



PRO-

Your main character is your

PROTAGONIST

He or she wants something. What, or who, exactly, is stopping him/her from reaching their goal?



The answer to this question is your

ANTAGONIST

Your ANTAGONIST is almost a mirror opposite of your PROTAGONIST. They want something, and this want defines their decisions, and thus their actions.

ANTI-

Your
PROTAGONIST
and your
ANTAGONIST
have opposing goals.

This is your story's
**CENTRAL
CONFLICT**

**PROTAGONIST
+
GOAL**

**CENTRAL
CONFLICT**

**ANTAGONIST
+
GOAL**

In pursuit of their respective goals, these two characters will be acting against each other.

In the back-and-forth struggle for dominance, their actions are the **EVENTS** which together form your **STORY**.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY "POSITIVE CONFLICT"?

In fiction, conflict—no matter how unpleasant—is a good thing. Without conflict, there is no story. Also, your story's conflict can be heated, openly hostile, or even brutal. But that does not make it "bad."

WAIT, WHAT?

Your protagonist and your antagonist may have opposing goals, but that doesn't always make them enemies.

AGAIN... WHAT, NOW?

Not every protagonist is a "hero," nor is every antagonist a "villain," each with the goal of defeating the other. They can be close friends, family members, spouses, business partners, etc., with the very best of intentions, BUT... they can still have opposing goals.

This can make for an especially compelling central conflict...

SOME THINGS TO CONSIDER:

- Your protagonist and your antagonist may be in conflict, but they may not necessarily ever meet face-to-face... each may not even know the other exists.
- The antagonist is usually a character, an "inverse" of the protagonist. BUT...
- Sometimes, your antagonist may be a set of circumstances, such as natural elements threatening your protagonist. OR...
- Sometimes, your protagonist and your antagonist are one and the same... your protagonist is conflict with their own self.

Whoa... dude...

EXERCISES



Think of a story (any book, film, play or TV show)...

Examples:

Who is the protagonist (the main character the story is about)?

Randall Patrick McMurphy (***One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest***, Ken Kesey);

What is his or her goal/what do they want?

Freedom and "the pursuit of happiness" for himself and his fellow patients.

"Character vs. Character"

Who is the antagonist (the character who represents the biggest obstacle to the protagonist)?

Nurse Ratched

What does he or she want?

Iron-fisted control over her ward.

With the above in mind, what is their central conflict?

McMurphy and Nurse Ratched are fighting over the welfare and the free will of every patient.

Are your protagonist and antagonist sworn enemies, each determined to vanquish the other? If so, can you think of a different story where...

There are different schools of thought on the categories of conflict. Some include "character vs..." technology, fate, the supernatural or extra-terrestrial.

...these two are not enemies, but still have opposing goals?

The Wire, Dave Simon (S3, Maj. 'Bunny' Colvin and Mayor Tommy Carcetti)

...where they may be rivals, but never physically cross paths?

The Lord of the Rings, J.R.R. Tolkien (Frodo and Sauran); ***No Country for Old Men***, Cormac McCarthy (Sheriff Bell and Anton Chigurh)

...where there is no single character, but rather the society as a whole that functions as the antagonist?

The Lottery, Shirley Jackson; ***The Handmaid's Tale***, Margaret Atwood

"... vs. Society"

...where the forces of antagonism are not a character, but the circumstances or environment?

To Build a Fire, Jack London; ***Cast Away***, Robert Zemeckis; every zombie movie ever

"... vs. Nature"

...where the protagonist and antagonist are one and the same?

Hamlet, William Shakespeare; ***A Streetcar Named Desire***, Tennessee Williams

"... vs. Self"

Food for thought: along with a primary antagonist, stories can have overlapping layers of conflict... the protagonist of a wilderness survival story ("man vs. nature") might also be battling with their own doubt, fear, and other personal limits ("man vs. himself").