Worldbuilding Competition: Rules & Instructions

Competition Sponsored by the English and History Departments of Iowa State University

Rules

- Contestants must be undergraduate students currently enrolled at Iowa State University.

- Entries must represent the team's own original work.

- A.I. tools/chatbots may be used for ideas and inspiration but cannot be used to generate the text of the entry itself (also, be warned: A.I. loves clichés, and clichés won't win!).

- Brief quotations from other texts are acceptable if in quotation marks and cited.

- While you are free to work creatively within the constraints of the "World Description" format, the four key categories must be addressed (Technology; Political Impacts; Cultural, Religious and Intellectual Impacts; Economic, Environmental, and Social Impacts).

- Incomplete entries will be disqualified.

- Submissions must be received by April 1, 2024 at 11:59pm Central to be considered for judging. Late submissions will not be accepted.

- The decision of the judges is final.

Team Guidelines and Getting Assistance

Finding a Team: Teams should include anywhere from 2-5 members. If you are looking for other people interested in forming a team, please contact Kelli Fitzpatrick at kfitzpat@iastate.edu and join the competition Discord Server. We will try to help you find a team.

Getting Help: If you are looking for help with registration, questions about rules or scoring, formatting, file submission, or other procedural issues, email Kelli Fitzpatrick (kfitzpat@iastate.edu).

If you have questions about ideas as your team crafts your world or if you are stuck on the research part, email Dr. John Monroe (jmonroe@iastate.edu). Dr. Monroe is also available in-person at his office, Ross 641, on Mondays from 1:00 to 3:00 and by appointment.

Instructions & Scoring

Each entry must contain four parts: a Reflection, a World Description, an Annotated Bibliography, and a list of Character Roles and Story Hooks. To give yourself a sense of what a completed entry looks like, **refer to the example submission packet available for download on the competition website**. Each of these four components will be scored individually, and the whole packet will be given an overall score for the clarity and quality of its writing.

Reflection (maximum 500 words, minimum 250)

This brief document, worth 10% of the total points, should be in three parts:

- "What We Did," a one-paragraph summary of the key elements of your game world.

- "How We Did It," a one-paragraph summary of the process your team followed to produce the packet.

- "Lessons Learned," a discussion of any snags or challenges the team overcame as it did its work

It will be scored according to the following rubric:

Reflection	**What They Did:** Does this section give a clear description of the key elements of the world? **How They Did It:** Does this section clearly describe the group's process for creating their world? **Lessons Learned:** Is there evidence of reflection on the process (what went well, what they would do differently, etc.)?	_____/10

World Description (maximum 3500 words, minimum 1500 words)

The World Description is the centerpiece of your entry, worth 40% of the total score. It should be divided into four parts: a description of the technology that will shape your future, followed by sections describing the impact of the technology in three areas: politics, culture/religion/intellectual life, and economy/environment/society. **Please label these sections with headings.**

The World Description will be scored according to the following rubric:

World Description	• **Incorporation of Issues Related to A.I.:** Does the world description imagine a future shaped by Artificial Intelligence?
	• **Required Sections:** How thoroughly and creatively does the description flesh out the following categories:
	    ○ Technology
	    ○ Political Impacts
	    ○ Cultural, Religious, and Intellectual Impacts
	    ○ Social, Economic, and Environmental Impacts
	• **Originality:** How new and fresh and interesting are the ideas?
	• **Coherence**: How well do the different aspects of the world interconnect and make sense?
		_____/40

Annotated Bibliography (maximum 2500 words, minimum 750 words)

The annotated bibliography lists the sources that you drew on for inspiration in imagining your world and is worth 30% of the total points. It should include at least three sources, though you will probably get better results if you aim for five or six. Most of them should be scholarly texts: that is, material such as books or journal articles published for an academic audience in the humanities or social sciences. Each bibliography entry should be followed by a one-paragraph "annotation": a statement briefly summarizing the key points of the text and explaining how you drew on it in your world description.

The Annotated Bibliography will be scored according to the following rubric:

Annotated Bibliography	• **Correct citation:** Are the entries fully and consistently cited in a recognized citation style? (MLA, APA, CMS, etc.)? • **Variety of sources:** Are the sources drawn from a variety of disciplines in the arts and humanities, including at least some scholarly sources? • **Effectiveness of Summary:** To what extent does each annotation show a grasp of the text as a whole? • **Depth of Analysis and Application:** How well do the students explain what concepts or insights they drew from each text and how they used them in their world?	_____/30

List of Characters and Story Hooks (maximum 1500 words)

This document explains how your world will function as a setting for a game, specifying the roles you imagine for player-characters and the game play scenarios that they'll engage in. This portion will be worth 10% of the total points, and will be scored according to the following rubric:

Story Hooks	● **Character Roles:** Is there a list of 3-5 character roles, are they creative, and are they borne logically out of the world? ● **Story Hooks:** Do they have 3-5 story hooks that make good use of the possibilities of the world for game scenarios?	_____/10

Quality of Writing (Judged throughout the submission)

The quality of the writing in the submission will be scored according to the following rubric:

Quality of Writing	● Clarity, spelling, punctuation, grammar, sentence fluency, style, and tone are suited to the purpose across all pieces.	_____/10

Process Tips

This is a big project, with a lot of complicated parts, so it's important to have an action plan in place before you begin. Take it from Dr. Monroe, who tried it: just sitting down and trying to write the World Description from scratch will be an overwhelming task. It's also likely that if you approach the challenge that way you'll find yourself getting tied up in mental knots: describing things in one impact area that contradict things in another, forgetting or overlooking things, coming up with so many ideas and nifty details that you have trouble fitting them all in under the word limit. Instead, our suggested way to approach the task is as follows:

1. begin with brainstorming to create lists of possible ideas,

2. use those ideas to guide some research reading for inspiration,

3. strengthen and develop those lists on the basis of what you've read,

4. *then* write up your World Description!

Below is a general work plan you and your team might choose to follow if it is helpful for you. (NOTE: You are free to approach the project however your team wishes, this is offered as a suggested process that will help set your group up for success.) "Meetings" could be in person or online depending on what works best and feels most comfortable:

Before your First Team Meeting:

Read over the example submission packet found on the [competition website](#), so you have a clear sense of the kind of document you and your team will be working to produce. You have a lot of freedom in how you put your world together, but every entry *must* include a World Description describing the technology and three impact areas, an Annotated Bibliography, a list of Character Roles and Story Hooks, and a Reflection.

At your First Team Meeting:

Start brainstorming the technology you imagine that your world will be built around. Have everyone throw out ideas as they come up. Perhaps try asking and answering a few questions. How far into the future will you project? What product or products of A.I. will be operative in that future? In what broad ways would the presence of such things change society? After people have thrown a bunch of options on the table, select the one that strikes all of you as most interesting. You want something that will have lots of consequences in the impact areas listed, and something gives you plenty of unique opportunities for possible stories or game scenarios.

At your Second Team Meeting:

Go to the library as a group and either start looking through the catalogue yourselves or meet with a reference librarian. Identify a "starter text," an essay or book that either describes a technology or addresses an issue directly relevant to the technology your group has chosen. One useful place to start here would be to search some relevant keywords in the humanities article database jstor.org. Find an article that looks relevant, see what sources that article cites, and follow the thread. If you get stuck, feel free to ask for help! You can always contact Dr. Monroe, or any other faculty member you think might be able to give you and your team some good leads.

After your Second Team Meeting:

Now that you've found a good starter text, everyone on the team should read it. When you've done that, you're ready for your next meeting!

At your Third Team Meeting:

Go back to the brainstorming board and refine your vision of the technology you'll be putting into your world. Now that you've read something dealing with the issue you're interested in, what ideas from the last meeting look strongest? Does your reading give you any ideas about how to change the technology to make it more believable, more interesting, more likely to create situations that would make for involving game play? Refine your description of the technology on that basis.

At your Fourth Team Meeting:

Now you're ready to start brainstorming lists of consequences it might have in the three impact areas (Political Impacts; Cultural, Religious, and Intellectual Impacts; Social, Economic, and Environmental Impacts). Once you have those lists, do a Scooby-Doo: split up. Team members should select an impact area that they'll work on "building out."

After your Fourth Team Meeting:

The process here is similar to the process used to come up with the technology, only now it's individual team members or a sub-group: Go to the library and find books or articles relevant to the issues in your impact area, then read what looks interesting. Ideally your reading will help you pick which impacts are most convincing and come up with cool new ideas you wouldn't have had otherwise (as any grad student or professor will tell you: that's one of the main things reading is *for*, and why it's *awesome*). As you get inspiration from what you read, keep track of the sources, maybe making a note of where you got each idea on your list. That will help when it comes time to write the annotated bibliography.

At your Fifth Team Meeting:

Now that everybody's done some reading and used it to sharpen up their impact lists, you're ready to think through the full structure of your world. Have each person or sub-group present their impact lists. Then, as a group, talk through the lists and think about how they all work together. Does the bizarre-seeming but also oddly convincing religion that the "Culture" people came up with make sense in relation to the new government agency the "Politics" people imagined? Does it line up with the business world and class structure that the "economics" people have developed? Are there changes that need to be in one area or another to fit things together? Does bringing these things together suggest new impacts in your category that you wouldn't have thought of without the other ideas? If so, great—that means the process is working! Change things around, add them in.

After your Fifth Team Meeting:

Each sub-group or individual writes up their impact description. Put everything in a Google Doc, so team members can see what's going on across the "World Description" and keep everything consistent. Now that you have a draft description, it's time to start writing the other parts of the entry. Go back through your lists to identify the texts you'll be including in the annotated bibliography. Assign one or two annotation paragraphs to each team member. It will work best, obviously, if the person writing the annotation has also read the text and understands exactly how it inspired aspects of the World Description.

At your Sixth Team Meeting:

Brainstorm Character Roles and Story Hooks. These will be easiest to come up with once your World Description is finished (you may want to go back and tweak the World Description if you figure out a cool hook that calls for adjustments or a bit more detail).

After your Sixth Team Meeting

Write the Reflection as a group, now that you can look back over the whole process. You'll need to briefly summarize what you created, describe how you did it, and identify any lessons your team learned as you put your entry together.

Then: you're off to the races! Good luck!