



ROLEPLAY ACADEMY

Become a better Roleplayer, Improviser, Storyteller

This is a collection of games and exercises that will help you practice skills that will make you a better roleplayer, improviser, storyteller, level up your GMing skills, become more creative, and come up with interesting ideas for your games and stories.

How to Play

Pick 3-4 games, read through their rules to get ready to explain them to other players, gather a group of 2-5 friends, and start playing!

Come play with us!

Join our community to play with us and practice roleplaying and improv skills with other friendly and creative people:

<https://rpgadventures.io/discord>

More games are coming soon!

Send feedback and game ideas to **lumen#7925** on Discord. Join our community to participate in playtests and get updates on new games.



YES, LET'S!

Practice the fundamental concept of good improv - embracing your friends' ideas, and building on top of them by adding your own ideas.

Player A: Suggest an activity

Suggest an activity by saying "Let's do x!".

Let's go defeat the dragon!

Player A: Build on top of this idea

Say "Yes, let's do x, and...", and builds on top of Player A's idea - expands on it or adds something new.

Yes, let's go defeat the dragon, and let's take his treasure and use it to overthrow our evil king.

Players keep taking turns

Continue saying "Yes, let's..." and adding to each other's ideas.

Yes, let's use his treasure to overthrow our evil king, and become kings ourselves.

Yes, let's become kings, and use our kingly powers to build a castle made out of cookies.



ONE WORD AT A TIME

In this game we will collaboratively tell a story, players taking turns, saying one word at a time. This game will help us to practice two important concepts:

- Listening - paying attention to what other people are saying, instead of being in your head. You won't be able to continue the story unless you were focused on everything people were saying before you.
- Being spontaneous, and holding ideas lightly - you won't be able to plan ahead, so you'll have to quickly respond in the moment.

How to play

Players take turns, tell a story one word at a time:

Once...
upon...
a...
time...
there...
was...
a...
beautiful...
princess...
who...
....

STORYTELLING



UNSCRIPTED

In this game, we'll collaboratively pitch a fun movie idea.

Take turns, suggest 3 prompts

1. Setting where the story takes place.

Wild west, magic library, abandoned spaceship.

2. Protagonist, the main hero of the story.

Rebellious princess, broken robot, unlucky viking, lovesick goblin.

3. Objective the hero will pursue (a problem they'll try to solve or a goal they'll strive to achieve).

Defeat a monster, find a treasure, deliver an item, do a heist, capture a creature, rescue someone, escape captivity, defend a location.

Take turns, pitch a movie idea together

Then we take turns, each player saying one sentence at a time.

We describe a movie trailer based on these prompts, trying to make it as exciting as possible. Describe the world of the story, the main characters, the biggest challenge the hero must overcome, and some dramatic or cinematic moments from the trailer.

After the pitch, we can ask each other questions about the story, or discuss ideas on how to improve the pitch and develop the story.



STORY SEEDS

Practice developing ideas for fun stories and adventures.

Any Player: Come up with a Setting Idea

Come up with the setting where the story takes place. Examples:

Pirate ship, magic castle, colony on an alien planet, ice age.

Player A: Pitch the Story Hook

Describe the scene at the beginning of the story that introduces the problem the heroes need to solve or the goal they will strive to achieve.

The heroes visit the King's castle, and meet the King who has been turned into a rat by an evil Vizier.

Player B: Pitch the Climax of the story

Pitch a scene at the end of the story where the heroes overcome the most important and difficult challenge and achieve their goal.

The climax takes place at the top of the Vizier's tower, where the heroes have to fight the animated suits of armor in order to steal the wand that can turn the King back into a person.

Keep taking turns pitching the adventure hooks and the corresponding climaxes in this setting.



WING IT!

Use improvised creative problem solving to overcome fun challenges.

Interesting scenes revolve around the heroes striving to overcome a challenge, an obstacle or a problem they must solve in order to move closer to their goal. In this game we will practice improvising cool challenges the heroes will face throughout the story.

Any Player - Set up the Story

Come up with a character and a goal they're striving to accomplish.

A group of rowdy pirates want to steal a flying ship.

Player A - Introduce a Challenge

Describe an obstacle the hero encounters on their journey, a challenge or a complication they face, an interesting problem they need to solve.

The ship has already left the skyport, and the only thing fast enough to chase it down is a pegasus. There are stables of pegasi nearby, but the rowdy alpha-pegasus will throw off anyone he doesn't deem worthy to ride him.

Player B - Creatively overcome the Challenge

Describe a creative solution to this problem.

The pirates craft a cardboard cutout of a beautiful mare to distract the alpha-pegasus while they steal some of the other pegasi.

Come up with a challenge for the next player to overcome.

How do the pirates board the well-guarded ship?

WORLDBUILDING



ZOOM OUT, ZOOM IN

Build a setting, from small details to large ones, and vice versa.

Zoom Out

Start by describing a small detail, and then build a scene around it.

Player A

A beautiful gem is set into an ancient stone.

Player B

A gem is part of a crown that rests on the head of a skeleton.

Player C

The skeleton lies under an ancient oak tree, with spider webs between its branches.

Player D

The oak tree is on a lone island in the middle of a bay, surrounded by sharp reefs. Hulls of many ships crashed upon the shallows...

Zoom In

Start by describing a large-scale setting, and imagine the camera gradually zooming in to see the details.

Player A

You see a small village nestled in the shadow of a mountain.

Player B

We zoom in to see a church in the center of the village.

Player C

Inside the church we see a stone statue of a gargoyle whose eyes are glowing with sinister green color.

Player D

A rat runs up to the statue and places a chunk of moldy cheese in front of the gargoyle, as an offering to its "God".



OUT OF PLACE

Collaboratively improvise an interesting and unique setting.

Any Player

Come up with a suggestion for a location.

An ancient desert.

Player A

Name a weird, surprising, absurd, or an out-of-place detail. Think about what you'd normally assume or expect to see here, and add something wildly different.

There's an old ship stuck in the middle of the desert.

Player B

Justify the existence of this detail - explain how it came to be, come up with a backstory for it, make it make sense.

After the sea dried out, an ancient seafaring civilization had to adapt. They attached wheels to their ships so they could sail the sands.

Then, come up with a detail for the next player to justify.

A skull with three eye sockets is half-buried in the sand.



WHAT IF?

In this game we will build a world around a fantastic premise.

Player A: Come up with a fantastic premise

What makes the fictional reality different from ours?

Invention of a device that lets people read each other's minds.

Player B: Explain the premise

Come up with an explanation for the premise. How did it come to be?

A brilliant neuroscientist wanted to enhance human empathy.

Player C: Describe the direct consequences

If this were true, what would happen?

Privacy vanishes, shared experiences become the social norm.

Player D: Describe the secondary consequences

What are the consequences of these consequences?

A new economy forms around "experience creators", introverts and private individuals fight for privacy and face ostracism.

Player E: Explore the final outcome

What is the ultimate result of this premise?

Society splits into "Sharers" who have merged into a hivemind, and "Individualists" who fight against it.

CHARACTERS



IMPROVISING CHARACTERS

Take turns, each player describing one aspect of the character.

Player A: Adjective + Occupation

To quickly improvise a simple character, often all you need is an **adjective** and an **occupation** (e.g. Friendly Pirate, Creepy Doctor).

Creepy Emperor's Advisor

Player B: Appearance

Name a few physical characteristics, details that stand out the most.

Long thin mustache, piercing green eyes, clothes that accentuate his height, adorned with golden patterns.

Player C: Personality

Think of an actor or a famous character you could cast in this role.

Cold and calculating (like Moriarty from Sherlock).

Player D: Motivation

What do they want, why do they want it, what will they do to get it?

Wants power. Will lie, cheat, steal, and betray to get it.

Player E: Contradiction

To make your characters more interesting and three-dimensional, you can create a contradiction between their outward traits/appearance/behavior, and their true inner nature.

Despite his imposing statue, deep inside he's a paranoid coward desperate for people's approval.



BACKSTORY FROM A DETAIL

Develop a character by improvising their backstory.

Any Player

Come up with a character suggestion

Mad scientist.

Player A

Point out an interesting, unexpected detail about the character (can be a physical detail, an item or piece of clothing, a behavior, a manner of speaking, etc.)

He has a peg leg.

Player B

Tells a backstory explaining how this detail came to be.

He was trying to train a gargoyle to fetch him papers, it got mad when he didn't give it a treat, so it ate his leg, and he had to invent himself a new one.

Come up with a detail for the next player to describe

He has a beautiful locket around his neck with a picture of a robot.



BUT THIS ONE...

Practice a simple method of making your characters more interesting.

Any Player

Come up with a character suggestion

A pirate.

Player A

Take one of the character's aspects, and replace it with something surprising, very different from what you'd normally assume or expect. You can reverse an aspect, exaggerate it, replace it with an out-of-place detail, or apply an aspect from an entirely different character.

[Characters] are usually [an expected aspect], but this one in particular is [surprising aspect].

Pirates are usually scary and rowdy, but this one in particular acts very gentlemanly and polite.

Player B

Explain why this character is so unusual.

Because he fell in love with a fancy lady and is trying to impress her.

Then come up with a character prompt for the next player.

A vampire.

DESCRIPTIONS



VIVID DESCRIPTIONS

Practice describing characters and locations.

Player A

Come up with a suggestion for a location or a character, in the format:
[Adjective] [Noun]

Abandoned space station, wizard's tower, bottomless chasm.
Rebellious princess, broken robot, unlucky viking, old wizard.

Then name an interesting specific detail:

In the wizard's tower, an old spellbook is lying on the floor.

Player B

Describe this detail in a couple of sentences. Paint a vivid picture in people's imagination, use specific details, engage multiple senses.

The dusty, spider-covered spellbook, its pages wrinkled from a spilled, tangy-smelling potion, lies abandoned on the cold, stone floor of the tower, whispering ancient secrets in the silence.

Then come up with a detail for the next player to describe:

An old owl sits on the windowsill.



ACTION SCENES

Practice vividly describing interesting and creative action scenes.

Player A

Come up with an action scene, establish:
[Location] [Characters] [Action]

Detective chases a criminal through the big city's rooftops
Ninja steals a diamond from the magic vault
Pirates fight inside of a fancy ballroom
Pilot lands a burning plane

Name one specific action that happens inside this scene.

Pirate dodging a crossbow bolt.

Player B

Improvise a vivid cinematic description of that action. Try to make it exciting, aim for creative or unexpected use of the environment.

The pirate leaps over a fallen table just as a crossbow bolt slams into its surface. With a quick glance, he spies a silver candelabra perched on the table's edge. With a flick of his sword, he sends it spinning towards his assailant, the candelabra's sharp edges slicing through the air with deadly precision.

Then come up with an action for the next player to describe.

One of the pirates swings from a chandelier to attack him.



STORY WARS

Improvise an epic battle between two legendary opponents.

Take turns, establish the 4 components of the scene

1. Protagonist (with a special Power)

Cooky inventor with a portal gun, ninja with Spider-Man powers, the pope with a sniper rifle, caveman with a pet velociraptor.

2. Antagonist (with a special Power)

Evil necromancer who can raise zombies, hyper-intelligent raccoon on a hoverboard, space pirate with a jetpack.

3. Battlefield

Top of a skyscraper, desert oasis, graveyard, rope bridge, steampunk factory, subway, moon base, pirate ship.

4. Victory Condition

Destroy their opponent, defeat the opponent without violence, defend their base, win a race, win an election, convince someone to go on a date, gain the most Twitter followers, survive the longest in a zombie apocalypse, be the first to capture a beast, win at hide and seek.

Take turns describing the battle

On your turn, describe the actions of one of the opponents, creatively using the Battlefield and their Power to their advantage. Escalate the battle until we have a clear winner.

SCENES



BASE REALITY

Practice establishing the key elements necessary for every scene:

1. **Who** are the characters and what is the relationship between them.
2. **Where** the scene takes place.
3. **What** the characters are doing, the action in the scene.

How to Play

Two players play a three-line scene (Player A says a sentence, Player B responds, Player A responds with the final sentence).

- The goal is to establish who, what, and where in these 3 lines.
- If you manage to establish the who, what, and where faster (in the first 1-2 lines), use the remaining lines to establish the relationship between the characters, or the emotion they're feeling.

Try playing scenes set in our normal reality, in a high-stakes reality of a movie or a TV show, or in a fictional (fantasy or sci-fi) world.

Player A

Arr, matey, charge the cannons!

Player B

Sir, yes sir, let's plunder that galleon and get us some treasure!

Player A

That's the spirit boy, keep it up you'll be the first mate in no time!



DRAMATIC CONFLICT

Conflict is an essential ingredient of a good scene, it makes the scene interesting to play, and gives the characters something exciting to do.

Conflict = Desire + Obstacle. Establish what do the characters want (from the world or from each other), and why is it difficult to get.

A scene is about the heroes trying various tactics to get what they want, and actively striving to overcome obstacles in pursuit of their goal. Their attempts progressively escalate the conflict and raise the stakes.

Establish the Base Reality (who, what, where)

Two players improvise a scene. Establish who the characters are, where does the scene take place, and what the characters are doing.

Establish the Conflict

Player A's character wants something, Player B's character opposes them: refuses to give it to them, wants the opposite thing, stands in their way, or competes for the same thing.

Escalate the Conflict

Player A's character should try at least 3 different tactics in an attempt to get what they want, opposed by the other character, each attempt raising the stakes, intensity, and tension.

Player B's objective is to help Player A to create a dramatic scene by supporting their choices. Player B will put obstacles in their way, helping them to escalate the conflict.

Resolve the Conflict

Play the scene until the conflict is resolved (Player A's character gets what they want, or suffers a setback taking them farther away from it).



MAKE IT WEIRDER!

Practice improvising unusual and comedic scenes.

Establish the Base Reality (who, what, where)
Establish the normal, ordinary world for these characters.

A kid and his parents are celebrating the kid's birthday party.

Discover the Unusual Thing

Play the scene until something unusual, surprising, unexpected, or weird happens. Carefully listen for subtle, slightly unusual things. Or deliberately introduce some absurd or unusual element.

The birthday cake is made out of broccoli.

Justify the Unusual Thing.

Invent an explanation for the unusual thing, provide a rationale for the weird behavior. If this unusual thing is true - why is it true?

The parents want to help their kid to lose weight.

Heighten the Unusual Thing

Make the unusual thing progressively weirder, heighten the absurdity, take the scene farther away from the ordinary reality we've established. Play the scene until you've made it as absurd as possible.

A present is weight-watcher membership.

The only guest is the sports coach.

The birthday wish is "better parents".

ACTING



EXPAND OUR ACTING RANGE

Practice portraying believable and grounded, as well as cartoony and exaggerated characters, and expanding our acting range.

Two players play short (1-2 minute) scenes. Your goal is to establish the base reality (who, what, where), the relationship between the characters, and play out a brief fun interaction between them.

We'll play 3 different types of scenes/characters:

Ordinary Characters

Play realistic characters who are similar to yourself. Scenes take place in our world - normal, ordinary, boring reality. The goal is to practice acting in the most believable and realistic way.

Exaggerated Characters

Play cartoony, exaggerated, over-the-top characters in extreme situations (e.g. cartoon supervillain's last monologue before they fall into a volcano). Make big, bold character choices. Bring as much enthusiasm and energy as you can. The goal is to get comfortable with being bold and playing ridiculous and absurd characters.

Believable Fictional Characters

Play characters who are very different from yourself, in the scenes set in a fictional reality (fantasy, sci-fi, action movies, drama, etc). The goal is to play a serious and dramatic scene with the characters who are as realistic and believable as possible. Avoid introducing any absurd elements, aim for a grounded, realistic scene that you could see in a serious movie.



EMOTIONS

Practice playing characters who are experiencing strong emotions.

One trick to creating very fun and engaging scenes is to choose to care strongly about what's going on in the scene, to emotionally invest in the imagined reality, to be emotionally affected by things happening in the scene, treat what's going on in the scene as important. Play characters with commitment - avoid being ironically detached.

We'll improvise short two-player scenes. Start by establishing the base reality (who, what, where), and then:

Choose an Emotion

At the beginning of the scene, choose an emotion your character feels, and then justify why you feel that way.

Heighten the Emotion

Progressively heighten the emotion and make it more intense.

Change Emotions

Play the scene until your character undergoes a change from one strong emotion to a completely different one.

Try playing two versions of this game - in one you'll play the cartoony over-the-top version of the emotions, and in another one you'll play the most grounded and believable version that you can.



STATUS

Experiment with playing high-status and low-status characters.

Exercise 1: Playing High and Low Status Characters

Play a series of short (1-2 min) two player scenes.

In the first scene, **Player A** acts high status, **Player B** acts low status.

In the next one, **Player B** acts high status, **Player C** acts low status.

Keep taking turns until everyone had a chance to play both high and low status characters.

Tip: Try playing typically high status characters (king, priest, business owner, etc.) as low status, and playing typically low status characters (janitor, kid, intern, etc.) as high status.

Exercise 2: Gradually Change Status

Two players play a scene, one starts as high status, the other one starts as low status, and their goal is to gradually change their status to the opposite one by the end of the scene.

Exercise 3: Switch Status

Two players play a scene, one as a high status character another one as low status. The third player occasionally says "switch", and the players continue the scene, switching their status.

CREATIVE THINKING



SUBVERT AND JUSTIFY

Practice coming up with unusual and creative ideas.

Any Player - Come up with the initial prompt

It should be a **Location**, a **Character**, or an **Action**. Examples:

Location: Zoo, Spaceship, Desert, Metropolis.

Character: Vampire, Inventor, Troll, Space Pirate.

Action: Knight fighting a dragon, thief stealing a painting.

Player A - Subvert the idea

Think about what you'd normally assume or expect to see, and do something wildly different: introduce a weird, interesting, surprising, out-of-place detail, make an absurd statement about it, create a surprising contradiction. The stupider - the better.

Knight fighting a dragon → Knight rescuing a dragon.

Spaceship → Spaceship piloted by vegetables.

Inventor → Posh gorilla-inventor.

Player B - Justify the subverted idea

Invent an explanation for the weirdness, describe how it came to be, make it make sense. If this unusual thing is true - why is it true?

The knight is rescuing a dragon because an evil princess has captured it to fight other monsters for the public's entertainment.

Then subvert the idea in a different way, for the next player to justify.

The knight is fighting a bunny.



COMBINE INCOMPATIBLE IDEAS

In this game we will practice a fun method for coming up with creative ideas, and use it to pitch exciting and interesting scenes.

Players take turns, suggest key scene elements

Take turns coming up with prompts for: **Setting**, **Character**, **Action**.

The goal is to suggest ideas that don't belong together, that are as unrelated from each other as possible, fit together the least. What kind of character would you least expect to see in the location? What kind of action you would not expect this character to take?

Player A pitches a Setting prompt:

Sci Fi Laboratory

Player B pitches a Character prompt:

Angry ghost

Player C pitches an Action prompt:

Performing a Heist

Pitch a scene based on these prompts

A player pitches a scene (characters in a location doing something) that combines these ideas in a way that makes sense, and justifies how that happened, explains how this scene came to be.

A sci fi laboratory is working on a hyper-advanced AI, projected as a 3D hologram (our "ghost"). A group of highly advanced thieves infiltrate the laboratory and steal this AI in order to liberate it from the scientists.



ABSURD ASSOCIATIONS

In this game our goal is to practice making surprising connections between the ideas that are not normally associated with each other.

Any Player: Suggest a topic

A topic can be a location, a character, or an action.

Birthday party.

Player A: Make Absurd Associations

Any topic has related aspects - ideas closely associated to it, things it makes you think of. An aspect can be a character, location, thing, action, adjective, or a detail related to the suggestion.

Aspects: Birthday cake, magician, clown, balloons, celebration, milestone, important event, inviting friends, presents.

Your challenge is to take an aspect of a topic, and associate it to something closely related to this aspect, but wildly different from the topic itself, not normally associated with it. Say it in this format:

[Topic] makes me think of [an aspect of the Topic]. [This aspect] makes me think of [association wildly unrelated to the topic].

Birthday party makes me think of a birthday magician.

Magician makes me think of Voldemort.

Player B: Combine the topic and an association

Combine the original topic with the absurd association, and justify it.

Voldemort is hired as a magician at a birthday party, and has to attend because he fell on hard times after his defeat and really needs the money.