IN ROSETIA, EVERY PLAYER CHOICE SHOULD:

- **BE PLAYER-DRIVEN, ACTIVE**
    - Player character is the centre of everything: they should define the scene, drive the action
    - Avoid player lines that just push the NPC to keep talking; they aren't compelling, and take agency away from the player; you're basically saying "You don't get to say anything cool, just keep clicking the button so I know you're still there listening to the story I want to tell"
    - Active is always better than Passive: even "Tell me about the victim" is better than "Who was the victim?"
- **HAVE OPTIONS WORTH CHOOSING, QUOTING, SHARING ONLINE**
    - Every dialogue response should be awesome, compelling, memorable – even if its not beneficial
    - Ideally, dialogue options should provide multiple pathways for the player to assert their own views or sway others to their side
    - Dialogue options allow player to express themselves and their vision of the player character; the options they choose dictate the narratives theme – your job is to tailor the dialogue to create the kind of story your player is telling you they want
- **ACCOUNT FOR ALL POSSIBLE PLAYERS**
    - To ensure every player has a character-appropriate response, include 4 types of responses
        - 3 personality-extremes (whichever ones are most relevant; you should have more than 3 basic personalities)
        - 1 moderate option (if the three other options don't represent their character; questions work well, or neutral/disinterested responses)
- **UNLOCK ADDITIONAL OPTIONS/SOLUTIONS BASED ON ACQUIRED ITEMS/KNOWLEDGE:**
    - I find it immensely satisfying when I think "Now that I know/have X, I wonder if I could talk to this character about it," and then find out that the game has actually anticipated this and accounted for it (without actively telling the player to do it); makes me feel like I discovered the solution, *I* earned it
    - Possible types of triggers for unique dialogue/solutions:
        - **KNOWLEDGE** (info found by reading books, snooping, discovering places, talking to different people) (e.g. Kate from Life is Strange) (e.g. Talking to Abebe first may unlock new options with Hanh and vice-versa)
        - **CULTURAL ITEMS** (holding or giving a particular item may unlock new options, e.g. quoting from a book of Tortan literature in your inventory may convince a poet to share their work; sharing photos of Earth may make politicians more inclined to believe in your good intentions)
        - **TECHNOLOGY** (sharing replicated technology is a good way to solve problems with brute force, but may have unintended consequences down the line)
    - Tracked via variable checks in-game (e.g. if player has read X book currently in their inventory, unlock Y option; if player has been in X area, unlock Y option)
- **AVOID FALSE CHOICES**
    - Minimize false choices: "Of course I'll help you," and "I hate doing this" both indicate agreement and make the player feel frustrated at their inability to disagree

IN ROSETIA, EVERY NPC DIALOGUE SHOULD:

- **HAVE AN ARC**
  - Think of every conversation as a dramatic scene: all possible paths must contain a hook, a strong pace which advances the plot/character/theme, and a satisfying climax which ends it
    - 'Hook' should serve as a lead-in/transition to establish mood and recap any relevant info
- **FUSE EXPOSITION WITH EMOTIONAL CONFLICT**
  - No pure info dumps; all backstory/exposition should be filtered through the personal stories and opinions of characters: instead of saying "Let me explain X," they say "I think X is good/bad because of this Y thing that happened to me."
    - This is efficient writing, as it characterizes NPCs, The World, and The Player Character (in their reaction to the NPC—agree/disagree?)
    - The best characters will act as partial outsiders, giving you both an internal and external view on their culture
- **MAKE THE CHARACTER LIKEABLE**
  - Have the character say/do something familiar, endearing – player should have at least one reason to like a character
  - Have the character show concern for other characters – pre-existing relationships are easy for the player to latch onto
- **CONFRONT THE PLAYER WITH 'DIFFERENCE,' ESTRANGEMENT**
  - Create estrangement by drawing attention to differing modes of expression, societal assumptions, and ways of thinking between the character and the player
    - Explore ontologies and epistemologies which conflict with the dominant Western culture (materialistic, capitalist, patriarchal, individualist), using the tool of SF to show that culture and society are often artificial constructs, not biological reality
- **CASUALLY REFERENCE EXTRANEOUS PEOPLE, PLACES, HISTORIES, CONFLICTS, IDEOLOGICAL DIVIDES, ETC.**
  - Can be used either to create connections within the world (e.g. One character expressing their opinion on the recent actions of a faction you're familiar with) or to imply a larger world beyond the screen (e.g. "You're like ____ in that old story from the ____ people.")
- **REFERENCE THE PLAYER'S PAST ACTIONS**
  - Each conversation should include at least one reference to past actions to reaffirm player agency; this does not have to be a meaningful branch – it can be as simple as opening with a variable check, outputting the unique line, and then merging back into the critical path
  - Possible things to reference:
    - **GOODWILL** (how much you've done for the community, i.e. reputation)
    - **CHARACTER** (whether you trend towards INTERVENTIONIST or NON-INTERVENTION)
    - **PAST QUEST RESOLUTIONS** (whether you've resolved past quests in ways others agree with)
    - **PAST DIALOGUE CHOICES** (track specific lines the player has selected)
      - e.g., admitting your young age may make older characters distrust you

- **PAST OVERWORLD CHOICES** (if possible, track what the player does outside dialogue)
  - e.g. Did they interact with something in the game world just before talking to the NPC? Have they gone a long time without talking to anyone? Did they ignore a time-sensitive questline to explore?
    - [Requires very specific checks, internal clocks]
- **REFERENCE THE PLAYER'S CHOICES WITHIN THE CONVERSATION**
  - Dialogue options chosen by the player should impact the NPC in the long-term as well as the short term: in real life, people listen to what you say and remember how you made them feel; over time, they will form a concrete opinion of you based on these past choices. Game dialogue can replicate this in two ways:
    - Reference the player's words a few lines later by setting a simple variable
      - (e.g. if player chooses to be obnoxious/sarcastic at the start of the conversation, set a variable to make the NPC deliver an alternate line when the conversation ends; NPCs shouldn't forget the way the player treated them the moment the branch merges back)
    - Unlock/close-off different dialogue outcomes by setting a numeric variable and increasing/decreasing it based on the players choices
      - (e.g. if you entertain them and ask questions about their lives, you get new branches; if you go straight to the point with a character that isn't no-nonsense, you'll be rejected)
      - (e.g. If you're trying to get information out of someone, picking 'nice' dialogue options will increase your Relationship stat; at the end of the convo, a high relationship stat will give you what you're looking for—if you're blunt and demanding, you'll get your answer quicker, but the information will be faulty)
- **TEST PLAYER'S STRATEGY AND SOCIAL AWARENESS SKILLS**
  - Include strategy: testing the player's ability to read social cues and read between the lines as a way of informing their dialogue choices
- **END WITH A CLEAR OUTCOME**
  - Communicate how the NPC has changed in reaction to their dialogue with the player
    - Has the player succeeded in convincing them to do something?
    - Has the player imparted any knowledge/wisdom that has changed their worldview?
    - If there will be future consequences for actions taken within this dialogue?
      - Are they adequately forecasted?

OTHER THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND
- **When writing sci-fi specifically:**
  - Humans are not 'special' and aliens should not be in awe of you; most of them are indifferent, uncomprehending or actively discriminatory (Tortans have no concept of aliens)
  - Aliens should see themselves and their world as the default normal, and view everything else in relation to that. (Tortans wouldn't say "Our sun never sets," they'd say "Your sun is GONE half the time? How do you keep from freezing???")
- **When to break up dialogue trees:**

- o The dialogue has gone on too long without being particularly engaging / the play-tester is bored
- o The focus shifts away from the player character
- o There's a dramatic highpoint or item of interest that most people would want to respond to right away
- o You're trying to communicate something important: if the NPC is communicating something vital, force the player to internalize it by making them question/react to it
- o If there's something in the dialogue you KNOW the player is going to want to respond to (<u>Always</u> have responses refer to the last thing the NPC has said; if the player needs to ask about something the NPC said 3 lines ago, you need to rearrange the lines)
  - ▪ Don't mention something which warrants a response without letting the player respond to it
- **According to Josh Sawyer, every choice should be:**
  - o **tactical** – what players say should be attuned to their goal and the person they're speaking to
  - o **strategic** – decisions should affect the player's reputation with major groups
  - o **forecasted** – players should know what's *likely* to happen once they make a choice (even if these consequences do not fully reveal themselves until much later) so they don't feel cheated
  - o **validating** – players should be able to succeed no matter their character by doing something *only* their character could do; whether you employ diplomacy or violence, you get the info you need (if not the ideal outcome…)
  - o **agonising** – players should have to make sacrifices to do what they feel is right / consistent with their character; no binary Good/Bad decisions, no Sophie's Choice situations (two terrible options with no obvious gain); Googling "How do I get the best ending?" should provide no results
  - o **impactful** – sacrifices should produce an emotional response in characters or a narrative impact on the world (best achieved through follow-up encounters)
  - o **isolated** (reactivity should be complex, but localized to a single branch rather than spiraling out to affect the whole tree)