

Worldbuilding — Workbook

This workbook turns the course into a buildable world. Each section maps to one course module and walks you from physical logic up through culture, power, and history, then into revealing it all without info-dumps. Work the exercises in order; the outputs of one section become the inputs of the next, so by the end you hold a coherent, story-ready world and a repeatable method for inventing more.

The Physical World: Geography, Climate, and Maps

Establish a physically plausible map so every culture and conflict that follows has solid ground to stand on.

Exercise: Run the Consequence Chain on a Blank Coastline

Sketch a rough coastline (a few minutes, no artistry required) and apply the five climate rules in order: latitude, prevailing westerlies, rain shadow, ocean versus interior, and currents. Mark where deserts, forests, and grasslands fall, and note the reasoning beside each so the map is derived rather than guessed.

- Where on your map does dry descending air create a desert near 30 degrees latitude, and which coast gets rain first?

- Place one north-south mountain range: which side is the lush windward slope and which is the rain-shadow desert?

- Pick one biome on your map and write the one-sentence physical reason it is there.

- What geographic feature on your map already implies a future conflict (a single pass, a lone harbor, a scarce river)?

Worksheet: Settlement Site Bargain Sheet

Choose three settlements and, for each, record the bargain it struck between trade, defense, and resources. Fill every field; a blank field means you have not yet decided why the place exists.

Settlement name

Water source (river / confluence / harbor / lake)

Why it exists (trade / defense / resource)

Defensive feature (hill / river bend / island / wall)

What it produces in surplus

Its biggest vulnerability

Checklist: Physical Plausibility Audit

- [] Every river flows downhill from high ground to the sea and never branches going downstream (except at a delta)
- [] Each desert, forest, and grassland has a stated physical cause
- [] Every major city sits on or near water and has a clear reason to exist
- [] At least one geographic chokepoint exists that concentrates wealth or power
- [] Any magic or fantastical element has been assigned the link in the chain where it enters (geography, climate, or resources)

Peoples and Cultures: Making Societies Feel Real

Derive cultures as survival strategies from your geography, then give them the internal contradiction that real societies carry.

Exercise: Generate a Culture from Its Environment

Pick one region from your map and answer the five culture-generating questions in writing. Do not invent dress, names, or festivals yet; let the visible culture emerge afterward from the survival pressures you identify.

- How do these people get food and water, and how reliable is that supply?

- What is the single biggest threat to survival here, and how does the culture organize against it?

- What do they value most and what is taboo, and what scarce or dangerous thing does each value protect?

- How do they explain what they cannot control, and what does that imply about their religion?

Worksheet: Anti-Monoculture Fault-Line Sheet

For one culture, deliberately install internal diversity and at least one fault line so it cannot collapse into a single-trait people. Fill each field with specifics.

Culture name

Regional variation (how the capital differs from the frontier)

Class or subculture split (how rich, poor, clergy, or soldiers differ in outlook)

Central internal fault line (the value they preach but violate, or the tradition under attack)

Who is dissenting or reforming, and why

How outsiders stereotype them versus how they actually are

Exercise: Imply Belief and Language Through Behavior

Design the texture of religion and language for one culture using behavior and a few pointed choices rather than charts. Write a short scene fragment that conveys belief through a single action.

- Write one sentence in which a character reveals their religion through a gesture or habit, not exposition.

- Coin two idioms grounded in this culture's environment, and state the value each encodes.

- Decide what these people swear by, and explain what that oath reveals about what they hold sacred or feared.

- Name one form of address that encodes the culture's social hierarchy.
-

Checklist: Culture Depth Checklist

- Each culture's customs trace back to an environmental or economic pressure
- No culture can be summed up in a single sentence or trait
- Every culture has at least one internal fault line or dissenting group
- Religion is shown through behavior, ritual, or taboo rather than a pantheon chart
- Invented names within one culture are phonetically consistent with each other
- Any real-world inspiration was researched from primary or own-voices sources, not fantasy pastiches

Systems of Power: Economy, Politics, and Conflict

Wire the world for tension by mapping resources and trade, choosing a power basis, and locating the pressure points that become plot.

Worksheet: Resource and Trade Map

List your major regions and trace economic gravity from surplus to deficit. Identify the keystone resources and chokepoints where wealth and conflict concentrate.

Region name

Surplus (what it sells)

Deficit (what it must buy or take)

Keystone resource it controls or lacks

Trade route and the chokepoint it passes through

Who controls that chokepoint and what they charge

Exercise: Choose and Justify a Power Structure

For your central society, decide what power is based on and let the institutions follow. Avoid defaulting to a medieval monarchy unless you choose it deliberately, and locate the fault lines where plot will live.

- What is power based on here: land, trade wealth, religious authority, military force, or administration?

- Given that basis, who governs, who serves, and who is excluded?

- Where is this structure unstable: a succession gap, a rising class, a weakening center?

- What single event (a drought, a dead ruler, a cut route) would tip this structure into crisis?

Exercise: Squeeze the World for Conflict

Audit your built world for latent conflict instead of inventing it from outside. Run the five conflict-finding categories and capture every pressure point you find, then mark the one or two your protagonist can actually feel.

- Scarcity clash: which two parties need the same limited resource, and what currently stops one from taking it?

- Power instability and belief collision: where does a worldview or a class grind against another at a border or in a city?

-
- Historical wound: what old injustice has the present generation not forgiven, and who wants to settle it?
-
- Disruptive change: what new magic, technology, route, or migration threatens an existing order, and who loses?
-

Checklist: Power and Conflict Checklist

- At least one keystone resource is unevenly distributed and widely needed
- Every chokepoint has a named controller and a stated cost to pass
- Any magic or technology has been run through the economy to determine who it enriches and who it ruins
- The central power structure has a clearly stated basis and at least one fault line
- You have listed multiple pressure points but selected only one or two for this story
- Each chosen conflict grows from the world's logic rather than being bolted on

History, Mythology, and Revealing It Without Info-Dumps

Give the world a past that pressures the present, then reveal everything through the iceberg method and need-to-know pacing.

Worksheet: Live History and Myth-Versus-Truth Sheet

Define three to five major historical events that still shape the present, and for each separate what really happened from the myth the culture tells. The gap between them is your richest material.

Event name and type (founding / catastrophe / war / golden age / fall)

What actually happened

The myth the culture tells about it

Winners and losers (and which losers remember longest)

Present-day grudge, institution, or border it still shapes

Unresolved thread it leaves (missing heir, lost artifact, disputed claim)

Exercise: Build the Iceberg, Show the Tip

Take one deep piece of your world (an old war, a religious taboo, an economic fact) and practice revealing it by implication. Build the full submerged detail in notes, then reveal only the sliver the story needs.

- Write the deep version: three to five sentences of the full background only you will ever see.
-
- Now reveal it in a single line of dialogue or action that treats it as ordinary and explains nothing.
-
- Replace one paragraph of history with one loaded object, scar, or offhand remark that implies it.
-
- Name one thing you will deliberately withhold to create intrigue rather than explain.
-

Exercise: Kill the Info-Dump

Take a passage from your own draft (or write a deliberately bad as-you-know exchange) and rewrite it so the information arrives through need, conflict, or point of view instead of explanation.

- Rewrite an as-you-know exchange so no character explains what they both already know.

-
- Tie one world fact to a beat of action or emotion so it arrives only when it becomes relevant.
 - Filter one explanation through an outsider character who genuinely does not know the world.
 - Teach one custom by dramatizing what happens to someone who breaks it.
-

Checklist: Reveal and Final-Draft Audit

- [] Three to five historical events each cast a live shadow on the present
- [] At least one culture's myth differs meaningfully from what really happened
- [] Most of the built world stays off the page; only the story-relevant tip is shown
- [] No passage stops the story purely to explain the world
- [] Every world fact on the page arrives because a character needs, reacts to, or is changed by it
- [] A final read confirms nothing on the page contradicts the established physical and cultural logic

Your Action Plan

1. Draw a rough coastline and apply the five climate rules in order to derive deserts, forests, and grasslands with stated reasons.
2. Place three to five settlements on water, recording each one's bargain between trade, defense, and resources.
3. Choose two or three core cultures and generate each from its environment using the five culture questions, before inventing any surface detail.
4. Install at least one internal fault line in each culture so none collapses into a single-trait monoculture.
5. Build a resource and trade map, naming one or two keystone resources and the chokepoints where wealth concentrates.
6. Decide what power is based on in your central society and locate its fault lines.
7. Audit the world for latent conflict and select only the one or two pressure points your protagonist can feel.
8. Define three to five live historical events and write the myth alongside the truth for each.
9. Build each major world element in deep notes, then plan to show only the iceberg tip the story needs.
10. Run a final worldbuilding audit on your draft: cut info-dumps, convert lectures into scenes, and verify consistency against your physical and cultural logic.

