

CHARACTER CREATION

CHARACTER CREATION IS PLAY

The moment you sit down to make the game and characters, you're playing Fate. This style of character creation does three things to reinforce that.

First, it distributes the responsibility of making up the details of the setting to the whole group. Everyone will walk away from character creation with a personal investment in the game, because everyone helped shape it.

Second, it sets the stage for the next part of the story. Each arc of a story sets up the next, so that they flow into one another in a natural evolution. Character creation needs to set up the first story arc.

Third, character creation in Fate is collaborative. As with game creation, character creation is best done as a group activity. Doing all of this together builds a strong foundation of communication between the players and GM, and this process has a number of ways to establish connections between the characters and the setting.

Combined with game creation, character creation can take a full session to do—this allows everyone to learn about the world and each other's characters. You and the other players will talk about your characters, make suggestions to each other, discuss how they connect, and establish more of the setting.

You'll want to keep good notes on this process. You can use the character sheet and character creation worksheet in the back of this book or downloadable at FateRPG.com.

WHEN CREATING YOUR CHARACTER:

- ♦ **Aspects:** Come up with your character's high concept and trouble aspects.
- ♦ **Name:** Name your character.
- ♦ **Phase One:** Describe your character's first adventure.
- ♦ **Phases Two and Three:** Describe how you've crossed paths with two other characters.
- ♦ **Aspects:** Write down one aspect for each of these three experiences.
- ♦ **Skills:** Pick and rate your skills.
- ♦ **Stunts:** Pick or invent three to five stunts.
- ♦ **Refresh:** Determine how many fate points you start play with.
- ♦ **Stress and Consequences:** Determine how much of a beating your character can take.

YOUR CHARACTER IDEA

Come up with your character's high concept and trouble aspects.

Player characters should be exceptional and interesting. They could very easily find success in less exciting situations than those that come their way in play. You must figure out why your character is going to keep getting involved in these more dangerous things. If you don't, the GM is under no obligation to go out of her way to make the game work for you—she'll be too busy with other players who made characters that have a reason to participate.

KEEP BUILDING YOUR SETTING: as you're making stuff up for your characters, you'll also make stuff up about the world around them. You'll end up talking about NPCs, organizations, places, things like that. That's fantastic!

You might also come up with a character concept that adds something fundamental to the world, like saying “I want to play a wizard” when no one talked about magic yet. When that happens, discuss with the group if that’s a part of your setting and make any necessary adjustments.

Because picking a high concept and trouble are linked, they’re grouped together. You’ll likely have more success coming up with a compelling character idea if you think about them as one big step rather than two separate steps. Only after you have that (and a name, of course!) can you move on to the rest of character creation.

That said, don’t worry too much—if your character idea evolves later on, that’s great! You can always go back and tinker with the early decisions.

DIALS, DIALS EVERYWHERE: Fate Core isn’t the be-all and end-all of Fate. It’s just a starting point—a set of default decisions that will work if you use it as-is, but almost every part of the system can be tweaked to fit your game. So, tweak away. We don’t mind.

HIGH CONCEPT

Your high concept is a phrase that sums up what your character is about—who he is and what he does. It’s an aspect, one of the first and most important ones for your character.

Think of this aspect like your job, your role in life, or your calling—it’s what you’re good at, but it’s also a duty you have to deal with, and it’s constantly filled with problems of its own. That is to say, it comes with some good and some bad. There are a few different directions you can take this:

- ♦ You could take the idea of “like your job” literally: *Lead Detective, Knight of the Round, Low-level Thug.*
- ♦ You could throw on an adjective or other descriptor to further define the idea: *Despicable Regent of Riverton, Reluctant Lead Detective, Ambitious Low-level Thug.*
- ♦ You could mash two jobs or roles together that most people would find odd: *Wizard Private Eye, Singing Knight of the Round Table, Monster-slaying Accountant.*

These aren’t the only ways to play with your high concept, but they’ll get you started. But don’t stress out over it—the worst thing you can do is make it into too big of a deal. You’ll come up with four other aspects after this one—you don’t have to get it all nailed right now.

IF YOU GET STUMPED ON ASPECTS: it’s okay to leave some blank. Look at Quick Character Creation for more on leaving parts of your character sheet blank.

High concepts can have overlap among the characters, as long as you have something to distinguish how your character is different from the others. If high concepts must be similar among all the characters, such as if the GM pitches an all-swordsmen story, it’s crucial that the troubles differ.

Lenny and Lily settled on the “guy and girl with sword” idea, and Ryan’s going with “guy without sword.” But those are just starting ideas. Now it’s time to turn them into proper high concepts.

Lily, on the other hand, doesn’t really know where to go from “girl with sword.” She’s not interested in the organization thing, so she’s thinking about adjectives. Eventually, she settles on *Infamous Girl with Sword*. (Keeping the “girl with sword” part makes her giggle, so she wants to say it often during the game.)

TROUBLE

In addition to a high concept, every character has some sort of trouble aspect that's a part of his life and story. If your high concept is what or who your character is, your trouble is the answer to a simple question: what complicates your character's existence?

Trouble brings chaos into a character's life and drives him into interesting situations. Trouble aspects are broken up into two types: personal struggles and problematic relationships.

Before you go any further, talk with the GM about your character's trouble. Make sure you're both on the same page in terms of what it means. Both of you may want to find one way this aspect might be invoked or compelled to make sure you're both seeing the same things—or to give each other ideas. The GM should come away from this conversation knowing what you want out of your trouble.

Lenny wants to contrast the whole "I know an ancient martial art" vibe. He's not playing an ascetic monk or anything like that. So he wants something that will get him into social trouble, something that has to do with him and not with any specific people or organizations. So he writes down *The Manners of a Goat*. His character will unconsciously make an ass of himself.

Lily likes this idea of her character being her own worst enemy, so she's also going for a personal struggle. She's had the idea for a while of playing someone who can't help but be *Tempted by Shiny Things*, so she writes that down.

THE "BRIGHT" SIDE OF TROUBLES: since your trouble is an aspect, it's something you should also be able to invoke, right? Because we've been so focused on how this complicates your character's life, it's easy to miss how a trouble also helps your character.

Lenny's *The Manners of a Goat* could be used to the group's benefit. Maybe he turns that up intentionally, to draw attention away from Lily's character sneaking around.

With Lily's *Tempted by Shiny Things*, we could reasonably say that Lily's character is well-acquainted with the value of various shiny things (and well-acquainted with getting caught and locked in prison, so she knows a thing or two about escaping).

Ryan's *Rivals in the Collegia Arcana* can come in handy when dealing with rivals he knows well—he knows what to expect from their tactics. He could also use this aspect to gain aid from people who share his rivals.

INTRO TO CHOOSING ASPECTS: in case you're pressed for time, here are some guidelines for choosing aspects.

Aspects which don't help you tell a good story (by giving you success when you need it and by drawing you into danger and action when the story needs it) aren't doing their job. The aspects which push you into conflict—and help you excel once you're there—will be among your best and most-used.

Aspects need to be both useful and dangerous—allowing you to help shape the story and generating lots of fate points—and they should never be boring. The best aspect suggests both ways to use it and ways it can complicate your situation. Aspects that cannot be used for either of those are likely to be dull indeed.

Bottom line: if you want to maximize the power of your aspects, maximize their interest.

When you're told you need to come up with an aspect, you might experience brain freeze. If you feel stumped for decent ideas for aspects, there's a big section focusing on several methods for coming up with good aspect ideas in *Aspects and Fate Points*.

If your character doesn't have many connections to the other characters, talk with the group about aspects that might tie your character in with theirs. This is the explicit purpose of Phases Two and Three—but that doesn't mean you can't do it elsewhere as well.

If you ultimately can't break the block by any means, don't force it—leave it completely blank. You can always come back and fill out that aspect later, or let it develop during play—as with the Quick Character Creation rules.

Ultimately, it's much better to leave an aspect slot blank than to pick one that isn't inspiring and evocative to play. If you're picking aspects you're not invested in, they'll end up being noticeable drags on your fun.

NAME

If you haven't already, it's time to give your character a name!

Lenny names his character "Landon," a name that's been in his head for years. He used it years ago for another roleplaying game, and decides to bring it back for nostalgia's sake.

Lily names her character "Cynere," which is Greek for "thistle." She sees Cynere as a beautiful plant, but one that'll prick you if you get too close. That fits nicely.

Ryan names his character "Zird," because it just hit his mind as an appropriately ridiculous wizardly name. Then he pauses for a moment before adding "...the Arcane," because he sees Zird as the sort of guy who would demand to be known as "Zird the Arcane."

THE PHASE TRIO

Describe your character's first adventure. Describe how you've crossed paths with two other characters. Write down one aspect for each of these three experiences.

Important: Before moving on to this step, you need to have figured out your high concept, trouble, and name.

The three remaining aspects on your character are made in phases, together called the phase trio. The first phase is about recent background: something you did that's interesting and adventurous. The second and third are about how the other player characters got involved in that adventure, and how you got involved in theirs.

This is an opportunity to tell a story about your characters. Each phase will ask you to write down two things. Use the character creation worksheet (at the back of this book, or at FateRPG.com) to write down those details.

- ♦ **First, write a summary of what happened in that phase.** A couple of sentences to a paragraph should suffice—you don't want to establish too much detail up front, because you might have to adjust details in later phases.
- ♦ **Second, write an aspect that reflects some part of that phase.** The aspect can cover the general vibe from the summary, or it can focus on some piece of it that still resonates with your character in the present day.

PHASE ONE: YOUR ADVENTURE

The first phase is your character's first true adventure—his first book, episode, case, movie, whatever—starring him.

You need to think up and write down the basic details of this story for the phase's summary. The story doesn't need to have a lot of detail—in fact, a pair of sentences works pretty well—because your fellow players will add in their own details to this past adventure in the next two phases (as you will to theirs).

If you find yourself stuck, look to your character's high concept and trouble. Find a dilemma that has a chance of throwing those ideas into focus. What problem do you get roped into because of your high concept or trouble? How does the other aspect help or complicate your life?

Landon gets into a bar fight with some of the Scar Triad. He is robbed of his sword and beaten severely. His life is saved by a veteran soldier named Old Finn. Finn helps to heal Landon, clean him up, and enlist him in the town militia.

I Owe Old Finn Everything

Ask yourself the following story questions. If you have trouble answering them, talk to the other players and the GM for help.

- ◆ Something bad happened. What was it? Did it happen to you, to someone you cared about, or to someone that you were coerced into helping?
- ◆ What did you decide to do about the problem? What goal did you pursue?
- ◆ Who stood against you? Did you expect the opposition you got? Did some of it come out of nowhere?
- ◆ Did you win? Did you lose? Either way, what consequences arose from the outcome?

Once you've come up with the adventure, write an aspect that relates to some part of what happened.

Lenny goes through Phase One. He looks at the story questions to help him figure out the events of the phase, and decides on the following:

The bad thing was that Landon kept getting into scrapes at his local tavern. He grew up with no sense of discipline or demeanor and constantly picked fights with people larger and stronger than him.

One thug Landon insulted at the tavern was connected to the Scar Triad, so some of the thug's bandit buddies showed up and beat Landon to within an inch of his life. His bleeding body was then found by a veteran soldier named Finn who healed Landon's wounds and encouraged him to join the town militia where he could learn some discipline and fight with honor.

Now Lenny has to write down an aspect related to this story. He decides to take *I Owe Old Finn Everything* as his aspect, because he wants to keep the connection to Finn in his story and give Amanda a cool NPC to play.

PHASES AND INDEX CARDS: in phase one, you each came up with your own adventure. In phases two and three, you're going to trade those stories around as other players' characters get involved. Figuring out how your character fits into someone else's story can be hard to do if you've handed your character phase worksheet to another player, so we recommend that you use index cards (or whatever scraps of paper you have).

During the first phase—when you're writing your adventure down on your worksheet—take a card and write your character's name and adventure description. Then you'll pass the card around during the second and third phases so people can contribute to your story. That way, you'll still have your worksheet when you're writing your contributions and aspects, and other people will know what stories they're supposed to hook into.

As with the high concept and trouble aspects, this (and the following phases) are further opportunities to flesh out the setting.

PHASE TWO: CROSSING PATHS

In the next two phases, you'll tie the group together by having other characters contribute a minor, supporting role in your adventure, and vice versa.

Once everyone has their adventure written down (which is where our index card suggestion comes in really handy), you're ready for phase two. You can pass to the left or right, or shuffle the stack and hand them out randomly (trading with the person to your right until you each have one that isn't yours). However you decide to do it, every player should now be holding someone else's adventure.

Your character has a supporting role in the story you're holding, which you get to come up with right now. Briefly discuss it with the player whose adventure it is and add a sentence or phrase to the summary to reflect your character's supporting role. Supporting roles come in three forms: they complicate the adventure, solve a situation, or both.

- ♦ **Complicating:** your character makes the situation more difficult, dangerous, or dramatic.
- ♦ **Solving:** your character contributes something that helps resolve the situation.

Complicating and solving: here, your character either solves one situation but creates another, or creates a situation but later solves a different one. Mash up the two ideas, using the word "later" in between them, such as:

- ♦ "Landon starts a fight with the Scar Triad while Zird is trying to lay low. Later, he helps Zird by fighting off undead while Zird's casting a spell."

The idea is to be a bit self-serving here. You want to put a little spotlight on your character in order to figure out a good aspect from it: something you're known for, something you can do, something you own or have, and someone you have a relationship with (for good or ill).

Finally, write the adventure idea and your character's contribution down on your phase worksheet. This is important, because your character gets an aspect from the supporting role he played. The person whose adventure it is should also write down the contribution, if there's room on his sheet.

Lily has Landon's starting adventure and needs to decide how she fits into it.

She decides that Cynere helped solve the situation. After Landon ends up in the militia, he still has a grudge against the Triad members who ganged up on him. In fact, they robbed him of his heirloom sword in the process. Hearing Landon's tale of woe, Cynere agrees to help steal the sword back.

She takes the aspect *A Sucker for a Sob Story*, to reflect the reason why she got involved.

PHASE THREE: CROSSING PATHS AGAIN

Once everyone's done with phase two, you'll trade adventures with whatever method you chose before, so long as everyone has an adventure that isn't theirs or the one they just contributed to. Then you're ready for phase three, where you'll contribute to this second adventure and determine your next aspect. Follow the directions from phase two.

Lily gets Zird's starting adventure, a pretty straightforward romp where Zird battles his Collegia rivals to obtain a magical artifact and return it to its rightful place.

She decides that she complicates that situation, by wanting the shiny artifact for herself. Ryan already established that Zird gets the artifact back to where it belongs, so she only holds it temporarily.

She decides to take *I've Got Zird's Back*, as a way of reflecting her willingness to stick her neck out for Zird—the group doesn't know what he did to earn such loyalty, but they figure they'll find out eventually.

And with that, you have your five aspects and a good chunk of background!

FEWER THAN THREE PLAYERS? The phase trio assumes that you'll have at least three players. If you have only two, consider the following ideas:

- ♦ **Skip phase three** and just make up another aspect, either now or in play.
- ♦ **Come up with a third, joint-story together**, and write about how you each feature in that one.

Have the GM also make a character. The GM won't actually play this character alongside the PCs, though—it should

- ♦ just be an NPC. Such an NPC can be a great vehicle for kicking off a campaign—if a friend they're tied to during character creation mysteriously disappears or even dies, that's instant fuel for drama.

If you only have one player, skip phases two and three, leaving the aspects blank to be filled in during play.

SKILLS

Pick and rate your character's skills.

Once you have mapped out your character's phases and chosen aspects, it's time to pick skills. You'll find descriptions and details for each skill in the *Skills and Stunts* chapter.

Your skills form a pyramid, with a single skill rated at Great (+4)—which we'll usually refer to as the peak skill—and more skills at each lower rating on the ladder going down to Average (+1):

- ♦ One Great (+4) skill
- ♦ Two Good (+3) skills
- ♦ Three Fair (+2) skills
- ♦ Four Average (+1) skills

FOR VETERANS: WHY THE PYRAMID? If you've played *The Dresden Files RPG*, you know that we use skill columns for that instead of the pyramid.

In this build of Fate, we wanted character creation to be as quick and accessible as possible, so we went with the pyramid as standard. If you want to use the columns, go ahead—you get 20 skill points.

Skill columns didn't completely go away. It's just reserved for advancement.

THE SKILL CAP: by default, we make Great (+4) the highest rated skill PCs start with. As characters advance, they can improve beyond this cap, but it's more difficult than improving skills rated below the cap (see Major Milestones).

If you're making a game about superheroes, pandimensional creatures, mythic gods or other beyond-human characters, feel free to set the tip of the skill pyramid—and thus the cap—at Superb (+5) or Fantastic (+6).

Mediocre (+0) is the default for any skill you do not take. Sometimes, a skill will state that it's unavailable if a character didn't take it; in those cases, it's not even at Mediocre.

Ryan knows that Zird's not like the other PCs in terms of skills, so he looks to distance Zird from them as much as possible. The group has decided that Zird's magic is going to work off his Lore skill, so he's naturally going to focus on that.

Note: a few skills have special benefits, notably those skills that affect the number of stress boxes and consequences you have available. If you know you want a certain number of those, put those skills on the pyramid first.

STUNTS AND REFRESH

Pick or invent three to five stunts. Determine how many fate points you start play with.

Stunts change how skills work for your character. Picking and inventing stunts are covered in the *Skills and Stunts* chapter.

Every character gets three free stunts during character creation. You may take up to two more, but each one you take beyond the third lowers your starting refresh by one.

Lily decides to take the Warmaster stunt as one of her freebies: +2 to Fight rolls made to create an advantage against an opponent, provided the opponent has a fighting style or weakness she can exploit.

For her remaining free stunts, she picks Second-Story Girl and Danger Sense. You can see the write-ups for these on her character sheet.

ADJUSTING REFRESH

A player character in Fate starts with a refresh of 3. That means he'll start each session off with at least 3 fate points.

If you pick four stunts, your refresh is 2. If you pick five stunts, your refresh is 1.

Note: some Fate games will change this setup. Regardless of how stunts work in your game, you can never have a refresh lower than 1.

You can adjust these defaults if you want to, and give out more free stunts if you want the PCs to have a lot of cool tricks and special bonuses. You can also change the default refresh rate—higher refresh means that the PCs won't need to take compels as often (think 4-color superhero comics), and lower refresh means they'll need to take several early in every session in order to have a decent supply (think *Die Hard*). Also, the higher your refresh, the more likely it is that players will buy stunts.

STRESS AND CONSEQUENCES

Determine how much of a beating your character can take.

When Fate characters find themselves in harm's way—a fairly common occurrence when you're highly competent, proactive, and facing drama at every turn—they have two ways to stand their ground and stay on their feet: stress and consequences.

Every character starts with two boxes of physical stress and two boxes of mental stress by default. Physique and Will can add more stress boxes to these tracks respectively, as detailed in the Skills and Stunts chapter.

Every character also starts with three consequence slots: one mild, one moderate, and one severe. Consequences are aspects representing lasting harm your character has taken, and they stick around until healed.

Certain skills and some stunts can add to these defaults. See the *Skills and Stunts* chapter for more on that. For the sake of quick reference, these are the skills in *Hearts of Steel* that alter stress and consequences: Physique (physical stress) and Will (mental stress).

Note: if you're playing in a setting with different skills, the skills that affect stress boxes and consequences may change. Take a note of those skill benefits when you're making your character.

Landon has Good (+3) Physique, which nets him two more physical stress boxes. His Will, however, is only Average (+1), but that's still good enough for one more mental stress box.

Cynere's Physique is Fair (+2), so she gets a third physical stress box. But her mental stress track remains at two boxes, thanks to her Mediocre (+0) Will.

Zird the Arcane, being a rather bookish type, has Mediocre (+0) Physique, so he has only the default physical stress track of two boxes. His Fair (+2) Will, though, is good for one bonus mental stress box.

Because none of these characters has Physique or Will rated at Superb (+5) or above, each has the default number of consequences: one mild, one moderate, and one severe.

YOU'RE ALL SET!

At the end of this process, you should have a character with:

- ♦ A name
- ♦ Five aspects, along with some backstory
- ♦ One Great, two Good, three Fair, and four Average skills
- ♦ Between three and five stunts
- ♦ A mental and physical stress track of 2–4 boxes each
- ♦ A refresh rate of 1–3 fate points

Now you're ready to play!

GMs, see the *Scenes, Sessions, and Scenarios* chapter for advice on how to take the aspects from the PCs' sheets and from game creation and turn those into thrilling scenarios for the players to experience.

Players, check out the next chapter for more on how to use your aspects, or jump straight to *Actions and Outcomes* to learn more about how to use your skills to do stuff.

QUICK CHARACTER CREATION

If you want to skip making a detailed character and just want to play, you can leave most of the character blank and fill in as you play.

At minimum, you need to have the following filled out to start:

- ♦ High concept aspect
- ♦ Best skill
- ♦ Name

When it comes to your high concept, you can start off vague and refine the aspect later. *Guy with Sword* is an okay high concept for this method, and later you might discover something about your character that puts a spin on it. When that happens, rewrite the aspect to reflect that spin.