

SYSTEMS REFERENCE DOCUMENT v1.0

A ROLEPLAYING GAME BY
KEVIN CRAWFORD

WORLDS WITHOUT NUMBER

AN INTRODUCTION

The document that follows is intended as a reference for game designers who wish to produce role-playing games using the mechanics of the **Worlds Without Number** fantasy RPG. It is not intended to substitute for the free PDF version of the game as a player resource or other reference, so the text included here is largely devoid of examples or other instructional text and it is not written to be convenient as a table reference.

Instead, it is meant to give other RPG designers an explicit document showing exactly what I consider to be freely-usable game mechanics or trivially implemented descriptive text.

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Kevin Crawford
3/13/24

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1.0.0 CHARACTER CREATION

1.1.0 ATTRIBUTES

A character has six attributes ranging from 3 to 18, reflecting a range from the minimum viable capacity for a playable character to the maximum normal human level.

Three of these attributes are physical.

Strength, reflecting physical prowess, melee combat, carrying gear, and brute force.

Dexterity, reflecting speed, evasion, manual dexterity, reaction time, and combat initiative.

Constitution, reflecting hardiness, enduring injury, and tolerating large amounts of magical healing.

Three are mental attributes.

Intelligence, reflecting memory, reasoning, technical skills, and general education.

Wisdom, reflecting noticing things, making judgments, reading situations, and intuition.

Charisma, reflecting commanding, charming, attracting attention, and being taken seriously.

NPCs do not normally have attributes. If necessary, the GM can choose them as appropriate, but usually they are assumed to have average scores if it's ever relevant.

1.1.1 GENERATING ATTRIBUTES

To generate their six attributes, the player rolls 3d6 in order, once for each attribute. At any point before section 1.5.0 in character creation the player may substitute a score of 14 for one rolled score.

Optionally, a player may choose to assign their stats from the following array of numbers: 14, 12, 11, 10, 9, and 7, divided up as desired among the attributes. If an array is used a score may not be substituted with a 14 later.

1.1.2 ATTRIBUTE MODIFIERS

Each attribute has a modifier, usually ranging from -2 to +2. This modifier is added to skill checks, attack rolls, damage rolls, Shock damage, and the relevant saving throw targets.

An attribute score of 3 has a modifier of -2. A score of 4-7 has a modifier of -1. A score of 8-13 has a modifier of +0. A score of 14-17 has a modifier of +1. A score of 18 has a modifier of +2.

Some Foci and abilities may add bonuses or penalties to an attribute's base modifier. Such bonuses or penalties cannot increase the modifier above +2 or below -2 unless explicitly indicated. Some injuries or character advancements may alter an attribute score; this new score may change the attribute's modifier.

1.2.0 SKILLS

A character's skills are the PC's learned abilities. A newly-created character starts with a few relevant skills and may acquire more as they advance in level. NPCs do not have individual skills, instead relying on their combat stat line's skill bonus when relevant. See section 2.3.0 for the rules for making skill checks.

1.2.1 SKILL LEVELS

Skills are rated on a scale between level-0 and level-4. A character must reach a certain minimum experience level to develop a skill to level-2 or beyond.

Skill Level

Level-0	Basic competence in the skill, such as an ordinary practitioner would have
Level-1	An experienced professional in the skill, clearly better than most
Level-2	Veteran expert, one respected even by those with considerable experience
Level-3	Master of the skill, likely one of the best in the city
Level-4	Superlative expertise, one of the best in the world

1.2.2 GAINING SKILLS IN CHARACTER CREATION

Characters gain skills from their Backgrounds as described in the section below and from a single free pick in section 1.7.4. Some Foci also grant particular skills. The first time a skill is picked or given, a character obtains it at level-0. The second time it is picked or given, the skill becomes level-1. The third and further times a skill is picked or given during character creation, the player instead picks any other skill that is not already level-1. No character can begin play with skills above level-1.

1.2.3 THE SKILL LIST

The following skills are standard to most fantasy campaigns. GMs may add or subtract from this list for specialized settings. Some skills may overlap at points in their application; the character may use either skill at their discretion.

Administer: Keep an organization running smoothly, scribe things well, plan out logistics, identify incompetent or treacherous workers, analyze records or archives, or otherwise do things that an executive or middle-manager would need to do.

Connect: Find or know people who are useful to your purposes, make friendships or social acquaintances, know who to talk to get favors or services, and call on the help or resources of organizations you belong to. Connect covers your PC's ability to find the people you need, though convincing them to help may require more than this.

Convince: Persuade a listener that something you are saying is true. Naturally, the more implausible the claim or more emotionally repugnant it is to them, the more difficult it is to persuade them. Furthermore, how they act on their newfound conviction is up to them and their motivations, and may not be perfectly predictable.

Craft: Craft or repair goods and technology appropriate to the PC's background and society. The Craft skill can be used for a wide range of artisan pursuits, though a GM is within their rights to keep the PC from building complex things that are too far away from their past background and experience.

Exert: Run, swim, climb, jump, labor for long periods, throw things, or otherwise exert your physical strength, stamina, and coordination. Even a PC with poor physical attributes might have a good Exert skill reflecting athletic training and expertise in making the most of their available talents.

Heal: Treat wounds, cure diseases, neutralize poisons, diagnose psychological health issues, and otherwise tend to the wounds of body and mind. The Heal skill cannot cure lost hit points directly, but it's a vital skill in stabilizing Mortally Wounded allies or ensuring

1.3.0 BACKGROUNDS

clean recovery.

Know: Know matters of history, geography, natural science, zoology, and other academic fields appropriate to a sage or scholar. While some sages might specialize in particular fields, most learned men and women in this age have a broad range of understanding, and will rarely be unable to even attempt to answer a question relevant to this skill.

Lead: Inspire others to follow your lead and believe in your plans and goals. Manage subordinates and keep them focused, loyal, and motivated in the face of danger or failure. A successful leader will keep their subordinate's faith and confidence even when reason might make the leader's plan appear questionable at best.

Magic: Cast or analyze magic and know things about famous mages or notable magical events. Classes that can't cast spells obtain only intellectual and scholarly benefits from this skill.

Notice: Notice small details, impending ambushes, hidden features, or concealed objects. Detect subtle smells, sounds, or other sensory input. Notice cannot be used simply to detect a lie, but keen attention can often discern a subject's emotional state.

Perform: Sing, act, dance, orate, or otherwise perform impressively for an audience. Compose music, plays, writings, or other works of performance art. Most performers will have a particular field they excel at, though polymaths might exist if the PC's background is appropriate for such versatility.

Pray: Perform the clerical rites of your religion, and be familiar with the gods, demons, and taboos of major and minor faiths, and identify iconography and persons of religious importance. Pray also helps you know the state of local faiths and the important persons in their hierarchies.

Punch: Fight unarmed or with natural body weaponry. Punch, kick, grapple, or otherwise brawl without the benefit of man-made tools. This mode of fighting is inefficient at best without some special Focus to improve it, but it's reliably non-lethal.

Ride: Ride an animal, drive a cart or carriage, or otherwise deal with land transportation. This skill also includes competence at mount care and tending, basic cart or carriage repair, judging good horseflesh, and other skills appropriate to a beast-rider of whatever society the PC comes from.

Sail: Sail or repair a ship, build small craft, navigate by the stars, read sea weather, manage sailors, and otherwise conduct the business of a professional mariner. This skill may apply to more esoteric means of vehicular travel in some societies.

Shoot: Fire a bow or crossbow or throw a hurled weapon. Maintain ranged weaponry and fletch arrows.

Sneak: Move silently, hide in shadows, avoid notice, pick pockets, disguise yourself, pick locks, defeat traps, or otherwise overcome security measures.

Stab: Fight with melee weapons or throw a hurled weapon. Maintain and identify weaponry.

Survive: Hunt, fish, navigate by the stars, mitigate environmental hazards, identify plants and wildlife, and craft basic survival tools and shelter. A PC's Survive skill is most pertinent to the environments in their background, but the basic principles can be applied in all but the most alien environments.

Trade: Buy and sell at a profit, identify the worth of goods or treasures, deal with merchants and traders, find black-market goods and services, and know laws regarding smuggling and contraband.

Work: This skill is a catch-all for any profession that might not otherwise merit its own skill, such as a painter, lawyer, farmer, or herdsman. The precise skill it represents will vary with the PC's background.

1.3.0 BACKGROUNDS

Every character has a Background, a past reflecting their career before they took up adventuring. A background may be chosen from the list below or a new one made up with GM permission.

1.3.1 BACKGROUND SKILLS

When a Background is chosen, a PC immediately gets its free skill at level-0. At that point, the player decides whether to gain further skills randomly or to pick specific choices.

If they choose randomly, they may make three rolls divided between the Growth and Learning tables of their background in any way they wish, including taking all three from just one table. If they pick specific choices they can pick any two skills from the Learning table, including picking the same one twice to raise it to level-1. They may not pick the "Any Skill" option, if it exists.

A skill pick of "Any Combat" means the player can pick Shoot, Stab, or Punch. A skill roll of "Any Skill" means they can pick any skill from the list above. Some campaigns may involve special magical or psychic skills; these cannot be chose with the Any Skill pick.

If an attribute bonus is rolled, such as "+2 Physical", the player may apply it to any physical attribute or split the bonus between two physical attributes. The same principle applies to Mental attribute increases. "Any Stat" increases may be applied to either physical or mental attributes. No attribute can be raised above 18.

1.3.2 NEW BACKGROUNDS

To create a new background, the player describes it to the GM and picks an existing background table that best fits the concept. Assuming the GM approves it, they may then roll or pick as usual. If no existing background table fits, they may make a new one with the GM's permission.

1.3.3 EXAMPLE BACKGROUNDS

The two following backgrounds are examples of those possible for a player, with others to be created as the designer thinks appropriate for their setting. The free granted skill is listed after each background's name.

Artisan			Craft	
d6	Growth	d8	Learning	
1	+1	Any Stat	1	Connect
2	+2	Physical	2	Convince
3	+2	Physical	3	Craft
4	+2	Mental	4	Craft
5		Exert	5	Exert
6		Any Skill	6	Know
			7	Notice
			8	Trade

Barbarian			Survive	
1	+1	Any Stat	1	Any Combat
2	+2	Physical	2	Connect
3	+2	Physical	3	Exert
4	+2	Mental	4	Lead
5		Exert	5	Notice
6		Any Skill	6	Punch
			7	Sneak
			8	Survive

1.4.0 CLASSES

1.4.0 CLASSES

PCs are uncommon in that each of them has a **class**. A class represents the particular skills, abilities, or talents that make the PC a viable adventurer. NPCs do not normally have classes, though they may have special abilities or powers of their own.

1.4.1 THE THREE BASE CLASSES

The three base classes are Expert, Mage, and Warrior. Each of these base classes has its own hit die, attack progression, and Focus advancement. PCs use the tables for the class they choose.

1.4.2 FULL AND PARTIAL CLASSES

There are two kinds of classes: **Full classes** and **Partial classes**. A PC may choose to pick a single Full class, committing completely to that class' profession, or they may choose to become an Adventurer and pick two Partial classes instead, mixing their abilities.

The Warrior, Expert, High Mage, Necromancer, Invoker, and Elementalist classes may be taken either as a Full class or as a Partial class. In the former case, the PC gains the full range of powers granted to the profession. If taken as a Partial class, a more restricted range of abilities are granted.

The Healer, Vowed, Bard, Thought Noble, Accursed, Wise, Mag-
eslayer, Skinshifter, Duelist, Beastmaster, and Blood Priest can only be taken as Partial classes. These classes are limited in scope, and must be paired with another Partial class.

1.4.3 THE ADVENTURER CLASS

The Adventurer is a special class that allows the PC to take two Partial classes and mix them together. These may be Partial-only classes, such as a Healer/Vowed, or they may be Partial versions of Warrior, Expert, or Mage classes, such as a Partial Expert/Thought Noble. A dual-specialization spellcaster is also possible by mixing a Partial High Mage/Partial Elementalist together, for example.

1.4.4 CLASSES AND EFFORT

Some classes have special abilities that are fueled with magical power, inner focus, or some other reserve of energy. This capacity is measured in points of **Effort**, a resource the PC can commit to activate their abilities.

Every class that uses Effort has its own unique pool: High Mage Effort, Vowed Effort, Healer Effort, and so forth. Adventurers with two Partial classes that use Effort have two separately-tracked pools, one for each class. Points of Effort from one class cannot be used to fuel powers from another.

The maximum Effort of a Full class is equal to 1 plus a relevant skill level and ability modifier given by the class. A Partial class uses the same formula, but with 1 fewer point of Effort, to a minimum of 1.

1.4.4.1 COMMITTING EFFORT

Most class powers require that Effort be Committed. Committing Effort is done as part of activating a power, and ties up the Effort for a varying amount of time depending on the ability used.

Some powers **Commit Effort for the duration**. This means the Effort remains Committed as long as the power is active. The PC can reclaim the Committed Effort at any time as an Instant action, deactivating the power.

Some powers **Commit Effort for the scene**. The Effort remains Committed until the end of the scene, after which it returns to the PC. It cannot be reclaimed earlier, even if the ability it fuels is only good for a single attack or action. A scene usually amounts to a single fight, event, or dungeon turn, almost never lasting more than fifteen minutes. Further specifics are provided in the time section of the game rules.

Some powers **Commit Effort for the day**. Once Committed, this Effort can be recovered only after a comfortable night's rest. If the PC is hungry, cold, sick, or sleeping without the benefits of a bedroll or other basic comforts, this Effort cannot be recovered.

Activating a power only ever requires Committing a single point of Effort, unless the power itself says otherwise.

1.5.0 THE CLASS LIST

1.5.0 THE CLASS LIST

The classes that follow are flavor-stripped versions of those found in **Worlds Without Number** and its supplement, **The Atlas of the Latter Earth**. While mainstays such as the Warrior, the Expert, or the High Mage are appropriate to almost any fantasy setting, others may not fit specific campaigns. A GM always has the right to omit classes that do not fit the flavor of the game they are running.

1.5.1 THE ADVENTURER

Not every hero is perfectly reflected by one of the three main classes, even with the wide latitude of concepts each one allows. For those heroes that straddle the roles, there remains the class of Adventurer.

An Adventurer picks two classes to reflect their own particular talents. A spell-slinging swordsman might choose to be a Partial Mage/Partial Warrior, while a stealthy assassin might be a Partial Expert/Partial Warrior, and a grifting mountebank-wizard might be a Partial Expert/Partial Mage. The player should pick whichever pairing serves best.

The tables below provide the hit dice, attack bonus, and Foci picks gained by each of the three possible pairings. Thus, a first level Partial Expert/Partial Warrior would roll 1d6+2 for their hit points, have a +1 attack bonus, and pick three Foci: one expert, one warrior, and one free pick.

Adventurers tend to have a wider range of abilities than a more focused PC, and the extra Focus pick can make a significant difference at low levels. The absence of the strongest class abilities of Experts and Warriors make a difference in the longer run, however, and a Partial Mage will never attain the same magical power in their tradition as a focused specialist.

PARTIAL EXPERT

A Partial Expert is treated just as a full Expert, including gaining the benefits of the **Quick Learner** ability. They do not have the **Masterful Expertise** ability, however, as they lack the versatility of a full Expert.

PARTIAL MAGE

A Partial Mage is treated as a Mage, and gains the **Arcane Tradition** ability, allowing them to pick a magical tradition for their powers. That tradition's abilities will be more limited for Partial Mages, however, as described under each of the paths.

It's even possible for a PC to pick the Partial Mage class twice for two different magical traditions, gaining portions of both arcane powers. They then use the usual full Mage chart for hit dice, attack bonus, and Foci, and the spellcasting table for dual casters if both partial classes cast spells.

A Partial Mage must adhere to the restrictions and limits of their magical tradition in order to use its abilities, regardless of whatever other partial class they may have.

PARTIAL WARRIOR

A Partial Warrior gains certain of the benefits of a full Warrior, including the improved hit die and a somewhat improved attack bonus. They do not have the **Veteran's Luck** special ability or the **Killing Blow** power, however, and must trust to their own talents to land blows and crush their enemies.

Partial Expert/Partial Warrior

Level	Hit Dice	Attack Bonus	Focus Picks
1	1d6+2	+1	1 Expert + 1 Warrior + 1 Any
2	2d6+4	+2	+1 Any
3	3d6+6	+2	
4	4d6+8	+3	
5	5d6+10	+4	+1 Any
6	6d6+12	+5	
7	7d6+14	+5	+1 Any
8	8d6+16	+6	
9	9d6+18	+6	
10	10d6+20	+7	+1 Any

Partial Expert/Partial Mage

Level	Hit Dice	Attack Bonus	Focus Picks
1	1d6	+0	1 Expert + 1 Any
2	2d6	+1	+1 Any
3	3d6	+1	
4	4d6	+2	
5	5d6	+2	+1 Any
6	6d6	+3	
7	7d6	+3	+1 Any
8	8d6	+4	
9	9d6	+4	
10	10d6	+5	+1 Any

Partial Mage/Partial Warrior

Level	Hit Dice	Attack Bonus	Focus Picks
1	1d6+2	+1	1 Warrior + 1 Any
2	2d6+4	+2	+1 Any
3	3d6+6	+2	
4	4d6+8	+3	
5	5d6+10	+4	+1 Any
6	6d6+12	+5	
7	7d6+14	+5	+1 Any
8	8d6+16	+6	
9	9d6+18	+6	
10	10d6+20	+7	+1 Any

1.5.0 THE CLASS LIST

1.5.2 THE ACCURSED

The Accursed are those men and women who have made pacts with otherworldly beings, intentionally or otherwise, and gained powers from that bond.

BENEFITS OF THE ACCURSED

The Accursed is a partial Mage class that must be joined with a second partial class by an Adventurer. A Partial Warrior/Accursed might be a grim demonic warrior, a Partial Expert/Accursed might be a sinister tempter, while a Partial Mage/Accursed could be a sorcerer willing to pact with foul creatures for their powers.

All Accursed gain Magic-0 during character creation. Even those who are not spellcasters must understand the ways of eldritch beings and the subtleties of sorcery.

While the arts of **Accursed Blade** and **Accursed Bolt** use Magic as their combat skill, Foci that normally apply to mundane weapons such as Armsmaster or Deadeye also benefit their relevant melee or ranged attacks. For these Foci, read "Magic" in place of "Shoot" or "Stab" when gaining their benefits, including the granted skill and the stacking damage bonus that the first level of the Focus may grant.

1.5.2.1 ACCURSED ARTS

An Accursed has an Effort score equal to their Magic skill level plus their Intelligence or Charisma modifier, to a minimum of one point. Every Accursed gains either **Accursed Bolt** or **Accursed Blade** as a starting art, plus one more of their choice. Accursed arts may be used in or out of armor.

Accursed Blade: As an On Turn action, manifest an occult melee weapon as a one-handed 1d8 weapon or a two-handed 2d6 weapon. Both add your Magic skill to the damage roll, have a Shock rating of 2/15, and use Magic as the attack skill and the best of Str, Dex, Int, or Cha as its modifying attribute.

Accursed Bolt: As Accursed Blade, but you launch blasts of occult force instead of meleeing. Their damage is 1d8 plus your Magic skill, their range is 200', and the bolts can be thrown in melee at a -4 penalty to hit. These bolts need both hands free to hurl them.

Bewitching Distraction: Commit Effort for the day as a Main Action when talking to an intelligent target when not in combat. They must make a Mental save or become dazed, oblivious to their surroundings and forgetting you and all else that happened in that scene. Danger ends the daze but not the forgetting.

Compelling Shriek: Once per scene, Commit Effort for the day as a Main Action and shout a command of no more than seven words. Chosen targets who hear and understand must make a Mental save or perform that action for one round, provided it is not totally contrary to their character.

Devil's Bargain: As a Main Action, consecrate a deal you've made with an uncoerced person. If they violate the deal or its spirit, you know instantly and may inflict 1d6 damage per level on them if desired.

Dire Pact: Foes suffer a penalty equal to your Magic skill on all saves versus your Accursed arts. If they succeed, however, you gain one System Strain.

Lying Face: Commit Effort as a Main Action; while it remains Committed, you can disguise yourself as any humanoid of the same general size, including clothing, scent, and voice.

Night-Black Eyes: You can see clearly in perfect darkness. As

PARTIAL EXPERT/ACCURSED

Level	Hit Dice	Attack Bonus	Focus Picks
1	1d6	+0	1 Expert +1 Any
2	2d6	+1	+1 Any
3	3d6	+1	
4	4d6	+2	
5	5d6	+2	+1 Any
6	6d6	+3	
7	7d6	+3	+1 Any
8	8d6	+4	
9	9d6	+4	
10	10d6	+5	+1 Any

PARTIAL MAGE/ACCURSED

Level	Hit Dice	Attack Bonus	Focus Picks
1	1d6-1	+0	1 Any
2	2d6-2	+0	+1 Any
3	3d6-3	+0	
4	4d6-4	+0	
5	5d6-5	+1	+1 Any
6	6d6-6	+1	
7	7d6-7	+1	+1 Any
8	8d6-8	+1	
9	9d6-9	+1	
10	10d6-10	+2	+1 Any

PARTIAL WARRIOR/ACCURSED

Level	Hit Dice	Attack Bonus	Focus Picks
1	1d6+2	+1	1 Warrior +1 Any
2	2d6+4	+2	+1 Any
3	3d6+6	+2	
4	4d6+8	+3	
5	5d6+10	+4	+1 Any
6	6d6+12	+5	
7	7d6+14	+5	+1 Any
8	8d6+16	+6	
9	9d6+18	+6	
10	10d6+20	+7	+1 Any

1.5.0 THE CLASS LIST

a Main Action, focus on a particular visible object, person, or location; you can tell if it is enchanted, though no details about the magic are seen.

Pacted Protection: Choose a type of harmful energy: fire, frost, acid, electricity, or the like. You become immune to natural degrees of this energy and take half damage from magical attacks involving it.

Rob Vitality: Once per scene, as an On Turn action, Commit Effort for the scene and target a visible foe. They must make a Physical save or lose their next Main Action, which you immediately gain instead.

Scouring Curse: Commit Effort for the scene as a Main Action and target a visible foe. Your curse inflicts a -1 penalty to their hit, damage, and saving throw rolls for one round per level. At 4th level this penalty becomes -2, and at 9th it becomes -3. Only one such curse can be active at a given time.

Shadowed Steps: As a Move Action, Commit Effort for the scene and teleport up to your Move distance. You cannot bypass walls or physical obstacles, but you can teleport vertically or into high places.

Snaring Speech: Once per round as an Instant action, Commit Effort for the day when failing a skill check to persuade or tempt someone. They must make a Mental save or agree with your proposal if it's something they would normally consider doing. Gain one System Strain when using this art.

Sorcerous Battery: Once per day, as an On Turn action, Commit Effort for the day. You or a visible ally refresh the spell slot of a spell that has been cast since the start of the prior round. Gain one System Strain.

Soul Consumption: As an Instant action, Commit Effort for the day when you fell an intelligent target with Accursed Bolt or Accursed Blade. They die instantly. You heal 1d6 hit points plus your level and lose one accumulated System Strain.

Tendrils of Night: Commit Effort as an On Turn action. While Committed, you exude numerous tentacles or eldritch arms that can manipulate objects with your strength up to 20' away. You gain no bonus actions, but the arms can melee at range. These arms have your AC, and you are damaged if they are hurt.

Unseen Steps: As an On Turn action, Commit Effort for the day to turn invisible for 1d6 rounds plus your level. This invisibility breaks before you attack, cast spells, or perform other vigorous or violent actions.

Weight of Sin: As a Main Action, Commit Effort for the day and target a visible foe. They must make a Physical save or lose their Move action for 1d6 rounds plus your level.

Weeping Wounds: Once per round, Commit Effort for the scene as an Instant action when a visible enemy takes damage. They must make a Physical save or suffer 1d6 damage per round for one round per level. They cannot heal or regenerate any hit point damage during this effect. This art does not stack.