Creating Believable Characters

When creating characters, the effort you put in before you write can really pay off. Good writers know about their characters before they even put the first word on the paper. They agonize over them, befriend them, and understand them before the story happens. If your characters aren’t planned out ahead of time, you won’t know how they would genuinely react to the situations in your plot, and nothing is worse than a character who acts differently than YOU KNOW they would, who does things that they would NEVER do. It infuriates the reader to see characters acting in ways contradictory to their normal behavior.

Here are some things to consider in planning your characters:
What does your character look like?
What does your character say? Do they have a catch-phrase?
What does your character do? How do they walk? Nervous tics?
What does your character believe? What do they stand up for?
What do other characters think of my character? Act around my character?
What is my character’s background?
What motivates my character?
What conflicts does my character face—internally and externally?
What does my character do to make money?
What family does my character have? What friends?

Answering these questions, and questions similar to them, before you start writing the story can help you to shape the story in a more believable way. You should know your characters better than you know your best friend. These are the kinds of things that help you develop characters well. However, you do not have to put every detail you know about the characters in the story. No one else really cares that your character used to juggle unless it is relevant to that story. Be careful of the character detail dump where you tell everything there ever was to know about each character into a single paragraph of word vomit. Mix it up. Add it slowly. Add it with action. Example: Her short hair bristled as she jumped around the room. See, you already know my character has short hair, is a girl, and has jumped around a room. You can even develop characters through the dialogue of others. People talk about each other. Use that in your story, just not the boring stuff. Follow these tips, and you will have expert characterization.