



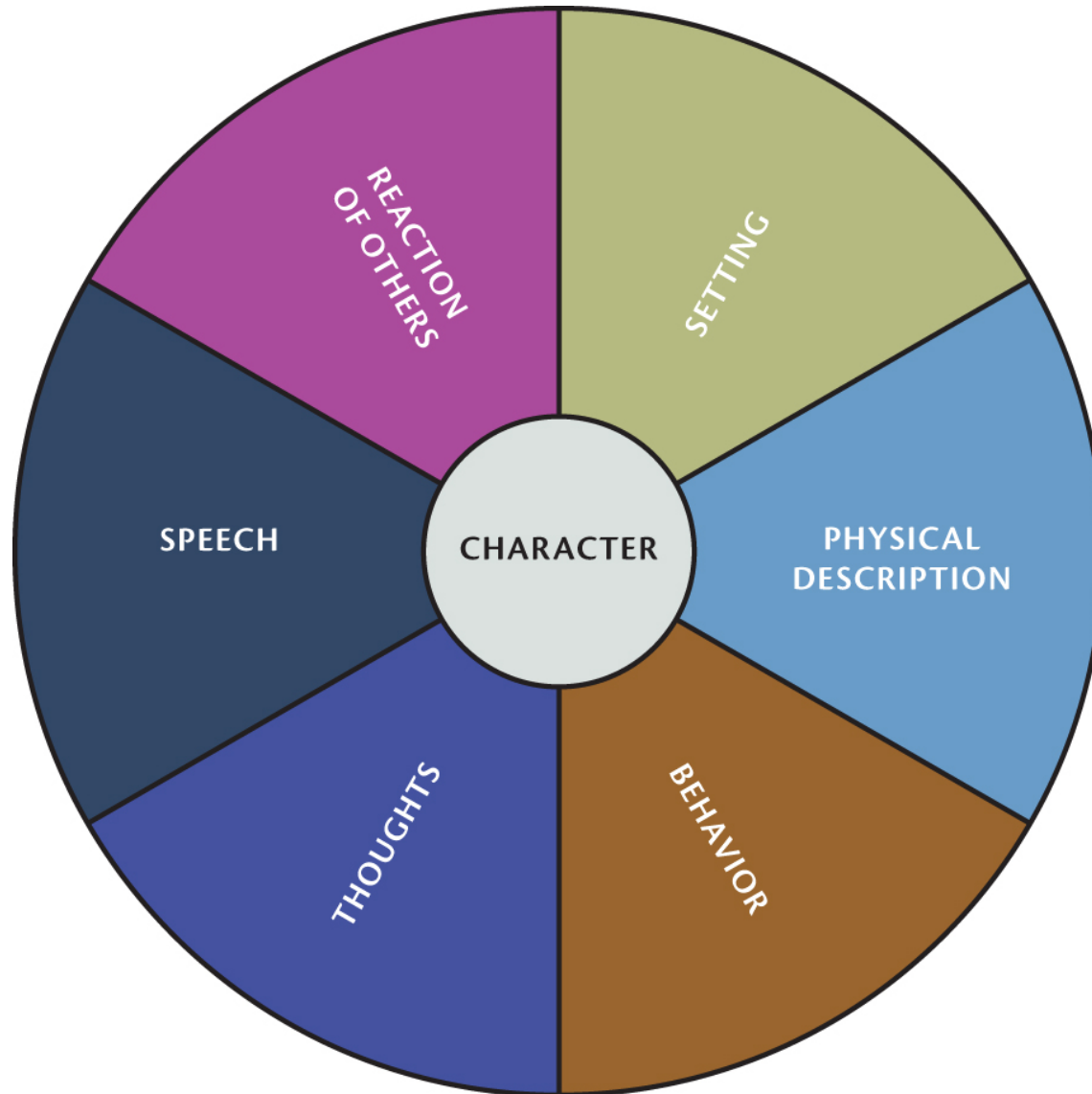
Image Grammar

Teaching Grammar as Part of the Writing Process



Character Wheel





Examine How Robert Louis Stevenson Paints with a Character Wheel

The character wheel is a graphic organizer that helps you visualize and describe different aspects of a character.

Notice how in the following description of the blind pirate Pew, a character in *Treasure Island*, Robert Louis Stevenson first describes the setting, then what the character looks like, then Pew's speech, and so forth, until he has used almost all of the methods listed on the character wheel.

To view an image of Pew painted by N. C. Wyeth go to one of the following:

<http://www.toughton.com/books/treasure/blindpew.htm>

http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Wyeth-Old_Pew.jpg

<http://www.meibohmfinearts.com/availablePrints.aspx?cat=81>

<http://www.tfaoi.com/mn/mia/mia55.jpg>

[Setting]

So things passed until the day after the funeral, and about three o'clock of a bitter, foggy, frosty afternoon, I was standing at the door for a moment full of sad thoughts about my father, when I saw someone drawing slowly near along the road.

[Physical Description]

He was plainly blind, for he tapped before him with a stick, and wore a great green shade over his eyes and nose; and he was hunched, as if with age or weakness, and wore a huge old tattered sea-cloak with a hood, that made him appear positively deformed.

[Thoughts]

I never saw in my life a more dreadful-looking figure.

[Physical Description]

He stopped a little from the inn, and raising his voice in an odd sing-song, addressed the air in front of him:

[Speech]

“Will any kind friend inform a poor blind man, who has lost the precious sight of his eyes in the gracious defense of his native country, England—and God bless King George!—where or in what part of this country he may now be?”

“You are at the Admiral Benbow, Black Hill Cove, my good man,” said I.

“I hear a voice,” said he, “a young voice. Will you give me your hand, my kind young friend and lead me in?”

The following is from Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*.

[Behavior]

I held out my hand, and the horrible, soft-spoken, eyeless creature gripped it in a moment like a vice. I was so much startled that I struggled to withdraw; but the blind man pulled me close up to him with a single action of his arm.

[Speech]

"Now boy," he said, "take me in to the captain."

"Sir," said I, "upon my word I dare not."

"Oh," he sneered, "that's it. Take me in straight, or I'll break your arm."

[Behavior]

And he gave it, as he spoke, a wrench that made me cry out.

The following is from Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*.

[Behavior]

He sat all day over the fire in the private room, gnawing his nails; there he dined, sitting alone with his fears . . . when the night was fully come, he set forth . . . and ventured on foot, attired in his misfitting clothes. He walked fast, hunted by his fears, chattering to himself, skulking through the less frequented streets and alleys, counting the minutes that still divided him from midnight.

[Thoughts]

Hyde set out through the lamp-lit streets, gloating on his crime, light-headedly devising others in the future.

[Reaction of Others]

“He gave me one look, so ugly that it brought out the sweat on me,” said Mr. Enfield. “I had taken a loathing to the gentleman at first sight.”

[Speech]

Mr. Utterson stepped out and touched him on the shoulder. “Mr. Hyde, I think?”

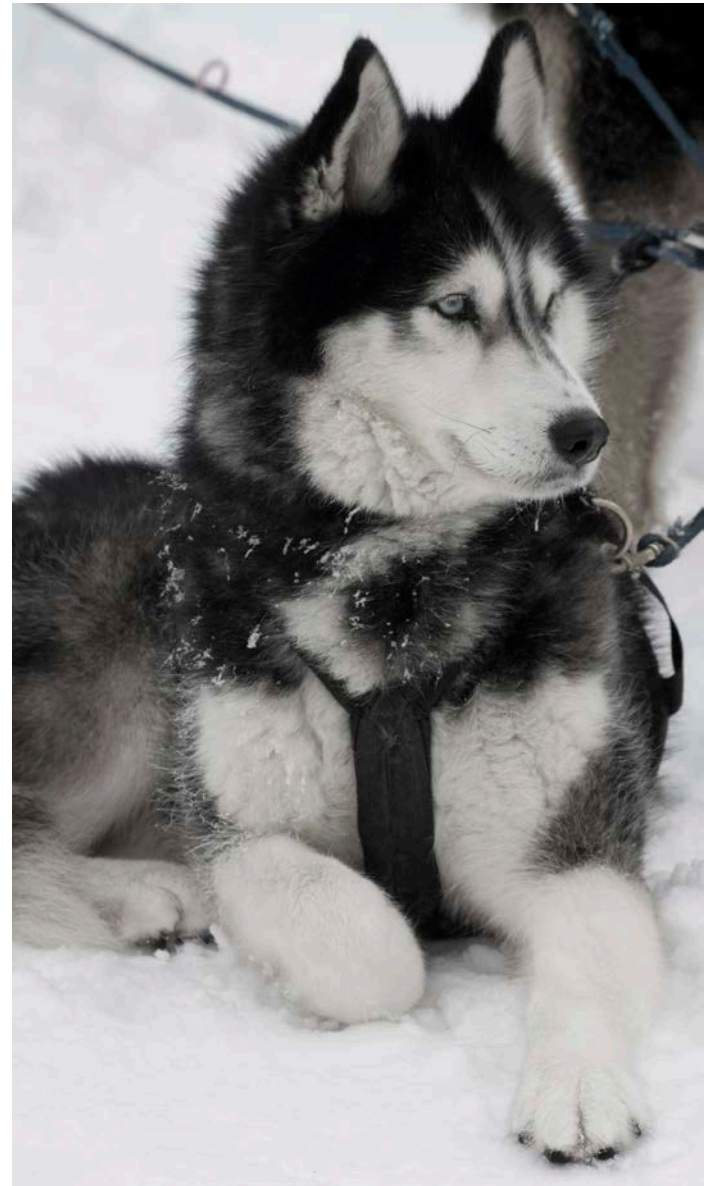
Mr. Hyde shrunk back with a hissing intake of breath. “What do you want?”

Character Wheel: Mercedes From Jack London's *Call of the Wild*

In the following excerpt from *Call of the Wild*, Jack London also uses items from the character wheel in his description of Mercedes.

Although London uses all of the techniques listed on the character wheel, a writer only needs three or four to make the images vivid.

Watch how he does this.



[Behavior]

Buck watched them apprehensively as they proceeded to take down the tent and load the sled. There was a great deal of effort about their manner, but no business-like method. The tent was rolled into an awkward bundle three times as large as it should have been. The tin dishes were packed away unwashed.

Mercedes continually fluttered in the way of her men and kept up an unbroken chattering of remonstrance and advice. When they put a clothes-sack on the front of the sled, she suggested it should go on the back; and when they had put it on the back, and covered it over with a couple of other bundles, she discovered overlooked articles which could abide nowhere else but in that very sack, and they unloaded again.

[Reaction of others]

Three men from a neighboring tent came out and looked on, grinning and winking at one another.

“You’ve got a right smart load as it is,” said one of them; “and it’s not me should tell you your business, but I wouldn’t tote that tent along if I was you.”

“Undreamed of!” cried Mercedes, throwing up her hands in dainty dismay. “However in the world could I manage without a tent?”

“It’s springtime, and you won’t get any more cold weather,” the man replied.

[Reaction of others]

She shook her head decidedly, and Charles and Hal put the last odds and ends on top the mountainous load.

“Think it’ll ride?” one of the men asked.

“Why shouldn’t it?” Charles demanded rather shortly.

“Oh, that’s all right, that’s all right,” the man hastened meekly to say. “I was just a-wonderin’, that is all. It seemed a mite top-heavy.”

Charles turned his back and drew the lashings down as well as he could, which was not in the least well.

“An’ of course the dogs can hike along all day with that contraption behind them,” affirmed a second of the men.

“Certainly,” said Hal, with freezing politeness, taking hold of the gee-pole with one hand and swinging his whip from the other. “Mush!” he shouted. “Mush on there!”

[Speech] (Characterizes both Mercedes and Hal)

The dogs sprang against the breast-bands, strained hard for a few moments, then relaxed. They were unable to move the sled.

“The lazy brutes, I’ll show them,” he cried, preparing to lash out at them with the whip.

But Mercedes interfered, crying, “Oh, Hal, you mustn’t,” as she caught hold of the whip and wrenched it from him. “The poor dears! Now you must promise you won’t be harsh with them for the rest of the trip, or I won’t go a step.”

“Precious lot you know about dogs,” her brother sneered; “and I wish you’d leave me alone. They’re lazy, I tell you, and you’ve got to whip them to get anything out of them. That’s their way. You ask any one. Ask one of those men.”

[Behavior]

Mercedes looked at them imploringly, untold repugnance at sight of pain written in her pretty face.

[Reaction of Others]

“They’re weak as water, if you want to know,” came the reply from one of the men. “Plum tuckered out, that’s what’s the matter. They need a rest.”

[Speech] (Characterizes both Mercedes and Hal)

“Rest be blanked,” said Hal, with his beardless lips; and Mercedes said, “Oh!” in pain and sorrow at the oath.

But she was a clannish creature, and rushed at once to the defense of her brother. “Never mind that man,” she said pointedly. “You’re driving our dogs, and you do what you think best with them.”

[Behavior of Hal]

Again Hal’s whip fell upon the dogs. They threw themselves against the breastbands, dug their feet into the packed snow, got down low to it, and put forth all their strength. The sled held as though it were an anchor. After two efforts, they stood still, panting.

[Mercedes' Behavior]

The whip was whistling savagely, when once more Mercedes interfered. She dropped on her knees before Buck, with tears in her eyes, and put her arms around his neck.

[Speech]

“You poor, poor dears,” she cried sympathetically, “why don’t you pull hard—then you wouldn’t be whipped.”

[Reaction of Others]

Buck did not like her, but he was feeling too miserable to resist her, taking it as part of the day's miserable work.

One of the onlookers, who had been clenching his teeth to suppress hot speech, now spoke up: "It's not that I care a whoop what becomes of you, but for the dogs' sakes I just want to tell you, you can help them a mighty lot by breaking out that sled. The runners are froze fast. Throw your weight against the gee-pole, right and left, and break it out."

[Behavior of Hal]

A third time the attempt was made, but this time, following the advice, Hal broke out the runners which had been frozen to the snow. The overloaded and unwieldy sled forged ahead, Buck and his mates struggling frantically under the rain of blows. A hundred yards ahead the path turned and sloped steeply into the main street. It would have required an experienced man to keep the top-heavy sled upright, and Hal was not such a man.

[Behavior of Hal and the Dogs]

As they swung on the turn the sled went over, spilling half its load through the loose lashings. The dogs never stopped. The lightened sled bounded on its side behind them. They were angry because of the ill treatment they had received and the unjust load. Buck was raging. He broke into a run, the team following his lead.

Hal cried “Whoa! Whoa!” but they gave no heed. He tripped and was pulled off his feet. The capsized sled ground over him, and the dogs dashed on up the street, adding to the gayety of Skagway as they scattered the remainder of the outfit along its chief thoroughfare.

[Reaction of others]

Kind-hearted citizens caught the dogs and gathered up the scattered belongings. Also, they gave advice. Half the load and twice the dogs, if they ever expected to reach Dawson, was what was said. Hal and his sister and brother-in-law listened unwillingly, pitched tent, and overhauled the outfit. Canned goods were turned out that made men laugh, for canned goods on the Long Trail is a thing to dream about.

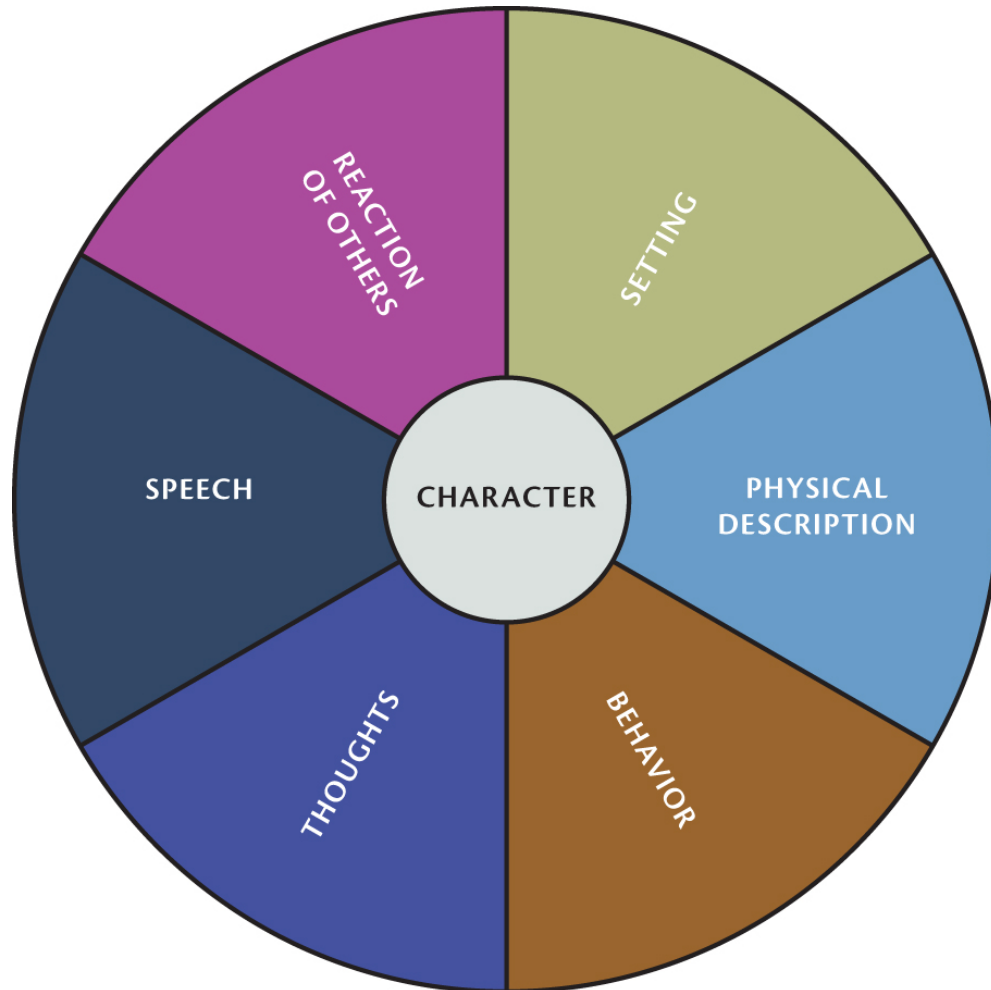
“Blankets for a hotel” quoth one of the men who laughed and helped. “Half as many is too much; get rid of them. Throw away that tent, and all those dishes—who’s going to wash them, anyway? Good Lord, do you think you’re traveling on a Pullman?”

[Behavior of Mercedes]

And so it went, the inexorable elimination of the superfluous. Mercedes cried when her clothes-bags were dumped on the ground and article after article was thrown out. She cried in general, and she cried in particular over each discarded thing. She clasped hands about knees, rocking back and forth broken-heartedly.

She averred she would not go an inch, not for a dozen Charleses. She appealed to everybody and to everything, finally wiping her eyes and proceeding to cast out even articles of apparel that were imperative necessities. And in her zeal, when she had finished with her own, she attacked the belongings of her men and went through them like a tornado.

Review the character wheel.





Try creating an instant character sketch using four of the six images shown.

Revise your four rough drafts to be sure you have included at least four different character wheel categories.

Remember that like artists, you can use your imaginary eye as well as your visual eye.

Review all of the remaining slide images. These are designed to help you visualize possibilities. The brief comment on each slide is for the purpose of evoking brainstorming. Feel free to ignore any images you dislike, including the image on slide 27—a possible protagonist in a suit standing in knee deep water. You might want to replace him with the woman on slide 31, the elderly man on slide 38, or another character out of your imagination. Keep in mind that all the images that follow are not required images but simply suggestions.

Describe the Setting (Home of the Protagonist)



Write a physical description of the protagonist. (You can add a little humor if you like.)



Describe in one sentence a hobby of the protagonist. (Behavior)



Describe another hobby of the protagonist with another sentence.
(Behavior)



Describe a third hobby of the protagonist. (Behavior)

What does this tell you about the protagonist's lifestyle?



Describe some thoughts of the protagonist about the card wizard who won a thousand dollars from him—the female wizard he suspects may be a spy. (Thoughts)




Terminated?

At right is a photo that the protagonist's father found recently. On the back of the photo was the word *terminated* followed by a question mark. Use this to add some thoughts of the father. (Thoughts)



Develop a conversation between the protagonist's father (pictured below) and his son. Their discussion might deal with a question such as, "Is the son a CIA agent or a Mafia hit man?" (Reaction of Others) Relay some information discovered by the father.





Remember that the elements in the character wheel can occur in any order. You can begin with an action (behavior), follow with a quote (speech), describe an exotic location (setting), tell what the main character looks like (physical description), etc.

The idea is to mix various types of information and to avoid relying on only one. Select one character from the seven that follow and create a character sketch using four methods from the character wheel.

Alternate Assignment

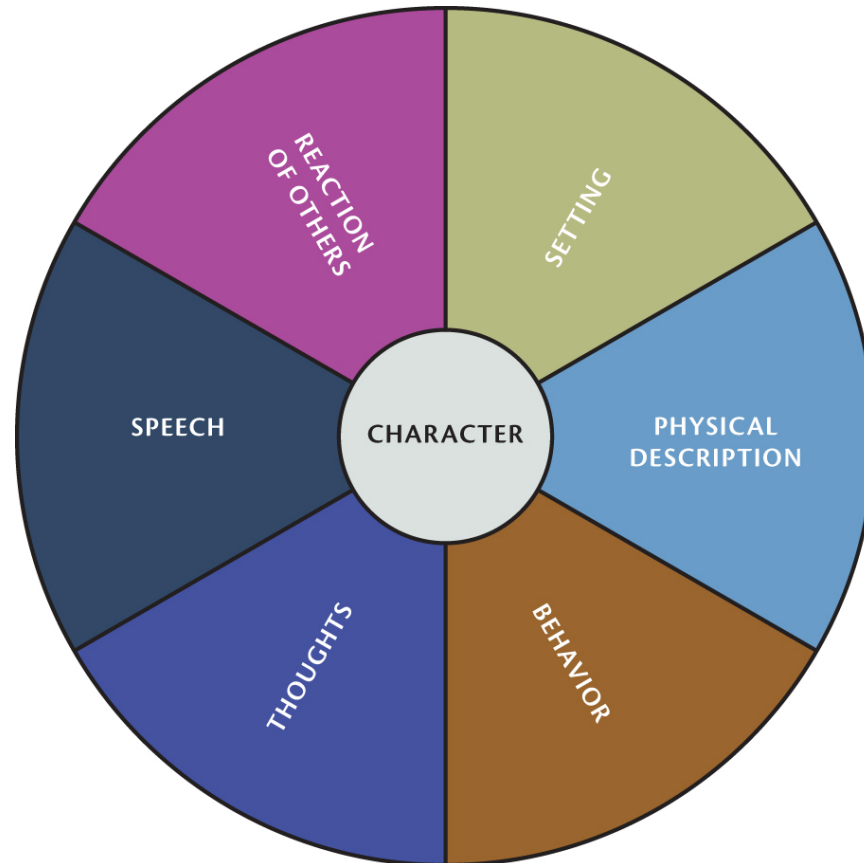
Imagine that two of the characters meet.

Describe their encounter using just three character wheel categories:

1. dialogue between the two selected characters (speech)
2. physical descriptions of both
3. behaviors of both.

Consider describing some type of conflict between the two you select.

Review the character wheel one more time before you begin.



Select two characters from the seven images that follow and create some type of interaction using any three character wheel qualities to describe them.













