Worldbuilding Questionnaire

Some worldbuilding questionnaires focus on asking as many questions as possible about your world so you end up with a bunch of scattered information about what your world looks like.

That’s not what this questionnaire is doing.

Because, frankly, we don’t think a bunch of scattered information about your world is incredibly helpful for worldbuilding.

Great worldbuilding doesn’t look like coming up with a bunch of random cool ideas and sticking them together in a world.

It looks like coming up with one or two cool ideas, but weaving them deeply throughout every single area of your world.

That’s what this questionnaire is designed to help you to do.

We’re not offering as *full* of a worldbuilding questionnaire as we could.

But we do hope we’re offering you an *effective* worldbuilding questionnaire for developing the most unique, awesome world you can in the least amount of time.

Let’s dive in.

**—Guiding Principles—**

The first step you need to take is to figure out what the one or two guiding principles are going to be for your world.

These guiding principles are what makes your story different from the normal world.

Is there magic in your story? Do physics work differently? Is the supernatural different? Are there really unique races (not just your cookie-cutter elves or dwarves)? Does your world’s cosmology radically change the nature of your world?

Here are some examples of what guiding principles can look like:

* Rings of power that can lengthen life and grant users special powers. (*The Lord of the Rings*)
* A science so sophisticated, it can predict the course of human civilization. (*Foundation*)
* Tremendous hurricane-like storms that regularly pass through the country and destroy everything in its path. (*The Stormlight Archive*)

Choose one or two elements that are going to make your world different from our world and list them below.

**Guiding Principle #1:**

**Guiding Principle #2:**

After creating your two guiding principles, the next step is to sketch out the three levels of worldbuilding: laws of reality, laws of the world, and laws of culture. Each level is comprised of multiple sections.

For each section, write up a minimum of two to three sentences explaining what that sphere looks like in your world. Then, write up one sentence minimum for each guiding principle explaining how it affects that topic (if at all).

After writing a paragraph for each section, choose one or two sections in Level One and Level Two, *and* two or three sections in Level Three. Write several additional paragraphs about these sections. We recommend using the related questions at this link to explore those sections: <http://www.sfwa.org/2009/08/fantasy-worldbuilding-questions/>

You don’t need to do this with all sections (we’re trying to be effective, not full); but you do need to have a couple areas developed in-depth—especially if your story focuses on it (e.g. if your story is set at a school, you need to develop education more than if your story is set on the battlefield).

This will help you make sure you’re using your world’s guiding principles to their full effect and applying them throughout the entirety of a society.

**—Level One: Laws of Reality—**

*These are laws that are unchanging no matter what planet you live on. It will form the basis of your characters’ worldviews.*

**Supernatural Beings**

Questions to Consider in this Section: What kind of supernatural beings exist (angels, demons, God[s?], etc.)? What is their general hierarchy? How do they influence the world?

How do supernatural beings affect Guiding Principle #1, if at all?

How do supernatural beings affect Guiding Principle #2, if at all?

**Philosophical Foundations**

Questions to Consider in this Section: What defines reality? Is reality inherently linear or cyclical? What is the nature of good and evil? Is morality in this universe different than our own? If so, how?

How do philosophical foundations affect Guiding Principle #1, if at all?

How do philosophical foundations affect Guiding Principle #2, if at all?

**Laws of Magic**

*If you have magic, magic will likely be one of the guiding principles of your world. Here are some questions to flesh out your magic system. If you don’t have a magic system, feel free to skip this section.*

Questions to Consider in this Section: Is magic in your world more of a science or a mystery? How does magic work? Who can practice magic and how do people learn magic? What is the cost of magic, and what are its limits? How can people accomplish magical acts?

How do magic and Guiding Principle #1 affect each other, if at all?

How do magic and Guiding Principle #2 affect each other, if at all?

**—Level Two: Laws of the World—**

*These are laws specific to the physical world your characters live in. These don’t affect anything supernatural or metaphysical, but do describe the physical makeup of your world.*

**Solar System**

Questions to Consider in this Section: What kind of solar system is your world in? How many planets and moons are there and how many can be seen with the naked eye? How many days are in a year? What are the seasons like and how long do they last?

How does the solar system affect guiding principle #1, if at all?

How does the solar system affect guiding principle #2, if at all?

**Geography**

Questions to Consider in this Section: What does the geography of your story look like (hint: draw a map)? What natural resources are available and what resources are scarce? What is the climate of your country like? Are there any unusual weather patterns or related circumstances?

How does guiding principle #1 affect geography, if at all?

How does guiding principle #2 affect geography, if at all?

**Races**

Questions to Consider in this Section: How many races exist in your world? What kind of races are they, and what are they like? How many people groups are humans divided into, and are there non-human sentient races? Where do they live and how intermingled are they? (If you want to develop races really in-depth, consider using [this resource](https://holyworlds.org/fantasy/viewtopic.php?f=244&t=7243&p=165363&hilit=race+fractal#p165363) to help.)

How does Guiding Principle #1 affect races, if at all?

How does Guiding Principle #2 affect races, if at all?

**Animals & Plants**

Questions to Consider in this Section: What unique animals exist in this world that your characters may interact with? What unique plants exist in this world?

How does guiding principle #1 affect animals and plants, if at all?

How does guiding principle #2 affect animals and plants, if at all?

**—Level Three: Laws of the Culture—**

*These are the laws & customs that dictate what the society/culture that forms the setting of your story. If you have multiple cultures, you may want to fill this out multiple times for each culture.*

**Theme Connection**

What three qualities does your society value more than anything else? What themes related to your story, if any, does your society embody?

**History**

Questions to Consider in this Section: What is the history of the cultures portrayed in your story? How has history shaped your culture’s values? Who are the heroes and villains in your culture’s history?

How does Guiding Principle #1 affect history?

How does Guiding Principle #2 affect history?

**Religion & Philosophy**

Questions to Consider in this Section: What major religions exist in your culture? What do these religions teach? How do people practice these religions? What philosophical movements have shaped your culture and how do they affect the way people act?

How does Guiding Principle #1 affect religion & philosophy?

How does Guiding Principle #2 affect religion & philosophy?

**Politics & Government**

Questions to Consider in this Section: What kind of government does the culture have? How does the form of government shape the way people act? What kind of foreign policies and domestic policies does the government enforce and how do those policies shape the way society functions? How much crime exists?

How does Guiding Principle #1 affect politics & government?

How does Guiding Principle #2 affect politics & government?

**Language**

Questions to Consider in this Section: How many languages exist in your culture? Do people on different spectrums of the social hierarchy speak different languages? What slang words, curse words, or colloquialisms are common in your culture?

How does Guiding Principle #1 affect language?

How does Guiding Principle #2 affect language?

**Science & Technology**

Questions to Consider in this Section: What technological and scientific advancements have your culture made? How were these technologies intended to help society? How have they actually shaped society? Is your society technologically growing or stagnant? How advanced is the practice of medicine?

How does Guiding Principle #1 affect science & technology?

How does Guiding Principle #2 affect science & technology?

**Economics and Jobs**

Questions to Consider in this Section: What kind of economic system does your culture have? What jobs are the best and worst paying? What jobs are considered prestigious? Are people allowed to choose any job or are they expected to take their parent’s job? How does their geographic position affect the jobs they need the most? What kind of businesses exist?

How does Guiding Principle #1 affect economics & jobs?

How does Guiding Principle #2 affect economics & jobs?

**Education**

Questions to Consider in this Section: What kind of education is available for people? Do people go to school or get trained at home? How many people can read? How important does your culture believe formal education is? What does formal education look like? What things is every member of society expected to know?

How does Guiding Principle #1 affect education?

How does Guiding Principle #2 affect education?

**Social Relationships**

Questions to Consider in this Section: What does the social hierarchy of your society look like? Who is on the top and who is on the bottom? What gender roles or expectations exist in society? What prejudices do people have? How much of a group identity does your culture have? What constitutes a major faux pax? What rite-of-passages do youths or outsiders need to undertake to be accepted as full members of society?

How does Guiding Principle #1 affect social relationships?

How does Guiding Principle #2 affect social relationships?

**Family**

Questions to Consider in this Section: What does the average family look like? How many kids does the average family have? How is divorce treated? How do people court? What do gender roles look like within the family? How important is the concept of family within the culture?

How does Guiding Principle #1 affect family?

How does Guiding Principle #2 affect family?

**The Arts**

Questions to Consider in this Section: What does your culture believe the purpose of art is? What theories exist to explain good art? What style of painting & drawing is in vogue? What is the role of music and how many people can play music? What architecture style does society follow? What does normal fashion look like? What do people eat? (Yeah, we’re technically cheating on this one, but where else do you put this?)

How does Guiding Principle #1 affect the arts?

How does Guiding Principle #2 affect the arts?