

— Rulebook Building 101 —

#1. Start with the Skeleton

- It's a lot like writing a term paper: outline comes first!
- Your game's rules are the muscles that make it a living, breathing organism. The rulebook is the skeleton that supports those muscles and allows them to function.
- Even if your rulebook won't include a printed Table of Contents, create a virtual one.
- Progress from macro to micro, big picture to small details.
- Don't be afraid to use an "FAQ" section (or similar) for oddball rules.

#2. Use Plain Language

- Write how we talk. Take keys from your teaching script to write with relatable language. Even college textbooks and gov't manuals are written to middle-grade reading level.
- Don't use complex sentences with lots of nested clauses. Break them down into shorter, more easily digestible pieces. (Have people read it aloud to test for this.)
- Decide what level of assumed knowledge is appropriate for your game's audience, and proceed with that in mind. (Should they know what a "hand" of cards is? Probably. A "worker placement" game? Depends.)
- Prioritize second-person POV and active voice.

#3. Choose Your Keywords Carefully

- Write out a list of all your keywords: words/phrases that carry game-specific meaning.
- Use keywords as shorthand for complex rules or mechanisms: define them once, and save yourself lots of redundant explanation.
- Be 100% consistent in the application of your keywords. Sharp-eyed readers will pick up on unintentional differences and wonder... (e.g., "action" vs. "activation")
- All of these things take on special importance for rules-on-cards games.

#4. Make Formatting Your Friend

- Use clearly defined headers and subheaders to help subdivide the information.
- Don't compromise on legibility in order to use a thematic font.
- Use formatting to call out your keywords (e.g., bold + italics) the first time they're introduced, or where they are defined. It's like a neon sign that says "I'm important!"
- Be liberal with white space! Cut your paragraphs in half. Then cut in half again.
- Multiple columns are a great solution for larger rulebooks.

#5. Show & Tell

- Don't make the reader figure out the intersections of mechanisms; point them out! You've created a world that lives by your rules — gotta show 'em how it works!
- Contextualize the importance of a rule by telling the reader how it affects the strategy and decision making in the game.
- Examples: Don't just illustrate individual rules. Present gameplay situations.
- LOTS. OF. GRAPHICS. (Or stage photos of gameplay situations with your proto.)