

Building Your Group

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ASSEMBLE YOUR CREW

Star Trek Adventures is a role-playing game, which traditionally means your fellow players are your friends. Usually this requires everybody to have some basic level of understanding of what a role-playing game might involve. With this game, you also have the benefit of the burgeoning *Star Trek* community, which means the barrier of entry is even lower. Any fan of *Star Trek* can understand pretending to be a crew member aboard a starship or station. So even if you're new to the concept of role-playing games, congratulations; you're halfway to playing *Star Trek Adventures* already!

There are things to bear in mind when you're arranging to play. The most obvious will be the questions of **how** and **when**. We'll discuss 'how' later in this chapter, but 'when' is often the most challenging question. Everybody has day-to-day schedules that can make setting aside time to play difficult; it can be even harder to agree on a specific time to do so. The consensus of a 'Thursday night game' every week often isn't feasible; and that's okay! There's no problem playing every two weeks, or once a month. What matters is that players cherish the moment and enjoy the memories they create, regardless of how often you play.

While putting your group together, it's a good idea to take a few moments to discuss how well the players know one another. A group that is well acquainted will have established rhythms, and may share their own internal relationships and in-jokes. It's entirely possible to make brand-new friends by playing *Star Trek Adventures* together. However, it is important to make sure all players are on good terms with one another. Avoid establishing groups with players who are, for whatever reason, uncomfortable with one another.

Once you have your crew together, the first thing to do will be to share something of a 'prequel' to the play session, where all players discuss the details of the game they'll be playing. It's tempting to start piecing together ideas in your mind prior to the game beginning; creating your character ahead of time and so on, but try to avoid doing that until you are all together. That way, all players will be on a fair and even footing with each other, and the gamemaster will be able to work with everyone to put together the best possible campaign. This time together is often called **Session 0**.

SESSION 0 TOPICS CHECKLIST

- Tone
- Era
- Campaign Length
- Character Concepts
- Creating your starship or starbase
- Scheduling
- Establishing channels for communication
- Safety and consent

SESSION 0

When you gather to discuss your game, there are several important key points you'll want to discuss. First, Session 0 is an icebreaker. Take the time to say hello to your fellow players, even if you're already good friends. Each step into a new series is new. Make sure everybody is physically comfortable, well-nourished, and in a good mental space to discuss the game.

Once everybody is comfortable, the gamemaster should typically start by outlining a little about the game they want to run. This helps to focus everybody on the task at hand. Say a little bit about your relation to *Star Trek*, the game rules, and what you hope to get out of your gaming experience. Now that you're focused, the real discussion can begin.

Find Consensus on Tone and Era

There's an entire Galaxy of stories waiting to be told with *Star Trek Adventures*, but before you can lay in a course for excitement and fun, you have to decide where and when in the Galaxy your group's story takes place. Determining the era and tone for your campaign are big decisions that will influence the kind of stories you tell and the experiences you'll share with your fellow players. Are you most interested in a starship-based, action-adventure romp during the 2260s? Or maybe you'd prefer a more methodical, introspective campaign set after the synth attack on Mars in 2385. Maybe you want to take on the roles of temporal agents who visit a different era every mission. All of these stories and many more await you, but some might appeal to your group more than others. Everyone should give these questions some thought and then try to come to a consensus before play begins.

Tone

Tone is the word often used to describe how a campaign feels and the kinds of themes it is likely to utilize. *Star Trek* often showcases a bright and optimistic tone in its largely positive depiction of humanity's future. Human beings have made great strides toward eliminating poverty, greed, prejudice, and many of the other ills that have marred Human history. This depiction of the Human adventure strikes a hopeful tone that has inspired millions of *Star Trek* fans throughout the years, and you may want to emulate that feeling in your *Star Trek Adventures* game.

You can do this by playing a character who strives to do right and who adheres to a code of ethics that enshrines non-interference, peaceful exploration, and scientific advancement as core principles. Many of the main characters of various *Star Trek* series aim for these standards. They may occasionally make mistakes, misjudge a situation, or compromise their principles, but they're unquestionably the heroes of their story, and their actions help make the Galaxy a better place.

But not every story must adhere to this bright and optimistic tone, even though we often think of it as the default tone for *Star Trek*. Games can just as easily make use of themes and story elements that introduce shades of gray into the mix. For instance, campaigns set against the

backdrop of a bloody interstellar war, such as the Dominion War or the conflict with the Klingons, will most likely take on a bleaker tone. Or you might decide to play an admiral in the upper echelons of Starfleet who must make difficult choices affecting the populations of multiple worlds. In these cases, you might find there's no single "right" choice. Rather, you might face several imperfect choices or a no-win scenario in which the only viable course of action will result in grave consequences.

There's no one way to tell a *Star Trek* story. The franchise has been a vehicle for everything from deep character studies to contemporary social commentary to high-octane action and adventure to side-splitting comedy. Some episodes combine some or all of these elements into a single story. All of these options can result in compelling game experiences for you and your group, and there's no single right or wrong answer for what kind of tone your game should strike.

Establishing a consensus increases the likelihood that everyone will be happy with the feel of the campaign and won't end up in situations that make them uncomfortable or frustrated. Those lines of communication should stay open throughout the campaign as well. Campaigns evolve, just like a broadcast series. Many gamemasters and players enjoy experimenting with different tones over the course of the campaign to keep the game from feeling stale. Be honest and open with your group about what kind of tone appeals to you, while keeping in mind that others may have different ideas.

Era

The era you set your game in is a large subject to consider; the best *Star Trek* shows contain episodes which are era-specific, but also episodes which are universal to all eras. Part of the decision also rests on the **tone** and **style** you want to incorporate. Many eras of *Star Trek* take part in a time of tentative peace among galactic species, while others explore Human nature through the lens of wartime hostilities, exploration into the unknown, search for meaning in a wider cosmos, or more. Rather than try to pin down your favorite era, consider what elements you enjoy the best and discuss those with your group. That way, you'll be able to come up with the setting that's right for everyone.

Additionally, remember there's no requirement to limit yourself to the eras outlined in this book and other supplements; you're free to set your stories in any time; humanity's first war with the Romulans, the uncharted 27th century, the journeys of the *U.S.S. Enterprise-C*, and more are open to you. Additionally, resist feeling too tightly bound by what is 'canon'; the *Star Trek* universe is a playground to draw from and create your stories with, not a cage to restrict yourself to with strict adherence.

Keep in mind the era you choose can influence the sort of missions your characters are likely to take on. For instance, are you interested in an era defined by a major conflict, such as war with the Dominion or Klingons? Would you prefer an era before the Borg threat overshadowed much of Starfleet's other priorities? The era also affects the kind of supporting cast and antagonists that might be available for your game. For instance, many of the worlds that eventually join the United Federation of Planets were still unknown to Starfleet in the 2150s, when the first *NX-class* starships took flight.

Campaign Length

The *Star Trek* canon features stories of varying scope and length. Sometimes a story requires only a single episode to reach its conclusion, while other story arcs stretch out over the course of years, perhaps even crossing over into other quantum realities and timelines. Similarly, *Star Trek*

Adventures provides players with plenty of options to find the right scope for the stories they wish to experience.

Lengthy campaigns provide terrific opportunities for character development and deep exploration of the setting, but one-shot stories can deliver game experiences that are just as memorable. After all, Captain Picard lived an entire lifetime on the planet Kataan after coming into contact with an alien probe, while only minutes passed for the rest of the *Enterprise* crew. Even if all you can spare is a couple hours, don't let that stop you from going boldly into the final frontier. Work with your group to get a sense of how much real-life time they'd like the game to last, and plan accordingly. If the group only wants to play for 2 months, it may be difficult to squeeze in an epic, Galaxy-spanning campaign.

Character Concepts

Next, you should create your characters together, or at least discuss character concepts. The players are encouraged to not only state their creation aloud as they fill out their character sheets, but discuss it amongst themselves.

During the process, it may be interesting for some characters to know one another before the start of their adventures. You may find that some of the characters were childhood friends. Some may have met in Starfleet Academy. Others may have first encountered one another while serving on a previous starship. Sometimes, characters have not met and are doing so for the first time in the first adventure. Discovering these backgrounds is an organic part of creating characters together as a group, and you should embrace them when they occur.

When it comes time to determine character rank, consider, as a group, who you'd like your captain to be. Would one of the players be the captain, or an NPC, controlled by the gamemaster? As an NPC, the captain can be a gamemaster tool to manage the flow and pace of the adventure as well as providing orders and direction for the player's characters. As a playable character, it allows the player the thrill and burden of leadership, and the challenge of making hard choices.

Roleplaying Career Events

The lifepath character creation process includes at least two opportunities to choose career events that played pivotal roles in shaping your character. These career events provide you with dramatic and colorful opportunities to fill in some of your character's backstory. Take a few minutes to flesh out each career event. Where and when did these pivotal episodes take place? Who else was involved? What did your character learn from the experiences?

It may even be fun to roleplay these events with your game group early in the campaign in brief scenes. If this sounds like something your group is interested in, each player should select a career event and describe it to the group. Each player might want to choose one career event they think is particularly dramatic or had the greatest impact on their character. As you describe your career event, determine if the event involves one or more supporting characters. If so, the other players in your group can take on these roles, which gives everyone something to do. Once all the necessary roles are assigned, and everyone's clear on the parameters of the scene, proceed with roleplaying the career event.

These scenes will differ from most of the other scenes in the game because the outcomes of your career events are already determined. For instance, if you chose the "death of a friend" career event, nothing any character does during these roleplaying scenes can save the doomed character. Your gamemaster might consider applying a trait to these scenes, such as **Flashback** to make it clear

to everyone that some parts of the scene cannot be avoided or affected by player actions. You may not even roll any dice during these scenes because the parameters of the events are determined ahead of time.

What use is this exercise if the outcome is never in doubt? It brings your career events to life so they're no longer simply entries on your character sheet. All too often, players choose career events that never factor into the campaign once play begins. Important questions go unanswered. Roleplaying these scenes encourages you to fill in those blanks. Any locations, ships, or supporting characters involved give the gamemaster hooks they can reintroduce later in the campaign. And it encourages you to consider how these defining events shaped your character.

Your group may not have time to roleplay career events for every character, or there might be other limiting factors. Accordingly, this step isn't mandatory, but, under the right circumstances, it can imbue your game with depth and plant seeds for future stories—all before the campaign has even begun.

Creating your Starship

In many ways, a starship is a character in its own right, with its own backstory and personality. Think how your character might feel receiving an assignment on a gleaming, state-of-the-art *Sovereign*-class vessel just off the assembly line. Now contrast that to how your character might feel being assigned to a timeworn *Oberth*-class ship in service for decades. That thought exercise stresses the importance of selecting the right ship for your game.

Star Trek Adventures provides many ways to customize your starship or station. Two of the most important decisions your group must make regarding your starship are choosing a spaceframe and mission profile. A ship's spaceframe determines its basic structure, while the mission profile determines how a ship's facilities and personnel are assigned. It's worth taking some time to consider these options so your group creates a starship with just the right character to fit your campaign.

Your ship can reinforce the tone of your game, or, in some cases, it might run counter to your game's tone in interesting ways. You might approach starship creation as an opportunity to put together an optimal build for the kind of missions you plan to undertake. This approach tries to match the strengths and weaknesses of a particular ship with the story your campaign will tell. An *Intrepid*-class spaceframe with the scientific and survey operations mission profile makes great sense if you expect your campaign to lean into scientific exploration and research. Or the D7-class battle cruiser spaceframe and the battleship mission profile would fit nicely in a Klingon campaign focused on conflict.

However, sometimes building a starship that, at first glance, seems ill-suited to its mission can make for compelling games as well. Perhaps a wormhole unexpectedly hurls that science-focused *Intrepid*-class vessel behind enemy lines, and the starship's crew now faces the very real possibility of starship combat, a mission for which it wasn't designed. Or maybe the D7 battlecruiser stumbles across a natural disaster and must work to save a population of refugees. Either example would add an interesting chapter to the ship's service record, even though neither ship was built with those missions in mind.

In the case of long-serving starships, ***Star Trek Adventures*** provides you with guidance to make sure your aging-yet-sturdy ship isn't completely outclassed by the newest ships. If your group

decides to crew an older vessel, you might want to discuss how many refits you have available and how you'd like to apply them.

You can use refits to further strengthen the systems you expect to rely on most often, or you could use refits to address potential weaknesses you anticipate your ship to have. It might also be fun to come up with a brief service record for your vessel and assign your refits to systems that would have been utilized heavily in the past. This method can reinforce the sense that your ship has its own unique history and that your characters are starting a new chapter in a larger story stretching back for decades.

Scheduling

Before your campaign begins, you should make it clear to the gamemaster and other players how much time you have to devote to the game and when you're most likely to be available. Scheduling conflicts often pose the greatest risk to the survival of a campaign, and you'll be doing everyone at the table a favor by being honest about what kind of participation your schedule permits. The gamemaster might want to run an extended, ongoing campaign that meets every week, while some players in the group may have time only for a one-shot session every few months. It's in everyone's interest to have open communication and broad agreement about the scope of the game and a plan for scheduling.

Hailing Frequencies

One of the more practical issues to cover during Session 0 is how the gamemaster and players plan to communicate with each other, and to trade contact information. Will you primarily be connecting over email, social media, phone texts, online forums, or some other method? Taking care of the essential logistics before the game begins will help to keep the group connected when planning or scheduling game sessions.

Safety and Consent

Role-playing can be an intensely personal experience. Players join a game placing a strong amount of trust in each other—trust that the story you create together will be a good experience, and that everyone's personal boundaries are respected. It's critical that everyone playing with you feels safe and comfortable in their gaming experience.

Roleplaying games require some improvisation and collaboration. The sometimes-unpredictable nature of the hobby can create situations where you might be exposed to ideas, themes, and situations that trigger discomfort or emotional distress. Session 0 gives every participant an opportunity to establish clear communication about what they are and are not comfortable with.

Note that if you're playing a game at an event or convention, you may not have the time for a Session 0. Therefore, it's important to check for content warnings in the description of the game, so that you have an idea of what to expect at the table. If the event doesn't have a content warning, ask the gamemaster before play begins.

“But We Don't Need Safety Rules!”

You might think there is nothing objectionable in your game, but the *Star Trek* franchise has dealt with a lot of difficult topics over its lifetime. While the franchise usually operates below a “mature audiences only” level of language and violence (harkening back to its roots as a network television show), some episodes, scenes, and situations across the franchise's hundreds of hours are more intensely graphic, violent, or disturbing, and these may be upsetting for some individuals.

Truth is, you likely don't know all your fellow players' histories or inner lives. Something you might not think is problematic might be triggering to another player. Often, you or the other players may not react to something right away, and emotions might strike later in the session. Err on the side of caution—no player should have to “get over it” for the sake of continuing the game session. Remember, everyone at the table is there to have fun. The amount of effort that is required for everyone to play safely is minimal and can avoid the campaign ending badly.

Hard and Soft “No”s

A strong way to start your campaign from a safe place is to discuss the tone your group wants from the game. Some players may want to delve into grittier, darker themes, while others may prefer to lean into humor. Any option is fine, but what matters is the group knowing what they're in for. Be sure that everybody is happy before you start playing.

Ask your players if there are any situations that they would not want to encounter in the game, or any topics they don't like. If a player has a topic which is a “hard no,” then everyone should strive to ensure that topic never comes up in the game in any way. Common “hard no's” include child abuse, animal abuse, sexual assault, and unwilling bodily or mental possession.

Soft “no's” are subjects that players might be fine with but prefer not to engage with directly in the game. Think of these as “off-screen” or “fade to black” events. Common soft “no's” might include sexual encounters and substance abuse. You should approach these subjects with considerable care and with attention to players' consent.

Reading the Room

If you are approaching a subject that might be difficult, it's important to slow the pace of the scene so you can get a good reading of how the group is feeling. If you are playing online, you can do this via webcam or by listening carefully to the audio stream. There are many signs another player might give which could indicate they are not comfortable with how a scene is progressing. These could include:

- Crossing their arms over their body
- Glancing to the side or away from the main group
- Nervous laughter
- Prolonged silence
- Sitting back, as if trying to pull away

If you notice these, call for a pause and check in with your group—ask if they are happy to continue. If anyone seems hesitant, you should stop. A player does not need to outwardly say that they are unhappy—people often feel put on the spot and may not answer honestly in the heat of the moment. If you're unsure, be cautious and keep checking in. If you're a player, you shouldn't have to rely on the gamemaster to catch these cues; if you see something happening or feel something is off, say something.

Handling Discomfort

When a player signals they are uncomfortable with a subject, some people at the table may be tempted to ask why or inquire what content the player finds objectionable. This should be avoided—someone who has come to a game night will find little enjoyment in being quizzed about their fears or phobias. Everyone at the table should strive to be respectful of their fellow players.

Sometimes somebody may discover they are uncomfortable about something only once it comes up, and it's important to recognize this. A player may have stated that they are fine with intense violence, only to discover that those descriptions are uncomfortable for them. If this occurs mid-game, treat it as you would any other discomfort and adapt your game accordingly. After the session, you should take a moment to touch base with your group to gauge if they are comfortable with the game, check if there are any issues, and, above all, if they're still having fun.

Safety Checklist

The checklist on the Modiphious website is a tool you can use in discussing where personal boundaries for certain themes in the game may lie. This list is divided into several categories, each of which includes a number of topics. Each topic can be marked with one of three comfort levels:

- **ALWAYS OK:** This means the player is always comfortable with this topic being described, shown, and represented in a game session.
- **YELLOW ALERT:** This means the player is generally comfortable with this topic being discussed in a game session, but prefers for the more vivid descriptions to be handled "off-screen."
- **RED ALERT:** This means the player does not want this subject to be discussed; they may have any number of reasons for this. Some reasons may include objection to the topic on moral principles, traumatic personal experience, a dislike of the topic being trivialized in a fictional entertainment medium, and so on. **Don't ask** what the reason is for the player who feels this way; it isn't anyone's place to change that player's mind. Simply accept their stance, respect it, and do not include the topic in question.

The best way to use this checklist is, naturally, as a starting point for conversations with your fellow players; many players won't want to fill out a questionnaire at the beginning of a campaign. However, you can use it as a means to determine the subjects which may come up during play, and from there you can get a good feel for everyone's comfort levels. Some players may prefer the "firmness" of being able to pin down how they feel in written form. Red and Yellow Alert subjects can be collected from each player anonymously, but the complete list should be presented somewhere visible to all players each session, for convenient reference.

The checklist provided is a starting point and not meant to cover all possible topics. Discuss with your players any other relevant topics to include.

Other Safety Tools

Some other popular safety tools you might choose to use in your games include:

- **THE FULL STOP CARD.** At the start of play, the gamemaster introduces a card with "Full Stop" written on it, which any player can lift or tap at any time to indicate discomfort with the game's content for any reason. When that happens, gameplay should pause briefly. Upon resuming from the break, the adventure 'reverses course'; rewinding the events until prior to the offending event or incident. Play should then continue in another direction, avoiding the topic entirely and following a different route. Consider this safety mechanism to be like charting a new course aboard a starship. A player using the Full Stop card is never required to justify its use.
- **POST-SESSION DEBRIEF.** At the end of each session, before leaving the table, every player (including the gamemaster) should be given an opportunity to describe something they enjoyed or found challenging about the session. If playing in a campaign, players could instead describe something they hope to do next session. As well as providing gamemasters with

useful feedback, it gives players room to talk about events in the game they were troubled by, with confidence that their concerns will be listened to. If everything went well, that's a nice thing to celebrate too!

There are other types of safety tools groups might prefer, and a bit of experimentation to find what works for everyone is worthwhile. Searching for "RPG safety tools" online should direct you to even more options.

Where to Play the Game

In this modern age of gaming, there are more ways than ever to connect with a group and play a game. Broadly, we'll discuss three of the most common: **online**, **in-person**, and at **conventions**.

Online

More and more often, the go-to means of getting a group together has become online. Although folks who have historically taken part in role-playing games were slow to take to online play, in the recent pandemic, online play became the de-facto necessity for many gamers, following which it has become clear it's a means which will continue to grow.

Gathering players online is often considerably easier, as entire online communities exist where people who both have a strong interest in *Star Trek* and wish to play role-playing games can network and make plans. There also exist entire websites which help share and disseminate information about *Star Trek Adventures*, as well as resources including podcasts, actual play videos, blogs, and so on.

Online games typically involve players utilizing a messenger based program to allow video and/or voice communication. It's also very common for players to utilize a virtual tabletop (VTT); a website which allows the gamemaster and players to host images such as tokens or background maps for their games. A VTT functions much like a physical one would, allowing all those who are taking part in the game to share the same on-screen view of the action.

There are many advantages to online games, such as being able to play with friends separated by a large distance. It does come with downsides; it can sometimes be harder for people to recognize physical signs of discomfort or anxiety. It's worth remembering that two people can read the same sentence and determine two entirely different meanings; this is also true for online games. It is therefore important to ensure all players are comfortable with expressing themselves, and that clear communication is made and understood by all involved.

In-Person

For decades, the only option to playing tabletop role-playing games was in person. While technology allows for various other options now, the intimacy and camaraderie drawn from the traditional act of gathering around a table as a group and telling a collaborative tale is perpetually enduring.

It's worth noting that in-person games come with their own hurdles. As well as the complexities of time management and personal schedule conflicts, online play allows for people to play within their own homes; those who struggle with anxiety and many neuro-diverse people may prefer online play. Before a gamemaster pushes forward with arranging in-person games, be sure to communicate and consider the needs of everybody involved.

The benefits to in-person play are numerous; one often overlooked element is the communal bonding experience of sharing a meal. Captain Pike was often noted as sharing a meal with his senior officers while in charge of the *U.S.S. Enterprise*; and as playing a game together forms a bond among the players, so does the act of eating together. Before you sit down to play an in-person game, be sure to also consider who will be providing food; some gamemasters like to cook for their players, while other groups like for everybody to bring a few snacks to share. There's no right or wrong way to do this; do whatever feels best.

It's also the duty of the group to determine where to play. This is often the home of one of the players; anywhere that has a large enough room to fit everybody. Alternatively, dedicated game stores or board game cafes have seating and food available for a nominal fee. Such venues can be found in most large cities, and specifically cater to gamers. If you don't know enough people who would like to play, it's worth simply asking at a local gaming store, and they can often help you find a group.

Convention Games

Although attending conventions can be a luxury for many due to rising costs, conventions still provide a significant backbone to both the *Star Trek* and tabletop role-playing game communities. Conventions provide a chance for people to meet, engage game creators, buy merchandise, make new friends, and share in the grandeur of the community. As such, conventions provide a fantastic opportunity to play ***Star Trek Adventures!***

Convention organizers often allocate specific space for games to take place, and provide a means for potential players to view what games are offered. Gamemasters should speak with the convention organizers to express their desire to run a game. Often a gamemaster will need to create the storyline for an adventure; but at times a convention may be able to provide one (including some written by the creators of ***Star Trek Adventures***). As time at conventions is a premium, it's also expected that the gamemaster will create playable characters, so that players can pick them up, read their sheets, and jump into the game straight away.

Games run at conventions tend to be formatted a little differently than ones you may play on a regular basis with friends. You'll generally be playing with strangers or people you're less familiar with, and won't have the time to prepare a full Session 0. Therefore, it's important for gamemasters to cater their adventures to a broad audience and try to ensure they can appeal to folks from any walk of life. It's even more important to ensure everybody at the table understands what safety mechanics are in place. Remember that players at conventions have often paid money for a chance to play a fun game, and will find it more enjoyable if their boundaries are respected and potential upsetting triggers avoided.