**World Building-Key Concepts**

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**SETTING/GEOGRAPHY**

**1. Locations:** Where does your story take place? On earth or an earthlike world?

Does it take place in the past, present or future? Or is it on an entirely different world?

How long is your planet’s day? How many moons does it have? Normal or altered gravity?

<http://goteenwriters.blogspot.com/2015/04/map-making-101-drawing-map.html>

**2. Water:**People, animals, plants need water in order to survive.

Where does it make sense to have oceans, springs, rivers, lakes, bays?

Consider the impact of too much or too little water on a society. How will this affect their behavior towards each other, towards other races/kingdoms? Think competition of resources.

**3. Maps:** If you are creating a new world or an altered earth, you may want to get out a sketchbook and a pencil to draw your world/town/house. Even if your story takes place in a very small setting, know that setting well. (Wheel of Time = world map, Harry Potter = Hogwarts school, Diary of Anne Frank = attic)

Fill in your map with other features such as forests, deserts, towns, cities, highways and mountains.

**4. Climate:** How will weather affect daily living in your world and where people will live?

Will certain seasons last longer than others and influence plant life? Influence clothing?

For example: Crematoria in Chronicles of Riddick—a planet that is used to house prisoners underground because of its extreme temperatures (-295 degrees at night and +702 in the day).

**CULTURES**

**1. Sterotype:** What is the most important ideal of this culture? (America = freedom, Canadians = polite)

**2.Traditions:** Which traditions are faithfully followed and which are simply fun to follow?

What annual traditions does this culture have?

Ex. Hunger Games – 12 districts participate in a compulsory annual televised Hunger Games with a boy and a girl selected from each district in a fight to the death. Versus Fourth of July barbeque and fireworks.

**3. Perspective:** Consider whose perspective you are writing from.

What does your culture look like to a native, and what does it look like to an outsider?

Example: Harry Potter experienced the wizarding world from the perspective of a newbie. Everything was brand new to him. What if the same story had been written from Ron’s perspective, or Voldemort’s perspective?

**4.  History:** What is the recent past before your story begins? Is it a time of peace or is this culture just emerging from a war or some other devastation?

What are some of the main events in your culture? Wars (civil or with neighboring kingdoms), natural disasters, plagues. Shifts in culture/attitude may have occurred as a result of huge events in the past.

Who are some of the most important historical figures? Why are they important? Are they revered or hated? (example: American Civil War, Martin Luther King Jr., Hitler.)

Keep in mind that just as we don’t know all of history, neither will your characters. They will only know or remember what is relevant to them.

**5. Cultural Drift:** Hannah Emery (PhD in sociology) explains that cultures have dramatic cultural changes over time. Even the US since its founding has changed over a relatively short period of time. When you don’t take cultural drift into account it can be easy to lump all cultures into one sterotype without allowing for variation. Example: centaurs are noble, dwarves are gruff, elves are arrogant.

**6. Deviance:**

Deviants: The law breakers. While each culture or society has laws, beliefs and values, there will always be those who break them or don’t adhere to them. (Example: Vulcans who had Pa’nar Syndrome because they were practicing mind melds—mind melding wasn’t accepted at the time.)

Misfits: In addition to the law breakers are the misfits, the ones who don’t break the law, but act outside the normal range of behavior, making people feel uncomfortable. (Example: teenager driving down the road, wearing old fashioned pilot’s hat.)

**SOCIAL CLASSES**

**1. Divisions/Status:** How are the classes divided in your world?

What are the class divisions based on – wealth, profession, location, family line (ex. Royalty, nobility, merchant, commoner or lower, middle, upper class)?

Consider how individuals in a culture are treated based on the following:

Gender

Race/Ethnicity

Sexual orientation

Religious beliefs

Physical and mental health

Appearance and attractiveness

Age

Marital status and parent status

Education level

Occupation and income

Native language and citizenship

Does your world claim equality (egalitarian), but have subtle divisions?

**2. Food and Drink:** Where people live has a big impact on what food and drink is available to them.

What can they afford to eat?

Are there certain foods only available to certain classes? Ex. Caviar and upper class.

**3. Jobs:** The types of jobs available to each individual can very much be determined by the social class they find themselves in. Consider your world and make a list of jobs that would be available in each social class.

**4. Appearances:**A person’s social class will determine what they can afford – what they will wear in terms of clothes and jewelry and how many changes of clothing they will have.

What styles will each class wear?

Will they be different according to the class?

Will there be differences in class in terms of physical appearance?

Will a certain race/species have risen above, or be relegated beneath another class for certain historical reasons?

**RELIGION**

If you do decide to include religion in your story, here are some things to consider:

**1.Origin Theory:** Religions often have an explanation for how the world came to be and how it will ultimately end.

**2.Higher Power/Beings:** Many religions believe in god/s, spirits, animals, elemental forces and worship them or seek wisdom/information/power from them.

Are these beings personal (do the followers have close contact with these beings?) Do they mingle with mortals often, on occasion, do they meddle with the lives of men and create chaos, mischief, and war, or are they impersonal gods that are worshipped from afar?

How much influence do these beings and your religion have on daily life?

How would your followers seek information?

How would your followers receive information from their god/s, spirits, animals?

**3.Beliefs/standards**: Religions put forth a set of beliefs and most require their followers to behave according to a prescribed code of conduct. Within the religion there are often roles assigned to specific individuals to carry certain duties out: example priests, bishops, etc. and include cultural values and standards for how people should behave.

What would be the hierarchy or ranks in your system? How do people move up (or down)?

What would be the set of beliefs? (Ex. Maradonian church which is an ode to soccer player Diego Maradona. Among the church’s commandments are: you must name your son Diego, change your middle name to Diego and spread the “miracles of Diego.”)

What would be the standards included in your religion? Sacrifices? Ordinances? Donations of time, money, items? Behavioral requirements?

These may include things like what clothing they are required to wear (or not allowed to wear), food they can and can’t eat, prayers they must offer up (and perhaps at certain times of the day or year), pilgrimages they must make etc.

What would be the consequences if those standards are not followed? Consequences for not following standards could range from mild to severe. (Think of some extremist groups today who have killed individuals for not following the standards of their religion.)

**4. Rituals:**

Religion often goes hand in hand with life events such as weddings, funerals, and transition times (entering adulthood). But rituals are also used to gain favor, seek information, etc.

What would those rituals look like?

Would there be any special clothing/special tools used in your rituals?

Who would have the obligation/authority to carry those rituals out?

Holidays: celebrations of the religion’s important events which may also include specific rituals

Consider how religion impacts your character/s in a positive or negative way.

**5.**What’s the reason for the religion? (from article by Chris Winkle)

Is it really true?

You decide:

* **Literally true:** There is actually a giant dinosaur that is asleep underground, and the mountains are part of the dinosaur.
* **Metaphorically true:** The beast represents all the magma beneath the surface. The villagers watch for signs that the beast is restless, because that means the volcanoes are active.
* **Partly true:** There is a giant beast in the ground, but it’s long dead and only the skeleton remains. However, the structure of that skeleton is responsible for the hills of the area.
* **Completely false:** The story of the beast in the ground was planted by someone powerful. That way, no one will question the rumbles caused by the science experiments she’s conducting on the other side of the mountains.

<http://inkwellideas.com/worldbuilding/worldbuilding-religion-design/>

**MAGIC**

If your story has magic in it:

Who can use magic? Who can’t?

Can anyone learn magic or are you born with it?

What do these powers look like?

How are these powers controlled? Or are they uncontrollable?

What is the source of the magic? Is it limited or unlimited?

Do you need items to use the magic: staff, wand, crystals, gems etc?

How do others feel about magic? Do certain individuals fear it, ban it, or even aware of it?

How is magic treated by different social classes, governments officials, religious authorities? Example: Harry Potter – Muggles are relatively unaware of magic. Ministry of Magic governs magic and deviants are sent to Azkaban.

What are the limitations on magic? What can it and can’t it do? Example: Bring a person’s spirit back to talk to you, versus bring them back to life.

What are the rules of your magical system? What are you and aren’t you allowed to do according to the teachers of magic (different from what is and isn’t possible.)

Think Harry Potter: Killing curses are theoretically possible, but against the school rules.

**TECHNOLOGY**

*If you don’t know, ask. Keep asking until you think you know. Then keep asking until you’re sure. And then keep asking some more . . . David Gerrold*

**Communication:**

How do people communicate? By mail? Phone? Fax? Radio? Telegraph? Internet? In person? How fast is their communication system? How private is it?

Are others monitoring it or listening in? Example: screened by the government.

**Information:**

How do people access their information? Internet or something similar? Other: books, phones, radio, word of mouth, songs, etc.

How accurate is the information people get? Is it filtered/controlled by others? Example: propaganda.

**Energy:**

How does this world get their energy? Fossil fuels? Hydro? Solar? Biofuels? Wind? Nuclear?

**Transportation:**

What do people use for transportation? Horses/other four-legged creatures? Carriages? Cars? Trains?

How is their transportation powered?

* **Medical:**
* What do they use for medicine? Plants? Pills? Liquids?
* Do most people have access to medical care? How do they feel about medical care? Do they trust it or not?
* **Entertainment:**
* What do people do for fun?
* Who has access to it?

**Manufacturing:**

How are things made?

Assembly line, hand made, made by robots?

**Weapons:**

What kind of weaponry do they use?

How advanced is it?

Do certain groups have more advanced weapons than others, if so why?

**Other questions:**

What is the level of technology in the world? Primitive, mid-level, advanced?

What everyday problems might people face?

Who creates the technology?

Who controls the technology?

Who can afford the technology?

Which technologies do the government/military use to control the masses?

Is technology developing quickly or slowly?

\* Final note: Remember not to overload your readers with information. Open up your world a little at a time in a natural way. NO INFO DUMPING! ☺

**RESOURCES**

Pinterest: <https://www.pinterest.com/RobinGlassey/world-building-for-writers/>

Pinterest: <https://www.pinterest.com/RobinGlassey/world-building-maps/>

<http://worldweaving.tumblr.com/post/60119312280/worldbuilding-basics-technology>

[http://www.amazon.com/Worlds-Wonder-Science-Fiction-Fantasy/dp/1582970076/ref=sr\_1\_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1464195524&sr=8-1&keywords=david+gerrold+how+to+write+science+fiction+and+fantasy](http://www.amazon.com/Worlds-Wonder-Science-Fiction-Fantasy/dp/1582970076/ref%3Dsr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1464195524&sr=8-1&keywords=david+gerrold+how+to+write+science+fiction+and+fantasy)