

Writing Character Descriptors

By: Jeanne Veillette Bowerman | October 28, 2014

Writing [character descriptors](#) is much like presenting them to the Queen. You are that person whispering into the Queen's ear, telling her who is in line to greet her and why she should care.

We've all seen a basic descriptor, such as this:

JOHN DOE (40s), tall and lean, confidently sits at the defendant's table.

What does it tell us? That John Doe is a skinny, confident tall man.

But is that enough to grab an actor by the throat and make them say, 'I'm dying to play a confident tall man!'

in·tro·duc·tion (in/trə duk'shən), *n.* **1.** the act of introducing or the state of being introduced. **2.** a personal presentation of one person to another. **3.** a preliminary part, as of a book, musical composition, or the like, leading up to the main part. **4.** an introductory treatise: *an introduction to botany*. **5.** an instance of inserting. **6.** something introduced. **1400; ME *introduccion* < L *introduction-* (s. of *tiō*). See **INTRODUCE**, **-TION**]**
—**Syn.** **3.** **INTRODUCTION, FOREWORD, PREFACE** material given at the front of a book to explain and introduce it to the reader. A **FOREWORD** is part of the matter and is usually written by someone other than the author, often an authority on the subject of the

Imagine you're whispering John Doe's details to the Queen in line, but this time, the Queen is an A-list actor you want to attach to your script. You need to introduce your character like a movie star.

Most often, the A-list actor you want to read your script won't ever lay eyes on it unless it gets past their agent first. That agent is going to head right to the page where the descriptor that introduces their client's character is. Is it interesting enough? Does it convey a personality and a role that screams multi-layered? Is this the kind of role they can sell their client on?

Yep, all of that is decided pretty much by that one descriptor. You're a writer. Write a good one.

Let's take the above John Doe descriptor. What if, you wrote it like this instead?

The prosecutor's eyes land on the stern, forbidding towering figure of the

primary defendant, JOHN DOE... a man accustomed to seeing others wither in his glare.

I don't know about you, but I am now intrigued as to who John Doe is, what he did to deserve being on trial, and how this prosecutor is going to defeat him.

Before you say, "Wait, you didn't [include an age!](#)" Sometimes, it's more important to get the tone of the character down than the age. The film director and [casting director](#) can often decide that themselves, based on the story and the actor they think would serve it best. You don't always need to lock in a specific age for talent, which enables the casting director to throw out a wider net to get the best actor for the job, not just the actor with the "right" age.

Before you submit that script to an executive, go back into your script, look at all of your character introductions, and play around, seeing if you can elevate them in any way to make an actor's agent sit up and take notice.

Start by asking, what would make *you* want to play that role?