

# A guide to good rituals

*An introduction to writing and performing  
LARP rituals.*

## Introduction

*“Do you wish to be great? Then begin by being. Do you desire to construct a vast and lofty fabric? Think first about the foundations of humility. The higher your structure is to be, the deeper must be its foundation.”*

**- Saint Augustine**

Written by Jaime and Corné van Kessel

Editing by Alexandra Kist



## Foreword

Rituals are a part of most fantasy LARPs and usually appear in horror or even some modern science fiction LARPs as well. In most of these settings, rituals are an extension of the spell casting system as they take longer and require more effort than a normal spell but have less (or even no) limitations in what they can achieve. However, writing and successfully completing a ritual is more easily said than done and it is a skill only few have mastered. We do not necessarily believe that we have mastered this art but we could be considered to be Journeymen Ritualists. Knowledge, however, takes more forms than mere implementation and over the years, we have found information from various sources and combined it into a somewhat formalized structure. This guide strives to provide a basic understanding of what a ritual *is*, how to *write* a ritual and finally how to *perform* it. We will also delve into how and why a ritual can fail and we will conclude with a possible rating and judgement system of a ritual. This document strives to be an introductory course to rituals. We hope and believe that this guide will aid starting and more advanced players to enliven many a LARP with beautiful, inspirational, and original ritual performances.

## List of important concepts and definitions

Here, we will provide a summary of the important concepts and definitions that will be used in the document. You are not required to read this before reading the rest of the document. Instead, refer to it if a certain concept is used and you are unsure what is meant with it. Most of the concepts are obvious and self-explanatory, but like with any good guide, it's smart to err on the safe side with important concepts. Many a ritual has gone terribly wrong by using the wrong words or a wrong assumption!

**Actions:** All the physical maneuvers used in the ritual, such as grabbing certain objects, tearing a piece of paper, slapping someone, dancing, etc. Even “static movement” such as posture and body language can be considered part of the actions of a ritual.

**Ceremony:** A ritual without 'power' or magical energy. A ceremony only has social, cultural or religious implications, but no supernatural, spiritual or magical effects. Both weddings and funerals are good examples of ceremonies, although they *can* be rituals. Do note that in real world literature there is hardly any distinction between ritual and ceremony and the two can be considered synonymous.

**Free ritual:** Ritual that is written specifically for the occasion and is not performed periodically. Most LARP rituals fall into this category as most LARP rituals are performed only once. The opposite is called a *standardized ritual*.

**Leading ritualist:** The leading ritualist (usually there is a single leading ritualist, but there can be multiple) is the ritualist who dictates the pace of the ritual. This ritualist is also the one who performs the most important actions and/or binds the separate pieces of a ritual together. The role of the leading ritualist can be very hands-on, but in larger rituals it usually has more in common with an orchestra conductor. Having multiple leading ritualists is possible, but this is more difficult to coordinate. Preferably the leading ritualist is the “best” ritualist, concerning the prominent role he/she plays.

**(Supporting) Ritualist:** All people who actively help in the ritual. Usually, only people with the right skills can invest additional power or fulfill an active role, but this depends on the rule set being used, as some rule sets allow for anybody to participate in or even lead a ritual.

**Ritual:** A set of actions performed for their symbolic value. Rituals try to show that a certain change has taken place, or they force the change to happen. This change can be anything, from the turning of a girl into a woman to the turning of a living person into a corpse or a mundane sword into a fiery weapon of retribution. In most LARP systems magical energy must be invested into a ritual to make it work.

**Standardized/Traditional ritual:** A ritual that is performed often and changes very little, usually because the ritual is standardized by a powerful institution or because of rigid metaphysical/magical laws.

**Symbol:** Something (object, action, etc.) that represents something else through association or convention. It serves as a metaphor for another item, action, effect, etc.

**Symbolism:** The group of symbols used in a ritual. Symbolism also refers to the interaction and interdependence of said symbols.

**Three pillar model:** The three pillar model states that every ritual must contain these three elements: symbolism, vocalization, and action. The three pillars make up the internal structure of the ritual and should be well-balanced to form a consistent whole.

**Vocalization:** All that is uttered during a ritual. This includes any type of speech, including singing.

# What is a ritual?

*“Art is a reality, not a definition; inasmuch as it approaches a reality, it approaches perfection, and inasmuch as it approaches a mere definition, it is imperfect and untrue.”*

*- Benjamin Haydon*

To answer the question “How to perform a good ritual?”, we first need to know what exactly makes a ritual. This might seem to be a simple enough question at first glance, but there are many possible definitions for a ritual. Not all these definitions are clear and some simply don’t contribute to someone’s understanding of its definition. We have settled at the following, since it’s relatively simple and offers direct insight into what a ritual is.

*A ritual is a set of actions, performed mainly for their symbolic value. It may be prescribed by the traditions of a community, including by a religious community.*

Let’s take a look at this definition and see what can be learned. The first sentence is an accurate description of what a ritual is, both in and outside of a LARP event. With regards to this definition, special emphasis needs to be placed at the *symbolic value*, as symbolism is key in rituals. All actions performed in a ritual are used to convey a certain change of things to the universe, the gods and its onlookers. For this, symbolism is a powerful tool indeed. The usage symbols is universal even when the exact meaning of them might differ. When you think about it for a while, all kinds of symbols should spring to mind. A few examples are: a crown is a symbol of a ruler or king, the sacramental bread in catholic rituals is a symbol for the body of Christ and his last meal, a cloak can be a symbol for hiding or shelter and a mirror can function as a symbol for opposites, reflections or pride. Though, as can already be seen from the examples, if symbolism is king in rituals, the context of these can be seen as its queen.

In most LARP systems, rituals are only performed once or twice and are written specifically for a certain moment, situation, or problem. Examples of such goals are creating a magical sword or cursing a foe with weakness, but some systems have more static rituals that hardly ever change and are repeated on a regular basis. A good example of such a regular ritual is a sun worshipper greeting the sun every morning and wishing it a farewell at dusk. The rituals that are part of a culture can help to roleplay a culture and might offer an interesting insight into the background of a group or individual. This boils down to two different types of rituals; **free rituals**, which are designed for a specific occasion and are hardly ever repeated and **standardized (or traditional) rituals** which are repeated often and remain unchanged over long periods of time.

Regarding free rituals, the traditions of a (religious) community only serve as a basis for the further design of the ritual and should only direct the style of the ritual. A voodoo priest will have a different style of designing and performing rituals than a catholic priest. Any rituals performed by a witch living in a shack in the woods will differ from those performed by an esteemed member of a

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university of magic. Structured rituals, on the other hand, are entirely "prescribed" by a community or the laws of nature, so when writing these rituals (as part of a culture for example) it helps to keep the style or ground rules of the setting/universe in mind. It is rather unlikely that a group of barbaric ogres performing a pre-battle ritual will quietly kneel and pray, as such a ritual is unlikely to ever develop in an aggressive warlike culture. Another important thing to keep in mind with traditional rituals is that all players who belong to the culture the ritual is part of, should know the ritual. Their characters have probably seen or participated in the exact same ritual several times. This does not mean that they know the entire ritual by heart, but they should at least be able to recognize what it is and what it is for.

But why do people perform rituals? Why perform all these symbolic actions and say all these symbolic words? This is because rituals have a leverage effect. A small action in a ritual can have significant and greatly magnified effects outside of the ritual. A voodoo priest sticking needles in a ragdoll can function as a clear example of this. The action is small and simple (putting needles in the ragdoll), but the effects are on a much larger scale and have more impact (the target suffering extreme pain or receiving wounds).

In short, a ritual is a highly symbolic set of actions based on a certain culture or religion and, if magical or supernatural in nature, strives to achieve a certain goal beyond or outside the ritual. A ritual strives to convince reality (and because it is a LARP ritual, it strives to also convince the onlookers and referees) that something, somehow has changed by doing the ritual. In some settings, where magic functions without an entity controlling it (as with most spiritual or divine magic), the ritual should still be convincing, although instead of convincing the world, the ritualists convince *themselves* that the ritual is working. Everything that no longer needs to be imagined frees up mental effort of the ritualist that can be aimed towards manipulating and steering the magical energies of the ritual.

## The three pillars of a ritual

*“Seeing much, suffering much, and studying much, are the three pillars of learning.”*  
- **Benjamin Disraeli**

This model was taught in-character on a LARP event in which there was a formal system for teachers to teach certain skills to students. One of the requirements of the system was that the teaching should be extensively roleplayed. One such a teacher used **the three pillars model**. It is a clear, elegant and simple model. It helps to understand, to create, to perform in and even to rate and judge a ritual. It also serves admirably to point out flaws in rituals and improve upon them. Even though it we did not create this theory, it will be used as a basis for the rest of the document.

The three pillars of a rituals, the building blocks *that must be present in every ritual*, are **Symbolism, Vocalization** and **Action**. All three serve to communicate something. All three help convince the world that the ritual changed something and achieved its goal.

### Symbolism or “*what is being implied*”

*A person who forgoes the use of his symbolic skills is never really free.*  
- **Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi**

A symbol is

*“Something that represents or stands for something else, usually by convention or association, especially a material object used to represent something abstract or invisible”.*

A symbol is something that is linked to something else by the minds of the people that perceive it. Symbols are not universal to all people, as different people have different associations with different objects. A sword might be a symbol for justice or punishment, just as well as it could be a military symbol. Keep this in mind when selecting symbols for your ritual.

## Leverage effect

*Give me a place to stand and I shall move the earth!*  
**-Archimedes**

The reason you use symbols in rituals lies ingrained in the nature of the leverage effect of rituals. Since you do something “small” (a ritual) to achieve something greater (the outcome), you will need a way to communicate this connection or causal relationship. Say a bunch of ritualists want to destroy an army that is marching towards their undefended borders. The ritualists are not skilled warriors themselves and have hardly any knowledge about warfare. Going out there and fighting the army is not an option. Instead, they might perform a ritual, in which they symbolically destroy the army. By having an group of small wooden soldiers standing in formation inside the ritual, which they soak in oil and set alight while they pour their fire magic into the concentrated effort of the ritual.

Getting the real army in the ritual would have been dangerous. Angry men with swords who want to kill you is, as a rule, something you want to avoid in your rituals, impractical, as the ritual place would need to be insanely big, not even considering the difficulties of coordination ritualists that are so far apart. The burning of the wooden soldiers conveys their message just as clear, without any of the previous problems.

So, the symbolism in rituals is used to achieve a greater effect than displayed in the ritual. For a LARP ritual, careful selection of the right symbols can therefore help solve a lot of problems when writing and performing a ritual. Use symbolic props that look good, are available to you and people easily associate with whatever it symbolizes. Different cultures have different meanings for symbols, so misunderstandings might arise by selecting the “wrong” symbols. This can partially be avoided by clearly explaining the meaning of your symbols. Instead of just using a sword to chop off a convicted criminal's head, the ritualist holding the sword might first raise it for all to see while proclaiming that this sword is justice itself and that justice will come to this person. In most cases, a single sentence should be enough if the symbol is not too abstract. If more words are needed to explain it, a different symbol might be a better alternative. Using a good set of symbols can make or break a ritual, and sometimes just selecting the right symbolism will quickly and effortlessly lead to a ritual.

## Typical symbols

*Few things are harder to put up with than the annoyance of a good example.*  
**- Mark Twain**

On the next page is a short list of some typical symbolic objects.

<b>Object</b>	<b>Symbol for</b>	<b>Actions with</b>
<b>A Crown</b>	Nobility, leadership, pride, the king/queen, being the best or greatest, authority	Coronation, smashing a crown, adding two crowns together, removing parts from the crown
<b>A Sword</b>	Justice, war, discipline, victory, dueling, nobility/knighthood, honour, steel, weaponry, dedication, sword cutting at two edges.	Giving it to someone, cleaning, sharpening, sheathing it, threatening someone, show fighting, killing someone.
<b>A chalice or cup</b>	Plenty, decadence, poison, drink, container for a liquid	Drinking, pouring something into or from the cup, carelessly tossing the cup or chalice aside
<b>Blood</b>	Family, wounds, power (birthright), death, suffering, wrath	Drinking blood, smearing blood on something, cleaning blood from an object
<b>The moon</b>	Night, lovers, silent beauty, silver, Femininity, a period of time (a month), the tides	Praying towards, performing the ritual during a full moon, calling the moon to witness the ritual
<b>A kiss</b>	Love, affection, lust, betrayal, kindness, a goodbye, politeness, servitude, a blessing	Kiss on several body parts (hands, lips, forehead, signet ring). Kiss an object or location.
<b>A dog</b>	Tracking, good nose, loyal, listens to orders, a friend, a predator, a closely knit group (pack)	Sniffing like a dog, barking, howling. Leashing or unleashing a dog.
<b>Rope or chain</b>	Strength, connection, binding	Tying things together, chaining someone.
<b>Smoke</b>	Illusion, hiding, healing, something that isn't permanent, air.	Cleansing an area, hiding oneself in the smoke.

The symbols presented above might be physically present in the ritual, for example, a coronation is a highly ritualistic happening, or it might be referred to, but only in wording. When official diplomats or a noble says "The crown wants..." he or she is usually referring to the king and/or

queen. Actions, such as kissing or touching something can also be symbols. A holy sword that is given as a reward to a pious paladin is usually treated with respect and reverence and is handled accordingly. If a few evil cultists obtained the exact same sword and wanted to corrupt it, it would be handled with a whole lot less respect. As is true for LARP rituals, it is important to think about what it is that you want to convey and select the symbols accordingly. Building the ritual the other way around by starting with a (set of) symbol(s) is possible but this tends to be quite difficult. Usually, the symbolism is only chosen beforehand if the ritual is based around an awesome prop or something like an awesome feature of the terrain surrounding the ritual. Whatever route you end up choosing, it is important that you remember that there is a close interdependence between symbolism, purpose and message.

### Consistency in symbolism

*“The only completely consistent people are the dead.”*  
**- Aldous Huxley**

Having arrived at this point in our understanding of ritual symbolism, it might be interesting to consider consistent symbols for a series of rituals performed by the same person or group. Let's take a look at catholic rituals. They use the same set of symbols for every ritual and the symbols became such strong symbols simply *because* they were used all the time. Almost everyone in western culture knows that in a catholic ritual a chalice of wine represents the blood of Christ and that it is a reference to the last supper. So, picking a few symbols that fit your group or individual style can increase uniformity in your rituals. This will also help you create a distinct style for the different ritually inclined characters you will undoubtedly portray in your LARP career.

Furthermore, it will also ease the process of selecting the right symbols, as some of them have been decided on beforehand. It will also be useful if you ever need to perform a quick and dirty improvisation ritual, since you can take most of the frequently used symbolic objects with you. As no warrior would enter the battlefield without his weapons and armor, no ritualist should ever be caught without a few nice objects to employ in his rituals. There are other elements of improvisation that can be prepared beforehand, which is discussed later.

## Vocalization or “*What is being said*”

*“Silence is one of the great arts of conversation, as allowed by Cicero himself, who says, 'there is not only an art, but an eloquence in it.' A well-bred woman may easily and effectually promote the most useful and elegant conversation without speaking a word. The modes of speech are scarcely more variable than the modes of silence.”*

**- Tom Blair**

Rituals are communication. Rituals must be both convincing and believable. A great deal of information can quickly and reliably be relayed to the crowd by simply saying something. You can go out of your way to find a symbol for say, a death sentence, but condemning the poor sod with a grave tone and a stern look on your face will work just as well, if not better. Some people prefer to write down everything they are going to say, while others prefer to simply think of stuff to say during the ritual itself and only write down the structure. Both have their ad- and disadvantages and are a matter of personal preference.

When working with several ritualists with different styles, it is advisable to agree on a certain key phrase or other indicator to communicate that his or her spoken part is coming to an end and that another ritualist should react to this. Such indicators help to avoid awkward silences that kill the pacing of the ritual. These kinds of key phrases can also be used to quickly instruct supporting ritualists what to do. Instead of teaching all the participants when to chant, murmur, or scream a certain sentence, the leading ritualist simply must tell them that every time he raises his arms above his shoulder (or any other clearly visible or audible trigger) they need to do something. This requires careful attention of the other participants on the leading ritualist. As a secondary result the supporting ritualists will have a more active posture and look more involved in the ritual. It also serves to focus the attention of the onlookers on the leading ritualist, as people tend to look towards something that other people are also looking at.

## Being heard

*“I am in earnest; I will not equivocate; I will not excuse; I will not retreat a single inch; and I will be heard.”*

**- William Lloyd Garrison**

When vocalizing something, it is important to be clearly heard and understood by all spectators. Unless the ritual is very secretive and whispering is part of the symbolism, there is hardly ever a reason not to speak up. Remember, you are convincing the audience, the world and yourself that something is changing, let them hear it! Speaking for a crowd can be very difficult for people not used to it. Orating itself a complex skill, so complex that entire books have been written about it. Fortunately, there are a few tricks to help make it as painless as possible.

If you are having difficulties speaking for large groups, it might help to not jump on large rituals with a large crowd right away. Try your hand at smaller rituals and ceremonies. Not only are there less spectators, but the results of a failed small ritual are far less severe.

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There are several tricks to make your voice carry further and more easily heard, but these tricks are difficult to teach via written words. Just to put it out there, there are tricks to be clearly heard over large distances without screaming, these tricks combined are sometimes called "the ritual booming voice". These tactics are also employed by singers and army officers, who both rely heavily on the usage of their voice.

As with all skills, practice makes perfect. It does not matter if you vocalize a presentation or a ritual, as long as you *speak*. The same skills are employed and so the same skills are learned. Don't think that great orators are born, they trained themselves, just as you should.

### Vocal emotion

*"There can be no transforming of darkness into light and of apathy into movement without emotion."  
- Carl Jung*

Emotion is also something to consider when using your voice. A flat monotone or even droning voice can work for certain rituals, but these are far and wide in between. A little bit of over-articulation helps make you understandable and exaggerating emotional value of certain words, or laying heavier emphasis on certain important parts of a sentence can help a great deal. Also do not underestimate the power of pauses in talking. Pauses can increase tension and emotion, serve to punctuate certain concepts and function to give structure and rhythm.

For example; a ritualist tries to overturn a corrupt ruler. To achieve this he makes a passionate plea to the onlookers. He explains that, if the people present want to rid themselves of their corrupt ruler, now is their chance to speak up. As the ritualist lifts a hammer over a crown symbolizing this ruler's sovereign might, he asks the crowd if they want their children to grow up under the tyrannical rule of the current leader. A small pause allows the spectators to think about how horrible it would be if that were the case, which in turn creates dramatic tension. Because voices can carry emotion and emotions are powerful symbols it should be used whenever possible in a ritual.

Be careful not to change emotions too fast as emotions usually slowly build up to a climax. Instead of directly starting to scream and foam when angry, slowly build up this anger. Raise your voice a little. Feel your temperature rise. Let the adrenaline surge through your body. Show that anger on your face. This is far more realistic (we were trying to convince people that something has changed, remember? Don't distract them with unbelievable stuff such as too fast emotional build ups) and it's also more interesting to watch. Next to that, if you slowly build emotion, it will probably be easier to role-play it as you are likely to get carried away once the emotional buildup starts gathering momentum. Look at people speaking at demonstrations and protests. They usually start calm and rational with logical arguments but get angrier and more passionate once they are about halfway through their speeches. Emotion is contagious to a certain degree. Whenever people sympathize with you, they will likely mimic the emotion they are seeing. Get people to sympathize and let the emotions appear as realistic as possible and you can sway the mood of the entire

crowd. By slowly changing the intensity of the emotions the audience is observing, you make it easy for them to follow (and mimic) your emotions. If you are able to “play” the emotions of your audience, you can do more than ‘just’ convince them that you are right, they will *feel* that you are right.

## Storytelling

*It is the mind which creates the world about us, and even though we stand side by side in the same meadow, my eyes will never see what is beheld by yours, my heart will never stir to the emotions with which yours is touched.*

**- George Gissing**

Some people are just natural storytellers and can make just about any story sound interesting. But just because some people seem to have an innate gift for this, does not mean that there is no improvement to be gained. One of the most important factors of a story is its rhythm. One can, by using the rhythm of their breathing spin far more wondrous tales than without. Not drawing breath for a couple of sentences makes your voice sound thick with tension and because humans are group animals, your public will have the tendency to also postpone another breath. This will create a very tense feeling in your public and they are literally breathlessly listening to your story. Suddenly drawing a deep breath after holding it for some time, will create an instant feeling of relaxation.

A few more tricks will quickly brush up your act. First and foremost, get rid of any “verbal clutter” in the lines of: “Uuumh”, “yeah”, “you know...”. A good story only has these if they are part of the story, not as a part of the storyteller. The audience that is listening is usually there for a small set of different reasons. They are interested in the ritual, they happened to stand near the ritual and can now see it take place, or they have some sort of a formal duty such as guarding the ritual circle. The good thing is that each and every one of these people *wants to be entertained*. Nobody dislikes hearing a good story being told by a talented storyteller. The same goes for a good ritual, performed by a good ritualist. Don’t stand shyly in a corner. Take whatever room you think you need to tell your story, look at the crowd when you spin your tales so that you make a connection. Change what you are doing if you are unable to hook the crowd and learn to observe and act on their reactions.

Storytelling goes further than knowing a few tricks to entice the crowd. Those tricks are but the icing on the cake. A good storyteller can tell stories you have heard several times before and still make them sound interesting. By allowing emotion to be heard in your voice, as mentioned in the previous chapter, it will be easier for the crowd to empathize with you. The amount of detail you put in describing certain elements in your stories is another important element.

Luckily there is quite a bit of learning material available to get a feel for how much and probably more important, *which* details are best suited for including in your story. Grab any thriller or easy to read book and take a closer look at the descriptions. Easy to read thrillers are just perfect for learning this, as they usually try to give an as accurate as possible description without using too

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many words, which could slow down the pace of the story. Don't be afraid to change the amount of detail in whatever you are telling based on where you are in the story and the reactions from the public. If they seem to be getting bored, drop some of the details.

With these hints you should have enough basic understanding to practice storytelling quite a bit more efficiently. Storytelling is, like most performance arts, something you get better at by doing it. However, a great deal of information can be obtained by taking a careful look at talented speakers. What does their voice sound like when they start telling their stories? How do they stand, where do they look? By simply *looking* at people who are good orators, the novice ritualist can learn a great deal. You'll be surprised how easy certain techniques are to spot, once you know what to look for.

## Music and Song

*"Music is the wine that fills the cup of silence."*  
**- Robert Fripp**

Song and music can be vocalization, although playing an instrument could also be considered a part of the action pillar. Both singing and playing music can help to set a certain mood and are extremely beneficial for the rhythm, timing and pacing of the ritual. It takes a bit more effort and preparation to get it right, but if the song has a chorus that is sung by all, this instantly gives the support ritualists an active role (which increases their enjoyment of the ritual) and conveys a shared and coordinated effort. You really don't need to be that good of a singer to pull this off, if you have a chorus large enough, who can sort of carry a tune. Having a few indicators on when to start and stop are a huge help here, especially if the singing is inter punctuated by speeches and/or other actions.

Much can be said for writing / composing a piece of music or song for a single ritual. Although this takes quite a few other talents not directly related to performing rituals, it can be a great boon to any ritual. A far easier tactic than starting from scratch is to take a simple folk song and change the wording.

Sometimes a sound installation is available for rituals, perhaps because the ritual circle has one as part of the special effects. Using music or sound effects that could be considered out-of-game is something that is frowned upon in some LARP communities, whereas some have no problem with this at all. Sound effects in the background can help tremendously to set a certain mood. A ritual with a rain or storm theme is aided by rain sounds in the background and a thunderclap here and there. Prerecorded and edited voice samples can also be a nice addition, for example ominous whispering sounds to indicate that a demonic entity is drawing near. When used in such a manner, the sound can become the backbone of the ritual, as the progress of the ritual is communicated to the bystanders by the increasing volume of the evil whispers. There are countless sound effect libraries to be found on the internet as well as many easy-to-use sound editing software. Give it a try someday!

When selecting music or prerecorded music for your ritual, please keep in mind that some music works quite a bit better than other pieces. As a rule of thumb, do not use music with understandable vocals, as they tend to distract from what the leading ritualist is saying. A word of warning on using pre-recorded music: It forces the entire cadence and timing of the ritual. If you use pre-recorded music, practice the ritual beforehand! There is nothing quite as sad to see a good ritual fail, because the music ended too soon or was cut off by the end of the ritual.

### Show and Tell

*“When your work speaks for itself, don't interrupt.”*  
**- Henry J. Kaiser**

As noted before, the vocal part can also be filled with symbolism and carefully tying what is being said to the symbols and what is being done can only strengthen a ritual. If possible, every major part of your ritual should have all three at the same time. The vocal part is usually the easiest part to tie into this trinity, as the ritualist always has the option to simply *explain* what the object or action symbolizes. Most conscious communication between humans is vocal and the vocal part is therefore the easiest to compose and change. We simply tend to have a greater control over the vocal part, as we are used to employing it on a day-to-day basis. Of course, there are exceptions, but this rule is true for most people.

And finally, an important warning; do not explain *too* much about what is happening in the ritual. Don't literally describe every action taken in the ritual. All three pillars need to be in balance. and it is rather easy to use too much vocalization. When in doubt, show, don't tell. It's okay to announce and explain certain stuff, but a ritual with just the leading ritualist saying a few things and the crowd chanting a few words along can hardly be considered a ritual at all and is neither fun to watch nor to participate in.

## **Actions or “what is being done”**

*“What you do speaks so loud that I cannot hear what you say.”*

**- Ralph Waldo Emerson**

Actions is everything you do in a ritual that helps the ritual. Yes, technically breathing and digesting food can be considered part of the ritual since not doing those things will cost you your life and this probably won't help the ritual, but only the stuff that is directly involved with the ritual is part of the actions pillar. Here the motto “show, don't tell” is king. If you can show what you mean without having to explain the crowd, you've done a good job. For example, when blessing the sword of a templar, don't just explain that the weapon will be free of taint and serves to protect the innocent, show everyone what you mean. Use symbols in a way that makes sense. You could per example carefully clean the sword with a pure white piece of cloth dipped in holy water (you should probably announce it is holy water you are using tough, the audience cannot tell the difference if you use regular water) , then announce that the sword is free of taint, after which it can receive the blessing by praying, burning holy incense around the sword or anointing it with all kinds of holy oils from impressive looking bottles. Finally, the templar kneels before the priest who holds the sword, the templar swears an oath to only use it for good and protect the innocent etc., after which the priest solemnly hands him the sword and (in the name of his or her god(dess)) bestows the paladin with his new sword.

## **Acting together**

*“It is not a question of how well each process works, the question is how well they all work together.”*

**- Lloyd Dobyns**

There are many ways to achieve the same goal, but without the actions this ritual would just be a guy bragging about his new awesome sword. With the actions helping and supporting (and in return being supported by) symbolism and vocalizations it suddenly becomes a far better ritual, and the chances of success increase dramatically. Even if, for whatever reason, the ritual fails, you have at least entertained the crowd better than you would have if you just explained everything. The crowd is giving you their attention and a place in the spotlight, the least you could do to return the favor is try to make it as entertaining for everyone involved! By this I mean entertaining for both ritualists and onlookers alike! Quite a lot of experienced ritualists have a nasty habit of doing everything themselves and neglecting the other (supporting) ritualists. It might still be interesting to look at for the onlookers, but if someone does not have a clear task in the ritual and is just there as a magical energy battery, leave them out of the ritual. This being said, it is usually not so difficult to think of something to do. Everyone should always be doing something active. The activity should not distract the attention from the center of focus (usually the leading ritualist) and the acts should be relatively small compared to those of the leading ritualist. But people standing still in a ritual gives the impression of a static and badly coordinated ritual. Even if you want people to stay in a particular location, an active pose should be adopted, or any pose that helps the ritual. For most spiritual rituals per example, a praying position (where the ritualists could also softly mumble prayers) is preferred to a static standing pose. Even standing in salute

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might be a good option, as the supporting ritualists are aiding in setting the mood (military, disciplined) and have adopted an active pose.

A well performed ritual with a handful of people is better than a crappy one with a hundred people who don't know what to do and are bored shitless throughout the ritual. As a ritualist, it is not your responsibility to make sure everyone can participate, it is your responsibility to create and perform an awesome ritual that is entertaining to both the public and the ritualists. Try to include people who want to participate, if possible (give people a chance to learn, we all started out as newbies), but it gets increasingly harder to add more and more people to a ritual and let them all have something useful to do. Singing or dancing comes in handy here, as it is rather easy to increase the size of a choir or the number of dancers. Not everyone should be doing something continuously, on the contrary. There must be a center of attention for the spectators or else they get confused, but as a rule of thumb, each ritualist that adds magical energy of some sort to the ritual should have at least one significant task during the ritual. Returning to the case of the holy sword, one priest might be responsible for cleaning the weapon, one for making it easy to wield by using holy incense and another priest anoints the weapon with the holy oils. The leading ritualist can simply take the weapon from each "station" to the next part of the assembly line and announce during the transportation that the weapon is now clean/lighter/holy/ready to be handed over to the templar. Alternatively, several priests could do the cleaning together, but it can get crowded around the sword quickly, and the onlookers still need to see what is going on. While it is possible to add nearly limitless stages to a ritual using this technique, a certain maximum should be decided on. About 3-4 of these separate stages should be fine, but more tend to get tedious very quickly.

## Dance

*"The dance is a poem of which each movement is a word."  
- Mata Hari*

As mentioned before, dance is a powerful tool if used correctly. Dance, especially synchronous dancing can create a potent image of coordinated and determined action. The dance must be practiced beforehand, so it is not very suited for improvised or rushed rituals unless the participants already know the dance to be performed by heart. A good example of this is the use of tai chi forms in rituals. The elegant, smooth, and relaxed movements of a tai chi form can be used for many, and diverse rituals and the forms have a bit of a magical channeling vibe to them. Learning such movements can also help to depict steering the flow of energy in the ritual or other abstract or difficult to visualize concepts. A haka is also nice for tribal and/or primitive rituals. A group of orcs doing a haka together while screaming, shouting, and grunting ferociously while their shaman continues drumming and calling the spirits to aid them in the next battle would be a good ritual in itself. On the other hand of the spectrum one can find formal (European) dance such as waltzes or other ballroom dancing. As with all other actions, the dance should be supported by symbolism and whatever is being said.

## Fire, pyrotechnics, and special effects

*“Careful with fire’ is good advice we know.  
‘Careful with words’ is ten times doubly so.”*  
**- William Carleton**

Fire and fire shows can make an excellent basis for rituals, but unfortunately, people forget to use (or explain) the symbolism and just do the fire show. Interesting to look at, but it could be better if it was clear what it was that they are trying to achieve with the fire show (*why* are you doing this?). Without these elements it is just a fire show, not a ritual. Trying to achieve immunity to fire or the ability to cast fire spells by fire breathing could work very well, but the ritualists should explain that this is what they are going for. For the structure and buildup of the ritual they could start out with the simple things and do increasingly more difficult and spectacular stuff with fire as the “ritual is starting to take effect”. In this case, the ritualists can loudly proclaim that this is happening, and suddenly the onlookers understand what is going on. It has become a ritual instead of a fire show in a ritual circle.

The same goes for pyrotechnics of any kind. If you can’t think of what the pyrotechnics add other than the pyrotechnic effect, don’t use them. It would be like adding random explosions and firefights to a tragic and sad romantic movie. A ritual is much like telling a story, so don’t distract from the story you are telling with needless explosions. However, if used correctly pyrotechnics are an awesome addition indeed. Nothing says “I have power at my fingertips” as a jet of brightly colored flames erupting from the ground when you just pointed to that spot on the ground.

The same goes for lighting and other special effects. Use them in combination with a solid ritual. Ask yourself if the ritual would still be a ritual without the fireworks, lights, and other special effects. If the answer is no, redesign the ritual immediately. Lights might break down, pyrotechnics might just fizzle, and then you are left with nothing. Sure, it’s always a shame if those awesome additions fail, but don’t rely on them. Time of the day is also an important thing to consider when using fire, pyrotechnics, electrical lights, or chemical break lights. All of these look so much better without too much background light, and these effects would be wasted in broad daylight. Dusk is an excellent time for rituals, as it is dark enough for the effects to be seen, but not too dark as this would make the rest of the ritual hard to see.

### Be seen

*“Make visible what, without you, might perhaps never have been seen.”*  
**- Robert Bresson**

Things that you say in a ritual should be heard by all the spectators whenever possible. Likewise, all things that you do in the ritual should also be highly visible. Make movements a bit bigger than they need to be. At first it might feel a bit silly to move so exaggerated but there is a huge safe zone between normal movement and slapstick. Especially on stage it is unlikely you traverse to the slapstick end of the spectrum. Make a show out of everything you do in the ritual. Talk

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animated, make movements dramatic, etc. For example, when hitting someone in the face as part of the ritual, move your hand all the way back. You won't actually be hitting any harder or faster, but it sure as hell looks more interesting. When you bow for whatever reason, add a nice flourish to the bow and make it look flamboyant and flashy. If you raise a sword in triumph do so as intensely and as high as you can. If you hand something over to the leading ritualist, make a little courtesy and/or bow as you do so and lift the object a bit higher than necessary. It is hard to ruin a ritual with too much intensity, energy and / or emotion so speak up! Act up! People need to see you and what you are doing. People need to *feel* what you are doing. People need to *hear* what you are doing. It is just like fighting with LARP weapons, which only looks interesting if the movements are exaggerated and made to look dramatic.

# Ritual structure and Form

## Preparation

*“It is generally true that, the more preparations one has for an event, the more inconveniently fast the event will occur.”*

*- Monica Fairview*

Being prepared can make a huge difference for the overall quality of the ritual, especially if you tend to get nervous right before the start of the ritual, or if you are not so great at improvisation. The most important thing you should remember is that people don't know what the ritual should look like, they only know what you are showing them. Accidentally changed the order of two actions in the ritual? Who will know but you? Unless you tell everyone, to the crowd it will look like this is how it was supposed to go. Don't panic, you can do this with the right preparation.

For those lucky few who have no problem speaking or performing for a large group, preparation is much less important. For those who are not so lucky; a good preparation can reduce stress and save you a lot of running around trying to find the last missing prop you need for your ritual. Gather all the stuff you will need way ahead of the ritual, explain to the referees what the ritual will be about (if required) and get your game face on. Preparation can also help you to quickly design a ritual and perform it in no time at all. For example, as a ritualist it might be good to build a kit or bag containing widely used ritual attributes. In the table below you will find an example list of the contents of such an 'ritualists emergency kit'. This is by no means a complete list. Based on your style, you could add and remove certain items from your kit.

<b>Item</b>	<b>Exemplar uses</b>
<b>A knife</b>	<i>Cut something in half, cut pieces of hair, carve something in wood.</i>
<b>A ball of string</b>	<i>Connect objects or people together, tie stuff together, make a complicated knot</i>
<b>A set of Candles</b>	<i>Background light / mood light, use as a beacon, symbol of fire,</i>
<b>Decorative plate</b>	<i>As a flat surface to put other stuff on, present food, symbol of hospitality.</i>
<b>Decorative cup</b>	<i>Drink something from the cup, mix ingredients, libation, offer the cup to someone else or share it.</i>
<b>Writing utensils and piece of paper</b>	<i>Write messages on the pieces of paper, make a drawing, draw a map, use the two as output for an information gathering ritual.</i>
<b>Fine sand or flour</b>	<i>Draw symbols on the ground, draw a ritual circle, toss it in the air, blow it in the wind.</i>
<b>Decorative gemstones (with or without lighting effects)</b>	<i>mark special points in ritual circle, indicate the moving or manipulation of flows of energy, focus of energy, prism, or lens like behavior.</i>
<b>Piece of cloth</b>	<i>Make it dirty, tear or cut it in half, unravel the piece of cloth, clean something with it, wrap something in cloth.</i>
<b>holy symbol / altar / workbench</b>	<i>A central piece that can be used to put stuff on and serves as the centre of attention.</i>
<b>Incense</b>	<i>Cleanse area / object</i>

Different parts of the rituals you might have to perform can also be created beforehand. For example, having several prayers about various subjects written down can help with the vocal part of an improvised ritual. Learning a not too specific song by heart can also come in handy, as is learning a tai chi form or a particular dance. It gives you something to fall back on whenever you don't know what to do next and it will increase the number of rituals that you can perform. It never hurts to keep options open.

## Cleaning and/or introduction

*“The secret of a good sermon is to have a good beginning and a good ending, then having the two as close together as possible.”*

**-George Burns**

In many regards, a ritual is like a story. The structure of a good story is quite like the structure of a good ritual. Both a story and a ritual start with an introduction of sorts. In the story, this is where the characters and the setting of the story is introduced. In the ritual, the leading ritualist sets the scene and has a short talk to clarify the goals and the nature of the ritual. It is possible for the ritualist to “clean” the ritual place to make sure any residual energy from previous rituals is dissipated and place everything needed for their ritual inside the ritual circle. Alternatively, the ritual location/circle (or triangle, square, altar, tree, be creative, the shape/location can also be part of the rituals symbolism!) can be constructed and empowered. The cleaning and/or constructing the ritual place should not take too long, but it can serve admirably to attract a bit of a crowd. The cleaning should take no more than a few minutes, where five minutes is an absolute maximum! Creating a circle might take a bit longer, but this can depend on setting specific rules concerning the creation of these ritual places. If there are no restrictions, keep it brief and clear. The location is the foundation, not the actual building itself! It is required but should not take up most of your attention. When the audience is getting restless wrap it up quickly.

Whatever you do, it should be clear that a ritual is about to take place and it should be made clear what the ritual will be about. If your ritual contains parts that might not be suited for a younger audience (because of certain adult themes or the extensive use of gore special effects), now is a good time to check if none are present (rules about such things tend to vary from organization to organization, but a double check right before the start never hurts). The leading ritualist explains a bit about the background and can tell a bit about what they will be doing, but more importantly, the leading ritualist should take extra care to explain what the “problem” is. There usually is a reason for a ritual to take place such as a curse that needs to be removed, locating a lost item, healing a dying person, boosting before battle etc., and it should be clear what the ritual is trying to solve, or at least what it is the ritualists are doing. There must be a reason why a few people have gathered to do a ritual, and it helps the audience's mindset (and the ritualists mindset) if the problem is explained or described in a few sentences before the start of the ritual. The reason why it is good to clear this up beforehand is that a ritual tries to change something. If it isn't clear what the ritual is trying to change, it will be very difficult for anybody to understand what the ritual is about. Even though the spectators usually do not formally judge the ritual (they can't influence the outcome of the ritual, nor is the effect based on their rating) they usually are good indicators if your ritual is clear enough. The introduction part should also be kept rather brief. A few minutes, up to a maximum of 4-5 minutes is about right. A skilled ritualist might make the introduction even shorter and be done with it in less than a minute.

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## Getting ready for the confrontation

*“There is no such thing as luck. There is only adequate or inadequate preparation to cope with a statistical universe.”*

**- Robert Heinlein**

After the introduction phase of a story or ritual comes the middle part. In the middle part the problem is faced, the smaller sub problems encountered are overcome and tension builds as the ritual moves towards its climax in which the problem is faced head on, and if all goes well, solved. In the center part of the ritual the preparations are being made to solve the problem. Looking back at the example of a voodoo doll, the center part would include burning all kinds of herbs do draw in the right Loa, tying a piece of the victim's hair to the doll, adding details to the doll and sharpening/testing the needles. The actual problem is not yet confronted, but at the end of the center part, the ritualists should be as ready as possible to solve the problem. It is difficult to say how long this part of the ritual takes. It all depends on the ritual and on how long you can keep it interesting and relevant. Sure, you can use 40 different steps in forging a magical sword, but about 3-4 will serve just as well. Anywhere between 2-30 minutes is a good length for almost all rituals.

This might seem like a very basic and uninteresting structure for a ritual, but sometimes it can be that simple. There are of course more complex structures to be thought of, such as “plot twists” in which the ritual suddenly and unexpectedly changes course. Again, the comparison with stories holds true. As with plot twists in stories, the ritual plot twist should not be too unexpected (surprise is good, confusion is bad). The twist should not only make sense but should also add to both the overall story and flow. Adding a twist just for the sake of increased complexity serves no purpose but to muddle the ritual. Some of the best rituals we have performed or have seen being performed had an interesting plot twist that completely changed everyone's perception of the ritual. It might even be considered to not tell your fellow ritualists about a certain plot twist (either because you want genuine surprise or have more nefarious purposes) and see how they react. This is not advisable for starting ritualists, as they have enough to concern themselves with already without adding fear of betrayal and sudden changes. For plot twists, the same rule applies as for special effects; it can help tremendously if used correctly in support of the ritual and the story you are telling but overdoing it is only distracting.

## Climax, resolution, and cleaning

*“Conscience does make cowards of us all, and thus the native hue of resolution is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought.”*

**- William Shakespeare**

The climax phase of a ritual is when the intensity of the ritual is at its highest. This seems a bit of a strange statement for rituals with a serene and calm nature, but even such rituals tend to have a moment supreme in which the problem is faced head on, and it is unknown if the problem will be overcome. The groundwork has been done in the center part of the ritual and everything is set to confront the problem. The climax is usually a good moment to cut loose with the special effects if you are using them in your ritual. If you are performing your ritual well, the audience should be hanging from your lips at this point, and it is in this phase that the actual change (which was the goal of all rituals) is achieved.

If the ritual is successful, the climax fades to the resolution. In the resolution the ritualists “formalize” the failure or success of the ritual. The formalization is still part of the ritual and should fit with the rest of the ritual based on the actions, symbols and vocal part that is being employed to finish the ritual. For spiritual rituals finalizing is usually done by thanking the entities that were asked for help (deities, spirits, angels, demons, etc.) and repeating any promises made to coax them into helping. There are numerous ways to finalize the ritual, and usually one can find something specific for the ritual reaching its end. A magical sword sheathed in its scabbard or wrapped in a piece of cloth is an excellent example of finalizing or closing of the ritual. Another example is something observed in the practice of many faith healers. Faith healers usually show some sort of “proof”, such as a crippled man getting out of his wheelchair, to indicate the healing (e.g. ritual) was successful.

Some people prefer to “clean” the ritual place after use, a process like the cleaning that can be done before the ritual starts. The idea is to remove any residual energy that might remain in the circle so that it won't interfere with the next ritual. Symbols and actions such as sweeping the ritual place with a broom or making pushing motions serve very well to show that you are cleaning the circle. This cleaning process can be seen as a ritual on itself, although very simple and short. If a ritual place was constructed specifically for just this one ritual, deconstructing the ritual place communicates this clearly.

## Maintaining rituals

*“Few things are impossible to diligence and skill. Great works are performed not by strength, but perseverance.”*

*- Samuel Johnson*

Some rituals must be maintained for the effect they are achieving to be maintained. If you suspect that such a thing might be applicable to your ritual, make sure you have something relevant to do to indicate that you are busy upholding the effect of the ritual. For example, we could consider a priest praying for the life of one of his mortally wounded brethren who needs to stay alive until the healer has arrived. A possible effect would be that the wounded priest will not die, so long as the ritualist maintains concentration and keeps praying on behalf of the wounded priest. Having a prayer, mantra, or a simple set of actions to repeat are life savers in these situations. A careful ritualist will usually try to avoid outcomes that force the ritualist to maintain a certain effect, as they can get tedious quickly and cannot be maintained indefinitely, but a smart and careful ritualist will be prepared just the same.

# Rating a ritual

This part of the document is aimed towards referees, storytellers and other people who might be tasked with passing judgement on a ritual performed by the participants of the LARP event. Even though there are a few objective rating systems available, most are subjective to one degree or another, as in most settings rituals tend to be judged on (subjective) elements such as originality or how enjoyable the ritual is to watch. Regardless of whether a subjective, objective or a mix of the two is chosen to judge rituals in a particular event a formal judgement system can be a great asset for any referee. It will increase the consistency of ratings given and will usually yield fairer ratings for rituals. This part of the guide is rather brief, as the guide's main focus lies with doing rituals, not rating them. The “rating a ritual” chapters have been included to give players some idea of how their hard work is judged.

## Objective vs subjective

We already hinted towards this distinction in the previous alinea. Judging rituals is no different from any other form of judgement and as such the rating can be based on both objective or subjective criteria. A sample list of objective and subjective criteria is listed below.

Objective	Subjective
Amount of (Magical) energy invested.	Enjoyable to watch or not?
Location (Special ritual places might incur a bonus)	Good symbols were used.
Amount of people participating and skills of participants.	Are all the participants actively involved?
Presence of certain individuals or objects in or near the ritual.	The movement of the ritualists added to the ritual.
Duration of the ritual (in minutes).	Was the ritual boring or too fast paced?
The ritualist performed certain predetermined actions (Greeting the gods, cleaning, walking a left handed circle etc).	Actions performed in the ritual made sense and added to the whole.
Presence of music.	Appropriate music was used.
The ritual is performed exactly as written down.	The ritual was original.

As we can see, there are quite some possible criteria to select from. Usually, a ritual is judged based on a combination of objective and subjective criteria. A ritual might be judged on how well it is performed (subjective) and combined with the amount of magical energy invested (objective).

The two ratings are combined, and the ritual has some effect. However, some systems have completely subjective systems and might even go so far as implementing the “if the crowd believes the ritual has an effect, it has the effect”. Others have a completely objective system, usually when new rituals are difficult (if not impossible) to create, and judge rituals based on how concise they are performed.

Whichever of the options you choose, objective or subjective, some people will think the judgement to be unfair. Objective systems can (counterintuitively) create feelings of unfairness and injustice as objective systems do not include how much effort was put in the ritual. Players who have invested significant time and means in a ritual might become disgruntled when an improvised ritual achieves a similar or even higher grade, even though the amount of effort invested differ greatly. There is no completely fair and just system, but having a grading system ready beforehand can increase fairness.

### **A sliding scale**

Another thing to take into consideration is the room for different magnitudes of success. A ritual hardly ever has a true / false result and usually has a broad spectrum of possible outcomes. Usually, ritualists ask for a certain outcome / reward for the ritual. Instead of granting or not granting the reward, it is possible to give a larger or smaller reward. For example, a few ritualists are trying to create an army of undead. The ritual is performed nicely, and the referee decides that the ritual will work. However, creating an army of undead is no small task and certainly a bit too much for the handful of ritualists present (not to mention balance issues). Therefore, the referee decides that instead of creating an army of undead, they can only create a small warband of about 30 undead. Impressive, but not quite the result the ritualists were hoping for.

Greater or smaller rewards than anticipated or asked for by players can serve several purposes. A smaller reward can indicate that the ritualists were asking too large a reward or that the ritual was not performed as well as could be. A lower reward might be given if other players are actively sabotaging the efforts of the ritualists, or there is an environmental factor that causes rituals to perform not quite as good as they expect it to work. A greater reward usually indicates the opposite; the ritual was performed superbly, the ritualists asked for too little reward, positive elements in the environment aided the ritual, etc.

A formal system can be a tremendous help in determining the magnitude of the reward. Especially if a numerical value can be attached to the performance of the ritualists. A certain threshold can be determined beforehand by the referee, and additional points scored by the ritualist mean a bigger reward. It can also help to compare rituals relatively to each other so that the effects of rituals are in the same order of magnitude. Not only does this help to keep the game balance it also ensures that less people will feel treated unfairly, as all rituals have comparable outcomes. It also helps ritualists to estimate if they have “what it takes” to achieve a certain effect. There should always be some risk of a ritual not succeeding, but an experienced ritualist should always be able to make an educated guess.

An often-used combination of objective and subjective criteria is that the ritual is given a grade based on how good it was combined with how much magical energy was invested or how many participants the ritual has. The relation of these two performance grades is left up to the referee. The grade can serve as a multiplier for the mana (a ritual that got a 10 and which had 20 mana effectively has 200 mana to achieve the desired effect), a bottleneck (effectively using 100+ mana requires a grade of 9 or higher) or the two might simply be added together to achieve a final grade. Needless to say, these systems can have greatly varying ranges of possible outcomes. Each of these systems encourages/rewards certain kinds of rituals. The selection of these can greatly influence the perception of magic in a setting.

Care should also be taken when handing out rewards, as players tend to display “monkey see, monkey do” type of behavior. If a certain type of ritual repeatedly gets disappointing results, players will likely stop performing similar rituals. The other way around also holds true. Success inspires copycats, who want the same rewards as their predecessors.

### **Failure and defeat**

Sometimes a ritual simply fails. Whatever the reason, be it poor performance, not enough energy or a few critical slips of the tongue, some rituals do not achieve the desired outcome. Based on how this decision was reached, an alternative outcome can take place. A perfect example of how a ritual can have a rather different outcome than expected could be found in one of the LARPs I participated in. A healer was practicing a few new spells he had not fully mastered. The incantation of one of his healing spells was something in the line of “Blood, come and repair these wounds.” The healer was practicing these spells on a helpless patient when he made an error. Instead of the right incantation he said “Blood, come and make these wounds.” The effect was that the patient, instead of having fewer injuries, got hurt even worse.

A caveat is in its place. Unexpected results are not always undesired and sometimes players will actively try to reproduce the effect of a failed ritual. As with all ritual results, unexpected results can have an impact on the game balance. Keep it sensical. The dramatic failed rituals should have comparable power as successful rituals.

It is advised to have each ritual do *something* no matter how horrible it failed or grossly underpowered the ritual might be. It might be that something goes horribly wrong as a result of the ritual or the effect is barely noticeable, but the effect, no matter how small or adverse to the ritualists goals, serves to indicate that the referee has, in fact, passed judgement and the ritual has taken effect. These minor effects are also a good way to teach the ritualists what mistake(s) they made and how to improve on them. There is nothing quite as frustrating as getting a single “no” as an answer.

### **Three pillar model and rating**

The three pillar model is also usable to rate rituals. For each of the pillars a series of criteria can be created, such as the presence of good music for the vocal pillar, and a set of criteria can be

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selected as part of the “fourth pillar”. In this fourth pillar criteria such as environment and magical energy invested can be grouped. A ritual can be judged based on the sub criteria in each pillar, and an overall mark is obtained based on the marks for each pillar. Using the three pillar model for rating ensures that most (if not all) the important parts of the ritual are being looked at.

### **What to do during a ritual**

Before the ritual starts, ask the ritualists what they are trying to achieve. This helps to get a sense of magnitude and direction for the ritual. During the ritual, forget what the ritualists said they wanted to achieve, just look and listen at the ritual. Base the outcome of the ritual on what happens during the ritual and pushing the intended outcome to the back of your mind will help interpret the ritual.

Try to interfere with the ritual as little as possible. Talking to the ritualists, asking questions, or describing what is happening can take the speed out of an otherwise great performance. Instead, take a more cautious pose and think carefully about interfering. It’s usually best if you reserve any action from your part for the end of the ritual. The exception is when the ritual is really going poorly and the ritualists are losing control over the energies they are shaping. It would be a bit strange that the ritualists (who usually are skilled professionals according to their background) didn’t notice anything until the ritual blew up in their faces.

Taking a more distant stance might result in questions that remain unanswered by the ritual. Instead of asking for clarification *during* the ritual, assume that whatever remains unclear is also unclear in the ritual itself. Say, for example, that the ritualists were not very specific about which god they involved in the ritual. This is the time to get creative and ask yourself; "who would reply?" and not; "who do the ritualists *want* to reply?".