

Connect SD Hoover High Documentary Film Class
Character in Documentary Films

What's the importance of thinking about characters in documentary films?

The importance of having good character development in a documentary film is that you, the filmmaker, are trying to get the audience to like and care about your characters. If the audience like the people in your film, they will also care about the other people, the events, or the issues shown in your documentary film. Even though you are not making up a character, as you would do in a dramatic film, you are still telling a story about a person (or people), event(s), or issue(s)

When you are making your documentary film, it is important to remember to develop your character through the following five steps:

1) Introducing who the character is

Tell more about your character's background to the audience. You're trying to make sure that the audience can identify with a real person that they can understand. Have your character talk more about himself/herself on camera such as saying their name and where are they from.

2) Explain the character's motivation and/or goals

Show what your character is trying to do by considering questions such as:

- What are his/her needs or wants?
- What does s/he want to accomplish?
- What will s/he gain if s/he accomplishes this goal or goals?

3) Identify the character's conflict

Develop your character more by showing what is his/her conflict. Showing the character's conflict helps the audience understand and sympathize with his/her struggle. Think about what is preventing him/her from reaching his/her goal(s).

- Is s/he having an internal or external conflict, or both?
- Is s/he fighting against another person, society, nature, or fate?

4) Follow the character's action

This part shows the most character development. You can show how the character deals with his/her conflicts, works toward his/her goals, and portrays the character in his/her most expressive state.

5) Show the character's resolution

The resolution is necessary in order to wrap up the story. In real life, it may take a long time to resolve conflicts or they may not get resolved, the film needs to end the story so that the audience feels satisfied. You can portray this resolution through addressing questions such as:

- Did s/he resolve his/her conflict?
- Did s/he reach his/her goal, and did s/he fail or succeed?