

THE  
EMOTION  
THESAURUS:

*A Writer's Guide To  
Character Expression*

ANGELA ACKERMAN  
& BECCA PUGLISI

# **The Emotion Thesaurus: A Writer's Guide To Character Expression**

**Angela Ackerman & Becca Puglisi**

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# ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Angela Ackerman is a member of the SCBWI and writes on the darker side of Middle Grade and Young Adult. She believes in the monster under the bed, eats French fries and ice cream together and is dedicated to paying it forward however she can. Angela lives in Calgary, Alberta in the shadow of the Canadian Rockies with her husband, two children, dog and zombie-like fish.

Becca Puglisi is a YA fantasy and historical fiction writer, magazine author, and member of the SCBWI. She resides in sunny south Florida, where she likes to watch movies, drink caffeinated beverages, and eat foods that aren't good for her. She lives with her husband and two children.

Together, Angela and Becca host [The Bookshelf Muse](#), an award-winning online resource for writers that offers a number of different thesauri to aid authors in their descriptive writing efforts.

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Terror

Uncertainty

Unease

Wariness

Worry

# INTRODUCTION

## THE POWER OF EMOTION

All successful novels, no matter what genre, have one thing in common: emotion. It lies at the core of every character's decision, action, and word, all of which drive the story. Without emotion, a character's personal journey is pointless. Stakes cease to exist. The plot line becomes a dry riverbed of meaningless events that no reader will take time to read. Why? Because above all else, readers pick up a book to have an emotional experience. They read to connect with characters who provide entertainment and whose trials may add meaning to their own life journeys.

As emotional beings, feelings propel us. They drive our choices, determine who we spend time with, and dictate our values. Emotion also fuels our communication, allowing us to share meaningful information and beliefs with others. And while it may seem that most exchanges happen through conversation, in truth up to 95% of all communication is nonverbal. Even in instances where we try not to show our feelings, we are still sending messages through body language. Because of this, each of us becomes adept at reading others without a word being said.

As writers, we must take our innate skills of observation and transfer them to the page. Readers have high expectations. They don't want to be told how a character feels; they want to experience the emotion for themselves. To make this happen, we must ensure that our characters express their emotions in ways that are both recognizable and compelling to read.

## VERBAL AND NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

Dialogue is a proven vehicle for expressing a character's thoughts, beliefs, and opinions, but it cannot deliver a full emotional experience by itself. To convey feelings well, a writer must also utilize nonverbal communication, which can be broken down into three elements: physical signals (body

language and actions), internal sensations (visceral reactions) and mental responses (thoughts).

**PHYSICAL SIGNALS** are how our bodies outwardly respond when we experience emotion. The stronger the feeling, the more the body reacts and the less conscious control we have over movement. Because characters are unique, they will express themselves in a specific way. Combine the vast number of physical signals with the individuality of each character, and a writer's options for showing emotion through body language and action are virtually limitless.

**MENTAL RESPONSES** act as a window into the thought process that corresponds with an emotional experience. Thoughts are not always rational and can skip from topic to topic with incredible speed. Utilizing thought as a way to express emotion is an excellent way to convey to the reader how a character sees their world. Thoughts add a layer of meaning by illustrating how people, places, and events affect the POV (point of view) character and can also be an excellent way to demonstrate voice.

**INTERNAL SENSATIONS** are the most powerful form of nonverbal communication and should be used with the most caution. These visceral reactions (breathing, heart rate, light-headedness, adrenaline spikes, etc.) are raw and uncontrolled, triggering the fight-or-flight response. Because these are instinctive body responses, all people experience them. As such, readers will recognize and connect with them on a primal level.

The very nature of these heightened visceral reactions requires writers to take special care when using them. Relying too much on internal sensations can create melodrama. Also, because visceral responses are limited, a writer can inadvertently use clichéd phrasings when describing them. A light touch is needed with this type of nonverbal communication, as a little goes a long way.

## **THE BALANCING ACT**

It is easy to see the power of emotion and how it connects a reader to the story and characters. The difficulty comes in writing it well. Each scene must achieve a balance between showing too little feeling and showing too much. Above all, the emotional description needs to be fresh and

engaging. This is a tall order for writers who tend to reuse the same emotional indicators over and over.

*The Emotion Thesaurus* addresses this difficulty by helping writers brainstorm new ideas for expressing a character's emotional state. But what about other pitfalls associated with portraying emotion? The following section explores a few of these common trouble spots and suggests techniques for overcoming them.

# WRITING NONVERBAL EMOTION: AVOIDING COMMON PROBLEMS

## TELLING

By definition, nonverbal emotion can't be told. It has to be shown. This makes it difficult to write because telling is easier than showing. Here's an example:

Mr. Paxton's eyes were sad as he gave her the news. "I'm sorry, JoAnne, but your position with the company is no longer necessary."  
Instantly, JoAnne was angrier than she'd ever been in her life.

This exchange is fairly easy to write—but not so easy to read. Readers are smart and can figure things out for themselves. They don't want to have the scene explained to them, which is what happens when a writer tells how a character feels. Another problem with telling is that it creates distance between the reader and your characters, which is rarely a good idea. In the preceding example, the reader sees that Mr. Paxton is reluctant to give JoAnne the bad news and that JoAnne is angry about it. But you don't want the reader to only see what's happening; you want them to feel the emotion, and to experience it along with the character. To accomplish this, writers need to show the character's physical and internal responses rather than stating the emotion outright.

JoAnne sat on the chair's edge, spine straight as a new pencil, and stared into Mr. Paxton's face. Sixteen years she'd given him—days she was sick, days the kids were sick—making the trip back and forth across town on that sweaty bus. Now he wouldn't even look at her, just kept fiddling with her folder and rearranging the fancy knickknacks on his desk. Clearly, he didn't want to give her the news, but she wasn't about to make it easy for him.

The vinyl of her purse crackled and she lightened her grip on it. Her picture of the kids was in there and she didn't want it creased.

Mr. Paxton cleared his throat for the hundredth time. "JoAnne...Mrs.

Benson...it appears that your position with the company is no longer —”

JoAnne jerked to her feet, sending her chair flying over the tile. It hit the wall with a satisfying bang as she stormed from the office.

This scene gives the reader a much better opportunity to share in JoAnne’s anger. Through the use of sensory details, a well chosen simile, specific verbs, and body cues that correspond with the featured emotion, readers can see that JoAnne is angry, but they also feel it—in the straightness of her spine and the cheap vinyl in her grip, in the force it takes to send a chair flying across the room simply from the act of standing.

An example like this also reveals a lot about the character. JoAnne is not well-to-do. She has children to support. She may be angry, but she’s also strong minded, family oriented, and proud. This information rounds out JoAnne’s character and makes her more relatable to the reader.

Showing takes more work than telling, as word count alone will indicate, but it pays off by drawing the reader closer to the character and helping to create empathy. Once in a great while, it’s acceptable to tell the reader what the character is feeling: when you have to pass on information quickly, or when you need a crisp sentence to convey a shift in mood or attention. But the other ninety-nine times out of a hundred, put in the extra work and you will reap the benefits of showing.

## CLICHÉD EMOTIONS

- The grin that stretches from ear to ear
- A single tear pooling in the eye before coursing down the cheek
- Quivering knees that knock together

Clichés in literature are vilified for good reason. They’re a sign of lazy writing, a result of settling on the easy phrase because coming up with something new is too hard. Writers often fall back on clichés because, technically, these tired examples work. That grin implies happiness as

certainly as knee knocking indicates fear. Unfortunately, phrases like these lack depth because they don't allow for a range of emotions. That single tear tells you that the person is sad, but how upset is she? Sad enough to sob? Shriek? Collapse? Will she even be crying five minutes from now? To relate to your character, the reader needs to know the depth of emotion being experienced.

When writing a certain emotion, think about your body and what happens to it when you're feeling that way. Excitement, for example. The heart races and the pulse quickens. Legs bounce. The speech of a methodical person becomes fast paced with streaming words. The voice is pitched higher and louder. For any given emotion, there are literally dozens of internal and external changes that, when referenced, will show the reader what your character is feeling. The lists in this thesaurus are great for providing ideas, but your own observations are just as helpful. Watch people—real flesh-and-blood specimens at the mall or characters in movies. Note how they act when they're confused or overwhelmed or irritable. The face is the easiest to notice but the rest of the body is just as telling. Don't overlook changes in a person's voice, speech, or overall bearing and posture.

Secondly, know your character. Individuals do things differently—even mundane activities like brushing their teeth, driving, or making dinner. Emotions are no exception. Not every character will shout and throw things when angry. Some speak in quiet voices. Others go completely silent. Many, for various reasons, will cover their anger and act like they're not upset at all. Whatever your character is feeling, describe the emotion in a way that is specific to him or her, and you're almost guaranteed to write something new and evocative.

## **MELODRAMA**

If all emotions were of average intensity, they'd be easier to describe. But emotions vary in strength. Take fear, for instance. Depending upon the severity of the situation, a person might feel anything from unease to anxiety to paranoia or terror. Extreme emotions will require extreme descriptors, while others are relatively subtle and must be described as such. Unfortunately, many writers make the mistake of assuming that to

be gripping, emotion must be dramatic. Sad people should burst into tears. Joyful characters must express their glee by jumping up and down. This kind of writing results in melodrama, which leads to a sense of disbelief in the reader because, in real life, emotion isn't always so demonstrative.

To avoid melodrama, recognize that emotions run along a continuum, from mild to extreme. For each situation, know where your character is along that continuum and choose appropriate descriptors. Just as extreme emotions call for extreme indicators, temperate emotions should be expressed subtly. The indicators for intermediate emotions will lie somewhere in the middle.

It's also very important that your character follows a smooth emotional arc. Consider the following example:

Mack tapped his thumb against the steering wheel, one arm dangling out the window. He smiled at Dana but she just sat there, twisting that one loop of hair around her finger.

“Worried about your interview tomorrow?” he asked.

“A little. It's a great opportunity but the timing's awful. There's too much going on.” She sighed. “I've been thinking about cutting back. Simplifying.”

“Good idea.” He nodded along with the radio and waved at the biker who thundered past on his Harley.

“I'm glad you agree.” She faced him. “I think we should break up.”

His foot slipped off the gas pedal. The air grew heavy, making it hard to breathe. The car veered toward the middle line and he let it drift, not caring whether he lived or died.

Unless Mack has a psychological reason for doing so, he shouldn't jump from placidity to depression in a matter of seconds. A realistic progression would be to move from contentment to shock, then disbelief, and finally to grief. Done thoughtfully, this emotional arc can be shown with relatively few words:

“I'm glad you agree.” She faced him. “I think we should break up.”

His foot slipped off the gas pedal. “Break up? What are you talking

about?”

“Mack. We’ve been headed this way for awhile, you know that.”

He gripped the steering wheel and took deep breaths. Sure, things had been rough lately, and she kept talking about taking some time, but she always came around. And she’d definitely never uttered the words, “break up.”

“Look, Dana—”

“Please, don’t. You can’t talk me out of it this time.” She stared at the dashboard. “I’m sorry.”

His insides twisted. He darted a look at Dana, but she was curled against the window now, both hands resting easy in her lap.

He gaped at her. They were totally breaking up.

Make sure that your character’s feelings progress realistically. Map out the emotional journey within the scene to avoid unintended melodrama.

All of this is not to say that real life doesn’t produce extreme emotion. Birth, death, loss, change—some situations call for intense responses that may go on for awhile. Many writers, in an admirable attempt to maintain believability, try to recreate these events in real time. This results in long paragraphs or even pages of high emotion and, inevitably, melodrama. Though real life can sustain this kind of intensity for long periods of time, it’s nearly impossible for the written word to do so in a way that readers will accept.

In these situations, avoid melodrama by abbreviating. This method is often used for other real-life scenarios—conversations, for instance. Small talk is left out to keep the pace moving forward. Mundane tasks are also cut short, because the reader doesn’t need (or want) to see the entire car washed, a piece at a time, while Bob ponders a problem at work. In the same way, extensive emotional scenes should be long enough to convey the appropriate information, but not so long that you lose the audience. Write the emotion well, develop empathy in your reader, maximize the words that you do use, but don’t overstay your welcome.

## **OVER-RELIANCE ON DIALOGUE (C) THOUGHTS**

Because nonverbal writing is so hard to master, it makes sense that some writers shy away from it, choosing to rely more on thoughts or dialogue to express what a character is feeling. But an over-reliance on either leads to problems.

“Are—Are you sure?” I asked.

“Without a doubt,” Professor Baker replied. “It was neck-and-neck right up to the end, but you came out ahead. Congratulations, William!”

“I can’t believe it,” I said. “Valedictorian! I’m so happy!”

Word choice is important in expressing emotion, but it will only go so far. After that, the writer is reduced to weak techniques like telling the reader what’s being felt (I’m so happy) and over-using exclamation points to show intensity. Without any action to break up the dialogue, the conversation also sounds stilted.

On the other hand, conveying emotion solely through thoughts has its problems, too.

My pulse was pounding somewhere in the 160 range. I did it! Valedictorian! I was sure Nathan would come out ahead—he was a phenom in the physics lab, and he’d been a ghost at school all month, practically living in the library.

I threw my arms around Professor Baker. I’d think about this later and cringe with embarrassment, but right now, I didn’t care. I’d done it! Take THAT, Nathan Shusterman!

Technically, there’s nothing wrong with this sample. Bodily cues, both internal and external, are included. It’s clear to the reader that William is excited. Yet it doesn’t ring true. Why? Because this monologue screams for verbal interaction with others. Professor Baker is there and has clearly been talking to William. For William to be so incredibly excited and not say anything comes across as...odd.

Internal dialogue is an important part of any story. There are many

scenes and scenarios where a paragraph or more of contemplation is appropriate. This isn't one of them. For this scene, and for the majority of scenes, emotion is much more effectively conveyed through a mixture of dialogue, thoughts, and body language.

My pulse jittered somewhere around the 160 mark. No, I'd heard him wrong, been tricked by an over-active, sleep-deprived, twisted imagination.

"Are—" I cleared my throat. "Are you sure?"

"It was neck-and-neck right up to the end, but you came out ahead. Congratulations, William."

The leather chair squeaked as I collapsed into it. Valedictorian. How'd I beat out Nathan, who'd been a ghost all month, practically living in the library? Not to mention that B- I scraped in physics.

"But I did it," I whispered.

The professor stood to shake my hand. I jumped up and threw my arms around him, lifting him off the floor. Later, I'd remember this and die of embarrassment, but right now I didn't care.

"I did it! Take THAT, Nathan Shusterman!"

"Knew you had it in you," the professor said in a strangled voice.

When expressing emotion, vary your vehicles, using both verbal and nonverbal techniques for maximum impact.

## **MISUSING BACKSTORY TO ENHANCE READER EMPATHY**

Every character is unique, influenced largely by events from the past. One surefire way to gain reader empathy is to reveal why a character is the way he is. Take the movie *Jaws*, for example. The first glimpse we have of shark hunter Quint, he's raking his none-too-clean fingernails down a chalkboard. Hardly endearing. As the movie progresses, the viewer's dislike is justified through his crass manners and bullying of young Mr. Hooper. But once he tells his story of the sinking of the *Indianapolis* and his five days and nights treading water with the sharks, the viewer understands how he became so hardened. His behavior hasn't changed and

we still don't like him very much, but we empathize with him now. We wish him better than what life has served up to him.

This is just one example of the importance of backstory in building reader empathy. People are products of their past. As the author, it's important for you to know why your characters are the way they are and to pass that information along to readers. However, it's hard to know just how much to share. Many writers, in an attempt to gain reader empathy, reveal too much. Excessive backstory slows the pace and can bore readers, tempting them to skip ahead to the good stuff. Undoubtedly, Quint's path to crusty and crazy contained more than that one unfortunate event, but the rest didn't need to be shared. That one story, artfully told, was enough.

In order to avoid using too much backstory, determine which details from your character's past are necessary to share. Dole them out through the context of the present-time story to keep the pace moving. For inspiration, consider your favorite literary characters, even those who may have been unlikable. Revisit their stories to see what clues from the past the author chose to reveal, and how it was done.

Backstory is tricky to write well. As is true of so many areas of writing, balance is the key.

# USING THE EMOTION THESAURUS

We've established that emotion powers a scene, and when written well, propels readers out of apathy and into the character's emotional experience. Writing authentic emotion is not always easy, but to create breakout fiction, writers must come up with fresh ideas to express their characters' feelings.

Emotion is strongest when both verbal and nonverbal communication are used in tandem. The Emotion Thesaurus can supply that critical nonverbal element writers need to fire up an emotional hit that will leave a lasting impression on readers. Here are some final ideas on how to use this thesaurus to its fullest:

## IDENTIFY THE ROOT EMOTION

Certain situations can arouse a single, easily identifiable emotion. But more often than not, human beings feel more than one thing at a time. If you are struggling with how to convey this conflict to the reader, take a step back and identify your character's root emotion. This is the catalyst that dictates any other feelings your character might also experience. Once you've found the root emotion, look to the corresponding thesaurus entry for a range of suggestions. The MAY ESCALATE TO field can also provide a logical progression for where your character's feelings might be headed. Once you've clearly shown the root emotion, you can layer other emotions on to a lesser degree and map out the full experience.

## UTILIZE THE SETTING

Characters don't live in bubbles—they interact with the world around them. This is especially true when emotions come into play. A character in the kitchen might sweep a wine glass off the counter in a fit of rage, but in an office setting, the same anger may require some control, ranging from a slammed office door to tense posture and fingers pounding the keyboard. When referring to the thesaurus entries, a writer should keep in mind the character's setting in order to create organic and unique emotional responses.

## LESS IS MORE

Using too many cues to describe a character's feelings can slow the pace and dilute the reader's emotional experience. Sometimes this happens when a writer fails to identify and focus first on the root emotion. Other times, it's the result of choosing too many weak descriptors. Strong imagery will paint an immediate picture, so always strive to create concrete body language for the reader to interpret. Watch for overlong emotional passages that slow the action. Always think like a reader, and keep those pages turning.

## TWIST THE CLICHÉ

Whenever possible, writers should use fresh ideas to convey emotion. But let's face it...some descriptors work well. That's why they crop up in novels again and again. Each thesaurus entry includes a myriad of possible cues; if you find yourself leaning toward a traditional response like eye rolling or fist clenching that can be seen as cliché, twist it first.

Take shivering, for example—a common visceral indicator to imply fear or discomfort. Shivers run up the spine, down the spine...these are tired phrases that can turn off readers. Sure, the sensation fits, but why not come up with something new? Why couldn't a shiver swarm over the back of the legs? How about using a simile that likens a shiver to leaf-cutter ants marching along a vine? Better yet, don't call it a shiver at all. Instead, describe the sensations of tightening skin or hair being raised. Never be afraid to experiment. There are many ways to take a tired expression and twist it into something unique.

## VIEW ENTRIES AS A LAUNCHING POINT

Body movement, actions, visceral sensations, and thoughts are as individual as the characters experiencing them. The list accompanying each thesaurus entry is not designed as a one-size-fits-all set of options. It is meant, rather, to prompt writers to think beyond the basics. Each character comes from a different background and has a unique personality. Their comfort level around others will also influence how they express emotion. With this in mind, entries should serve as a brainstorming tool

and encourage writers to take the next step and create fresh, individual ways to show a character's emotional state.

## **TRY RELATED EMOTIONS**

If you're struggling to find the perfect physical response, visceral reaction, or thought, try reading through the entries of similar emotions. Each entry contains different cues. Studying the lists for related feelings may spark an idea for something new.

## **VISCERAL REACTIONS AS PHYSIC INDICATORS**

Sometimes, the strongest emotional responses are instinctive (visceral) ones that occur mostly internally and are therefore difficult for others to notice. This becomes a problem for writers who want to show a character's emotion while remaining true to their third- or first-person point of view. In these cases, writers should focus on visceral reactions that have a physical "tell" attached to them. For example, sweating, blushing and shakiness have an external component that can be seen by others. Utilizing these cues allows a writer to describe a visceral reaction without damaging the integrity of the point of view. Because of the external signs that accompany these unique internal sensations, we have included them under the PHYSICAL SIGNALS heading.

## **A FINAL WORD**

Our hope for this book is that it will help writers brainstorm unique ways to express character emotion. These entries are only a starting point, but we hope *The Emotion Thesaurus* will become a useful companion on your writing journey, and will travel with you from book to book. Happy writing!

# THE EMOTION THESAURUS

# ADORATION

**DEFINITION:** the act of worship; to view as divine

*NOTE: the subject of adoration can be a person or thing*

## **PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

Lips parting

A slack or soft expression

Walking quickly to erase the distance

Mimicking body language (of the subject)

Touching one's mouth or face

Reaching out to brush, touch or grasp

Steady eye contact, large pupils

Leaning forward

Stroking one's own neck or arm as a surrogate

Pointing one's torso and feet toward the subject

A flushed appearance

Nodding while the subject speaks

Smiling

Open body posture

Releasing an appreciative sigh

Laying a hand over the heart

Frequently moistening the lips

Pressing palms lightly against the cheeks

Skimming fingertips along the jaw line

Eyes that are bright, glossy

Agreement (murmuring affirmations)

Speaking praise and compliments

Keeping trinkets, pictures, or articles of the subject

Constantly talking about the subject to others

Rapt attention, still posture

Becoming unaware of one's environment or other people

A radiant glow

Visible shakiness

Reduced blinking

Closing the eyes to savor the experience

Speaking with a soft voice or tone

A voice that cracks with emotion

### **INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

Quickening heartbeat  
Breathlessness  
Feeling one's pulse in the throat  
Mouth drying  
Throat growing thick  
Rising body temperature  
Tingling nerve endings

### **MENTAL RESPONSES:**

A desire to move closer or touch  
Fixating one's thoughts on the subject  
Acute listening and observation  
Ignoring distractions  
An inability to see the subject's flaws or faults

### **CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM ADORATION:**

Obsession  
Fantasizing  
Believing that the feelings are mutual  
A sense of destiny (of belonging together)  
Stalking  
Writing and sending letters, email, and gifts  
Taking risks or breaking laws to be near or with the subject  
Weight loss  
Poor sleep patterns  
Jealousy towards those interacting with the subject  
Taking on traits or mannerisms of the subject  
Carrying something that represents the subject (a picture, clothes)  
Possessiveness

**MAY ESCALATE TO: [LOVE](#), [DESIRE](#), [FRUSTRATION](#), [HURT](#)**

### **CUES OF SUPPRESSED ADORATION:**

Clenching or hiding one's hands to hide sweating or shaking  
Avoiding conversations about the subject  
Watching or observing from afar  
Staying out of the subject's proximity  
Blushing  
Sneaking looks at the subject

Creating chance run ins

Writing secret letters, keeping a diary

Lying about one's feelings regarding the subject

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**WRITER'S TIP:** *Body cues should create a strong mental picture. If the movement is too drawn out or complicated, the emotional meaning behind the gesture may be lost.*

# AGITATION

**DEFINITION:** feeling upset or disturbed; a state of unrest

**PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

A reddening of the face

A sheen of sweat on the cheeks, chin, and forehead

Hands moving in jerks

Rubbing the back of the neck

Patting pockets or digging in a purse, looking for something lost

Clumsiness due to rushing (knocking things over, bumping tables)

A gaze that bounces from place to place

An inability to stay still

Jamming or cramming things away without care

Abrupt movement (causing a chair to tip or scuff the floor loudly)

Flapping hands

Becoming accident prone (bashing one's hip on a desk corner, etc.)

Dragging the hands through the hair repeatedly

Forgetting words, being unable to articulate thoughts

Backtracking to try and undo something said in haste

Adjusting one's clothing

Avoiding eye contact

A wavering voice

Not knowing where to look or go

Guarding one's personal space

Taking too long to answer a question or respond

Throat clearing

Overusing *ums*, *ahs*, and other verbal hesitations

Turning away from others

A bobbing Adam's apple

Pacing

Making odd noises in the throat

Rapid lip movement as one tries to find the right thing to say

Flinching if touched

Minimizing another's compliments

Fanning self

Unbuttoning a top shirt button

Tugging at a tie, collar, or scarf

## **INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

Excessive saliva  
Feeling overheated  
Stiffening hair on the nape of the neck  
Light-headedness  
Short, fast breaths  
Sweating  
Tingling skin as sweat forms

## **MENTAL RESPONSES:**

Mounting frustration that causes thoughts to blank  
Compounding mistakes  
A tendency to lie to cover up or excuse  
Anger at oneself for freezing up  
Trying to pinpoint the source of discomfort  
Mentally ordering oneself to calm down, relax

## **CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM AGITATION:**

Flight response (looking for an escape or fleeing the room)  
Snapping at others, or adopting a defensive tone  
Scattering papers and files in a frantic search

**MAY ESCALATE TO:** [ANNOYANCE](#), [FRUSTRATION](#), [ANXIETY](#), [ANGER](#)

## **CUES OF SUPPRESSED AGITATION:**

Changing the subject  
Making excuses  
Joking to lighten the mood  
Staying busy with tasks to avoid dealing with the source of the emotion  
Shifting attention to others, putting them in the spotlight

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**WRITER'S TIP:** *A ticking clock can ramp up the emotions in any scene. As the character hurries to complete a task or meet a need, mistakes caused by rushing open the door for a richer emotional ride.*

# AMAZEMENT

**DEFINITION:** overwhelming astonishment or wonder

**PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

Widening of the eyes

A slack mouth

Becoming suddenly still

Sucking in a quick breath

A hand covering one's mouth

Stiffening posture

Giving a small yelp

Rapid blinking followed by open staring

Flinching or starting, the body jumping slightly

Taking a step back

A slow, disbelieving shake of the head

Voicing wonder: *I can't believe it!* or *Look at that!*

Pulling out a cell phone to record the event

Glancing to see if others are experiencing the same thing

Pressing a hand against one's chest, fingers splayed out

Leaning in

Moving closer

Reaching out or touching

Eyebrows raising

Lips parting

A wide smile

Spontaneous laughter

Pressing palms to cheeks

Fanning oneself

Repeating the same things over and over

Squealing dramatically

**INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

A heart that seems to freeze, then pound

Rushing blood

Rising body temperature

Tingling skin

Stalled breaths

Adrenaline spikes

**MENTAL RESPONSES:**

Momentarily forgetting all else  
Wanting to share the experience with others  
Giddiness  
Disorientation  
Euphoria  
An inability to find words

**CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM AMAZEMENT:**

A racing heartbeat  
Shortness of breath  
Knees going weak  
Feeling overwhelmed, as if the room is closing in  
Collapsing

**MAY ESCALATE TO:** [CURIOSITY](#), [DISBELIEF](#), [EXCITEMENT](#)

**CUES OF SUPPRESSED AMAZEMENT:**

Holding oneself tight (self-hugging)  
Walking in jerky, self-contained strides  
Clamping the hands to the chest  
Looking down or away to hide one's expression  
Eyes widening a bit before control is asserted  
Mouth snapping shut  
A stony expression  
Taking a seat to hide the emotion  
Making excuses if reaction is noticed  
Stuttering, stammering

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**WRITER'S TIP:** *To add another layer to an emotional experience, look for symbolism within the character's current setting. What unique object within the location can the character make note of that perfectly embodies the emotion they are feeling inside?*

# AMUSEMENT

**DEFINITION:** appealing to the sense of humor; to feel entertainment or delight

**PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

A shiny or rosy face  
Raised or wiggling eyebrows  
Snorting, laughing  
Chuckling or cackling  
Displaying a wide grin  
Exchanging knowing looks with others  
Witty commentary  
Making joking observations  
Turning away and bursting out in laughter  
A playful pinch, nudge, or shove  
Eyes squinting, lit with an inner glow or twinkle of mischief  
Smirking or offering a bemused smile  
Clutching at another person for support  
Gasping for air  
Slapping one's knees or thighs  
Drumming feet against the floor  
Falling against someone, shoulder to shoulder  
"Drunken" behavior (weaving, staggering)  
Repeating the punch line or a select word to spur more laughter  
A high voice  
Holding one's sides  
Whimpers of mirth  
Spewing food or drink if laughter hits while eating or drinking  
Falling to the ground, rolling on the floor  
Nose running, sniffing  
Crashing into things, being clumsy but not caring  
A wide-eyed look that gets others dissolving into laughter again  
A belly laugh  
Holding onto a chair or wall for support  
Giggling, making faces, winking  
Plucking at clothes to cool down

### **INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

Pain in the ribs or stomach  
Wheezy breath  
Body temperature jumping up  
Weakness in limbs, especially the knees

### **MENTAL RESPONSES:**

A need to sit down  
Replaying the humorous event  
Embellishing the event in one's mind, increasing the mirth  
Wanting to keep the amusement going by adding to it with others

### **CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM AMUSEMENT:**

Uncontrollable laughter  
Laughing so hard it becomes soundless  
Body quaking  
Shaking the head emphatically  
A loss of body control (weak muscles, having a hard time staying upright)  
Begging people to stop  
An inability to form words  
Breathlessness  
Eyes tearing  
A sweaty, disheveled appearance  
Loss of bladder control  
Needing to leave the room  
**MAY ESCALATE TO: HAPPINESS, SATISFACTION**

### **CUES OF SUPPRESSED AMUSEMENT:**

Clamping the lips together  
Holding a hand up as if to say *No more!*  
Shaking the head  
Swallowing laughter  
Wiping at the mouth  
Covering the mouth, biting lips to hide a smile  
A reddening of the face  
Turning away to collect oneself  
Confining a laugh to a snort  
Pressing a fist against the lips

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**WRITER'S TIP:** *To create empathy for a character (including the antagonist), take the time to humanize them through their actions. Even the most unlikable person has a redeeming quality, so show it to the reader in a small, subtle way.*

# ANGER

**DEFINITION:** strong displeasure or wrath, usually aroused by perceived wrong

## **PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

Flaring nostrils

Sweating

Holding elbows wide from the body, chest thrust out

Sweeping arm gestures

Handling objects or people roughly

A high chin

Noisy breathing

Legs that are planted wide

Baring one's teeth

Repetitive, sharp gestures (shaking a fist, etc.)

Cutting people off when they speak

Jerky head movements

Protruding eyes

Flexing the fingers or arm muscles

Cracking knuckles

Rolling up sleeves or loosening a collar

Eyes that are cold, hard, flinty

Entering another's personal space to intimidate

Jeers, taunts, a cutting wit

Tightness in the eyes or expression

Glaring

A reddening of the face

Lips that flatten or curl

Closed body posture (crossing the arms)

Nails biting into one's own palms

Pounding one's fists against thighs, table, a wall, etc.

Slamming doors, cupboards, or drawers

Punching, kicking, throwing things

Stomping or stamping

A vein that pulses, twitches, or becomes engorged

Laughter with an edge

A shaking or raised voice, yelling

Deepening one's tone  
Deploying sarcasm, insulting others  
Picking fights (verbal or physical)  
Snapping at people

**INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

Grinding one's teeth  
Muscles quivering  
Pulse speeding, heartbeat pounding  
Body tensing  
Heat flushing through the body  
Sweating

**MENTAL RESPONSES:**

Irritability  
Poor listening skills  
Jumping to conclusions  
Irrational reactions to inconsequential things  
Demanding immediate action  
Impetuosity  
Taking inappropriate action or risks  
Fantasizing violence

**CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM ANGER:**

Exploding over little things  
Ulcers  
Hypertension  
Skin problems, such as eczema and acne  
Damaging one's own property as a way to vent  
Longer recovery time from surgeries, accidents, and other trauma  
Cutting oneself  
Road rage  
Taking one's anger out on innocent bystanders

**MAY ESCALATE TO: [RAGE](#)**

**CUES OF SUPPRESSED ANGER:**

Using a carefully controlled tone  
Drawing in slow, steady breaths  
False smiles

Passive-aggressive comments

Avoiding eye contact

Slanting the body away from the source of anger

Withdrawing from the conversation

Hiding one's hands and feet so clenching and twitching can't be seen

Excusing oneself for a brief time

Headache

Sore muscles and jaw

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**WRITER'S TIP:** *Pay special attention to the events leading up to an emotional response. If the plotting feels contrived, the character's reaction will seem contrived as well.*

# ANGUISH

**DEFINITION:** emotional or mental distress; acute suffering

**PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

Manic pacing  
Muttering  
Rubbing the back of one's neck  
Rocking back and forth  
Tugging one's hair  
Not eating or drinking  
Visible sweating  
Skin bunching around the eyes, a pained stare  
Hands clenching into fists  
Rubbing the wrists or wringing the hands  
Restless fingers  
Jumping at sounds  
Grinding one's teeth  
Clenching the jaw  
Moving about, being unable to settle in one place  
Muscles jumping under the skin  
A corded neck  
Curling one's toes  
Repeatedly touching an object that symbolizes safety  
Audible stress in one's voice and tone  
Picking at lips, skin, or nails  
Clutching at oneself  
Shivering, moaning  
Sobbing or weeping  
Yelling or shouting  
Checking and rechecking the time  
Asking those in authority for updates  
Shoulders that curl over the chest  
Bringing one's legs up close to the body's core  
Crying, wailing, begging for help  
Turning away from others  
Seeking corners in confined spaces  
Rubbing the arms or legs

Beating at walls or surrounding objects

**INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

Nausea

Sore muscles, stiffness, cramping

Pain in the back of the throat

Difficulty swallowing

Elevated body temperature

**MENTAL RESPONSES:**

Thinking irrationally

Praying, bargaining

Believing in anything that promises a positive outcome

Fixating on the source of suffering

A willingness to put oneself in harm's way for emotional relief

**CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM ANGUISH:**

Screaming for release

A gaunt appearance, wasting away

Premature aging

Posture that bends or crumples

Vomiting or dry heaves

Hyperventilation

Poor coloring, dark circles under the eyes

Wrinkles and sagging around the eyes and mouth

Alcohol, drug, or medication dependency

Bald patches

Facial tics or repetitive mannerisms (hair tugging, body rocking)

Cutting, scratching, or other self-destructive behaviors

Depression

Suicide

**MAY ESCALATE TO: [DESPERATION](#), [DEPRESSION](#)**

**CUES OF SUPPRESSED ANGUISH:**

Wincing

Gritting one's teeth

Uncontrolled shivering and hand tremors

Muscle tightness

Furtive movements

Hiding expressive gestures like hand wringing  
Bitten nails, bleeding quills  
A downturned mouth or pinched lips  
Attempting to hold back whimpers or moans  
Heavy or shaky breathing  
Minimal speaking (one-word answers, shaking or nodding the head)  
Chain smoking  
Drinking heavily  
Sallow skin

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**WRITER'S TIP** *Don't be afraid to challenge your character's morals. Putting them in situations that are outside their comfort zone will make them squirm, and the reader will too.*

# ANNOYANCE

**DEFINITION:** aggravation or mild irritation

**PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

A pinched expression

Sighing heavily or with exaggeration

Statements suggesting impatience: *Here, I'll do it.*

Narrowing eyes

Crossed arms

Tapping a foot, fidgeting

Swatting at the air

Tics and tells (a throbbing forehead vein, fingering a collar)

Lips pressing into a white slash

Clenching the jaw

Grimacing, sneering, frowning

Complaining

Folding the arms across the chest

Hands that briefly clench

Making pointed suggestions to alleviate the annoyance

Tugging at clothing (jerking down a cuff, forcing a zipper up)

Cocking one's head and then shaking it

Raising one's eyebrows and giving a glassy stare

A gaze that flicks upward

Minutely shaking the head

Changing one's stance (shifting weight or position)

Propping the head up with a fist

Holding the head in the hands

Opening the mouth to criticize, then stopping short

Taking a deep breath and holding it in

Finger-tapping a tabletop

A smile that slips or appears forced

Snapping a pencil tip, using unnecessary force

Pacing

Light sarcasm

Asking a question that has a painfully obvious answer

A sharp tone

Speaking in short phrases

Visible tension in the neck, shoulders, and arms  
Rigid posture, cords twanging in the neck  
Rubbing the brow as if to ward off a headache  
Avoiding the person or object of annoyance  
Pressing a fist to the mouth

**INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

A headache  
Stiffness in the neck or jaw  
Raised body temperature  
Sensitivity to noise

**MENTAL RESPONSES:**

Berating thoughts  
Straying attention  
Thinking of an excuse to leave  
Making unkind mental comparisons  
Wishing to be somewhere else

**CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM ANNOYANCE:**

A reddening face  
Rough handling of objects  
Taking over someone else's job or duties  
Grinding one's teeth  
Throwing the hands up in a gesture of surrender  
Stalking off to get some air  
Shutting down, not speaking or responding  
Pulling someone else into the situation to divert attention and allow one to exit

**MAY ESCALATE TO: [FRUSTRATION](#), [ANGER](#)**

**CUES OF SUPPRESSED ANNOYANCE:**

Nodding, but tightly, as if holding back from speaking an insult  
Switching to another job to keep hands and thoughts busy  
Attacking a task, diverting one's energy  
Forcing oneself to remain in the presence of the annoyance  
Faking interest, barely holding impatience at bay  
Carefully controlling one's voice and tone  
Focusing one's gaze elsewhere in an attempt to ignore

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**WRITER'S TIP** *Don't get caught up on the eyes to convey emotion. While eyes are often the first thing we notice in real life, they provide very limited options for description possibilities. Instead, dig deeper, showing how the character behaves through their body movement, actions and dialogue.*

# ANTICIPATION

**DEFINITION:** hopeful expectation; to await eagerly

## **PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

Sweaty palms

Trembling hands

Crossing and uncrossing one's legs

Frantic planning for the event

List-making

Clasping one's hands to the chest

Being unable to think or talk about anything else

Fidgeting as if movement will make things go faster

Bouncing on one's toes

A bright-eyed look, engaging with others or the environment

Fussing with clothes, rearranging things

Waiting at a window, hovering at the door or by the phone

Checking and rechecking hair or makeup in a mirror

Gossiping with others, sharing excitement, giggling

Closing eyes and squealing

Jittering a foot against the floor

Covering one's face and then peeking

Biting one's lip

Fake swooning

Asking questions: *How long? When? What is it?*

Wetting the lips

Closing the eyes and sighing

Pacing

Rhythmic movements (swinging one's legs back and forth, etc.)

Obsessive clock-watching

Checking and rechecking email

Phoning or texting friends to talk about what's coming

Grabbing another person and saying *Tell me!*

Leaning in

Picking at food, too excited to eat

Begging someone for details, an answer, for a look at something

## **INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

A fluttery, empty feeling in the stomach  
Breathlessness  
A pounding heart  
Tingling all over

**MENTAL RESPONSES:**

Daydreaming  
A desire for perfection  
Fearing that something will happen to screw things up  
A lack of concentration  
Imagining what will happen  
Becoming self-critical (questioning clothing choices, abilities)

**CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM ANTICIPATION:**

Sleep loss  
Frustration or impatience  
Short-temperedness, irritability  
Neglecting everything else (responsibilities, friends, family)  
Fantasizing or building up the event far beyond its reality  
Over-thinking (organizing every minute detail, etc.)  
Going overboard in preparation (dressing over-the-top, etc.)

**MAY ESCALATE TO: [EXCITEMENT](#), [JEALOUSY](#), [DISAPPOINTMENT](#)**

**CUES OF SUPPRESSED ANTICIPATION:**

Sitting unnaturally still  
Pressing one's lips together  
Rubbing sweaty hands on one's clothes  
Pretending to read a book or watch TV  
A corded neck  
Clamping one's hands tightly together  
Avoiding conversation  
Sneaking glances at a clock or doorway  
Feigning boredom  
Telling oneself that it doesn't matter  
Acting interested in something else  
Rolling one's shoulders and neck as if stiff  
Changing the topic

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**WRITER'S TIP:** *If a critique partner voices confusion over the emotional reaction of one of your characters, check to make sure the stimulus trigger is prominent. Showing the cause-effect relationship is vital when conveying authentic emotion.*

# ANXIETY

**DEFINITION:** mental apprehension and unease; a sense of foreboding

## **PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

- Rubbing the back of the neck
- Crossing the arms, forming a barrier to others
- Standing with one arm holding the other at the elbow
- Clutching a purse, coat, or other object
- Wringing one's hands
- Twisting a watch or ring
- Scratching
- Hands repeatedly rising to touch one's face
- Fingering a necklace
- Rolling one's shoulders
- Bouncing a foot
- Glancing at the clock, phone, or doorway
- Holding one's stomach
- Clutching one's hands
- Rocking in place
- Twisting one's neck as if sore
- Biting at the lips or nails
- Head shaking
- Shifting, unable to get comfortable
- Blowing out a series of short breaths to gain control
- Digging in a purse or pocket to keep the hands busy
- Becoming easily distracted
- Adjusting clothes as if they chafe
- Rubbing at one's hands
- An inability to eat
- Rubbing one's arms and looking around
- Bouncing a curled knuckle against the mouth
- A darting gaze
- Increased awareness of one's environment
- Starting at noises
- Excessive swallowing
- Repeatedly checking a phone for messages

Impatience

Praying

**INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

Feeling too hot or too cold

Restless legs

Dizziness

A churning stomach

Increased thirst

Tingling in one's limbs

A tightening chest

Accelerated breathing

Feeling like one's insides are quivering

**MENTAL RESPONSES:**

Thinking about worst-case scenarios

Self blame

Seeking reassurance from others

Time feeling like it's slowing down

Discomfort in close spaces

Irrational worries

Replaying the events that caused the feeling

**CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM ANXIETY:**

Excessive sweating

A ragged appearance

Talking to oneself under the breath

Rocking in one's seat

Heart palpitations

Panic attacks

Hyperventilating

Emergence of fears, phobias, or OCD-like symptoms

**MAY ESCALATE TO: [FEAR](#), [DESPERATION](#), [PARANOIA](#)**

**CUES OF SUPPRESSED ANXIETY:**

False smile

Avoiding conversation

Finding somewhere to be alone

Doing things to appear normal (ordering food but not eating it)

Feigning interest in something nearby  
Closing one's eyes in an attempt to stay calm  
Smoothing or stroking one's own hair as a soothing gesture

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**WRITER'S TIP** *For each scene, identify the emotion you need to show and think in terms of three...what three ways have you reinforced the character's feelings through verbal and nonverbal communication?*

# CONFIDENCE

**DEFINITION:** having faith in one's own influence and ability

## **PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

Strong posture (shoulders back, chest out, chin high)

Walking with wide steps

Strong hygiene and personal grooming

Holding the hands loosely behind the back

Touching one's fingertips together (tapping, forming a steeple)

A gleam in one's eye, an inner light

Smiling, a playful grin

Winking or giving someone an easy nod

Keeping one's hands out of the pockets

Appearing relaxed (drumming fingers against a leg, humming)

Taking up space (legs spread wide, arms loose at the sides)

Approaching people with ease

Looking others directly in the eye

Arms swinging while walking

Choosing the middle, not the sides (be it a couch or a room)

Using exaggerated movements to draw attention to oneself

A booming laugh

A tilted-back head

Speaking boisterously

Offering witty commentary

Giving a half-shrug or a grin that conveys secret knowledge

Light-hearted teasing

Flirting

A strong handshake

Leaning back in a chair, hands behind the head

An easygoing manner

Stretching

Showing comfort in the close proximity of others

Initiating contact

Telling jokes, adding to or steering a conversation

Hosting events (getting the guys together for a football game)

Openness when dealing with people

Appearing unbothered by what others may think

Leaning in to talk or listen  
Increased physical contact, becoming touchy-feely  
Running hands through one's hair or flipping the hair back  
Assuming a pose that draws attention to one's best attributes  
Wearing clothes that are flashy or dramatic  
Leading rather than following

#### **INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

Relaxed muscles  
Easy breaths  
Lightness in the chest

#### **MENTAL RESPONSES:**

A sense of calm and ease  
A positive outlook  
Interest in whatever's going on

#### **CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM CONFIDENCE:**

Doing or saying things outside of the norm without anxiety or concern  
Obsessively talking about an achievement or material object  
Reacting with anger or jealousy if one's reputation is impugned  
Bragging, showing off

**MAY ESCALATE TO:** [SATISFACTION](#), [SMUGNESS](#), [CONTEMPT](#)

#### **CUES OF SUPPRESSED CONFIDENCE:**

Minimizing compliments  
Modesty  
Changing the topic to bring others into the spotlight  
Downplaying one's own comfort level to make others feel better  
Asking for opinions or advice

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**WRITER'S TIP:** *It is natural to hold back or hide our true scope of emotions in the presence of others. When writing a conflicted protagonist, it is critical to show through action the emotion the character wants to convey to others while also expressing their true feelings to the reader.*

# CONFLICTED

**DEFINITION: experiencing opposing emotions**

**PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

Lips pressing together in a slight grimace

Increased swallowing or blinking

A smile that wavers

Gaze ping-ponging, avoiding direct eye contact

Start-and-stop gesturing (reaching then hesitating, changing direction mid-stride)

Broken dialogue, self-interruptions

Opening and closing the mouth

Struggling to find the right words

Voicing support, but with a tone that lacks enthusiasm

Becoming quieter, less animated

Scratching one's neck or cheek

Rubbing or pulling at an ear

Asking questions to gain more insight

Talking to others about similar experiences or situations

Gathering opinions on what others would do

Soft head shaking

A need to sit down and reflect

Rubbing or pinching the bottom lip

A pensive expression

Making a *Hmmm* noise in the throat

Tilting the head in a side-to-side rhythm

Pulling in and then slowly releasing a deep breath

Apologizing for one's lackluster reaction, citing mixed feelings

Requesting some time to digest everything

Tapping one's index finger against the lip

Brows pulling in

Looking downward

Rubbing at the middle of one's forehead, eyes closed

Voicing conflict: *This is a tough decision*

Voicing surprise: *Sorry, you caught me off guard*

Knees that bend, then straighten

A restless stance, pacing

Rubbing a hand through the hair

Smoothing one's clothes or touching items to keep the hands busy

Cancelling gestures (smiling while shaking the head, nodding and grimacing)

Holding one's elbow while the opposite hand makes a fist against the mouth

Blowing cheeks out, then swallowing the air or releasing it

Wrinkling the nose

Holding hands out and "weighing" them in the air

Rubbing a hand against the front of one's shirt (over heart)

Forcing enthusiasm because it's "the right thing to do"

Subdued or delayed reactions

### **INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

Headaches

A heaviness in the body

Tightness in the chest

A sinking feeling in the stomach

Loss of appetite

### **MENTAL RESPONSES:**

Weighing the pros and cons

Researching or seeking information

Guilt toward those negatively affected by a final decision

Playing *What if?* to understand the repercussion of a situation

A need to verbalize the internal conflict

A desire to retreat and go somewhere quiet to think

An inability to focus on anything but the internal conflict

Drawing on moral beliefs to help one decide

### **CUES OF BEING CONFLICTED OVER THE LONG TERM:**

A disheveled look (hair out of place, clothes rumpled)

Obsessive information-gathering, looking for the "key" solution

Stomach upset, poor diet, weight loss

Stress headaches

Difficulty sleeping

Loss of self confidence

Avoiding making any decisions at all

Hair loss

**MAY ESCALATE TO: [CONFUSION](#), [OVERWHELMED](#), [FRUSTRATION](#), [ANXIETY](#)**

**CUES WHEN SUPPRESSING THE FEELING OF BEING CONFLICTED:**

Citing that one is not the ideal candidate to make the choice

Making excuses to avoid the situation

Suggesting that a break is needed to regroup

Making a joke to alleviate tension or lighten the mood

Giving a distracted nod to what's being said

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***WRITER'S TIP:****In scenes where information must be shared, characters should still be moving, acting, and revealing emotion to keep the pace flowing smoothly.*

# CONFUSION

**DEFINITION:** a state of befuddlement or bafflement

**PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

Difficulty completing a task

Fumbling

Using *um* and *uh* hesitations

Grimacing

Excessive swallowing

Scratching at one's cheek or temple

Rubbing the chin

Repeating back what was said as a question

Touching the base of the neck

Showing one's palms and shrugging

An uncertain tone

Increased difficulty in finding the right words

Body posture that loosens or collapses

Tilting one's head to the side and pursing the lips

Narrowed eyes

Stuttering

Head flinching back slightly

Trailing off when speaking

Running hands through the hair

Eyebrows that squish together

Pulling or tugging on an ear

Asking someone to repeat what was said

Gaze clouding, going distant

Rubbing one's forehead or eyebrows

Asking questions

Frowning

Biting one's lip

Rapid blinking

Hands touching the lips, mouth, face

Glancing around as if looking for answers

Wandering a short distance away before returning

Turning away to gather one's thoughts

A slight head shake

A mouth that opens but nothing comes out  
Blowing out the cheeks, then releasing  
A blank look, a slack expression  
Staring down at the ground  
Asking for affirmation: *Are you sure?*  
Tapping a fist against the lips  
Poking one's tongue into the cheek  
Dry washing one's hands

**INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

Rising body heat  
Fluttering in the stomach  
A tightening chest  
Sweating  
Feeling overheated

**MENTAL RESPONSES:**

Thoughts that freeze  
Hoping for an interruption to delay answering  
The mind racing, searching for answers

**CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM CONFUSION:**

Flight response  
Failing grades  
Loss of respect from others for unfinished or inaccurate work  
Broken or unfulfilled promises  
A lack of productivity  
A loss of self esteem

**MAY ESCALATE TO: OVERWHELMED, FRUSTRATION,  
RESIGNATION, INSECURITY**

**CUES OF SUPPRESSED CONFUSION:**

Nodding or agreeing, to avoid attention  
Waving a hand  
False confidence  
Assuring others that everything is under control  
Smiling and nodding  
Physical touches to reassure (a clap on the back or shoulder)  
Fidgeting

Steering the conversation to a different topic

Launching into a flurry of activity

Making promises

Showing a sudden interest in other things

Visible sweating

Using “word filler” to stall for time

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***WRITER’S TIP:*** *Men and women experience and express emotions differently. When writing a character of the opposite sex, get a second opinion if needed to ensure a character’s reactions, thoughts, and feelings are authentic.*

# CONTEMPT

**DEFINITION:** a lack of reverence or respect; to hold in disregard

## **PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

Crossing one's arms, showing closed body posture

A downturned mouth

Head tilting away

Sneering

Head shaking

Mocking

Rolling the eyes

Using sarcasm

Gossiping

Snorting loudly

Buzzing the lips to be rude (blowing a raspberry)

Baiting the other person

Turning the body at an angle instead of facing the subject head-on

Walking away

Waving dismissively

Stiff posture

Refusing to respond or engage

Lowering the chin to look down on someone

Cold eyes

A pinched mouth

A hard, distinctive jaw line

Smirking as the subject speaks

Ugly laughter

Making jokes at another's expense

Flashing a cold smile to show insincerity

Spitting in the direction of the one provoking contempt

Sticking a tongue out

A wide stance, chest thrust out

## **INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

Rising blood pressure

A tightening in the chest

Stiffness in the neck and jaw

A roiling heat in the belly

**MENTAL RESPONSES:**

Negative thinking

Unkind observations

Mental insults

A desire to verbally tear down or hurt another person

Wanting to expose the subject's ignorance

**CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM CONTEMPT:**

Swearing and offering insults

Yelling, arguing

High blood pressure

A vein throbbing visibly in the forehead

Thoughts of violence

Angrily dismissing someone from one's presence

Needing to leave (excusing oneself, cutting a meeting short)

**MAY ESCALATE TO:** [DISGUST](#), [SCORN](#), [ANGER](#)

**CUES OF SUPPRESSED CONTEMPT:**

Flushed skin

Biting at the cheek

Fidgeting

Pressing the lips together to keep from speaking

Dry washing one's hands

Purposefully not looking at the source

Feigning interest in something else

Turning away to ignore the source

Becoming non-responsive

Pushing on the diaphragm to keep the anger in

Leaning back, arms crossed

Moving away, creating personal distance

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**WRITER'S TIP:** *When revising, look for instances where emotions are NAMED. Nine times out of ten this indicates a lack of confidence that the emotion is shown clearly through thought, sensations and body language. Strong verbal and nonverbal cues negate the need to "explain" the emotion to*

*the reader.*

# CURIOSITY

**DEFINITION:** inquisitiveness; a desire for knowledge

**PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

Tilting the head to the side

Raised eyebrows

Body posture that perks up

A slow smile that builds

Repeating a statement as a question

Leaning forward, sliding one's chair closer

Pausing to examine

Eyebrows furrowing and then releasing

Blinking

Gazing with focus

Shifting from casual conversation to pointed questions

A softened voice or tone that may contain wonder

Crossing one's arms while observing

Prying or snooping

Nose-wrinkling

Posing hypothetical questions

Lingering touches

Stopping to pay attention (a sudden halt, a fork pausing halfway to the mouth)

Straining to hear, shushing others to be quiet

Eavesdropping

Cupping an elbow with one hand while tapping the lips with the other

Pushing one's glasses up

Bending, kneeling, or squatting to get closer

Tilting one's body toward the source

Shuffling, creeping, or edging closer

Exploring the senses (smelling something new for the sake of knowing, etc.)

Verbally expressing interest: *Oh, look at that!* or *Isn't that amazing?*

Asking questions (who, what, when, where, and why)

Pulling on someone's sleeve to get them to join or follow

A still demeanor to aid in observation

Lips that are slightly parted

Nodding slowly  
Poking or prodding at something

### **INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

Breaths that hitch or briefly stop  
An increased pulse

### **MENTAL RESPONSES:**

A need to know, touch, or understand  
Forgetting what one was about to say or do  
A compulsion to detour toward something new  
Temporary cessation of worries, stress, or actions  
A desire to investigate or experiment  
Increased awareness of sensory information  
Wonder or interest at how something works or why it's there

### **CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM CURIOSITY:**

Fidgeting or tics  
Hypersensitivity to the source of interest  
Obsessive thoughts  
Pointed or even rude questions  
Snooping or sneaking about to satisfy the need to know

**MAY ESCALATE TO:** [EAGERNESS](#), [AMAZEMENT](#), [CONFLICTED](#)

### **CUES OF SUPPRESSED CURIOSITY:**

Keeping one's eyes down  
Holding the hands in the lap  
Lack of eye contact  
Providing an excuse to linger or move toward the source  
Pretending to ignore or be unaware  
A sidelong glance  
Using one's hair to hide an interested glance  
Feigning boredom

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**WRITER'S TIP:** *Smell triggers memory. Take advantage of this sense and build olfactory description into the scene. This will draw readers in and make them feel part of the action.*

# DEFEAT

**DEFINITION:** the feeling of having been mastered, conquered, or bested

## **PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

Chin lowering to one's chest  
Hands that go limp  
Holding one's palms up and out  
Shaking the head  
A lack of eye contact  
Staring down at one's hands or feet  
Going quiet or non-responsive  
Weaving in place, a lack of balance  
Agreeing for the sake of it  
Arms hanging at one's sides  
A long, low sigh  
A thickening voice  
Stumbling, knees hitching  
Rubbing at the eyes, hiding redness or tears from others  
Backing away  
Cheeks that burn  
A bobbing Adam's apple (thick swallows)  
Hunched or rounded shoulders  
Sagging posture  
Hands hidden behind the back or in pockets  
Chin tremors  
Arms clutching one's body as if to hold it together  
Lackluster movements  
Toneless responses  
Vacant eyes  
Slumping into a chair  
Holding one's head with the hands  
A cracking voice

## **INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

Feeling a pulse in one's throat  
Heart thudding dully in the chest

Wheezing breaths  
Feeling like the head is spinning  
Chest pain or numbness  
A sour taste in one's mouth  
A lack of energy  
Tears or heat behind the eyelids  
A painful lump in one's throat  
Limbs that feel too heavy to lift or move

**MENTAL RESPONSES:**

A desire to flee or be alone  
Shame  
Worrying that others will feel let down or disappointed  
Mental fatigue

**CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM DEFEAT:**

A quaking or trembling body  
Uncontrollable tears  
Pleading or begging  
Collapsing, knees giving out  
Self-loathing

**MAY ESCALATE TO: [RESIGNATION](#), [DEPRESSION](#), [SHAME](#), [HUMILIATION](#)**

**CUES OF SUPPRESSED DEFEAT:**

Shaking the head  
False bravado  
Trying to maintain eye contact  
Demanding a rematch  
Repeating the word *No*  
Shouting, cursing  
Laying the blame on others  
Making accusations of cheating or underhandedness  
A chin that juts sharply  
A flinty gaze  
Using anger to feed strength

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**WRITER'S TIP** To reveal quieter emotions, try using contrast. For example, pairing a character with someone who is highly volatile will help their own milder body cues stand out clearly.

# DEFENSIVENESS

**DEFINITION:** resisting attack; defending against a perceived danger or threat

## **PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

Stepping back

Leaning away

Crossing the arms over one's chest

Rigid body posture

Squinting eyes

A lowering brow

Sucking the cheeks in

Shaking the head

Sputtering, gaping

Holding an object as a shield (a book, a folded jacket)

A darting gaze

Licking one's lips

Rapid blinking that leads to a wide-eyed look

Hands up, palms toward the aggressor

A fixed stare

Flipping one's hair in annoyance

A snort of dismissive laughter

Raising one's voice

Crossing the legs

Body shielding (turning at an angle)

Interrupting

Looking to others for backup

Blowing out a noisy breath

Going on the offensive and verbally attacking the accuser

Deflecting blame

Flinching, jerking back

Difficulty being articulate

Hand splaying across one's upper chest

Stiff neck, cords standing out

Chin lowering and pulling back against the neck

Wagging a finger, berating another for their accusations

Using sarcasm

Eye rolling  
Rising color in one's cheeks  
Visible sweating  
Dragging others into the situation for support  
Verbalizing disappointment or denial  
A voice that hardens over the course of an argument  
Jerky movements, a loss of fluidity to actions  
Excessive swallowing

**INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

Raised blood pressure  
A pounding heartbeat that grows loud in the ears  
Dry mouth  
A body that feels hot  
Intense thirst  
The stomach tightening and hardening

**MENTAL RESPONSES:**

Scrambling thoughts, trying to diffuse the situation  
Anger, shock  
Feeling betrayed  
Sifting memories for evidence (to support innocence or challenge accusations)

**CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM DEFENSIVENESS:**

Eyes darting for an exit or escape (flight response)  
Shouting  
Bringing up past examples when one supported the accuser or saved the day  
Citing an opponent's shortcomings  
Increasing one's personal space  
Storming away

**MAY ESCALATE TO: [ANGER](#), [FEAR](#)**

**CUES OF SUPPRESSED DEFENSIVENESS:**

Maintaining an even tone  
Offering a fake smile  
A forcibly calm demeanor  
Changing the subject

Denial (shrugging, forcing a laugh)

Calmly stating that one doesn't need to prove anything

Not leaving or walking away, despite discomfort

Attempting to reason through facts, not emotion

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**WRITER'S TIP:** Choose each setting with deliberate care. Each location should symbolize something to your main character, and have an impact (positive or negative) on their psyche coming into the scene.

# DENIAL

**DEFINITION:** a refusal to acknowledge truth or reality

## **PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

Verbal disagreement

Backing away

Vigorous head shaking

Waving someone off

Dialogue in the negative: *Don't blame me* or *I had nothing to do with it*

Speaking emphatically with finger pointing or other hard gestures

Raising one's palms

Shrugging

Tucking in the upper lip

Arms crossing one's chest, closed body posture

Placing a hand against the breastbone

A slackened mouth, displaying shock

Speaking rapidly, not letting others get a word in

Rationalizing or justifying

Shuffling backward

Speaking slowly, stretching out words: *What? No way!*

Leaning back, creating space

Warding someone or something off

Raised eyebrows

Widening eyes

Raising one's voice

Emphatically saying *No*

Slanting the body away from an accuser

Questioning someone's source or the facts

Making an "X" motion with one's hands

Eye contact dropping (if one is unsure or lying)

Choppy responses, short sentences

Sweating

Staring down at one's hands

## **INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

Mouth going dry

A lump forming in one's throat

Feeling heavy or numb  
Heat rising behind the eyelids  
Tingling in the stomach

**MENTAL RESPONSES:**

Replaying past events in order to understand  
Thoughts centering on the facts of the situation  
Brain scrambling to find a logical excuse (if lying)  
Anger or hurt at being put in this situation

**CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM DENIAL:**

Blaming others  
Pleading, crying, begging to be believed  
Becoming closed-minded, refusing to listen  
Wanting to be left alone

**MAY ESCALATE TO: [DEFENSIVENESS](#), [HURT](#), [GUILT](#), [ANGER](#), [CONFLICTED](#)**

**CUES OF SUPPRESSED DENIAL:**

Refusing to argue or respond to an accusation  
Steady eye contact  
Explaining that one is not in denial  
Voicing *We'll see* comments  
Supplying reasons to convey that a viewpoint is invalid  
Repeating the truth as one sees it and sticking to it  
A steady, even tone

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**WRITER'S TIP:** *Make a list of your body language crutches (frowning, smiling, shrugging, head shaking, etc.). Use your browser's search function to highlight these so you can pinpoint where the emotional description needs some freshening up.*

# DEPRESSION

**DEFINITION:** a state of withdrawal; extreme sadness and reduce vitality

## **PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

A gaunt appearance

Notable weight loss or gain

Eyes that blink infrequently

Wet or red eyes

Staring down at one's hands

Becoming non-reactive to stimulus or noise

Laying in bed with no motivation to get up

Saggy posture, bent neck

Head resting on one's hand

Tangled hair, overlong nails, and other signs of letting oneself go

Wearing the same clothes day after day

Shuffling steps

Lethargic hand movements

Obsession with an object that represents loss (a photo or trinket)

Crying

A vacant stare

Making excuses

A downturned mouth

Lines in the face, a slack expression

Dark circles under one's eyes

An inability to sleep

Sleeping too much

Poor eating habits

A tone that lacks strength or vitality

An unclean home, room, or office space

Ignoring phone calls or visitors

Premature aging (wrinkles, tired eyes, gray or white hair)

Illness

Having no interest in hobbies

Failing grades at school, lack of success at work

Choosing isolation

Dropping out of activities and moving away from friendships

Picking at food or finding food tasteless  
Being unable to focus on tasks (work, school, home life)  
Forgetting appointments, conversations, and meetings  
Bulky or dull clothing choices  
Non-responsiveness to others, even family  
Poor conversation skills  
Body odor

**INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

A hollowness in one's chest  
A slow pulse  
Aches and pains  
Shallow breathing  
Fatigue

**MENTAL RESPONSES:**

Focusing inward  
Desiring to live in the past or be alone  
Poor observation skills  
Obsessive thoughts  
A negative outlook  
An inability to concentrate  
Losing track of time  
Thoughts of self-harm  
Bleak observations about the world and the people in it  
An aversion to noise, crowds, and stressful situations

**CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM DEPRESSION:**

Eating disorders  
Manic behavior (hair pulling, OCD, paranoia)  
Thoughts of suicide  
Suicide attempts  
Addiction to medication  
Hoarding

**MAY RELATE TO: [NOSTALGIA](#), [REGRET](#), [SADNESS](#)**

**CUES OF SUPPRESSED DEPRESSION:**

Slight pauses before reacting  
Emotional displays that seem forced or false

Heavy self-medicating or drinking  
Wearing false, overly bright smiles  
Pretending to be ill to avoid social situations and people  
Lying

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**WRITER'S TIP***It isn't enough to show emotion; a writer needs to make the reader feel it. Think about the core visceral sensations you experience when feeling strong emotion, and if appropriate, utilize them to convey a similar experience to the reader.*

# DESIRE

**DEFINITION:** to covet, wish, or long for

*NOTE: the object of desire can be a person, a thing, or an intangible (prestige, acceptance, etc.)*

## **PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

Lips parting

Firm eye contact

Hands moistening

Stroking one's arm as a surrogate for the object of desire

Mirroring the object's movements (if a person)

Trembling

Lowering one's voice when speaking

Leaning in or forward

Moving closer to erase distance

Relaxing one's posture

Facing the object straight on

Eyes shining, glossing over, and softening

Slightly parting the legs

Muscles losing tension

Frequent touching of the face and lips

Hands clenching briefly, then releasing

Becoming inarticulate

Skin flushing

Increased swallowing

The tongue darting out to touch or lick the lips

Knees loosening and feeling weak

Responding immediately when called upon

Touching or holding the object close

A slow smile that builds

Subconsciously thrusting out one's chest

Lifting one's chin to expose the neck

Holding in a breath

Stuttering or stammering

A lingering touch, brushing up against the object

Touching or stroking one's own throat

### **INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

A strong awareness of one's own heartbeat  
The sensation of being flooded with warmth  
The mouth becoming moist, increased saliva  
A sensation of hair raising on one's arms and nape  
Fingers aching or tingling with the need to touch  
Quickening breath or breathlessness  
Hypersensitivity to touch and texture  
Fluttering or even mild pain in the chest  
Light-headedness  
A shifting feeling near the heart, a pang  
A shiver that brings pleasure  
Nerve endings that stir and tingle  
Bodily cravings of being touched by the object (person)

### **MENTAL RESPONSES:**

Preoccupation with the object's scent  
Focusing on the object's most desirable qualities  
Tuning out distractions in order to fixate on the object or want  
A desire to erase all distance  
A need to touch and explore  
Daydreaming or fantasizing about the object  
A determination to have or own  
Impatience  
A loss of inhibitions  
Setting goals to obtain the object  
Taking opportunities or meeting challenges to prove one's worth  
Wanting to care for and put the object's needs first

### **CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM DESIRE:**

Bumping, pushing, or shoving to get closer  
A willingness to endure suffering or hardship to obtain the object  
Not caring what others think or feel  
Obsessive thoughts  
Centering all aspects of one's life on being with the object  
Neglecting friends, family, work, and other interests  
Fixation on self-improvement, education, or goals leading to achievement  
Shedding bad habits or flaws to appease or impress

**MAY ESCALATE TO:** [ADORATION](#), [LOVE](#), [DETERMINATION](#), [ENVY](#),

## JEALOUSY

### **CUES OF REPRESSED DESIRE:**

Glancing away for a brief time

Feigning interest in something else

Making a display of engaging in conversation with others

Examining or pretending to consider other objects

Smiling at other objects

Forcing a slow gait rather than rushing to be with the object

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**WRITER'S TIP** *Emotion should always lead to decision making, either good or bad, that will propel the story forward.*

# DESPERATION

**DEFINITION:** a state of hopelessness that leads to rashness

**PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

Feverish, over-bright eyes

A darting gaze

Quick movements

An inability to sleep or eat

Finger twitches, compulsive and repetitive movements

A herky-jerky walk

Reaching or touching in hopes of gaining help or favor

Facing danger head-on

Acting in ways that push the limits of endurance

Pacing

Anxiously muttering to oneself

Grabbing fistfuls of one's hair and pulling

A pained stare

An emotion-choked voice

Fluttery hand movements

Moaning

Rocking in place

Bargaining

Shaking, trembling

Curling the arms over the head

Hugging one's shoulders, chin resting on the chest

Stiff neck, strained forearms

Eyes that appear wet

Teeth biting down on the bottom lip

Wringing one's hands

Shoulders curling, a bent spine

Shaking one's head in denial

Protective posture (chin to chest, arms holding the body tight)

Dragging nails down the cheeks

Rubbing one's upper arms for comfort

A shaking voice

Sweating profusely

## **INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

Racing heartbeat  
A dry mouth  
A sore throat from pleading, crying, begging  
A heightened level of pain resistance  
Tightness or pain in the chest  
Excessive or manic energy

## **MENTAL RESPONSES:**

Constant planning and obsessing  
Irrational thinking, poor judgment  
A willingness to do anything  
Ignoring the law or society's values  
Casting morality and good judgment aside  
Sacrificing others or lesser goals, desires, and needs if necessary  
Disregarding another's feelings if they conflict with one's goal

## **CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM DESPERATION:**

Crying, sobbing, wailing  
Screaming  
Beating one's fists against something to the point of injury  
Kneeling  
Pleading, abasing, or disregarding personal worth or pride  
Extreme risk taking  
Offering an exchange: *Take me instead or I'll go, you stay*  
Pushing past one's limits to find needed strength  
Refusing to be persuaded

**MAY ESCALATE TO: TERROR, DREAD, ANGER, DETERMINATION**

## **CUES OF SUPPRESSED DESPERATION:**

Holding oneself tight  
Believing a lie if it offers hope  
Fidgeting  
Retreating internally to cope, shutting the world out  
Difficulty sitting still  
Clock-watching  
Reassuring others  
Fixing one's hair and clothes to appear unaffected  
Taking advantage of a distraction (watching a movie, TV)

Curling hands into tight fists

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**WRITER'S TIP** *Clothing choices are individual and project an image of one's personality. When creating unique emotional body language, think about how a character's clothing can be utilized to reveal their insecurities or vanities and show feelings of self-worth.*

# DETERMINATION

**DEFINITION:** firm intention on achieving a goal; decisiveness

## **PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

Being the first to speak

Moving into someone's personal space

Using articulate words and short, strong sentences

A steady, lower-pitched voice

A furrowing brow

Tight muscles

Alert gaze

A set jaw

Strong eye contact

A curt nod

Forming hands into a steeple

Mirroring the leader's movements

Using affirmative words: *Yes* and *I will*

Pressing the lips together

Tightening fists

Organizing one's things, being prepared

Standing solidly, at the ready

Planting one's feet in a wide stance

Leaning in, hand on one knee

A high chin, neck exposed

Pushing up one's sleeves

Shoulders pushing back

Strong posture

Precise movements

Sharp hand movements (jabbing a finger for emphasis, etc.)

A fast-paced stride

Asking pointed questions

Straightened legs, knees uncrossed

Thrusting the chest out

Offering a firm handshake

Inhaling deeply through the nose, then exhaling through the mouth

Exuding calm and focus

Practicing a skill

Making preparations or conditioning the body  
Studying or gathering information  
Accepting criticism to improve

**INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

A fluttery feeling in the chest  
Increased internal temperature and heartbeat  
Muscles tightening in readiness

**MENTAL RESPONSES:**

Planning for obstacles and strategizing ways to overcome them  
Mentally encouraging oneself to succeed  
Active listening  
An acute sense of purpose  
Ignoring distractions or discomforts  
Extreme mental focus on the objective  
Running through what one must say or do  
Dismissing negative thoughts  
Setting goals

**CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM DETERMINATION:**

Conditioning for the task in advance  
Muscle clenching along the jaw line  
Headaches  
Muscle strain  
Ignoring pain, stress, or any outside elements  
Sacrificing what is needed to achieve the desired result  
**MAY ESCALATE TO: HOPEFULNESS, CONFIDENCE**

**CUES OF SUPPRESSED DETERMINATION:**

Purposely adopting a languid pose  
Feigning disinterest  
Meaningless gestures (scrutinizing cuticles, checking for split ends)  
Placing one's hands in one's pockets  
Engaging in banter or non-threatening conversation  
Benign questions  
Yawning  
Shrugging  
Laughing or making jokes meant to disarm

A lack of eye contact

Closing one's eyes as if relaxed or dosing

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**WRITER'S TIP:** *Never underestimate the power of texture. The way an object feels against the skin can create a powerful reaction (positive or negative) and add to the reader's emotional experience.*

# DISAPPOINTMENT

**DEFINITION:** a state of dismay or dissatisfaction; feeling let down

## **PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

Lowering one's head

Lips pressing tight

Shoulders dropping or slumping

A hunched posture

Looking up with hands raised in the *why me?* position

Collapsing onto a chair or bench

Weaving slightly

A bitter smile

A heavy sigh

Covering one's face with one's hands

Breaking eye contact

Bending the neck forward

Slowly shaking one's head

Tilting the chin down and frowning

Making a noise in one's throat

Swallowing hard

Sagging against a door or wall, reaching out to steady oneself

Dropping the head, eyes closed

Stumbling mid-stride

Face going slack and paling slightly

The mouth falling open

Pressing hands to one's temples

Weaving hands into the hair and pulling

Frowning

A stony expression

Watering eyes that display an inward focus

Wincing, a pained expression

Looking around in confusion or shock

Attempting to hide (covering the head, ducking one's chin)

Restless fiddling

Hands fluttering like they've lost track of what they should be doing

Feet shuffling, kicking at the ground

Rubbing at the back of one's neck

A voice that drops or goes quiet  
Whispering *No* or cursing under the breath  
Biting or chewing at the lip  
Clutching oneself (gripping the elbows, rubbing the arms)  
Pressing a hand to the abdomen  
Slinking away (flight response)

**INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

A heart that feels like it's shrinking  
A clenching stomach  
Sudden onset of nausea  
A tightening chest  
Breaths that hitch  
A heaviness in the body

**MENTAL RESPONSES:**

Negativity  
A feeling of dread or hopelessness  
Defeatist thoughts about oneself  
Wanting to be alone  
Feeling worthless

**CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM DISAPPOINTMENT:**

Berating oneself  
Wallowing (drinking too much, listening to depressing songs)  
Obsessing over why things happened the way they did  
An inability to move on

**MAY ESCALATE TO: [DEPRESSION](#), [DEFEAT](#), [RESENTMENT](#), [ANGER](#)**

**CUES OF SUPPRESSED DISAPPOINTMENT:**

A slight lip press  
Dropping the shoulders, then hitching them up again  
Offering false cheer, a weak smile  
Comforting others  
Citing a backup plan or listing more options  
Making promises  
Clasping one's hands in one's lap  
Congratulating the victor

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**WRITER'S TIP:** *Characters experiencing raw emotion often react without thinking—either through dialogue or action. Rash behavior creates the perfect storm for increased tension and conflict.*

# DISBELIEF

**DEFINITION:** withholding belief; a refusal to see the truth

**PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

Mouth slackening

Eyes widening

Looking down or away

Rubbing at an eyelid or brow

Being at a loss for words

Turning away and covering the mouth

Expression blanching, going pale

Asking *Are you sure?* questions

Scratching one's jaw

A shake of the head

Rubbing absently at the arms

Verbalizing shock: *Are you kidding?* or *Impossible!*

Moving back slightly, increasing one's personal space

Showing one's palms

Lifting a single eyebrow

Cocking the head

An unfocused gaze

Rapid blinking

Running hands through one's hair

Gaping, stuttering, mouth opening and closing

Hands dropping to one's sides

Posture slumping slightly

Neck bending forward

Hands carving through one's hair, holding it back and then releasing

Pulling glasses down and looking over the rims

Openly staring

Covering one's ears

Repeating *No* and other negatives: *It's not true!*

Folding the arms over the stomach

Staring at one's palms as if they hold the answers

Jiggling, tugging, or tapping the earlobe

Doing a double take

Waving something off

### **INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

A tingling in one's chest  
A hardening or clenching stomach  
A small intake of breath (gasp)  
Lightheadedness  
Restricted breathing

### **MENTAL RESPONSES:**

Making an immediate moral judgment (either good or bad, wrong or right)  
Thoughts scrambling to understand  
Attempting to reason or glean more information  
Pretending to have misheard

### **CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM DISBELIEF:**

A restless stance  
Arguing  
Walking away  
Voicing the emotion over and over: *I just can't believe this*  
Difficulty speaking, choppy responses  
Holding a hand up to ward off the truth  
Demanding those with influence do something to change the outcome  
Closed body posture (arms creating a barrier across the chest)

**MAY ESCALATE TO: DENIAL, ANGER, OVERWHELMED, RESIGNATION**

### **CUES OF SUPPRESSED DISBELIEF:**

Changing the topic  
A nervous laugh  
Making excuses  
Supporting the outcome, acting like one was "in the know" all along  
Reassuring others of one's belief, commitment, etc.  
Asking questions to glean information without giving away disbelief  
Throat clearing  
Coughing, pretending a drink went down wrong  
Avoiding eye contact  
Offering fake platitudes: *Interesting* or *Well, that's good then.*

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**WRITER'S TIP:** *While melodrama is usually a bad idea in fiction, it can be used effectively to characterize an over-the-top character.*

# DISGUST

**DEFINITION:** an aversion, usually to something distasteful; revulsion

**PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

A curling lip

An open mouth, the tongue pushing slightly forward

Wrinkling one's nose

Flinching, recoiling

Swallowing hard

Leaning back

Stroking the throat and grimacing

Turning one's back to the source

Eyes that appear cold, dead, flat

Refusing to look

Shaking one's head, muttering

Walking away to regain composure

Toes curling up

Pulling up a collar to cover the mouth and nose

Averting one's gaze

Spitting or throwing up

Hands up, backing away with a shudder

Repeating what someone has said, purposely devoid of all emotion

Dry washing the hands

Pressing a fist against the mouth and puffing out the cheeks

Rubbing at one's exposed forearms

Covering the mouth

Jerking away from contact, or even the suggestion of contact

Pressing hands against the stomach

Demanding that someone stop speaking or desist what they are doing

Violently rolling shoulders as if one's own clothing is creating discomfort

Using a purse or jacket to create a shield

Shunning or offering evasive answers

Eyebrows lowering and pinching together

Pressing one's knees together

Narrowing one's stance, bringing the feet together

A face that blanches

Rubbing at one's nose or mouth

Dry heaving  
Cringing away from the source  
An expression that appears pained

**INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

A choking or uncomfortable swallow  
Excessive saliva, a need to spit  
A sour or bitter tang in the mouth  
Nausea or a heaving stomach  
Burning in the throat  
Skin tightening (crawling flesh sensation)

**MENTAL RESPONSES:**

A compulsion to flee  
Feeling unclean  
Wishing to be somewhere else  
The mind replaying what was seen in agonizing detail

**CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM DISGUST:**

Focusing on cleanliness (showering, rubbing skin raw)  
Hyper-protectiveness of personal space  
Acting jumpy or jittery when near the source  
Becoming non-responsive, less verbal  
An intense need to flee the source

**MAY ESCALATE TO: [SCORN](#), [FEAR](#), [ANGER](#)**

**CUES OF SUPPRESSED DISGUST:**

Offering a watery smile while maintaining a safe distance  
Forcing oneself to come closer  
Maintaining eye contact, no matter how difficult  
Waving a hand as if something doesn't matter  
Biting the lip  
Slowly walking closer, but keeping arms close to the body  
Standing away and reaching in with one hand  
Hesitating  
Heavy, jerky movements  
A frozen smile

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**WRITER'S TIP:** *With extreme emotions that trigger an immediate fight-or-flight response, it's important to know which "side" fits best with your character's personality. All actions should line up with this choice.*

# DOUBT

**DEFINITION:** to lack confidence in or consider unlikely

**PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

Brows drawing closer, face tightening  
Looking down or away  
Avoiding eye contact  
Pressing the lips together  
Shuffling one's feet  
Shoving hands in pockets  
Throat clearing  
Thumbing the ear  
Expressing concern  
Checking and rechecking one's appearance  
Delaying tactics (suggesting time to review options, etc.)  
Pauses, *ums*, or other conversation fillers  
Taking a slight step back  
Lingering at the edge of a group or event  
Biting one's cheek  
Declining an offer of support  
Running hands through the hair  
Pulling or tugging at one's clothes  
A smile that appears tight  
A hesitating nod  
Rocking on one's heels, pretending to study the floor  
Cocking the head while raising the eyebrows  
Swallowing more than usual  
Tipping one's head side to side, weighing an idea or choice  
Tapping the fingers together  
Slightly clenched fists  
A deep, weighted sigh  
Pursing the lips  
Shrugging  
Shaking the head  
Asking for assurances or clarification  
Arguing or questioning  
Citing possible repercussions

Rubbing the back of the neck  
Fiddling with a ring or button to avoid eye contact  
Putting a hand over the face, closing the eyes  
Drawing in breath, then releasing it  
Tactfully offering alternative suggestions  
Hesitation (accepting a leaflet with reluctance, etc.)  
Crossing the arms or legs

#### **INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

A slight heaviness or quiver in the stomach

#### **MENTAL RESPONSES:**

Worrying over the current path  
Looking ahead to possible collateral damage  
Searching for ideas on how to circumvent the situation  
Dredging up evidence in order to sway opinions  
Hoping or praying it will work out

#### **CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM DOUBT:**

Avoiding speaking or agreeing openly  
Sharing a look with an ally, raising the eyebrows to convey a message  
Wincing as others rally behind a weak solution

**MAY ESCALATE TO:** [WORRY](#), [DISBELIEF](#), [UNEASE](#)

#### **CUES OF SUPPRESSED DOUBT:**

Fidgeting in a chair  
Coughing as one agrees or supports a doubtful decision or stance  
Mimicking confidence (straightening, speaking in a booming voice)  
Lying or misleading others  
Making excuses for not agreeing immediately  
Reassuring others of loyalty, commitment, etc.  
Offering to handle the problem instead  
Delaying verbal support

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**WRITER'S TIP:** *When steering your character through scenes that allow for emotional growth, don't forget to also provide setbacks. The path to enlightenment isn't smooth for anyone, including our characters.*

# DREAD

**DEFINITION:** a nearly overpowering fear to face or meet; a strong desire to avoid a future event or circumstance

**PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

Holding the stomach as if pained

Clutching arms to one's chest

Shoulders curling forward, caving the chest in

A bent neck

Leaning back or away from the source of discomfort

Dragging footsteps

Making excuses to leave

A quiet voice, offering one-word responses

Hunched posture and a drooping head

Clasping one's knees tightly together

Avoiding eye contact

Turning the torso, shielding it

Lifting the shoulders as if to hide one's neck

Sweating

Rocking slightly

Hands that tremble

Seeking the safety of darkness, an exit, etc.

Holding one's elbows tightly against sides

A downward gaze, using the hair as a shield

Making oneself appear smaller

Huddling in the corner, behind, or against something

Flinching or cringing

Heavy footsteps

Uncontrollable whimpering

Increased swallowing

Arms crossing the stomach in a protective huddle

Rubbing and twisting one's hands, spinning rings or bracelets

Scratching at the skin, picking or biting at nails

Clutching comfort items (a necklace charm, phone, etc.)

Dragging the palms down one's pant legs

Chewing at one's lips or inner cheek and making them bleed

A pale or sickly complexion

**INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

A rolling stomach  
Heavy or sluggish heartbeat  
Chills  
Cold fingers  
Tingling in the chest  
A weighted chest  
Difficulty breathing  
A sour taste in the mouth  
Ache in the back of the throat  
Difficulty swallowing  
Dizziness  
Shakiness in the limbs

**MENTAL RESPONSES:**

Thoughts of escape  
Wanting to hide  
Wishing time would speed up  
An inability to see a positive outcome  
The need to check for danger overriding the need to hide

**CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM DREAD:**

Shaking, shuddering  
Jumping at sounds  
Teeth chattering  
Weeping  
Seeking any excuse to avoid what is to come  
Hyperventilating  
Bargaining, pleading  
Anxiety attack

**MAY ESCALATE TO: [ANGUISH](#), [TERROR](#)**

**CUES OF SUPPRESSED DREAD:**

Acting like one is simply feeling under the weather  
Attempting to escape via distraction (TV, book, music)  
Focusing thoughts to keep fear from taking over  
Keeping still

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**WRITER'S TIP:** *Maintain an overall perspective of the book's emotional range. A strong manuscript will always expose the reader to several contrasting emotional experiences that fit within the context of the protagonist's growth.*

# EAGERNESS

**DEFINITION:** enthusiasm for what is to come

**PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

Leaning forward  
Eyes that glow  
Rushing one's words  
Speaking in a bubbly or loud tone  
Rapt attention, nodding  
Using excitable language  
Agreeability to whatever is suggested  
Fiddling with an object to keep the hands busy  
Squeezing the hands at one's sides  
Strong eye contact  
Talking over others  
Raising a hand immediately to be called on  
Asking questions, requesting information  
Rubbing the hands together  
Leaning forward with a hand on the knee  
Sitting at the edge of a chair  
Allowing others into one's personal space  
Licking one's lips, smiling  
Feet pointing forward  
Shoulders straight and back  
Animated gesturing  
Bouncing on one's toes  
Moving, fidgeting, pacing  
Blowing out a long breath and smiling  
Eyes wide, rounded, with very few blinks  
Hands clutched together  
Head up, alert  
A fast walk, jog, or run  
Sharing a look or wink with another  
Clambering closer to a group or event  
Whispering in hushed, excitable tones  
Scuffing a chair closer to the table  
Arriving early

Quirking an eyebrow and smiling  
Friendliness, even with those not in one's own social circle  
Pulling or prodding others to hurry up

**INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

Fluttery stomach  
Increased heartbeat  
An expanding feeling in the chest  
Breathlessness  
Adrenaline causing alertness

**MENTAL RESPONSES:**

Focused listening  
Strong organization and preparedness  
An inability to concentrate on anything else  
Desiring to share and include others  
Losing all inhibitions  
Positive outlook and thinking  
A willingness to take on responsibility, to help or lead

**CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM EAGERNESS:**

Preparing early, often hours or days before needed  
Planning or obsessing over every detail  
Seeking perfection  
Hurrying or rushing to make things happen quicker

**MAY ESCALATE TO:** [EXCITEMENT](#), [IMPATIENCE](#)

**CUES OF SUPPRESSED EAGERNESS:**

Clamping the hands in the lap  
Tight muscles  
Forcing oneself to sit still  
Slowing one's speech, concentrating on being articulate  
A series of deep breaths  
Taking up a task or chore to pass the time  
Feigning disinterest by adopting a loose and relaxed posture  
Making a slight detour as a ruse

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**WRITER'S TIP:** *To generate friction in dialogue, give the participants opposing goals. A heightened emotional response is the natural result of not getting what one needs.*

# ELATION

**DEFINITION:** in high spirits; a state of euphoria or exhilaration

## **PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

High color, a flushed appearance  
A smile or grin that cannot be contained  
Laughing  
Squealing, screaming, shouting, whooping, hollering  
Falling to one's knees  
Jumping up and down  
Talking over one another, babbling  
Holding arms up in a "victory V"  
Head tipping back, turning one's face to the sky  
Running a victory lap  
A beaming face, strong color and sheen  
Embracing others  
Dancing in place  
Whooping loudly  
Not caring what others think, a lack of self-consciousness  
Enjoying communal happiness, feeling part of the crowd  
Repeating words over and over: *Wow!* or *I can't believe it!*  
Flinging out the arms and legs, taking a wide stance  
Thrusting the chest out  
Eyes wide and glowing  
Grabbing at the sides of the head in an "I can't believe it" gesture  
High energy, a bouncing walk or run, skipping  
Hugging, kissing, or other displays of affection  
Breaking out into a run  
Happy tears, shining cheeks  
Throwing something into the air—a hat, books, confetti, helmet  
Sweating  
Thrusting a fist into the sky

## **INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

Warmth radiating throughout the body  
Racing heartbeat, drumming in the chest  
Feeling ultra-awake, rejuvenated by adrenaline

### **MENTAL RESPONSES:**

Thoughts scatter, too excited to think straight  
Wanting to be surrounded by family and friends  
Feeling vindicated for the effort, sacrifice, or hard work  
Revisiting the hurdles leading to this moment  
Gratitude to those who helped make this possible

### **CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM ELATION:**

Tears streaming down the face  
Loss of motor control  
Trembling muscles  
Sinking to the ground, exhausted  
Breathlessness  
Losing one's voice from screaming or shouting  
Speechlessness

**MAY ESCALATE TO:** [SATISFACTION](#), [PRIDE](#), [GRATITUDE](#)

### **CUES OF SUPPRESSED ELATION:**

A grin that can't be contained no matter how hard one tries  
Bottling up one's breaths to try and calm down  
Self-hugging to contain the feeling  
Closing the eyes and covering the mouth  
Quivering with the effort of controlling oneself  
Looking down to hide a grin

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**WRITER'S TIP:** *Make a list of the body parts you incorporate when expressing emotion. Are there ones you don't use at all? Challenge yourself to come up with a unique cue by using one of these "missing" parts, and substitute it for a gesture that is overused.*

# EMBARRASSMENT

**DEFINITION:** a lack of composure due to self-conscious discomfort

## **PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

A flush that creeps across the cheeks  
Visible sweating  
The body freezing in place  
Grimacing or swallowing  
Ears that turn red  
The chin dipping down  
The chest caving  
A bent spine  
Hands curling around one's middle  
Feet shuffling  
Clearing the throat  
Coughing  
Covering oneself (crossing the arms, closing a jacket)  
Pulling at the collar  
Rubbing the back of the neck  
Wincing  
Covering the face with hands  
Cringing or shaking  
Fidgeting, squirming  
Stuttering, stammering  
Flinching away from touches  
A weakened voice  
Speechlessness  
Toes curling up  
Knees pulling together  
Arms tucking in at the sides  
Sliding down in a chair  
Looking down, unable to meet someone's eyes  
Shoulders slumping or curling forward  
Responding with anger (shoving, punching)  
Gritting one's teeth, pressing the lips tight  
Shoving hands in pockets  
Fiddling with shirt sleeves

Hiding behind a book  
Shielding (having a death grip on a purse)  
A walk that accelerates into a sprint  
Using hair to hide one's face  
Glancing about for help, an exit, or escape  
Tugging a hat down low or pulling a hood over the head  
A trembling chin

**INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

Excessive swallowing  
Lightheadedness  
A tingling that sweeps up the back of the neck and across the face  
A tightening chest  
Stomach hardening or dropping with a manifestation of dread  
The face, neck, and ears feeling impossibly hot  
Rushed breathing  
A rapid heartbeat

**MENTAL RESPONSES:**

A compulsion to flee (fight-or-flight)  
Muddled or panicked thoughts  
A disconnect where the mind struggles with belief: *This can't be happening!*  
Thoughts searching for a solution

**CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM EMBARRASSMENT:**

Crying  
Running from the room or situation  
Plummeting self-esteem  
Fear of public speaking or being on display  
Withdrawing from groups, activities, and social interaction  
Loss of appetite  
Obsessing about the embarrassing event, reliving it  
Poor sleep  
Weight loss

**MAY ESCALATE TO:** [HUMILIATION](#), [DEPRESSION](#), [REGRET](#), [SHAME](#)

**CUES OF SUPPRESSED EMBARRASSMENT:**

Pretending to not have heard or seen  
Intensely concentrating on something else, actively ignoring others

A fake smile

Pretending to laugh it off

Changing the topic in any way possible

Lying

Deflecting attention and assigning blame to another

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**WRITER'S TIP** *Be wary of showing emotion too readily through the act of crying. In real life, it takes a lot to reach a tearful state and so it should be the same for our characters.*

# ENVY

**DEFINITION:** resentful awareness of an advantage enjoyed by another, paired with a longing to acquire that advantage

*NOTE: the advantage can be a person, an object, or an intangible (popularity, lifestyle, etc.)*

## **PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

Staring

Glowering

The mouth turning down

Lips parting slightly

A tightening under the eyes

A thinning mouth

Chin poking forward

Squinting

Baring the teeth slightly

A pouty bottom lip

Crossing the arms over the chest

Shoulders hunching slightly

Leaning closer

Reaching

Flaring nostrils

A coveting gaze that drifts to the symbol of envy (the advantage)

Being snarky or rude, seemingly without cause

Shoving one's hands into pockets

Twitching hands

Hands tightening into fists

Muscles bunching

Turning away from the advantage and stalking off

Swallowing frequently

Rubbing the hands over one's clothing

Feet and torso facing the advantage

Licking or sucking on the bottom lip

Sweaty hands

A reddening of the face

Rubbing at or massaging one's chest as if pained

Stroking or pinching one's throat

Taking a step toward the person or object one wants

Obsessive behavior (stalking, making a plan to acquire the advantage)

#### **INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

Quick heartbeat

Ribs squeezing tight

Rising body temperature

A pulling sensation in the gut

Dry throat

Sucking in breath through clenched teeth

#### **MENTAL RESPONSES:**

A strong desire to touch, hold, and own

Anger at the unfairness or injustice

Unkind thoughts about the other person

Frustration

Scheming ways to acquire what another has

Self-loathing

Fantasizing about the advantage

An inability to commit to or focus on anything else

Dissatisfaction with what one does have

A feeling of entitlement: *I deserve it* or *That should be mine*

#### **CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM ENVY:**

Feeling that life isn't worth living without the advantage

Grabbing or stealing the coveted object

Fighting or arguing with the envied one to release frustration

Falsely belittling or minimizing the attributes of the desired advantage or object

Irrational thinking

Making demands: *Give it to me.*

**MAY ESCALATE TO: DETERMINATION, RESENTMENT, ANGER, DEPRESSION, JEALOUSY**

#### **CUES OF SUPPRESSED ENVY:**

Congratulating or offering praise

Forcing a smile

Acknowledging the object and complimenting it

Attempting not to stare  
Watching from a distance

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**WRITER'S TIP:** *When crafting the physical movement of a fight scene, remember that less is more. Too many details create a play-by-play feel which can come across as mechanical.*

# EXCITEMENT

**DEFINITION:** the state of being energized or stimulated and provoked to act

## **PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

A wide grin

Eyes that sparkle and gleam

Laughing

Bouncing from foot to foot

Squealing, hooting, yelling

Telling jokes

Chest bumping with others

A loud voice

Singing, humming, chanting

Slam-dunking trash into a barrel after a game or event

Babbling or talking over one another in a group setting

Fanning oneself

Pretending to faint

Verbalizing thoughts and feelings without hesitation

Lifting someone up or swinging them around

Trembling

Acting hyper, immature, or foolish out of a sense of fun

A ruddy complexion

Moving about, being unable to stay still

Good-natured shoving and pushing

Waving the arms, using grand gestures

Drumming one's feet against the floor

Hugging, grabbing onto someone's arm and holding it

Bumping shoulders

Raising up or bouncing on tiptoe

Phoning or texting to share news or pass on the excitement

Speed-talking with others, heads close together, gossipy

Throaty laughter

Getting the giggles

Friendly demands: *Tell me! Show me! Let's go!*

A body that's constantly in motion (nodding, bobbing, weaving, pacing)

A distinct walk, a fast-paced strut

Making eye contact with others, confidence  
Displaying affection with friends or loved ones

**INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

Lightness in the chest  
A fast pulse  
Dry mouth  
Heightened senses  
Breathlessness  
Adrenaline rush

**MENTAL RESPONSES:**

Camaraderie with others  
Imagining what could happen  
Enjoyment of the communal energy  
Impatience

**CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM EXCITEMENT:**

A need to run, jump, scream, whoop it up  
An intense desire to share the feeling with others  
A beaming face  
Racing heartbeat  
Sweating  
A hoarse voice from screaming, yelling, or shouting  
A loss of inhibitions

**MAY ESCALATE TO: [SATISFACTION](#), [HAPPINESS](#), [ELATION](#),  
[DISAPPOINTMENT](#)**

**CUES OF SUPPRESSED EXCITEMENT:**

Controlling one's movement with intent  
Biting down on a smile  
Swallowing a laugh or shout of glee  
Feeling like one's insides are vibrating  
Smoothing down clothing  
Eyes that glow with inner light  
Nodding rather than speaking

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**WRITER'S TIP** *If you're stuck on how to show an emotion, form a strong image of the scene in your mind. Let the scene unfold, and watch the character to see how they move and behave.*

# FEAR

**DEFINITION:** to be afraid of; to expect threat or danger

**PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

Face turning ashen, white, pallid

Hair lifting on the nape and arms

Body odor, cold sweats

Clammy hands

Trembling lips and chin

Tendons standing out in the neck, a visible pulse

Elbows pressing into the sides, making one's body as small as possible

Freezing, feeling rooted to the spot

Rapid blinking

Tight shoulders

Staring but not seeing, eyes shut or crying

Hands jammed into armpits or self-hugging

Breath bursting in and out

Leg muscles tightening, the body ready to run

Looking all around, especially behind

A shrill voice

Lowering the voice to a whisper

Keeping one's back to a wall or corner

Shaking uncontrollably

Gripping something, knuckles going white

Stiff walking, the knees locking

Beads of sweat on the lip or forehead

Grabbing onto someone

Eyes appearing damp and overly bright

Stuttering and mispronouncing words, tremors in the voice

Jerky movements, squirming

Licking the lips, gulping down water

Sprinting or running

Sweeping a hand across the forehead to get rid of sweat

Gasping and expelling one's breath as if pained

Uncontrollable whimpering

Pleading, talking to oneself

Flinching at noises

## **INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

An inability to speak  
Shakiness in the limbs  
Holding back a scream or cry  
Heartbeat racing, nearly exploding  
Dizziness, weakness in the legs and knees  
A loosening of the bladder  
Chest pain  
Holding one's breath, gulping down breaths to stay quiet  
A stomach that feels rock hard  
Hyper-sensitivity to touch and sound  
Adrenaline spikes

## **MENTAL REACTIONS:**

Wanting to flee or hide  
The sensation of things moving too quickly to process  
Images of what-could-be flashing through the mind  
Flawed reasoning  
Jumping to a course of action without thinking things through  
A skewed sense of time

## **CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM FEAR:**

Uncontrollable trembling, fainting  
Insomnia  
Heart giving out  
Panic attacks, phobias  
Exhaustion  
Depression  
Substance abuse  
Withdrawing from others  
Tics (a repetitive grimace, a head twitch, talking to oneself)  
Resistance to pain from rushing adrenaline

**MAY ESCALATE TO: [ANGER](#), [TERROR](#), [PARANOIA](#), [DREAD](#)**

## **CUES OF SUPPRESSED FEAR:**

Keeping silent  
Denying fear through diversion or topic change  
Turning away from the cause of the fear  
Attempting to keep one's voice light

A watery smile that's forced into place

Masking fear with a reactive emotion (anger or frustration)

False bravado

Over-indulgence in a habit (nail biting, lip biting, scratching the skin raw)

A joking tone, but the voice cracks

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**WRITER'S TIP** *Prime readers for an emotional experience by describing the mood of a scene as your character enters it. If your character is antsy, the reader will be too.*

# FRUSTRATION

**DEFINITION:** vexation caused by unresolved problems or unmet needs; the feeling of being hindered

## **PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

Pinching the lips together

Holding hands behind the back, gripping one's own wrist

Rushed speech

Tapping one's fingers to release energy

Swearing

Pointing with an index finger

Scratching or rubbing the back of the neck

Shaking the head

Jerky movements (talking with the hands, changing direction mid-stride)

Pacing in short spans

Stiff posture, rigid muscles, a corded neck

Clenching the jaw

Speaking through the teeth with forced restraint

An impatient snort or sneer

Drawing breath and releasing it before speaking

Splaying hands out wide to stretch, then relaxing them

Baring one's teeth

Swearing

Throwing hands up in an "I give up" gesture

Stalking away from someone, leaving in a huff

Attempting to hurt through name-calling and personal jabs

Speaking without thought, often leading to regret

Slamming a door

Grabbing one's hair in clumps, looking up at the sky

A heavy sigh

A strained voice

Laying one's head down on the table

Stilted speaking

Eyes squinting, tightening

A harried appearance

Running hands through the hair

Fists tight, fingernails biting into the palms

A pinched, tension-filled expression  
Scrubbing a hand over the face  
Pounding a fist against a tabletop  
Scrunching up the face and then releasing, trying to regain calm  
Holding one's head in one's hands  
A high chin  
Arms crossing in front of the chest  
Clumsiness due to rushing (spilling coffee, knocking something over)  
Theatrical groaning  
Restlessness

**INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

Throat closing up  
Hardening of the stomach  
Tightness in the chest  
High blood pressure  
Headache  
Jaw pain

**MENTAL RESPONSES:**

Extreme focus on problem solving  
Replaying a scene or event over and over in one's mind, obsessing over it  
Self-talking to calm down, to think straight  
A need to ask questions and rehash information  
Reining in one's emotions before damaging relationships

**CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM FRUSTRATION:**

Shouting, yelling, ranting, screaming, or criticizing  
Crying, sobbing  
Pleading, bargaining: *Please stop!*  
Storming out of a room  
An inability to sleep or relax  
Profuse sweating  
Using more force than necessary (stomping feet, throwing instead of handing off)  
A display of violence (kicking, grabbing, shaking, or destroying something in release)  
A tantrum (screaming, body flung down on the floor, crying)

**MAY ESCALATE TO: [CONTEMPT](#), [ANGER](#), [IMPATIENCE](#)**

## **CUES OF SUPPRESSED FRUSTRATION:**

Gritted teeth

Swiping at tears, trying to hide them

Silence or minimal responses

Briefly closing one's eyes

Taking a deep breath

Scraping a hand over the face as if to wash away emotion

Excusing oneself and leaving

Trying to shake or roll tension from the shoulders

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**WRITER'S TIP:** *Use a character's intuition to draw the reader more fully into the scene. If you show what has primed their intuition clearly, the reader's own gut will respond and they will pay extra close attention. The flash of intuition must pay off in some way to complete the circle.*

# GRATITUDE

**DEFINITION:** thankfulness; feeling grateful or appreciative

**PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

Eyes that are soft, filled with an inner glow  
Clasping another's hand or forearm  
Tapping a loose fist against the heart  
Placing a hand on the chest  
Tearing up  
Laying a hand on one's heart then gesturing to a person or group  
Pressing fingers to smiling lips  
Repeating one's thanks and appreciation  
Holding onto someone's hand for longer than necessary  
Hugging, showing affection  
A light squeeze during a handshake  
A smile that has a genuine build and lights up the face  
Steady eye contact  
Open palms  
Moving closer, into another's personal space  
Forming a steeple with hands and pressing them to lips  
Offering praise for others  
An emotion-rich voice  
Offering small touches to connect  
Laying a hand on someone's back or shoulder  
Nodding, eyes glowing  
Offering a gift, favor, or boon of appreciation  
Raising one's palms to the sky and looking up  
Complimenting  
Clapping vigorously  
Body and feet pointed forward  
Offering a wave  
A two-fingered salute  
Tipping the head back for a moment and closing the eyes  
Bowing or curtsying  
Blowing a kiss  
Offering a wave of thanks

### **INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

Tingling warmth in the limbs  
A release of all bodily tension  
A feeling of expansion in the chest  
Heart that feels “full”  
A comfortable warmth in the face  
Weakness in the knees

### **MENTAL RESPONSES:**

Desiring to repay another’s kindness and support  
Feeling overwhelmed in a good way  
Wanting to drink in the moment, to remember this feeling forever

### **CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM GRATITUDE:**

Worship  
Falling to one’s knees  
A desire to do anything to repay  
Joyful tears  
A feeling of connection and love

**MAY ESCALATE TO:** [SATISFACTION](#), [PEACEFULNESS](#), [HAPPINESS](#),  
[ELATION](#)

### **CUES OF SUPPRESSED GRATITUDE:**

Closing the eyes  
Ducking the head to hide one’s expression  
Avoiding eye contact with others  
Quick, darting glances to express a hidden thanks  
Offering a distraction or changing the subject

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**WRITER’S TIP** *Make it a goal to offer the reader something unexpected in every scene, be it an emotional reaction, a roadblock to trip the character up, or a snippet of dialogue that sheds new light on the events unfolding.*

# GUILT

**DEFINITION:** a feeling of culpability over an offense (either real or imagined)

**PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

Averting or lowering one's gaze

Turning away

Shifting about

Chin dipping to the chest, adopting a slumped posture

Blushing

Reacting defensively

Short-temperedness

Consuming antacids

Repetitive swallowing

Lying

Sweating

Grimacing

Lip biting

Avoiding a person or place

Talking too much or too fast

Keeping at a distance

Rubbing the nose or ears

Shoulders drawing up, elbows tucking into the sides

Closing or curling one's hands inward

Stuttering, growing flustered

Joking to lighten the mood or distract others from the truth

Seeking comfort by touching one's own hair, neck, or clothing

Pinning the arms against the stomach

Becoming unnaturally quiet or still

A quivering chin

Muttering tearfully to oneself

Anxious movements (pawing a hand through the hair, pacing)

A cracking voice

Pulling at one's collar

Taking a deep, pained breath and closing the eyes

Staring down at one's feet

Palms hidden (stuffed into pockets, held behind the back)

Darting glances at the person wronged  
Following the one wronged, trying to convince oneself to confess  
Inflicting pain on oneself as a penance  
Destroying one's own possessions  
An inability to join in fun activities or be with friends  
Looking pale, having a harried or haunted look  
Not showing up for work or school, letting grades slip

**INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

Upset stomach  
Tight chest  
Pain in the back of the throat  
Loss of appetite  
Thickness in the throat

**MENTAL RESPONSES:**

Replaying what happened  
Anxiety  
Thoughts filled with self-loathing  
Wishing one could go back and change what happened  
Desiring to confess or share the pain or burden with another  
Brooding, retreating inward, withdrawing from others  
Paranoia that others know and are passing judgment  
An inability to concentrate on anything else

**CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM GUILT:**

A lack of interest in one's own appearance or wellness  
Drinking until passing out (to forget)  
Insomnia  
Depression  
Exhaustion  
Nightmares  
Drug use  
Crying, sobbing, hitching breaths  
Flight response—running away, unable to deal with the consequences  
Growing reclusive, cutting oneself off from others  
Self-mutilation  
Self-loathing  
Attempting suicide as a way out

**MAY ESCALATE TO: [CONFLICTED](#), [REGRET](#), [SHAME](#), [REMORSE](#)**

**CUES OF SUPPRESSED GUILT:**

Becoming excessively resourceful or helpful to make up for earlier failure

Fidgeting

Hiding one's mouth behind a hand

Changing the subject

Deflecting attention

Throat clearing

Verbally denying having anything to do with the event

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***WRITER'S TIP:*** *Character bibles can help you keep track of hair, eye and clothing choices for each character, keeping the continuity from the first page to the last.*

# HAPPINESS

**DEFINITION:** a state of well-being or joyful contentment

**PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

An upturned face

Smiling

Humming, whistling, singing

A relaxed appearance

Telling jokes, laughing frequently

Laugh lines

Raised, prominent cheekbones (from smiling)

Eyes that dance, sparkle, or shine

A bubbly or light voice

Rapid speaking

Buying gifts for others or offering tokens of kindness

Stretching out the legs, adopting a wide, open stance

Giving someone the thumbs-up

Sitting up, straight and alert

Fluid movements

Offering compliments

Swinging the arms while walking

Enthusiastic waving

A polite manner

Stepping lightly, skipping

Initiating physical contact with others

Infusing one's speech with positive words

Showing a talkative nature and courtesy with strangers

Spontaneity

Lightly rapping one's fingers (as if to internal music) on a leg or other surface

Swinging or tapping one's foot to an easy beat

Satisfied, catlike stretches

Expressing enjoyment of the senses (swaying to music, savoring food)

Nodding or leaning in, actively showing interest

Bouncing on the toes

Clasping hands to the chest

Offering encouragement and support

Quick movements, no hesitation  
An overall visage that glows or radiates  
Holding the arms out wide as if to hug the world  
Initiating random acts of kindness

**INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

A feeling of breathlessness  
Heat that radiates through the chest  
Tingling hands  
Lightness in the limbs  
A feeling of weightlessness

**MENTAL RESPONSES:**

Positive thinking  
Desiring to spread joy and make others feel good  
Noticing the small things (smelling the roses, so to speak)  
Helpfulness  
Being at ease with the world, content  
Showing patience  
A bright outlook (glass half full)  
A desire to be with loved ones or friends  
Fearlessness  
Benign risk taking for fun

**CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM HAPPINESS:**

Joyful tears  
Shaking with excitement  
Big movements (leaping, fist pumping, running)  
Happy bursts of screaming, shouting, laughter, squeals, giggles  
Shows of affection  
Spinning in a wild circle  
Dancing

**MAY ESCALATE TO: ELATION, GRATITUDE, SATISFACTION,  
PEACEFULNESS**

**CUES OF SUPPRESSED HAPPINESS:**

Pressing the lips tight to keep from smiling  
Difficulty staying still  
Taking deep, calming breaths

Bouncing lightly in place

Averting the face

Fiddling with things to keep hands and feet from twitching

Carefully-masked features, but eyes that betray the true emotion

Putting away happy thoughts to savor later

Intense concentration on something or someone else

Hiding a joyous expression with one's hair

Holding a hand over the mouth to cover a smile

Pinching oneself and using the pain to help contain the emotion

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**WRITER'S TIP:** *To increase tension in a scene, think about what is motivating your character, and which emotions could get in the way. Introduce an event that creates the very emotions the character wishes to avoid.*

# HATRED

**DEFINITION:** to loathe or detest; to feel animosity toward

**PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

Fists that shake

An intense, fevered stare

Clenched jaw, grinding teeth

Rigid and defined forearm muscles

Uttering dark, hurtful words meant to provoke

Stiff posture, square shoulders, a lurching walk

Shoving, pushing, tripping

Bearing the teeth

Fingers retracting, turning claw-like

Shouting, screaming, swearing

Lunging at an enemy

Spittle flying while yelling

A red face and neck

Sweating

Visible vein throb

A corded neck

Walking off, refusing to stay in another's presence

Switching shifts or altering a schedule to avoid an enemy

Tightness in the face, skin stretched into a snarl

An animalistic growl in the throat

Flaring nostrils

A grip that unintentionally crushes or breaks (snapping a pen, etc.)

A tense body, on the verge of springing

Bullying, cyber trolling

A mouth that curls with dislike, sneering

Spitting at someone or in their direction

Reaching out to throttle, hit, or cause pain

Shoving people aside to reach the enemy

Angry tears

Cursing, swearing

A scathing tone

A shaking voice

Using friends to help ostracize or bring the enemy low

Initiating hateful gossip, setting the enemy up, starting rumors  
Wrenching an enemy's arm to stop them from leaving  
Acting on violent urges (throwing a chair, destroying property)

**INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

Loud breaths, a heaving chest  
Pain in the jaw from clenching or grinding teeth  
A pounding heartbeat  
Headache  
Rising body temperature  
Strain or soreness from tense muscles  
Roaring in the ears

**MENTAL RESPONSES:**

A dark mood that no one can reach through or dispel  
Rash decisions, impaired judgment  
Irrational thoughts, taking risks to get even  
A desire to carry out a vendetta (via vandalism, theft, etc.)  
Single-minded focus on how to destroy another  
Humiliation fantasies featuring the enemy  
Actively wishing for harm or misfortune to happen to another

**CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM HATRED:**

An inability to enjoy positive things or happiness  
Difficulty eating and sleeping  
Isolation  
Fixating on an enemy, stalking  
Deriving pleasure from violent fantasies involving an enemy  
Committing crimes against the enemy  
Assault or murder

**MAY ESCALATE TO:** [PARANOIA](#), [RAGE](#)

**CUES OF SUPPRESSED HATRED:**

Clamping the teeth shut to contain hard words  
Taking deep breaths to calm oneself  
Seeking out a distraction or diversion  
Leaving the situation or presence of an enemy  
Surrounding oneself with supportive friends

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**WRITER'S TIP:** *One way to create emotional intensity is to have the character remember the stakes on the cusp of taking action. Worry over the outcome can add a slice of desperation to any scene and create a compelling emotional pull for the reader.*

# HOPEFULNESS

**DEFINITION:** a bright, promising outlook; optimism

**PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

Holding one's breath

Raising the eyebrows and offering a questioning gaze

Leaning in

Clutching at the chest or belly

Muttering *please* repeatedly under the breath

Clasping hands under the chin (in a prayer gesture)

A face that seems to shine

Gently biting the lip

Covering the mouth with a hand, eyes wide and shining

Deep breaths

Wiggling, squirming

Verbalizing the pros, not the cons

Strong eye contact

Smiling

Stiff posture, an air of readiness

Smoothing one's clothing to appear collected or worthy

Nodding along as another speaks

Holding still in expectation

Rapid swallowing and nodding

Chattiness, babbling

Lips parting slightly

Asking others to reaffirm the chances of success

Shifting back and forth

Making promises to convince others of one's worthiness

Offering commitment, to show one's ability to meet expectations

Attentiveness to tasks or people connected with one's goal

Restlessness

Licking the lip with cautious hope

Exhaling while the eyes look up

A gaze that darts to a symbol of hope (a friend in the know, a table of judges)

**INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

A flutter in the belly  
A light-hearted feeling  
Tingling limbs  
A jolt through the body  
A floating sensation, like all one's burdens have been removed  
Breath that temporarily bottles up in the chest

**MENTAL RESPONSES:**

A willingness to believe that everything will be all right  
A strong awareness of one's surroundings  
Thinking positive thoughts  
A sense of calm  
Focusing on improvement (studying, working extra hard)  
Refusing to consider, speak of, or listen to negatives  
Preparing for the best case scenario

**CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM HOPEFULNESS:**

Hands clasped in prayer, pressed to the lips, eyes closed  
Quivering breaths  
Shakiness  
Tears  
A trembling voice  
Whimpering

**MAY ESCALATE TO:** [EAGERNESS](#), [EXCITEMENT](#), [DISAPPOINTMENT](#)

**CUES OF SUPPRESSED HOPEFULNESS:**

Locking hands together to force stillness  
Mentally reducing high expectations  
Reminding oneself of obstacles or competition  
Pressing the palms downward to stave off over-confidence  
Keeping one's face blank  
Looking down or away

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**WRITER'S TIP:** *Force your characters to make choices between bad and worse. Readers will empathize with your character, remembering their own past when they faced a similar dilemma.*

# HUMILIATION

**DEFINITION:** feeling degraded or mortified, worthless or cheap

## **PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

Body collapsing in on itself

A bowed head

Shoulders curling over chest

Angling torso away from others

Uncontrollable shuddering or shivering

Hair hanging in face, hiding the eyes

A downward gaze

A flushed face

Hitching chest

Eyes dull, lifeless

Pulling down a shirt hem (covering gesture)

Body shielding (if holding onto an object)

Hands clutching at stomach

Covering face with hands

Bottom lip or chin trembling

Whimpering

Throat bobbing

Arms falling to sides, lifeless

Uncontrolled tears

Flinching at noise or from being touched

Huddling, crouching

Trying to cover body with hands

Neck bending forward

Movement is slow, jerky

Knees locked tight together

A loss of coordination

Cold sweat

Stumbling, staggering

Backing up against a wall, sliding into a corner, hiding

Visible tremors coursing through the body

Hands gripping elbows

Pigeon toes (tilted inward)

Sobs trapped in throat

Drawing knees up to the body's core  
Wrapping arms around self  
Runny nose

**INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

Weakness in legs  
Sluggish heartbeat  
Pain in chest  
Rapid swallowing  
Dizziness, a sense of vertigo  
Ribs squeezing  
Body feels broken  
Skin tightens (crawls)  
Loose muscles  
Hot eyes and cheeks  
Nausea

**MENTAL RESPONSES:**

Self-loathing  
Shattered thoughts  
A feeling of nakedness, of being on display  
A need to hide or flee that supersedes all else  
Wanting it to end at all costs

**CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM HUMILIATION:**

Curling up on the floor  
Hiding behind something, against something  
Crying, blubbering, hitching sobs  
Willingness to escape by any means  
A desire to die, for the emotional pain to end

**MAY ESCALATE TO: [DEPRESSION](#), [REGRET](#), [SHAME](#), [ANGER](#), [HATRED](#)**

**CUES OF SUPPRESSED HUMILIATION:**

Numbness in mind and body  
Becoming passive and disengaged  
Closing off all thoughts of what is happening  
Not speaking or making any sound  
Sending the mind "somewhere else"

A disconnect between the mind and body

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**WRITER'S TIP** *Add conflicting emotions for a richer experience. A character might feel excitement and pride at purchasing their first car, yet worry that they might be extending themselves too far financially. This inner conflict helps to humanize a character to the reader.*

# HURT

**DEFINITION:** suffering grief or mental pain; feeling wounded or aggrieved

**PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

Eyes widening, yet brows are furrowed  
Swallowing hard  
Lowering the head, the neck appearing to shrink  
A slow, disbelieving head shake  
A trembling chin  
Mouth falling open  
Flinching, starting  
Color draining from the face  
Saying *How could you?* as an accusation  
Hunching over as if choking down a sob  
Pressing a fist to the lips  
Biting down on one's bottom lip  
Gripping a fistful of shirt at the chest level  
Holding a hand up, warding others off  
Clutching the stomach  
The body crumpling in on itself  
A hitching chest  
Drooping shoulders  
Weakness in the knees  
An uneven step  
Displaying poor balance and coordination  
A hand pressing against the throat or breastbone  
Stuttering, choking out words  
Letting out a whimper  
Eyes that water  
The mouth opening, but no words forming  
Sending someone a long, pained look and then breaking eye contact  
A hanging head  
Retracting the arms, bringing them close to the torso  
Stumbling back a step  
Backing up  
Spinning away

A grimace that lingers  
Clutching at oneself, elbows pressed to the sides

### **INTERNAL SENSATIONS**

Dizziness  
Stomach hardening, nausea  
A painful tightness in one's throat  
Constricting lungs, making it hard to breathe  
Heartbeat seeming to slow or stop momentarily  
Weakening muscles, trembling in the limbs  
Spots flashing in one's vision

### **MENTAL RESPONSES:**

The sense that time has stopped  
Thoughts spinning, focusing inward  
Shock, disbelief  
Dredging up history, trying to understand how it led here  
Feeling broken inside

### **CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM HURT:**

A sense of betrayal that rocks the mind to the very core  
A collapse in body posture  
Tears, sobbing  
Running away  
Reacting with anger (screaming, slapping, hitting)

**MAY ESCALATE TO:** [DEPRESSION](#), [ANGUISH](#), [ANGER](#)

### **CUES OF SUPPRESSED HURT:**

Visible swallowing  
Unnatural stiffness  
Pinching the lips tight to keep them from trembling  
Tensing the body to ward off shaking  
Lifting the chin  
Forcing oneself to maintain eye contact

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**WRITER'S TIP:** *A natural way to describe a character's appearance is to show them interacting with their environment. A sense of movement also allows*

*this type of description to flow with the scene as it progresses.*

# IMPATIENCE

**DEFINITION:** feeling restless or short-tempered; having a desire for immediate change, relief, or gratification

**PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

Raising one's eyebrows

Placing hands on the hips

Scowling

Head tilting back, gaze looking up

Crossing the arms

Standing or sitting stiffly

A tapping foot

Folding the hands

Pursing one's lips

Fiddling with cuffs or jewelry

Glancing repeatedly at the clock

Pacing

A hard jaw line, a jutting chin

Clicking one's fingernails against a table

Fidgeting instead of sitting or standing still

Narrowing eyes, having an intense focus

Interrupting, talking over someone else

Compressing the lips while someone else speaks

Being unnerved by annoying tics (loud breathing, pen clicking)

Frowning

A sharp tone

Massaging the temples, as if weary

Pinching the bridge of the nose and squeezing the eyes tight

Attention that snaps toward sound or movement

Door watching

Complaining under the breath: *Where is he?* or *This is taking too long!*

Holding a plate of food but not eating it

A clenched jaw, gritted teeth

Whining, grumbling, or pouting (small children)

Letting out a loud breath

Moving about (sitting then standing, choosing a different chair)

Toying with items (turning a cup, mangling a paperclip)

Muttering, shaking the head  
Tilting the head to the ceiling and letting out a heavy sigh  
Uncrossing and re-crossing the legs  
Tension in the face, shoulders and neck  
Using the body to nudge, push, or block (line jumpers)  
Repeatedly running the hands through the hair  
Veiled anger or light sarcasm

**INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

Breathing that grows heavier, louder  
Rising body temperature  
Feeling exhausted or strained to the limits  
Headaches

**MENTAL RESPONSES:**

Mentally berating a time-waster  
Wishing time would speed up  
Running through how to do something faster or more efficiently  
Attention straying to other things  
Asserting mental restraint to avoid snapping

**CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM IMPATIENCE:**

Slapping a hand against the table  
Barking orders, yelling  
Cutting people off  
Taking over a project or duty  
Telling the speaker to move on and get to the point  
Redirecting the focus to allow things to proceed better  
Setting a time limit  
Making demands  
Resorting to the physical (pushing, shoving)

**MAY ESCALATE TO:** IRRITATION, FRUSTRATION, ANGER, SCORN

**CUES OF SUPPRESSED IMPATIENCE:**

A frozen smile  
Going for a walk  
Using the time to run an errand or complete a task  
Attempting to distract oneself in an effort to be patient  
Rooting in a purse or pocket as a distraction

Checking and rechecking a phone for messages

Fussing with appearance (brushing away lint, checking fingernails)

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**WRITER'S TIP:** *Never let the reader notice the writing. Overusing metaphors, similes, descriptive terms, and repeated body language can pull the reader out of the story.*

# INDIFFERENCE

**DEFINITION:** a state of apathy, casualness, or disinterest

**PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

Shoulders are lowered and loose

A slow, steady gait

Arms hanging limply at the sides

Shrugging half-heartedly

Long pauses before responding

Staring blankly or emotionlessly

Lifting a hand loosely, palm up in a “Who cares?” gesture

Placing hands in one’s pockets

Leaning back or away

Looking sleepy or glazed

Speaking in a flat voice

Smiling politely, not genuinely

The body sagging while seated, lacking tension

A wandering gaze

Picking at lint, scratching at cuticles, etc., to show that interest is lacking

Closing one’s eyes to shut everything out

Texting during an event or while someone speaks

Not bothering to answer someone’s questions

Being non-responsive during a group discussion or debate

Ignoring something being handed over (a file, business card, etc.)

Turning away

A nonchalant attitude

Speaking only when spoken to

Not responding to jokes or personal exchanges

Pointedly ignoring another person or situation that draws others in

Relaxed posture

An unhurried exit

Focusing on one’s shoe, scuffing at the ground, etc., rather than giving due attention

Responding with *Whatever* or *So?*

Randomly changing the topic

Muted body language, lacking energy

Yawning

Mimicking boredom (slumping in one's seat, tapping a pencil)  
Half-lidded eyes  
Muttering *Uh-huh* or *Yeah* when it seems appropriate  
Being easily distracted by other things (TV, a hot girl walking past)

**INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

A lack of energy  
Slow, even breaths

**MENTAL RESPONSES:**

Zoning or tuning others out to concentrate on other things  
Wandering thoughts  
A lack of empathy  
Thinking about the time or future events

**CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM INDIFFERENCE:**

A disconnect with one's life or society  
A fading sense of empathy  
Falling into a routine  
Meaningless interaction with others  
Finding little day-to-day joy  
Ignoring the pain or suffering of others

**MAY ESCALATE TO:** [IRRITATION](#), [ANNOYANCE](#), [CONTEMPT](#),  
[RESIGNATION](#)

**CUES OF SUPPRESSED INDIFFERENCE:**

Smiling and pretending to pay attention  
Asking a few token questions  
Making an excuse to leave

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**WRITER'S TIP:** *To create a fluid, emotional arc in your story, make sure your character's feelings build in intensity and complexity as the novel progresses.*

# INSECURITY

**DEFINITION:** feeling unsure of oneself or displaying a lack of confidence

## **PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

Smoothing down clothing  
A self-deprecating laugh  
Breaking eye contact and shrugging  
Hiding the hands in the pockets  
Fidgeting  
Checking one's breath  
Throat clearing  
Visible blushing  
Licking or biting the bottom lip  
Petting or stroking one's own hair (comfort gestures)  
Covering up (pulling a jacket tighter, holding one's elbows)  
Holding the knees and legs tightly together  
Awkwardly mirroring the behavior of others  
Choosing loose clothing over tight, revealing ones  
Asking for reassurance from others  
Brushing off compliments or putting oneself down  
Looking down while walking  
Staying at the edge of a group, seeking the corner of a busy room  
Tucking the hands behind the elbows  
Wrist twisting  
Not smiling, or offering a smile that fades quickly  
Visible tension in the muscles  
Rubbing one's forearms  
Needing advice or instruction on what to say or do  
Laughing too loudly, or at odd times  
Clutching an item to the chest (book, binder, purse)  
Tapping the leg to settle nerves  
Hiding behind one's hair  
Biting nails or picking at loose threads on one's clothing  
Staying at a distance  
Holding a hand close to the face while speaking  
Difficulty speaking or offering opinions

Rubbing at one's lips  
Wearing too much makeup  
Rushed speech  
Increased sweat output during uncomfortable moments

**INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

A heartbeat that races when one feels confronted  
A roiling stomach  
Uncontrollable flushes of heat  
An uncomfortable, dry throat

**MENTAL RESPONSES:**

Difficulty making decisions  
Over-thinking problems or choices  
Obsessing over one's own flaws and shortcomings  
Alert to others, to see how they react and what they do  
Agreeing only to avoid a confrontation  
Fixating on the talents and strengths of others  
Comparing oneself to others and finding oneself lacking

**CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM INSECURITY:**

Holding onto a comfort item (a special piece of jewelry, a picture)  
A bent spine  
Blushing when noticed or spoken to  
Avoiding social situations  
Acting skittish around people  
Panic symptoms when put on the spot  
Preferring to do things alone  
Wearing plain clothing to reinforce invisibility  
Difficulty making friends  
Choosing a seat in the back of the room or away from others  
Seeking interaction online rather than in person

**MAY ESCALATE TO: [UNEASE](#), [WARINESS](#), [WORRY](#), [PARANOIA](#)**

**CUES OF SUPPRESSED INSECURITY:**

Tossing the hair  
Thrusting the chest out  
Standing taller, squaring one's shoulders  
Forcing oneself to maintain eye contact

Deflecting questions or concern  
Rushing into decisions to prove decisiveness  
Mimicking others who display confidence  
Risk taking  
Lying  
Inserting oneself into conversations

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**WRITER'S TIP** *Scenes do not happen in a vacuum. Don't forget to include setting, thoughts or verbal cues that allude to the passage of time.*

# IRRITATION

**DEFINITION:** impatience and displeasure; the sense of being bothered

**PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

The lips pressing together, pursing, or flattening

Face tightening

Narrowing eyes, squinting

Rubbing the back of the neck

Watching the source furtively

Frowning

Crossing one's arms

A glance that returns to the source of irritation

Pulling or plucking at clothing as if that is the source of discomfort

Fidgety movements (scraping the hair back, curling one's fingers)

Turning one's attention to someone else

Adopting a challenging tone, arguing

A hard smile

Poking a tongue lightly into the cheek and inhaling a long breath

Asking pointed questions

Changing the subject

Forcing a laugh

Raising the voice

Opening the mouth to say something, then thinking better of it

Biting the inside of the cheek

Restless legs (crossing and uncrossing, unable to stand still)

Going silent, disengaging from conversation

Feigning interest in other things to buy time and regain control

Making small, jittery movements with the fingers

Breathing through the nose (audibly to others)

Curling one's toes

Clasping the hands tightly, a whitening of the knuckles

Interrupting

Repeating a mannerism (scratching an eyebrow, adjusting glasses)

Spots of color entering the cheeks

Clenching one's teeth

### **INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

Tightness in the chest

Tense muscles

Sensitive skin

Quickened pulse

A twitchy feeling in the extremities

Raised body temperature

Tightness in the jaw and facial muscles, causing discomfort

### **MENTAL RESPONSES:**

Dismissing the source as unworthy

Trying to put the upsetting information out of one's mind

A desire to talk the situation over with someone else

Wishing someone would stop or shut up

Stubbornly sticking to one's belief even if it doesn't make sense

Clouded judgment

Judging others and their performance or contribution

### **CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM IRRITATION:**

Openly challenging another's logic or standpoint

Swearing

Negative language: *You don't know what you're talking about!*

Sarcasm

Name-calling

Facial tics

Rising blood pressure

**MAY ESCALATE TO: [FRUSTRATION](#), [ANGER](#)**

### **CUES OF SUPPRESSED IRRITATION:**

Avoiding the source

Two-faced behavior

Nitpicking

Passive-aggressive comments

Forcing oneself to not look at or acknowledge the source

Leaving the room or situation to clear thoughts

Seeking to discredit the source so as not to have to believe him or her

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**WRITER'S TIP:** *Make body language unique to the character. Do they lift themselves up in their shoes as they wait in line? Do they run a finger along the seam line of their jeans when deep in thought? Creative emotional mannerisms help characters leap off the page.*

# JEALOUSY

**DEFINITION:** hostility toward a rival or one suspected of enjoying an advantage

*NOTE: the advantage can be a person, an object, or an intangible (love, success, etc.)*

## **PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

Adopting a sullen look

Making a slight growl or noise in the throat

Bitterness at watching how others respond to the rival

Quick, sharp movements (swiping tears from cheeks, shoving hair out of eyes)

Pursing or pressing lips flat

Crossing arms in front of chest

Clenching teeth

Muttering unkind things under breath

Starting rumors, acting catty

Picking on someone weaker for a sense of power and control

Sneering

Ugly laughter

Shouting insults, name-calling

Taking a step closer, fists clenched

A visible flush in cheeks

A pinched expression

Tight muscles

Body mimicking that of the rival

Trying to “one-up”

Issuing a challenge to the rival that contains an element of risk

Criticism

Spitting in the direction of the rival

Swearing

Kicking at nearby objects

Showing off

Pulling stunts or pranks to regain attention

Rudeness, saying something that is a “low blow”

Reckless behavior

Gloating when the rival falters or shows weakness

## **INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

Burning sensation in the chest or stomach  
Stomach hardening  
Breaths coming coarser, faster  
Spots or flashes in vision  
Pain in jaw from clenching teeth

## **MENTAL RESPONSES:**

A desire to vent and voice the rival's unworthiness to others  
Rash decision-making (quitting a team, storming out of a party)  
A flash of anger when the rival is mentioned  
A desire to discredit, or take away the rival's power  
Wishing harm  
A desire for revenge  
Turmoil at having negative feelings  
Focusing solely on the rival's negative attributes  
Comparing oneself to the rival in the eyes of peers  
Rejecting the advantage (choosing to pursue another girl instead)

## **CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM JEALOUSY:**

Jeering, running someone down, bullying  
Picking fights  
Unhealthy obsession with the rival  
Indulging in petty crime (keying the rival's car, etc.)  
Engaging in self-mutilation as a release  
Negativity spilling into other parts of one's life  
Self-doubt, a lack of confidence  
A relationship categorized by negativity, passive-aggression, and criticism  
Feeling fake from wearing two faces for so long  
Dishonesty with self and others  
A pattern of subversively trying to undermine the rival in the eyes of others

**MAY ESCALATE TO: [ENVY](#), [DETERMINATION](#), [ANGER](#), [HATRED](#)**

## **CUES OF SUPPRESSED JEALOUSY:**

Acting normal to the rival's face but talking negatively behind their back  
Watching the rival furtively, privately  
Striving to also excel at whatever is desired  
Grouping with others who also lack whatever is desired

Kissing up to gain approval through association  
Trying not to focus on the rival  
Telling oneself that it doesn't matter  
Attempting to think positive thoughts about the rival

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**WRITER'S TIP***In each scene, think about the lighting. Full sunlight, muddy clouds washing everything in grey, the onset of sunset or even darkness...light and shadow can affect a character's mood, amp their stress level or even work against their goals.*

# LONELINESS

**DEFINITION:** the feeling of being isolated or cut off

## **PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

A longing gaze

Disinterest in one's appearance (bland clothing, lackluster hair)

Slumped shoulders, limp posture

A monotone voice

Looking down when walking in public

Watching people furtively

An expressionless, unsmiling face

Sullenness

Being generous to others in order to curry favor

Spying or eavesdropping on others to feel a part of something

Filling schedule with work or volunteering to avoid downtime

Using books, the internet, and TV to escape

An expression that crumples at other peoples' affection displays

Hugging oneself

A lack of eye contact

False bravado

Tears, sadness

A heavy sigh

Talking to oneself

Feeling a sense of comfort from a full mailbox (even junk mail)

Stroking self (rubbing an arm absently for contact)

Using bright or eccentric clothing choices in an attempt to get attention

Doting on someone or something (a neighbor, a pet)

Talking to strangers to feel connected

Relishing opportunities to talk or engage (mail deliveries, etc.)

Rambling when conversing with others

Adhering to a routine (eating the same meals, visiting the same park)

Living vicariously through an alter ego or avatar (social networking, gaming)

## **INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

A thickness in the throat, signaling the onset of tears

A longing so intense it manifests itself as an ache or pain

Insomnia

Fatigue

**MENTAL RESPONSES:**

Avoiding crowds, large events, or social situations

A desire to be included, wanted

Anger, bitterness

Daydreaming about people one would like to have relationships with

A feeling of unworthiness

**CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM LONELINESS:**

Doubting oneself, a lack of confidence

Weight gain

Believing that one is ugly or unworthy

Uncontrollable crying bouts

Despairing of ever being able to change

High blood pressure

Workaholic tendencies

Bingeing to compensate (eating, drinking, shopping, gambling)

Hoarding pets

Suicidal thoughts

**MAY ESCALATE TO: [SADNESS](#), [HURT](#), [DEPRESSION](#), [RESIGNATION](#)**

**CUES OF SUPPRESSED LONELINESS:**

Committing too quickly to anyone who shows interest

Choosing negative relationships over being alone

Being too friendly and coming across as desperate

Frequently calling family or friends

Solitary activities that show a craving for contact (people watching from the porch)

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**WRITER'S TIP:** *Body movements should never be random. Everything a character does should have a specific intent: to achieve an end, reveal emotion, or to characterize.*

# LOVE

**DEFINITION: deep affection, attachment, or devotion for another**

## **PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

Moving to get closer or touch

Smiling at nothing

A beaming expression, glowing cheeks

Strong eye contact, very little blinking

Focusing on the other's best attributes

Taking large, deep, savoring breaths

A yearning look

Licking one's lips

Unconsciously parting the lips

A light, bouncing step

Throat clearing, swallowing

A silly grin, laughing

Leaning against one another

Lying in the other's lap

Using pet names or terms of endearment

Mooning over photos or representations of a love interest

Listening to and connecting with love songs

Adopting a silly love-struck tone when communicating

Nervous behaviors (fiddling with the hands, moistening one's lips)

Flirtatious talk or nonstop talking

Torso and feet pointing toward the loved one

Playful shoving and grabbing

Sharing secrets and desires

Affectionate touches (arm stroking, holding hands, kissing, hugging)

Sitting together so the legs touch

Putting an arm around someone's shoulders

Realigning hobbies or interests to match the other's

Hooking a hand in the other person's belt or pocket

Ignoring or neglecting other friends to be with the significant other

Writing notes or poetry to the other person

Offering gifts of time, value, or thoughtfulness

Talking to friends about the special person, asking for advice

Obsessively checking the phone to see if the love interest has called

Constant texting back and forth  
Doodling hearts and names  
Dieting or working out in an effort to improve one's appearance  
Watching romantic movies  
Saying *I love you*

#### **INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

A fluttering in the stomach, a feeling of emptiness  
A racing pulse  
The heart beating, banging, or hammering  
A hyper-awareness of the body  
Weak knees or legs  
A tingling or electrical jolt at accidental touches  
Getting tongue-tangled

#### **MENTAL RESPONSES:**

Euphoria, pleasure at touching and closeness  
Appreciating the world and everything in it  
Losing track of time when with the other person  
Mental fuzziness, distraction  
Daydreaming  
Losing awareness of surroundings when love interest is present  
Seeking ways to make a loved one proud  
Worrying when too much time has passed without contact  
A feeling of possessiveness, jealousy  
Feeling safe and whole when together

#### **CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM LOVE:**

Exchanging personal effects (clothing, jewelry, keys)  
Embracing the love interest's friends as one's own  
Sharing finances and possessions  
Enduring hardship to be with the love interest or make them happy  
Putting the other's needs and desires first  
Intimacy  
Sharing hopes and dreams, becoming emotionally vulnerable  
Future planning that centers around the love interest  
Living together, a committed relationship, marriage

**MAY ESCALATE TO: PEACEFULNESS, SATISFACTION, DESIRE, ADORATION**

## **CUES OF SUPPRESSED LOVE:**

Flushed skin

A high-pitched voice

Nervous laughter or giggling

Standing close yet not touching

Darting glances

Watching from a safe distance

An increased interest in the other person's personal life

Forcibly declaring that nothing's going on: *We're just friends*

An overall brightening when the other person enters the room

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**WRITER'S TIP** *Sentence structure is especially important when describing. Varied sentence length keeps the pace moving and livens up sensory detail, avoiding a "dry report" feel.*

# NERVOUSNESS

**DEFINITION:** the state of feeling unsettled and being easily agitated

## **PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

Short, jerky movements

Pacing

Rapid blinking

Rubbing the back of the neck

Unbuttoning the top button of a shirt

Scratching or rubbing skin

Biting at lips

Jumpiness

Flighty hand movements, fidgeting

Clumsiness

Rubbing hands down one's pant legs

A lack of eye contact

Scraping a hand through the hair

Quick breaths

Crossing and uncrossing arms or legs

Eyeing the exits

Bouncing a knee (while sitting)

Repeated gestures (tie straightening, touching an ear)

Increased sweat, particularly on the hands

Tingling fingers and toes

Pupils appear dilated

Biting or picking at one's fingernails

Shaking out the hands

Clearing the throat

Facial tics

Stuttering, stumbling over one's words

Quick, high-pitched laughter

Restlessness (sitting, then standing)

Laughter that goes on for longer than normal

Closing the eyes and taking a calming breath

Rapid speaking, babbling

A change in the pitch, tone, or volume of the voice

Tackling a task to distract (cleaning, waxing the car)

## **INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

Acute senses

Nausea

Sensitive skin

Faintness

An empty feeling in the pit of the stomach

Quivering, twitchy muscles

A rolling or fluttery feeling (butterflies) in the stomach

Loss of appetite

Dry mouth

Heart palpitations

Headache

## **MENTAL RESPONSES:**

The desire to flee

Erratic thought processes, irrational fears

Overreacting to noise

The mind going to the worst-case scenario

Wishing time would speed up

## **CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM NERVOUSNESS:**

Vomiting

Fatigue or insomnia

Panic attacks

Withdrawal

Irritability

Ulcers and other digestive disorders

Weight loss or gain

Negative thought patterns

Indulging in alcohol, drugs, or chain smoking to take the edge off

**MAY ESCALATE TO: INSECURITY, ANXIETY, FEAR, DREAD**

## **CUES OF SUPPRESSED NERVOUSNESS:**

A pasted-on smile

Flexing the fingers, curling and uncurling

Clasping one's hands together

An unnatural stillness

Eyes that blink too much or don't blink enough

Not meeting anyone's gaze

Changing the topic  
Avoiding conversation

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**WRITER'S TIP** *Body movement and external reactions alone will not create an emotional experience for the reader. Pairing action with a light use of internal sensations and/or thoughts creates a deeper emotional pull.*

# NOSTALGIA

**DEFINITION:** the yearning for a return to a past period or situation

## **PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

An unfocused gaze

A slight smile

Slowly flipping through old pictures, stroking the pages

A relaxed posture

Eyes that fill with tears

Using a quiet voice

Cocking one's head to the side

Subdued laughter

A shallow sigh

An unhurried walk

Rubbing a hand against the heart

Slouching on a sofa, watching old movies

Slow, languid movements

Growing animated when memory is triggered (an old song playing on the radio, etc.)

Eyes brightening as memories are recalled

Keeping mementos from the happy time

Telling and retelling stories about the past

Seeking out those who shared the event

Gently touching memorable items (a baby blanket, wedding invitations)

Closing one's eyes to more clearly recall the memories

Trying to recreate a past event (burning the same scented candle, wearing the old clothes)

Seeing similarities in the present: *You look just like him* or *This is the same color as our first car*

Increased tenderness (sitting close, a quick kiss) for those who shared in the event

## **INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

Eyes prickling with tears

An excited flutter in the belly

An overall relaxation of the body

Breathing slows as a memory takes over

Dulled awareness (sitting in an uncomfortable position without feeling it)  
Experiencing (to a lesser degree) the same physical sensations felt during the past event

**MENTAL RESPONSES:**

Losing track of the time while remembering  
A desire to go back and visit the past  
Mentally replaying past events  
Satisfaction at having experienced the event despite any pain or loss resulting from it

**CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM NOSTALGIA:**

Discontentment with the way things presently are  
Expressing more emotion about the past than the present  
Spending large periods of time in the past  
Hoarding tendencies  
Neglecting current duties or relationships  
An inability to move on  
Depression

**MAY ESCALATE TO:** [SADNESS](#), [DEPRESSION](#), [HAPPINESS](#)

**CUES OF SUPPRESSED NOSTALGIA:**

An austere lack of mementos from the past  
Sniffing back tears  
Rejecting opportunities to revisit the past (reunions, trips to the old house or hometown)  
Not engaging in conversations about the past  
Masking nostalgia with practicality: *I kept his toys so he could give them to his kids*

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**WRITER'S TIP:** *When introducing and describing characters, parcel out personal details in small bits. Anything that isn't pivotal to plot or characterization can be left to the reader's imagination.*

# OVERWHELMED

**DEFINITION:** to be overpowered or overcome by feelings or circumstances

**PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

Bringing a shaky hand to the forehead  
Holding a palm up to stop someone from dumping on more worry  
Waving people away  
Shoulders that drop or curl  
A chest that caves in  
Clutching at one's arms or stomach  
Touching a temple while closing the eyes  
A voice choked with tears  
A chest that hitches  
A quaking voice  
Poor balance  
Mumbling, muttering  
Letting out an uncontrollable cry, sob, or whimper  
Uncertain (almost drunken) steps  
Sagging into a chair, leaning against a door frame or wall  
Pulling the knees up to the chest, circling one's knees with the arms  
Falling against another person  
Shaking all over  
Tearful eyes  
Difficulty forming responses  
Holing up in a corner, placing one's back against the wall  
Dropping or spilling things  
Shaking the head repeatedly  
A glassy stare, a glazed look  
Staring down at one's empty palms  
Crumpling to the floor  
Putting one's hands over one's ears  
Rocking back and forth  
Closing the eyes  
Inappropriate responses (laughing, screaming)  
Leaning over with the hands on the knees  
Hyperventilating

Loosening belts, collars, and other confining clothing  
Touching one's fingertips to one's lips

**INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

Weakness in the legs, a sudden need to sit down  
A wave of heat or cold  
Light-headedness  
Difficulty breathing  
An inability to eat  
Noise sensitivity  
Ringing ears  
Tunnel vision

**MENTAL RESPONSES:**

Mental numbness  
Retreating inward  
Becoming non-responsive to others, almost catatonic  
Wishing for comfort  
The desire to be alone  
An inability to focus  
Indecisiveness

**CUES OF BEING OVERWHELMED LONG TERM:**

Flight  
Snapping under pressure (screaming, yelling, hitting others)  
Fainting or swooning  
Weeping  
Hysteria  
Headaches  
Hypertension  
Muscle fatigue and soreness  
Seeking comfort in unhealthy ways  
Heart attack or stroke  
Chronic fatigue, insomnia  
Decaying physical health, hospitalization

**MAY ESCALATE TO: [ANXIETY](#), [DEPRESSION](#)**

**SUPPRESSED CUES OF BEING OVERWHELMED:**

Verbal denial: *I'm fine, really*

False smiles and confidence

Agreeability or false enthusiasm

Masking weakness with excuses: *Sorry, I stood up too fast*

Feigning a headache or other malady rather than admit one's limits

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**WRITER'S TIP:** *When delivering emotional description, it's easy to rely too much on facial expressions. Instead, look down and describe what the arms, hands, legs, and feet are doing.*

# PARANOIA

**DEFINITION:** excessive or illogical suspicion and/or distrust of others

## **PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

Startling easily

Clenching the jaw

Darting eye movements

Excessive safety precautions (extra locks, guard dogs, video surveillance)

Fidgety hands that won't settle

Wide eyes

Restless sleep, tossing and turning

Insomnia

Backing away with raised hands

Flinching

Eyes that don't seem to blink often enough

Crossing the arms tightly over the chest

Muttering under one's breath, talking to oneself

Scratching compulsively

Sweating

Bloodshot eyes

Scouting for exits when entering a room

A heightened need for personal distance

Dependency on caffeinated beverages or drugs to stay alert

Pallid skin from lack of sunlight

A ruffled appearance

Accusing innocent people of planning or carrying out mischief

Facial tics, muscles that jump

A quick, erratic pace

Always looking over the shoulder or around the next corner

Weight loss

Plucking at clothing as if it chafes

Aligning with fringe groups and conspiracy theorists

Espousing far-out beliefs and opinions

Becoming easily offended

Jumping to the defensive

Verbally attacking any perceived opponents

Spouting inane or irrational arguments  
Citing unreliable sources  
Stubbornly adhering to one's beliefs no matter how outlandish  
Perfectionist tendencies  
Compulsive behaviors  
Refusing food or drinks prepared by others

**INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

Heightened senses  
Fatigue  
Muscles that are always tense, ready to fight or run  
Sensitivity to touch and sound  
A racing heartbeat  
Raw nerves and skin  
High adrenaline level, jumpiness

**MENTAL RESPONSES:**

Seeing danger symbols in everything  
Judging too quickly  
A heightened sense of self-importance  
Irrational responses, jumping to illogical conclusions  
Mental fatigue from not getting enough sleep  
Seeing and hearing things that aren't there  
An inability to connect with others due to a lack of trust  
Always seeing the worst-case scenario  
Negative thought patterns  
Feeling watched or followed  
The belief that everyone else is deluded  
Adhering to superstitious beliefs to stay safe

**CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM PARANOIA:**

Contacting the authorities for help against suspected assailants  
An inability to maintain long-term relationships  
Isolation  
Living off the grid  
The belief that one is no longer required to live by the laws of society  
A complete break with reality  
Rage  
Hallucinations

Anxiety attacks, phobias, psychosis

**MAY ESCALATE TO: [FEAR](#), [ANGER](#), [RAGE](#), [HATRED](#), [DESPERATION](#)**

**CUES OF SUPPRESSED PARANOIA:**

Avoidance of social situations

Attempting to engage socially, but with wary and darting eyes

Agreeing with everything in an attempt to seem “part of the group”

Watching others and mimicking them as a way of appearing normal

A smile that is frozen, manic

A high voice or odd laugh

Using medicine or seeking therapy

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**WRITER’S TIP:***In dialogue, it’s not always what a character says that’s important, it’s how they say it. (And sometimes it’s what they are trying hard not to say!)*

# PEACEFULNESS

**DEFINITION:** a state of calm that is devoid of strife, agitation, or commotion

## **PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

A relaxed posture

Smiling, grinning

Fingers loosely clasped in one's lap

Closed eyes, the head tipped back

Softened features that imply calm

Nodding to others in greeting

Leaning back, an arm hooked over the back of a chair

Taking a deep, satisfied breath

Using a friend's shoulder as a shelf for your elbow

An unforced laugh

Whistling or humming

Sparkling eyes, a weightless gaze

Enjoying an event (a movie, a concert in the park, a picnic)

Lying on the grass to soak up the sun

Catlike stretches

A warm voice, caring tone

Half-closed eyes, a lidded look of satisfaction

Lacing fingers behind the head

A wide stance, open demeanor

Languid movements

Rolling the neck back and forth

Looping the thumbs in the front pockets while standing

An easy walk, unhurried

A wandering gaze, taking in random things

A satisfied sigh

Unhurried speech

Contentedly taking more time to complete tasks

Expressing a greater interest in the happiness of others

Engaging in meaningful conversations

## **INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

Slow and easy breaths

Slack muscles

Loose limbs

Drowsiness

A lack of tension and stress that almost equates to a feeling of nothingness

A steady, calm pulse and heartbeat

### **MENTAL RESPONSES:**

Being with others with no need to fill the silence

Satisfaction with the world at large

A feeling of connection to life

Having no desire to be anywhere else

Enjoying listening to others

Living in the moment, not acknowledging the past or future

Avoiding topics of conversation that will kill the mood

Delighting in even mundane, everyday tasks

A desire for everyone to experience such peace

### **CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM PEACEFULNESS:**

A lessened need for worldly goods

Choosing to spend time with positive or like-minded people

A growing interest in spiritual or religious philosophy

A desire to maintain a positive status quo

Changing one's lifestyle to accommodate new beliefs (recycling, moving to the country)

Impatience with corporate greed and capitalism

A desire for more natural living

An increased awareness of one's body and what goes into it

Engaging in new and satisfying hobbies and interests

**MAY ESCALATE TO: [HAPPINESS](#), [SATISFACTION](#)**

### **CUES OF SUPPRESSED PEACEFULNESS:**

Claiming that one's calm demeanor is simply tiredness

Forcing oneself to maintain a slight stiffness in posture

Pretending to disengage because of boredom

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**WRITER'S TIP:** Choose verbs carefully. The meaning of a sentence can be altered through the words used to describe action. Readers will see a character

*who trudges up the stairs as being in a different emotional state than one that bounds up them, two at a time.*

# PRIDE

**DEFINITION:** proper self-respect arising from a significant achievement, possession of an item, or involvement in a relationship

## **PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

A high chin

Shoulders back

Chest thrust out

Standing tall with good posture, legs spread wide

A gleam in one's eye

A knowing grin

Perfectionism

Watching others to see their reactions

Verbalizing the ups and downs that led to this point

Calling friends and loved ones to tell them about an accomplishment

Direct or intense eye contact

A booming laugh

Becoming talkative

Lifting the heels and rising up slightly to emphasize words

Steering or dominating the conversation

Becoming extra animated when there's an audience

A grin that conveys secret knowledge

Thrusting oneself into the middle of an event or debate

A satisfied smile

Hooking thumbs into one's belt loops, thrusting the pelvis forward

Pulling in a deep breath

False modesty

Ignoring or overlooking any flaws associated with the pride item

A preoccupation with one's appearance

Standing with hands tucked in one's armpits, thumbs visible and pointing up

Running the hands through the hair, flipping hair back

Assuming a pose that's sexy or draws attention to one's best attributes

Appearing unaffected by what others think

Speaking first, thinking second

## **INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

The feeling of being taller, bigger, stronger  
Lungs expanded to their fullest through deep, satisfied breaths

### **MENTAL RESPONSES:**

Positive self thoughts

Preoccupation with one's achievements or successes

A feeling of being able to conquer the world

Wanting to be surrounded by supportive loved ones

A desire to share achievements with others

A tendency to judge people according to one's personal measuring stick

Over-estimating one's capabilities

Underestimating others

A sense of entitlement

Planning and seeking advantages

### **CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM PRIDE:**

Enjoyment at proving others wrong

Bragging, obsessively talking about an achievement or material object

Praising group accomplishments as a way to remind people of one's own involvement

Reacting with anger or jealousy if one's reputation is impugned

Making radical statements or promises about future goals

Revisiting the source or place of accomplishment to feel empowered

**MAY ESCALATE TO: [SMUGNESS](#), [CONTEMPT](#), [CONFIDENCE](#)**

### **CUES OF SUPPRESSED PRIDE:**

Waving off a compliment

Passing the credit to someone else

Turning attention away from oneself

Seeking others' opinions as a form of validation

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**WRITER'S TIP:** *Understand your character's emotional range. For one character, intense situations may make them hyperventilate. For another, it might cause them to shift slightly while seated. Knowing how expressive a character is will help you find the perfect body cue to convey an emotional meaning.*

# RAGE

**DEFINITION: violent and uncontrolled anger**

**PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

Flushed or mottled skin

Shaking extremities

Hands that clench and unclench

Wide eyes, showing the whites

Spittle building up in the corners of the mouth

Biting criticism and belittlement

Jabbing a finger in someone's face

A corded neck

Nostrils flaring

Lips pulling back, baring the teeth

Cracking the neck from side to side for intimidation

Muscles and veins straining against skin

A guttural roar

Planting the feet wide apart

Sudden explosions over seemingly little things

Pushing and shoving

Limbering up shoulders and neck as if readying to fight

Squeezing someone's arm to the point of bruising

Using insults to pick a fight

Cracking one's knuckles to intimidate

Pulling out a weapon (knife)

Finding something close to hand to use as a weapon (branch, rock)

Moving slowly and deliberately toward another person to intimidate

Barreling toward someone, uttering a scream or war cry

Fighting with no thought for one's own safety

Throwing or kicking things

Jumping to extreme anger with little provocation

Screaming

Threatening violence

Staring someone down to frighten them

Getting into someone's personal space

Manipulation

### **INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

A pounding in the ears  
Increased blood flow to the extremities  
Elevated pulse  
Clouded vision  
A dry throat from rushed breathing  
Pain that is suspended until later  
Adrenaline rushing through the body  
A sensation of increased strength  
An edgy, twitchy feeling  
Tunnel vision

### **MENTAL RESPONSES:**

Being driven by the belief that one has been mistreated or done wrong  
A desire for vengeance  
Looking for a fight  
Wanting to hurt someone, to see blood  
A sense of release when violence is expressed  
Not thinking or caring about consequences  
A need to dominate or control  
Difficulty focusing or concentrating

### **CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM RAGE:**

Beating someone senseless  
Committing assault or murder  
Seeking out opportunities to react violently  
Self-destructive addictions  
Depression  
Heart disease, stroke  
Ulcers  
An inability to cope with smaller problems over time  
Insomnia  
Fatigue  
Destroying property

**MAY ESCALATE TO: [PARANOIA](#), [REGRET](#)**

### **CUES OF SUPPRESSED RAGE:**

Unnatural silence  
Uncontrollable body tremors

Punching a wall or object instead of a person

Clenched, grinding teeth

Pain in the jaw from clenched teeth

A tight smile that doesn't reach the eyes

Grabbing onto something secure (like a steering wheel) and shaking it violently

Punching or ripping apart something soft

Aggressive workouts

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**WRITER'S TIP:** *As your character reacts emotionally to circumstances within the environment, don't underestimate the importance of sensory details. Do textures bother them because of a heightened state? What sounds do they pick up on that they might not otherwise notice?*

# REGRET

**DEFINITION:** sorrow aroused by circumstances beyond one's ability to control or repair

**PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

Scrubbing a hand over the face  
Laying a hand against the breastbone  
A heavy sigh  
A downturned mouth  
Bent posture  
Heavy arms, the shoulders pulled low  
Apologizing  
Trying to reason or explain  
Eyebrows gathering in  
A pained expression  
Hands falling to the sides  
Staring down at one's feet  
Covering the face with the hands  
Squeezing one's eyes shut  
Lifting hands up and then letting them fall  
Pinching the bridge of the nose, eyes closed  
Wincing or grimacing  
Rubbing the chest as if pained  
Avoiding the victims (shame)  
Seeking reconciliation (determination to set right)  
Berating oneself for actions or choices  
Losing the thread of conversations  
Hiding behind one's hair  
Shaking the head  
A voice that loses its power  
Using broken sentences or trailing off while speaking  
Making a *tsking* noise or murmuring regret: *What a shame*  
Asking questions about the fallout: *How did she take the news?*  
Scrambling to reverse what was said or done  
Increasing one's distance from others  
Trying to fade into the background at social events  
Putting oneself down

### **INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

A knotted belly

Insomnia

An inability to fill lungs completely

A nervous stomach

Loss of appetite

Dullness in the chest, a feeling of heaviness

### **MENTAL RESPONSES:**

Self-loathing

The feeling that one deserves pain or judgment

Obsession with the person or event associated with the regret

Reliving past events

Thoughts that turn inward

Trying to forget the event

A desire to go unnoticed

Distractedness

Wishing it hadn't happened

### **CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM REGRET:**

Not taking physical care of oneself

Weight loss

Withdrawing from society

Dropping out of clubs and groups

No longer finding joy in hobbies or favorite pastimes

Overcompensation in other relationships

Crying, sobbing

Self-destructive behaviors

Drug and alcohol abuse

Unsafe sexual practices

Abusive relationships

A string of broken relationships

Ulcers

A lack of intimacy with others

An inability to forgive oneself

**MAY ESCALATE TO: SHAME, FRUSTRATION, DEPRESSION**

### **CUES OF SUPPRESSED REGRET:**

Desperately seeking out new relationships

Talking about one's accomplishments as a way of winning people over  
Making life-altering decisions (career change, a move, etc.) as a way to start over  
Acting like the life of the party  
Putting on a happy face

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**WRITER'S TIP:** Watch for possible description crutches. Is the color "green" used too much? Does a sensory sound (like wind rustling through the trees) happen in multiple scenes? Keep track of these details to avoid overuse.

# RELIEF

**DEFINITION:** the alleviation or lightening of oppressive stressors

## **PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

Covering the mouth with a hand

Shaking head and closing the eyes

Gasping

Trembling hands

Reaching out to another for comfort

Slumping posture

A slow smile

Using humor to lighten the moment

Shaky laughter

Sagging against a wall or person

Pressing the palms to the eyes

Asking for the good news to be repeated

Wobbly legs

Buckling knees

Stumbling back a step

Flopping back in a chair

A gaping mouth

Struggling to speak, to find the right words

An unsteady walk

Crying or calling out in release

Asking redundant questions to assure that the moment is real

Eyes going up, looking heavenward

Letting out a huge breath

Rocking back and forth

Eyes shining, locked on the source of relief

A slight moan

Lips parting

Showing kinship with others involved (hugging, reaching for their hands)

Pressing one's hands to the stomach

A palm pressed to the heart

A bowed head

Starting to fall then catching oneself

Closed eyes, compulsive nodding

Letting the head fall back  
Uttering a soft curse or thanking God  
Making the sign of the cross (if religious)

**INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

Dry mouth  
Weak muscles  
An unexpected release of all tension  
Tears welling up behind eyelids  
A sudden lightness or giddiness

**MENTAL RESPONSES:**

Wanting to be held  
A desire to be still and let the relief sink in  
Gratitude  
Jumbled thoughts  
An inability to formulate an appropriate verbal response  
Postponement of residual loss or pain until a later time

**CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM RELIEF:**

Breaking down, tears  
Exuberant responses (jumping up and down, shouting, running, hysterical crying)  
Collapsing  
An expanding feeling in the chest  
Light-headedness  
A thick throat

**MAY ESCALATE TO: [HAPPINESS](#), [EXCITEMENT](#), [GRATITUDE](#)**

**CUES OF SUPPRESSED RELIEF:**

A deliberately quiet exhale  
Briefly closing the eyes  
Drawing a deep breath through the nose  
Biting the lips to keep from smiling  
Swallowing and nodding  
Narrowed eyes, when it's necessary to focus on something besides the source of relief  
Not thinking about it, putting it off to savor later  
Inattentiveness

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**WRITER'S TIP** *When a character is hiding an emotion, the cues are not as noticeable. In this circumstance, it's often more effective to show the emotion through change—altering a speech pattern, falling back on habits, posture shifts, etc.*

# RELUCTANCE

**DEFINITION:** unwillingness; aversion

**PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

Stalling gestures (taking time to think, turning away)

A hard, obvious swallow

Wetting the lips

Tense arms, shoulders, or face

Hesitant steps

The head pulling back as the shoulders push forward

Responding slowly (accepting an item, offering assistance)

Pressing lips together

Glancing around uneasily

Hands that shake, nervous twitching

Hands almost curling into fists and then straightening

A grimace or pained look

Eyebrows squeezing together

Stuttering, stammering

Making excuses

Lying

Tentatively reaching out or touching

Holding a hand up, warding someone or something off

Suggesting someone else to help or act instead

Shaking the head

A hand fluttering to the lips or neck

Nervous habits (running hands through the hair, pacing, repetitive gestures)

A too-quick smile

Glancing at one's watch

Jumpiness

Moving toward an exit

Putting distance between oneself and the requester

Biting the lip or nails

Pinching the bridge of the nose and tightly squeezing the eyes

Changing the topic or diverting attention

Closed body language (hands up, crossed arms)

Leaning or turning away from the person making the request

Asking for time to make the decision  
Expressing skepticism  
Asking questions for clarification  
Not meeting the requester's eyes  
Not engaging in further conversation  
Answering with a "maybe" response  
Muttering negatives: *No* or *I don't want to*

**INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

Taking a deep breath before acting  
A tightening chest  
Slight tenseness in the muscles  
A heaviness in the stomach

**MENTAL RESPONSES:**

A desire to get away from the person making the request  
Indecision  
A mind that is clearly distracted  
Guilt  
Searching for ways to get out of whatever is requested  
An inability to focus on anything but the decision to be made  
A need to justify one's reluctance

**CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM RELUCTANCE:**

Resentment  
A tight or roiling stomach  
Avoidance of the source  
A strained relationship

**MAY ESCALATE TO: SKEPTICISM, DEFENSIVENESS, ANGER, FEAR, DISGUST, RESENTMENT, DREAD**

**CUES OF SUPPRESSED RELUCTANCE:**

Agreeing, then not following through  
Hints about being busy or overly stressed  
A rising antipathy toward the person responsible for the situation  
Passive-aggressive comments  
Deflecting, acting as if the request is absurd  
Joking comments to deflect  
Revealing true feelings to a third party, hoping they'll pass the information

along

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**WRITER'S TIP:** *Avoid brand dropping to characterize. Brand names come and go and can date your writing. Instead use other clues to convey your character's personality, strengths, or shortcomings.*

# REMORSE

**DEFINITION:** distress resulting from guilt over wrongdoing; a desire to undo or fix

## **PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

Heartfelt apologies

Asking to talk

Following the aggrieved party

Repeatedly returning to the scene where past events took place

Head down as the eyes look up

Watering eyes

A hand that cups the mouth

Holding one's head in hands

Tears that one does not try to hide or control

Silence

Offering restitution

Using the victim's name in dialogue when they are present

Telling the unvarnished truth

Speaking without hesitation when answering

A quivering chin

Holding the stomach

Shoulders that curl over the chest

Not defending oneself against attack (verbal or physical)

Crumpled body posture

Staring down at the floor

Clasping the hands together in the lap

Shaking

Begging for forgiveness

Shoulders that quake with repressed sobs

A pleading tone

A pale or unhealthy complexion

Dark circles under the eyes

Hollowed cheeks

Reaching out to touch and then pulling back as if not worthy

Readily agreeing to a punishment or pronouncement

A voice that cracks

Verbalizing responsibility for what happened

Quiet answers to questions  
Arms hanging at the sides  
Still hands and feet  
Obedience  
Breaking into sobs

**INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

A stomach that feels hard  
Runny nose  
Nausea  
Gritty or dry eyes from lack of sleep  
A lump in the throat

**MENTAL RESPONSES:**

Mentally berating oneself over an action or poor decision  
Wanting to face the consequences  
Obsessing over finding a way to repay the debt  
Empathy for the other party and what they are going through  
Being honest about one's role in the situation  
Relief for owning up to wrongdoing

**CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM REMORSE:**

Weight loss  
Headaches  
Heart problems  
Self-destructive behaviors out of the belief that one does not deserve happiness  
Desperation to balance the scales or resolve the situation  
A complete life change (taking up charity work, finding God, etc.)

**MAY ESCALATE TO: SHAME, REGRET, DETERMINATION**

**CUES OF SUPPRESSED REMORSE:**

Avoiding friends who are also culpable (if a group act)  
Lying about feelings  
Claiming that the victim was partly responsible  
Making an excuse to leave  
Dropping out of activities, school, or work on false pretenses  
Moving away

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**WRITER'S TIP:** *Description is clearest when a writer adheres to the real order of events in a scene. Show the action (stimulus), then the reaction (response) and a reader will clearly see how A leads to B.*

# RESENTMENT

**DEFINITION:** indignation toward an act, remark, or person; feeling injured or insulted

**PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

A pinched mouth

Arms crossed over the chest

A flat look, narrowed eyes

Scowling

Increasing one's personal distance from others

Complaining

Rudeness

Pouting (children)

Catty behavior

Name-calling

A voice that rises in volume or intensity

Arguing

Looking past someone rather than at them

A hard expression

Arms straight, hands locked into fists

Refusing to be bought off through kindness or thoughtfulness

Shunning the source

A stiff stance

Purposely ignoring someone's conciliatory efforts

Muttering under the breath or cursing

Twisting the mouth, a soured expression

Belittling another's status or accomplishment

Tension in the neck and shoulders

Pointing and jabbing the air for emphasis

A curling lip, showing the teeth

A sharp, defined jaw line

A tart tone, snapping at others

Sabotaging another's projects or actions out of a sense of being wronged

Talking behind someone's back, gossiping

An unkind smile

Shaking the head in disapproval but not saying anything

Balling the hands into fists

Walking out of the room  
Spinning away in a huff  
Stomping up the stairs  
Shutting a door with more force than necessary

**INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

Tension headaches  
Pain in the jaw  
A tight chest  
Constricting the throat  
High blood pressure  
Stomach troubles or ulcers

**MENTAL RESPONSES:**

Unkind thoughts toward the target  
Frustration at unfairness or a lack of justice  
Fantasizing harm or the downfall of another  
Moodiness  
Wanting to be alone  
Fixating on a person or situation to the detriment of other relationships  
A desire to bring others in and create a mob mentality of resentment

**CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM RESENTMENT:**

Weight gain  
Illness  
Insomnia  
Arriving late, calling in sick, or refusing work shifts to avoid the source of resentment  
High blood pressure  
Seeking revenge

**MAY ESCALATE TO: [ANGER](#), [HATRED](#), [JEALOUSY](#)**

**CUES OF SUPPRESSED RESENTMENT:**

Walking away  
Keeping silent  
Changing the topic to something safe  
Putting on a smile

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**WRITER'S TIP:** *When exposing the reader to a new scene, person, or object, it can be useful to have some description or opinion delivered through a secondary character's dialogue. What they notice and how they respond provides an opportunity to characterize.*

# RESIGNATION

**DEFINITION:** the state of surrendering, often with little or no resistance

## **PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

Sighing dejectedly

Slumped shoulders

Blank features

Stooped posture

Shuffling footsteps

Small steps

Tears

A monotone voice

Becoming less verbal over time

Dull eyes

A chin that trembles

Answering with a small nod

Sagging facial features

Limp hands and arms

Unwashed hair

Wrinkled, disheveled clothes

A loss of appetite

Disinterest in former hobbies or passions

Making oneself small (hugging oneself, squatting down, fetal position)

Avoiding eye contact

Being at a loss for words

Lethargically giving comfort to others (rubbing their back, patting their shoulder)

A shake of the head

Head tipping back on the neck to look skyward

Agreeing, but without emotion

Clasping the hands together

Leaning forward, elbows on knees

Staring off at nothing

A hanging head

Loose jaw

A half-hearted shrug

A long exhale  
Muttering, mumbling  
Holding the head in the hands  
Propping a cheek on a fist  
Unresponsive or slowed reactions to stimulus  
Grunting, one-word answers  
Purposely closing the eyes, as if to process  
Excessive sleeping

**INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

A falling or dropping sensation  
Emptiness, numbness  
A lack of emotion  
Weakness in the muscles

**MENTAL RESPONSES:**

A determination to make the best of the situation (glass half-full)  
An inability to focus or concentrate  
Feeling directionless  
Confusion: *How did this happen?* or *What will happen to me now?*  
The sense that nothing will ever be the same  
Feeling powerless over the present or future  
Believing that one has failed

**CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM RESIGNATION:**

Depression  
Retreating inward  
Disconnecting from others  
Doubting oneself, a decrease in confidence  
Apathy  
Becoming submissive, giving up control

**MAY ESCALATE TO: [SADNESS](#), [DISAPPOINTMENT](#), [DEFEAT](#)**

**CUES OF SUPPRESSED RESIGNATION:**

Whining, questioning, offering token weak arguments  
Squaring shoulders, but without any real force or strength  
Offering a small display of anger  
Acting like giving in was a choice, not the only option

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**WRITER'S TIP:** *Too many emotional internalizations in a scene can slow the pace considerably. If the thoughts are key, try shifting some of these to active, realistic dialogue. It will increase the pace and still reveal the character's feelings.*

# SADNESS

**DEFINITION:** characterized by grief or unhappiness

**PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

Crying

Puffy face or eyes

Eyes appear red

Running makeup

Spotchy skin

Sniffing, wiping at nose

Wincing

Drooping shoulders

Voice is tearful or breaks

Staring down at one's hands

Stooped posture

Rubbing the heel of a palm against chest

Decreased coordination and clumsiness

A distant or empty stare

A flat, monotone voice

Downturned facial features

Covering the hands with the face

Arms hang at the sides, slack

Rubbing or pressing a fist against the chest

Crossing one's arms, holding onto one's shoulders

Slumping rather than sitting straight

A heavy-footed walk

A slack expression, wet, dull eyes

Bending forward, laying head on arms

Movements that lack energy

A trembling chin

Digging for tissues

Touching a cross or fingering jewelry for comfort

Drawing the limbs close to the body

Staring down at one's empty hands

A bowed spine

Clutching a token that is the focal point for the emotion

Quaking shoulders

Decreased interaction with the world at large

**INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

An aching chest

Hot or gummy eyelids

A scratchy throat

A runny nose

Soreness in the throat and lungs

The world spinning or seeming to slow down

Heaviness or tightness in the chest and limbs

A heart that is breaking or aching

Blurred vision

Lack of energy

Body feels cold

**MENTAL RESPONSES:**

Difficulty responding to questions

An inability to see where the future might go

Turning inward, withdrawing

A desire to escape the sadness (through sleep, drink, companionship)

A need to be alone

Wishing comfort from others

Avoiding the painful subject, denial

Wanting the pain to end

**CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM SADNESS:**

A pained keening

Tears pouring, dripping, or coursing

Hyperventilating, shortness of breath

Loss of appetite

Despair, hopelessness

Despondency

**MAY ESCALATE TO: [NOSTALGIA](#), [DEPRESSION](#), [LONELINESS](#)**

**CUES OF SUPPRESSED SADNESS:**

Turning away

Halting one's speech to gain control

Deep breaths

Biting the lip

Blinking

Gulping air

Changing the subject

Sipping a drink or taking a bite to eat

Quivery smiles

Hands gripping each other or an object

A hand covering the mouth, rubbing the chin

Focusing on alleviating another's pain rather than one's own

Excusing oneself to use the restroom or get a drink to be alone

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**WRITER'S TIP:***In dialogue, be on the lookout for where your character "thinks" instead of "responds" verbally. This leads to unnatural, one-sided conversations.*

# SATISFACTION

**DEFINITION:** the state of being content or fulfilled

## **PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

A high chin and exposed neck

A crisp nod

Arms crossed

Smoothing the front of a shirt or tugging down the sleeves

Offering a “thumbs-up”

Giving a toast or praise

Clapping someone on the back

A wide stance, fists on hips, elbows wide

Surveying the finished product with a pleased expression

A raised eyebrow and a *See?* look

A sleek walk that draws the eye (catlike, deliberate)

A shy, confident, radiant, or cocky smile

Apt dialogue that sums up the situation perfectly

Saying *I told you so!*

A puffed-out chest

Shoulders back, straight posture

A fist pump

Clapping

Fingers forming a steeple

Including others in the moment

Bragging

A hand casually anchored on the hip

Stretching the arms out wide

Leaning back, at ease and in control

A deep, gratifying sigh

Whistling or humming

A distant, unfocused smile

Taking deep breaths, savoring the moment

Unhurried, relaxed movements

A direct manner (eye contact, strength in voice)

Rewarding oneself

## **INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

A hyper-awareness of others and their reactions  
A lightness in the chest  
Warmth spreading through the body  
A tiredness that is fulfilling rather than exhausting

**MENTAL RESPONSES:**

Happiness over a job well done  
Euphoria, exhilaration  
Contentment  
Gratification  
Increased confidence  
Looking forward to a well-earned rest  
Mentally fixating on the recent success  
Not paying attention to one's surroundings  
Self-congratulations  
Generosity to others as a result of feeling gratified  
A desire to tell everyone about the success

**CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM SATISFACTION:**

Justified possessiveness  
An expression of supreme confidence, a glow  
Cockiness

**MAY ESCALATE TO:** [HAPPINESS](#), [SMUGNESS](#), [PRIDE](#), [GRATITUDE](#)

**CUES OF SUPPRESSED SATISFACTION:**

Twitching lips  
Hiding a smile behind a hand  
Bouncing lightly on the toes  
Getting away at the first opportunity to tell someone the good news  
Settling back in a chair in release

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**WRITER'S TIP:** *Loners and their lack of social interaction present specific writing challenges. To break up long stretches of introspection, maintain some character relationships. Remember that a person can be lonely even when surrounded by people; use the dialogue, dysfunction, and drama that go along with those relationships to keep the pace moving forward.*

# SCORN

**DEFINITION:** extreme contempt or derision; regarding as inferior

**PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

A biting remark

Belittling comments that remind the target who has the upper hand

A smirk

A quick, disgusted snort

Looming over the target

Crossed arms, a wide stance

Sarcasm

A tight jaw

A harsh squint

A deliberate eyebrow raise and head tilt

Pulling down glasses and looking over the rims with a flat gaze

Flapping a hand in dismissal

Bullying tactics

An exaggerated eye roll or upward glance

Blowing out a breath that rattles the lips

Insulting the target in front of others

A thrust-out chest

An ugly twist to the mouth

Encouraging others to speak up against the target

Limited verbal responses, as if the target isn't even worth talking to

Laughter at another's expense

A wrinkled nose

Flicking a hand in front of one's nose as if to get rid of a bad smell

A tight mouth, as if tasting something bad

Narrowed eyes

Staring the target down

Applauding in a deliberately false fashion

Projecting hurtful observations: *I'd be embarrassed if I were you!*

Anger at being touched or addressed by the target

Calling attention to another's weaknesses

Ignoring the target

Speaking slowly to emphasize hurtful words

Leaving to show that the target is not worth one's time or energy

Apologizing to others for having their time wasted by the target

**INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

A puffed-up feeling

Adrenaline rush at taking away another's power

**MENTAL RESPONSES:**

Elation at delivering a blow to an opponent through dialogue or action

Anger

A desire to put the person in their place

Superiority

Arrogance

**CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM SCORN:**

Asking questions to further incriminate the target

Egging the target on

Picking fights

Forcing the target into circumstances where he is sure to fail

Gathering other like-minded people and encouraging their scorn

Seeking to hurt through a "low blow" comment

**MAY ESCALATE TO: [ANGER](#), [HATRED](#), [ELATION](#)**

**CUES OF SUPPRESSED SCORN:**

A blank, emotionless face

Becoming unresponsive to questions or action

Turning away

Shaking the head

A slight muscle jump in the cheek

Tightened jaw

Clamping one's lips tight to keep from saying anything

Making an excuse to leave

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**WRITER'S TIP:** *When describing a character's emotional state, pay attention to their voice. Does it rise or drop in pitch? Get louder or softer? Grow rough or silky smooth? Changes in pitch and tone are great indicators for when a character is trying to hide their feelings from others.*

# SHAME

**DEFINITION:** the feeling that arises from a dishonorable or improper act; disgrace

## **PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

Cheeks that burn

Crumpling onto a chair or sofa

Pulling arms and legs in toward the core

Muttering *What have I done?* or *How could I let this happen?*

Using the hair to hide the face

Pulling a ball cap low

Pressing hands against one's cheeks

Dropping the chin to the chest

Wet eyes

A blank look

An inability to meet another's eyes

Crumpling under scrutiny

Shaking, trembling, shivering

Hunched shoulders

A perpetual slouch

Tears

A closed-off stance (crossing the arms, making oneself small, averting the head)

Pressing a palm over the lips to hold back a cry

Shaking the head

Letting out an uncontrolled moan

Punching fists against thighs to release frustration

Lashing out at others to transfer anger or blame

Arms hanging at the sides

Hitching breaths

A trembling chin

Shielding the body, angling away from those bearing witness to shame

Pulling and tugging at one's clothes as if they can make one less visible

Vandalism of one's own things

Loss of interest in one's personal appearance

Seeking out second chances (fawning, begging, following others) to regain self worth

Lying or doing whatever it takes to keep a shameful secret

**INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

Hypersensitivity to noise, crowds, activity  
Flu-like symptoms (nausea, sweats, tingling in chest)  
Weak knees  
Thickness in throat  
Heat and tingling in face  
Body tremors

**MENTAL RESPONSES:**

Flight reaction  
Pulling away from friends and loved ones  
Avoiding familiar places and activities  
Self-loathing, berating oneself, anger, disgust  
Risk-taking behaviors, hoping something will happen to balance the scale  
Denial  
An utter lack of self-confidence  
A desire to fade into the background and avoid notice

**CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM SHAME:**

Self-violence (scratching, cutting, pulling hair)  
Depression  
Substance abuse  
Eating disorders  
Increased sexual activity  
Panic attacks  
Anxiety disorders  
Perfectionist tendencies to balance the source of shame  
Seeking power as a means of self-validation  
Denial, diversion of blame to others  
Suicide  
Abusive relationships  
Attempting to change one's appearance  
The belief that one deserves pain  
Rejecting help out of a desire to do penance

**MAY ESCALATE TO: [DEPRESSION](#), [HUMILIATION](#), [REMORSE](#)**

**CUES OF SUPPRESSED SHAME:**

Shame is, by and large, private. People are always trying to suppress this emotion so all cues for shame are *naturally suppressed*.

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**WRITER'S TIP** *There are dozens of physical, internal, and mental responses to use when conveying a given emotion. Filter possible cues through what you know about your character. "Would my character react this way?" is a great question to ask to stay on the right track.*

# SKEPTICISM

**DEFINITION:** having a disposition of doubt or incredulity

## **PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

Pursing the lips in thought

Tilting the head and pausing

Shaking the head

Pressing the lips into a fine line

Raising the eyebrows

Clearing the throat

Fiddling with jewelry or other items

Shrugging

Nodding, but with a tight expression to show one is not fully committed

A confrontational stance

A smirk or eye roll

A hand flap that dismisses the person or their idea

Demanding proof or evidence to support

Listing the possible consequences

Polite verbal opposition

A condescending smile

Muttering negatives: *I don't think so* or *No way that would work*

Restlessness (pacing, tapping fingers, clock-watching)

A tightness in the face

Rigid body posture

Rubbing the back of the neck without making eye contact

Narrowed eyes

Biting or chewing on one's lip

Gossiping with others, running a person down for their choices or ideas

Sniping remarks

Licking one's lips

Hemming and hawing

Referencing similar events from the past that did not pan out

Bringing up everything that could go wrong

A purposeful shiver or shudder

Biting the fingernails

A heavy sigh

Walking away

Tapping a finger against the tabletop in an effort to drive a point home  
Asking *Are you sure?* or *What if?* questions  
A jutting chin  
A silent look  
Wrinkling the nose like there's a bad smell  
A quick exhale through the nose, a snort

#### **INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

Tightness in the chest  
Increased heartbeat and pulse  
Tense muscles  
A flare of adrenaline, firing the brain to act

#### **MENTAL RESPONSES:**

Negative thoughts  
Uncertainty  
Honing in on flaws, either of logic or of a physical nature  
A desire to change the speaker's mind or standpoint  
Wanting to be around people with the same opinions

#### **CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM SKEPTICISM:**

Anger  
Frustration  
Passive skepticism becoming more overt  
Looking for ways to discredit the speaker  
A desire to shut the speaker up  
The mind racing through possible arguments  
Disbelief, that others can't see the truth  
Actively seeking to bring people over to one's way of thinking  
Becoming argumentative

**MAY ESCALATE TO: [UNCERTAINTY](#), [SUSPICION](#), [RESIGNATION](#), [SCORN](#)**

#### **CUES OF SUPPRESSED SKEPTICISM:**

Attempting to keep a neutral facial expression  
Footsteps that drag  
A quick widening of the eyes before schooling one's expression  
Apologizing for not showing immediate support  
Sitting still, hands clasped, mimicking interest and attention

Acting noncommittal: *Interesting idea*, or *That's something to think about*  
Asking for a person to review the pros and cons again for clarity  
Suggesting a trial basis as a solution  
Requesting more time to reflect  
A suggestion that perhaps more thought or study is needed

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**WRITER'S TIP** *Don't make it easy for your heroes. Pile on the difficulties. Overwhelm them. Make it seemingly impossible for them to succeed so that when they do overcome, the reader will be properly impressed.*

# SMUGNESS

**DEFINITION:** supreme confidence in and satisfaction with oneself

**PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

A jutting chin

Crossed arms

A thrust-out chest

Deliberately raised eyebrows

Cocking or tilting the head

A smirk or sneer

Direct, probing eye contact

Squinting and a hard smile

A dismissive nod or glance

Rolling the eyes

Aggressive teasing intended to put another in their place

A sigh conveying annoyance (a huff)

Waving a hand in dismissal

Leaning in aggressively as if to challenge

Rocking back on heels

Mean-spirited talk behind another's back

Projecting the voice, reinforcing who has the upper hand

Sarcasm: *Whatever*, or *Sure you are*, or *If you say so!*

A look that radiates superiority

Perfect posture, shoulders back, exposed neck

A determined walk, strut, or swagger

A loud voice, bragging, full of bluster

Using boisterous movements to draw attention to oneself

A wide stance

Criticism and belittlement

Talking over people, controlling conversations

Looking down one's nose at others

Dominant behavior (invading another's personal space, standing while others sit)

Lavishing praise on favored ones (children, friends, people in power)

An arrogant laugh

Preening (fussing with clothing, checking oneself in the mirror)

Flashy or dramatic clothing

Tossing one's hair back, a shake of the head

Adopting a pondering pose (hand clasping the chin as if struck by deep thoughts)

Settling back in a chair with exaggerated casualness

Movements that draw attention (waving a cigar, gesturing with a glass of wine)

A deliberate crossing of the legs or clasping of the hands

Fidgeting with jewelry in order to draw attention to it

Clapping someone on the back, overplaying closeness or friendship

Name-dropping

Rubbing it in with an *I-told-you-so*

### **INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

Warmth radiating throughout the body

A puffed-up feeling

### **MENTAL RESPONSES:**

A firm belief in one's own rightness and superiority

Disdain for those who are unworthy

Over-confidence

A desire to belittle the unworthy and exalt one's own accomplishments

Gratitude at having risen above the rest

The belief that those who have not succeeded are to blame for their failure

### **CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM SMUGNESS:**

Extreme pride in appearance and possessions

Careful consideration of friendships, purchases, places where one is seen

Reminding someone of a past mistake to rub it in

Choosing to spend time in environments that are a reminder of success

Generosity that displays power (hosting charity functions, etc.)

Acting as if rules do not apply or one is above the law

**MAY ESCALATE TO:** [CONTEMPT](#), [SCORN](#)

### **CUES OF SUPPRESSED SMUGNESS:**

Making token acknowledgements to those who played a part in an outcome

Citing that luck was involved, but not meaning it

Preachy advice: *Do what I did and you'll succeed too.*

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**WRITER'S TIP:** *When describing a character's feelings, the word "felt" is often a cue for telling emotion, not showing. Run a search for this word and challenge yourself on its use.*

# SOMBERNESS

**DEFINITION:** having a dark or gloomy manner

**PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

An unmoving stance

A voice devoid of emotion, deadpan

A grave expression

A sad or serious demeanor

Hands folded in one's lap

Sitting quietly

Flaccid yet unwelcoming (closed) body language

A tendency to look down

A thoughtful expression

Hesitation before speaking, as if weighing words

Dark or heavy observations

A bleak mood that affects others, lessens energy, brings people down

An inward gaze or unfocused stare

Loose posture

Speaking at the air rather than make eye contact with others

Hands clasped loosely behind the back and gaze down

A slow walk

Features are smooth, expressionless

Keeping arms and legs in close to the body

Movements are functional and precise

Unsmiling, humorless

Words are chosen deliberately

Not reacting to stimuli (laughter, excitement, activities)

Drab, colorless clothing choices

A grim twist to the mouth

Sedate mannerisms, minimal or economical movement

Eyes that look dark or serious

An unnatural stillness

A pensive expression

Food and drink lacks taste or does not bring enjoyment

**INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

Fatigue, lacking energy

Heaviness in the limbs or muscles  
A weighed-down feeling  
Breathing is slow and even

**MENTAL RESPONSES:**

Subdued personality  
A negative outlook  
A desire to be alone  
Difficulty engaging in conversation  
Searching internally for answers rather than asking others

**CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM SOMBERNESS:**

Accepting a negative outcome or realization  
Uninterested in hobbies or entertainments  
Melancholy, gloomy  
Shunning other people who are not of like mind  
Inability to focus on the needs of others (children, family)  
Apathetic toward goals, desires or upcoming events

**MAY ESCALATE TO: [DEPRESSION](#), [RESIGNATION](#)**

**CUES OF SUPPRESSED SOMBERNESS:**

Forced laughter  
A too-frequent smile  
Smiles that quickly fade  
Agreeing to attend happy social events, then not showing  
Smiles that don't reach the eyes  
Light words delivered in a serious tone  
Adding an adornment (a pin, fancy hat, a bright scarf) solely for appearances

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**WRITER'S TIP:** *If your scene includes a small dip into the past to retrieve information that has direct bearing on the current action, make sure there is an emotional component. Emotions are triggers to memory and help tie the present to the past.*

# SURPRISE/SHOCK

**DEFINITION:** unexpectedly struck with a feeling of wonder, joy, or fear

*NOTE: can be negative or positive*

## **PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

The mouth falling open

A hand flying to the chest

Fingers touching parted lips

A gasp

An incredulous stare or dazed look

Jerking the head back

Slapping hands against the cheeks

A playful swat at a friend for causing the surprise

Shuffling back a step or two

A yelp, gasp or squeal

A sudden stiffening posture, rigid muscles

Stopping mid-stride or stumbling

Hugging friends close by

Giddiness

Widening or bulging eyes, a double take

Shaking the head, voicing denial

Stuttering, stammering

A rise in vocal pitch

Grabbing onto a friend's arm

Hiding the face

Squeezing the eyes shut

Gripping the sides of the head as if to cover the ears

Spreading the fingers out in a fan against the breastbone

Touching the throat

Turning away (negative surprise)

Pulling books or packages tightly against one's chest

Raising a hand to ward off others from approaching or speaking

A shaky, soft, halting, or disbelieving voice

Asking simple questions for clarification: *Who? When? Why?*

A tentative smile that builds as surprise sinks in

A bark of laughter

Breaths that catch or hitch  
Tipping or turning the head to the side

**INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

Tingling skin  
A heavy feeling in the stomach  
Racing heartbeat  
Breathlessness  
A sudden coldness that hits at the core (if surprise is negative)  
Disorientation, dizziness, or euphoria  
A fluttery feeling in the belly  
A flush of adrenaline tingling through the body

**MENTAL RESPONSES:**

Wanting to hide  
Fuzzy thoughts, an inability to think  
Embarrassment

**CUES OF ACUTE SURPRISE (SHOCK):**

Ducking, covering one's head with the arms  
Collapsing from a perceived fright  
Breathlessness  
Tears or shakiness  
Ducking the chin to hide the neck  
Jerkiness in the legs, leaping back  
Hands rushing toward the mouth to cover  
Gasping or letting out a sharp scream  
Clutching at one's chest on reflex  
Muscles tightening, head drawing back stiffly  
Flight reaction (running away, hiding)  
Fight reaction (shoving the initiator, delivering a punch to release anxiety)  
Arms drawing back to the body core in a protective flinch  
Stuttering or speechlessness  
Swearing or shouting

**MAY ESCALATE TO: AMAZEMENT, HAPPINESS, FEAR, ANGER,  
RELIEF, DISAPPOINTMENT**

**CUES OF SUPPRESSED SURPRISE:**

One's smile going stiff in an effort not to lose it (negative)

Rapid blinking

Widening eyes

Lifting the eyebrows

A closed-lipped smile

Nodding the head, as if one is not surprised at all

A quick tensing of the body

A split second where breathing is suspended

Tightening the grip on whatever is being held

Shaking out the hands in an effort to relax the body once the initial shock has passed

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**WRITER'S TIP:** *With emotion, never be afraid to try something new. Individual expressions should be genuine but unique.*

# SUSPICION

**DEFINITION:** suspecting, with little or no proof, that something is wrong

## **PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

Narrowing the eyes, squinting

Body angling away from suspect

A wrinkled brow

Flushed skin

A deliberate lowering of the head to study or stare

Arms tight to the body

Shooting glances at the suspect

Avoiding direct eye contact

A fake smile

Sneaking or spying

Eavesdropping

Following the suspected person

Keeping at a safe distance

Evaluating the subject's manner and appearance

Forced nonchalance to avoid the subject's notice (hands in pockets)

Crouching or leaning forward to get closer without being seen

Lips pressed flat

Recording the suspect's activity and movement (notes, pictures, etc.)

A set jaw

Head tilted while mentally weighing evidence

Being confrontational: *What are you doing here?* or *What do you want?*

Pointing a finger while confronting

Openly expressing distrust

Crossing the arms

Legs wide apart

A raised voice

Trying to convince others of the suspect's guilt

Big movements (waving arms while talking, counting out arguments on fingers)

Swaying from side to side

Arguing with the suspect

Pacing

Biting the inside of the lip

Sarcasm: *So you just happened to be near when my car's tires were slashed, huh?*

Questioning others as a way of gathering information

Googling the suspect

### **INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

Quickened breaths

Adrenaline rush

Thumping heartbeat

Fight-or-flight reflex kicking in

A knot in the belly

A sense of release when confronting the suspect

### **MENTAL RESPONSES:**

Intent listening, so as to catch the suspect in their lie

Mentally running through everything known about the situation

Wanting to shield oneself and others from the person

Second guessing, fearing others will think one's concerns are irrational

Carefully preparing an argument or plan of attack

Weighing the danger level of the situation

### **CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM SUSPICION:**

Obsession with the suspect

Stalking

Setting up the suspect in the hopes he will reveal his true self

Attempting to openly discredit or blackball the suspect

Contacting the appropriate authorities to express concern

Fantasizing about the day the suspect is finally exposed

**MAY ESCALATE TO: FEAR, AGITATION, ANGER, PARANOIA**

### **CUES OF SUPPRESSED SUSPICION:**

A slight head nod

*Hmms*, as opposed to overt agreement

A flat tone of voice

Noncommittal answers

Avoiding the suspected person

Agreeing too quickly, too loudly

Over-the-top support: *I'm with you 100%, I absolutely agree*

Nervous movements (biting nails, twisting a shirt button, rubbing the neck)  
Standing back from the suspect, not stepping into his circle of friends  
Spending minimum time with the suspect before finding a reason to leave

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**WRITER'S TIP:** *While it's tempting to let a character speak openly about their emotions in dialogue, it will raise a red flag for the reader. If you wouldn't say it in real life, don't let your character.*

# SYMPATHY

**DEFINITION: sensitivity to and sharing in another's emotions**

## **PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

Kind words, a soothing tone

Telling someone that they aren't alone, how things will work out

Rubbing someone's back

Squeezing a shoulder or hand

Lightly stroking a forearm

A sad smile

Offering a deep sigh and thoughtful expression

A parting hug lasting longer than normal

An understanding nod

Eyes narrowing, eyebrows pulling down in concentration

Crying with the person

Offering the bright side: *At least now we know, or It could have been worse*

Hugging, holding

Pulling someone against your shoulder

Stroking or smoothing someone's hair

Clumsy attempts to comfort (a weak smile, an awkward hug)

Fumbling for words

Patting a leg in comfort

Leaning in, scooting closer

A gentle tone, using words the other person wants to hear

Phrasing questions in a positive way to make the other person feel better

Sitting with knees touching the other person's

Bringing a box of tissue or a cup of tea, unasked

Floundering hand movements

Pulling someone into a side hug

Handling distractions (answering the phone) so the other person won't have to

Apologizing, not out of accountability, but to voice the unfairness of the situation

Offering the advice of a relative or well-known person: *As my uncle used to say...*

Fussing over the person's appearance while speaking in encouraging tones

Listening intently while ignoring discomforts (cold, rain, heat)

Making sacrifices to offer comfort (cancelling plans, being late for an appointment )

**\*SPECIAL: Sympathetic physical signals between males**

Saying *That sucks*, or *Yeah, I hear you*, or *I feel you, man*

A soft tap to the arm, a pat on the back

Lightly touching a shoulder

Listening, arms crossed over one's chest

Leaning in awkwardly with hands in the pockets, asking if things are okay

A heavy nod

Speaking in a quiet voice

A single shoulder shrug that breaks quickly

Listening while participating in another activity

Looking elsewhere while listening, so as not to make the other male uncomfortable

Offering to take him somewhere—a walk, a car ride, to hang out

Agreeing, even if he's being irrational

Letting him blow off steam or talk trash about others

Offering to avenge the offended party

Attempting to distract him (going to the movies, a party, drinking)

**INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

Feeling emotionally drained

An overall weighted feeling

A slower heartbeat

Ache in the throat

**MENTAL RESPONSES:**

A desire to be near or to make physical contact

Wishing one could alleviate the pain

Uncertainty about what to say

Listening without judgment

Worry that this event could happen to anyone, particularly to oneself or loved ones

Appreciation for the little things

The mind turning often to the person

Offering up prayers on their behalf

A narrowed focus, allowing for sole concentration on the other person

Relief

## **CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM SYMPATHY:**

Obsessive thoughts on how to fix the situation

Employing clichés: *This too will pass, keep your chin up, etc.*

Giving comfort through gifts, plying a person with food or attention

Involving oneself in the situation, internalizing the other person's pain

**MAY ESCALATE TO: [SADNESS](#), [ADORATION](#), [LOVE](#), [GRATITUDE](#), [NOSTALGIA](#), [WORRY](#)**

## **CUES OF SUPPRESSED SYMPATHY:**

A hand that lifts towards someone, then lowers

Speaking often of the person or situation

Privately praying for the person

Smiling or winking at the person but not offering verbal support

Watching at a distance, hoping for change

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**WRITER'S TIP:** *Emotions usually don't jump from mild to extreme in a short period of time. To gain the reader's trust, lay the proper foundation and show how stressors lead to a greater intensity.*

# TERROR

**DEFINITION:** a state of extreme fear

**PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

Rasping breaths

Bulging eyes, an inability to blink

Full body tremors

Bolting out of hiding, rushing away from the threat

Screaming, crying, blubbering

Speechlessness or incoherence

Holding oneself tightly (clutching the arms or wrapping arms around the belly)

Squeezing eyes shut

Moaning, whimpering

Trembling chin and lips

Running away with no destination in mind

Shaking one's head as if in denial

Clapping the hands over the ears

Pressing fists to the sides of the head

Crumpling, sinking to the ground

Retreating into the fetal position or curling up on the knees

Covering the face

Cringing, flinching, jumping at sounds

Tense muscles, rigid posture

A primal scream

Flaring nostrils

Grabbing onto another person, refusing to let go or leave them

Clumsiness (bumping into things, knocking things over)

Clutching the throat or chest

Gasping for air

Clammy skin

A harried, wild appearance

Clawing at the cheeks, dragging the fingers down

Tremors in the hands and fingers

Copious sweating

Risking lesser danger in order to escape

Causing self-harm and not noticing (cuts, bruises, etc., while trying to

escape)

Spinning around, trying to spot any and all danger

Backing away in quick, jerky steps from something or someone

Fight response (a rush attack, using anything at hand to hit or destroy)

### **INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

Hyperventilation

A racing pulse

Sound of heartbeat thrashing in the ears

A clenched jaw

High pain tolerance, not feeling or noticing injuries

Increased strength or stamina

Claustrophobia (even in one who is not usually claustrophobic)

Pain in the chest, lungs, or throat

Weak legs

Increased sensitivity to every sound, touch, or change in the environment

Dizziness, seeing black spots

### **MENTAL RESPONSES:**

A compulsion to look back (when fleeing)

Impaired decision making

A single-minded focus: to save oneself or someone else

Risk taking

Surrender if breaking point is reached

Hyper-vigilance

Thoughts that keep coming back to the worst possible outcome

Sensitivity to noise and movement

### **CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM TERROR:**

Passing out from a stress overload, lack of oxygen, or both

A mental break (humming, rocking, hands over ears or eyes)

Heart attack

Shutting down mentally, retreating inward

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

Insomnia

Hallucinations

Anxiety attacks

Weight loss

Nightmares

Depression

Substance abuse

Difficulties relating to others

Isolation

Phobias

**MAY ESCALATE TO: [PARANOIA](#), [RAGE](#)**

**CUES OF SUPPRESSED TERROR:**

Terror by nature is almost impossible to suppress or hide. Any attempt to hide terror would simply display itself as [FEAR](#)

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***WRITER'S TIP:**When conveying high emotion, keep the metaphors to a minimum. No matter how flowery or creative a character might be, in the midst of strong emotion, most people don't think in those terms. Keep it simple to maintain believability.*

# UNCERTAINTY

**DEFINITION:** the state of being unsure; unable to commit to a course of action

## **PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

Biting the lip or inside of the cheek

Frowning

Glancing at others to see what they think

Looking down

Asking others for advice or opinions

Hands that fidget (twisting together, rubbing down the front of one's pants)

A downcast expression

Forehead wrinkling

Squinting, looking inward

Pinching or tugging on the bottom lip

Tilting the head from side to side, weighing choices

Rubbing the jaw or back of the neck

Pushing the hair out of the face

An impatient huff

Shuffling feet

Hesitating mid-action (while reaching for something or pulling out a wallet)

Starting a sentence with the word, *Well...*

Pulling back slightly

A grimace and a slight shake of the head

Asking questions to elicit more information

Making a *Hmmm* noise or throat clearing

Swallowing

Cracking the knuckles, or other 'stalling' gestures

Doodling on paper

Swaying or rocking on one's feet

Rubbing the lips or chin

Biting the inside of the cheek or bottom lip

Sighing

Rolling the neck

Tapping a pencil against a notepad or table

Jotting notes as a way to delay answering  
Rounded shoulders, a slumped posture  
Staring at nothing for an overlong moment  
Talking through the options aloud  
Asking for reassurance

**INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

Breaths that catch in the chest  
Tenseness in one's stomach  
Increased thirst

**MENTAL RESPONSES:**

Feeling trapped  
Indecision  
Unease at one's options or choices  
The mind racing through possibilities  
Avoiding the person or issue  
A desperate need to find answers  
Feeling flustered by a less-than-ideal situation  
Making decisions, then second-guessing oneself  
Shutting down, refusing to make a decision

**CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM UNCERTAINTY:**

Self-doubt  
Uncertainty that bleeds into other decisions and situations  
Anger and frustration  
Dismissing the situation without making a decision  
Inability to make any decision on one's own  
Researching (searching the web, speaking with professionals) to find answers  
Going for a walk or leaving the situation in hopes of gaining a clear head  
Repeatedly postponing or rescheduling events  
An increased sense of desperation as time goes by and the situation is unresolved

**MAY ESCALATE TO:** [CONFUSION](#), [DENIAL](#), [FRUSTRATION](#), [UNEASE](#)

**CUES OF SUPPRESSED UNCERTAINTY:**

A delayed response  
A noncommittal answer: *Maybe* or *We'll see*

Changing the topic to avoid hurt feelings or an argument

Diversion rather than open support

A hesitant nod

Stalling for time (pouring a glass of water and drinking)

Refusing to answer, letting the silence do the talking

Opening one's mouth to argue, then stopping

Offering something noncommittal: *Let's put that in our back pocket for now, okay?*

Suggesting a vote of majority

Offering weak agreement or half-hearted support

Requesting more time to consider in order to delay

Passive-aggressiveness

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**WRITER'S TIP:** *Maintain an overall perspective of emotional range as the story progresses from scene to scene. A strong manuscript will always expose the reader to contrasting emotional experiences that fit within the context of the POV character's growth.*

# UNEASE

**DEFINITION:** a restlessness of the body or mind

**PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

Shaking one's head

Crossing and uncrossing the arms or legs

Shifting in one's chair

Twisting or pulling at clothing

Slipping hands into pockets

Sidelong glances while keeping the head still

*Tsking* or making a noise in the throat

Leaning away from the source

Drawing back, making oneself smaller

Stopping to listen intently

A quick glance at the source, then away (a person, a clock, a door)

Chewing on a fingernail, picking at cuticles

Drawing the mouth into a straight line and biting the lip

Excessive swallowing

A shaky voice

Tugging clothes more firmly into place, closing an open jacket

Flipping hair or combing fingers through it

Hiding behind one's bangs

Being unnaturally quiet

Throat clearing

Frowning

Pushing food around on a plate

Gulping food down in order to escape more quickly

Trying to evade notice (slumping in a chair, withdrawing from conversation)

Turning slowly, unwillingly

Clutching an item tightly or holding it as a shield

Reluctantly speaking or approaching someone

Stilted, halting dialogue

A tapping heel

Checking a cell for messages or to see the time

Fiddling with jewelry or props

A swinging foot that suddenly goes still

Scrunching oneself up in a chair or sofa  
Choosing a safe spot to wait  
Flicking through a magazine without reading it  
Lifting the chin in an attempt to look confident  
Consciously forcing one's limbs to relax  
Licking the lips  
Tightening the hands into fists, then loosening them  
Rigid posture  
Nervous habits (picking off nail polish, humming under the breath)  
Warm, sweaty hands  
Constant motion (applying lip gloss, texting people, rooting in purse)

### **INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

A slight chill or shiver  
Hair lifting on the back of the neck  
A prickling of the scalp  
A quiver in the stomach

### **MENTAL RESPONSES:**

The feeling of being watched  
Denial: *There's nothing wrong, or You're overreacting.*  
Heightened emotions, a feeling of being on edge  
Impatience  
Time feels like it's slowing down  
Heightened watchfulness

### **CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM UNEASE:**

Increased fidgeting, an inability to remain still  
Pacing  
An unshakeable sense of something being wrong  
A need to leave, but not understanding why  
Shifting from foot to foot  
Feeling physically ill  
Pretending to be unaware of a loud argument or uncomfortable situation  
**MAY ESCALATE TO: NERVOUSNESS, WORRY, FEAR**

### **CUES OF SUPPRESSED UNEASE:**

Trying to slow one's breathing  
Attempting to loosen up by rolling the shoulders

An unfocused gaze as one strives for mental calm  
Walking away to gain composure  
Wide eyes  
A quick, false smile  
Studiously not looking at the source  
Keeping at a distance  
Talking too fast

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**WRITER'S TIP:** *To create a stronger reader reaction to emotion, remember to focus on showing what triggers the feeling, rather than only showing the character's response to it.*

# WARINESS

**DEFINITION:** mistrust marked by caution and watchfulness; being alert to possible danger

## **PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

Head cocked to the side

Eyes narrowed, as if in confusion

Pursing the lips

Lowering the brows

Cutting the eyes toward the source

Hands up in a defensive stance

Speaking in a soothing, placating voice

Backing away

Posture “perks up” as awareness increases

Sidestepping, but keeping one’s gaze on the source

Actively listening for something

Lifting the chin

Keeping one’s hands free

Taking note of possible exits

Being aware of what lies behind

Asking questions to discern the root issue before things turn bad

Circling, approaching someone or something in a roundabout fashion

Slow, cautious movements

Speaking rapidly, with the intent of maintaining the status quo

Standing back and observing before jumping in

Stiffening and going still

A strained or tense voice

Flinching when touched

Hesitation

Lip biting or pressing the lips together

A probing gaze

Careful words

A furrowed brow

Rubbing at the forehead or temples

Gritting the teeth

A stern or serious expression

A jutting jaw

Alert to sudden movements

**INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

Increased adrenaline

Rapid heartbeat and pulse

Tense muscles

Breath that catches or stops briefly

An intuitive feeling that something isn't right (hairs standing up, prickling of skin)

**MENTAL RESPONSES:**

Mind tries to discern possible danger

Trusting one's gut feelings

Heightened senses

Defensiveness

Racing thoughts while trying to make sense of the situation

Confusion

Difficulty committing fully to any action

A finely-tuned sense of observation

Trying to see and hear everything at once

An inability to relax or smile

Thinking ahead to what might happen

**CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM WARINESS:**

Increasing one's personal space

Positioning oneself to create a barrier (moving behind a table, etc.)

Arguing without aggression, only to provide insight

Scanning for potential weapons

Asking questions one knows the answers to in an effort to discern another's intent

**MAY ESCALATE TO: [ANXIETY](#), [FEAR](#), [UNEASE](#), [SUSPICION](#)**

**CUES OF SUPPRESSED WARINESS:**

Standoffishness

Looking from lowered lids

Attempting to lighten the mood with a joke

A posture that suggests discomfort (standing by oneself, clamping the hands around the waist)

Leaning away

## Hesitation

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**WRITER'S TIP***When writing emotion, pull from your own past. Even if you haven't experienced what the POV character is going through, chances are you've felt the same emotion about something else. Draw on your personal experience and bring life to the story.*

# WORRY

**DEFINITION:** mental distress that arises from disturbing thought: usually regarding some anticipated event

## **PHYSICAL SIGNALS:**

Wrinkling the brow

Biting one's lip

Pinching the skin at the throat

Feet that bounce or tap

Pulling or twisting at one's hair

Pacing

Drinking too much coffee, smoking too much

Circles under the eyes

Eyebrows drawing together

Tossing and turning in bed, an inability to sleep

Asking too many questions

Stroking or rubbing an eyebrow

Rumpled, unwashed clothes

Rubbing one's hands on pant legs

Lank or unwashed hair

Poor communication with others

Repeatedly rubbing the face

A gaze that flits around the room, never settling on a person or object for long

Clinging to loved ones

Taking deep breaths in an effort to calm oneself

Pointless activity as a way to stay busy

Calling in sick

Stooped posture

Clutching at a sweater, purse, or necklace for comfort

Biting the nails, chewing on a knuckle

Running a jerky hand through the hair

Smoothing and re-smoothing clothing

Clasping one's hands together

A stiff neck, strained muscles

A pained or watery gaze

Throat clearing

Blinking less (as if worried one might miss something)  
Fidgeting, having a hard time sitting still  
Sitting, then standing, then sitting again

**INTERNAL SENSATIONS:**

A loss of appetite  
A sensitive stomach  
Heartburn or other digestive issues  
Dry mouth

**MENTAL RESPONSES:**

Uncertainty over choices made  
An unwillingness to leave a certain place (phone, house, car)  
An inability to focus  
A need to control  
Regret for a past action  
Distancing oneself from others  
Reading into things, over-analyzing  
Assuming the worst-case scenario  
Over-protectiveness  
Irritability

**CUES OF ACUTE OR LONG-TERM WORRY:**

Weight loss  
Premature gray  
New wrinkles  
Slipping grades at school, poor performance at work  
Ulcers  
Anxiety attacks  
Panic disorders  
High blood pressure  
Heart disease  
Increased sickness due to compromised immune system  
Insomnia and fatigue  
Hypochondria

**MAY ESCALATE TO:** [WARINESS](#), [FEAR](#), [ANXIETY](#), [PARANOIA](#), [DREAD](#)

**CUES OF SUPPRESSED WORRY:**

Furtively watching the clock or door

## Jumpiness

A strained or faked smile

Adopting new hobbies to distract oneself

Putting up a false front as if everything is okay

A shortened attention span

Difficulty focusing

Humming that feels forced, or fades quickly after it starts

Going about one's daily activities with the mind somewhere else

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**WRITER'S TIP:** *Weather details can add texture and meaning to a scene. Consider how a character's mood can shift because of the weather. It can also stand in the way of their goals, providing tension.*

# RECOMMENDED READING

*The Definitive Book of Body Language* (Allan & Barbara Pease)

*Characters, Emotion & Viewpoint* (Nancy Kress)

*Creating Character Emotion* (Ann Hood)

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Happy writing!

Angela & Becca

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