Westerville Public Library

Tabletop Roleplaying Game (TTRPG) FAQ

What is a TTRPG?

TTRPG stands for Tabletop Roleplaying Game. Sometimes people will also call them “pencil and paper” rpgs. TTRPGs can cover many types of table games including card games like Pokémon, board games like Clue, and pencil games like Dungeons & Dragons (D&D). A TTRPG usually has some component of role-playing, whether you are pretending to be a Pokémon trainer, Miss Scarlet solving the mystery of Mr. Body’s murder, or an elven rogue who likes to steal shiny objects.

Why is the library promoting TTRPGs?

TTRPGs are a great imagination tool for children and adults! They help with team building, learning to take turns, creative thinking, reading, mathematics, and problem solving. They can also be a starting place for creative writing skills and painting (if you like miniatures).

How do I know if I’ll like TTRPGs?

The best way to find out is to try it! Which is why the library is so great – you don’t have to make a monetary commitment, and if you find that it’s not your cup of tea, then you can return the items! A good litmus test though is if you like video games with storylines (like The Witcher, the Final Fantasy Series, or The Legend of Zelda).

What do I need to start playing?

The best place to start is to find a group of like-minded people who would also like to play! Meeting new people is awesome, but sometimes it's easier to start something new with people you know. The library has also compiled a list of local hobby shops in the Westerville/Columbus area where you can find people to play with! Next, you'll need some dice, pencils, and paper. You don't have to have a manual to start with, though it helps to check one out from the library so you can go over the rules of the game you want to play.

There are a lot of acronyms and abbreviations that people use when talking about TTRPGs, what do they all mean?

You can find a handy glossary of terms here!

Do I have to play in person, or can I play online too?

Yes, you can play online with people as well! Here is a list of free online resources we have compiled for people, including websites that are completely devoted to giving people a space to play TTRPGs online!

There are so many different books and editions, how do I know which ones to start with?

The best place to start is always the "Player Handbook" for any game series. Sometimes they are called the "Core Handbook" or "Basic Set." As for edition – the newest edition is usually the best to start with. They are refined versions of the books that came before and in general are the easiest to understand.

Do I have to use miniatures/maps/etcetera when playing an in-person game?

No, you can do whatever you want with your games. Some people use the “theater of the mind” style of play that requires descriptions of everything the players are doing, seeing, hearing, and smelling. Some people use play mats, white boards, or poster printers with lamination that allow the use of erasable markers. Cutting and shaping Styrofoam is a great way to make cheap, but elaborate maps. Miniatures can be bought at hobby shops or printed using a 3-D printer. Some people put all of these together and also use miniatures and elaborate 3-D maps (see: Matt Mercer on Critical Role or Brennan Lee Mulligan on Dimension 20). You do whatever fits best with your style of play.

Do I have to role-play?

You never have to do anything you’re not comfortable with. Though you should always discuss your feelings with your GM and your group. You can tell everyone what your character is doing in a 3rd person style if you want. For example, “Pumpkin the gnome walks into the store and buys a sword” is just as good as making up a voice and pretending to be Pumpkin walking into the store. Some people like to cosplay and dress up, some people like to make voices for their characters, and some people just like to fight things and don’t like role-playing. You do you.

What is a session zero?

Session Zero is the first session of any new game. Usually, it is a good time for players and the GM to hash out what kind of game they want to play. For example:

- Which game rules are you going to use (Pathfinder, D&D, GURPS, Quest, FATE, etcetera...), and will the GM allow homebrew content?

- How “crunchy” (strictly following the rules) is the game going to be? Less “crunchy” (rules are a guideline and the GM can change them if they want for better storytelling) or more “crunchy” (the rules will be strictly followed)?

- What people’s triggers, boundaries, and dislikes are (for example, some people don’t want to fight Giant Spiders; some people don’t like animals getting hurt; or some people don’t like overly graphic descriptions of blood).

- Creating guidelines of how to deal with interpersonal issues in the group or disputes over rules.

- Are you playing a pre-written adventure? What is the setting like, what things will your characters need to know beforehand?

- Creating your characters.

- Determining how your group comes together in the game (Are you already a party of adventurers? Childhood friends? Or complete strangers?)

- How you want to deal with in-character conflict amongst players. Not all characters are always going to agree on the best course of action. Talk about these things with your co-players so no one takes things personally. You can also reference here for a guide on following proper player etiquette.

- Scheduling a regular time and place to meet.

- Deciding how long your sessions will be – 2 hours? 4 hours? Less? More?

I don’t know what all these different dice are supposed to do!

You can find a handy guide here on what each die is and how they’re generally used in a game. If you’d prefer not to use all those dice, there are some games that only require

a six-sided die (GURPS), a twenty-sided die (Quest), or a ten-sided die (Vampire: the Masquerade).

What's the difference between a campaign and a one-shot?

A campaign is a long-term game that (depending on how often you meet) can take years to finish. A one-shot is generally short and takes one or two sessions to complete (sometimes more if people get creative). One-shots are a good place to start for first time players and GMs.

Why are there all these jokes and memes about scheduling Dungeons and Dragons games?

The real final boss of RPGs is time management. No matter how hard you try to set a schedule, it will eventually fall apart. Keep on trying though! Even if you don't meet at the same time every week or month, if you can get together and play then it's worth it!

What RPGs are there other than Dungeons and Dragons?

There is a list here of all the different TTRPG manuals the library currently owns! A quick Google or Amazon search will also give you even more!

What's an OGL?

OGL stands for Open Gaming License. Basically, it is a document that was released by Wizards of the Coast (WotC) and Hasbro (the companies that own D&D) that allowed people to create and sell content based on the D&D rule systems. There is a lot of legal-speak about the new OGL that WotC is planning to release, so this YouTube video helps explain it more simply. The OGL: Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About the Open Gaming License but were Afraid to Ask

Being a GM is scary, but no one wants to do it. How do I learn to GM?

Being a GM isn't as scary as you think it might be. You do not have to memorize everything; you're allowed to make mistakes. You do not have to create everything from scratch and make up your own story or world. There are lots of videos, articles, books, and podcasts that you can find to help you begin GMing on your own. You can also come to the library and ask the librarians where to start!

Just think of the GM as the narrator of the story. The players get to choose their own adventure, and the GM flips the pages and tells them what happens. If there is any dissent, just refer to the rule guidelines you created with the group in session Zero. Does the GM have the final say or did you agree to handle it democratically?

Finally, the most important thing to know about TTRPGs is that you are there to have fun. If you're not having fun, then it's okay to stop.