

# Ambassador's Guide to Sharing WordTrails

**"We're all just walking each other home." - Ram Dass**

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## An Underlying Spirit of Inquiry and Evolution

WordTrails is an evolving entity with its own existence, separate from any of us.

The considerations and suggestions on offer here aren't exhaustive. This process of understanding and evolving is alive, nuanced, contextual. This document offers things we've discovered so far.

As you work with WordTrails, you'll discover more.

The spirit underneath all of this:

- **Respect players' agency**
- **Create space, don't fill it**
- **Invite curiosity, don't answer it**
- **Consider, don't direct**
- **Wonder, don't explain**
- **Trust the structure, not your control of it**

If you stay grounded in this spirit, everything will flow from here, and it will be surprising in very alive and interesting ways.

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## Before You Read This Guide - an invitation.

**Consider trying this.**

**First, mess with the game and get familiar with it. Just dive in and see where it takes you...don't worry about the structured game. Just lay it out on a table, and mess with it.**

Just play. In the very best sense of the word.

**Let the game teach you.**

See what your own questions are. Notice what you wonder about. Pay attention to your own experience.

**Then, once you've made it your own at least a little bit, come back and read this. Let these comments and suggestions inform your experience, rather than directing it from the start.**

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## What This Guide Is

We're not here to explain WordTrails to you—the game does that.

We're here to share what others have wondered about, learned, and shared with us:

- Some human tendencies that can trip things up
- Some language considerations
- Some questions that have come up

**Your experience, your questions and your conclusions may be different. We'd love to hear about them. Especially the things you see people doing, the things you hear them reporting, the things you learn, in the introducing and offering. PLEASE stay in touch with your reports from the field. They are invaluable to us.**

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## The opening gambit

We're all doing our best here. You will not get this perfect.  
There is no one right way.

**AND** there are things to stay awake to.

So simply notice, try to stay awake to conditions and opportunities, oriented towards potential resonance, and do your best.

That's the practice. That's all any of us can and are doing. Always.

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## How to think of yourself, as an Ambassador

Someone who offers:

- **Space**
- **Time**
- **Support, in the form of knowing how to lay the game out, and how it works.**
- **One who strives, as best you can, to stay in the space of curiosity, encouraging the OKness of not knowing, not needing to know, helping the energy in the room be that of possibility to consider what else might be true, by being that energy.**

## **About Making Space "Safe"**

This is not a "doing"—it's an **aspiration**.

You make space safe by trusting the game to do what it does.

- Not explaining (which would trigger defense/performance)
- Not trying to make it easier (which would remove agency)
- Trusting the structure to hold what you don't need to hold
- Giving space and time

NOT by:

- Managing players' experience
- Anticipating their needs
- Softening edges
- Making sure they're comfortable

## **This is tough, and you are human.**

YOU (as human):

- Are NOT perfect, not unconditional.
- WILL sometimes be triggered - there is NO SUCH THING as an un-triggerable human.
- Are learning this too - we ALL are
- Are doing your best

WordTrails (the structure):

- IS non-triggerable
- GIVES space, time, and possibility reliably and unconditionally
- Will not trigger or harm

**The distinction matters:** You put WordTrails on the table, set it up. Maybe you take the first step. **Then you work to more and more become a participant.**

The first time through, you may need to be a bit of a guide. You can help them feel safe figuring out the dynamics of play - that's totally fine. Even then, you are not responsible for their experience.

Perhaps for the first game, you will stand to the side and let them play with it, figure it out, answering questions as appropriate. More and more as things go along, you will become a participant wandering alongside them, building on shared wonder.

Know that every group, every game, every time, will be different. At first that may take everything you've got, to be comfortable with. That's fine. The more you experience this, the easier it will get to be hands-off, letting the chips fall where they may, see what happens.

That's when it gets really good.

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## What You Are NOT

You are NOT:

- Responsible for players' experience (beyond creating the structure) Let them have their experience - their fear, trepidation, self-judgment, prsturing...whatever shows up. It is not on you to get between them and their experience - it is on you to NOT. 😊
  - Telling players what they should find, feel, or do
  - The authority (the structure is the authority)
  - The guide (after setup and whatever orientation this group calls forth, you become a participant)
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## Job #1: Practice Being Okay

Your primary work as an ambassador is to not try to teach perfectly or represent flawlessly.

**It's to practice and model being okay, so they can.**

Practice being okay with:

- Not knowing
- Your own discomfort
- Not making players comfortable
- Being alongside without managing
- **It coming and going** (some days easier, some days harder)
- **Some people/situations triggering you more than others**

You're going to be getting more and more comfortable with this. **And it's going to come and go.** It's not a straight line thing.

- With some players, you'll be more comfortable

- In some situations, less comfortable
- Even with really good friends, not always comfortable. Sometimes that's the hardest of all - this is where you may experience the greatest desire for them to "get it". There is no "it" to get. Just this radically different form of interaction to experience.

**Skin crawlingly uncomfortable? That's normal. That's the practice.**

The best way to hold this space is to stay in *not knowing* yourself.

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## WordTrails as Improvisation

**One way to think of WordTrails is as a deep dive into the act of improvisation.**

The foundational rule of improv: **"Yes, and..."**

- **Accept. Say yes** to what has been played (Rule #2: no take backs—what's on the table stays on the table)
- **And** you build on it (place your next chip, add your piece, respond to what's there)
- Catch what is thrown to you, find a way to make it work, and pass it on.

You don't:

- Refuse what's been played, try to make it go away, take it back, dismiss or shame it.
- Argue with it
- Try to fix it
- Wish it were different

**You work with what's actually present.** You say yes to the reality that's on the table, and you add your piece to it.

**You are working to make it work. Together.**

This is why explaining is not allowed—explaining is often a way of denying or defending what's there. At the very least, explaining takes you out of the YES and side of your thinking, and plops you right back into something else that is not yes.

Improvisation says: **"It's there. OK, great, now what? What can we build with this? How can I make this work?"**

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## Human Tendencies That Can Trip Things Up

## When It Might Stop Working/Go flat

WordTrails can go flat and stop being magical when you arrive with a hidden **agenda**.

Try to stay awake to these patterns in yourself:

- Want players to achieve something
- Want players to see something
- Want players to understand something
- Want players to **feel something** (comfortable, happy, connected, understood)
- Have a point you're trying to make
- **Desire to match and mirror** to make players more comfortable
- **Trying to help players be more comfortable**

When these happen, you've stopped being a participant and started trying to guide with outcome in mind. The structure can't hold if you're trying to control the experience.

**The principle:** You want to be out of the way of their experience as much as you possibly can. You want them to have THEIR experience—which includes their experience of you (knowing, not knowing, comfortable, uncomfortable, whatever it is).

**What you get to practice:** Agenda-less participating. Shared wonder. Being alongside without managing players' internal states.

### **Sidebar: NOTE FOR FACILITATORS OF ANY KIND.**

If you are a facilitator, a counselor, a therapist, or operating in any capacity where it has been agreed that there IS an agenda, here's how that works:

The same guidance applies as far as any HIDDEN agenda - do your best to not bring any hidden agendas.

If there is an agreed upon agenda for the game, it should be wide open, on the table.

And, the agenda for the game itself should be kept very clear.

WordTrails does NOT carry the agenda of solving problems.  
WordTrails IS here to shift team dynamics closer to synergy.

An example of this for a divorce mediator might be:

*We are here to build better team dynamics between you two, so the focus can truly be on the best interest of/outcome for all concerned, keeping the children at the center of the conversation.*

*We are not trying to get you back together forever.  
We are working to bring you back together in a good enough way, and LONG  
ENOUGH, to work as the best possible team for your kids.*

For an entrepreneurial team, it might be very similar:

*We are here to build better team dynamics so we can be open to the best interest  
of/outcome for all concerned, keeping the project as the focusing element of the  
conversation.*

*These new team dynamics will inform our work together, as we approach today's  
workshop question: Where do we want this company to be in five years. what are our top  
values and priorities that will get us there, what obstacles do we foresee, and how will  
we work with those?*

*This session with the game is NOT to answer the questions we will be posing.*

*Our work with the game is to get us synched up and operating together on all cylinders.*

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## Things People Have Wondered About

### "How do I guide someone their first time?"

Some players dive right in and are fine. Other players feel more intimidated—more timid—coming in, and need a little more help. That's completely fine.

#### **For players who need more support:**

Acknowledge upfront: "Some people dive right in and they're good to go. Other people feel more intimidated coming in and need a little more structure. That's totally normal, completely fine."

#### **Offer a two-game structure:**

"The best way to do this is just to play it once through, kind of a test run. I can answer questions as we go along. Then to really get the full experience, let's plan on playing a second time—and it's even better to play a third time because then you really begin to get the sense of how different it is every time.

**The first time through? It might be messy.** It might feel like a shit show. Maybe it'll be easy for you, but if it's not—if any part of it feels intimidating—just know: **the first time through anything is usually messy. It's simply time for learning. Getting comfortable.** You won't

have the full experience because we'll be talking, and that's fine. We'll go again, and it'll make more sense.

### **What this does:**

1. Gives permission for it to be messy/intimidating the first time
2. Sets expectation that talking/questions during first play is fine, and removes pressure to get it right.
3. Clarifies that the full experience comes in the second play, when everyone is an equal participant
4. Names your role shift: First time = guide. Second time = participant.

**The gradual release:** You're not abandoning players (riding off into sunset). You're not managing their whole experience (staying guide forever). You're providing scaffolding for the first time, then stepping back into participant role.

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### **"What IS WordTrails actually offering?"**

WordTrails is a **radically safe space** that offers:

- **Space** to pause and consider
- **Time** to wonder without rushing
- **Possibility** to consider what else might be true
- All with ZERO need to perform for others, or stay attuned to any danger from outside.

### **"What is WordTrails NOT doing?"**

WordTrails does NOT:

- Tell players what they will experience
- Promise specific outcomes, solve specific problems
- Guide players to particular answers
- Tell players what they should feel, think, or do
- Make things "easier" by softening or simplifying
- Do the work for players

**The distinction:** WordTrails makes things **possible and accessible** (removes unnecessary barriers, provides clear structure). It does NOT make things "easier" (which would remove agency and the meaningful challenge of discovery).

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## **"How do I talk about WordTrails without telling people what they'll experience?"**

This is one of the subtlest, most challenging and important bits. And the answer: it's hard, we're still learning, and it depends. In the end - the less said the better.

**The principle:** Players don't need to know what will happen...because no one knows. And therein lies the magic.

They don't need to understand before they play, because they CAN'T understand before they play. It's just not possible.

People are more likely to step forward if you seed a little curiosity, and then step back and leave them wondering. See if they want to enter. The less attached you are to whether they do, the easier it will be for them to approach, sniff around, and decide whether they want to come closer.

Try this. Picture sitting near a small animal that you would love to have approach you so you could pet it. How do you become approachable? Do that.

If you're trying to do this with words, stay awake to messaging that:

- Doesn't trigger defensiveness
- Doesn't click players into performance mode
- Doesn't click players into "getting it right" mode

### **But instead:**

- Allows players to stay in wondering
- Allows players to stay in not knowing
- Removes the pressure to know
- Honors "not needing to know yet"

### **If your messaging makes players think:**

- "I need to understand this before I play"
- "I need to figure out what I'm supposed to get from this"
- "I need to do this right"
- "I should know what this means"

**You might have moved things out of the magic of that curious, perhaps timid approach.** You might be clicking them into performance anxiety, and the need to get it right.

That's OK - just lean back into the curious, yourself.

Maybe wonder, "Hmmm. How can I let go of my own agenda to get any one particular person to play, and focus more on how to create a wondrous invitation, and see who shows up?"

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## **"What's the power of 'yet'?"**

**"I don't need to know yet"** is profoundly different from:

- "I know" (pressure, performance, fixation)
- "I don't know" (failure, inadequacy, shame)

**"Yet" does enormous work:**

- Removes shame (I'm not failing for not knowing)
- Removes pressure (I don't have to know right now)
- Removes urgency (there's time)
- Adds possibility (I might know later, or I might not, and both are okay)
- Honors process (knowing takes time, unfolding, experience)

**"Not yet" = space, time, possibility**

**In your messaging, say things like:**

- "Players don't need to know anything yet, before they begin."
  - "Wondering is enough"
  - "Not knowing yet is a perfect place to start"
  - "Are you curious about WordTrails, but not sure how to start? That's perfect. What if you let yourself show up, play and see what happens?" That, in fact, IS the game of WordTrails.
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## **"What's the difference between reporting and promising?"**

**Reporting what others have experienced is great:**

- "Some players have described this experience as euphoric"
- "Players report feeling more connected after playing"
- "People have said they felt seen in a new way"

**Describing the offer is great:**

- "WordTrails offers space, time, and possibility to consider"
- "The game creates conditions for getting or taking the time you actually need"

- "The structure holds safety for checking in with yourself, away from things like judgment, shame, blame and guilt.

### **The nuance**

- Rather than "You will feel euphoric" try this: Many people report feeling euphoric after playing.
- Rather than "This will make you feel more connected" Try: "Many people report feeling more connected"
- Rather than "You'll finally feel seen" try: Many people report finally feeling seen.

### **The distinction:**

**Reporting = "Here's what some players found"** leaves space for them to find something different - they are free to find whatever they do.

**Promising = "Here's what you'll find"** removes their agency, creates expectation, invites resistance.

## **"What's actually happening when people play?"**

One way of thinking about this is that every chip placed can be seen as both a statement of personal condition and an **implicit request for clarification**

When a player places their chip and steps back, they're saying: **"Here's something true for me. Now—your turn. Give me more information. What's true for you? What comes next?"**

When another player places their chip and steps back, they're saying: **"Here's my response. Here's what came through related to what you played, for me. Now—your turn. What do you have to add?"**

**Back and forth. Taking turns giving each other information.**

### **The invitation in every turn:**

Each placement is simultaneously:

**Offering:** "Here's something I need or want to say. It's on the table now."

**Inviting:** "Please tell me more. I want to know you. You matter. I care."

And, when felt, the trinket is placed. **Oh. I get it. Yeah, me too.**

**Not just not defensive - The opposite of defensive.**

Every turn says: **"Please. I want to know more. You, me, this, what is happening here between us, matters to me. Your experience matters, as does mine. They are interwoven. Please tell me what's true for you, and I will do the same."**

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## **"How can I talk about this implicit conversation?"**

When you talk about WordTrails, you can say:

- ✓ "WordTrails creates space where players can share things they may have never been able to say, or never thought they would be able to say to another person - or to THIS particular other person."
  - ✓ "A space where players are invited to show what's true for them, see that be received by others, and receive other's truths in turn."
  - ✓ "Taking turns giving each other deeply true personal information"
  - ✓ "How very amazing it feels, to be wondered about, and given a chance to share."
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## **Language Nuances People Have Shared With Us**

Here are some specific language refinements that have emerged from practice. These aren't rules—they're things to notice and wonder about in your own usage.

### **"Consider" rather than "figure out"**

- **Why:** "Figure out" implies there's an answer to find, a problem to solve. "Consider" is spacious, open, no pressure to arrive anywhere.
- **Example:**
  - ✗ "A space to figure out what's true"
  - ✓ "A space to consider what's true"



### **"You seem like" rather than "you look like"**

- **Why:** "Look like" is based on appearance, surface level. "Seem like" acknowledges sensing something deeper, more intuitive.
- **Example:**
  - ✗ "You look like someone I'd like to know better"
  - ✓ "You seem like someone I'd like to know better"



## Stay awake to "We need to talk"

- **Why:** This phrase tends to trigger defensiveness immediately—it codes as "you're in trouble." Even trying to reframe it afterward can keep the threat active in the nervous system.
- **Consider instead:**
  - "I'd like to connect. Wanna play?"
  - "Can we talk? Would you like to play?"
  - "Wanna play? No agenda. Just being together."



## In speaking of the trinkets, consider saying "One to play it, one to second it" rather than "one to agree"

- **Why:** "Agree" implies judgment or evaluation. "Second" is just acknowledgment, resonance—not endorsement.
- **Example:**
  -  "One person plays it, another person agrees with it"
  -  "One person plays it, another person seconds it, says, in effect, "Me, too."

## "Maybe something will emerge, maybe not. It's okay." rather than just "see what emerges"



- **Why:** "See what emerges" creates expectation that something SHOULD emerge. Adding "maybe not, it's okay" removes pressure and honors that sometimes nothing particular happens—and that's fine.
- **Example:**
  -  "Let's play and see what emerges"
  -  "Let's play. Maybe something will emerge, maybe not. It's okay."

## "None of us can get it perfect" rather than "we're imperfect"

- **Why:** "Imperfect" sounds like a flaw we're tolerating. "None of us can get it perfect" names the impossibility—it's not about being flawed, it's about perfection being impossible for anyone.
- **Example:**
  -  "We're imperfect, and that's okay"
  -  "None of us can get it all perfect. None of us will. And we're okay. We're right here together."

## Removing implications of finding THE truth

- **Why:** Implies there's a singular truth to discover, puts pressure on outcome, suggests players will "get an answer."
- **Example:**

-  "A space to discover what's true"
  -  "A space to consider what might be true for you"
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## Things That Tend to Trigger Defensiveness

Here's what we've noticed can trigger defensiveness in players:

1. **"We need to talk"** - codes as "you're in trouble"
  2. **Language that tells players what they'll feel/find/experience** - removes their agency, makes them want to prove you wrong
  3. **Expectations of specific outcomes** - creates pressure to perform or "get it right"
  4. **"Figure out" language** - implies there's a problem that needs solving
  5. **Perfect/imperfect framing** - creates judgment and comparison
  6. **Language that explains their experience TO them** - assumes you know better than they do what's happening inside them
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## Key Reminders

### WordTrails is its own entity

It's not us telling players what WordTrails is. WordTrails speaks for itself through the experience. Our job is to create access to that experience, not to explain it or sell it.

### You cannot tell players what they'll discover because you cannot know

The moment you try, you've removed their agency and made it about performing your expectation rather than discovering their truth.

### Stay in wonder yourself

If you're not in wonder, you can't hold space for others to wonder. Your own agenda will leak through and create pressure.

## **The structure is the authority**

Not you. Not any person. The rules apply equally to everyone. That's what makes it safe.

## **You're learning too**

You don't have to have this perfect. You're practicing the same things players are practicing: yes, no, not yet. Space, time, possibility. Wondering without needing to know.

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## **For Social Media and other Messaging Development**

Because these nuances are subtle and important, and WordTrails can be so dang hard to talk about, we welcome a highly collaborative approach to messaging.

**If you'd like help, or wonder about language, there's a whole team here, happy to help.**

**Bring your posts to the Ambassador Campfire call, and we can share them, kick around ideas together. Send me your drafts and I'll keep a collection we can nuance together and share. It'll be great.**

**We'll work to get them just right, together, and use the process to develop a whole stable of posts all Ambassadors can use.**

**WordTrails 101, in action. Here we are! 😊**

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## **Once again:**

## **The Underlying Spirit of Inquiry and Evolution**

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The spirit underneath all of this:

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If you stay grounded in this spirit, everything will flow from here, and it will be surprising in very alive and interesting ways.

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## **We'd Love to Hear From You**

What has playing WordTrails left YOU wondering about?

What have YOU learned?

What human tendencies have YOU noticed in yourself?

When you discover something, please share it with us. This guide is alive—it grows from what we all learn and share.

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