



The Architect's step by step guide to building an adventure.

First and foremost, if you find value in this and you'd like to get more information to help build an Adventure, [check out The Website](#).

[Also, if you want 1 on 1 help, I do consultations!](#)

Finally, if you'd rather [watch than read](#), I cover this and much more on my [Youtube Channel](#). Finally, there is a [blog on my site](#) with more ideas!

Otherwise, **LET'S BEGIN**

Step 1:

You need to start with the purpose, and then the "perceived purpose". The purpose is simple, maybe a proposal or a birthday. That being said, you can't tell your players what the purpose is ("Happy birthday honey! There's a surprise party waiting for you and you need to find it!") This brings us to the perceived purpose. It could be something as simple as "I built this day for you, follow the clues!" Or to be more elaborate. "Here's a box. you need to find the key."

Step 2:

Next, you need to lock down your "anchor points." The most important anchor point is the end. Figure out where and when, and then jump all the way back and commit to the beginning.

Once you have the beginning and end down, you can scout for fun locations in between. Simple rule I like to follow is "no location should ever be longer than 15 minutes Travel time from the previous location".

This should help narrow down the radius of where you want this Adventure. After that it's just a matter of finding fun and interesting locations. In the beginning just write down everything and slowly narrow it down.

Some of my favorite basic locations that usually work for most places:

- Park
- Zoo
- Museum
- Restaurant
- Bookstore
- coffeeshop
- Library
- antique shop
- Statue
- Bronze plaque
- High point (An overlook or a hill where you can use a monocular)

Go on Tripadvisor, google, and yelp. Start checking out fun and interesting places in your area. Add them to this [schedule doc](#). While you do that, populate them on a [custom google map](#).

Step 3:

Once you have a basic idea of the adventure locations, it's time to start adding "gambits" (I call them gambits because you're not going to use a puzzle at every stop. Gambits are "anything you use to propel your player to the next stop." It might be them finding something, or it might be them solving a puzzle or decoding a message!

Gambits can be broken down into one of three buckets:

- Dead Drops
- Handoffs
- Decodes

Dead Drops - This is any kind of play where you literally hide something for your player to find. It could be something as simple as a locked chest sitting in their home to an envelope sitting in the hand of a statue in a public square. Dead drops are the most risky. I recommend hiding them well and giving your player detailed instructions and/or having someone keep eyes on the drop until it's picked up!

Handoffs - This play is where you have a human literally handing off what's needed. These aren't nearly as risky but require more help. Easy handoffs could include incorporating

businesses or restaurants or getting the help of friends and family to be at certain locations to approach your player!

Decodes - This play is where you encode a clue/instructions and then send your player to a place where they could decode the message. My favorite is a [book/Ottendorf cipher](#) (National Treasure, back of the Declaration of independence). There's something really fun about using a public plaque or sign to decode a hidden message just for you!

In closing, I recommend mixing things up. Decodes can be safe but if you hit your participant with nothing but puzzles, their brain might explode. Dead drops are exciting but leaving envelope after envelope in public places will cause you lots of undue stress. Get that balance! Here are a couple parting rules I always harp on that you should keep in mind as you're building the adventure:

- Always make the adventure easier than you'd like.
- Keep it under 6 hours. Brains get tired. If it's your first try, shoot for 2-3 hours tops.
- Mitigate risk. If you're going to do something risky (Like leave an envelope in a public place for an hour) **MAKE SURE YOU HAVE A CONTINGENCY PLAN**.
- Think of a way that you can slow or speed up your player if there is a time sensitive ending (Like a surprise party or proposal)

Want more guidance on building out an Adventure? Check out this ["how to format an Adventure"](#) Blog post by The Confounder

Finally, Here is a list of materials that I often purchase

when I'm running adventures with a little breakdown. Some of them (Like the Cryptex) I use ALL THE TIME. Others (Like the Mexican Army Cipher or the Jefferson Wheel) are only recommended for specific circumstances. Full disclosure: With some of these links, as an Amazon Associate I earn from qualifying purchases.

- [5 digit Cryptex puzzle box](#)
 - This one is my favorite. It's a little pricier but holds up wayyyyy better than the cheaper alternative. It's got great weight and you can set the 5 digit password to anything
- [6 digit Cryptex puzzle box](#)
 - Same as above, this one has 6 letters instead of five. Also the inside cylinder has a heart etched into it so it kinda pigeonholes you into using it for something romantic.
- [The Justin Nevins Cryptex puzzle box](#)

- These are made by the guy that designed the first Cryptex. They are pricier but absolutely incredible and well worth the money if you have the budget. I own one and never use it for adventures. It's part of my personal collection. If you want to make a statement and have a keepsake you'll treasure forever. This is where you go
- [Mexican army cipher](#)
 - This is a great way to give someone a few math based puzzle/logic problems before they can decode a message. I have a short list of problems if you feel inclined to use this
- [Jefferson wheel](#)
 - This can only be used to decode messages (no puzzles, just transcribing). It's definitely fun, yet simple.
- [Blacklight](#)
 - Honestly, You can get anything. This one is pretty small and inexpensive. They're all the same.
- [Blacklight markers](#)
 - Similar to the light, you're probably ok with anything. I personally like this set because Blue/pink markers are VIBRANT but can potentially be seen by the naked eye while yellow is much more subtle. The different levels of visibility give you options.
- [Elemental Ink pens](#)
 - These are great. Heat makes the ink disappear and cold makes it reappear. Can add some really fun "magic tricks." Same as the Cryptex, just let me know if you're interested and we can talk about it!
- [Simple Hollowed out book](#)
 - Great for use in libraries and bookstores. You can also find a few other options at your Local Hobby Lobby
- [Realistic Hollowed out book](#)
 - This one is a little pricier but actually has real pages. Plus the combination lock adds an extra step for the more difficult adventures. Heads up, the lock isn't great.
- [4 letter lock](#)
 - This is great for putting on a small chest with an accompanying riddle. There is a list of possible answers that comes with the lock and I can help find/create riddles with you.
- [A different 4 letter lock](#)
 - These come in different colors and have a different buffet of letters and answers.
- [Directional lock](#)
 - This is a tad more complex but gives you lots of options. We can create a directional puzzle or use number/letter/other stickers that come with the lock. I personally love using the Heart/Diamond/Club/Spade sticker and creating a fun puzzle using playing cards

- [Small chest](#)
 - The chest is pretty nice but the lock feels a bit cheap. You can also go to hobby lobby and find boxes but you'll have to buy a hasp from a hardware store and attach it yourself
- [Antique Locks](#)
 - These are great. They are heavy and need the key to open.
- [Lockbox](#)
 - This is a simple portable box that can be tethered in a public place. You can place it somewhere in advance and can confidently know that it will still be there when your player arrives.
- [How to Puzzle Cache Book](#)
 - This is specifically for Geocaching, but the rules are the same. It's full of great ideas for location based puzzles and hiding objects

Hope this helped! If you're just starting out, I would recommend trying my [Valentines Day formula](#). Just make small changes to fit whatever feeling you're trying to elicit!

BEST OF LUCK
The Architect