

## Round and flat characters

Most of the characters in the above examples could be called round characters because they have three dimensions, like a ball. These characters are complex, possessing conflicting traits. Mme. Loisel is both frivolous and responsible. The Swede is paranoid yet insightful. John Marcher is sensitive yet callous. In writing, you must not oversimplify – that is, create flat characters. (It's all right to have flat characters as part of a setting but not as part of an interactive community, the cast of your story.)

Flat characters have few traits, all of them predictable, none creating genuine conflicts. Flat characters often boil down to stereotypes: fat, doughnut-eating cop; forgetful professor; lecherous truck driver; jovial fatso; shifty-eyed thief; anorexic model. Using these prefab characters can give your prose a semblance of humor and quickness, but your story featuring them will have about as much chance of winning a contest as a prefab apartment in a competition of architects. Even more damaging, you will sound like a bigot. As a writer you ought to aspire toward understanding the varieties of human experiences, and bigotry simply means shutting out and insulting a segment of population (and their experiences) by reducing them to flat types.

But can you have a character without types? What would literature be without gamblers or misers? The answer, I believe, is simple: Draw portraits of misers, but not as misers – as people who happen to be miserly. And if while you draw misers as people you feel that you fail to make characters but do make people, all the better. Ernest Hemingway said, "When writing a novel a writer should create living people; people, not characters. A *character* is a caricature." So, give us people. ("Give me me.") Let the miser in me come to life – and blush – reading your story.