

FANTASY WORLDBUILDING CHECKLIST

by Kellie Doherty, science fiction & fantasy author

Worldbuilding is where you, as the writer, are setting up where your story takes place. At the most intense level of worldbuilding, you're constructing an entire imaginary world—hence the name.

How is fantasy worldbuilding unique?

Fantasy is different than other kinds of worldbuilding because of the distinctly fantastical elements you get to play with. Namely, the magic and dragon element.

Here are the eight elements you'll need to flesh out to create a believable world:

- Creatures**
Here you'll think about what kind of animals roam your world, both the mythological beasts (like wyverns) and the everyday animals, even the types of pets your characters can have.
- Magic**
This is where you'll brainstorm the magic system, the rules, who has magic, who doesn't, how do they get it, what do they use it for.
- Geography**
These are things like the landscape, climates, plants, water, deserts. In fantasy, maps have become quite popular and can be a tool used to keep it all straight in your own mind and to help your readers.
- History**
This is both the "big" history—like world wars—and the "little" history—like what happened in the country your characters are from, or the village they're starting in.
- People**
Who lives where and why, forming their culture and language, figuring out if they get along with their neighboring areas, their religion and what they value.
- Social hierarchy**
Here, you'll have to determine what kind of government you have, who rules and how, what kind of weapons they have if they go to war, how they deal with crime, politics, their laws.
- Business**
Brainstorm what kind of jobs the people have in your world, things like transportation, science, technology, medicine, architecture, arts, etc.
- Everyday life**
This is nitty gritty stuff like fashion and food and manners.

How do we sprinkle all these elements into the story?

- Use your character point of view to narrow your focus.
- Ask “should my reader care about this?”
- Use dialogue.
- Show off different cultures through the characters your main character meets.
- Showcase your world while your characters are traveling.
- Show it off through food.
- Include little details to immerse your readers into the world.
- Don’t feel the need to include everything.

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