# 3. Skills & Skill Tests

While Attributes describe characters’ capacities in broad strokes and combine their innate dispositions, nature and abilities developed during their lives equally, Skills are more focused. They represent more specific areas of potential expertise and are things that the character has actively learned and trained to do.

This chapter will cover the Skills available in the game, how characters get them and advance them, and how to test them. Skill Tests are the central and arguably the most important mechanic in the game – whenever the outcome of characters’ actions are not certain, a Skill Test will be rolled. In fact, most dice rolls during play will be exactly for Skill Tests.

Basics of Skills:

The system has 28 skills divided into 7 groups; One group for each Attribute – so you have Might-based Skills, Cunning-based skills etc. The skills are deliberately broad enough to cover most\*, if not all situations expected to come up during play, while also being specific enough to not overlap too much (if at all).

\***Note:** If you have a character concept such that there’s really no Skill that fits with what the character does, you can work with the GM to introduce a new Skill into the game. More word on this later.

The table below lists the 28 default Skills sorted by their group. Their full and detailed descriptions can be found at the end of the chapter.

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| --- |
| **Might:** |
| Athletics, Fortitude, Melee, Unarmed |
| **Agility:** |
| Acrobatics, Escapology, Stealth, Throw |
| **Reaction:** |
| Marksman, Perception, Reflex, Ride/Drive |
| **Intelligence:** |
| Lore, Outdoorsman, Reasoning, Science |
| **Equilibrium:** |
| Artistic, Composure, Concentration, First Aid |
| **Cunning:** |
| Deception, Investigate, Skulduggery, Tinker |
| **Presence:** |
| Command, Consort, Sway, Willpower |

Governing Attributes:

Each skill has a Primary Attribute that governs it, and this always corresponds to the group to which the skill belongs.

For example, all four of Athletics, Fortitude, Melee and Unarmed have Might as their Primary Governing Attribute, or **PGA**.

Each Skill also has a Secondary Governing Attribute (**SGA**). This is specific to each Skill and can be found next to their descriptions (if none is noted, that means it’s the same as PGA).

Ranks:

The Rank is a measure of how good a character is with a specific skill. It’s a simple number ranging from 0 to 12. Rank 0 means that the character has no prior experience nor any training in the field. Rank 12, on the other hand, represents complete mastery, though few will achieve this.

Skill Tests:

So here it is – the core of the game, contained within one small mechanic. At its simplest, the flow of play will usually be like this:

* The GM describes the scene and the situation, then asks the players what they want to do.
* The players decide on various actions for their characters to do in the game world in the attempt to resolve situation.
* Sometimes these actions will be trivial, in which case they succeed automatically, and the game carries on normally.
* However, the most interesting situations are ones in which success isn’t certain. When that’s the case, players roll Skill Tests for their characters and the story moves forward in one direction or the other, depending on the success of the tests.

Skill Tests come in two flavours: “regular” Tests, which we roll when the characters are facing off against inanimate obstacles, and Opposed Tests, which we roll when multiple characters and/or creatures are facing off against each other.

The Fundamental Mechanic:

Being the heart of the game, the Skill Test mechanic must be simple and intuitive. So, all it comes down to is the following:

* Roll a number of six-sided dice (the exact number depends on the Skill’s Rank and its governing Attributes).
* Count successes – dice that came up with a 6\*.
* If the number of successes meets or exceeds some previously set target number\*\*, the test is successful. Otherwise, it fails.

\***Note:** Before you jump to conclusions about how improbable this makes any Skill Test, I urge you to read about Edge, Focus and the Elliptical Rule in the following sections.

\*\***Note:** In all further text, we will refer to this target number as the Difficulty Class, or DC for short. This name is vestigial from some now quite old games, but it was kept because it rings nice and familiar.

The procedure above describes a regular Skill Test. For an Opposed Skill Test, there’s no static DC – all who rolled compared the number of successes with each other to find out who comes out on top.

### How Many Dice:

The base number of dice a character rolls for a Skill Test is equal to their Rank with that Skill, plus the modifier or that Skill’s Primary Governing Attribute.

Also add a number of extra dice equal the modifier of the Skill’s Secondary Governing Attribute lowered by 1, if that number is positive.

Often, this will not be the final number of dice rolled for a Skill Test. There are many mechanics which influence this, but they will all be described where appropriate.

### Zero Dice?

If the testing character would have zero dice to test with, he may roll 2 and discard the higher one. Any less that that, and the test automatically fails (but it may be "attempted" regardless) – unless you know how to roll a number of dice lower than 0.

Fumbles / Criticals

GM Tip - Determining DC Values:

For the most part, when it comes to regular Skill Tests, it will be up to the GM to determine the DC of the task. That is ultimately an arbitrary decision, and requires some experience and “a feel for it”, but this section will provide some guidelines for making that decision, in the interest of keeping a fair and consistent game.

First, let’s state that the DC values typically range from 1 to 14:

* **DC 1 or 2 is easy:** You average Joe can complete this task with minimal natural aptitude and little or no training.
* **DC 5 or 6 is moderate:** An especially gifted individual, or one with some training can sometimes accomplish this task. With specialized knowledge, they can succeed more often than not.
* **DC 9 or 10 is difficult:** At this level, even talent verging on superhuman would lead to success only very rarely. Highly trained individuals can make it, but can also easily fail with a stroke of bad luck.
* **DC 13 or 14 is very hard:** Tasks of this difficulty are far beyond the capabilities of even above-average people. Natural aptitude, creative thinking and exceptional effort are not enough anymore – specialized knowledge is required to succeed, though that would still be regarded as nearly impossible.

Accomplishing a task with a DC beyond 14 would be considered a miracle even for masters of the trade. Such feats are the stuff of legends, and require enormous talent and skill, and favorable circumstances to have any chances of succeeding.

Although the listing above does not cover every possible DC value, the GM can use his judgement to “interpolate” the difficulty of a situation and place it somewhere between the two categories.

### Think in a Vacuum:

When thinking up the DC for a task, isolate it from the rest of the world. Imagine an average person faced with the task, in circumstances that are neither especially beneficial nor detrimental to their success.

Let’s take a running leap across a 4 metre-wide chasm as an example. An average person could make with a little effort, so we place the DC at 4. This is taking into consideration that the ground is solid and that the character has enough time do it, that they are not wounded etc. We don’t increase the DC if the ground is slippery, or decrease it if there’s a strong wind blowing at the character’s back. For such circumstantial modifiers, we use Extra Dice and Negative Dice, explained in the following section.

Extra Dice & Negative Dice:

Characters’ Attributes and Skills are mostly static, and the DCs, once set, are also static. When we want to model things that make a specific Skill Test easier or harder, such as having an appropriate special ability or the right tools for the job, or some complicating circumstances, we use this mechanic.

Basically, Extra Dice increase the total number of dice that a character gets to roll for a Skill Test, and Negative Dice decrease it. These effects stack. So, for example, if a testing character gets 2 Extra Dice and 3 Negative Dice, the net effect is that he rolls one die less than usual for the test.

There are many rules in the book which explicitly state that they award characters with Extra Dice, or penalize them with Negative Dice. There are Effort, Synergies and Specializations, to name a few.

### Circumstantial Modifiers:

Very often, situations will arise during play that give a testing character clear advantage or disadvantage for the task at hand. The rules cannot (and should not aim to) cover all the possibilities. In those cases, it’s up to the GM to determine whether some Extra Dice or Negative Dice are in order. We call this “Circumstantial Modifiers”.

The rolling player is always free to point out an advantageous circumstance and request Extra Dice from the GM, though the GM has the final say on this.

With that said, try to keep these modifiers small – when the situation is weighed as a whole, total dice added or removed because of Circumstantial Modifiers should not exceed three – barring truly exceptional cases, which should be kept rare.

Edge:

When a character is attempting a Skill Test, his Edge describes his abstract internal state, both of mind and of body. Shifting Edge does not change the limits of what the character can achieve, but it does help push him near those limits more consistently.

The two most prominent ways to increase Edge are Inspiration (about which you will read in the chapter on Vestiges), and the Elliptical Rule, which will be described later in this chapter. As you will see, the Elliptical Rule is almost always in effect, with the exceptions being when the character is very hurt, fatigued and/or under a lot of stress. And it makes perfect sense that a character under those conditions probably won’t be able to reach his limits.

Mechanically, what Edge does is lower the bar for success on die rolls. With an Edge of 0, only sixes counts as successes. With an Edge of 1, you get a success with a 5 or more. And so on.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Edge value** | **Success on:** |
| -1 or less | - |
| 0 | 6 |
| +1 | 5 - 6 |
| +2 | 4 – 6 |
| +3 | 3 – 6 |
| +4 or more | 2 - 6 |

Another way to think about it is this: When rolling for a Skill Test, add your Edge value to each die. Results of 6 or more are successes. Ones (and less) are always failures.

Opposed Skill Tests:

All rules that apply to regular Skill Tests also apply to Opposed Skill Tests. The only difference is that there’s no static DC – whoever generates the most successes, wins (or succeeds, whatever is appropriate for the situation).

### Breaking Ties:

In case of a tie (same number of generated successes), if one player has a special ability which allows them to break the tie in their favor, and the other doesn’t – then it’s obvious who wins.

Otherwise, simply determine the victor with a fair die roll.

Alternatively, the GM may rule that the tie stands. This option won’t always be applicable, depending on the situation (for example, this rule wouldn’t be a good for for most combat tests).

Graduated Tests:

Supplementary Mechanics:

In this section we’ll go over some mechanics that supplement and enhance the fundamental Skill Test mechanic. That’s not to say that these rules are optional – in fact, you’ll find the game quite unplayable without them.

Focus:

Focus is a stat that describes one’s ability to utilize and combine their skills and abilities with the goal of overcoming an obstacle. It represents both craftiness and the ability to work under pressure, or while stressed or wounded.

By default, a character’s Focus score is equal to their EQU + 3. As you will see in the chapter on Hardship, it can be temporarily reduced when the character is Stressed out, Fatigued, Wounded and similar.

In game terms, Focus is important because most special rules and abilities that allow characters to roll extra dice for Skill Tests, or gain some additional effects on success, cost Focus.

It's important to note that Focus is never “spent”, it only imposes a limit on the number of helpful effects that a character can utilize for a single Skill Test.

For example, let’s say that a character has a Focus score of 5, and that he’s currently not suffering any penalties to that value. He then attempts a Skill Test and spends 3 Focus points: 2 on the Elliptical Rule and 1 on Effort. That doesn’t mean that he now has only 2 Focus points left – the next time he attempts any Skill Test, he will have 5 Focus points to work with again (unless his total Focus score changed in the meantime).

The Elliptical Rule:

This rule can be invoked whenever a character is attempting any Skill Test. It allows them to:

* **Increase their Edge value by 1** for this specific test, at a cost of 1 Focus point.

Or, alternatively (and preferably):

* **Increase their Edge value by 2** for this specific test, at a cost of 2 Focus points.

This rule is always available to all characters and creatures, and requires no Attribute, Trait or Perk requirements (so long as they have enough Focus points to spend).

The Elliptical Rule is a monumental boost for any Skill Test, and if a character can’t use it, it usually means that he’s in a troublesome situation – Tired, Stressed and Wounded – and sometimes all three.

If you’re wondering about the name, know that you’ll be using 2 points of Focus for this rule in the majority of cases. And now remember that, in mathematics, an ellipse is a curve with two focal points.

Yes, it’s all a big, terrible (nerdy) pun.

Effort:

Effort is another mechanic for which the players can spend Focus (and often additional resources) in order to bolster their chances of succeeding on a Skill Test they deem important.

Before rolling the dice for any Skill Test, the player may take up to 3 Extra Dice. The limit is raised to 4 dice if the testing character has the PGA of the Skill used at 10 or 11 (looking at the **base** value), and to 5 if he has it at 12.

Using the Effort mechanic even for 1 Extra Die costs 1 point of Focus.

After the Skill Test is done, no matter if passed or failed, the player rolls a d12 for each Extra Die added using Effort. For each number that comes up that is higher than the character’s PGA (**base** value) of the used Skill, the character gains 1 point of Stress (explained in the chapter on Hardship). We call this an “Effort Test”.

A natural roll of 1 never gives a Stress point, and a natural roll of 11 or 12 always gives a Stress point.

### Enervation:

The Enervation stat describes effects that make the character easier to stress and tire out. During Effort Tests, add the character’s Enervation score to each d12 rolled before comparing it to the base Attribute value for determining whether it gives a Stress point or not.

Enervation is most commonly gained from wearing armour or carrying a lot of equipment. It can never be negative.

Skill Synergies:

Sometimes it may happen that, although a single Skill is clearly the best fit for the current situation, you can find connections to other Skills as well.

For example, you’re looking for clues in the house of a missing man. That’s obviously Investigate. But, if your character has a keen eye, proposing the use of Perception would make sense. The Synergy mechanic looks to cover those cases.

Before rolling any dice for a Skill Test, a player may seek to add more dice based on Skill Synergies. He must clearly and concisely explain why another Skill is relevant and how he’s using it. If the GM agrees that the proposition is sound, the player gets 1 Extra Die to roll for the test (2 if the Skill used for Synergy effect is at Rank 7 or higher). If possible, the GM should include Synergies when describing the results of the Skill Test.

Synergizing with a Skill costs 1 Focus point, no matter if 1 or 2 dice are added to the roll. Players can Synergize with multiple Skills if the have the Focus to spend.

There are no hard rules as to which Skills can be Synergized with in which situation. It’s up to the players to get creative, and up to the GM to arbitrate it.

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Running Skill Tests:

This section provides various tips for setting up Skill Tests and adjudicating their results. It’s meant mostly for GMs, though it won’t hurt if the players read it as well.

Stating Intent (what?)

Stating Method (how?)

Always Test Skills, Never Attributes

Determining DCs

Two Directions

Failure Complicates the Matter

Let it Ride

Scopes of Skill Tests (small & big!)

Advancing Skills & Levelling Up:

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Skill Specializations:

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Skill List:

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Introducing New Skills:

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