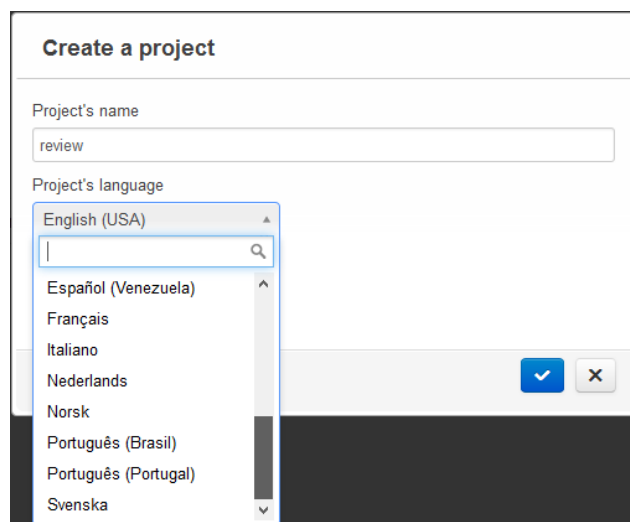


By J. A. Awadalla

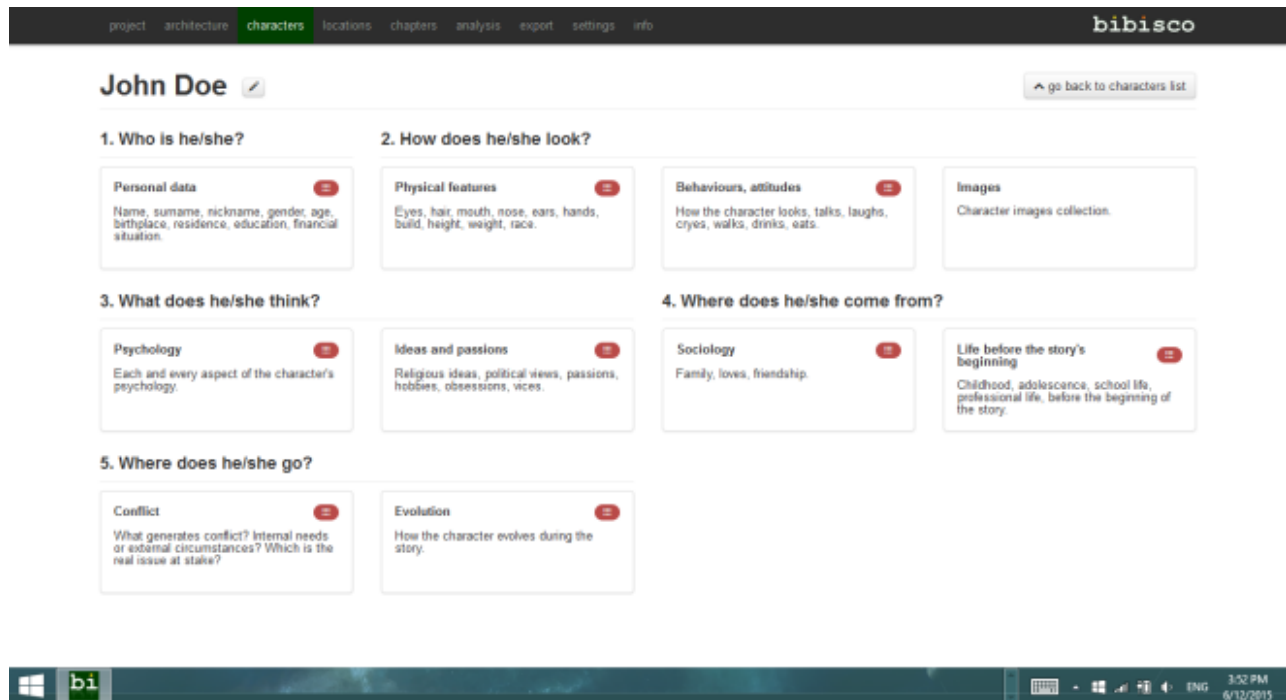
Please note: This review was based on the latest version of Bibisco as of June 2016.

I have a hard time with book-length projects. I constantly fuss over them, I get lost in the middle of them and they prove to be an overall pain most of the time. I have three that I have completed but never edited and I honestly loathe the thought. So, I set out to rectify the problem. I looked around for a writing software I found many years ago (I don't recall the name anymore) but it let you sort your work into scenes, chapters, and so forth, on top of creating listings of your characters and locations. Unfortunately, it wasn't as good as I remembered and I promptly uninstalled it. I wanted something a bit more visual since I get tend to get a little lost in seas of *just text*. After some searching, I found a very nice program similar to it called Bibisco and fell in love (after much difficulty getting the download to actually download, for some reason. Though I'm sure that was Firefox's fault).

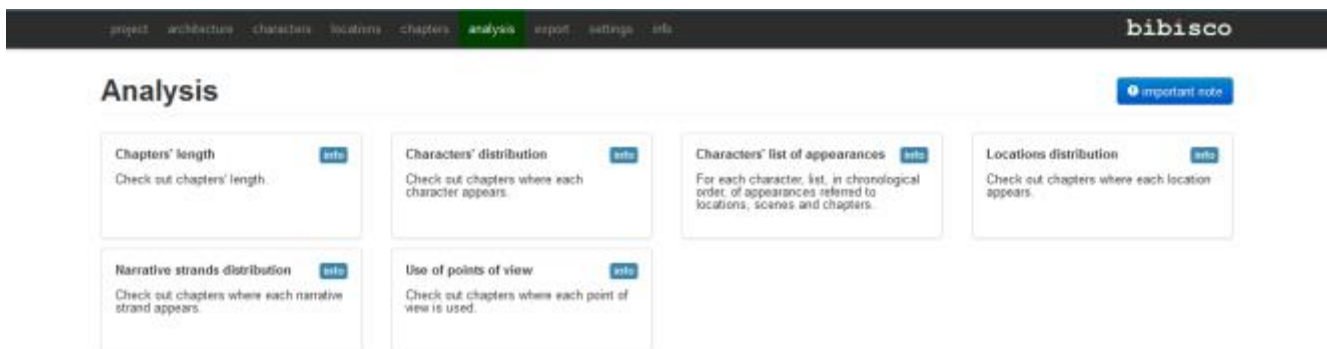


For lack of a better term, its presentation is very "polite." I know that's a strange word to use for a program, but that's all that comes to mind at the moment. When you first open Bibisco, you start out by naming your project and choosing from one of almost 20 languages it is available in. Then it takes you to some tips for starting off your novel including refreshers on character building, plot building and other finer points of writing. It kind of feels like you have a writing instructor sitting next to you as you get set up. You don't have to start writing

immediately, though, and can start out by completing descriptions of your characters, locations, and so on with the options at the top of the window. I like that Bibisco doesn't force you to start writing content first, especially since some writers like to start with the building blocks of their works rather than make things up as they go.



If you check out the “Architecture” section, it starts you off with a few writing exercises to help set your novel’s stage, i.e. summarizing it in one sentence and writing an outline of events. The “Characters” section is self-explained, but for major characters, Bibisco asks you a ton of (skippable) character-building questions like who they are, what they look like, what their personality is like and even if you have any pictures of your character. It’s quite sprawling and can be extremely useful, especially if you are starting from zero and have no idea what to write. “Locations” falls a little flat by comparison, giving you a simple blank box to fill in to describe it. I feel like that section could have used some detailed questions relating to imports, exports and overall economic conditions, if applicable. I also would have liked to see some optional world-building questions and maybe an option to choose if the story takes place in a realistic world or a fantasy world. I feel like the “Locations” section still needs a bit more work, but that’s the only section that feels inconsistent or flat in any way. Even then, the discrepancy is minor.



Once you get to “Chapters,” things get interesting. Bibisco poses one very interesting question after you title the chapter: *why* are you writing the chapter? What purpose does it serve in the overall story? There is an additional section to jot down any notes regarding the chapter, while the chapter itself is broken down into scenes. Where

Bibisco truly shines, however, is in its “Analysis” section. Bibisco tracks how often characters appear, how often you use a particular perspective—useful for if you like to change perspectives often—chapter length, *and where narrative strands appear*. This feature, this one feature, truly makes Bibisco a stand-out in my eyes and I just love it. This was the biggest problem I used to grapple with because half the time I would forget the subplot was going on in the first place! I love that Bibisco keeps track of subplots for you, as this helps to organize the story substantially better than you could just writing it out in Word alone. (Just remember to tag that a scene or chapter is part of a particular subplot.) If you need to export for any reason, you can export it as a PDF, RTF or a Bibisco database for use on another computer if your work is incomplete.

The best part is that Bibisco is completely free and open source. The person who created it, Andrea Feccomandi, runs completely off of donations and with Bibisco’s high quality, I would say they are well-deserved. Overall, I find Bibisco to be a simple and intuitive way to manage my larger writing projects and help get them off the ground. My only complaint would be that there is no mode or separate download for nonfiction work, but with a little imagination it could be used for nonfiction regardless. I would appreciate any nonfiction tips they may have had to help me along the way, but I understand that this is completely a volunteer project. I definitely recommend it, especially if you have difficulty managing the particulars of your story. It’s available for both Windows and Linux and works great on Windows 8 (just remember to pin it to your taskbar). If you want to give it a try for yourself, you can find it [here](#).

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