

CHOOSING CHARACTERS' NAMES by Jim Hitt

1. **Make sure your readers can pronounce the characters; names--** Keep names as simple as possible. No D'ekjfa or Um'ro'a or Qwghapfe. Your name should be easy to pronounce).
2. **Be Consistent--** A character who is called John one minute, Jonathan the next, and Mr. Pierce every now and then is bound to confuse the readers. Many of us answer to more than one name, but in a novel, there's simply no way of using multiple names for one character without confusing your readers.
3. **Be Dissimilar--**Whether you've got three characters or 30, give each one a uniquely different sounding name. That means no Ben and Bud. No Laurie and Lauren. No Adam and Aden. Readers don't actually read the entire word. They'll stop at L, for example, understanding it to be Laurie. (There are exceptions. In my novel THE COURAGE OF OTHERS two of my central characters --Davy and Daniel--started with the same letter. Although one was white and the other black, they were mirror images of one another, which the names tended to reinforce. Despite both beginning with 'D', the names look different and are of different lengths. In addition, the story is told in first person by Davy, thus eliminating more confusion.)
4. **Reinforce the Character's Qualities --** Use names to give special insight into the character. The character's name often shapes who he or she becomes. With a hippie name like River, your character may be an apologist for her parents. With a strong name like Stone, she may be a loner that's rough around the edges.
5. **Name only players, not spear carriers—**Although WAR AND PEACE had over 500 speaking parts, the general rule is not to clutter the story with too many names. At any rate, you're not writing WAR AND PEACE, since today no publisher would buy it. A named character needs to play a significant role. Just call him "the pizza guy" if his only purpose is to deliver pepperoni with extra cheese.
6. **Get your era right --** If you need a name for an 18-year-old shop girl in a corset store in 1930s Atlanta, you know enough not to choose Sierra or Courtney, unless such an unusual name is part of your story. Browse for names in the era you're writing. You can look up American baby names by decade at the Social Security Administration <https://www.ss.GOV/OACT/babynames/>
7. **Choose names right for the genre --** Buck Duane or Han Solo, Gabby Hayes or Chewbacca

A free Web source: Name Generator: Name Your Character

<https://www.name-generator.org.uk/character/>