IWU's WC|TS Presents Advice on:
Developing Your Characters

1) Come up with a Name (or a Nickname)

First of all, give your character a name or a nickname. It might not be the official name but something you can call them. This way, your character becomes slightly more real. You can now address them and get to know them better.

2) Read More Books

Read books not only for joy but also for practice. The more you read, the better you understand techniques that successful writers use to develop their characters. If you spot an interesting feature, borrow it and analyze it, thinking how you can make your character better.

3) Create a Portfolio for Each Character

The key characteristic of a good book is that each of your characters develop. Define what your character is before your writing and what they become after. Determine what will influence them throughout your piece and what will change them. Write down their past and how it shaped their personality. Take a test on their personality type and write it down. Choose a problem that a character deals with throughout your writing and what they should decide for themselves at the end.

4) Choose "Odd" Features for Your Character

Trivial characters like a solely evil antagonist do not seem real. Instead, try incorporating some unusual features into your character. For instance, your main character is scared of small dogs, or your antagonist may tenderly love breeding parrots. No person is exclusively good or evil–every single one of us has bad and good characteristics. Create your characters the same way. Pick one of the things you like most about yourself and give it to your antagonist. Decide what you hate about your personality and give it to the main hero.

5) Create a Board of Your Characters' Interactions

It is easy to get lost in episodes and interactions, especially when you are writing a whole book. Instead of memorizing every single detail of your plot, create a visual

board with your characters' interactions. Mark each section where your character experiences personal growth or a fall and what causes it. Come up with a color for each character and connect these sections with colorful threads or lines to visualize where your characters meet and interact.

6) Treat Your Characters As Real People

Every character of yours must have their personality and behavior. You should have a different approach to each of them. One of your characters might be an introvert, and it will take weeks and even months to gain their trust and let them tell you everything about their past and desires. Other characters might be naïve by nature and be ready to tell you everything in just one day. If you cannot get any information from your character, don't force them. Give them some time to start trusting you, ask simple questions.

Resources for Your Creative Process:

- The writing center tutors! We have several tutors who, if you select "creative writing" from our "limit to" menu at the top of the WCOnline feature, would *love* to help you write creatively. For more on how to make an appointment with one, look at this handout.

- A book *How Not to Write a Novel: 200 Classic Mistakes and How to Avoid Them–a Misstep-by-Misstep Guide* you can request through I-Share

- An e-book available through the Ames Library at Illinois Wesleyan: *The Handbook of Creative Writing*, which takes you through tips from experts about getting your creative writing to the next level!

- Use a Pomodoro Timer to take guided breaks and have a more productive writing session.

- Visit Think Written to get great ideas for creative writing prompts. They have 365 so you could technically do one each day for a whole non-leap year!