

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

Then we create 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 strive to incorporate them into our story, use them to guide our improv.

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 target number represents your likelihood of success, it depends on the difficulty of the task, situation you're in, and your approach to solving a challenge. GM sets lower target numbers for easier tasks and clever solutions, and higher numbers for difficult situations and risky actions. If you saw characters in a movie attempt something like this, would you expect it to work?

Consequences

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

Freeform Roleplay

Freeform roleplay doesn't have many rules - there's nothing stopping us from doing anything we can imagine, but we trust each other to play fairly - avoid game-breaking actions, do things that make sense in the story, and try to make it interesting and fun for other players.

Keeping up good pace

Aim for a 3-hour game. One hour for brainstorming, two hours for roleplay. That gives us two 10-minute scenes per Plot Point, or one 20-minute scene.

If you notice we're falling behind on time - please let everyone know so we can wrap up the scene and move the story along.

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 a print out of a blank story template to write down your ideas on:

<https://rpgadventures.io/template.pdf>

Play Online

Come play with us on discord!
<https://rpgadventures.io/storygames>
Use blank story template google doc:
<https://rpgadventures.io/template>

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 or fail, 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.
What are your goals and motivations? What do you want from this quest?
Do you have relationships with other PCs? What do you think about them?

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

Key Plot Points

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

Exciting Adventure Hook

Introduce the heroes and the world around them.
Encounter a problem that draws them into action.
Determine the goal, plan, first task to accomplish.

The First Steps

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

Surprising Midpoint

Unexpected complication/twist/reveal changes the direction of the story.
Crisis, major setback, everything goes wrong? Villain makes a move?
Difficult challenge. Raise the stakes and threat level.
Deal with the problems that arise.

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!

Goals, Problems, and Challenges

Pick one of these goals as the main adventure goal.

Pick 3-5 subgoals, smaller challenges the heroes encounter along the way.

Mix challenges from multiple categories, combine two goals into one.

Choose the objective

Go on a mission to...

Solve a problem with...

Help someone else to...

Prevent the antagonist from...

Action/Adventure

Defeat a villain and his minions.

Obtain/Steal a McGuffin/Information.

Find a lost person/creature/item/place.

Capture/Kidnap a person/creature.

Save/Rescue a person/creature/item.

Protect/Guard someone/something.

Invade or Defend a location.

Escort/deliver a person/creature/item.

Chase/pursue or escape from pursuit.

Race someone to the destination.

Assassinate/Kill a person/creature.

Destroy a target item/place.

Complete a project.

(Build/repair/research something).

Sabotage a project (interrupt a ritual).

Build or repair an object.

Sabotage an item/device/place.

Distract the enemies, act as bait.

Intercept a delivery/escort.

Deal with a huge threat.

Perform a robbery.

Win a competition.

Gather resources.

Duel someone.

Fight a war.

Social/Intrigue

Convince/manipulate someone.

Get someone to do you a favor.

Get someone to reveal a secret/info.

Get someone to give you something.

Get someone to take a specific action.

Get someone to let you do something.

Find a non-combat resolution.

Persuade a group of people.

Resolve conflict, broker peace.

Pit people/factions against each other.

Negotiate, close a deal, bargain.

Make allies. Impress/Befriend/Seduce.

Blackmail/Pressure someone.

Seize political power.

Gain status, influence, fame.

Change someone's social status.

Run a society/organization/team.

Organize or Sabotage an event.

Ensure the event goes as planned.

Put down or incite rebellion/mutiny.

Navigate a strange culture/customs.

Recruit people to your cause.

Deception. Create a convincing lie.

Put on a show, entertain.

Train or be tutored.

Exploration

Overcome environmental obstacles.

Survive environmental dangers.

Journey to a distant location.

Explore a dangerous place.

Scout/survey a location, gather info.

Overcome natural hazards.

Extreme weather, natural disasters.

Invade/Capture/Secure a location.

Prepare and execute an ambush.

Escape a trap/ambush.

Gain control over the territory.

Track something/someone.

Deal with a natural disaster.

Clear a location of danger.

Find a way home.

Solve puzzles.

Investigation/Mystery

Find answers, solve a mystery.

Obtain info required to achieve a goal.

Solve a crime. Find the murderer/thief.

Investigate supernatural events.

Discover fate of a missing expedition.

Find out what happened at this place.

Uncover a conspiracy, secret plot.

Figure out who's behind the plot.

Find the spy/traitor/mole.

Discover someone's secret.

Figure out who can be trusted.

Find evidence. Prove guilt/innocence.

Interview witnesses/secret keepers.

Interrogate suspects.

Spying/Surveillance, gather info.

Do the research.

Use clues to deduce a conclusion.

Stealth/Heist

Plan, prepare, and execute a heist.

Break into or break out of a location.

Overcome security, defenses, traps.

Infiltrate and spy, go undercover.

Impersonate someone.

Steal an item/information.

Break into place, obtain Information.

Smuggle/Plant an Item/Info/Rumor.

Hide, cover your tracks, lay low.

Sneak through undetected.

Deal with unwanted attention.

Get caught lying/cheating/sneaking.

Clean up evidence.

Frame someone for a crime.

Fake someone's death.

Perform a con.

Difficulties

Must use social/political means only.

Must be stealthy, secret, under cover.

Avoid violence, collateral damage.

Must compete with the rivals.

Must cooperate with an enemy.

Sympathetic/innocent antagonist.

Incomplete/false information.

Limited resources/preparation.

While on the run from the law.

Against the will of authorities.

Under scrutiny/supervision.

Bound by rules/laws.

Under time pressure.

While protecting someone.

No one can be trusted.

They don't want your help.

Target must be unharmed.

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.
A ghost town.

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.
Adapt folklore, fairytale, myth.

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.