

A flexible freeform framework

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F I C T I O N

The word 'FICTION' is rendered in a bold, hand-drawn, sketchy font. The letter 'F' is colored red, while the remaining letters 'I', 'C', 'T', 'I', 'O', and 'N' are black. Each letter has a textured, hatched appearance. Below the letters, there is a long, horizontal shadow that is red under the 'F' and grey under the other letters, suggesting a 3D effect on a white surface.

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**If you want to hack/
tweak/change/adapt and/
or republish this game,
feel free!**

Fiction is a collaborative, improvisational freeform game for a flexible amount of players. In the game, a group of players get together and sketch the game they want to play, and then go do it!

Design goals:

- ◆ To make a freeform framework for a flexible amount of players, which is possible to play within the amount of time they have available.
- ◆ To design a game you can pick up and play.
- ◆ To ensure high replay value.
- ◆ To provide a tool for both inexperienced and experienced players to lean on when improvising a game from scratch.

As preparation for play, the players decide on the elements described below in whichever order they prefer. They don't necessarily have to use all the elements, for instance, story backgrounds could be improvised during play. Through brainstorming and collaborative workshoping, the players end up with a basic 'scaffolding' for the story they wish to enact. The elements can be written down on a blackboard or large sheet of paper for reference throughout the game.

This game can be played as a stand-alone. If you'd like to expand it with more techniques and principles, we recommend having a look at *Play With Intent*, by Emily Care Boss and Matthijs Holter. Their game gives many further details and suggestions on how to play such games. Please see <http://playwithintent.wordpress.com/> for more ideas! Feel free to experiment with, change and adapt techniques as you see fit.

Some principles

Time

Decide roughly how long the game will last.

Scenes

The game is structured in scenes. The players take turns establishing and ending the scenes. The player in charge of the scene decides which characters will be present in the scene and when it's time to end it. (S)he can also act as director, asking players for inner monologues, introducing characters etc. (S)he can also be a player in the scene.

Re-incorporate

Try to remember what has happened in previous scenes, and re-incorporate elements from them. Recurring characters, places and themes are all good to work with. Background material that comes up during play, should have consequences later on. "One must not put a loaded rifle on the stage if no one is thinking of firing it."

Handling conflicts

If a conflict arises during play that can't be resolved through roleplaying, the person who established the scene calls a vote. Play continues while the players not involved in the conflict point at the player they think should win. The player with the most votes wins, and the other player will have to find a way to yield through roleplaying. In case of a draw, roleplay continues until a player changes his/her vote.

Physical play

The scenes are enacted with your whole body. Get up on the floor and use the space available. The players should agree beforehand on what level of touching they are comfortable with.

Cut and Brake

Cut and brake are safewords. These meta-rules are important in themselves, but they also provide a safe framework for exploring your boundaries, knowing there is an accepted way out.

Any player can at any time say "Cut!" if their physical or mental boundaries are about to be, or have been, crossed. All play should stop and the person made comfortable. Do not start to play again before that player says it is OK. Do not ask why they cut, this might be very personal, but they are free to share as much as they want.

If a player feels that play is approaching something they will be really uncomfortable acting out, they can say "Brake." The players around them should then reduce the pressure a bit and give them room and/or help to play themselves out of the situation.

The elements

When working to reach a consensus on the elements needed to play the game, enter the discussion with an open mind. Listen to others and try to say yes more than you say no. But be sure to veto ideas you are really uncomfortable playing. You might want to choose a facilitator who can keep the discussion on track and speed things up if it takes too long to reach a consensus.

Setting

Agree on some keywords for the setting you'll play in. Maybe it's a historical setting, like the trenches of World War 1? A contemporary setting from some TV show? Maybe it's high fantasy, maybe it's a setting from a book you all know.

Atmosphere/style of play

Do you want a humorous game? An action-filled one? A game inspired by the mood in a particular movie? This atmosphere will also affect the style of play. Slapstick humor should be limited if one decides upon a high-drama atmosphere, for instance.

Story background

Describe the background for the story that is about to unfold in three sentences or so. A good method can be to pitch one sentence, and then another player starts the next sentence with the words "Yes, and ...".

Characters

Decide on the ownership of characters: Does one player own a character, or can the players switch characters during the game? Maybe the characters are symbolized by props or cards that are put on a table between scenes, and when the scene starts you pick the character you want to be for that scene.

Describe some of the characters we'll meet in the story, in roughly one sentence. These can either be made collaboratively, or by the player who'll play them, or you can make up characters for each other. You can invent more characters as the need arises.

Decide whether to choose the relations between the characters beforehand, or if it fits the game better that they are improvised through play. Relations may be implicit in the characters (a mother and her two daughters), or you can connect the characters after they are created. ("I want to play a neighbour who hates you").

Methods

Maybe you want to employ some particular techniques in your game?

Some example methods:

- ◆ Establish what the first and last scene will be about before the game starts.
- ◆ Fate play: decide upon some particular events that will happen during play before the game starts. It will be a collaborative responsibility to drive towards these events during play.
- ◆ Give the game a theme: The theme explains what the story is to be about. It's usually about a sentence long. For instance: "How do you deal with disappointment?" or "What wouldn't you do for love?"

It can be a good idea to have the theme and/or fates written down someplace visible for the players to easily incorporate them in the game.

- ◆ Inspirational cards: All the players write a few notes with inspirational words that can be drawn by the person responsible for setting the scene - these can be theme, motive, atmosphere etc, and can be used to inspire the person setting the scene.
- ◆ Chronicle: Scenes are introduced by voiceover narration from the player responsible for the scene.
- ◆ The document “Play With Intent” is chock-full of ideas for techniques you can use in a freeform game. Please see <http://playwithintent.wordpress.com/>

You don't have to decide on the elements above in any particular order. If you have an idea you want to try out, please suggest it to the group.

Warm-up

Do a theatre style warm-up exercise that is both physical and creative. Example: The Theater Machine: We are building a machine that creates an emotion the players decide upon beforehand. Anger, joy, excitement or jealousy, for instance. One player starts with a rhythmic movement accompanied by a sound. The other players join the machine one by one with their own movements and sounds that together create The Theater Machine. The warm-up is over when everyone has contributed as an element of the machine.

Then: Go play!

Examples

Here are a couple of examples of ‘game scaffoldings’ made up using the method above - all were created in the sequence they are written, to show how the creative process can change according to what element you start with:

1. Spaghetti Western

Methods: Everyone can introduce new characters whenever they feel like it. Everyone in the scene can create sound effects. Fate play: The sheriff’s gun will malfunction in the last scene. The Mexican’s gold tooth will harm him in some way.

Setting: A town in the wild, wild, west.

Characters: The dirty Mexican, the good-hearted sheriff, the happy hooker.

Atmosphere/style of play: Spaghetti Western.

Story background: The sheriff has a thing with the hooker, who’s the Mexican’s sister.

2. Vegas Wedding

Atmosphere/style of play: The movie “Broken Flowers”

Setting: Las Vegas

Story background: The main characters are on vacation in Las Vegas. The game begins with a wedding where one of the couple answers ‘no’.

Methods: In this story, we’ll establish the first and last scene before the game starts. The first scene: one of the wedding couple answers ‘no’. Last scene: A new day, new opportunities. A drop down curtain and sunlight. We’ll also create some inspirational notes for scene setting before the game. These can be used at the whim of the player responsible for setting the scene.

Characters: The bride, the groom, a drunk towed in from the street to be the best man, friends and family (?), a cop.

3. The Isle of Terror:

Characters: A rugged sailor, a young backpacker, a crazed poet, a shy accountant.

Setting: The characters are shipwrecked on a tropical island.

Story background: We decided to skip story background in order to use flashbacks to create the backstory.

Atmosphere/style of play: Paranoia/horror

Methods:

- ◆ Flashback scenes: Example: Before we set the scene, we decide if it happens before the characters got to the Island or in the present.
- ◆ Shadowing ghosts: Any player can symbolize, through putting a hand on his/her head, that (s)he plays a ghost of the Island.