

## NERO West NPC Guide

Our NPCs (non-player characters) are a huge asset to the game. They can have a great deal of fun, don't have to pay to play, and even get experience points they can apply to their player-characters. We do best when we know NPCs are coming, because we can set up roles for them to take on. Still, it's important to know that the game typically revolves around the PCs since they're the center of the story we tell. That means that NPCs sometimes have down-time during games, and that the NPCs sometimes get stuck waiting for the PCs to get moving. Also, the best NPCs keep in mind that their job is to make the game fun and engaging for the PCs. Here are some guidelines to help you get started being an NPC.

1. Keep it safe – Make sure you know how to fight safely, and observe all holds. Know the terrain and hazards. Scout a location before you use it, if at all possible. Guide PCs away from hazards. Make sure the weapons you're using are safe.
  - a. Holds: **MOST IMPORTANT**. If someone says “hold”, it is an out-of-game statement that **stops all play**. Holds are called for safety reasons and a few important plot reasons. Anyone can call a hold at any time. When a hold is called, crouch or go to one knee. Stop fighting and talking. Don't wander around until the person who called the hold says it is okay to do so. Holds are ended by the person who called the hold asking “Is anyone not ready?” If there's no reply, call, “3, 2, 1... Lay on.”
2. The Rules
  - a. Spend some time with the rules before jumping in as a character. Practice, if you can.
  - b. Don't take on a character whose skills you don't understand.
  - c. Learn how to read a monster and character card.
  - d. Err in the PC's favor. If there's a disagreement, it's fine to bow out gracefully and let the PCs have their way. You can always ask for a ruling from Plot after an encounter. If you lose track of hits, feel free to die too soon. You're there to help the PCs have a good time, and rules-bickering doesn't achieve that.
3. Role-play
  - a. If your white headband isn't on, you should be playing your character. You never know when a player is watching, and it helps generate an atmosphere of realism if you play the part, even if the PCs are hundreds of yards down the trail.
  - b. Know your character – Why are you here? What do you want? Are you good or evil, forgiving or vengeful? Try to add depth to the character, even if he's a little kobold destined to die within a minute or two.
  - c. Wear your costuming – If you're a monster, try to wear the mask even though it's not comfortable. If it inhibits vision, fine, that monster type has poor vision. That said, if the mask is intolerable, wear it briefly to set the image in the player's minds, then remove it.
  - d. Role-play your death – Saying “I'm dead” and walking away with your hand on your head doesn't cut it. Give the players time to make sure you're really dead, to search your corpse, or just to worry about your corpse. Count out your minute of first-aid time, and your five minutes until resurrection if you can.
4. Care for all props: Return them when you're done with them and treat them nicely. Props add a lot to the game, but can cost a lot of money and are hard to replace. This goes for weapons too!
5. Be clearly in-game or out-of-game – There's nothing worse than asking someone if what they just said was in-game or out. If you're out of game, keep quiet and keep a hand on your head or a headband on. Don't even go to the bathroom at 2am unless you're clearly in-game or out-of-game.
6. Never improvise skills or creatures – Unless you've specifically been given the authority to invent characters and plotlines, stick to what you've been given.
7. Never use out-of-game reasons to target players – Your NPC **character** may have a reason to target a **character**, but you as a **player** should never target another **player**. This isn't the place for your revenge fantasy.
8. Don't see the players as the enemy. You're there to entertain and challenge the players, not to win against them. If you really want to “show those PCs how to fight by kicking their butts” you're going in with the wrong mindset.
9. Don't overkill – Sometimes you'll encounter PCs who are far below the levels needed to deal with your NPC. Say you're swinging 15's and have 200 body. If you encounter three PCs who are swinging 2's, try to intimidate them and get them to run. Give them a scare and a story to tell, not a death.
10. Don't let players bully you. Helpful advice from players is fine, but draw a line and don't feel pressured if they're getting pushy.
11. If you have an issue with a player, remain calm and polite and consider talking to them quietly in private. Don't make a scene. Don't hesitate to report them to plot.
12. Keep Plot informed. Make sure we know how encounters proceed, and particularly make sure to note anything that could become a plot hook. We'll often build up a story around an NPC's innocent impromptu comment.

### Who's in charge?

We try to keep NERO West fairly free of bureaucracy, but there's still a chain of authority. NPCs with more experience and better understanding of the game and the rules should guide newer NPCs. We also will usually have a monster marshal who is responsible for outfitting NPCs and sending out random encounters. Plot is ultimately in charge. We'll introduce ourselves at the start of the game.

### How much leeway do I have?

If you're new, just try to follow the lead of others. As you gain experience and earn the trust of the plot committee, we'll have you do more and more and give you bigger roles. But feel free to ask to play something, if you want. We're not shy about tapping the creativity of our NPCs. Just keep plot informed so we can weave it into the tapestry of the game!