



GAME NARRATIVE
SUMMIT

Character Wrangling

Managing Large Casts with
Documentation and Design

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Create and maintain comprehensive, collaborative documentation. Tailor it to your needs. Keep it up-to-date and participatory.



Benefits

- Planning and implementation tracking enhances collaboration
- Shared resources allow devs to build on each other's ideas
- Dialogue samples help writers maintain diverse character voices
- Dev notes make it easier to understand why certain decisions were made and how they relate to future content



Wiki vs Doc – Two Basic Approaches

Wiki Benefits

- Improved navigation and linking
- Built-in Citation system
- Flexible

Doc Benefits

- Extremely Portable
- Can double as content tracking and approval documents
- Better for comprehensive changes and replacements



What Your Database Includes

- Personality and visual touchstones for each character
- Searchable keywords for game-relevant qualities
- Sample character dialogue of different types
- Implemented content and future plans
- Additional backstory or worldbuilding
- Tool reference numbers
- Developer notes



Is it in the game?

- Focus on content and story that exist in game
- Differentiate between internal knowledge and player knowledge
- If something important is not in game and on the critical path, you have a problem



Collaboration and Compliance

- Assign primary responsibility to a single person or team
- Schedule ample time for document maintenance
- Reward contribution and participation
- When there are conflicts, privilege documented over undocumented
- Use documentation in the planning process
- Combine Lead or IP approval docs with reference




Transmedia Tie-ins

Transmedia should be included in your documentation, but it has different significance than in-game content.

- Reinforce transmedia information in game
- DON'T hide broad-strokes character development in other media
- DO use media to deepen and explore traits and personalities



How Canon Is It?

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1. Live and Playable – players encountered these events in-game
 2. Live Word of God – formally confirmed by a reliable narrator
 3. Locked – fully implemented, headed for release
 4. Implemented – substantial internally-playable content exists
 5. Planned and Scheduled – designed and has a solid release date
 6. Rough – plans to include this exist, but are not scheduled



Word of God vs the Unreliable Narrator

Word of God: Anything the player may not directly witness that can still be assumed to be definitively canon

Unreliable Narrator: Facts conveyed by an in-universe character or organization may be biased, or based on incomplete information

Establish which sources are Word of God, and which are not.
Players often prefer in-character sources with personality.



How does documentation help with writing?

- At-a-glance summaries that include personality, dialogue, and future plans allow collaborators to understand the direction of a character
- Prevents proliferation of disposable generic archetype characters
- Unused content can be revitalized or inspire new ideas
- Running jokes, recurring bits, and call-backs become more successful



Cross Discipline Documents

Monitor relevant docs from other teams. Link and collaborate.

- Content Tracking Documents – confirm implementation status
- Style Guides – spot check to make sure these match practices
- VO casting guides – pull from in-game text and database descriptions
- Narrative Roadmaps – link comprehensively, flag if something vital is missing from implemented and scheduled content



Takeaways

- Document maintenance is a time-saving task - schedule it aggressively
- Shared characters foster an attitude of collaboration, mutual inspiration, and collective ownership
- What players see is paramount, background is secondary
- Documentation helps everyone, so include everyone in the process



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