

How to Play

Welcome!

Story Games are for people who love improvisation, freeform roleplay, and collaborative storytelling. Together we will improvise an adventure from scratch, with no preparation.

Brainstorm

We use the Story Template to guide us through the game. First, we brainstorm to establish the important parts of our adventure: interesting premise, our goal, setting, non-player characters, challenges we may encounter.

Create Characters

Create the player characters, establish who they are, what abilities they have, their motivations and relationships.

Freeform Roleplay

Then we improvise the scenes of the adventure. The template contains a list of key plot points, we use them to guide our improv, strive to incorporate them into the story.

Tell a fun story

We win the game if we have created an interesting story that makes sense and resolves in an awesome and satisfying climax.

Game Master

One player becomes a Game Master (GM) - the narrator of the story. GM describes the world around the players, plays the role of non-player characters, decides what challenge the players will face next, narrates the consequences of their actions.

Players take turns GMing scenes

One player GMs a scene, we play through it as our characters, then the next player GMs the next one. Each scene revolves around players trying to overcome a challenge established by the GM. The scene ends when the challenge is resolved.

Collaborative Storytelling

If the current GM has trouble figuring out what happens next, they can tap out and let someone else continue the story. When necessary, we can pause between the scenes for a quick brainstorm and figure things out together.

All players actively contribute to the story, introduce new ideas, complete the missing information, create interesting situations, help to advance the plot and take the adventure in new directions.

Rolling Dice

After you describe your approach to solving a challenge, roll a 20-sided die to determine the outcome. If you roll above the target number (set by the GM) - you succeed. Otherwise you suffer a negative consequence, setback, or a complication. If your character is using an ability relevant to the task you're attempting, roll two dice and take the best result.

Setting a Target Number

The GM considers the difficulty of the challenge, situation the players are in, and their approach to solving the problem. Then GM uses common sense to decide how likely the players are to succeed. Set lower numbers for easier tasks or clever solutions, set higher numbers for difficult challenges or reckless actions. If you saw characters in a movie attempt something like this, would you expect it to work?

Consequences

The situation always changes after a roll, moving the characters closer to or farther away from their goals. Each outcome moves the plot forward, takes the story in a different direction. Failure leads to consequences - the characters may suffer a temporary defeat, face a complication, or have to try a different approach.

Action and Combat Scenes

Don't roll for separate attacks/actions. Use the dice to determine the outcomes of decisive moments in the conflict, dramatically interesting turning points.

Resolve most fights in one roll. Describe how you're fighting, roll to see if you win. Defeating a fearsome enemy (like a dragon) may require 2-4 challenges (get close enough while avoiding its attacks, pry open one of its scales, land a killing blow).

Players don't die, but you can describe how they got hurt and take it into account when deciding the difficulty of future challenges. If the situation gets severe, players may be forced to escape or be left at the mercy of their enemies.

What do you need to play

About three hours, 3-5 players, some 20-sided dice (ideally two per player, but one die for the group will do), and something to write down your ideas on (paper, cards, whiteboard).

Play Online

Join our discord community to find people to play with!

<https://rpgadventures.io/storygames>

Story Template

Adventure Idea

What will the adventure be about? Exciting premise. Prompt. Fantastical “What if” question. Take ideas from movies/books. Mix and match tropes. Combine two ideas into something new. Add an unexpected twist.

Problem/Goal

What problem will the heroes need to solve, what goal will they strive to achieve? What Evil Plan must they prevent? The main conflict. Event that will determine whether we succeed, and resolve the story.

Setting/Locations

Where does the story take place? What makes it interesting/unusual? Where does the adventure begin? To what interesting or important areas might the adventure lead?

Non-Player Characters

Who is the main antagonist? What do they want, why? Who are some other important characters our heroes will meet? Their appearance, personality, occupation, motivations.

Challenges

What steps might the heroes take to accomplish their goal? What’s our plan? What problems might we encounter, obstacles we need to overcome? What unexpected complication might change the direction of the story? What final, epic, climactic challenge could resolve the main conflict?

Create and Introduce Player Characters

Description: Who are you? Name, appearance, personality, occupation.

Abilities: What can you do? Cool powers, special skills, useful items.

Motivations: What do you want from this quest? What are your goals?

Relationship: Pick at least one PC to establish a relationship with.

Connection - How do you know each other? What do you think about them?

Tension - What do you want from them? Why do they refuse to give it to you?

Key Plot Points

Use plot points to guide our improv, strive to incorporate them into our story.

Exciting Adventure Hook

How do the heroes encounter the problem? The first scene that draws our heroes into action, gives them the first set of tasks to accomplish.

The First Steps

First milestone players need to reach.
First obstacle the heroes need to overcome as they strive towards their goal.

Surprising Midpoint

Unexpected complication changes the direction of the story.
Difficult challenge. Crisis, major setback, everything goes wrong?
Surprising reveal. Raises the stakes and threat level.
Villain makes a move?

Awesome Climax

Final, most important/dangerous challenge that resolves the main conflict.
Epic scene at a cool location.

Resolution

The aftermath. Outcomes/consequences of the adventure.
How does the world (and heroes’ lives) change after the climax.

Guidelines

Get the most out of our games

Follow these guidelines to get the most out of our games. If you're new - don't get too overwhelmed by all these tips. Practice them one at a time - pick one principle you'd like to get better at, and focus on that one thing for the duration of the game. When GMing, try to encourage players to follow these principles.

Brainstorm what's hard to improv

During the brainstorming part, try to make sure we have prepared everything that would be hard to improvise on the spot, but no more.

Take inspiration

If you're struggling to come up with a creative idea - use one from your favorite Movie, Game, or a TV show. Mix and match tropes. Combine ideas. Add an unexpected twist. Change a key element of the idea (genre, setting, goal, etc.) What makes it different from what we've seen before?

Grounded Story, Funny Roleplay

When brainstorming/GMing, focus on creating a good, interesting story with a solid plot, establishing the base reality that makes sense. Don't try to make it funny - try to create a grounded believable world on top of which we can improvise funny and entertaining situations.

Play to find out what happens

Do things that result in a good story, optimize for fun instead of "winning".

Yes, and

Treat the ideas suggested by other players as awesome (even when they may seem silly). Don't shut down people's ideas - embrace them, help them succeed. Adopt ideas, build on top of them, add something new, find a way to make them work, make them better. Help other players be awesome. Actively help others to have cool moments and achieve their goals, create opportunities for other characters to shine. When GMing, listen to players and build off of the ideas they contribute.

Contribute to the story

Don't be afraid to add information to the story. Help the GM to establish the scene, point out interesting details in the world around you. Vividly describe what you do. Answer unanswered questions, provide explanations for information that seems inconsistent, help to create a story that makes sense.

Help the GM to move the story along. If you notice that players are stuck talking to each other and going nowhere - make a decision, conclude this scene, and move on to the next one.

Develop your Character

What is their current goal? What do they want from this quest? What are their values and ideals? What do they fear? What flaws/weaknesses do they need to overcome? What is their backstory, significant events that shaped them? What is their deep dark secret? Do they have a strong opinion about what's going on? What's going through their head at this moment?

Be an active player

Don't wait for others to entertain you, assume the responsibility for making the story more fun for yourself and others, try to actively contribute ideas to the story, enhance everyone's experience. Positive energy and enthusiasm are always welcome.

Be a proactive character

Don't wait for the GM to tell you what to do. Figure out what your character wants, form your own goals, pursue them, and creatively overcome obstacles on their way.

Stay in character

Try to immerse yourself in playing your character, playing them like an actor. Try to make other people love and care about your character. Think about your character's distinctive features, quirks, unique speech patterns. Act it out, do a silly voice.

Explore the Relationships

How does your character feel about the other party members? Do you have history? Create interesting tension, conflict dynamics between the characters in the party (while still collaborating as players). What does your character want from another PC? Why do they refuse to give it to you? Could your goals be at odds with each other? As the story goes on, can your characters resolve the conflict, find an agreement, a win-win outcome?

Ask Questions

When GMing, draw players into the story by asking questions "How does your character feel about [x]?", "What's going through their head as they do [y]?", "Describe how you want to do [z]."

Keep up good pace

Aim for a 3-hour game. 40 minutes for brainstorm, 30 minutes per plot point (adventure hook and resolution can be shorter, climax can be longer). Keep scenes short. Start scenes as close to the action as possible, end them as soon as the interesting part over.

Relax and have fun

Remember, as long as you and others are enjoying the game - you're doing great!

Idea Prompts

Use these ideas as inspiration for your adventures. Combine two prompts to create a fun premise. Change one of the elements to something unexpected.

Setting Prompts

Wild West. Cowboys, bandits, gold.
Pirates. Tortuga. Ships. Treasure.
Egyptian/Aztec Pyramids. Mummies.
Ancient/Lost Civilization. Atlantis.
Battleground between two factions.
Prehistoric. Dinosaurs, mammoths.
Land of Outcasts/Exiles/Criminals.
Vehicle. Zeppelin, Train, Submarine.
Magic forest. Elves, druids, unicorns.
Abandoned spaceship. Space station.
Remote island. Tropical Jungle. Oasis.
Extreme weather. Maelstrom, radiation.
Exotic Building. Castle, Tower.
Steampunk. Elaborate machines.
Magic School. Adventuring Academy.
The world of the dead. Heaven/Hell.
Horror movie. Old cabin. Halloween.
Underground. Glowing plants.
Secret organization. Spies. Agents.
In Virtual Reality, Game, Illusion.
Underwater. Merfolk. Kraken.
Secret Society/Conspiracy/Cult lair.
Mad Scientist/Wizard laboratory.
Monster lair. World of monsters.
Post-apocalyptic fallout.
Colony, scientific expedition.
Research facility/labs.
Ninja/Samurai temple.
Dark evil empire.
Floating islands.
Alien planet.

Fictional elements

Creatures/objects turned sentient.
A person turned into an animal.
Alien cultures, creatures, invaders.
Portal to another world.
Undead. Zombies. Ghosts. Vampires.
Mythical creatures. Sphinx, Yeti.
Time manipulation. Slower/Faster.
Reverse/accelerated aging.
Mind control. Possession.
Memory wiping/alteration.
Multiple personalities.
Artificial Intelligence.
Shared dreams. Dreams turned real.
Drugs with unusual/magical effects.
Djinn. Monkey's Paw. Wishes.
Ancient Curse/Prophecy.
Ancient evil awakened.
People shrunk to a tiny size.
Monster (alien/dragon) egg.
Love potion. Succubus.
Holograms/Illusions.
Deal with the devil.
Clones. Evil twins.
Witches. Shamans. Voodoo.
Hivemind. Swarm/Horde/Tribe.
Body swap. Freaky friday.
Truth serum. Anti-lying field.
Big monsters. Dragons, Kaiju.
Robots. Mutants. Aliens.
Body Snatchers. Shapeshifters.
Superheroes/Supervillains.

Goal Prompts

Objectives

Go on a mission to...
Solve a problem with...
Help someone else to...
Prevent the antagonist from...

Obtain/Steal McGuffin/information.
Capture/Kidnap a person/creature.
Find a missing person/creature/item.
Save/Rescue a person/creature/item.
Escort/deliver a person/creature/item.
Journey to a distant location.
Explore/Survive a dangerous place.
Kill/Destroy a target.
Smuggle/Plant an Item/Info/Rumor.
Invade/defend a location.
Escape from pursuit.
Break out of captivity.
Investigate. Solve mystery.
Heist/Robbery. Enter a guarded place.
Infiltrate and spy, go undercover.
Uncover a conspiracy, secret plot.
Find a spy/traitor.
Find evidence. Prove guilt/innocence.
Complete/sabotage a project.
Organize/Sabotage event.
Convince/manipulate someone.
Resolve/Cause conflict.
Negotiate, close a deal.
Make allies. Impress/Befriend.
Seize political power.
Gain status, influence, fame.
Run a society/organization/team.
Ensure the event goes as planned.
Deal with a big threat/disaster.
Put down or incite rebellion/mutiny.
Win a competition. Put on a show.

Difficulties/Restrictions

Add them to the goals to modify them and create new interesting ideas.

Stealthy, without getting noticed.
Avoid violence, collateral damage.
Target must be unharmed.
Use social/political means only.
Incomplete/false information.
Limited resources/preparation.
Against the will of authorities.
While on the run from the law.
Under scrutiny/supervision.
Sympathetic/innocent antagonist.
Evil allies/employers.
Bound by rules/laws.
Must compete with the rivals.
Must cooperate with an enemy.
Pretend to be someone else.
Under time pressure.
While protecting someone.
No one can be trusted.
They don't want your help.
Enemy has hostages
Enemy has a dead man's switch.
Enemy has political power/influence.
Multiple goals at odds with each other.
Main goal requires 2-3 subgoals.

Challenges

Action/Adventure

Defeat a villain and his minions.
Defeat a monster/creature.
Chase scene. Pursue/escape.
Protect/Escort /Guard someone.
Rescue someone.
Destroy a target.
Interrupt a ritual/project.
Capture and secure a location.
Defend a location.
Perform a robbery.
Escape from pursuit, hide.
Prepare for the mission, plan.
Distract the enemies, act as bait.
Build or repair an object.
Intercept a delivery/escort.
Prepare and execute an ambush.
Gain control over the territory.
Reach the place before rivals do.

Exploration

Survive/avoid environmental dangers.
Overcome environmental obstacles.
Travel through multiple locations.
Track something/someone.
Deal with a natural disaster.
Survive (find food/shelter, way home).
Overcome security/defenses.
Escape guarded location.
Escape Trap/Ambush.
Set up a Trap/Ambush.
Explore/survey the location.
Find a lost location/item.
Scout for information.
Clear location of danger.

Social/Intrigue

Convince/Persuade a person.
Get them to reveal a secret.
Befriend/Seduce someone.
Blackmail/Force someone.
Find a non-combat resolution.
Persuade a group of people.
Gain social status, power, influence.
Change someone's social status.
Help someone find love/forgiveness.
Put down or incite rebellion.
Negotiate a deal, bargain.
Broker peace, unite rivaling factions,
Navigate a strange culture/customs.
Pit people/factions against each other
Find the spy/traitor/mole.
Defend someone in the court.
Put on a show, entertain.
Recruit people to your cause.

Stealth/Heist

Steal (or plant) an item/information.
Hide, cover your tracks, lay low.
Sneak through undetected.
Assassinate stealthily.
Deal with unwanted attention.
Clean up evidence.
Smuggle something.
Frame someone for a crime.
Fake someone's death.
Infiltrate a group, go undercover.
Spy on someone.
Break into place, obtain Information.
Perform a con.
Get caught lying/cheating/sneaking.

Midpoint Prompts

Halfway through the adventure things go horribly wrong. Here's how.

Complications

Surprising reveal redefines the goal.
Enemy more powerful than expected.
The path to the objective is blocked.
A big risk or sacrifice is necessary.
Environment becomes dangerous.
A dishonorable act is required.
A rare/unique item is required.
Heroes are captured/trapped.
Heroes are betrayed by a key ally.
Lose a key ally. Captured or killed?
Disgruntled ally turns on heroes.
Key item is lost/stolen/fake.
Transportation is sabotaged/stolen.
Key information is lost/missing/wrong.
Important location is destroyed.
A player or ally is badly injured.
Objective is moved/hidden/destroyed.
Ally insists on a strict code of conduct
Heroes have been framed for a crime
Antagonists get backup.
Lose a major advantage/ability.
Enemy discovers heroes' weakness.
The mission was designed to fail.
Enemy presumed dead comes back.
Captured enemy escapes.
Enemy is warned of heroes' actions.
Innocents are in danger, require help.
A mistake or bad luck leads to ruin.
Someone dies.

Villain's Moves

Personally confront the players.
Send minions after the players.
Flee, force the heroes to give chase.
Take hostages or capture an ally.
Control/possess a player or key ally.
Set up a trap/ambush.
Send a double agent, traitor, spy.
Send an assassin or bounty hunter.
Hire a rival team of adventurers.
Threaten an NPC heroes like.
Frame heroes for a crime.
Reveal heroes' secrets.
Bribe/intimidate people in power.
Make the public dislike the heroes.
Have a "dead man switch".
Set a ticking time-bomb.
Blackmail/threaten an innocent.
Pretend to be someone else.
Befriend and betray players.
Kidnap one of the players or an ally.
Plant false clues/decoys.
Foster rivalries, mistrust, disorder.
Create difficult choices for heroes.
Take away players' resources.
Mislead about their weaknesses.
Use heroes' flaws/temptations/fears.
Develop a good public image.
Seduce allies to the dark side.
Influence a powerful institution.

Character Abilities

Special talents, skills, or superpowers your character has. Don't limit yourself to these options, use this list as an inspiration for making up your own.

Skills and Powers

Strength
Stealth
Acute Senses
Deception
Expertise at
Knowledge of
Crafting
Piloting Vehicles
Darkvision
Fireball
Hacking
Deadeye/Marksman
Speak with animals
Create Illusions
Charm Person
Technomancy
Telekinesis
Telepathic message
Walk on Walls
Control Insects
Summon Familiar
Shapeshifting
Fame/Reputation
Connections/Allies

Items

Grappling Hook Gun
Walkie-Talkie
Sentient Rope
Disguise Kit
Forgery Kit
Infrared Goggles
Trampoline
Super Magnet
Spring Shoes
Anti-gravity device
Hoverboard
Truth Serum
Tracking Device
Invisibility potion
Shrinking potion
Chloroform
Pokeball
Smoke Grenade
Catnip
Neuralizer
Clay Golem
Loyal Robot
Wingsuit
Trusty Steed

Character Motivations

(What do you want from this quest? What are your goals?)

Wealth. Respect. Knowledge. Fame/glory/recognition. Revenge. Romance. Humiliate the opponents. Gain skill/experience. Gain power. Get out of this alive. Honor/Ideals - do the right thing. Change the status quo. Impress someone. Redemption, atone for my sins. Escape, leave my past behind. Make new allies. Help/save a friend. Bring justice. Freedom. Acceptance. Rebellion. Ambition. Greed.

Relationships

Use these prompts to establish your relationship to at least one other PC.

Connections

(How do you know each other? What do you think about them?)

Is a sibling of. Was saved by. Served with. Protected by. Adventured with. Is a friendly rival of. Childhood friend of. Is magically bound to. Survived with. Escaped with. Apprentice of. Acolyte of. Idolizes. Drinking buddies with. Business associate with. Is indebted to. Was trained by. On the run with. Relatives. Former co-workers. Old buddies. Partners in crime. Rivals. Romance. Boss and hired hand. Fanboy/Rockstar. Mentor/Apprentice. Former-pirates. Former prisoners. Keepers of ominous secret. Rescuer/rescuee. Reluctant allies. Brains and Brawn. Blood debt. Former enemies that now work together. Bounty hunters. Former soldiers in a losing war. Lord and serf. Ward and protector. Business partners. Former slaves.

Tension

(What do you want from them? Why do they refuse to give it to you?)

Friendship. Obedience. Mentorship. Romance. Respect. Loyalty. Trust. Forgiveness. Support/help. Attention. Protection. Promotion/Raise. Truth. Connections/Influence.