

Character Combos: Avoiding Character RRT

Oftentimes when we write, we get stuck when referring to the characters in the story. We use the character's name or pronoun over and over, every time s/he acts. For example, when retelling "Jack and the Beanstalk", there are only so many ways to refer to Jack – Jack, he, him, the boy... That's about it. The problem is that the redundancy pulls the quality of a story down and causes the reader to lose interest.

How does a writer keep character references fresh and the reader invested?

Here are some tips:

- 1.** Give the character a name at the beginning of the story. That opens the door for referring to him/her by name or as "Mr. So and So" or "young So and So" or "old So and So" or "Miss So and So" or Ms. or Mrs., etc.
- 2.** The directions for this take longer than actually doing it. It only takes a few seconds to make a list of character references using an **adjective-noun combination technique**.

First, **make a list of adjectives** that describe the character throughout the story. Different adjectives will apply at different places throughout the plot. List at least 3, but only spend a minute or two total.

Second, **make a list of nouns** that can refer to the character throughout the story. Again, different nouns will apply at different times. List 3 or more.

Third, **combine an adjective from your list with a noun from your list** and create a **Character Combo list**. Apply a term from this list in an appropriate place in your story whenever you need to refer to the character. Some terms will not work in just any place, so you have to choose effectively. Be sure to use a certain Combo **ONLY ONCE** in a story. They are so unique that repeating them will be annoying to your reader.

For example, this is what a writer could do with Jack of "Jack and the Beanstalk":

Adjectives that describe Jack at different times in the story:	Nouns that apply to Jack at different times in the story:	Character Combinations:
young lazy innocent curious shocked resentful terrified struggling brave	son boy teen slacker climber thief rascal renegade fugitive	lazy boy shocked slacker curious explorer resentful teen struggling renegade young fugitive terrified thief beloved son skilled climber

Once you get going, it's easy to think of new ones without a chart. A writer would use an applicable Character Combo whenever a fresh reference was needed in order to avoid another "Jack" or "He".

In "Jack and the Beanstalk", a writer would also complete this process for the giant, the beanstalk, and any other character or entity that recurs throughout the story. Such would be necessary for other stories that have multiple recurring characters/entities as well.

This Combo principle works for terms in reports and essays, too!