# DES 335

**Spring-2025**

**Partner Designer Feedback—Project 3**

**DigiPen Institute of Technology**

# Student Name: <Matthew Oliver>

# Partner’s Name: <Noah Crissey>

# Partner’s RPG Title: <The Court of Alphame>

# Turnover Date: <3/9/25>

## Designer Feedback Document Requirements

As you work on creating your adventure for Project 3, you must keep notes about the other student’s game system to provide them feedback. Track instances where the rules are vague, conflicting, over/underpowered. You will also be assessed by your suggestions on how to improve rules, where to add, where to cut—showing that you’re collaborating, not just using the system for your own purposes without feedback to the original designer.

Aim for 2-3 pages of feedback and suggestions—both quantity AND quality will be assessed.

Starting Week 9, you must provide your partner this document so they can adjust their project based on your feedback. You will provide updates as well on Weeks 10-11.

**You must remove the <text> sections before submission**.

## Rubric

The final update to this report is to be submitted as part of a .zip file that includes your turnover of Project 3. This is not a separate grade, but is included as part of your P3 final grade, with the chance for additional points for good analysis and feedback. The following are the max possible modifiers on that grade (also found in the P3 rubric):

* **WEEKLY TURNOVER TO PARTNER:** -5% if no turnover is made or is more than 24 hours late.
* **-20%:** No Designer Feedback document includes on turnover
* **-10%:** Documents are hard to follow or use
* **+2%:** Document provides basic feedback on system flaws for original designer
* **+2%:** Provides good WHY notes on system flaws
* **+1%:** Suggestions expand appeal of system to different player types
* +**1%\*:** Very good suggestions, ideas or notes (+1% per exemplary note)

This page does not count towards total page count; start on next page.

# Partner Designer Feedback

## Suggestions

### Rules

**Bonuses**

You should 100% create categories for your bonuses. Having lots of different and unique bonuses is a massive boon for roleplay-heavy systems. Quantifiable bonuses that are given in certain situations are a great way to make your players feel like they’re playing a character that is good and bad at certain things. It makes the characters feel alive in a way that something like advantage from 5E doesn’t. However, it is very easy to run into something I call the Pathfinder Problem, which is when you have so many different bonuses for so many different situations that it becomes too hard for the players to keep track of them all. I can see the potential for the Pathfinder Problem in your system and the best way to deal with it is to make it easier for your players to remember what kinds of bonuses they might get. One way you could do this is by having a table that just shows all the different bonuses that could affect a player’s roll. This works because then they can just look at the table and use it as a checklist. The problem you could run into with that is now every time you change your bonuses, whether adding new ones or removing old ones, you have to update that table. For your system that wouldn’t be a huge deal because you don’t have too many bonuses, but there are other solutions that may work better. Categories are my personal favorite way to handle this problem. What you can do is group your bonuses in different ways that make it easier for the player to remember what does and does not apply in certain situations. I’m not sure what groups you could come up with for your system, and it could potentially require some pretty big changes to how your bonuses work. But it is definitely worth looking into.

**Success and Failure**

Consider changing the way you handle Degrees of Success and Failure. There really isn’t a problem with the way you’re handling it now, but as we talked about on Thursday it might feel weird when a 2 counts as a Major Success against a 1. You could change it to be flat numbers instead of being based on percentages, that could make it feel more real. I understand however that that would require a lot of math to be done to determine what values would be appropriate. Another suggestion I have, which should be taken with a spoonful of salt, is rolling min and max on your die. This would not work that well the way your system is currently set up, and I also know that you want to remove as much luck-based success as possible. But consider ways that you could use min and max rolls to potentially solve this problem.

**Details and Secrets**

You need to clarify how your details and secrets system works. After speaking to you I’m aware that they intention is for NPCs to have Importance values assigned to their Details and Secrets, which can provide bonuses. You never explicitly state this in your rules however and I doubt I would have figured out how it worked without talking to you about it. At the very least make sure you mention that somewhere early on so the player is guaranteed to see it. I would also suggest actually having Importance values for players as well. I think it would be really cool if the NPCs had the ability to use D&S against the players during social encounters. It feels like that would add a lot more to the back and forth and make your NPCs feel much more alive and threatening. As it is right now player D&S only exist for roleplay purposes, which I think is a bit of a waste because it’s a very cool system.

**NPC Creation**

You absolutely need to add NPC creation rules. At the very least there needs to be an NPC sheet and realistically you should also have a section dedicated to making NPCs. The fun of your game comes from interacting with these shrewd, dangerous negotiators and the easier you can make it for DMs to create them the more fun everyone will have.

**Patience**

You need to clarify the starting Patience value in a Social Encounter. I love the mechanic but having it just be a random stat that the NPC has isn’t enough. I have no context for what the value should be or what it should be based on.

**Organizations**

Your Organization system is super cool but feels a little bare-bones at the moment. I would put a lot of time into making the organizations feel super cool and giving them way more features. I have a few suggestions for things you could consider, but will be compiling them at another time as it would take too long to do. The first thing is having Important Persons that do various things for your organization. For example maybe you hire a spymaster who discovers Details and Secrets about people for you. Maybe you could have an Accountant who is able to generate Wealth over time. There are a variety of different people you could make to fill this role and in my mind it would be really cool if the players had different people in their organization to talk to rather than just “manpower.” You have the basics of this through the Informant Asset but I feel like this could be expanded.

### Layout

**Footer**

Consider adding a footer that includes the page number, right now the only way to tell what page you’re on is if the PDF reader has a built-in counter.

**Chapter Layout**

There are a couple of places where the way your layout is set up could cause confusion. You’re probably aware of them and it’s just a matter of fighting Homebrewery to get it to work. Some of these are caused by your method of changing chapters. The Backgrounds chapter is a good example of this. You have your chapter change right after the Socialite and then the Analyst goes into the right column. There’s nothing specifically wrong with this but most TTRPGs with a 2 column format will instead continue along the same column and won’t start the next chapter until completely done. What this would look like is your Analyst section would stay in the left column and then you’d start you Backgrounds chapter after it, most likely in the right column. There are two reasons to do this. First, many people who are used to playing 5E are going to assume that’s how things are formatted. I know when I was first reading through your rules I assumed that Analyst was a background because I saw that a new chapter had started. It wasn’t until rereading that I realized that wasn’t the case. This reason is honestly pretty weak and completely up to personal preference. My second reason however is stronger. Also in the Backgrounds chapter is the Noble. The Noble sits at the end of a page just before a chapter change and because of your formatting style you have one section in the right column of the first page, one in the left column of the next, and the last in the right column of the next page. This is really weird looking. There are probably other things you could do to fix this formatting issue but having some of your text wrap normally and some of it not is confusing.

**Table of Contents**

I’m not sure how difficult this is in Homebrewery but I would suggest having at least one more level of headers shown in your Table of Contents. This just makes it easier for players to find what they’re looking for, specifically players who are unfamiliar with your system.

**Core Mechanic Introduction**

Consider adding a section in your introduction that introduces the core mechanic and how rolls/checks are made. I understand that you have sections later which describe it but your intro is your opportunity to give an initial explanation so that players have it in their head as they’re reading through.

**Social Quality Rock Paper Scissors**

Consider adding a graph that better shows which Social Qualities defend against which. I have no problem with the rule itself, I actually like the rock paper scissors nature of it, but there is no way I can remember them off the top of my head. Players will probably be flipping back to this section a lot during their first hours of play and the easier you can make it to visualize the faster they’ll learn it.

## Fix

### Typos (Some may be intentional)

Page 3 – Interpreting Mechanics

“Most things that the players can do are left intentionally vague in theses rules.”

*Misspelled, should be “these”*

Page 7 – Possible Missions

“the downfall of a Speaker of the Court so that one of use can take her place.”

*Potentially misspelled, did you mean one of “us” can take her place?*

Page 9 – Aptitude and Dice

“Each Aptitude level has a type of dice associated with it.”

*Misspelled, should be singular “die”*

Page 11 – Social Archetypes

“They dictate what a Social Skills a character excels…”

*Duplicate “a”*

Page 16 – State Objective and Determine Difficulty Bonus

“Examples of good, reasonably Objectives include:”

*Misspelled, should be “reasonable”*

Page 16 – Resolve the Encounter

“Decrease the player organization’ Image by 1.”

*Floating apostrophe, could be “player’s organization,” or “player organization’s”*

Page 17 – Gather Information

“The players love a Progress Tick,”

*Misspelled, should be “lose”*

Page 21 – Events

“Vathrin to persuade you to give you the trade deal.”

*Should be “him”/”her”*

Page 17 – On Your Turn

“On a your turn…”

*Added an “a” where there shouldn’t be*

Page 17 – Make the Play

“Reduce your Organiztion’s Image by 1.”

*Misspelled, should be “Organization’s”*

### Clarifications

Page 15 - Details

“To use a Detail, a player must mention the Detail or when using a Social Skill”

*I’m assuming this is a typo but if it isn’t it definitely needs to be clarified*

Page 17 – Gather Information

“Choose a Social Skill. Use an Insight Social Skill”

*I’m assuming this means I should choose an Insight Social Skill, the wording is just funky*

### 

# Week 10 Feedback

## Social Encounters

### The Problem

I want to spend the majority of this feedback tackling what I believe to be a fundamental issue with the system, which is the structure of Social Encounters.

I have now run two playtests, with different people and numbers of people in each one. In both of these playtests I have noticed that the social encounters don’t run very smoothly and, in my opinion, do not have the desired theme of orderly negotiation. I wrote what I feel is a good summary of the issue in my playtest notes, which I will paste below.

“I think there’s a problem with the way that Social Encounters are structured, or rather there’s a problem with their lack of structure. There was no real order to the conversation, people would just say random things and as the DM I would have to respond to each one. It didn’t really feel like a conversation at all. I don’t think that it was just a problem relating to a lack of experience in the system. In both playtests run I noticed this issue, and it feels to me like a system problem. I think overall the actual victory conditions and roleplay aspects are too separated. It would be easy to replace certain things with words like “Attack” and “Health,” and it would feel just like an ordinary combat-driven game. It feels more like the chaos of a battle in D&D than the order that I think is intended. I have suggestions on how to fix this, which I will put in the feedback document.”

In summary, I feel that the current Social Encounter system is very chaotic, and does not have the intended feel. Below I will outline an idea I had for how to fix this. This idea is by no means the only way to solve the problem, but it is something I came up with that could introduce a little more order.

### Suggestions

I feel that the main issue of chaos stems from a lack of structure with the Social Encounter system. Despite being the main mechanic that players will be using constantly, it feels very small and simple. This in and of itself is not a problem, there’s nothing wrong with a simple system; however, I believe that an emphasis on the sandbox-style has created an unintended verbal combat scenario when what you should get is a very orderly and high-society-esque conversation. Below I will outline my belief that you can split any social encounter into three phases: Introducing the Idea, Negotiating the Terms, and Sealing the Deal.

Introducing the Idea is exactly what it sounds like, during this phase of the social encounter the players would be introducing themselves and their Goal. This Goal could be anything. You could be trying to purchase something from the NPC, or trying to win their favor, maybe convince them to vote against a piece of legislation. Whatever your objective is, you spend this phase trying to establish that this is worth their time. I would suggest keeping the Patience mechanic for this, as in this stage the players are still trying to convince the NPC that they have a good idea which is worth their time. You could also potentially include something like a First Impression mechanic, where the way the players introduce themselves and their goal can impact whether they get to move on. Actions and Maneuvers could be themed around this to make it feel more like the initial part of a meeting, maybe with Actions like Attempt to Impress or Convince of Feasibility. After the players have managed to convince the NPC that this is worth their time, they move onto the Negotiating the Terms phase.

The Negotiating the Terms phase is used to determine the exact outcome of the encounter. The players might have told the NPC that they want to buy something, but they still have to decide on a price. This phase could be spent going back and forth trying to find terms that both sides believe are Fair. This Fairness value could be the main mechanic of the Negotiating the Terms phase. With Actions like Demand More or Give Concession affecting this Fair value. This would go back and forth until the players put forth their Final Offer, at which point a check is made to determine if the NPC agrees. If the NPC does agree the encounter moves on to the Sealing the Deal phase.

Sealing the Deal is all about making sure that both parties feel good about the deal and establishing good relations for future deals. I don’t know exactly how this phase would work, but it would likely have something to do with a Regrets value, which the players are trying to prevent from going up.

I feel that all of this could help the Social Encounters system feel more structured and more like an actual meeting. Theming and Categorizing the different parts of the negotiation process has the potential to make the entire thing feel more important and more realistic.

## Other Stuff

I’m unsure whether I should tell the players the Patience and Progress Tick values as we’re in the encounter. It feels like they can’t make optimal decisions about what to do unless they know this but I don’t want them to have to keep asking how impatient the NPC looks. I would suggest adding an Action that allows the players to gauge how Impatient an NPC is, and potentially how much progress they’ve made in convincing the NPC.

There was some confusion about the Inquisitor’s Archetype Trait. Would this sort of thing cover specifically Question checks? Is it used when taking the Gather Information Action? I feel it needs to be more clear as I wasn’t able to decide whether it could be used or not.

Social Encounters usually end very quickly at the moment, in both playtests I ran the encounter was over in 2-3 rounds. Whether or not you choose to change the Social Encounter system I would still suggest somehow increasing the amount of time that Social Encounters last.

# Week 11 Feedback

## Trading

I feel like it would be really cool to have rules for trading. You reference several times throughout your rules that trade is a large part of what goes on in Alphame, and the pre-gen organization supports that, but there are no actual rules for how trade is handled. I think it could add a lot to your system and might scratch the itch for a lot of Gamists. The idea of min-maxing trade routes and goods seems like something that could appeal to a lot of people. I’m not sure exactly how you would choose to incorporate this, but definitely give it some thought.

## Penalty for Details/Secrets

I think there should be a penalty for if you try to use a detail/secret and fail. As it is now there’s no penalty for failing which seems kind of weird because if you’re threatening to spill the beans on someone’s big secret and it doesn’t end up pressuring them, it should certainly at least put them in a bad mood or result in a reduction in Patience.

## Make Details/Secrets Encounter Long

I think you should explore the idea of having Details/Secrets apply for an entire encounter rather than just one check. I worry that this makes them feel a little weak when I believe your intention is for them to be very important. Using a detail one time on a check that might not even be Make the Play feels a little lackluster.

## Make Multiple Social Encounters Clearer

The rules don’t make it clear that you expect players to do multiple social encounters with one NPC. I was under the impression that one social encounter was supposed to encompass everything that the players want to do with a given NPC. After discussing it with you the vision is much clearer and I’ve implemented it into my adventure. But I think you should include a section giving an example of a multi-encounter event, that way it’s clearer to players that that is something they’re expected to do.

## Moderate Failure

Moderate Failure not being a loss to the encounter feels a little weird. I understand that it’s because it would be too easy for players to just fail encounters that way but allowing them to just keep trying over and over again doesn’t feel right either. As it is now players can simply try for as long as they want assuming they are capable of keeping the NPCs patience from going to 0. I feel that it could introduce a lot more tension and incentivize the players to play more strategically if a Moderate Failure also ended the encounter. That way the players would have to keep going until they were confident that they could guarantee a win.

## Appealing to Gamists

I think overall Court of Alphame doesn’t have many mechanics which appeal to Gamists. There aren’t really any systems which support things that Gamists typically enjoy. I would say you should try to find a way to incorporate some min-maxxable mechanics. I gave a suggestion with trading, but there are other things you could try as well. Perhaps make gift combinations? As in the players have to find out exactly what kinds of things the NPC likes and can get a bonus to an encounter with them if they bring the right combination of gifts.

## Expand Organizations

I would recommend expanding the organization system and making that your core Gamist appeal. You could do this fairly easily as the way organizations work is pure numbers. I’m sure people would love finding the optimal ways to increase their wealth without taking hits to manpower or image.