

Campaign Premises for Mage: the Ascension

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Mage: The Ascension Premises

House Rules of the Storyteller system in this game:

1. **Characters should not be limited to a short list of Abilities.**

Choose Secondary Abilities as you see fit. If you have access to the *Book of Secrets* or the *Book of Shadows*, you can choose any of the Abilities in those books for your character, too. If you don't, you can make up your own Abilities, with Storyteller approval.

2. **Ability Rankings tell more than dice rolls.**

Sometimes, in a pinch, you need the dice to tell you what's what. For every other time, trust the ability rating. Unnecessary dice rolls add nothing to suspense and a whole lot to time and overhead. We're avoiding them whenever possible.

3. **Having a complementary skill can help you out on a tough check, but only if you have time to make use of it.**

Sometimes a good Science skill really does help out with a Technology check. Using two skills to figure something out takes longer than using one skill, though, so you have to take the time to gain the advantage.

In game terms, you have to make a check with the complementary skill; successes on that roll reduces the difficulty of the other roll by -1 for each success over the first (-1 difficulty for two successes, -2 for three, and so forth), up to a maximum of -3.

This is covered under the *Complementary Rolls* sidebar in the Mage 20th rulebook.

4. **'Partial' success is success.**

For twenty-some-odd years, White Wolf has been vacillating over whether you should count a single success on a roll as an actual success or as some kind of lame, gimpy 'Partial Success'.

In this game, it's a success.

Making one success does not mean you barely succeed, or that you look stupid succeeding, or that you succeed but should probably roll again next turn just to be sure. Any of those results would be success with a cost. Making a single success simply means you accomplish what you meant to with no frills nor extra benefits.

5. Failing a dice check usually doesn't mean your character does something stupid or even looks stupid.

If your character fails a dice check while he or she is attempting to do something that's obviously above his skill ranking, then he probably did something stupid. At all other times, failing a dice check means that something outside the character's control conspired against him that prevented him from succeeding in a task he rightfully should have looked awesome doing.

I mean, come on. Your character is *obviously* a badass--otherwise, why the heck are you playing him, and why are we following him? Badasses don't look stupid when they fail onscreen, they still look awesome. Maybe the other guy looked awesomer this time. Maybe the deck was stacked against him. Either way, we're going to avoid making characters look dumb just because we rolled crappy dice for them.

Choices make characters look stupid. Dice rolls do not make characters look stupid.

6. Failing a dice check doesn't *necessarily* mean your character doesn't succeed--it just means your character doesn't succeed in quite the way he or she would have liked...

Success with a cost is often an option. Sometimes the ST will offer a trade: success, but you do it loudly; or success, but you take longer than you'd expected; or something similar. Alternately, on a simple failure the player can offer one (1) trade along the same lines (*so make it a fair one*), which the ST can accept, refuse, or counter. These are options, and the player can always opt for failure instead.

Botches, on the other hand, are still botches, and **never** qualify for success at a cost.

7. Succeeding a dice check *may* not mean your character succeeds, necessarily--sometimes, the ST may offer a **Complication on a skill check in exchange for an Experience Point.**

When the ST presents a complication, he or she describes what's going to happen to the character instead of success. The details may be fuzzy, but it's not a mystery offer. Accepting the Complication means the character immediately gains an XP but fails the check (*or has it rendered moot*) due to

circumstances outside his or her control. Again, this is an option, and the player can always opt for her rightful success instead.

8. Gaining XP is mostly about setting goals and seeing them through.

XP is all about growth, and the best way to grow is to undertake a task and then to complete it.

9. Demeanor isn't really a thing.

Demeanor is a non-binding game statistic the character doesn't get anything for and can change at will--therefore, what's the point? We're not gonna track Demeanor. A character has a Nature, and that governs how he regains Willpower, but he or she can demean himself however he wants without reporting it to the Storyteller.

10. Unless you've got a really good reason, every Mage PC starts with Arete 2, not 1.

Because who wants to play a mage limited to divination? Seriously? I mean, do the folks at WW *actually* play starting characters at Arete 1? On the other hand, *most* mages still don't start with an Arete above 3. If you want to start with 4, you'd better have a really good reason.

11. Regarding other supernatural critters in this setting, never assume you know what's what, just because you've played other WoD games.

I love tweaking, and I've done my fair share of it in this game to make other supernatural denizens of the night not *quite* what you might expect, if you know the rules.

Don't just assume the big, scary vampire is gonna run away with his tail between his legs just because you conjure an eternal flame. He might--but then again, he might not, and don't complain to me if he doesn't. It's my world. Vampires work my way.

Spoiler: Vampires don't twinkle in the sunlight.

House Rules of Magick:

1. Doing rites is way easy.

Rites that you've taken the time to learn are practically second-nature to your character. You've invested the practice in them so that when you flick your wand and say 'Expelliarmus!', you don't *have* those embarrassing backfires. As such, getting simple success on a coincidental rite doesn't require a dice roll, even in combat, and even for vulgar rites, you can't

botch. For any effect that requires more than a single success, like damage, duration, or modifier, you should probably make the roll. Note that you don't have to pay XP to learn Rotes in M20. You do have to spend a few hours practicing the rote (*more for higher-rating rites*) and you do have to make an Intelligence check using either the appropriate Esoterica (*for magickal spells*) or Science (*for enlightened procedures*). Obviously, your Foci have to match those spelled out by the Rote, or you can't learn it. There are no limits on the number of rites a character can learn, within time constraints. However, if anybody abuses that freedom, we'll houserule it. I don't know about you, but I don't want to have to keep up with 5 pages of rites for a single character.

2. Unless you're under pressure, you can always do awesome magick.

Simple success on simple effects for which you have the Spheres shouldn't need a dice roll unless you're resisted or working under pressure. If the degree of your success matters, though, you'd better roll for it.

3. Magick isn't always something you *do*.

You're a Mage, not a Sorcerer. Magick isn't what you *do* so much as what you *are*. As such, you may experience or exhibit magickal effects, even when you aren't actively *casting* them. Such effects are entirely under the purview of the Storyteller, and you can't depend on them--that's why Mages invented spells, after all. But, especially for one-dot perception effects, don't be surprised if your character randomly exhibits magickal ability within the realm of his or her Spheres that he wouldn't normally possess except under the effects of a formal spell. These effects are spontaneous, but they're most often triggered by investment or necessity. If the character sees a malicious bully prodding a defenseless snake at the zoo, he's more likely to respond by making the glass disappear at that time than if he's leisurely studying the snake under the lamps.

4. Your Affinity Sphere says more about you than which Sphere is cheapest to advance.

Your Affinity Sphere is more about what kind of magick resonates with your avatar and less about who your teacher was. As such, in this setting, you can pick *any* affinity sphere you like, regardless of your background. In addition, the aforementioned spontaneous magickal effects are much more pronounced within your Affinity Sphere. A Chronomancer with a Time Sphere affinity, for example, is more likely to catch stray glimpses of the past or future; while an Evoker with a Forces affinity might spontaneously ward off the occasional bullet or knife thrust.

Again, although these effects are more pronounced, they're still not dependable. These may be awakened glimpses of the true nature of reality from your avatar's perspective, but they're only glimpses.

5. You can learn Rotes you can't technically cast.

You can learn a Rote with a Sphere requirement one dot higher than you actually possess as long as you have at least one dot in each required sphere--that's what practice does for you; although, expect it to take longer to learn a Rote for which you don't have a required sphere rating. You can cast these effects as if you had the required spheres, but you can't cast them automatically the way you can cast Rotes within your abilities. These, you have to roll every time.

6. Prepare beforehand to exceed your limits.

If you play into your foci, you can fudge your Sphere levels a little when you need to. This probably will cost a point of Willpower, which also means you won't be able to spend Willpower for an automatic success. However, a word of caution for the ambitious: Don't Botch. Expect extra Paradox if you're attempting to cast a spell above your ability.

If you draw circles, *playing into your focus* means using orichalcum dust to draw your circle. If you burn candles, it means pulling out the black candle with the wick woven by three Grand Masters. If you use mathematical formulae, it means taking the time to permute the variables through the golden ratio tables, or running them through the theoretical computer algorithm, which you prepared for a situation exactly like this one.

Playing into your focus means taking the time beforehand to stack all the odds in your favor when you really need them. A prepared wizard always keeps an ace up his sleeve when he knows he may need it. If you do the same, your foci will not fail to come through for you when you need them the most.

7. We're using the Allocating Successes rules (detailed on M20 p. 538) for spellcasting from Second Edition, Revised.

You can use extra successes in this system to buy damage, duration, and additional targets, according to the Optional Dividing Successes Rule chart on M20 p. 504. It gives you a little more versatility in spellcasting.

8. Your Focus can provide secondary skills for Arete rolls.

Starting mages have crap pools for making magick--everybody knows that. You're sweating just to get that *Night Vision* spell to work without botching, much less fireballing anybody. However, if you're minding your Focus, it can provide you with secondary skills that can reduce the target number of Arete checks, making them easier to hit, even with fewer dice.

9. Most Arete Rolls can turn into Extended rolls.

You don't actually have to be performing some kind of mystical ritual to make an extended roll for spellcasting--in fact, in this campaign, you can turn **any** spellcasting roll into an extended roll if you need a few more successes before you cast. Just declare that you're spending another turn casting the spell. You can release it at any point, with three caveats:

a. *If you roll a failure, you must release the spell with the successes you've accrued to this point, or else it collapses. This includes failure due to Countermagick (as described in M20 p. 545), and Countermagick **can** counteract successes you've already banked. Obviously, this makes Countermagick a serious consideration in making extended spellcasting rolls.*

b. *If you roll a botch at any point, no matter how many successes you have in the bank, the entire spell goes sideways and you suffer Paradox for it. Even worse, if you suffer a Paradox Backlash and the spell is intended to deal damage, the successes you've already accumulated add to the damage for the Backlash.*

c. *If somebody wounds you while you're in the middle of extended casting, you may have to make a **Stamina + Meditation** check to keep control of the spell. The Difficulty for this check depends on the type of damage (**Bashing: 6, Lethal: 8, Aggravated: 9**) and the Threshold is equal to the number of Health Levels taken. If you fail, the spell simply fails.*

10. A mage doesn't actually have to start with Seven Foci.

A mage's Focus is a very personal reflection of his or her Art, and as such, sticking a number to it--even a mystically significant one--trivializes the importance of the focus in the mage's worldview. Besides that, some categories of focus are much broader than others, and it's difficult to compare the statistical worth of wands versus computer programs.

As such, a starting mage needs some foci with which to work her magick.

Whether it's three foci or seven foci or nine foci is up to the player.

This also means that mages don't automatically lose access to their foci as they improve in Arete. If a mage wishes to give up her foci, that's something better handled through practicing using magic without foci and through resolving personal goals and quests than through an arbitrary system mechanic. If a mage prefers to keep using foci, that's fine, too.