



Habits, Motions, and Common Actions of Fictional Characters

Beth Hill

Head/Neck/Shoulders

brush hair, twirl hair, pull out hair

crack neck, crane neck

lean forward, lean back or away, lean sideways

lift or lower head or face or chin

lift shoulders, relax shoulders, roll shoulders

roll head, cock head, turn head, tilt head

rub neck

shrug

touch (drop) chin to chest

Face

adjust glasses, push up glasses, pull down glasses

blink eyes, cross eyes, bat eyes, roll eyes

blot makeup, blot sweat, wipe off sweat

blow nose, pick nose, wipe nose, hold nose

massage forehead, rub temples

pick at blemish

play with beard or mustache

pull (tug) on ear, pick at ear, clean out ear

raise eyebrow(s)

rub eyes, massage eyes

scratch nose or chin or head or ear

smooth eyebrows, pluck at eyebrows

wink

wipe away tears

Mouth

apply lipstick or ChapStick

bite lip, bite tongue

bite the end of a pen or pencil

blow bubbles (with gum, spit, water)

chew (pop) gum, chew tobacco

chew ice

choke

frown, grimace

gargle, gurgle

grind teeth; tense, tighten, or grip jaw

gulp, swallow

lick lips, smack lips, chew lips

pick at chapped lips

play with food

purse lips, squeeze lips together with fingers

put finger to lips (in thought or to *shush* someone)

sing

sip tea or coffee (other drinks), gulp down alcoholic drinks

smile

smoke, fiddle with cigarette

spit

spit out food, spit out water

stick tongue out

stuff mouth

suck on candy

tap teeth, pick teeth, bite nails

throw up (hurl, vomit, spew, upchuck, get sick, toss cookies, lose dinner, regurgitate)

touch tongue to lips

whistle, hum, make sounds with mouth

yawn

Hair

braid hair

chew hair

pull at curls, push hair behind ears, mess with barrettes or ribbons or hats

push hair off face (own face or the face of others)

Hands/Fingers

crack knuckles

cut nails, clean nails, paint nails, bite nails

hold someone's hand

massage thumb or finger, massage (rub) wrist or sore joints

pick at nails/cuticles

pick at scab, push at bruise

play with cups, dinnerware, napkins, salt and pepper shakers, anything on a dinner table

roll a coin or pencil between fingers

rub hands together

rub hands up and down arms, up and down legs

snap fingers

suck thumb or finger

tap or drum fingers on self or object
toss ball (or other object) hand to hand, juggle objects
trace scars or injuries
wag, shake, or point finger
wrap arms around own body
wring hands

General

bounce (kick) foot
check watch, check e-mail, check current devices
clean glasses (on cloth, under water, on clothes, with spit)
cross and uncross legs
dance (hop or bounce) from foot to foot
doodle
draw
fiddle with radio or music device
fiddle (play) with rings, bracelets, necklace, earrings; twirl them; take them off, put them on; play with jewelry clasps
freeze (cease moving)
hold and stroke pets
laugh, cry, smile, sniffle
shudder, tremble, quiver, twitch, shake, wiggle, wriggle through
sigh, hold breath
sneeze

squirm (in seat)

talk to self

take notes

tap on phone (or other communication devices)

tilt (tip) chair back

Beyond these kinds of motions, there are also simple body motions. Go for variety in these common movements as well. Yes, sometimes a character simply walks. But you don't want to find you have that character walking across a room 100 times. Rather than use *walk*, try *saunter*. Rather than simply say *turn*, try *pivot*. Rather than *look*, try *study*.

Be exact in your word choice, yet make sure the words sound natural in context. You want the reader to accept your word choice without wondering if you chose a word from a thesaurus.

A few examples to get you started with these everyday motions—

Cry: wail, blubber, howl, weep, sob, simper, snivel

Look: study, examine, scrutinize, see, watch, peer, peek, peruse, check out, stare, gaze, focus on

Run: race, lunge, move, gallop, dash, sprint, bolt, jog

Touch: stroke, finger, caress, trace, rub, tap, pat

Turn: rotate, whirl around, twirl, pivot, change (reverse) direction, back up

Walk: step, run, race, cross (a room), ease (over or into or across), move, saunter, stalk, stomp, stamp, pace

Source: <http://theeditorsblog.net/2014/07/02/habits-motions-and-common-actions-of-fictional-characters/>