

**Welcome to Write by the Rails**  
**Developing Characters and Writing Dialogue!**  
**Moderated by Jan Rayl**

**Resource for descriptions**

<https://www.carvezine.com/from-the-editor/10-tips-for-writing-physical-descriptions-of-your-characters.html>

<https://www.writerswrite.co.za/a-fabulous-resource-for-writers-350-character-traits/>

**Exercise 1: Write a description of one of these facial expressions**



**Jan Rayl:** H: I could see the wonder in his eyes as he recalled his trip back to California. The haunting of the fires was gone he no longer looked tormented.

**Mary Rook:** D: He pressed his hands together, placing the tips at his mouth. There was an edge in his eyes like he was about to explain the sun to a blind man.

**Nancy Wyatt** A: His intense expression, disheveled hair, and scruffy beard made his equally likely to be a male fashion model or a serial killer. She couldn't tell which was more likely as he advanced toward her. She could only hope for the first since there was no place to run. Nancy Wyatt  
That crimson red hair is what first attracted this group of volunteers to pay attention to her message of how to help those less fortunate than they. Since half the participants overcame physical disabilities to participate, they found great relief in turning their attention outward to others, instead of inward to the challenges they face daily. The grandparents among them imparted wisdom; the children among them imparted youthful optimism and creative thinking. It was a joy for all and a lasting memory forever

**Becks Sosa:** It was obvious she liked to dance. Her whole body worked in sync. She laughed and smiled. And she smiled with her whole body. I, on the other hand, moved in mechanical

**Sharon Krasny:** His smile was always in front of our relationship. Shouldering the small talk and jobs that needed doing, he would keep going, shoes on till the dark of each night came.

My job in our marriage was to keep his plate warm and give him a clean pillow to rest on. That's the arrangement our friends saw. But that's not the me my man needed or loved.

**Exercise II Pick two or more people in these photos and tell me about their relationship**

- Describe the characters
- Give me a glimpse of their personality
- Scatter the physical description in the prose

**Exercise III with same photos: Describe actions that reveal some of the characters physical characteristics**



**Jan Rayl:** (the red head and the fella in white t-shirt behind her)

I finally felt my heart full as Jamal stood behind me, in the family photo. Not just my family, not just min, but ours. I felt like I had conquered the world. Both families had joined in unity. It definitely was not always like this. The night of our first date...

**Sharon Krasny:** (the man and woman seated in the front with hat and coral sweater)

He laughed a hearty laugh signaling the end of his new favorite joke. He had adapted it a bit more this time and his eyes scanned for reactions. He seemed pleased as his hand landed to slap my knee for the punchline's emphasis. A warm little squeeze on my knee told me all I needed to know. I reached over and patted his hand before pretending to push it away.

**Mary Rook:** (the man and woman seated in the front with hat and coral sweater)

Bernie gripped Gloria's hand sneakily beneath the eye of the camera, his aged brown fingers still strong. She squeezed his in return. He glanced back and grinned. Everything about her was soft. The curve of her cheeks, the part in her carefully smoothed black hair, even the gleam in her glasses and charitable heart; the reason they were even there. She was more than he deserved.

Aubrey sensed James stepping closer. His body gyrating like a beached seal.

"Back it up," Aubrey warned, ready to elbow him in the sternum. "I'm just dancing," James said, eyeing her thin frame. His grapefruit of a head towered over hers as he drew too close, still dancing. She pulled back a wiry fist and punched him square in his pock-marked face.

**Nancy Wyatt:**

Downs Syndrome did not dampen his buoyant enthusiasm for life. He ran to them and hugged everyone within a ten feet radius. Young Mr. Kim, however, was much more reticent and shy - never quite knowing if he were accepted, since no-one in the group looked like him. He observed carefully before smiling hesitantly and entering an activity. Always reassuring in her demeanor, the silver-haired, but ever-youthful counselor abided them all and helped them find acceptance.

**Jan same couple:** (the red head and the fella in white t-shirt behind her)

Jamal walked confidently as if drawn by that red hair across the room. She was buying coffee but that hair! It swayed as she approached the counter. He stood taller he had seen her in French class. He loved the way her she said y'all. Her eyes shone as she spoke. Je t'aime, love. Today was the day he would ask her out. He moved forward again. This time his arm hit the chip stand and the chips fell like rain hitting the roof. They were everywhere. He knelt to pick them up. She turned and started helping him.

**Exercise IV: Describe accessories and clothing.  
Describe how he moves. Describe what he sees.**



**Nancy Wyatt:**

Lanky and sinewy, with elongated muscles accustomed to cycling and hiking, Roger bore his 50-pound backpack with ease, as its blue canvas shell drooped downward with the weight of food and emergency supplies. The white water bottle rested in its mesh pocket undisturbed as Roger surveilled the landscape in appreciation of its vistas and decided his next move. His only mistake was that he had adorned his feet with new hiking shoes, but had not worn them enough in advance to avoid those hobbling blisters. He rested lightly on his hiking stick. The cap and dark glasses shielded his eyes from the sun as he scouted for a good place to sit down for a minute.

**Mary Rook:**

He halted, pressing his hiking stick deeper into the rich, beautiful earth. Though sweat trickled down his hooded brow, and the heavy pack he wore ached his thick shoulders, he felt alive in the glorious valley. He told himself before he came that he wouldn't stop for anything, but the mirrored pond, the distant mountains peaking over the horizon, the deep blue of the clear sky, he had to stop and pull in the fresh mountain air into his tired lungs. Just for a moment.

**Sharon Krasny:**

The second small breeze brushed across the sweat gathered behind the knees. It felt cool and good. The remainder followed that if he stayed much longer, the effort to keep going would be too much. Sarah would have loved the view today. Lingering thoughts of her long hair pulled back, bobbing over her backpack made him stay. He watched the shadows of the clouds push over the lake water. Sarah would have loved it. Adjusting his hat and wiping the sweat from behind his glasses, he shouldered his pack and pushed on.

**Jan Rayl:**

God's world unfurled as he rounded the corner. Compelled by unknown forces he stopped to take in the unimaginable expanse. The brown mountains of the black hills kissed the blue sky off in the distance. The clear blue sky hosted two puffy white clouds lazily crossing over the rugged mountains. Despite the sweat dripping down his back Matt just had to run up the hill of wildflowers to set up his camera for the all-important selfie. Despite the difficult terrain he had decided to make the hike this way just for this view.

Glad he brought his walking stick Matt leaned it on his hip as he removed his baseball cap and sunglasses to wipe his brow. Picking up his walking stick he began lumbering down to the valley, looking forward to the dip in the lake. That cool mountain water would make the hike worth it. Might as well take advantage of the daylight Matt thought as he reached toward his white water-bottle on the side pocket of his blue Kelty day pack.

**Exercise V: What is going on? What are they saying?  
Remember a little description can go a long way.**



**Mary Rook:**

"I can't believe we're doing this," Tracy said. "I know," Bob grinned, his heart racing as they floated gently across the pool's surface. "Do you think they'll find us?" Tracy asked, gripping Scott's hand. He shushed her. "Just enjoy it while it lasts." A sliding glass door opened in the house. "Hey!" an angry male voice proclaimed. "What are you doing in my pool?!" "Bail!" Scott shouted, pulling Tracy from the watermelon floatie. They sprinted from the backyard, cackling and dripping, hand still in hand.

**Nancy Wyatt:**

"Florida, at last," he said, lightly gripping her fingers as they floated side by side in the pool on inflatable plastic, summer-themed rafts. "This is what we always dreamed of," she sighed, smiling. They took turns listing the joys of the day "No snow," she said. "No jobs," he replied. "No kids," she half-lamented. "No commuting," he countered. Smiles. "Yes, but, you know, I can last about five minutes in the position, and then I'll be bored to death," they exclaimed in unison.

**Jan Rayl:**

As Ben reached for her hand with without a word Peg reached for his.

"I'll never tire of holding your hand Peg," said Ben.

"Mw either," Peg answered, "as long as you don't pull me off this watermelon raft."

"Not a chance," said Ben. "We are not twenty anymore. I'd have to help get you out of the water."

"Who wants to be twenty anyway?" questioned Peg. "Our grand-kids are twenty."

"I still can't get over the fact that no one breathed a word about sending us on this luxury trip," said Ben.

Peg smiled, "I know Hawaii for our fiftieth-anniversary. And you are still as handsome as you were on our honeymoon."

**Exercise VI: Let's look at some inner dialogue...**

**Or First-person narrator**



**Nancy Wyatt:**

When I shoot Fall pictures, I'm so aware that I'm photographing stages of life and death. It's intense! Should I get one that has still-green, and then gold and orange leaves, as well as one or two that have turned brown, or a bare twig from which all leaves have fallen? Can I use this shot with a poem about life and death? Should I just go for beauty and something to post on Facebook? Twenty minutes later...Is the lens cap off the camera? Oops!

**Mary Rook:**

Finally, it came. My brand-new Nikon SD 500, and on the most beautiful day of the year, no less. I donned my favorite leather jacket, wrapped a scarf the same color as the leaves around my neck and stepped out the door, camera in hand. I loved the smell of fall: old wood and premature snow.

**Jan Rayl:**

Breathtaking, Jeremy thought as he inhaled deeply. I just can't help it that just keeps running through my mind. Geeze, I can't believe there is snow on the ground, and I have on sandals. It's June for crying-out-loud! Who thinks of snow in the Rockies in June? I'm not at all cold now but tonight I'm going to freeze. Man, I must get better prepared. I want to camp right here. No wood. No fire. I'll freeze to death. I hear mom, "Don't take any unnecessary changes." Ok I'm going.

**Exercise VII: Connect these two people with dialogue.**



**Mary Rook:**

"Jenna, you there?" Jason asked for the third time. "I said I was sorry." "Sorry won't bring you there," Jenna said, ripping another errant hair from her eyebrow. "I know, you're right." He banged his head on the desk. This time, he was telling the truth. He DID have to work late.

**Nancy Wyatt:**

He cradled his head in his hands on the desk. "Man, I blew it! How can I get her to listen to me? She'll never believe me now." She had been through this before. Time to move on. Time to put on the makeup and ready a smile. "You total ass!" she thought. "I'll show you. More than one guy is waiting in the wings for me." He raised his head and said, "No, this one can't get away. I'm going over there." He, texted... "I told you we should use the wheelchair! Now, look what you've done," she admonished. "It's no big deal," he replied, "So I fell. So what? People fall all the time. Nothing's broken. I need the exercise. Just help me get up." "You stubborn fool," she retorted. "That's why you married me." he answered. "I'm a stubborn fool - heavy on the fool for marrying a nagging wife."

**Jan Rayl:**

"Our third anniversary," thought Jenn smiling she applied her make-up in the mirror. She reflected on the last three years it had been hard. So hard. COVID, James losing his job, and finally getting another one. But, today is our day she thought. I am looking good for my man.

In the study James looked at her photo and put his head on his desk. It had been the worst year, now this. How can I get through tonight without telling her? I don't want to ruin our anniversary. I'll do it. I can't. I just can't fight cancer without her knowing anymore!



**Mary Rook:**

He gripped her shoulder, pinning her to the spot. "Smile," he said, teeth bared. "What if I tell them what's happening?" she whispered through her fake smile. "I'll throw you over the bridge," he muttered. She touched the edge, ready to jump in herself. The happy tourists snapped two more photos.

**Jan Rayl:**

Joe don't try to get up," said Sally bending down to help her beloved husband.

"I can get up, I just tripped," said Joe.

"Help," hollered Sally, "help someone help me."

"Dam it Sally, stop with the commotion I'm fine," winced Joe trying to get up.

She heard the screams as Joe flung back on the pavement.

"Get some help honey," stammered Joe, "your right again. We need help I think I broke my damn leg."

**Nancy Wyatt:**

It was great fun and mind-expanding. Would not mind a repeat style exercise in the future.

<https://www.facebook.com/3HotsandCotbyNancyWyatt> my page for my published book