

## 02. Key Features of Prose Fiction: Character

**Please note the differences between the types of prose fiction, which are all governed by length:**

**Novels:** Multi-chapter narratives without any specific length requirements or restrictions.

**Novellas:** Multi-chapter narratives which are shorter than novels, typically averaging between 100 and 150 pages.

**Short Stories:** Very short narratives, typically not longer than one or two chapters.

**Flash Fiction:** Extremely short works of fiction that average around 100 words.

**N.B.!** As per your course requirements for this module, you will not be expected to analyse anything more than an extract from a novel, novella or short story.

**N.N.B.!!** Remember to focus your analyses on the passages present to you **only!** Even if you are familiar with the novel the passage comes from, make sure that your work focuses only on the information in the passage, as that is what you are being tested on.

**N.N.N.B.!!!** **Characters** are the vehicles that **move plots forward**, so they can be **critical** to the **pacing** of the story. More significantly than that, they are also normally used to **highlight the themes** in a narrative, as so many themes revolve around the human condition.

**Character** is a very **important** and **useful** feature of **prose fiction**, as sound character analysis can often be used to **discover central themes** and **support** an **analysis** of said themes. Of the four key features of prose fiction, **character is the second most important** – just be careful not to turn a character analysis into a retelling of the story. Focus on **what events tell us** about the **characters**, rather than how the **characters influence the events**.

### Character:

Most narratives normally include many characters, but at least one will stand out as the focus of events. This is the **main character** or **protagonist**. The protagonist is frequently opposed by another character or institution, which we call the **antagonist**.

Very complex works of fiction often avoid having a single protagonist or antagonist. These novels are normally very long and are considered **epic** or **grand narratives**.

**Shorter narratives**, such as short stories, often only include one or two characters, as their length restricts the amount of **exposition** they can engage in.

Often the **rising action** and **climax** are driven by the conflicts between the **protagonist** and **antagonist** of the narrative.

**N.B.!** Sometimes the protagonist can act in very negative ways and actually be the **villain** of the narrative. Sometimes the protagonist can also have very selfish motivations, but still accomplish positive goals, in which case we call him or her an **anti-hero**.

Characterisation is developed through plot, sub-plots, within the descriptions, the thoughts, the dialogue (the monologues, soliloquies and internal monologues), the actions and reactions of the various characters. This development of character is often subtle and must be indirectly inferred by the reader through observation and analysis of the above.

Apart from driving the action of the narrative, characters are also important as they often act as a lens or filter through which the reader experiences the narrative, which brings us to the different **perspectives** or **modes** from which an author can write prose fiction:

- **First Person**
  - The reader's perspective is from within the mind of the protagonist.
  - The entire narrative is subjective and coloured by the perceptions of the protagonist.
  - **I, Me, Mine** and **My** – the use of personal pronouns within the text suggests that the perspective is **biased** towards the protagonist.
  - The audience then **only** knows what the narrator knows. Knowledge and perspective is limited to the protagonist.
  - The narrator's **limitations** and biases must be taken into account when reading such a text, and **questions** must be asked about how the narrator's impressions of a sequence of events or a conversation have been distorted to present a singular perspective.
- **Second Person**
  - The reader's perspective is **secondary**. This means that the narrator, most likely the author, often talks directly to the audience, asking them to engage in the reading of the text, often from a more personal and intimate space.
  - **You** and **Your** are indicators of an author using second-person narrative.
  - This rare form of writing in prose fiction is very difficult to get right, but is very common in text books, study guides, technical manuals, speeches and presentations (i.e. non-fiction).
- **Third Person**
  - The narrator is on the **outside** looking in, without being directly involved in the action.
  - This sort of narrative is generally considered to provide a fairly **objective** perspective, as the **author's voice** provides the narrative and tends to be **neutral**.
  - **He, She, Their** and **It** are indicators of an author using second-person narrative.
  - There are generally two types of third-person perspective:
    - **Third-Person Omniscient** - All is known to the reader and all characters' thoughts and feelings are exposed.
    - **Third-Person Limited** - When the reader is limited to the perspectives of a particular individual or individuals within sections of the text or sometimes throughout the entire work.