LESSON 4: Internal GMC

As mentioned in the previous lesson, GMC has an external component and an internal one. The **external** one focuses on **tangible goals** and **physical obstacles**, while the **internal** GMC focuses on **emotional needs** and **mental obstacles**. They are both **tied together**, but it helps when planning to separate them out, so you can see the different pieces and how they relate to one another.

1. Internal Emotional Need (Goal) - This is what the main character *needs* emotionally in order to succeed and reach the external story goal. It is related the character's flaw or a "What's missing from my life?" element in the story.

2. Internal Motivation – This is the *why* behind the need. Think about where the need originated (the character's back story) and why it makes their life so hard because they don't have it.

3. Internal Conflict – This is what holds the character back from fulfilling that need and finding true happiness. What emotional wound or error in thinking must the character overcome by the end of the book to see the truth about themselves? What holds them back mentally from achieving their dreams in life?

More on the Error in Thinking

As you discovered in previous lessons and through the exercises, all main characters have a **wound** of some sort, also known as *an error in thinking*. Something the main character believes about themselves or the world around them that isn't necessarily true and causes them to feel dissatisfied or unfulfilled in some way. It's an emotional issue they need to work through over the course of the story.

This wound plays a big role in the internal GMC and is tied to the external GMC through the external motivation. Remember how I said when you first ask why a character wants the story goal the first answers you come up with is usually too simple? That's because there's something more going on under the surface that you need to tap into in order to truly understand what drives your character toward the story goal. This deeper piece is always emotional. Examining the internal GMC of your main character will help you pinpoint what it is.

Start by reviewing your exercises from Lessons 1 and 2, and **think about why the character in your story isn't completely happy**. Think about things this person is **afraid of**. What will happen if the story goal isn't met? Fear can be a very strong emotional motivator and is a good indicator of what is missing from the main character's life. Look at back story and events from the past.

Usually this wound is something the reader sees, but the main character doesn't, or if the character is aware of it, they don't realize the true extent of the problem and often blames other

things (or people) for why life is so hard. Some common errors in thinking are: "I'm unworthy." "I don't deserve this." "My father never loved me." "I'm responsible for her death."

This misconception often leads the character to make **bad choices** under the illusion they're doing the right thing. Think about **past mistakes** the character may have made. Regrets, guilt, things of that nature. They may play a role in the character's internal GMC.

An Example

Let's go back to our heroine whose external story goal was to build the B&B of her dreams. Her external motivation for this could be something like she needs a place to live after a fire wipes out her home, but really there's something deeper going on. She could just rebuild her home, right? So why the B&B of her dreams? And why is it so important to her?

That's where the emotional component on the internal GMC comes in. There's some need in her, deep down, that must see this goal succeed in order to feel fulfilled. Maybe her flaw is that she's never finished anything she's started, and something happened recently that reminded her **what a failure she is** (in her own mind—again, not necessarily true or how others see her, but how **she sees herself**—that "error in thinking" that messes with the character's mind).

So maybe this B&B project is her way of **proving she's not a failure**, that she can see something through to the end.

Let's then look at what might be the *why* behind this emotional goal to prove she's not a failure. Likely something happened in her back story that made her feel this way. Maybe something with her family. Journaling can help you uncover these answers, which is why we did those exercises in Lessons 1 and 2. Remember, those aren't the only questions to ask, but just a starting point. Every character is different. **If you need to know something else, ask your character and journal about it.**

The heroine's internal conflict to reaching this emotional goal could be herself (we are our own worst enemies, after all). Maybe **her own lack of belief in herself is a major obstacle**, or maybe there's also an external element (see how the external GMC and the internal GMC intertwine?). Maybe there's **someone in her life who keeps reminding her of past failures**, and this someone also poses an external obstacle to her story goal by interfering with her building plans.

For the **hero** in this scenario, we said his goal was to get the building project for his failing architecture company. When trying to figure out his internal GMC, let's look at why this project is so important to him. Externally, **his motivation probably revolves around money**. He needs to win the project to keep his company afloat. But again, there's **something more going on here**. **Something inside him** must see this goal through to completion or die trying (remember how we said that external story goal should feel like life or death to the character?). So some internal (emotional) motivation is at work here that **goes far deeper than money**.

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Maybe he also suffers from **sense of failure** like the heroine does. Maybe his famous architect father has always been a domineering presence in his life, and he feels a need to **prove something** to his father. Maybe **his error in thinking** revolves around the belief that **his father can't love him if he doesn't live up to certain expectations**.

So, his internal *goal* is to **prove he's worthy to his father**; his internal *motivation* stems from a sense of **failing to meet expectations** and a **desire for paternal approval**. The internal *conflict* could then, like the heroine, start with himself and **how he views himself**, and then extend to his emotional relationship with his family, particularly his father.

What about that fictional detective we mentioned earlier who is hunting the serial killer? Externally, the killer is throwing up a lot of obstacles that keep the detective from succeeding in catching him, but you also want to look at what's happening inside the detective. **He's an emotional (internal) obstacle to himself**. Maybe there's something in his past that's got a hold on him emotionally and it's causing him to screw up the investigation, to make mistakes. Maybe his **wound** revolves around feeling responsible for a particular victim's death (having feelings of inadequacy or uselessness), and he'll be forced to overcome that if he's to succeed in catching the killer.

Adding to the GMC Chart

As with the external GMC, it's a good idea to write down the elements of the internal GMC you've brainstormed for your main character. Not only does this give you **a visual to refer to as you're writing to story** to keep you on track, but it also allows you to spot **connections between the external and internal components of the GMC**—or a lack of connections, which could indicate there's a problem with one or both of the GMCs.

If you aren't seeing a connection when you fill out the chart, one or more of the elements might need tweaking. Maybe the story goal isn't important or urgent enough, or maybe the motivation behind it isn't strong enough. Or maybe you just need to do a little more digging to uncover the true nature of your main character's emotional issues. Whatever it is, **fixing it now will save you a lot of headache later** and help prevent your story from stalling once you start writing it.

Exercise

Fill out the Emotional/Internal GMC portion of the GMC chart you began in the previous exercise (see sample chart on next page), and **look for connections** between your main character's external GMC and the emotional need they have, and think of ways these elements can play a role in your story.

For further reading, check out this blog post about character wounds and how they make characters more interesting:

http://www.adventuresinyapublishing.com/2016/02/secrets-lies-mistakes-and-wounds-trick.html

And if you aren't already aware of this series of reference books, check out the ***Emotional Wound Thesaurus*** by Angela Ackerman and Becca Puglisi. Can be a big help in brainstorming your character's emotional issues.

https://www.amazon.com/Emotional-Wound-Thesaurus-Writers-Psychological-ebook/dp/B076KFRFNF/

Post your character's complete GMC (internal and external) to the loop if you'd like feedback on it.

Character Name:

STORY GOAL	EXTERNAL MOTIVATION	EXTERNAL CONFLICT
What is the character's overall story goal? (What do they want to achieve?)	Why do they want it? Why *now*?	What stands in the way?

EMOTIONAL GMC: What "baggage" does the character carry from the past that holds them back from a full life? (Mistaken beliefs, character wounds, past mistakes…)

INTERNAL NEED	INTERNAL MOTIVATION	INTERNAL CONFLICT
What's missing from the character's life (they may not be aware of this themselves)?	Why does the character need this to feel whole again?	What wound or error in thinking holds them back from filling that missing part of themselves AND from achieving the Story Goal?

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Ongoing Reading Assignment

In the book you've chosen to read during the workshop, review the chapters you've read so far and see if you can pinpoint the Internal GMC of the main character.

How does it intertwine with the external GMC you identified in the previous assignment?

What appears to be the main character's overall internal or emotional issue that needs addressing in the story?

Save your answers to the reading assignment for the last day.