



The Essential Worldbuilding Blueprint and Workbook

Create a compelling world your readers will love.

Scribe Forge



The Essential Worldbuilding Blueprint and Workbook:

CREATE A COMPELLING
WORLD YOUR READERS
WILL LOVE.



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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Welcome to The Essential Worldbuilding Blueprint! This guide will help you design and organize your fictional world so that you can start writing your story.

Every project is different, and this guide covers topics for fantasy, paranormal romance, and space opera books. Not every topic covered will be relevant to your project. Feel free to skip anything that doesn't apply.

Part 1 provides information and guidelines about different areas of worldbuilding. It starts with the physical world and then covers society and culture.

Part 2 provides worksheets to help you build your fictional world. To make printing easier, all the worksheets are grouped together (in the physical version of the guide, worksheets are groups with their chapters). Use this section as your project bible that tracks the details of your world.

TIPS TO GET STARTED

To make your world believable, **set limitations** on it (this guide will help you create some). Rules and limits create problems, and facing problems is what stories are about!

Anchor your world in something familiar. It makes your world more believable and accessible for your readers. One way to do this is to use something from Earth as a basis that you change and build upon to create something new.

Remember to **consider both the good and the bad** of your world (this guide will help with that), since nothing is entirely positive or entirely negative.

Remember that **all parts of a world are interconnected**. For example, the form a civilization takes is related to its natural environment, and that civilization will change the environment around it. If you include magic or advanced technology, consider how it affects society, relationships, and daily life.

Finally, make sure the characters you create are **the products of your world**. Annalee Newitz provides a great example: “An agrarian culture won’t produce a computer whiz, since it will be devoted to farming rather than information technology. A technical whiz from an agrarian world might invent something like the cotton gin, however.”

Methods of Worldbuilding

These methods are not mutually exclusive, and you can combine them.

Start with a character: Once you have a character, create the society they come from, keeping in mind that all people—real and fictional—are products of their society and culture. You can also start with a fictional being (alien or paranormal) and then create the world that produced them.

Tip:

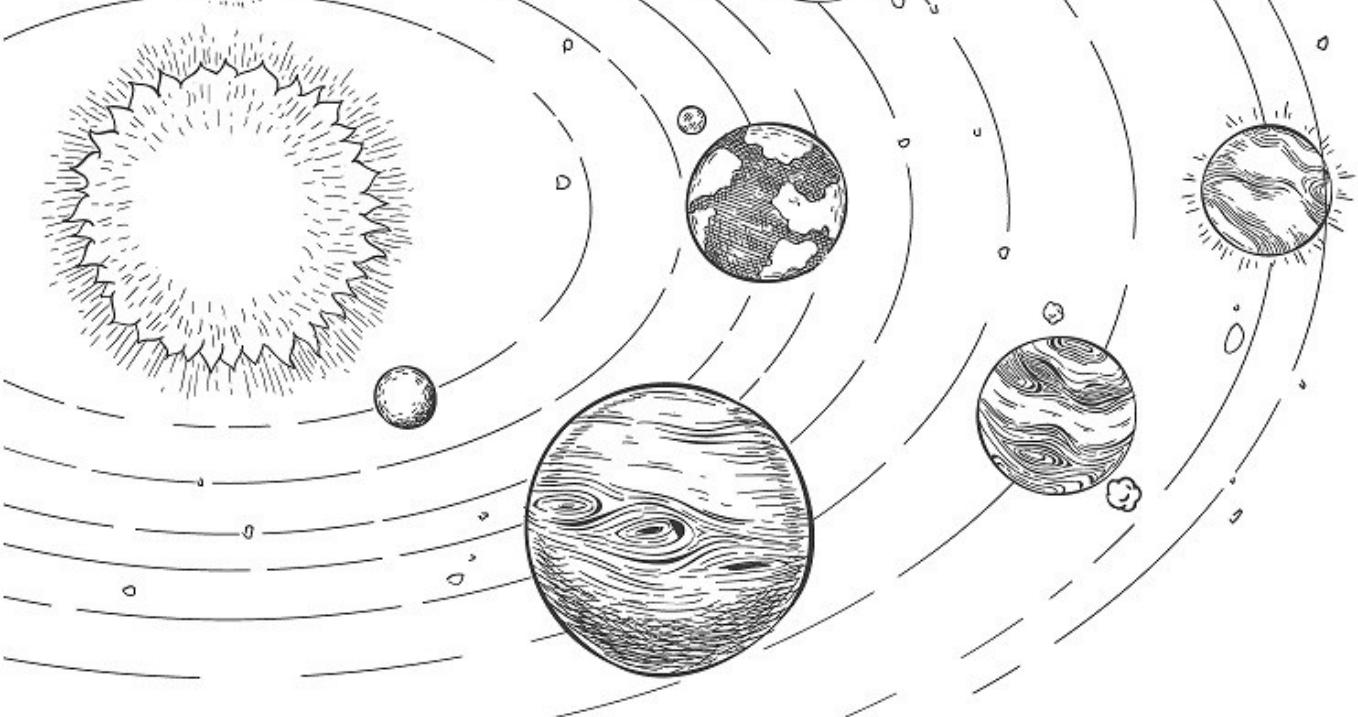
Keep a worldbuilding bible—a collection of every worldbuilding decision you make—so you can ensure consistency. See Appendix B for tools that will help you organize your notes.

Start with an idea: For example, a society run by women. Then, design your world around that concept.

Top-down: Start with the big picture, including the planet, its geography and climate, technology level, and social structure. Worlds created this way tend to be consistent, but they require a lot of planning before you start writing the story.

Bottom-up: Design just the elements of the world you need to start writing the story. Add more details as you need them. This method means less up-front work, but the world may have more inconsistencies that you have to deal with later.

PART 1: INFO AND TIPS FOR WORLDBUILDING



STARS AND PLANETS

This chapter discusses the very basis of your world: its planet and the star(s) it orbits. If your project is science-fiction, this is essential. If your story takes place on Earth, you can skip this chapter.

If your story takes place in a fantasy world, this info might be helpful, depending on how much your world differs from Earth.

Stars

The star your world orbits has wide-ranging effects. Different types of stars radiate different amounts and wavelengths of light, which affect:

- The habitable zone (the distance from the star at which liquid water and life as we know it can survive on the surface of a planet)
- The planet's temperature
- Sky color
- Vegetation
- How that life will see (ex. In ultraviolet light, visible light like humans, etc.)

The star's wavelength also determines the color of the star. The type of star and the distance at which the planet orbits determine how much solar radiation the planet receives. This affects the temperature of the planet and the type of life that will evolve.

Unlike our sun, many stars come in groups of two or three. Stars in a binary or triple star system orbit their shared center of gravity while planets orbit one of

Worlds

In Mary Doria Russell's novel *The Sparrow*, the planet Rakhat orbits Alpha Centauri A. Because Alpha Centauri A is part of a binary star system, Rakhat has two "days."

One day occurs when Alpha Centauri A, a yellow star like our sun, is in the sky. The second day occurs when Alpha Centauri B rises. It is a smaller orange star. When it is the sky, Rakhat experiences a day that is like twilight here on Earth.

the stars. On a planet that orbits a star in a binary or triple system, the seasons, climate, and days will be more complicated than on a planet in a single star system.

The table below provides an overview of the different star types.

Star Type	Description	Habitability
O	Super-hot stars that are blue in color and emit intense ultraviolet light. They shine with over a million times the brightness of our sun.	Type O stars are short-lived and unlikely to evolve life. It may not be possible for planets to form around a Type O star. If one did, it would have to orbit far from the star for any atmosphere, water, or life to exist without being burned away. Even then, the planet would be bombarded with intense amounts of UV radiation.
B	Though they are cooler than O stars, Type B stars are still super-hot and emit intense ultraviolet light. They are blue in color. O and B stars tend to be found together in regions of star formation.	Like Type O stars, B stars are too young and short-lived for complex life to evolve. Any planet harboring life would have to orbit very far away from the star to avoid being killed by the high-heat and UV rays.

Star Type	Description	Habitability
A	Type A stars range from a third to twice as hot as our sun. They are white or bluish-white in color.	If our sun were a Type A star, the habitable zone would be in the orbits of Mars and the asteroid belt. Planets around a Type A will receive more UV radiation than we do from our sun.
F	Type F stars are slightly hotter than our sun. They are yellow-white in color.	Earth-like life could evolve on a planet that orbits farther away from the sun than Earth does or that has a very strong magnetic field that protects the world from radiation.
G	Our sun is a Type G star. They are white to yellow in color.	G stars are good candidates for life because they are stable and long-lived.

Star Type	Description	Habitability
K	<p>Type K stars are cooler than our sun. They are orange in color. They include red giants, red supergiants, and orange dwarfs.</p>	<p>The orange dwarfs are long lived, stable, and common, making them good places for life to evolve.</p> <p>Red giants and supergiants are stars near the end of their life. When our sun becomes a red giant, it will expand to Earth's orbit. Because they are old stars, life is likely to have evolved, but the expanding star may kill it off. Life on planets farther away from the star may survive its expansion.</p>
M	<p>Type M stars are small, cool, and dim stars that shine red. M stars include red giants, red supergiants, and the more common red dwarfs.</p>	<p>M stars are long-lived, which gives life a lot of time to evolve. To receive enough heat for life to exist, a planet has to orbit close to a M star, so is likely to be tidally locked (see page 13)</p>

Star Type	Description	Habitability
D	<p>The D stands for degenerate dwarf. Also known as white dwarfs, Type D stars are very hot and shine blue or white in color. Despite their high heat, their luminosities are low—less than 1% of our sun's. They are extremely dense.</p>	<p>White dwarfs are the cores of dead stars that no longer generate energy through nuclear fusion. They slowly cool and fade as they radiate their remaining energy.</p> <p>They are not likely to harbor life, but they might have before dying. Any planets that do orbit one will receive high amounts of heat but little light.</p>
Neutron Stars	<p>Neutron stars are created by the collapse of a star's iron core in a supernova. They have incredibly high density and gravity. They release pulsars from their poles.</p>	<p>Neutron stars are unlikely to have life, but you can take that as a challenge. What would it be like to live on a planet lit only by pulsars?</p>

Planets and Moons

The first step in designing a planet is to choose the type. The table below outlines the main types of planets and their habitability. It also includes the habitability of moons.

Type	Description	Habitability
Gas Giant	Except for a small rocky core, gas giants are comprised of dense atmosphere. Their atmospheres are mostly hydrogen and helium. Gas giants form and orbit farther away from their star than terrestrial planets do.	Earth-like life could not evolve or survive in the dense and violent atmospheres of gas giants. So, design some creative alien species instead (chapter 4 will help with that!).
Ice Giant	Ice giants are similar to gas giants, but their atmospheres are comprised of elements heavier than hydrogen and helium. Uranus and Neptune are examples.	No life that we know of could live on an ice giant, but you don't have to write about earth-like life.

Type	Description	Habitability
Terrestrial	Terrestrial planets are rocky worlds, such as Earth, Mars, and Venus. They tend to form close to their parent star and within the ice line. Beyond the ice line, planets don't receive enough solar heat to have liquid water on their surface.	Terrestrials are more likely to support life than the other planet types. Not all terrestrials can support life, however. For example, Venus is extremely hot and has an atmosphere that is toxic to humanoids (though you could create a life form that thrives in it).
Moons	Moons orbit planets instead of stars. They are usually rocky, with some moons being made of rock and ice. Some moons are geologically active, or were in the past.	Some of the moons of gas giants and ice giants may support life. Tidal forces from the gas or ice giant heat a moon and prevent it from freezing solid even when they receive little solar radiation. These moons are ideal places for life to evolve from a star.

Things to Consider When Designing a Planet

Distance from star: The distance a planet orbits its parent star determines how much solar heat and radiation it receives. For bright, hot stars, the habitable zone is farther away than for cool, dim stars.

In a binary or triple star system, the planet will orbit one of the stars. However, it may have seasonal variations in solar heat as the companion star(s) move closer or farther away.

The distance from the star also determines how long it takes the planet to orbit its star. Planets close to their star have shorter orbits, and thus shorter years, than those farther away.

Planets that orbit close to their stars will become tidally locked—their rotations gradually slow, their days and nights becoming longer, until one side always faces its star. The side facing the star experiences continuous day and becomes blisteringly hot. The side facing away from the sun never sees sunlight and becomes freezing cold. The extreme difference in temperature between the dayside and the nightside causes violent weather patterns and storms.

Tidally locked planets also have a border zone between the day and night sides. Here, it is always twilight and temperatures are more moderate.

Rotation and day length: Massive planets have faster rotations, and thus shorter days, than smaller planets.

In binary or triple star systems, planets might have more than one day when different stars rise. However, in some multiple star systems, the stars are very far apart, so the companion stars might appear as very bright stars in the sky rather than as a second or third sun.

Things like day length also affect society and culture. For example, think of how things might be different if humans colonized a world with 60 hours of sunlight a day.

Density and gravity: The amount of surface gravity on a planet is determined by the planet's mass and density. On a high-gravity world, life is more likely to be compact and low to the ground, while on a light-gravity world, life can be tall and spindly.

Axial tilt, seasons, and climate zones: The Earth's axis is tilted by 23.5 degrees, which creates seasons. The hemisphere tilted closer to the sun experiences summer while the hemisphere tilted away from the sun experiences winter. A greater tilt would create stronger seasons, while a lesser tilt would create weaker seasons. With no axial tilt, a planet has no seasons.

The tilt of the axis also defines equatorial, temperate, and polar climate zones. On Earth, equatorial climate zones fall within 23.5 degrees north and south of the equator. Temperate zones in the northern hemisphere extend from the Tropic of Cancer (23.5 degrees north) to the Arctic Circle (66.5 degrees north, almost 23.5 degrees north of the Tropic of Cancer).

Worlds

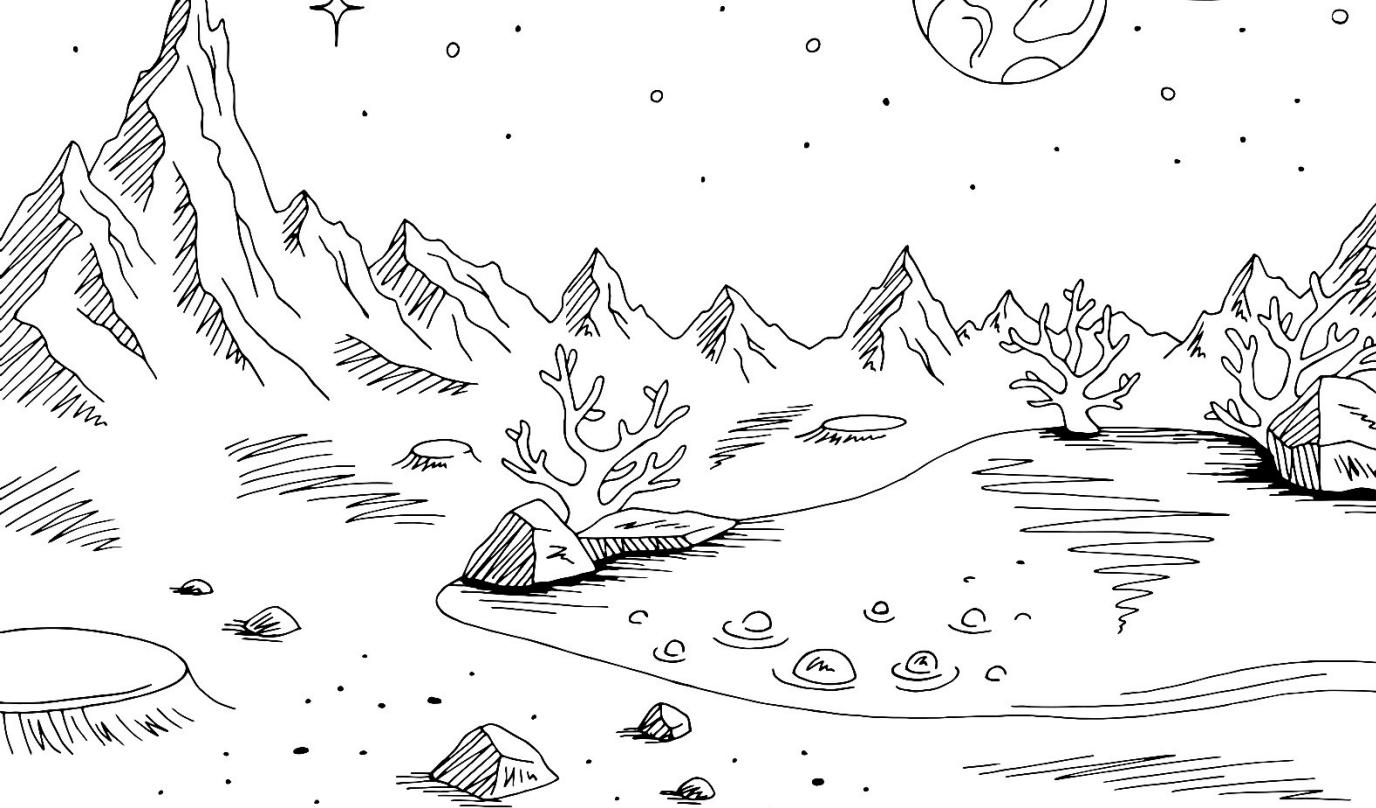
Uranus has an axial tilt of 97 degrees. This causes extreme seasons. The hemisphere experiencing winter doesn't see the sun for 21 Earth years, while the hemisphere experiencing summer receives constant sunlight for 21 years.

Seasons and climate zones affect the kind of life that evolves and civilization that develops.

Moons: A planet's moon causes tidal forces and can help stabilize a planet with an axial tilt.

Moons are also culturally important; think of the significance the moon has in mythology, science, and time-keeping here on Earth.

For worldbuilding, the moons—or lack of moons—in the sky is a good detail for establishing that the story isn't set on Earth.



LOCATIONS: GEOGRAPHY, CLIMATE. ECOLOGY

This chapter discusses designing a world's geography and climate. If your story takes place in an existing environment (ex. urban fantasy), you can skip this chapter.

In designing a location, consider geography and climate. One affects the other. For example, areas on the lee sides of mountain ranges are dry. Coastal areas are wetter and warmer than areas farther inland. Rivers join to form larger ones and originate from higher ground, usually mountains, to travel towards the sea.

Axial tilt, geography, winds, and currents also determine climate. For

example, Britain would be freezing if not for ocean currents that bring warm waters to its shores. If you decide on an axial tilt when designing your planet, keep in mind the climate zones determined by the tilt. See page 14 for details.

Tip:

“When you describe your fantasy world, it’s important to describe it from the perspective of the characters who inhabit it. You should pay attention to their lived experience of being in that place.”

- Malinda Lo

Consider the effect of human, alien, or paranormal activities on geography and climate. For example, the deserts in Iraq were once fertile farmlands. Over-farming turned the area to desert.

When determining your world’s geography, it’s a good idea to draw a map (though not everyone does, so you can get by without one).

Ecology

If your characters are travelling through a forest to research its animals, then you need to know a lot about your world's ecology. If your story takes place in a built environment that is largely cut off from the natural world, you don't need to know as much. Keep in mind, however, that even artificially created environments have ecology too, such as bugs and rats that hitch a ride on your spaceship.

An important thing to remember about your world's ecology is that all life on a planet exists in an interconnected web and evolved from a common ancestor (unless aliens have colonized the planet or someone created life artificially through magic or science). Because they share a common ancestor, the life forms on a world will have commonalities. For example, land animals and birds on Earth have four limbs (four legs, two legs and two wings, or two legs and two arms).

It's also important to remember that everything evolves to survive

Tip:

“If you put massive predators in an environment, you must be sure the environment can support enough other animals to feed them (which also means plants and water). And please, vary the life forms. Insects, birds, fish, fowl, mammal, reptile, amphibian: keep them all in mind. Even if they aren't key to your plot, having them around helps add richness to your world.”

-C.L. Wilson

in its environmental niche. Unless a sudden environmental change has left a species ill-adapted to its new environment, each species will have traits that help it survive in its surroundings.



FICTIONAL BEINGS: ANIMALS, ALIENS, & PARANORMALS

In this section, you'll learn about creating a new life form, whether it's an animal, a magical creature like a werewolf, or an alien.

The amount of detail you need about a fictional being depends on their role in your story. For a creature who only appears briefly, their environment, appearance, and basic behavior are enough information.

If you're designing paranormal beings or aliens who will be the main characters in your story, then you need to know a lot about them to make them believable. You'll need to understand their psychology and society as well as their physical form. Consider how their environment and physical characteristics affect their psychology and personality.

Here are the things you should consider when creating a fictional being.

Environment

Beings evolve to survive in their environment (unless they are genetically engineered or artificially created through magic or science).

When figuring out a being's physical form and instinctive behaviors, it's more important to consider the environment they evolved in than the one they currently live in. These aren't always the same. For example, humans didn't evolve in cities, nor did dogs evolve on tropical islands even though they live there now.

If the fictional being lives in a different environment than they evolved in, consider how that affects their behavior.

Size

The size of a life form is related to the planet's gravity and atmospheric density. A denser atmosphere means a higher density of chemicals needed for survival (ex. oxygen), which allows for more efficient metabolism and bigger animals.

A general rule for size is that land animals are larger than flying animals, and water animals are larger than land animals because they don't have to support their own weight.

If you are writing magical creatures, you can break these physical rules if magic provides an explanation for their size.

Respiration

In nature, a variety of methods are used for breathing. Insects have a simple network of tubes. Some fish and amphibians breathe through their skin.

Both gills and lungs can vary in number and complexity, but keep in mind that they require a circulatory system and some form of blood. Also consider how often the being must breathe. For example, whales surface for air every 15 minutes but can hold their breaths for up to an hour. In some stories, vampires don't need to breathe at all.

Food and Eating

What does the fictional being eat? How do they find and catch food? They will need the necessary equipment to match, such as teeth, beaks, claws, venom, wings, etc. Consider how they consume food. For example, snakes swallow their prey whole while vampires might suck blood from wounds.

Movement

A being's movements determine their body shape and limbs, as well as how they interact with the environment and obtain food. Their main methods of movement should be suited to their environment—unless magic is involved.

Worlds

Manta's Gift by Timothy Zahn features the Qanska. This highly intelligent species resembles giant manta-rays. They live in Jupiter's atmosphere where they “swim” through the atmosphere's dense gases.

For example, a species skilled at climbing trees would evolve in a forested area and have limbs capable of gripping onto bark and branches. A magical being, such as a ghost, might float or teleport instead.

Shape

The being's shape should be suited to their movements and environment. For example, swimming animals have streamlined bodies. Think about how your character manipulates their environment to determine the shape of their body and limbs.

Body Type

Consider if the being is warm-blooded, cold-blooded, or something else entirely. This also depends on environment.

Warm-blooded animals eat more often because they are more active. They also need a way to conserve body heat, such as fur or fat.

Cold-blooded animals need an external source of heat. Because they eat less often, they are good at surviving in harsh conditions.

Does your alien or paranormal being have fur, feathers, skin, scales, shells, spikes, wings, or fins? Determine their markings and colors. Are they transparent like a ghost? Pale like a vampire? Blue like an alien?

Structural Support

The two main structural supports are exoskeletons (skeletons outside the body) and endoskeletons (skeletons inside the body). Some animals, such as the octopus, do not have skeletons at all. What does your fictional being have? A magic creature, such as a ghost, might not have any structural support at all.

Growth

Does your being grow gradually as humans do? Do they experience metamorphosis as caterpillars or werewolves do? Do they age quickly or slowly?

Consider their life span and life stages, such as childhood and old age. Think about the changes they go through as they mature and age.

Reproduction

Worlds

The Oankali of Octavia E. Butler's *Xenogenesis* trilogy have three sexes: male, female, and ooloi. All three are needed for reproduction.

Oankali children are born sexless. To become adults, they go through a metamorphosis and develop into a male, female, or ooloi.

Does your fictional being reproduce asexually or sexually? Perhaps they reproduce magically, such as a werewolf bite creating a new werewolf.

If they don't reproduce sexually, how do they reproduce?

If they do reproduce sexually, how many sexes are there? It can be more than two. Consider if they are a placental mammal, a marsupial, or an egg-layer. Do they use internal fertilization (like earthly mammals) or external fertilization (like fish)?

Decide if the fictional being has mating seasons and mating rituals. In humans, rituals are

decided by culture, and this is likely true of highly intelligent aliens and paranormal beings as well. Some less intelligent animals have complex mating rituals, however. Think of the mating dances of birds of paradise.

Does the fictional being have any traits that exist only for sexual selection? These are traits that are not helpful for survival, but that increase an individual's likelihood of reproducing. For example, a male peacock's bright feathers attract predators, but the female peahens prefer males with big, bright feathers.

Decide how many offspring individuals typically have. Who cares for the young, and how much care do they provide?

Senses

Sight: Consider the wavelengths of light the being can see (this will depend on the star their world orbits as well). Think about their night and color vision, the distance they can see, and the resolution of their sight. You can also get creative. For example, you can give your fictional being eyes that have telescopic zoom.

Hearing: Consider the range of frequencies they can hear. How strong is their sense of hearing? Are they capable of echolocation or sonar?

Taste: How sensitive is their sense of taste? What information can they gain from taste? For example, they could determine the chemical composition of something by tasting it.

Smell: How sensitive is their sense of smell and what information can they gain from it? For example, vampires might be able to tell blood type from scent alone.

Touch: Do they experience touch through skin, antennae, whiskers, or something else? How important is touch to the fictional being?

Other senses: There are other kinds of senses you can include as well, such as telepathy, magnetic field sense, and an electrical field sense.

Location: Decide on the location of the fictional being's brain, sense organs, and nervous system.

Communication

How do the fictional beings communicate? Do they use speech, chemical signals, color changes, telepathy, body language, or something else entirely?

Social Group

Decide if the fictional being lives alone or in groups. If they live alone, how do they find mates? If they live in groups, consider the size of the group, its composition, and hierarchy.

Personality and Psychology

For beings who are not central to the story, you only need a common set of traits for the entire species.

If the fictional being is going to be a main character, remember that individuals will have different personalities. However, some traits might be common to the entire species. For example, humans differ widely in personality and culture, but some emotions (anger, guilt, shame, love) are common to most humans. Dog breeds vary widely, but they share some common behaviors like the urge to chase and to sniff everything.

Remember that a being's psychology and behaviors will arise, at least in part, from their physical form and environment. If they have culture, that will also affect traits and behavior. Think of how politeness varies across human societies, for example.

Other Behaviors

Other behaviors to consider include:

- Sleep
- Hibernation
- Shelter
- Migration
- Range and population density



MAGIC

Time to design your own system of magic.

Soft Magic and Hard Magic (as defined by Brandon Sanderson)

Soft magic is mysterious and has no clearly defined rules. It creates the greatest sense of wonder because the characters and reader don't understand how it works or why it does what it does.

In general, soft magic should not be used to solve problems, because it will seem like a deus ex machina. However, soft magic is perfect for creating problems for your characters. An example of soft magic is in The Lord of the Rings where the inner workings of magical characters like Gandalf and Sauron remain unknown to the reader.

Hard magic has explicit rules that are shown to the reader. Because it's clear how it works, magic becomes a tool that can be used to solve problems.

Many stories fall in a middle ground where the reader understands some of the magic but not all of it's working. Harry Potter is an example of this.

Brandon Sanderson's four laws of magic for a compelling story

Rule 1: “An author's ability to solve conflict with magic is DIRECTLY PROPORTIONAL to how well the reader understands said magic.”

If characters solve a problem with magic, the reader must understand how that magic works beforehand (in other words, it's a hard magic system). Otherwise, the magic will feel like a deus ex machina. This means you need to establish clear rules about your magic (the worksheets will help with this).

Rule 2: “Limitations > Power.”

What a magic system can’t do is more interesting than what it can. Limitations create conflict and force your characters to struggle for their goals. It also creates tension, because it’s not obvious that characters will win a battle or achieve a goal.

Limitations can be as simple as a character unable to do magic while tired or more complex, such as needing to be happy to perform magic.

Furthermore, magic must have consequences for the user. For example, in the Wheel of Time series the users of the magic slowly go insane.

Rule 3: “Expand on what you have already, before you add something new.”

Sanderson writes, “A brilliant magic system for a book is less often one with a thousand different powers and abilities – and is more often a magic system with relatively few powers that the author has considered in depth.”

One thing to consider is the effect of magic on society. For example, if magic can create food, how will that change trade and politics?

Another way to expand on what you have is to make the magic powers of a character seem like a coherent whole—that is, tie the powers together under a theme such as healing, necromancy, etc.

Rule 4: “Err on the side of AWESOME.”

Ultimately, magic should be kick-ass and fun.

Sources of Magic

The following table provides common sources of magic. You can use any of these or try to think of new sources of magic.

Source	Description
Elemental	Using earth, wind, fire, air, or any other elements to perform magic.
Demon	Summoning and controlling demons using a summoning spell or by knowing their names.
Witchcraft	Performing magic by using spells, potions, and wands. Study can improve the magic-user's abilities.
Psy	Magic through telepathy, telekinesis, and precognition. Sometimes psy powers are inherited or awakened after a traumatic event.
Weather	Ability to control weather, wind, storms, and so on.
Beast	Communication with or control of animals. This form of magic may include a totem animal, shapeshifting, or warging (entering the body of an animal).
Rock and Crystal	Using crystals or rocks to perform magic.
Metallurgical	Using metal objects such as swords, shields, etc. that have magical properties.

Source	Description
Astrological	Magic based on the alignment of planets, stars, etc.
Blood	Using blood to perform magic.
Necromancy	Magic tied to ghosts, spirits, and the dead. May involve raising the dead, communicating with them, or controlling spirits.
Creature	Using a piece of a magical creature, such as dragon scales or a unicorn's horn, to perform magic.
Divine	Magic given to a person by a god or goddess.
Time	The ability to manipulate and control time, including time travel.
Healing	Using magic for medical purposes.
Mana	Magic derived from an energy source that can be used up, but recharged. Common in video games.



URBAN FANTASY AND PARANORMAL ROMANCE

The chapters on magic, fictional beings, social structure, values, and religion are also crucial to writers of urban fantasy and paranormal romance. But these two genres have a few unique worldbuilding needs that we'll cover here.

Urban fantasy and paranormal romance take place in a version of the real world where creatures of legend and myth, such as vampires, are real.

This creates an extra layer of worldbuilding around what is known about the paranormal beings and what remains hidden.

Consider if your paranormals are “out” to the human world or if they stay hidden. If they’re out, how does this change the world? How do humans react to them? For example, in the Kitty Norville books, some humans see paranormal beings as inherently evil. Consider how governments would react as well.

Think about how society views relationships between humans and your paranormal beings. Are they banned or accepted? Are relationships with some paranormals accepted while others aren’t? What do the paranormal beings think about humans?

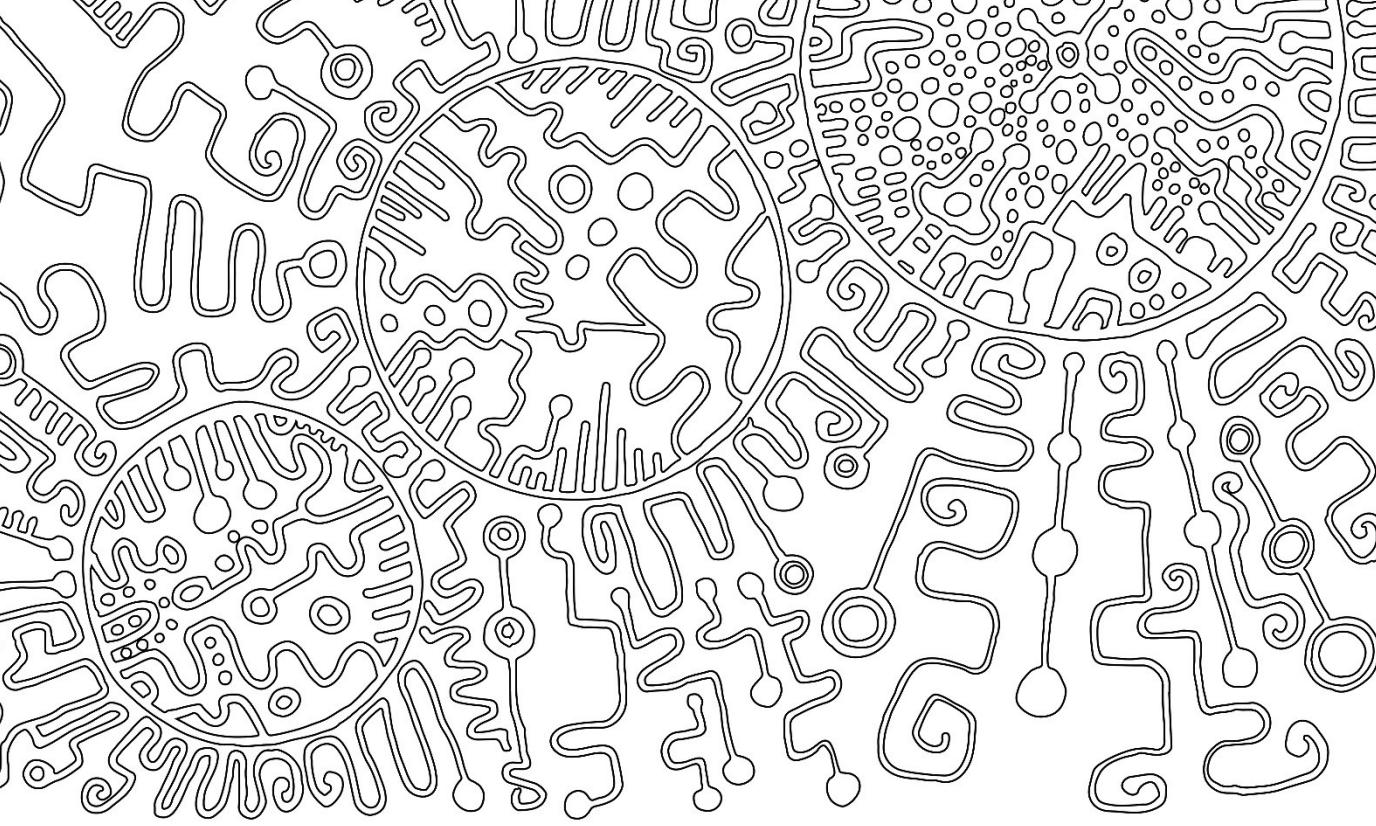
If the paranormal beings are hidden, how do they remain undetected? Does their presence affect the world in significant ways that humans remain ignorant of?

How do paranormal beings fit into the wider world? Do they get jobs? What kind of job does a vampire or an angel get? How do they change the world just by existing and living their lives?

Other things to consider are which paranormal or supernatural beings exist in your world (the Fictional Beings worksheet can help if you’re creating a new type), and if they’ve always been there or if something recently created them.

If your paranormals use magic, you’ll need to build a magic system for them. See the chapter and worksheet on magic for help with that.

Paranormal beings will also have their own societies and cultures, particularly if they remain cut off from the human world. See the chapters on social structure and values for help with these aspects.



SCIENCE

If your world features highly advanced technology that you want to seem plausible, you'll need some science to back it up.

In *Aliens and Alien Societies*, Schmidt argues that science and technology are not the same, though they are related. This workbook takes the same approach and covers technology in the next section.

According to Schmidt, science is a way of examining and understanding the world. It may not develop in a society at all, though technology always will.

Science makes the development of technology easier and quicker, however. Therefore, a society with advanced technology will probably have science to match.

When considering science in your fictional world, remember that the different sciences may develop at different rates in the same society. The soft sciences may be advanced and the hard sciences relatively simple, or vice versa.

Unless your story centers on scientists, you won't need to know everything about science in your world. A general idea of how advanced, or not, science is in your world is enough.

Fictional Science Based on Real Theories

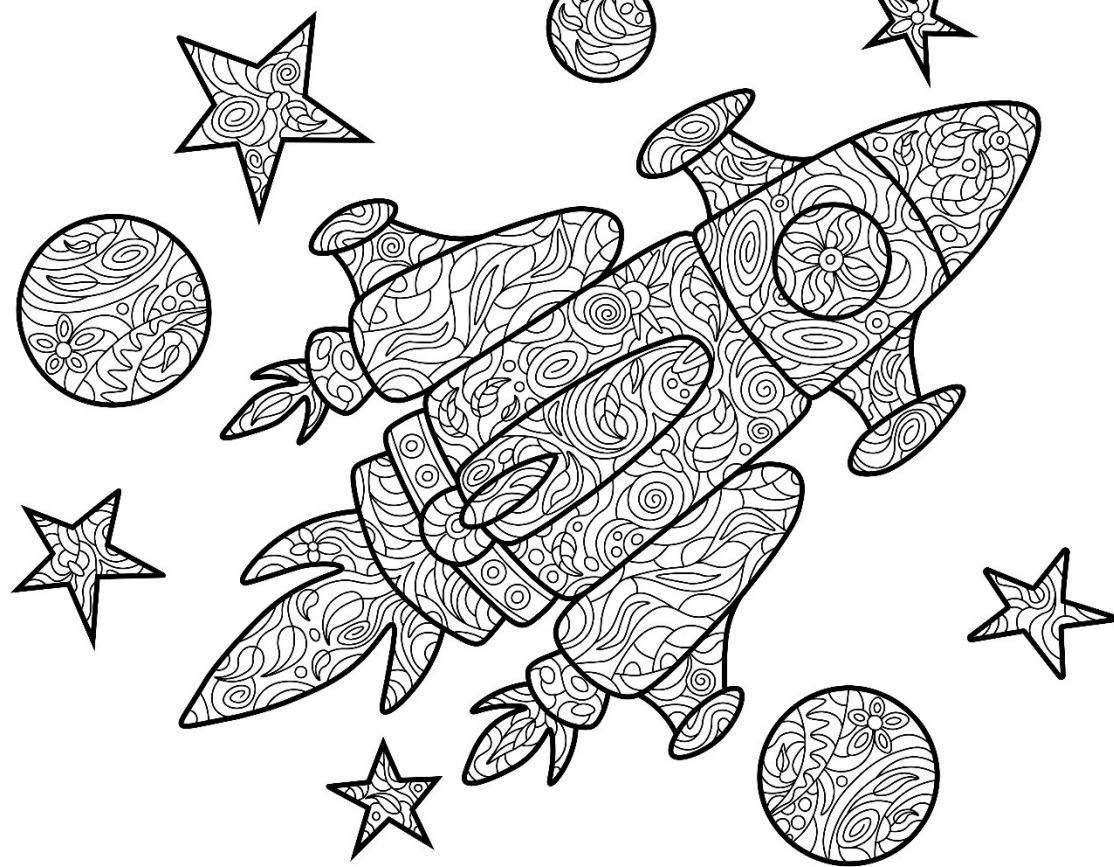
To make advanced technology seem plausible, you need real-world science to explain it.

To make this science convincing, it should not contradict anything we currently know about the natural world.

If it does, and you don't have a plausible way to explain it, you're getting into the realm of magic. This is perfectly fine—and often accepted in soft sci-fi—just be aware that's what you're doing.

Worlds

According to special relativity, nothing can travel faster than light. Authors, however, exploit loopholes in the theory to make faster-than-light travel possible. One loophole is hyperspace, where the intrepid crew takes a short-cut through an alternate dimension. It's been used in *Star Wars*, *Dune*, and *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, to name a few.



TECHNOLOGY

From swords to spaceships to nanobots, let's design some fun gadgets.

Even if you write fantasy, take some time to design the technology in your world. Any tool is considered technology, after all.

The importance of technology in a science fiction world is obvious. But even in a fantasy or paranormal romance world full of magic, technology is crucial. For example, farming with a plough, battling with swords, and building castles are all forms of technology.

The level of technology affects all aspects of society. For example, technology determines how people travel. Has your society developed the wheel? Does it have good roads to enable quick travel? Or perhaps it uses flying cars or teleportation instead.

Technology also determines how people communicate. Has your fictional society developed the printing press for mass distribution of books? Are pens and paper easily and cheaply produced? If not, only the rich will be able to send letters. Or does everyone own a device capable of instant communication anywhere in the galaxy?

Technology and warfare is another big issue to think about. The development of technology often goes hand-in-hand with war. Furthermore, the more advanced a society's technology, the more advanced and deadly their weapons (unless they've moved beyond war).

Tip:

“Remember, the level of technology needs to be commensurate with the other aspects of your culture.

Hunter-gatherers, for instance, would probably not have internal combustion engines. Medieval knights would not have light sabers.”

-C.L. Wilson

Tip:

“Any technology or [magic] power you introduce is going to have far-reaching effects...Going with the invisibility example, you'd have people using it to spy on each other — but you'd also have a huge boom in heat sensors. We'd start redefining the whole concept of privacy... and it might be legal to shoot an invisible intruder on sight (on smell?).”

- Charlie Jane Anders

Remember that magic and technology often exist side-by-side. If your world has magic, consider what tasks are usually accomplished with magic and what tasks are usually accomplished with technology. How do the two interact to help or hinder each other?

When designing your world's technology, think about how it affects daily life (the worksheets will help you do this).



SOCIAL STRUCTURES

Next up, let's talk about social structures and the hierarchy of your civilization.

Society is based on conflict and cooperation—how a group of people ensures cooperation within the group, how it ensures cooperation with other groups, and how it handles conflict.

When constructing a civilization, researching ethology (animal behavior) might help. Civilizations are built, at least in part, on the behavior of the being's evolutionary ancestors. For example, a society of people who evolved from herbivores that lived in large herds will be very different from a human or werewolf society.

When designing your society, keep in mind the planet, geography, climate, magic, science, and technology you created earlier. They will all affect the form and structure of your society and vice versa.

Remember that all parts of a society are interconnected with each other, as well as with the other areas of worldbuilding covered in this guide.

Worlds

The Dispossessed by Ursula K. Le Guin features three contrasting societies: Anarres's social structure is based on social anarchism, A-Io is a capitalist economy, and Thu is an authoritarian communist system.

The rest of this chapter discusses the different types of social structures and provides examples.

Love and Relationships

Personal connection is the basis of all social groups. Consider the kinds of relationships that are valued in your fictional society (ex. is friendship important or is the focus on family?).

How do people form relationships, both romantic and platonic? Do they find each other on their own? Do they have fated mates? Do they practice arranged marriages? Consider how many romantic partners is considered acceptable or common, as well.

Family

Reproduction and child-rearing will shape a society. For example, in a society with a polygyny family structure, many men won't marry and have families (at least not in the traditional sense). What other roles does society offer them?

Related to family structure are gender roles—the behavior that society expects of individuals based on their sex. Gender roles apply within the family and the wider society.

The table below provides examples of family structures.

Family Structure	Description
Patriarchy	Men are considered the authority within the family and society.
Matriarchy	Women are considered the authority within the family and society.
Alloparenting	Children are cared for by people other than their biological parents, either exclusively or in addition to care provided by biological parents.
Fictive Kin/ Found Family	People who are not biologically related but are considered family.

Family Structure	Description
Extended Family (Matrilocal, Patrilocal)	Multiple generations of a family living in the same household. For example, a married couple and their children living with siblings and parents. In a matrilocal system, a married couple lives with the wife's family. In a patrilocal system, they live with the husband's family.
Polygamy (Polygyny, Polyandry)	A person has multiple spouses. Polygyny refers to having multiple wives, while polyandry refers to having multiple husbands.
Group Marriage	A group of adults who are married to each other. A group can include multiple men and women.
Walking Marriage	Sexual partners do not live in the same household. Children are raised by their mother and her family.

Social Stratification

Social stratification creates a hierarchy that establishes a person's position in society, the resources and opportunities they have access to (such as education, money, food, and health care), and their lifestyle.

Class, usually defined by socio-economic class, is the most widely known form of social stratification.

The table below provides examples of social stratification.

Social Stratification	Description
Socio-economic Class	A person's place in society is based on the amount of wealth they earn or inherit.
Slavery	A system where some people are considered property. They are bought, sold, and forced to work.
Feudalism	Social hierarchy is based on land holdings. The king owns all the land and grants "holdings" to nobles and knights in exchange for military service. Nobles and knights grant holdings to farmers (also known as serfs) in exchange for labor. The serfs are at the bottom of the social hierarchy.
Caste System	Social hierarchy based on inherited membership in a caste (group). It is a fixed system, meaning that people cannot move between castes. The caste defines a person's occupation and lifestyle. Caste systems include ideas of purity and pollution where people of some castes are considered "impure" in relation to people of higher castes.

Social Stratification	Description
Classless Society	An egalitarian society that has no social hierarchy. Social harmony is valued above wealth, power, and status.

Government and Politics

The type of government has a huge effect on a society and daily life. Even a small government with few laws will impact daily life, as there will be little law enforcement and a lack of investment in public services and infrastructure.

When creating your fictional society's government, keep in mind that the form of government grows out of a society's history.

The table below provides examples of government types.

Type of Government	Description
Council of Elders	Age is equated with wisdom, so a council of elderly people govern the group. This type of government is more common in tribes than large societies.
Leadership by Right of Combat	A person becomes group leader by defeating the current leader in combat.
Theocracy	The group is ruled by a religious leader who claims to have a direct connection with one or more deities.

Type of Government	Description
Absolute Monarchy	A monarch has absolute power that is not limited by a constitution or by laws.
Constitutional Monarchy	A monarch's power is limited by a constitution. Constitutional monarchies often have elected parliaments and the monarch's role is ceremonial.
Social Anarchism (Anarcho-socialism)	The means of production are owned by all members of the society, and all organizations are subject to democratic control. This system emphasizes cooperation.
Military Dictatorship	Power rests exclusively with the military. Like all dictatorships, it is an authoritarian form of government where political dissent is repressed.
Oligarchy	Power rests with a small group of people, distinguished by royalty, wealth, military control, or corporate control.
Technocracy	Power rests with the technical elite, such as scientists and engineers. Leaders are chosen based on skill in their field.
Direct Democracy	All citizens debate and vote on legislation. This is a slow process and it works best in smaller groups.

Type of Government	Description
Democratic Republic	Citizens elect representatives, who develop and vote on legislation on behalf of the people.

Economy

How people obtain what they need is important in daily life and in structuring a society. Economy includes currency, trade, farming, manufacturing, division of labor, and black markets. In creating an economy for your world, consider who controls the money and flow of goods.

The table below provides examples of economic systems.

Type of Economy	Description
Subsistence Economy	A community produces only what they need to survive.
Imperialist/Colonialism	A system designed to funnel resources from the colonies to the center of imperial power. It usually leads to the exploitation of people in the colonies in order to extract greater profit from their labor.
Free Market Capitalism	The government does not regulate business or the economy. The economy is driven by supply and demand. Few laws exist to protect workers from exploitation.

Type of Economy	Description
Communism	All property is owned communally. Because everyone shares everything, there are no rich or poor. In practice, communism is difficult to maintain, and it usually descends into an oppressive system.
Socialism	The government regulates business and the economy. Sometimes the government controls entire sectors of the economy with the profits going to government coffers.
Corporatism	Private corporations control governments that they help put in power, or they completely supplant the government. They take over services the government used to provide, such as education.

Legal System

The legal system is related to a society's government and economy. For example, a military dictatorship will have a very different legal system than a direct democracy. The legal system in a corporatist economy will have stronger punishments for theft than the legal system in a socialist economy.

Societies have different ways of enforcing laws and of determining guilt or innocence. This section provides examples of both.

The table below provides examples of legal enforcers.

Type of Enforcer	Description
Watch	People volunteer to stand watch over the community and look out for trouble.
Secret Police	An organization with the full backing and resources of the government, but that acts covertly and outside of the law.
Vigilante	An individual or a group who carries out law enforcement or punishment without legal authority. Vigilantism arises when people think the official legal system is inadequate.
Bounty Hunters	People hired to pursue criminals and bring them in for trial.
Police	An organization with the backing and resources of the government. Unlike secret police, it is supposed to act within the law to protect citizens.

The table below provides examples of trials.

Type of Trial	Description
Trial by Jury	A jury of the defendant's peers hears evidence and decides if the defendant is innocent or guilty.

Type of Trial	Description
Trial by Combat	The defendant and their accuser engage in single combat. If the defendant wins, they are declared innocent. If the defendant loses, they are declared guilty.
Trial by Ordeal	<p>The defendant is subjected to a painful ordeal, such as walking through fire. If they survive, they are declared innocent.</p> <p>In some cases, such as the witch hunts in Medieval Europe, if the defendant survived, they were found guilty.</p>
Bench Trial	The trial is held before a judge who decides on the defendant's guilt or innocence.
Secret Trial	Trials held in secret without the public knowing about them. Oppressive regimes often use secret trials to eliminate political opponents.
Show Trial	A highly public trial where the authorities have already determined the guilt of the defendant. Show trials are held for propaganda purposes.

When designing your social structures, consider how elements such as magic and technology affect them. For example, a police force armed with nanobots will operate very differently than one armed with pikes. A bench trial with telepathic judges is different from a bench trial with priests as judges.



VALUES AND ETHICS

This section discusses creating a culture for your fictional society by focusing on values and ethics—the driving forces behind people's behavior.

In the previous chapter, you designed your world's society—the way people organize themselves in groups. In this chapter, you'll design the society's culture—the customs, values, and beliefs of a group.

The same culture can exist within different societies, and a society can have more than one culture within it. Think of multicultural societies where people from many backgrounds live together with the same class system, government, legal system, and economy.

To complicate things, a society also has its own dominant, or mainstream, culture and minority subcultures.

Worlds

In Jacqueline Carey's *Kushiel's Legacy* series, the core value of the D'Angelines is "Love as thou wilt." Not every group within the society follows this value perfectly, however. The warrior-priests are sworn to a lifetime of celibacy, and the nobility is often expected to marry for political gain rather than for love.

Culture is a complex thing. To make creating one easier, this section focuses on values and ethics as the defining elements of a cultural group.

Core Values

Every culture has one or two things that it values more than anything else. In feudal Japan, it was honor. In Medieval Europe, it was piety. In the United States, it's wealth and personal freedom.

In deciding the core value of your constructed culture, it's important to remember that every culture and society has its contradictions and conflicts.

For example, in Medieval Europe, piety was highly valued, but corruption was rampant among the clergy and Church.

Furthermore, subgroups within a culture will interpret and express the core values differently. For example, American liberals interpret freedom as the government staying out of personal decisions but regulating business and the economy. Conservatives interpret freedom as few government regulations on business and the economy, but more laws surrounding social matters like marriage and reproductive health care.

Decide on the core value of your constructed culture—what most members of the group will agree is of central importance. But remember that no group is monolithic. Not everyone of the same culture thinks the same. There are always contradictions and different interpretations of the core value. The worksheets will help you sort this out!

Keep in mind that the core value of a culture is related to social structure. A theocracy will derive its core value from its religion; a capitalist society is likely to value wealth.

Ethics

A culture's ethics outlines what it considers appropriate behavior. It addresses the big issues, such as right and wrong, and the small issues, such as taboos and polite behavior.

A group's ethics will be reflected in its laws, but ethics also include the unwritten rules and moral codes that people are expected to follow. For example, most people consider cheating on a spouse unethical, but it's not illegal in most Earth cultures.

Tip:

When creating your fictional culture's ethics, "keep in mind your social structure. In a society dominated by the warrior there will always be a tendency toward a 'might makes right' morality. Worker societies are more likely to be dominated by a strong work ethic."

- Michael James
Liljenberg

Remember that no culture is monolithic. Some people will interpret the culture's ethics differently, and some will outright disagree with them.

Think about how people react to those who violate the group's ethics in small ways (for example, talking about sex in polite company) and in big ways (for example, abusing a child). The worksheets will help you figure all this out.



RELIGION. MYTHOLOGY, AND PHILOSOPHY

Now, it's time to get mystical.

Religion, mythology, and philosophy are lumped together because they define a group or individual's overarching worldview.

How People Make Sense of the World

Every group has a collection of ideas and stories that they accept as true and that they use to make sense of the world. Sometimes it's

derived from religion or mythology, and sometimes it is derived from philosophy. In many cases, it includes a bit of all three.

Worlds

Bokononism is a fictional religion from Kurt Vonnegut's novel *Cat's Cradle*.

Bokononism states that all its teachings are lies (or forma—"harmless untruths"). By believing in the religion's forma, you can achieve happiness and peace of mind.

Remember that many societies have more than one religion, mythology, and philosophy that people believe in, even if it's just a small minority.

In choosing a religion, mythology, or philosophy for your fictional society, think about how the society's structure and values will affect their belief system and vice versa.

The table on the next page provides examples of types of religions.

Type	Description
Monism	There is a cosmic force that everything is one with. It is not a god. The Force in <i>Star Wars</i> is one example.
Pantheism	There is a god, and everything is part of god.
Animism	Everything in the world (even inanimate objects) has a spirit. There is no hierarchy of gods or spirits.
Polytheism	Belief in many gods and goddesses, each representing an aspect of the world that they oversee and control.
Dualism	The belief that there are two opposing forces of light and darkness that are locked in a struggle with each other.
Monotheism	Belief in one god.

The following table provides a few examples of non-religious philosophies.

Type	Description
Atheism	The belief that no deities exist. Some religions, such as Buddhism, are atheist in that they do not believe in any deities.
Agnosticism	The existence or nonexistence of deities is unknown. An agnostic neither believes nor disbelieves in any god.
Naturalism	Nothing exists beyond the physical world.
Secular Humanism	The belief that people can be ethical and moral without religion. Ideologies should be examined rather than accepted on faith.
Epicureanism	The greatest good is pleasure, which is gained through simple living and knowledge.

The table below outlines the three main types of mythology.

Type	Description
Aetiological (or etiological) myths	<p>These myths explain the reason why something is the way it is. The reasons given are not the true, scientific reasons.</p> <p>For example, explaining thunder as Thor pounding his hammer.</p>
Historical myths	<p>These are stories about a historical event and are similar to legends. They sacrifice accuracy for meaning or to provide a lesson.</p> <p>For example, The Iliad about the Trojan War. While the war probably occurred, the famous characters are likely myths.</p>
Psychological myths	<p>These myths explain human emotion and behavior. An emotion or action is explained as divine intervention, such as attributing sexual feelings to Aphrodite.</p>



HISTORY

It's time to become a historian. This chapter discusses creating a history for your world.

History makes your world feel more realistic and lived in.

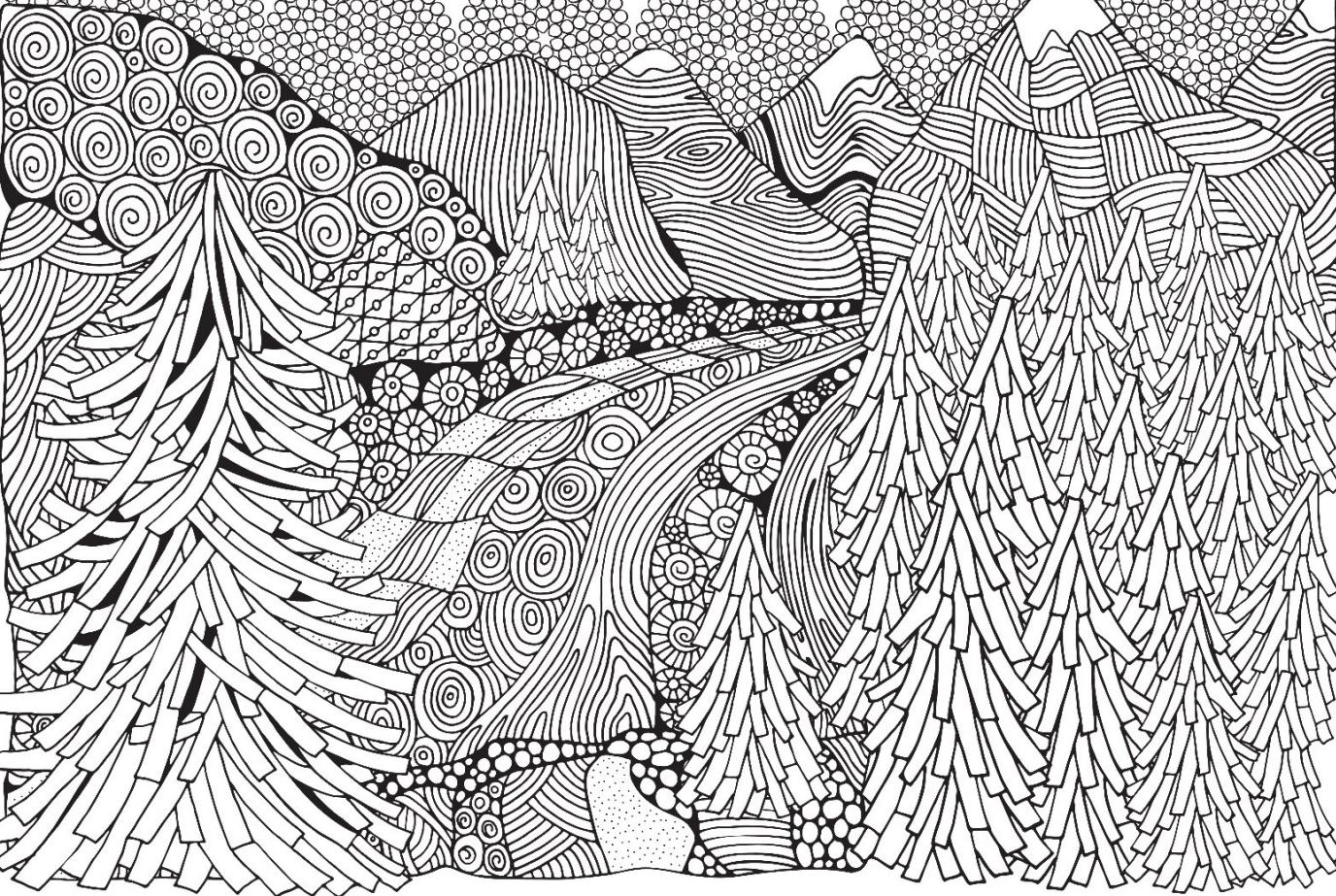
Mentioning previous events gives readers the sense that there is more to the world than what is on the page. You don't need a long and detailed history, but you should think about the events that shaped the world in major ways.

Tip:

“Your world has a timeline too. The more you know about it, the more fully-realized your world is going to be... It does help to document a few key ‘major’ events—things that the people in your story will know about, that will have had some effect on the events in the story.”

-C.L. Wilson

When crafting your world's history, remember that history is written by the victors. Their account of events will justify their actions while often ignoring other perspectives. Consider how history's losers also view the same historical events. The truth will often be somewhere in between.



THE FINE DETAILS

This blueprint focuses on the essential frameworks of your world, but it is often the smaller details that make the world feel real to your reader.

Making a World Feel Lived In

So far, this guide has covered the frameworks of your world. These are essential to worldbuilding because they provide the context for your story and characters. A world's frameworks are more difficult to make up as you go along because you run the risk that major inconsistencies will arise. For example, if your magic system is a form of necromancy at the beginning of the story and witchcraft by the end, you'll have to rework large sections of your plot.

The details are essential to making the world feel real and lived in. They are easier to make up as you go along. For example, if the style of clothing changes half-way through the story, it's much easier to fix.

The table on the next page outlines some of the details to consider when creating your world. Some of them might be essential to your plot rather than extra details. If so, make sure to think about them before you start writing.

Tip:

“The big things, the frameworks...are the bricks and mortar, the windows and doors and load-bearing walls. The details, though, are the pictures hanging on the walls...the way the corner of the sofa has toothmarks from a puppy that isn't there anymore...The details let you know the house is lived in, and not just a showhome.”

-Alice Leiper

Art

Fashion

Architecture

Games and sports

Entertainment and holidays

Naming conventions and language

APPENDIX A: RESOURCES

Included in this appendix are all the sources used to create this guide, as well as resources that provide more information.

General Resources

Ahmed, Saladin

At Home In Fantasy's Nerd-Built Worlds

npr.org/2013/01/06/168631403/at-home-in-fantasys-nerd-built-worlds

Anders, Charlie Jane

7 Deadly Sins of Worldbuilding

io9.com/7-deadly-sins-of-worldbuilding-998817537

Hardy, Darrell

Five Classic World-Building Mistakes

darrellhardy.com/archives/five-classic-world-building-mistakes

Landsborough, D. William

Hard and Soft Magic

www.dlandsborough.com/blog/2017/3/21/hard-soft-magic

Leiper, Alice

Adding Depth to a Fantasy World

mythicscribes.com/world-building/adding-depth-to-a-fantasy-world

Mellenthin, Jessica and Susan O. Shapiro

Mythology Unbound: An Online Textbook for Classical
Mythology
press.rebus.community/mythologyunbound/chapter/three-types-of-myth/

Mythic Scribes

The Mythic Scribes site includes a ton of great articles by many different writers.
mythicscribes.com

Newitz, Annalee

The Rules of Quick and Dirty Worldbuilding
io9.com/5039477/the-rules-of-quick-and-dirty-worldbuilding

Ochoa, George and Jeffrey Osier

The Writer's Guide to Creating a Science Fiction Universe
Writer's Digest Books, 1993

Roy, Georgina

A Beginner's Guide to Writing Urban Fantasy
writingtipsoasis.com/beginners-guide-to-writing-urban-fantasy/

Sanderson, Brandon (via The Copper Mind)

Laws of Magic
[coppermind.net/wiki/Sanderson%27s Laws of Magic](http://coppermind.net/wiki/Sanderson%27s_Laws_of_Magic)

Silverstein, Janna

Kobold Guide to Worldbuilding
Open Design LLC, 2012

Wilson, C.L.

Wilson has a series of excellent blog posts about worldbuilding, covering topics such as choosing a planet, warfare, magic, government, and history.

clwilson.com/category/world-building-101/

The World Building School

worldbuildingschool.com

Worksheets and Checklists

Liljenberg, Michael James

Creating Fantasy and Science Fiction Worlds

Archived at:

webarchive.loc.gov/all/20150110001859/http://www.elfwood.com/tutorial/c9416faa-ad87-5049-dbob-228d6f80c922/creating-fantasy-and-science-fiction-worlds

Lisle, Holly

Create A Culture Clinic

OneMoreWord Books, 2010

Lo, Malinda

Five Foundations of World-building

www.malindalo.com/blog/2012/10/five-foundations-of-world-building

Neitherworld Stories

Culture-making checklist

neitherworldstories.blogspot.ca/2007/02/culture-making-checklist.html

Wrede, Patricia C.

Worldbuilder Questions

larseighner.com/world_builder/index.html

Maps

Cartographer's Guild

cartographersguild.com

Fantastic Maps

This site has many wonderful tutorials on mapmaking. I'm only including two links, but the whole site is worth checking out.

How to design a town

fantasticmaps.com/2013/03/how-to-design-a-town

Worldbuilding By Map

fantasticmaps.com/2013/05/worldbuilding-by-map

Old Maps Online

oldmapsonline.org

Languages and Names

Ancient Scripts

Provides inspiration for creating a language.

ancientscripts.com

Behind the Name

An excellent resource for names from around the world.

behindthename.com

Rosenfelder, Mark

The Language Construction Kit

zompist.com/kit.html

Alien Planets and Species

Gillett, Stephen

World-Building

F+W Media, Inc, 1996

The Habitability Index

hzgallery.org/

Schmidt, Stanley

Aliens and Alien Societies

Writer's Digest Books, 1996

Revis, Beth

Three Tips For Creating a Brand New Alien Planet from Scratch

io9.com/5976266/three-tips-for-creating-a-brand-new-alien-planet-from-scratch

History

Grun, Bernard and Eva Simpson

The Timetables of History: A Horizontal Linkage of People
and Events
Touchstone, 2005

Smithsonian

Timelines of History
DK Publishing, 2011

Timeline Generator

Great starting point if you're stuck

fantasist.net/timeline.shtml

APPENDIX B: TOOLS

This appendix provides useful tools for worldbuilding and writing projects.

Writing a Novel

yWriter

Free novel-writing software for Windows.

spacejock.com/yWriter6.html

Scrivener

Novel-writing software for Windows and Macs.

literatureandlatte.com

Mapping

WonderDraft

www.wonderdraft.net/

World Anvil

www.worldanvil.com/

Inkarnate

inkarnate.com/

WorldSpinner

ui2.worldspinner.com/

ABOUT US

Scribe Forge started as a group of professional authors from sci-fi, fantasy, and paranormal romance. We soon realized that many authors could benefit from having a simple and comprehensive method of worldbuilding.

However, most writers are already overworked and overwhelmed -- they don't have the time and energy it takes to search for multiple books and worksheets to find what really works.

Scribe Forge has collaborated with authors to create a set of worldbuilding worksheets for crafting binge-worthy worlds without wasting time on unnecessary details.

It is our hope that you will use this guide to strengthen your writing craft, start writing faster, and delight your readers.

