



How do your characters react to stress? If the story forces them to do something outside their comfort zone, how does it affect their level of stress? The more stressed your character feels, the more anxious your reader feels. Turning up the heat on your characters make the reader eager to see the stress relieved. This keeps them turning pages.

How does your character's normal reaction to stress affect the other characters? Are they opposites or compatible? Two similar characters can make each other worse. Opposites can talk each other down or create a battle of negativity. If you want your character to spiral out of control, pull multiple triggers. Increase the pressure to their breaking point.

Deadlines and obstacles encourage some of your characters to push harder and some of them to fall apart. How your character reacts under stress is critical to any plot with tension.

Stress can be from a mild annoyance, such as delayed traffic. It can stem from a direct, perhaps mortal, threat.

Whether the stimulus is mild or monstrous, your characters react initially based on their natural tendency. Circumstances can force them to move past this innate response, but their initial reaction tends to be true to their nature.

SBB II introduced sixteen mannequins. Each character has a natural tendency to deal with things in a specific way. Natural tendencies can be shifted by life events from balanced to severely unbalanced.

Let's see how our character mannequins handle stress. Remember each mannequin has a male, female, androgynous, and transgender counterpart. I use he to avoid the plural they.

1. Wynn

Wynn is the responsible, practical type who thrives on order and plans. It doesn't take much to upset his apple cart. His natural inclination is to withdraw and avoid conflict. He becomes rigid in the face of opposition or criticism. He shuts down and turns away. Getting him to face the threat will be a challenge. The motivation level needs to be high.



2. Francis

Francis is responsible, practical, and thrives on order and plans. He becomes controlling when anxious. He has no problem confronting other people and believes he is always right. He annoys some and infuriates others (ruining any chance he had of cooperation) when he takes over the efforts to solve the scene or overall story goal. However, less decisive characters might look up to Francis at a time of crisis, putting their faith in someone who at least has an idea.

3. Nevada

Nevada is responsible, practical, and thrives on order and plans. His natural inclination is to gather consensus and get people to cooperate. He becomes hypercritical and controlling when things don't go his way and people refuse to work together. He irritates some of the people he attempts to corral while convincing them to do what he wants. The less they cooperate, the more livid Nevada grows. He's trying to save you! Why won't you listen? If the person doesn't want or need Nevada to save him, the conflict heats up.

4. Arden

Arden works hard and is a stand-up kind of guy. He likes being in control. He becomes hypercritical and controlling when stressed. The more he imposes his will, the harder others will resist him, which feeds the cycle. He will offer more criticism and impose more limitations. His method may be needed, but often is not appreciated.

5. Blair

Blair is responsible and practical, but highly emotional. His natural inclination is to become passive and withdrawn when anxious. Getting him out the door to take the necessary action requires a very seductive carrot, or a very large stick. He sneers and turns subversive in the face of opposition. His opponent may not know that Blair is actively working against him in the background.

6. Dallas

Dallas is fanciful and free-flowing. He hates being restricted and limited. His natural inclination is to become passive-aggressive when stressed. Rather than openly confront



people, he hides in the shadows and conducts sneak attacks. He may present a very cooperative front while secretly undermining his foe.

7. Hadley

Hadley is fun and freedom loving. He is practical but hates being limited in any way. He becomes excessively impulsive under pressure. His erratic nature makes him scatter when he needs to focus. He may get lucky and hit the target as he shoots up the room, or not.

8. Shelby

Shelby is a live and let live kind of guy. He's guarded. He becomes highly emotional and critical when stressed. He vents and rages. He finds it difficult to stay calm and work his way through the problem. He isn't looking for reassurance. He wants someone to agree with him. "Yes, it's awful. Now let's go do this." He may need someone to force him to focus on what needs to be done.

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9. Joss

Joss is a man of action and few words. He may never talk about the problem or what needs to be done about it. Stress can make him impulsive. He may attempt things that were better left alone. He may drag in a few other maverick loners like himself. They may drive each other to ridiculous lengths.

10. Kelly

Kelly is a one-man show. He's wild and crazy. Stress makes him more impulsive than usual. He has no trouble confronting people or tasks. His efforts won't be focused and the results are iffy. He will probably charm someone else into taking a hit for him.

11. Greer

Greer is a quiet, elusive kind of guy. He isn't very social to begin with. As long as people leave him alone, he really doesn't care what they do. When they dump problems in his lap, he becomes resentful and withdraws. He may be forced to tackle the problem in his careful, logical way, but whoever caused it will pay the price for disturbing his peace.

12. Taylor

Taylor thrives on being social and gaining cooperation. He becomes rigid and irritable when stressed. If someone provokes him, he will hold tight to his goal and snap at everyone he dragoons into helping him. He is good at getting people to do what he wants them to. His opponent will feel the sting.

13. Cam

Cam isn't terribly social. As long as people leave his lofty logical fortress alone, he ignores them. Attack him and he freezes in amazement. He leaves other people alone. Why would they go after him? He calmly sets about destroying his attacker in his creative, methodical way. He won't broadcast his success or ask for help. He'll just take quiet satisfaction in his work.



14. Morgan

Morgan is erratic in nature. He's a rolling stone that gathers no moss. He isn't interested in fighting unless someone brings the fight to him. When stressed, he becomes scattered. He'll find it hard to focus, but his scattershot approach may have many undesirable consequences for his enemy.

15. Lee

Lee is lethal. He is used to getting his way and cuts down anyone brave enough to confront him. He isn't a touchy-feely, *let's be a team* kind of guy. He is good at dragooning others into carrying out his wishes. He becomes hypercritical when stressed and snipes and cracks the whip. His enemies should just move out of the way.

16. River

River is a pacifist. He wants what is best for everyone. He isn't interested in fighting unless someone brings the war to him. He becomes critical and self-absorbed when stressed. His strength lies in his uncanny intuition. He will figure out his opponent's weakness in a heartbeat and use it to his advantage.

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For more about how to craft characters, pick up a copy of *Story Building Blocks II: Crafting Believable Conflict*, available in [paperback](#) and [E-book](#) and *Story Building Blocks: Build A Cast Workbook*, available in [paperback](#) and [E-book](#).