# 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.

|  |
| --- |
| **Might:** |
| Athletics, Health, Melee, Unarmed |
| **Agility:** |
| Acrobatics, Escapology, Stealth, Throw |
| **Reaction:** |
| Marksman, Perception, Reflex, Ride/Drive |
| **Intelligence:** |
| Insight, Lore, Outdoorsman, 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, Health, Melee (Armed) and Melee (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 the extent of a character’s training and experience with a certain skill. It’s a simple number ranging from 0 to 10.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Rank | Description |
| 0 | Untrained |
| 1, 2 | Dabbler |
| 3, 4 | Apprentice |
| 5, 6 | Journeyman |
| 7, 8 | Master |
| 9, 10 | Grand Master |

<Maybe take specs into account here?>

Game Flow:

Before explaining the intricacies of Skill Tests, it would be good to know roughly where their place in the game is. Grossly oversimplified, the typical flow of the game will be something 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.
* Repeat.

This flow is explained in more detail on page XX.

Basics of Skill Tests:

To roll a Skill Test, you must first determine your character’s **Skill Exponent** for the skill being tested. This number represents the character’s overall proficiency with the skill being tested, and the higher it is, the higher the chances of passing the test.

By default, we get the Skill Exponent by adding together the modifier of the Skill’s PGA and the Skill’s Rank. If the modifier of the Skill’s SGA is at least +2, also add that modifier lowered by 1.

So, for short:

mod(PGA) + Max{mod(SGA) – 1, 0} + Rank

The Skill Exponent can sometimes be modified through other mechanics, most notably Skill Synergies and Skill Specializations, both of which are described later in this chapter.

The second important value here is the **DC** (short for Difficulty Class\*), a number denoting how hard the task being attempted is (determining exact DC values is explained later in this chapter).

\***Note:** If the term “Difficulty Class” sounds strange, that’s because it’s vestigial from some now quite old games, but it was kept because it rings nice and familiar.

A Minimal Skill Test:

Without any additional bells and whistles, the procedure to do a Skill Test is as follows:

* **Roll dice:** Roll three 12-sided dice and count the total number of successes generated by all three results (each dice generates between 0 and 3 successes; the higher the Skill Exponent, the lower the thresholds for generating more successes, as shown on the Master Skill Table on the right).
* **Determine the outcome:** If the total number of successes meets or exceeds the DC, the test is successful, and the testing character makes progress towards finishing his intent (or achieves it completely). Otherwise, the test fails. In either case, narrate the consequences of the test and then carry on with the game.

More mechanics that touch upon and affect this basic structure will be introduced later in this chapter.

Master Skill Test Table:

The table below coveys two very important pieces of information:

* First, it tells us the thresholds for generating 1, 2 or 3 successes from a single die during a Skill Test (columns marked 1S, 2S and 3S, respectively) in regards to the relevant Skill Exponent.
* Second, it tells us the minimum DC that’s required for a test to be considered Difficult or Challenging for a tester with a certain Skill Exponent. If it meets neither requirement, it counts as a Routine test. This is important for Skill advancement, as will be described later in this chapter.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Exp.** | **Min. roll for Success** | | | **Minimal DC** | |
| **1S** | **2S** | **3S** | **Diff.** | **Chal.** |
| 0 | - | - | - | - | - |
| 1 | 11 | - | - | 1\* | 2 |
| 2 | 10 | - | - | 1 | 3 |
| 3 | 9 | - | - | 2 | 3 |
| 4 | 9 | 11 | - | 2 | 4 |
| 5 | 8 | 11 | - | 3 | 5 |
| 6 | 7 | 11 | - | 3 | 5 |
| 7, 8 | 7 | 10 | - | 4 | 6 |
| 9 | 6 | 10 | - | 4 | 6 |
| 10 | 6 | 9 | - | 5 | 7 |
| 11, 12 | 6 | 9 | 11 | 5 | 8 |
| 13 | 5 | 9 | 11 | 6 | 8 |
| 14 | 4 | 9 | 11 | 6 | 9 |
| 15, 16 | 4 | 8 | 11 | 7 | 9 |
| 17 | 4 | 8 | 10 | 7 | 10 |
| 18, 19 | 3 | 8 | 10 | 8 | 10 |
| 20 | 3 | 7 | 10 | 8 | 11 |
| 21, 22 | 3 | 6 | 10 | 9 | 11 |
| 23 | 3 | 6 | 9 | 9 | 11 |
| 24, 25 | 2 | 6 | 9 | 10 | 12 |
| 26, 27 | 2 | 6 | 8 | 10 | 12 |
| 28, 29 | 2 | 5 | 8 | 11 | 13 |
| 30, 31 | 2 | 5 | 7 | 11 | 13 |
| 32, 33 | 2 | 4 | 7 | 12 | 14 |
| 34, 35 | 2 | 4 | 6 | 12 | 14 |

**Note:** Any Skill Exponent over 35 counts as 35.

With a Skill Exponent which has the same thresholds as the one before it (underlined in the table above), the rolling player may apply a +1 bonus to a single die of his choice (after rolling).

Skill Tests, Extended:

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.

Circumstance Modifiers:

These modifiers can be positive or negative, and represents current (often temporary) conditions that make the task at hand easier, or more difficult, respectively.

With a Circumstance Modifier of +1, when doing a Skill Test, roll one additional die and then discard the lowest roll.

A Circumstance Modifier of -1 is the similar, making the player roll an extra die but discard the highest roll instead.

Positive and negative Circumstance Modifiers cancel each other out on a 1:1 basis, and those of the same sign can stack up to +3 or down to -3 (up to three extra dice rolled in their case).

### Advantage & Disadvantage:

Maybe you’ve encountered the concept of “Advantages” and “Disadvantages” in other role-playing games. Circumstance Modifiers are this game’s analogy of those two, with Advantage translating to a +1 CM bonus, and Disadvantage translating to a -1 CM penalty.

Automatic Successes:

When the rules say that a character gets a certain number of Automatic Successes for some Skill Test, those successes are added to any successes generated by rolling for the test. They are not rolled for, hence the name.

Since they are guaranteed, Automatic Successes are a very powerful boost to the testing character. Because of that, the GM should not give them to in-game characters unless a game rule specifically says so, or the GM is really confident that they know what they’re doing.

Max chance for Difficult: about every other

Max chance for Challenging: about 1 in 6

<Multiple detailed examples>

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 out or wounded.

By default, a character’s Focus score is equal to their mod(EQU) + mod(CUN) + 2. 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 Rule of the Ellipse 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 changes in the meantime).

The Rule of the Ellipse (RotE):

What has two points of focus? An ellipse. And also, hopefully, your character.

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

* **At a cost of 1 Focus point**, roll this specific test with one extra die, and consider 4 dice instead of 3 when counting successes (as opposed to dealing with Circumstance Modifiers, where a die is discarded).

Or, alternatively (and preferably):

* **At a cost of 2 Focus points**, apply the previous effect twice – roll the test with two extra dice, and then count successes on 5 of them.

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 Rule of the Ellipse 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.

<More examples, also with CM and RotE combined>

Effort Tests:

To be clear right off the bat, Effort Tests are **not** a method of task/conflict resolution. They are always used in conjunction with Skill Tests or some other mechanic, and are tied to the resource-management aspect of the game.

There’s no player or GM arbitration involved in deciding when to do an Effort Test – the game rules will always instruct you when needed. Most commonly, when a character uses some powerful special ability, he will have to do an Effort Test and suffer some penalty on failure (this is usually Fatigue or Stress buildup).

Similar to Skill Tests, Effort Tests are rooted in one of the character’s Attributes. To do an Effort Test, roll a single d12. For the test to be successful, the result of the roll must be equal to or lower than the Effort Threshold of its root Attribute.

A natural roll of 1 is always successful, and a natural roll of 12 always fails.

Effort:

Effort is a mechanic that represents characters pushing themselves (to the limit) in order to pass an important test, at the risk of becoming stressed out or exhausted if they do it too often.

The Effort rule comes into effect after rolling for a Skill Test (and after discarding extra dice if any Circumstance Modifiers are involved). It also costs 1 Focus point to use. The procedure is as follows:

* If there are any dice that are 1 point short of generating an additional success, you may get 1 extra success for the test per each such die.
* However, right after the test, no matter if successful or not, you must roll an Effort Test (rooted in the PGA of the skill that was just tested) for each success you generated this way. For each failure nets 1 Stress point.

Skill Synergies:

Let’s say that a situation has come up that calls for a Skill Test. The GM has determined the most appropriate Skill for the situation, but the rolling player notices that his character has other Skills that are currently applicable.

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

Before rolling any dice, the testing player may ask to Synergize with one or more other Skills. He must clearly and concisely explain how they are relevant and helpful to his cause. If the GM agrees that the proposition is sound, the player rolls the test with a temporary +1 bonus to Skill Exponent per Skill Synergized with (+2 if that Skill is at Rank 7 or higher).

If possible, the GM should take regard of all used Skills when describing the results of the test.

Synergizing with a single Skill costs 1 Focus point, regardless of how high a bonus is gained. Players can Synergize with multiple Skills if they 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.

Aid:

When one character is attempting a test, other characters may help him (the GM decides what the maximum number of character that can effectively help is, if any).

Their players must concisely explain how they are helping.

Every helping character first rolls the same Skill Test, but with the DC halved (rounded down).

If they succeed, the character receiving aid and doing the ‘main’ test receives +2 Skill Exponent for their roll. On a failure, nothing happens.

Running Skill Tests, Part I:

This section includes information that’s mostly tips for the GM, though, of course, it will only help the players to know how things are working in the background. Part I covers determining DC values and Circumstance modifiers. Part II, found later in this chapter, offers some more general information for setting up Skill Test stakes, outcomes, and consequences.

Determining DC Values:

As stated before, the DC (Difficulty Class) represents the overall difficulty of the task being attempted in a Skill Test. In game terms, it is the number of successes needed so that the test is passed. Sometimes, the rules will explicitly state the DC of a task. However, often, it will be up to the GM to assess the situation and estimate the appropriate DC.

The following list offers guidelines for coming up with appropriate DC values for the situation.

* **DC 0 - Trivial:** A task so simple, that rolling a Skill Test for it would be meaningless.

Walk across a room uninterrupted.

* **DC 1 - Easy:** A task that is simple enough as to be within reach of someone with no talent nor training.

Notice something large in plain sight.

* **DC 3 - Moderate:** A gifted individual, or one with some training, can accomplish this task (often reliably).

Find recent animal tracks in the woods.

* **DC 5 - Hard:** A task that may be too much for your average Joe, but simple to an expert.

Pick a basic lock.

* **DC 7 - Formidable:** A task that requires good effort from a trained individual.

Example…

* **DC 9 - Brutal:** A task that is challenging even to a talented expert. Best attempted by someone specialized in the field.

Example…

* **DC 11 – Legendary:** Success at this level is almost certainly a combination of talent, mastery and advantageous circumstances. It is the stuff of legends.

Example…

* **DC 13 – Miraculous:** Accomplishing such a task would be a miracle even for masters of the trade.

Example…

* **DC ∞ - Impossible:** It simply cannot be done.

Jump to the moon.

Although the list above skips every other DC value, if the GM feels like a task is somewhere between two categories, he may use the mean value of their DCs.

<Use 5 as normal (baseline) difficulty>

parry an attack from a seasoned fighter, infiltrate into a noble's residence

pickpocket a trickster god

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| d20 DC | T#p equivalent |
| 5 | 1 |
| 10 | 3 |
| 15 | 5 |
| 20 | 7 |
| 25 | 9 |
| 30 | 11 |
| 35 | 13 |

Skill Familiarity:

<I DON’T LIKE THIS, TOO FIDDLY>

You'll notice that most skills are only vaguely defined - Melee, Outdoorsman, Lore and Artistic could mean a lot of things - this keeps the skill system simple but also creates an opening for the characters' backstories to come into play.

A character who has spent his entire life in a desert might have a high Outdoorsman rank, but still may not be able to survive in a jungle. A wrestler with a high Melee Skill still probably isn't proficient in the use of halberds. Having lots of ranks in Artistic does not mean that your character is great at painting, sculpting, singing, dancing, game design etc. all at once.

To represent this in-game, the GM should adjust the DC of all Skill Tests based on the backstories, according to the list below.

* The Task/Topic is directly related to character's former experiences; He should be familiar with it:

**No DC adjustment.**

* The Task/Topic is similar to character's former experiences; There's a good chance he has dealt with it (if indirectly) in the past: **Increase DC by 1.**
* The Task/Topic is loosely related to something else the character is familiar with; With some luck he could make it work: **Increase DC by 2.**
* The Task/Topic is unrelated to anything the character has done before. Chances are he doesn't know anything about it:

**Increase DC by 4.**

Determining Circumstance Modifiers:

We use Circumstance Modifiers to represent the effects that various advantageous or detrimental conditions can have on Skill Tests. You can think of them as temporary bonuses or penalties that arise from the specifics of the current situation.

Let’s take a leap across a small chasm as an example, and that the GM has determined that it’s a DC 4 task. If the character has enough room for a running jump, that’s an advantageous thing and that confers a +1 CM bonus to his test. If it was raining and the ground is slippery, or his leg is hurt, he gets a -1 CM penalty for each of those negative conditions.

Sometimes, the rules of the game will explicitly state that the testing character gets a CM bonus or penalty in specific conditions. However, very often, situations will arise during play that give a testing character clear advantage or disadvantage for the task at hand, but which are not covered by the rules. The rules cannot (and should not aim to) cover all the possibilities. In those cases, it’s up to the GM to determine whether a CM bonus or penalty is in order.

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

**GM Tip:** If you’re not sure whether a DC adjustment or CM adjustment is more appropriate for the current situation, look at it like this: The DC is inherent to the task, while Circumstance Modifiers are given for various external factors, which are often temporary.

Types of Skill Tests:

In the game, there are several different kinds of tests. They’re all very similar and mostly follow the rules outlined up until this point.

Standard Tests:

These are your “regular” tests described by the rules on the previous pages: A character tests his abilities against a static DC value representing some (usually) inanimate obstacle.

Opposed Tests:

Opposed tests are used when two characters are actively doing something against one another.

When one character is clearly the initiator of the action, he rolls first, followed by the other character’s roll. For example, attacking and defending in combat works this way.

Otherwise, they both roll at the same time. A good example would be an arm wrestling match.

In either case, the character who generated more successes wins the contest. In the case of a tie, one of 3 things happens:

* If only 1 of the competing characters has a Trait or Perk which allows them to break the tie in their favour, then they win.
* If the situation is such that a tie could make sense thematically, then the tie stands.
* Otherwise, the tie is broken with a fair d6 roll.

Not always will the opposed characters be rolling the same skill. In the above example with the arm wrestling, yes, both will be rolling Athletics. But in others, such as Sneaking past some guards, it will be Stealth vs Perception, for example.

Size Adjustment For Opposed Tests:

When two creatures or different size categories are competing in an Opposed test, and that test is about a physical task, we must adjust it to account for this difference. Depending on the particular situation, we split this into a few cases:

* In a **direct contest of strength** (i.e. grappling, arm wrestling, pushing, pulling etc.), the larger creature is clearly favoured. If it is 1/2/3/4/5 size categories larger than its opponent, it receives 1/2/4/8/16 automatic successes. If the difference is more than that, you can keep doubling the bonus, but more likely the opponent already had no chance of winning at 4 or 5 categories of difference.
* In a situation where **strength and/or size are a factor, but not the only one**, the adjustment is a flat 1 Automatic Success per size category of difference. These automatic successes are awarded to the creature who benefits from this difference. For example, in melee combat, an ogre (Large) fighting a human (Medium) would be the benefactor of size adjustments when rolling both for attack and defence. However, the situation would be reversed for ranged combat.

Gradient Tests:

Gradient tests are those in which there isn’t a single DC to beat, but they rather work on a basis that at if the testing character gets at least 1 success, he manages to do whatever he was going to, but getting more successes means he does it with a larger magnitude.

<STUB>

Knowledge Tests:

Knowledge tests are a special kind of Graduated tests used to check a character’s knowledge about a specific subject.

The special thing about Knowledge tests is the following: Any of the governing Attributes for the skill being tested that is not Intelligence is replaced by Intelligence for purposes of Knowledge tests, regardless of the skill’s actual profile.

Of course, most Knowledge tests will be made with the Lore and Science skills, which already use Intelligence as their PGA and SGA. This rule comes into effect in all other cases, for example:

* A fighter rolling Melee to appraise the quality of a sword he just found.
* A driver rolling Drive to assess the chances of his car making the jump across the chasm.
* A thief rolling Skulduggery to recall information about a certain type of lock.

Running Skill Tests, Part II:

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

Two Directions

Failure Complicates the Matter

Let it Ride

Scopes of Skill Tests (small & big!) WTF is this

Skill Specializations:

<Placeholder>

Skill List:

<Placeholder>

Introducing New Skills:

<Placeholder>