



What is a “Campaign Bible?”

A campaign bible is a document that a Dungeon Master creates for her players to introduce them to the basics of a campaign and/or a homebrew world. It gives general information about the history, geography, and society of your fictional world. It should have everything a player needs to create and connect a new character to your campaign. The bible can also be a selling point to convince reluctant players to join or make sure that everyone is on the same page regarding the tone and style of the game. In short, your campaign bible is all the information about your world and your adventure that players need to know (with spoilers and secrets removed, of course).

When TV writers and directors create a new series, they often have a “show bible” -- this document not only helps keep everyone on the same page, but serves as a sort of mission statement, establishing tone, theme, and the direction of the show, often serving as a selling point to producers and investors. This is also a good way to think about your campaign bible.

Keep in mind that your campaign bible doesn’t need everything in listed below! The DM may also want to keep a “DM’s copy” of the campaign bible with secret information relating to the various places and powers discussed.

Before you begin

List your inspirations!

- What movies or books inspired this game?
- Is there a theme or tone you want the game to focus on?
- Is the game character-focused or more plot-focused? Light-hearted or serious?

Think about the goals of a campaign bible!

- Convey the tone or themes of your campaign to your players.
- Consider the basic information about the world that the players will need to know.
- Explain what it means to be the different species or classes in this particular game.
- Don’t forget to include information about when and where the game begins. The bible should not only help your players make characters but transition those character ideas into the first session of play.
- Are you building your own world or using someone else’s? Even if there is a published guide for your campaign setting you should still consider condensing the essential information for your story to something short that you can give to your players!
- Is there a mechanical twist? A new race? A new class? If so, think about how you will present this to your players.

Introduction

Your bible should start with a quick introduction to your world and your campaign. You should probably write this last! Summarize the basics of the themes and conflicts that are included in the rest of the document. Your goal here is to hook your potential players into the idea of your campaign. The introduction should be as short as possible (one-to-three paragraphs).

Part 1 - General Information

This should include one-to-five pages of background about your campaign world. Common knowledge about history, gods, magic, recent events, politics, current conflicts, and important locations. This is where you can really convey the basic tone or themes of the game to your players. Don't overwhelm them with a lengthy treatise on every aspect of your world. Less is more! Make sure that players can read through this in just a few minutes. Things you should include in Part 1:

A short history and timeline

Give a short history of your world. This could just be a simple timeline of important events. Don't forget recent events too! You want to avoid having all the important world-shaking events happening in the distant past.

Geography and a map

This can be a detailed map or quick sketch of the campaign world. Depending on the scope of your campaign this could be a nation, a continent, a city, or a solar system. Limit your cartography to the areas that will be most important in actual play. Emphasize places where the characters might be from and places that characters may visit in the first several play sessions. If you're not great at cartography, don't forget you can always steal maps from other published settings or from real places and add your own labels. You can even just draw a flow chart with lines and nodes can help your players know what locations are nearby or faraway.

Gazetteer and description of important places

You should list and describe some of the places on your map. This should include the place where the campaign starts. Include centers of power, commerce, or learning as well as dangerous locations and places where treasure could be acquired.

Life in the world

Provide a brief sketch of basic information about living in your world. Consider the everyday details of your world. What is used for currency? What are the days of the week and months of the year? Is it easy to travel or hard? What languages are spoken? Be sure not to alienate your players make anything too unfamiliar or weird. A non-decimal currency or a three-day week may sound cool, but they may just cause unnecessary headaches.

Power and punishment

Who is in charge and what are they in charge of? Are there any powerful nations, dynasties, corporations, or organizations that the players should be aware of? What is the source of their power? What is illegal? Who enforces the law? What are typical punishments for crimes?

Daily life

What is the role of magic or technology in the life of most people? Are there any common professions? Are the majority of folk cosmopolitan or parochial? What do commoners fear or want?

NPCs

List and describe some important non-player characters or entities in your world. These could be rulers, powerful spellcasters, or mentors. Don't limit yourself here to just individuals. Describe any important factions, organizations, armies, or corporations. Consider describing "monsters" here too. Players should know about the greedy lich who sends zombies to attack the city every three years and the tribe of ogres who control the old forest.

Magic, gods, and the planes

What is the role of magic in your world? Is it respected or feared (or some combination of the two). How can one acquire magical powers? Who are the gods or main faiths of your world? What are their attitude towards mortals? What other planes or dimensions influence our world? Can someone or something travel between our world and another plane?

Part 2 - Player Information

The second half of your campaign bible should focus exclusively on helping players make characters and start the game. Information to write in this part should include basics on each of the species/races and classes so that players can make informed decisions when creating their characters. Make sure the starting location or event of the campaign is described so your players can create characters that are ready to begin adventuring when you actually start playing!

Species in your world

This should be a few short sentences describing the status, demographics, and role of each of the major species in your game. Players should know, for example, if halflings are the majority, are common, or are rarely seen in a given place. Rough percentages can help here.

You may also want to add a sentence or two explaining why a member of a particular species might be an adventurer or be part of your campaign.

Include a list common names for members of each species or culture. You can write these yourself or point players in the direction of an appropriate list, for example the entry on Dwarves in the PHB or a list of Roman names.

Classes in your world

This should quickly describe the frequency and status of each class. Is this class respected? Loathed? Something in-between? You will also want to add why a member of this class would be involved in the start of your campaign.

Consider including brief descriptions of class-specific organizations or factions. For example, a sentence describing a barbarian tribe, a thieves guild, or a wizard academy will help players make characters in those classes that fit in with your world.

Starting location or event

You should also include details about the starting location of your campaign. This could be a description of the town or neighborhood where the game begins or a description of an event (a ball, an invasion, a party) that starts the adventure. As you did in Part 1, write a few sentences describing important places, daily life, and interesting NPCs for your starting location.

Character hooks

Write several character hooks or traits explaining why an adventurer might be at the starting adventure or location for the first session. Think of these as ways to link your players into the campaign. For example, if your game begins with the coronation of a new king, then your campaign traits might be a list of reasons characters would attend this event. Some rules systems have mechanical options that may help you incorporate a character hook, for example, traits in Pathfinder or backgrounds in D&D 5e.

New rules

If you have any new rules, equipment, spells, backgrounds, feats, or other options for your players, it may be a good idea to include them in the campaign bible. New rules don't have to be mechanical! You can, for example, ask your players to consider their social status (are they from common or noble blood?) and their experience or naivety with the wider world (are they from a newly-contacted backwater planet or the center of the galaxy?).

A brand new class or species probably deserves its own independent document, but you should also include a brief description of this new option in your bible.

A final checklist:

- ☐ Is there info for all the common species?
- ☐ Is there info for all the common classes?
- ☐ Is there a description of the starting location?
- ☐ Are the gods or religions described? Likewise, are any special warlock patrons, wizard schools, etc. described?
- ☐ Do you convey the tone or feel of the campaign?
- ☐ Are all the optional or new rules included (if any)?
- ☐ If you are removing anything (races, feats, classes, spells, etc.), is that clearly communicated to your players?
- ☐ If some skills or themes are important (for example the Nature and Survival skills for a wilderness focused world, or swimming and sailing proficiency for a nautical campaign), is that clearly communicated to your players?
- ☐ Does your bible have a short introduction? Can you quickly give an elevator pitch to your potential players?
- ☐ Is your campaign bible too long? If a player can't read it quickly, then start cutting!
- ☐ Lastly, are you prepared to change or modify your world to accommodate or better engage your players? If you players find one aspect of the campaign interesting but don't like another, consider doubling-down on what your players enjoy!



Thanks for reading this "Guide to Making a Campaign Bible" by DM Rob and DM Matt of [Dungeon Master of None](#). Check out our podcast for more suggestions and links to Matt and Rob's example campaign bibles from their own games.