

The Ultimate Character Arc Template



Craft a compelling journey
for your character.



Lay the Foundation With a Character Built for Transformation

Creating an arc gets way easier when you nail down these character details.

Name

Who is this character at the beginning of your story? How did they become who they are?

What is the worst thing that ever happened to them?

What is the Lie they live by to avoid repeating that trauma going forward?

What change do they want to see in their life?

Why do they believe this change would make their life better?

How do they think they can make this change happen?

What do they really need? Can they see that they need it? Why or why not?

Describe this character's internal conflict.

Describe their external conflict.

What's their greatest strength?

What's their greatest flaw?

What's their greatest fear?

What one line do they believe they'd never cross? How will you, the diabolical author, get them to cross it?

Nice work! Keep these answers in mind as you fill out the beats of their journey. Don't be afraid to haunt them with their past trauma, challenge their Lie, and expose their flaws. Be merciless.

Build the Arc

Now that you've worked out the nature of your character's transformation, you can plan the actual events that force them to grow. Make it as simple or as complex as you want—whatever makes sense for the character.

What does their normal look like? (This will inform the way you introduce the character and their world at the beginning of your story.)

What event interrupts their normal and presents them with a new threat or opportunity?

What significant choice do they make in response to that interruption?
(Remember, this response should send them in a new direction but still align with their Lie. No big internal changes yet.)

What event interrupts their normal and presents them with a new threat or opportunity?

Time to throw in a big surprise that changes everything all over again. What is it? How does it make them more vulnerable than they've ever been?

Time to challenge that growth. What horrible thing happens to them now? (Remember to target a fear and/or conjure past trauma.) What error do they make? What is the "change or die" decision they're now faced with?

Let them choose change. What does that look like? Do they succeed because of their transformation? (They don't have to, unless it's a romance.)

Establish the new normal. What does your character's life look like now that they've changed? How does their growth transform the world around them?

Woo-hoo! You did it! You created an engaging character arc that adds dimension to your story and resonates with readers. That's a big stinkin' deal.

You rock.