

The nine sections of a rulebook, in the order a new player needs them

What am I doing, what is in the box, how do I set it up, what do I do on a turn, what happens after everyone has had one, when does it end, who won, what about the odd cases, what did that word mean. Nine sections, this order, every game. Tick each one off when your draft has it where it belongs.

☐ 1. Overview

What the game is, for how many, how long, what you are trying to do and how it ends — in one paragraph, before a single rule. A new player cannot hold a rule until they know what it is for. "Each player is a moth keeper. Over several rounds you plant moths in a shared garden and light wicks to draw them to your lantern. When the night ends, the keeper whose lantern holds the most valuable moths wins."

☐ 2. Components

Every piece with its count, in one list, before setup mentions any of them. The draft named the 48-card deck, the 6 Dusk cards, the tiles and the wicks across four paragraphs; a reader opening the box for the first time needs them in one place, so that setup can say "the 6 Dusk cards" and be understood.

☐ 3. Setup

Numbered steps, in the order the hands do them, each naming a component from the list above. A rule that only applies later ("the Dusk cards enter after round 2") gets a cross-reference, not a paragraph: "Set the 6 Dusk cards aside. They enter the game after round 2 (see The night ends)."

☐ 4. The turn

Turn order, then how many actions, then each action in its own paragraph with its whole rule in it. The draft's Plant rule continued three paragraphs later under "one more thing"; in the rewrite the two halves sit together. A player reading Plant should finish Plant.

☐ 5. End of round

What happens when every player has had a turn, as numbered steps in order: who takes what, what resets, who draws, who starts next. This is the section most drafts fold into the turn, and it is the section a table argues about at eleven at night.

☐ 6. The game end

The trigger, stated once, and what happens when it fires: finish the round or stop dead. The draft said "when a dusk card is drawn"; the rewrite says what happens on the fourth, what happens if the deck runs out first, and that the current round is finished either way, with the end-of-round steps.

☐ 7. Scoring

Every point source as its own line, then the tie-break, in order. Only the current rule: the draft's crossed-out Ghost Moth scoring ("no wait we changed that") does not appear. A tie-break that says "share the win" is a rule; a scoring section with no tie-break is a question.

☐ 8. Edge cases

The answers from the draft's "things people asked", each placed beside the rule it belongs to, and the rest collected here: lighting an empty tile, two wicks on one tile, what a full tile means for a Ghost Moth. Also what is not included — 5 players, solo — said plainly so nobody plays a rule that was never written.

☐ 9. Index of terms

Every capitalised word the rules use, defined in one line: Deck, Discard pile, Dusk card, Full tile, Garden, Ghost Moth, Grey tile, Lantern, Lit wick, Round, Set. A new player who has forgotten what a Lit wick is should not have to re-read The turn to find out.

The rule behind the order: every section depends on the one before it — setup needs the components, the turn needs the setup, scoring needs the turn. A reader who meets a term before its definition reads the rest holding a question. Reorder first, lay out second; the pictures go beside the rules once the words are in place.