

# How To Write a Downtime

## The Basics

Downtimes are a written way to cover what your character does between sessions. They are submitted once a month, prior to a Field Operation, and are used to engage with plot by a written series of attempted actions. Each of these actions is referred to as a **Downtime Point**. Most Downtimes will have up to 10 Downtime Points available.

More information on what you can and cannot do in Downtimes is in the 'Format of the Game' section of the rulebook.

## How To Write A Successful Downtime

Writing a Downtime can seem intimidating, particularly if you've not done one before, and sometimes it's hard to work out how ambitious you're allowed to be. The answer is 'very', but there are some particular tips and tricks that will help you actually achieve your Downtime ambitions.

Some basic points to start:

- Decide on a goal. This could be as simple as 'making friends with Bob the NPC' or as complex as 'uncovering the full details of the Event'. It can be personal to your character (making art, finding out what happened to a loved one) or intensely connected to the wider plot (just what the hell has happened to physics?).
- Once you have a goal, come up with a plan that will lead to that goal. Work out what the steps are, remembering that there might be setbacks. Ideally, be prepared to try multiple approaches to achieve your goal.
- Translate those steps into actions you'll take in the Downtime. Sometimes you'll need to wait for the answers to earlier steps to complete later tasks - this is fine! A goal wouldn't be very satisfying if you could get everything straight away.
- Remember: Downtimes should always be phrased in such a way that you are telling us what your character is trying to do, and what they are hoping to achieve. Downtime Points where you try to tell us what will happen won't work; the world is a big and strange place and sometimes things are unpredictable. It also gives us less to respond to if you try to dictate the outcome, which means you might miss out on plot.
- You can use first or third person depending on your preference. Answers will always be written in second person!
- If you don't tell us what you're trying to achieve, we will struggle to give you satisfying answers.
- Not everything has to be for a grander purpose - sometimes small actions will have wider effects on the world even if your character is just filling the Facility with paperchains for the fun of it.
- Fluff and flavour give us stuff to bounce off. If your character is being moody and stompy when they ask for their dinner, let us know!

In order to illustrate how one successfully gets information, plot and exciting things done in their Downtimes, we are going to look at the hypothetical example Downtime of Miles Maudsley, our intrepid HR administrator. In this hypothetical Downtime, Miles would like to attempt to interact with an NPC, do some research, visit the surface, create a test, investigate some personal plot, and make an item with statistical in-game effects.

(This Downtime is entirely fictional - Miles is up to a lot of stuff, but many points here are just for example purposes.)

## Example 1: Miles Maudsley's Exciting Adventures

Point 1: Check in with Douglas McIntyre

Miles is going to spend some time talking to Douglas McIntyre (Craig's psychologist NPC) about the psychometric test that he wants to create. He'll be looking for Doug's input as a psychologist, but still very much wants to retain creative control of the project himself.

This is a pretty good starting Downtime Point! As we've highlighted, Miles's player is making it clear who he means OOC (this early on, you'd hope we won't forget who NPCs are, but sometimes it happens - similarly if you misheard a name or can't remember it, giving us more specifics about who you mean will make it easier for us), and also what he wants to discuss with them. He's given us a bit more detail so we have an idea how that conversation might go, and to make it very clear what he wants to happen, without telling us what *will* happen.

Talking with NPCs like this in Downtimes is a good way to develop relationships with them, and also potentially to learn about plot, or to gain answers. You can find out what an NPC's opinion on something is (or at least what they're willing to tell you), or get assistance from someone with a different skill-set. Remember: befriending NPCs is a superpower all of its own.

Point 2: Look for data on the missing persons

Having already gone through some of the personnel files last downtime period, now I want to narrow down information about the four scouts who've gone missing specifically. I'll be asking System and also looking for any hard copies of personnel files in the old HR office.

(This point has been written in first-person to illustrate how that might look!)

The key points here that Miles's player is doing well are telling us what he knows already, what he would like more detail on, and - importantly - where he's getting this information. This lets us know that we can look at his last downtime to see what he already knows (a helpful start!) and also give different bits of information and flavour from his two selected sources.

As this is likely to be quite simple information and probably will contain a good deal of overlap, it's perfectly fine to have these two sources in a single downtime point. If Miles was looking into something more complex and he wanted a much more detailed answer (for instance, trying to get a full story from two separate NPCs), he would be better off putting them into two separate points.

### Point 3: Scout out the surface

Having heard about the hole in the fence discovered last Council, Miles is going to cautiously embark on a patrol of the fence along with [a player character] while staying in radio contact with Christina Kitson. He wants to check that there aren't any other holes or points where damage has been done, and generally check the state of fence overall.

This is significant particularly because it involves another Player Character in the Downtime Point. In order for this to happen as described, the other player must make sure they also include the action in their Downtime, as well. If they don't, the response to Miles will include something about them being otherwise engaged and will assume that he undertook this task alone.

Alternatively, you might decide that there is no way Miles would ever go alone, and that undertaking the action itself depends on the other Player Character also being present. In this situation, you might prefer to receive no answer at all, rather than receiving a response where Miles decides to go out anyway. To make sure you get the response you want, it's important to include that explicitly. You could write something like:

*"Having heard about the hole in the fence, Miles and [player character] have agreed to meet up and cautiously embark on a patrol of the perimeter fence. Given all that's happened over the last few weeks, Miles is definitely not going alone, and will wait for [player character] to be ready before trying anything. They've agreed to stay in radio contact with Christina Kitson the entire time for added safety. He wants to check that there aren't any other holes or points where damage has been done, and generally check the state of fence overall."*

This tells the ref what information he is looking for, where he's going, and under what circumstances he would stop searching, ensuring that we give his player a satisfactory answer.

### Point 4: Create a psychometric test

Armed with advice from Dr. McIntyre, Miles is going to begin producing his psychometric test. He'll be using reference books from the library to give a starting point and editing them to be more apt and appropriate to the Facility itself.

**(OOC - I have written and created a test for this, subject to ref approval!)**

Sometimes, you'll want to create, write, or build things in the setting that don't have an in-game effect, whether that's art, or a paranoia wall, or a psychometric test to inflict upon your fellow residents. It's usually a good idea to include making these items in your Downtimes as well, because even if they don't affect the game on a statistical level, you never know when you might encounter some plot or unexpected circumstances that might influence or change what you can do - or when your actions might influence wider events as well.

This Downtime Point makes it nice and clear how and where he's getting the information - including noting the advice from his first point, as well as using the library for further reference. We can use this to give him a rough description of what he can find, and possibly even a time frame of how long it'll take to create - or, indeed, if he finds anything odd while looking into it.

The final (and very important) part of this Downtime Point includes Miles's player letting us know that he intends to actually create this as something players can physically interact with. Normally, creating this kind of thing, the refs are happy to just say, 'yep, you have that now!', but obviously we don't have to time to actually create the item in question. The player here has informed us he's going to make that himself, and also acknowledged that it will need a ref approval if the information he found either from Dr. Doug or from the library would be hugely different to what he's produced.

We might choose to answer this by saying it'll take him two Downtime Periods to finish (and ask to review it at the next Council, so that when it's made IC it's fully ready to go). We might tell him this is fine and he can go right ahead with whatever he has. We might tell him this should be fine, he can have it this session once we've checked it over first. It all depends on what other factors the refs feel might have influenced the information or materials that little Miles had access to.

Important note: You don't *have* to create a physical representation of a Fluff Item in order to make it IC. You can say you have your paranoia wall or your oil painting portrait of Mrs. Hookway and either keep it off screen, or have something just approximating it to show in play.

#### Point 5: Look for Family

Miles is going to start looking through some of the footage that the Facility picked up in the months immediately prior to the Event - specifically the goodbye videos and last minute calls. He's hoping to sort them by location and time to narrow down any that are likely to contain **information about what happened to his two brothers** - if they made it to another shelter or not. Ultimately, he's aware that this is looking for a needle that **might not even exist** in a truly gigantic haystack, but he has to *try*, damn it.

This point demonstrates how Downtimes can be a good way for players to try and access personal plot, particularly things related to their character's background. In this instance, Miles's player is letting us know that his character is highly interested in finding out what eventual fate befell his family. He might not learn anything from this, but it allows for a characterful interaction and lets us know this is an angle that he finds compelling - which normally means we need to work out what the answer to that question is specifically, how he might find that out, and if that might lead onto further plot for him.

In particular, you'll note that he's given us details on who this family is as a reminder, and acknowledged that just because he searches for it doesn't mean it will be there for him to find. Sometimes the answer is just 'they're all dead, Dave'.

#### Point 6: Ask Christina to make me a set of armour

Shortly after the last Council, Miles will approach Christine about making him some **Simple Cloth Armour**. He'll tell her that he's intending to head up some patrols around the Facility, particularly on the surface, and argue that such excursions would be better done while protected. In actuality, he's a bit anxious and just wants something to protect himself when he's

doing his regular work.

Given this hasn't been sanctioned by the rest of the group, he'll be sneaking into the stores at night and taking the materials needed to hand over to Christina, but telling her that the others agreed to it. If she refuses, he'll quietly replace the bits he took.

Here we see Miles attempting to be a bit sneaky, and also attempting to acquire an in-game item. Importantly, he's told us what in-game item he is looking to acquire specifically, who he wants to get it from, and how he's going to pay for it. It's entirely possible that your character might not know exactly what it is they want made, but if it's an item that will require a phys-rep, it would generally be useful for us as refs to know what you have phys-reps for.

Given he's taking a bit of a risk by just removing items from storage, he's also helpfully included a contingency for what he'll do if Chrissy finds this approach altogether too dodgy and tells him to come back with a writ from someone (or something, who knows what Chrissy will do). This makes it easier for the refs to determine what happens next in the event that something goes awry, and minimises chances of unwanted chaos for him.

## In Conclusion

We hope that Miles's hypothetical Downtime has been useful for those who might not have written them before. To finish, we'll give a quick summary of the important points in Downtime-writing:

- Tell us what your character wants.
- Tell us how they plan to get it.
- Give us space to offer creative replies and responses, and...
- ... be prepared for the first attempt to possibly go awry. This is particularly important when it comes to advancing Skills and Points Apps, as well as in 'soft' game plans.

If you ever have any questions or feel unsure about something, you are welcome to email the refs ([trinityfallsarp@gmail.com](mailto:trinityfallsarp@gmail.com)) or message us on Facebook with your queries.

Thank you for reading, and happy Downtiming!