

# Manga Artist Meet-Up: Story and Character Basics

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## Story Overview

Story is what keeps readers interested in manga. Even if you have great art, people will get bored if your manga doesn't have an interesting story.

### Drama

- All good stories have “Drama”
- Drama = Event + Emotion.
  - An Event is something that moves the story forward and also catches the reader's interest.
    - *Example:* Two friends race across a falling bridge.
      - Interesting events have “conflict”; Something that is an obstacle, challenge, or problem to overcome.
  - Emotion is the feeling of the event. It is also called the Tone of the event.
    - *Example:* If the feeling or tone is “Humorous” then the way that the two friends race across the bridge could be silly or crazy things could happen. If the emotion or tone is “Scary”, then the two friends might be racing to save their lives instead of for fun.
  - When you create your stories, make sure every part of it has drama.

## Creating a Story Idea

### C.O.P.E.

There is a simple tool you can use to quickly come up with a story premise. Try using this acronym: C.O.P.E.

- C is for Character. Who is the main character?
- O is for Objective. What is the character's goal?
  - Interesting objective or clear goal.
  - Strong Verb

- To Accuse Someone Who Has Killed You.
- To Leave a Dream World.
- To Give Hope To Distressed Statesmen.
- Note that a goal that has a deadline attached to it is a strong goal. A goal that has a cost for failure is even better. Finally a goal that has a cost for success is the best, tension and suspense is inevitable with this kind of goal.
- P is for Problem or Conflict. What is preventing the lead from reaching their objective?
  - Internal Pressure, External Pressure, or Both
  - Intensity, Tension, Suspense, and Emotion all arise from conflict. It is what keeps the story interesting and flowing along.
- E is for Ending. How is the story resolved?
  - Is it a happy ending, meaning the character reaches their goal?
  - Is it a negative ending, meaning the character doesn't reach their goal?
  - Or is it an Ironic ending?
    - The character reaches their goal, but something bad happens as a result
    - The character doesn't reach their goal, but it ended up being for the better.
    - The character abandons their goal all together or changes their goal.
- Breaking down your story using C.O.P.E. will get you to the core of your story. From here you spend time filling in the details. How does the lead go about reaching or failing to reach their goal? What series of events and actions takes them to the knock out ending?

## **Tone**

- Another important thing to consider once you have the spine of your story figured out is the tone.
- Tone is the feeling of the story. It sets the overall emotional direction for the work and helps you determine what things should and shouldn't be in the story. It also establishes expectations in the reader's mind.
  - Is your tone Adventurous? Humorous? Serious? Experiment with taking one story idea and applying different tones to it just to see how much of an impact tone has on a story.

## Story Structure

All stories have a structure of some sort. The traditional story structure is known as the 3-act structure which basically breaks the story up into 3 parts: Act I, Act II, and Act III.

- Act I: Beginning:
  - Establish the Tone.
  - Introduce the Lead and Main Characters
  - Establish a Conflict.
  - Compel readers to the middle with an inciting incident that forces characters into the story.
- Act II: Middle:
  - Deepen and Complicate Characters and Relationships.
  - Creating More Interesting Conflicts.
    - Building up higher and higher.
  - Support, Expand and Explore the Core of the Story in Various Incarnations.
    - Setting
    - Characters
    - Events
    - Side Plots
    - Themes, etc.
  - The penultimate event leading to the final act.

- Act III: Climax and Resolution:
  - Final obstacle is faced and the climactic action of the story takes place.
  - Resolution: Tie up loose ends; Answer all critical questions to the central plot.
  - Devise ending that resonates with readers.
    - Meaning/Moral: Speaking to some aspect of human experience.
    - Intriguing or Surprising outcome (justified/ set-up by experience).
    - Satisfying Ending.
      - Meeting or exceeding their expectations.

## Scene Writing

Scenes are the smaller units that make up a story. Scene structure follows the same basic principles as story structure, just with more specific detail.

- Hook to Capture the Reader's Attention
  - Set-up what's going on.
  - Some interesting action, camera shot, or dialogue.
- Intensity, Conflict, and Emotion (The I.C.E. Principle)
  - I is for *Intensity*.
    - A Desperate Goal for the character. The more desperate and immediate the goal, the greater the intensity.
  - C is for *Conflict*.
    - More obstacles in the way or pressures on the character, the more conflict there is.
  - E is for *Emotion*.
    - The stronger the character's desire to reach the goal, the more emotion there is.
- **Prompts and Resolutions**
  - Prompts are cliffhangers, surprises, or set-ups at the end of a scene that keep the readers interested in what will happen next and thus keep them committed to the story.
  - Resolutions satisfy questions that were set-up earlier in the scene or story. They may take the form of prompts which create new questions in the story.

- Think of the scenes in your stories as Question and Answer sessions. Think about them in this way and you can constantly keep people engaged while they experience your story.

### **Scene Motivations and Reactions**

Every action and reaction in the scene is driven by: *Objective Motivations* and *Subjective Reactions*.

- Objective motivation is something that the character can see, hear, taste, smell, touch, or sense.
  - i.e. a monster, an explosion, someone screaming, a person grabbing ones arm, etc.
- Subjective reactions are the voluntary and involuntary actions that a character does based objective motivations.
  - I.e. Sigh, Become Afraid, Think to one's self, etc.

All beats in a scene are based upon characters being motivated to take action of one sort or another.

### **Stringing Scenes Together: Scenes and Sequels**

A way to structure scenes for great dramatic effect is to have scene types that basically follow this flow:

- Scene A: Goal, Conflict, Disaster
- Scene B: Reaction, Dilemma, Decision

In this way of structuring a scene, the character has a goal and a conflict and at the end of the scene they will fail to reach that goal and will end up worse off because of it. Then, in the following scene (or within the same scene in some cases) the character takes a moment to react to the failure and think over all of their options before moving forwards with a decision to take another action in order to reach a new goal. From there the process just starts over and a new Scene A will follow. You can write ABABABAB until you are done.

### **Reversal of Expectation (R.O.E.)**

A general principle that you can apply to every level of story creation is the reversal of the reader's expectations. Predictable and cliché stories are boring. By reversing on the

reader's expectations you keep them constantly on their toes and genuinely surprised and stimulated at every moment of your story.

This is of course to be balanced with giving the readers a little of what they want as well. If you surprise or reverse on their expectations too much, they may become frustrated and dismiss the work as overly contrived or sensationalist. The most important thing is to keep them interested in what's going to happen next.

**Story Name:**

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**By:**

**Who is the main character in the story?**

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**What is the character's goal in the story? What are they trying to do?**

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**What's the conflict? What is preventing the character from reaching their goal?**

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**What happens in the end? Is the ending happy, sad, or both?**

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## Characters

Characters are the actors that populate and give direction to a story. They connect the reader to the events and emotions in the story.

### Creating a Character Idea

- You can come up with a character idea by combining an Adjective + Noun:

○*Example:*

- an Evil Musician
- a Clumsy Mailman
- a Genius Student

### Character Personality Traits

After you have an idea for a character, think about their personality traits (how they think, act, and their basic attitude).

*Example:*

- An Evil Musician who is “mean” and “shy”, but who also has a funny “sense of humor”.
- A Clumsy Mailman who is “talkative”, “kind”, and “supportive of others”.
- A Genius Student that is “calm”, “reserved”, and “clever”.

### Character Quirks

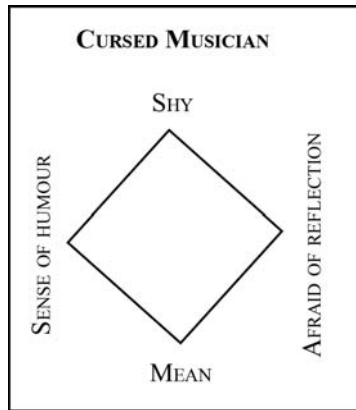
Character traits are something that are universal to characters (many different characters can be “brave” for instance.), but a character quirk is something special and unique about your character’s personality.

*Example:*

- The evil musician is always startled and scared by his reflection.
- The clumsy mailman is kind and supportive of people, but doesn’t like dogs and picks a fight with one wherever he sees them.
- The genius student is incredibly smart but can’t seem to write his own name correctly or remember where he lives (often gets lost on the way home).

## Character Diamond

Use a character diamond to help you organize your character traits and quirks.



## Creating a Character Profile

Once you have a character idea and have described their personality, you can make up all of the details about the character using a character profile.

A character profile includes things like:

- The character's name,
- Their history/ background
- Their likes and dislikes
- The kinds of clothes they wear
- etc.

## **Character Name:**

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### ***Character Personality:***

(Describe your character idea, the character's traits, and quirks here.)

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### ***Character's Age:***

### ***Physical Details:***

(Are they tall or short? Small or large? Do they have any special eye color, hair or, clothing?)

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### ***Ability/Skill:***

(Describe any skills, talents, or special abilities they have.)

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***Likes:*** \_\_\_\_\_

***Dislikes:*** \_\_\_\_\_

***Job/Duty:*** \_\_\_\_\_

***Friends/Family:*** \_\_\_\_\_

***Background/ History:***

(How did the character grow up? Where did they come from? How did they get to where they are now?)

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***Extra Details:***

(You can put anything else special or important about your character here.)

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