to sit or lie down
Nausea
Dizziness
Light-headedness
Headache
Muscle cramps
Scratchy throat

Mental Responses:

Fatigue
Irritability
A mental fixation on getting something to drink
Reduced mental acuity

Cues of Acute or Long-Term Dehydration:

Extreme thirst

A voice that grows whispery, lacking strength

Confusion

Little or no sweat production

Amber-colored urine

Skin that appears shriveled and lacks elasticity

Low blood pressure

Elevated heartbeat and rapid breathing

Fever

Delirium

Shock

Unconsciousness

Organ failure

Death

Writer's Tip: *Depending on the age and size of a person, dehydration can become serious quite quickly. If it factors into your scene, make sure to research the effects of dehydration on the body to maintain authenticity.*

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DISTRACTION

DEFINITION: mental preoccupation that makes focusing difficult

Physical Signals:

Gazing off at nothing
Not answering when a response is requested
Doing jobs half-heartedly
Being late
A slack expression, the mouth slightly agape
Forgetting appointments and meetings
A general state of disorganization
Performing poorly at work or school
An inability to complete menial tasks (burning dinner, leaving clothes to mildew in the dryer)
Clothes that are buttoned up wrong
Arriving at a destination and realizing that something has been forgotten
Bumping into people or things
Trailing off while speaking
Adopting a look of extreme concentration in an effort to pay attention
Losing interest in hobbies or pastimes
Wearing mismatched or dirty clothes
Oversleeping
Avoiding social situations
Attending social events but not joining in (standing to the side, hanging out by the snacks)
Being included in conversations but not participating
Clumsiness
Forgetting the basics (leaving doors unlocked, losing track of one's things, forgetting to shave)
A seeming preoccupation with oneself
A perception of being snobby or standoffish generated by the inability to engage
Difficulty falling asleep
Asking people to repeat themselves
Apologizing or making excuses for one's inattention
Kids or employees getting away with more than normal because of decreased monitoring
Losing items

Internal Sensations:

Hunger pangs from not eating
Dry throat from thirst
Cramped muscles from a lack of movement or stretching
A feeling of restlessness

Mental Responses:

Forgetting to eat

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A gnawing feeling; wanting the situation to be resolved

Losing the thread of conversations

Obsessing over the cause of the distraction

An inability to focus on the work at hand

Avoiding situations where concentration is required

Scattered thoughts; the mind jumping from one thing to another

Thoughts turning inward to one's own problems or decisions to be made

Cues of Acute or Long-Term Distraction:

Decreased intimacy with friends

Loved ones voicing concern

Repercussions at school or work for poor performance

Careless driving (running stop signs, changing lanes without looking)

Accidents resulting from inattention (cutting oneself with a knife, burning a finger on a hot plate)

***Writer's Tip:** Distraction can be caused by mental or physical fatigue, but more often it is the result of the mind being focused on an unresolved emotional situation. Make sure that the reader always understands the cause of the distraction and the root emotion at play.*

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EXHAUSTION

DEFINITION: the state of being extremely or completely tired

Physical Signals:

Heavy eyelids
A head that droops, as if it's wobbling on the neck
Eyes involuntarily drifting shut
Bloodshot or red-rimmed eyes
Bags or circles under the eyes
Swaying from side to side
Sagging in a chair
Speech that trails off
Hands hanging limply
An unkempt appearance
Poor communication (repeating things, incoherence, thoughts trailing off)
Disorganization
Falling asleep in odd places at odd times
Sleeping a lot or not sleeping enough
Speaking in a subdued voice
Unshaven cheeks (men)
Muttering or mumbling
Slouching or leaning with the shoulders bowing over the chest
Yawning
Eyes tearing up
Rumpled clothing
Clumsiness
Slurred words
Forgetfulness
A distant look or glaze in the eyes
Supporting the head with a hand
Laying the head on the arms
Tipping the head back and briefly closing the eyes
Rubbing at one's face and eyes
Slowed reaction time
Laying the head down on a desk to "rest one's eyes"
Jolting at sudden sounds (phones ringing, doors slamming)
Inappropriate responses (laughter that's hard to stop, bursting into tears, aggression)
Slumped posture
Dragging footsteps

Internal Sensations:

Scratchy eyes
Blurred vision
Heaviness in the limbs
Weighted eyelids
A ringing in the ears; sounds coming as if from very far away
Lack of appetite

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Slowed breathing and heartbeat
Heavy muscles
Dulled senses
Heartburn from too much coffee

Mental Responses:

Difficulty focusing
Wanting or needing to sit or lie down
Impatience
Inattention
Lack of interest in hobbies and activities

Cues of Acute or Long-Term Exhaustion:

Depression
Hypersensitive emotions
Crying
Loud snoring
Irritability
Impaired judgment
An inability to think clearly
Passivity; letting others take the lead
Forgetfulness
Poor performance at school or work
Falling asleep at inappropriate or dangerous times (while driving, etc.)

Cues of Suppressed Exhaustion:

Increased use of stimulants (coffee, energy drinks, loud music, drugs)
Constant motion so as to avoid any situation where one might fall asleep
Using products to cover physical clues (eye drops, cosmetics)
Offering excuses for tiredness (work, projects, loud parties next door)
Lightly slapping one's cheeks to "wake up"

Writer's Tip: *When a person's physical or mental condition is compromised, it leads to poor judgment and mistakes. Take advantage of a weakened character to create further conflict.*

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HEAT

DEFINITION: exposure to elevated external temperatures that cause one's internal temperature to rise

Physical Signals:

Flushed skin
Sweat
Chapped lips
Squinting or closing one's eyes
Fanning oneself with a hat or book
Peeling off excess clothing
Rolling up pants and long sleeves
Spotchy skin
Flapping the front of one's shirt to cool the body
Weakened steps
Arms hanging limply at one's sides
Shuffling
Swaying on one's feet
Walking with an unsteady gait
Panting or wheezing
Fainting
Turning toward even the faintest of breezes
Heat rash
A puffy look
Large sweat patches on one's clothing
Increased body odor
Sunburn
Swollen feet and ankles
Eyes that appear sunken
Peeling skin
A lack of coordination
Falling down
Sweat-darkened hair
Frizzy hair (if humidity is a factor)
Blotting at the face and neck with a towel or tissue
Shielding one's head with whatever is at hand

Internal Sensations:

A dry or sticky mouth
Hot skin
A tongue that feels swollen
Blurred vision
Blood pounding in the skull
Lightheadedness and dizziness

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Nausea and vomiting
Muscle weakness
Muscle cramps and spasms
Headaches
Lethargy
Excessive thirst
Rapid heartbeat
Fatigue
Muscles that feel weighted

Mental Responses:

Confusion
Irritability
An inability to think clearly
Lack of focus
Fantasizing about water
Single-minded focus on finding shade or a reprieve from the heat

Cues of Acute or Long-Term Heat:

Elevated body temperature
Stripping down; ceasing to care about appearance or modesty
Hostility or rage
Impaired decision-making
Skin that ceases to sweat
Dark-colored urine
Hallucinations
Seizures
Brain damage
Loss of consciousness
Death

Writer's Tip: Heat is a natural amplifier, the perfect catalyst for pushing ordinary people to anger and violence. But characters and readers need a respite from the heat every once in awhile. Give them a break periodically by providing relief, a chance to rest and recharge so they're better able to jump back into battle when the temperature rises again.

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HUNGER

DEFINITION: having a desire or vital need for food

Physical Signals:

Trembling hands
Licking or chewing at one's lips
Staring at food
Breathing in deeply to catch the scent of food
Openly watching others eat
Moaning or groaning at the sight of food
Swallowing often
Begging for food
Limbs that quiver
Moving closer to the food source
Lips that are slightly parted
Talking about food constantly
Fingers twitching involuntarily toward food sources
Touching or rubbing the stomach
Arms cradling the stomach
Overeating when food becomes available
Cramming food into one's mouth with no thought for propriety or table manners
Chewing on a stick or grass stalk to mimic eating

Internal Sensations:

An empty, gnawing feeling in the belly
The stomach twisting in knots
Dry mouth
A gurgling in the belly
Nausea
An over-sensitive sense of smell
Quick salivation at the sight or scent of food
Lightheadedness
Headaches or migraines
Stomach pain
A hollow ache in one's mid-section

Mental Responses:

Obsessive thoughts of food
Lack of focus
Lethargy
The feeling that even little actions are too hard
An inability to concentrate
Impulsiveness and impulse buying regarding food
Desperation

Cues of Acute or Long-Term Hunger:

Distended midsection
Weight loss or emaciation
A willingness to commit violence for food
Clothes hanging on one's frame
Bony shoulders, fingers, or legs
Hollowed-out eyes
Prominent facial bones, like a skull
Sallow skin
Thinning hair
Crying
Teeth loosening in the gums
Health problems from a lack of essential nutrients
Shiny, glittery eyes
Oversleeping
Exhaustion
Weak movements
Body tremors
Loss of consciousness
Sagging skin
An unhealthy complexion (greasy skin, discoloration, acne)
Protruding cheekbones
Unfocused thoughts
A whispery voice
A willingness to eat anything, even food that is rotten or unsafe
An uneven or racing heartbeat
Death

Cues of Suppressed Hunger:

Drinking lots of water in an attempt to fill the void
A gaze that drifts back to where food is kept or displayed
A clear refusal to look at food
Chronic gum chewing, smoking, or other oral fixations
Trying to stay busy or occupied to avoid obsessing about the lack of food

Writer's Tip: *As hunger intensifies, both common sense and determination erode. Characters will do things they normally wouldn't do if it means alleviating their hunger.*

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ILLNESS

DEFINITION: an unhealthy condition that weakens the body

NOTE: Though illnesses can focus on either the body or the mind, this entry has been limited to illnesses within the physical body.

Physical Signals:

Feverish, glassy eyes
Eyes that appear dull and blank
Skin shining with sweat
Coughs and sneezes
A runny nose
Chattering teeth
Quivering muscles
Vomiting
Fainting
Dehydration
A pale complexion
Prolonged sleep periods
Bad breath
Restless sleep
Labored breathing
A loss of stamina
Skin that is dry and papery, hot and flushed, or cold and clammy
A raspy or nasal voice
Seeking a doctor's advice
Taking medications
Working hard all day and crashing at the first sign of rest
Complaining
Steps that drag
Drooping shoulders
Dark smudges under the eyes
Coughing up phlegm

Internal Sensations:

Sensitive skin
Feeling feverish
Body aches
Nausea
Muscle weakness and joint aches
A sensation of being cold or hot
The sense of taste being "off"
A loss of appetite
Aches in localized places (head, stomach, ear, throat)
Dry mouth

EMOTION AMPLIFIERS

Fatigue and lethargy
Thirst
Rapid or sluggish blood pressure and pulse

Mental Responses:

Impatience
Feeling “foggy”
Losing a sense of time
Attempting to distract oneself from the discomfort
Trying not to think of all the things that aren’t getting done
Worry over others getting sick
Fearing that one’s simple cold will turn to something worse
Frustration at a lingering illness

Cues of Acute or Long-Term Illness:

Anger
Depression
Weight loss
Hair loss
Sunken eyes
Sallow skin
An odor of sickness
Refusing to eat
An overall demeanor of frailness
A weakened physique
A determination to overcome
Gratitude; an appreciation for the good things in one’s life
Finding comfort in religion
Wanting the discomfort to end
A willingness to try risky or unproven remedies
Finding simple verbal exchanges exhausting

Cues of Suppressed Illness:

Denying to oneself and others that anything is wrong
A determination to push through and keep working despite symptoms
Dependence on medications and sleep aids
Avoiding loved ones to hide one’s condition

Writer’s Tip: *When rounding out a character, don’t forget about her physical side. Is she strong or prone to illness? What kind of illness, and what brings it on? Knowing these weaknesses enables you to lay a foundation for things to go from bad to worse at critical times.*

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INEBRIATION

DEFINITION: intoxication; a state of exhilaration or stupefaction, usually caused by alcohol

Physical Signals:

A weaving walk
A slurred voice
Giggling, excessive laughter
Waving the arms in slow motion
Poor hand-eye coordination
Poor depth perception (stumbling over obstacles, missing a chair when sitting)
Excessive dancing or celebrating
Hooting, yelling, shouting, and swearing
Speaking unfiltered thoughts
Overreacting
Misjudging the emotions of others
Falling into people, crashing into objects
Holding onto the wall when walking
Using shuffling steps
A lurching walk or run
Hunching over
Leaning too closely to people
Increased touches through movement and gesturing
A relaxed posture
Spilling food or drinks
Slowly tilting the head
Sloppy eating
Closing one's eyes
Shifting the body back and forth to find balance
Leaning, standing, or sitting at an angle
Sweating
Talking too loudly
Glittering or glowing eyes
Slowed reflexes
Blinking rapidly to focus on something
Beer breath
Easy camaraderie (hugging, touching), even with strangers
Talking too much or interrupting others
Pulling pranks or committing petty crimes for fun

Internal Sensations:

Tunnel vision
Nausea
Feeling like the room is spinning
A tingling or fuzzy feeling in the body

Mental Responses:

A desire to socialize, talk with, and interact with others

A decreased sense of personal space

Taking risks

Poor judgment

A sense of courage; feeling the need to act

Losing track of time

Increased aggression

Missing or misinterpreting negative body language cues

Slowed reactions and responses

A loss of inhibitions

Increased sense of kinship and affection: *I love you, man!*

Immunity to embarrassment

Believing that one is more suave, charming, or intelligent than one really is

Assuming that everyone else is just as inebriated

Cues of Long-Term Inebriation:

Collapsing

Yawning, falling asleep, passing out

Vomiting

Blackouts

Alcohol poisoning

Loss of bladder control

Cues of Suppressed Inebriation:

Insisting that one is sober or fine

Attempting to prove soberness (walking a line, touching the nose)

Forcing eyes as wide as they'll go

Deflecting: *He's way more drunk than me*

Avoiding eye contact

Writer's Tip: Depending on how quickly the liver metabolizes alcohol, inebriation symptoms will vary from person to person. Weight, body chemistry, and genetics are also factors in how well the body tolerates liquor. Because alcohol has an affinity for water, people with more fat tissue often take longer to reach peak BAC (Blood Alcohol Content).

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LETHARGY

DEFINITION: the quality or state of being drowsy, listless, or apathetic

Physical Signals:

Slouched body posture
Steps that drag
Ponderous movements
Half-closed eyes
Slow, deep breaths
An unfocused gaze
Lying prone or sagging in a seat
The body conforming to whatever surface it rests on
Staring at nothing
Propping one's head up with a hand
Limp limbs
Hands and feet that are still
Lifeless eyes
Signs of letting oneself go (unwashed hair, wrinkled clothes)
Using the least amount of physical exertion to finish a task (taking the elevator instead of stairs)
Drinking caffeinated beverages or energy drinks
Dropping out of active hobbies
Sitting or lying for long periods without moving
Yawns and languorous stretches
Moving only to shift one's body position
Going without instead of getting up to get a drink or snack
Asking others to do things that require movement
Canceling appointments
Turning down social opportunities
Withdrawing from others
Choosing activities with no physical or mental stimulation
Not engaging in conversation
Answering questions with a mumble or shrug
Asking others to bring things rather than get up and get them
A lack of pickiness
Living in a cluttered environment
Avoiding people; displaying hermit-like tendencies

Internal Sensations:

A heaviness in the limbs
A sensation of not wanting to move
Loss of appetite

Mental Responses:

Lack of motivation
Having to mentally talk oneself into a better mood

EMOTION AMPLIFIERS

Seeking out possible causes
Worrying over a possible physical ailment behind the lethargy (sickness or disease)
Loss of interest in things that used to cause excitement
Thick thoughts
A desire to do nothing, to not think
Denial that there is a problem
Not noticing what's going on with other people
An inability to help others with their problems
Difficulty making decisions

Cues of Acute or Long-Term Lethargy:

Depression
Symptoms of an underlying illness that is causing the lethargy
Isolation
Dependence on stimulants
Muscle atrophy
Illness
Weight gain or loss
Sleep that doesn't restore one's energy

Cues of Suppressed Lethargy:

Blaming one's behavior on boredom or being overworked
Claiming that all one needs is a good night's sleep
Putting on a happy face around others, then crashing when alone
Claiming to have participated in physical activities that no one has witnessed
Waving off the concerns of others
Refusing to see a doctor out of fear of the results

Writer's Tip: *Lethargy is largely a physical ailment, but it has a profound effect on a person's psyche, compounding the physical problem with self-doubt, anxiety, and even depression. When dealing with an ailment like lethargy, always remember to address the emotional and mental effects, too.*

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PAIN

DEFINITION: physical discomfort associated with an injury or illness

Physical Signals:

Clenching or grinding the teeth
Probing, rubbing, or grabbing at the pained area
Wincing
Hobbling about; taking tentative steps
Eyes that water or cry
Flinching when touched
Leaning back and grimacing
Expelling a grunt or pained hiss at exertion
Asking for aid (to move, to get something, to call for help)
Medicating
Breaths that saw in and out
Flaring nostrils
Trying to sleep it off
Gripping people or nearby objects for support
A bent back, hunched shoulders
A stiff walk
Trembling limbs
Blotchy skin
Glassy eyes
Screaming, moaning, or groaning
Biting the lip
Rocking back and forth
Panting
Repeating the same phrase over and over
Distracting gestures (flapping a hand, tapping a foot, nodding the head)
Squeezing the eyes shut, refusing to look
Squirming in discomfort
Arching the back

Internal Sensations:

Shuddering breaths
Hyperventilation
Nausea
Light-headedness at the sight of blood
Starbursts behind the eyelids
Tight muscles
Dizziness
Fainting or blacking out
Cramping
Feeling cold or feverish
A dry or coppery taste in the mouth

EMOTION AMPLIFIERS

The body shutting down or going into shock

Mental Responses:

Panic

Attempting to calm oneself

Hallucinations

Short-temperedness

Trying to convince oneself that it isn't as bad as it seems

Bargaining with God

Cues of Acute or Long-Term Pain:

Begging for the pain to end

Making final preparations

Depression

A haggard face

Drooping eyelids and mouth

Dark hollows under the eyes

A pale complexion

Excessive sleep

Passing out

Medication dependency or addiction

Personality shifts

Asking for death

Researching, planning, or attempting suicide

Cues of Suppressed Pain:

Clenching the jaw

Whitened lips

Tension throughout one's body

Lying down

Remaining perfectly still

Avoiding talking to others

Sweat gleaming on the face

Hands clenching

Hands bunching up a blanket or clutching at one's clothing

Writer's Tip: Each person has a different pain tolerance. Your character's personality and (in)ability to withstand pain will determine whether he would show open symptoms of pain or suppress them.

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RELAXATION

DEFINITION: being at ease; unstressed

Physical Signals:

An easy smile
Half-lidded eyes
Leaning back in a chair
Reclining on a couch or floor
Leaning against a doorjamb or wall
Placing the hands behind the head
An open stance
A carefree walk
Slouching
Putting one's hands in one's pockets
Yawning
Hands that hang loosely at the sides
Feet angling out
Flaccid muscles
Fingers lacing across the belly (if lying down)
Hands laying in the lap
Legs crossed with one foot languidly bouncing
Stretching, rolling the neck
Sprawling on a couch, chair, or bed
Participating in relaxing activities
Listening to soothing music with one's eyes closed and the head nodding
Easy touches (patting someone's hand, rubbing their back, giving a light hug)
Unhurried speech
Driving under the speed limit
Being unconcerned with external events
Becoming somewhat unobservant
Acting as if one has all the time in the world
Falling asleep while watching TV or laying out by the pool
Sleeping deeply and waking up refreshed

Internal Sensations:

Loose muscles
Steady, even breathing
An overall feeling of health and well-being
An improved immune system

Mental Responses:

A deliberate attempt to not be disturbed by external events
Indulging in daydreams
Wanting the feeling to go on and on
A lack of urgency
Clear-headedness
A sense of balance

EMOTION AMPLIFIERS

Agreeability

Cues of Acute or Long-Term Relaxation:

Laziness

A refusal to participate in anything strenuous or potentially stressful

Selfishness

Foggy thinking

Excessive sleeping

Restlessness

A desire to get back to something stimulating or challenging

Writer's Tip: *In life, relaxation is good, but in a story, it signals a lack of conflict. If your character is relaxed, make sure a catalyst is introduced to ensure he doesn't stay that way for too long.*

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STRESS

DEFINITION: a state of strain or tension

Physical Signals:

Rigid muscles
A clenched jaw
Tendons standing out
Pacing
A quick, hurried walk
Accelerated speech
Barking orders at people
Eyes that dart from one thing to another
Becoming quick-tempered
Using a strong, businesslike handshake
Constant motion
Speaking in a rushed tone
Yelling
Rolling the neck and shoulders
Shaking out the hands and arms
Rubbing the neck
Running the hands through the hair
Arriving late to meetings and appointments
Squinting
Criticizing
Leaning forward with a stiff neck
Approaching mundane tasks mechanically and efficiently
Driving offensively or thoughtlessly
Listening to loud, angry music
Complaining
Grinding the teeth
Gum-chewing, knuckle-popping, and other stress relief gestures
Bursting into tears
Aggression
Skipping meals

Internal Sensations:

Neck and back pain
Muscle strain or spasms
Headache
Loss of appetite
Knots in the stomach
Heartburn

Mental Responses:

Difficulty sleeping

EMOTION AMPLIFIERS

Irritability

An inability to see value or enjoyment in the little things

Impatience

Awaking from sleep feeling unrested

Becoming argumentative

An inability to turn the mind off

A lack of concentration

Worrying

Defensiveness

Cues of Acute or Long-Term Stress:

Weight loss

Heightened anxiety

Insomnia

Drinking to fall asleep

Reliance on sleep medication

Exhaustion

Digestive disorders

Hypertension

Increased sickness

Strained relationships

Ulcers

Worry that borders on paranoia

Cues of Suppressed Stress:

Closing the eyes and taking deep breaths in an attempt to relax

Increased physical exercise as a form of release

Increased negativity

Making excuses for one's behavior

Overcommitting in an effort to look like everything is in control

Denial

Forcing a smile

Apologizing for one's tone or actions

Writer's Tip: *Body tension should always have a root emotional cause. Make sure the emotional component is attached to the bodily stress so there is no doubt in the reader's mind that something is driving this behavior, rather than it being a normal characteristic.*

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ELEVATE YOUR WRITING WITH MORE BESTSELLING GUIDES

If you found *Emotion Amplifiers* helpful, you might be interested in more writing guides that are currently available in the *Writers Helping Writers* collection. For your convenience, we have provided information on our resource books here, along with a sample from each.

THE EMOTION THESAURUS: A WRITER'S GUIDE TO CHARACTER EXPRESSION

"One of the challenges a fiction writer faces, especially when prolific, is coming up with fresh ways to describe emotions. This handy compendium fills that need. It is both a reference and a brainstorming tool, and one of the resources I'll be turning to most often as I write my own books."

James Scott Bell, bestselling author of *Deceived* and *Plot & Structure*

SAMPLE ENTRY: FEAR

DEFINITION: to be afraid of; to expect threat or danger

PHYSICAL SIGNALS:

Face turning ashen, white, pallid

Hair lifting on the nape and arms

Body odor, cold sweats

Clammy hands

Trembling lips and chin

Tendons standing out in the neck, a visible pulse

Elbows pressing into the sides, making one's body as small as possible

Freezing, feeling rooted to the spot

Rapid blinking

Tight shoulders

Staring but not seeing, eyes shut or crying

Hands jammed into armpits or self-hugging

Breath bursting in and out

Leg muscles tightening, the body ready to run

Looking all around, especially behind

EMOTION AMPLIFIERS

A shrill voice
Lowering the voice to a whisper
Keeping one's back to a wall or corner
Shaking uncontrollably
Gripping something, knuckles going white
Stiff walking, the knees locking
Beads of sweat on the lip or forehead
Grabbing onto someone
Eyes appearing damp and overly bright
Stuttering and mispronouncing words, tremors in the voice
Jerky movements, squirming
Licking the lips, gulping down water
Sprinting or running
Sweeping a hand across the forehead to get rid of sweat
Gasping and expelling one's breath as if pained
Uncontrollable whimpering
Pleading, talking to oneself
Flinching at noises

INTERNAL SENSATIONS:

An inability to speak
Shakiness in the limbs
Holding back a scream or cry
Heartbeat racing, nearly exploding
Dizziness, weakness in the legs and knees
A loosening of the bladder
Chest pain
Holding one's breath, gulping down breaths to stay quiet
A stomach that feels rock hard
Hyper-sensitivity to touch and sound
Adrenaline spikes

MENTAL REACTIONS:

Wanting to flee or hide
The sensation of things moving too quickly to process
Images of what-could-be flashing through the mind
Flawed reasoning
Jumping to a course of action without thinking things through
A skewed sense of time

CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM FEAR:

Uncontrollable trembling, fainting
Insomnia
Heart giving out
Panic attacks, phobias
Exhaustion
Depression
Substance abuse

EMOTION AMPLIFIERS

Withdrawing from others

Tics (a repetitive grimace, a head twitch, talking to oneself)

Resistance to pain from rushing adrenaline

MAY ESCALATE TO: anger, terror, paranoia, dread

CUES OF SUPPRESSED FEAR:

Keeping silent

Denying fear through diversion or topic change

Turning away from the cause of the fear

Attempting to keep one's voice light

A watery smile that's forced into place

Masking fear with a reactive emotion (anger or frustration)

False bravado

Over-indulgence in a habit (nail biting, lip biting, scratching the skin raw)

A joking tone, but the voice cracks

WRITER'S TIP: Prime readers for an emotional experience by describing the mood of a scene as your character enters it. If your character is antsy, the reader will be too.

THE POSITIVE TRAIT THESAURUS: A WRITER'S GUIDE TO CHARACTER ATTRIBUTES

“In these brilliantly conceived, superbly organized and astonishingly thorough volumes, Angela Ackerman and Becca Puglisi have created an invaluable resource for writers and storytellers. Whether you are searching for new and unique ways to add and define characters, or brainstorming methods for revealing those characters without resorting to clichés, it is hard to imagine two more powerful tools for adding depth and dimension to your screenplays, novels or plays.”

Michael Hauge, Hollywood script consultant and story expert, author of *Writing Screenplays That Sell* and *Selling Your Story in 60 Seconds: The Guaranteed Way to Get Your Screenplay or Novel Read*

SAMPLE ENTRY: COURAGEOUS

DEFINITION: possessing the mental or moral resilience to face opposition, danger, or difficulties despite one's fear

CATEGORIES: achievement, interactive, moral

SIMILAR ATTRIBUTES: brave, dauntless, heroic, valiant

POSSIBLE CAUSES:

The desire to honor role models by living up to their moral standard and/or sacrifice
The belief that one must not let fear stand in the way of what is right

Wanting to protect others from harm or suffering

Having a strong moral code

Believing one person can make a difference and the future is determined by one's actions

ASSOCIATED BEHAVIORS:

Doing what is right instead of what is easy

Facing danger, uncertainty, or hardship with strength

Being strong for others

Being confident

Standing up for those who are not equipped to stand up for themselves

Stepping up when leadership is needed

Facing fear to achieve a goal

Understanding one's shortcomings

Enduring pain or suffering with a show of strength

Telling the truth when it's important

Speaking up when others stay silent

Facing the unknown

Showing compassion and empathy for others

Putting oneself in danger so others will be safe

EMOTION AMPLIFIERS

Following one's beliefs even when it's dangerous to do so
Living one's life according to one's beliefs
Having a strong sense of one's purpose
Believing in justice and equality
Determination
Having a strong mental focus when it's needed
Having high stamina and perseverance
Accepting responsibility for one's actions
Being willing to step outside of one's comfort zone
Giving someone a second chance, or asking for a second chance
Not being defeated by rejection or failure
Having strong convictions
Knowing when to speak and when to stay silent
Being in control of one's emotions
Putting others before oneself
Focusing on the end goal; not allowing oneself to be sidetracked
Knowing what one believes and not allowing others to sway those beliefs
Resiliency; the ability to keep trying even after multiple failures

ASSOCIATED THOUGHTS:

*Jon's going to be devastated. But the news should come from me, not a stranger.
Mom and Dad might be disappointed, but this is something I need to do.
Mrs. Bloom shouldn't treat Marc differently than me. I'm going to talk to her.
This isn't exactly safe, but Rick's sister is in there and someone's got to get her out.
That kid is struggling in the current. I need to get out there now!*

ASSOCIATED EMOTIONS: determination, guilt, resignation, somberness, wariness, worry

POSITIVE ASPECTS: Courageous characters will make up for what is lacking in any circumstance. After reflection or a moral assessment, they will step up, no matter the odds, because they know that it's the right thing to do. People who show courage have a core of inner strength and a strong moral compass. They're willing to put the welfare of others first when it counts most. They feel fear, but can master it, and do not allow it to alter their decisions. Characters who are courageous lead by example, even if they are unsuited to a task. Others are inspired by their courage and often strive to honor it by showing courage themselves.

NEGATIVE ASPECTS: Courage, while commendable, is not always smart. Characters with this trait sometimes don't see beyond the immediate situation to the long-term impacts of a choice or action. When pausing to think might be the best course of action, courageous characters can be impulsive and respond emotionally, letting their desire to act override wisdom.

EXAMPLE FROM LITERATURE: Frodo, the simple hobbit from *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, is the least suited for a dangerous mission against a deadly, powerful foe. Yet his willingness to set forth provides an incredible lesson in courage. Lacking the strength of humans, the battle training of dwarves, and the magic of wizards, Frodo makes his way to Mount Doom to destroy the one ring before it can send Middle earth into darkness.

EMOTION AMPLIFIERS

His fortitude and strength comes from within, and despite his fear, he ultimately saves the world. **Other Examples from Literature and Film:** Harry Potter (*Harry Potter* franchise), Herman Boone (*Remember the Titans*)

TRAITS IN SUPPORTING CHARACTERS THAT MAY CAUSE CONFLICT:

gullible, manipulative, reckless, self-destructive, selfish, timid, violent, weak-willed

CHALLENGING SCENARIOS FOR THE COURAGEOUS CHARACTER:

Facing a situation where one has failed in the past

Dealing with a phobia

Having to choose between doing what's right and doing what's popular

Facing a decision that will mean life or death for someone else

Showing courage despite a hardship, disability, or great personal cost

THE NEGATIVE TRAIT THESAURUS: A WRITER'S GUIDE TO CHARACTER FLAWS

“As Ackerman and Puglisi explain in their insightful opening chapters, character flaws drive character arcs. Without a solid understanding of what major problem is at the crux of our character's personal dilemma, we will never have the knowledge to shape a powerful transformation over the course of our story.

But more than just power, we also want originality, and this is where *The Negative Trait Thesaurus* should prove especially helpful. Just in browsing a few entries, my imagination was immediately spurred to look beyond obvious, first-glance choices toward bigger and more unique possibilities. I look forward to using this wonderful tool (complete with some of the best "bonus goodies" I've ever seen in the appendices) in shaping my characters in my next work-in-progress.”

K.M. Weiland, bestselling author of *Structuring Your Novel* and *Outlining Your Novel*

SAMPLE ENTRY: CONTROLLING

DEFINITION: inclined to exercise a restraining or directing influence over others

SIMILAR FLAWS: despotic, dictatorial, domineering, tyrannical

POSSIBLE CAUSES:

Growing up in an environment where one had no control
Being raised by a caregiver whose expectations were unrealistic
A thirst for power or the respect of others
Deriving pleasure from the domination of others
Having an intense need to be right
A fear of failure
A need for structure and predictability
Obsessive Compulsive Personality Disorder

ASSOCIATED BEHAVIORS AND ATTITUDES:

Perfectionism and pickiness
A drive to succeed
Difficulty delegating tasks to others
Requiring others to follow one's rules
Hypercriticism; a tendency to micromanage
Involving oneself in every possible decision
Keeping strict control of one's finances
Overriding the suggestions or opinions of others in favor of one's own agenda
Avoiding activities where one must be subservient to another
Intimidation and manipulation
Territoriality and defensiveness
Being highly responsible

EMOTION AMPLIFIERS

Feeling anger, frustration, and jealousy when others succeed
Possessiveness (in personal relationships)
Becoming aggressive when one's dominance is questioned
Giving backhanded compliments: *Good game, son. But it would've been better if...*
Being impatient with others
Rewarding loyalty with favoritism
Demanding respect
Instituting surprise visits and "check-ins" to make sure rules are being obeyed
Withholding resources, information, or affection until one's demands are met
Blaming others
Needing to know where one's child or spouse is at all times
Making others feel badly for not measuring up (making comments that demean or hurt)
Noticing flaws rather than assets
Helping someone, then reminding them that they are now in one's debt
Pushing one's interests and hobbies onto others
Making suggestions that are really demands
Separating people from their support systems in order to better control them
Employing double standards (being tardy, yet expressing impatience at being kept waiting)
Requiring things to be in a specific order and place
Rewarding subservience and compliance
Punishing rule infractions or free thinking (withholding affection or help, etc.)

ASSOCIATED THOUGHTS:

This is too important for someone else to handle.
She's inept. How many times do I have to tell her how to do this?
This is my responsibility. How dare he try and tell me how to do it?

ASSOCIATED EMOTIONS: annoyance, confidence, determination, disappointment, frustration, impatience, smugness

POSITIVE ASPECTS: Controlling characters are relentless in their pursuit of perfection. Via this trait, they can push others to be their best. Their fear of failure spurs them on to frequent success, and their competence makes them fruitful project managers in the workplace.

NEGATIVE ASPECTS: Because of their need for perfection, controlling characters can be overly critical of others, undermining their confidence and making them feel unappreciated. This type of character has a hard time delegating work, believing that no one can do it as well as they can. Their constant supervision creates resentment, damaging morale. When their dominance is threatened, controlling characters may employ any method necessary to regain the upper hand, including threats, manipulation, verbal abuse, or physical violence.

EXAMPLE FROM FILM: Among other frightening traits, Hannibal Lecter (*The Silence of the Lambs*) has the need to control, as is evidenced through his interactions with Clarice. He keeps her off-balance by demanding personal information in exchange for his help with her case, yet is personally offended when others treat her disrespectfully. When

EMOTION AMPLIFIERS

Miggs, another prisoner, is rude to Clarice, Lecter admonishes him so severely that he commits suicide. It's no surprise that Lecter chose a career in psychology, where he could have immense influence and control over his patients. **Other Examples from Film and Literature:** Don Vito Corleone (*The Godfather*), Martin Burney (*Sleeping with the Enemy*), General Woundwort (*Watership Down*)

OVERCOMING THIS TRAIT AS A MAJOR FLAW: Understanding the reasoning behind one's need to control and implementing necessary changes to alter the behavior are both important steps to letting go. It can also be helpful to throw the character into a situation where he has no control; in the result of a positive outcome, the character may see that everything can and will work out without his constant micromanaging. Controlling characters can benefit greatly from getting to know the people around them—their strengths and weaknesses, likes and dislikes —and giving them the chance to achieve their own personal best.

TRAITS IN SUPPORTING CHARACTERS THAT MAY CAUSE CONFLICT:
compulsive, disorganized, independent, lazy, mischievous, rebellious, uncooperative

**THE RURAL SETTING THESAURUS: A WRITER'S
GUIDE TO PERSONAL AND NATURAL PLACES**

SAMPLE ENTRY: RIVER

SIGHTS

Eddies and whitecaps creating constant movement, leaf-dappled sunlight, water that is sparkling in some spots and murky in others, silt and mud along the river bottom, reeds growing near the bank, trees hanging out over the water, grasses on the banks that bend in the wind, a fast- or slow-moving current, boulders breaking the water's surface and causing white water and foam, litter (paper cups, soda cans, plastic bags, discarded clothing) caught at the river's edge, spiderwebs stretched between branches along the bank, fish jumping, smooth stones, algae-slick underwater rocks, banks dotted with wildflowers and weedy growth, organic debris floating on the current (flower petals, twigs, leaves, dead bugs, branches), cracked mud along the river's edge as the water level goes down and exposes more of the bank, murky polluted waters, a dam of branches and twigs created by beavers, deadwood gathering at a bend in the river, a fork in the river's path, rapids and waterfalls, raccoons washing their dinner in the water, deer and foxes coming to drink, otters playing in the river, birds (herons, loons, kingfishers, ducks, egrets) gliding across the surface to fish, spiders and ants, annoying midges and mosquitoes, dragonflies whirling through the reeds, turtles resting on logs, alligators sunning themselves on the bank (in certain locations), canoes and motorboats, kids swinging from a rope out into the river, people fishing in the shallows or on the banks, teens jumping off pedestrian bridges into deep water or floating down the river on calm days in tubes and rubber boats

SOUNDS

Rough water frothing and crashing, gentle water trickling and chuckling, water splashing over rocks and thundering down a waterfall or set of rapids, birds calling, chattering squirrels, buzzing insects, animals scampering through nearby undergrowth, fish jumping, turtles plopping, alligators sliding into the water, branches and twigs dropping with a splash, a canoe or kayak hull sluicing through the water, oars slapping the river's surface, the whirl of a fishing line being thrown, swimmers splashing and laughing, the slurp and splash of someone walking in waders, wings flapping as a bird takes flight, voices from picnickers, kids shrieking, distant urban noises (traffic, people calling to one another, doors slamming), a boat's motor

SMELLS

Algae, wet earth, a clean water or stagnant water smell (depending on the area and time of year), wildflowers, grass, rotting deadfall or leaves, fresh-caught fish

TASTES

River water accidentally swallowed, snacks (chips, pretzels, candy, granola bars), picnic foods (sandwiches, fruit, cookies, brownies), cold drinks from a cooler (bottled water, beer, soda), wild berries or rose hips found along the banks

EMOTION AMPLIFIERS

TEXTURES AND SENSATIONS

Cold or warm river water, being splashed by a friend, leaves and twigs brushing against one's skin, slimy rocks underfoot, mud oozing between the toes, sitting on a sun-warmed rock, water from an oar dripping onto one's legs when one changes paddling sides, a hard plastic canoe seat, an ache in the lower back from sitting on a backless seat, sunburn, wet skin being dried by the sun, the wind picking up and causing a chill, the tug of a biting fish on the end of one's line, mosquito bites, the shock of cold river water when one's canoe tips over, the pull of a strong river current, fighting to swim ashore and hardly moving

POSSIBLE SOURCES OF CONFLICT

Someone drowning or experiencing a near-drowning

Hitting one's head on a rock

Ingesting contaminated water

Alligators, crocodiles, and snakes (in certain climates)

Being run over by a boat and knocked unconscious

Developing hypothermia from falling through the ice or being stuck in the water for a long time

Going over a waterfall or set of rapids and being injured

Stepping on unseen garbage at the river's bottom and cutting a foot

Capsizing a canoe in fast-moving water

Getting lost in the adjoining woods and missing one's boat rendezvous point

Canoeing with a partner who has no clue what she's doing

Not catching any fish

Hooking something troubling while fishing (a garbage bag with a body part inside, a shirt with bloodstains on it)

PEOPLE COMMONLY FOUND HERE

Canoers, fishermen, kayakers, locals out for a walk, people picnicking, swimmers

RELATED SETTINGS THAT MAY TIE IN WITH THIS ONE

Campsite, canyon, creek, forest, hiking trail, lake, marsh, meadow, mountains, rainforest, waterfall

SETTING NOTES AND TIPS

Rivers and their smaller cousins (streams and creeks) are a great choice for a natural setting because the inherent activity associated with them will add a sense of motion and movement to the scene. But rivers don't have to be fast flowing and exciting to be meaningful; a stagnant, polluted river can set a completely different mood for your story. And while rivers often flow through forested areas, they also can be found cutting across a plain, meandering down a mountain, or rushing through canyons and gorges. Their versatility makes them a strong setting choice for a story.

SETTING DESCRIPTION EXAMPLE

I stumbled up the hill, my body baked as dry as the land I'd crossed. Flashes of liquid light winked through the trees ahead and my legs tremored. Cocking my head, I heard it at last: the gentle burble of salvation.

Techniques and Devices Used: Metaphor, simile, symbolism

Resulting Effects: Reinforcing emotion, tension and conflict

THE URBAN SETTING THESAURUS: A WRITER'S GUIDE TO CITY SPACES

SAMPLE ENTRY: POLICE CAR

SIGHTS

Front Seat: steering and dashboard equipment, a mounted or hand-held radar for gauging the speed of oncoming cars, a dash camera, a portable microphone that can be placed in a pocket, a laptop mounted in the passenger seat, a LoJack system, buttons to engage the sirens and lights, an organizer containing record-keeping supplies (file folders, forms, pens, notepads, a clipboard), a rifle or shotgun locked into place, cold weather clothing in the winter (jacket, hat, gloves), a communications radio, extra handcuffs or zip ties, neon traffic vests and gloves, a PA system, a beverage in the cup holder

Backseat: a stark and bare interior, hard plastic seats with little leg room, seat belts, impact-resistant windows, door handles that don't work from the inside, bars on the windows, a clear Plexiglas or metal mesh divider between the front and backseats, hard floors (most prisoner transport models have no carpeting)

SOUNDS

The radio crackling to life, sirens wailing, the officer's voice amplified through the PA system, the officer talking in the front seat, a suspect (shifting position on the back plastic seat, nervously tapping the floor or the back of the driver's seat with a foot, yelling, crying, vomiting, mumbling, tapping or banging on the window or the divider between seats), traffic noises outside the car, people walking by, external voices, the beeping of a radar gun, fingers tapping on the laptop as records are retrieved, the car's acceleration and deceleration

SMELLS

Coffee, fast food that was recently picked up and eaten in the car, odors from suspects and detainees (sweat, urine, body odor, vomit, alcohol, cigarette or pot smoke), old fabric (if the vehicle has fabric seats, as some models do), pepper spray

TASTES

Some settings have no specific tastes associated with them beyond what the character might bring into the scene (alcohol, mouthwash, chewing gum, etc.). For scenes like these, where specific tastes are sparse, it would be best to stick to descriptors from the other four senses.

TEXTURES AND SENSATIONS

The crisp cloth of a police uniform, an adrenaline rush kicking in as the sirens blare and the cruiser takes off, a hard plastic backseat, feet sliding on the uncarpeted floor, being cramped in the back of the cruiser, having to duck in order to get into the car, metal handcuffs or zip ties binding one's wrists and causing painful twinges, claustrophobia, sitting awkwardly with one's hands bound behind one's back, sliding across the plastic seat at high speeds, vainly trying to force the door open by bashing against it, nausea, carsickness, adrenaline or drugs in one's system that make one feel jittery or numb

POSSIBLE SOURCES OF CONFLICT

Suspects trying to spit through the mesh divider at an officer
Inebriated suspects whose actions are unpredictable
Violent suspects
Abusive officers
The arrest of an innocent suspect
Being arrested and having no one to call for help
Being prone to carsickness and vomiting in the backseat
A large person having to ride in a small backseat
An officer being falsely accused of mistreating a suspect
Misconduct by an officer that is caught on tape
An ethical disagreement between partners
Political pressure from higher-ups
Budget cuts that mean faulty equipment and poorly maintained vehicles
A suspect that suffers a seizure or passes out while in the backseat

PEOPLE COMMONLY FOUND HERE

Criminals, friends and family members doing a sanctioned ride-along, police officers and training officers, suspects

RELATED SETTINGS THAT MAY TIE IN WITH THIS ONE

Rural Volume: Country road, house fire, house party

Urban Volume: Big city street, car accident, courtroom, parade, police station, prison cell, small town street

SETTING NOTES AND TIPS

Remember that police procedure, equipment, and vehicle contents can vary depending on where your story takes place. Also, people will react very differently to being cuffed and put in the back of a police car, and their responses can reveal a lot to readers. Perhaps the suspect is having a full-blown panic attack that seems over-the-top for his situation. Maybe the suspect is icily calm, showing no emotion whatsoever. What might the reader infer from a happy character, one who won't stop talking, or someone who lies down and goes to sleep on the hard plastic seat? Desperate situations are great for revealing a person's true colors. Make sure that your character reacts according to who he truly is.

SETTING DESCRIPTION EXAMPLE

Janelle's knees shook, making a constant rubbing noise against the reinforced seat divider. The seat was hard and cold, and she had to lean sideways to keep from sitting on her hands. Of course this meant that every time the officer turned a corner, the window grate slammed into her like a baseball bat smacking a piñata. Sadistic creep. The metal cuffs crimped the skin at her wrists and the odd angle sent jolts of pain up to her shoulders. The cop tried to talk to her, but she wasn't that stupid. She could almost hear Dad in her ear, telling her to keep her yap shut until a lawyer showed up. She'd seen him hauled off enough to know how it went, although being the one arrested was a lot different than watching someone else be taken in.

Techniques and Devices Used: Multisensory descriptions, simile

Resulting Effects: Characterization, hinting at backstory, reinforcing emotion, tension and conflict

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