

DIE ROLLS AND CHALLENGES

In Asylum you play characters that solve mysteries, investigate the unknown and become changed from their experiences. Naturally, there is a healthy amount of uncertainty involved. To help guide you and your characters through this uncertainty, Asylum breaks the action down into clear units of time and uses a simple system of die rolls.

Scenes and Rounds:

Just as in a book, movie or television show, story arcs in Asylum can unfold over anywhere from a few hours to a few months. In order to make things clear, time is broken down into scenes. A scene is any length of time where the characters accomplish something. This could be as simple as crossing the street or as involved as spending an entire day looking for a missing person.

During a scene, the players and the Narrator will have plenty they'll want to do. To keep everyone from talking all over one another, the narrator may find it necessary to break a scene down into rounds. A round is simply letting everyone take their turn one at a time. Once everyone has taken their turn, the round ends and a new round can begin. Occasionally, the narrator will decide that it's important to know in what order everyone will take their turn. In this case, you will each roll a die and add your Initiative to the result. The person with the highest total goes first, followed by the second highest and so on until everyone has taken their turn. This system of rolling a dice is how almost everything else is determined too.

Rolls:

The die used is a 10-sided die – or d10 from here on. A player rolls the d10 and almost always adds something to the number rolled. This something is called a **modifier**. The sum of the roll plus the modifier is called the **result**. If the result is higher than or equal to a number called the **Difficulty Level** (which is usually 8), good things happen. Perhaps your character finds a clue, convinces people to help, or maybe just avoids something bad that was coming her way. If the result is lower than the Difficulty Level, bad things happen or nothing happens at all – which can sometimes be just as unfortunate.

So to recap the basic rule of the game:

d10 Roll + modifiers = result

If the result is > or = Difficulty Level, things go your way

If the result is < Difficulty Level, things don't

There is one exception to this general rule: a d10 roll of "1" automatically loses.

Modifiers:

Modifiers add or subtract to the die roll. The most common modifiers come from your skills and aspects. This represents the effort, training and raw talent your character brings to the table.

Exactly how much of a difference this makes is shown below:

Using no skill or aspect:	Half of relevant attribute (Round down)
Trained in a skill:	+3
Using a Talent:	+4
Expert in a skill:	+5
Master of a skill:	+6

The Narrator may assign other modifiers to your roll. These are usually the result of the circumstances surrounding the situation your character is in. When the Narrator determines that a circumstance would improve your chances of success you are granted a **minor advantage**. Likewise, whenever a circumstance would interfere with success, it imposes a **minor disadvantage**. Two or more simultaneous minor advantages count as a **major advantage**. Two or more simultaneous disadvantages count as a **major disadvantage**.

Just how far advantages and disadvantages affect your roll is shown below:

Minor Advantage:	+1
Major Advantage:	+2
Minor Disadvantage:	-1
Major Disadvantage:	-2

The thing to remember about modifiers is that they are used both actively and passively. Passive modifiers are when the Narrator asks for specific skills or aspects and sets the circumstances that give an advantage or disadvantage. Active modifiers are when you decide what kind of modifiers you want and make a case for your own advantages.

For example:

Let's say that Jim is an awakened Human detective, Luna is a Greek siren businesswoman and Alex is a fire elemental trying to go straight. During their story a runaway truck screeches off the road and is now barreling straight toward them! To determine what happens next, the players will need to make a roll against a difficulty level of 8.

Using only passive modifiers:

The Narrator says "Okay, you can use any skill involving Might or Agility to get out of the way or any Aspect that moves you around." Jim is an Expert in Athletics, so he opts to use that to jump out of the way. With a +5 to his roll, it should be a cinch. Alex has an aspect he can use but he is also a Ranged Combat expert, so he decides to shoot a tire or two out and divert the truck. Because he's trying to make such a precise shot, the Narrator tacks on a minor disadvantage which lowers his modifier to +4. Luna gulps because she doesn't have any skills or aspects that the Narrator mentioned. She'll have to try her luck with nothing but the roll of the dice!

Using Active modifiers:

Luna decides that she should be able to do her own thing, so she tells the Narrator that she's going to use her siren powers (an aspect) to captivate another hapless driver into heading off that truck by smashing into its side. Her siren powers roll at +4 or use her Relate skill (whichever is higher) – and Luna is a master of Relate. Luna decides to press her case further and make it a point to enthrall a male driver since in the stories men are particularly affected by a siren's call. The Narrator is convinced and grants Luna a minor advantage. 6 (master of a skill) + 1 (minor advantage) = +7 to the die roll. Doing her own thing has really paid off!

Difficulty Level (DL):

The DL is the number you have to beat in order to win a die roll. DLs will usually be assigned to skills and aspects. Assigned DLs are usually written like this: "Players may roll Mechanics at Hard DL." This means that if you decide to use the mechanics skill, you will have to roll an 8 or higher. The Narrator generally determines difficulty levels using guidelines provided in this book. The standard range of difficulty levels is covered below:

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| Trivial (DL 4) - | Easy for anyone, only someone who is untrained can expect to fail. |
| Ordinary (DL 6) - | Easy for someone with training, and anyone with expert or master training can expect to succeed almost every time. |
| Hard (DL 8) - | Someone without training is likely to fail, but most people with some training can figure it out at least half the time. This is the most common difficulty and considered the default unless the Narrator says otherwise. |
| Rare (DL 10) - | Someone without expert training is likely to fail, and this problem can stump even master practitioners occasionally. |
| Elite (DL 12) - | This action is impossible for someone without at least training, and so daunting that even masters are likely to fail half the time. |

You may have noticed that "hard" is the most common DL. This is because Asylum is all about characters doing extraordinary things. The Narrator should rarely call for an ordinary roll and almost never call for a trivial one. We've included them here so you get an idea of where your character stands compared to most people. It's also there to show just how hard an "ordinary" task is without the proper training. Fixing a light switch may be easy for a trained electrician, but for someone without any skills it may result in short circuits or worse.

Blunders and Specialty Dice:

There are two additions to the basic rule. A blunder happens when your result is very, very low. Blunders indicate that not only have things not gone your way, but something truly bad or unfortunate has happened. Specialty dice are extra dice you get to roll because your character has a skill or aspect that seems tailor made for the situation.

Blunders occur when your result is at least 4 lower than the difficulty level. A blunder doesn't just waste time; it adds new complications. Most of the time, these new complications will give everyone a Minor Disadvantage for at least 1 round. However, the Narrator can sometimes decide that a blunder is especially bad and throw something even worse your way.

When a skill or aspect says that you gain a specialty die, it means that you may roll an additional d10 and take whichever result is higher. The write-up of the skill or aspect will tell you when this happens. Usually, it's when you're doing something that falls under your character's particular area of focus or expertise.

For example:

Armisen is a drag racing djinn who has the Mechanics skill with an expertise in "Vehicles." If Armisen was using Mechanics to fix a broken tool or build a new non-vehicular invention, he would roll as normal. When using Mechanics to do anything vehicle-related (such as drive or fix an automobile) he would roll two d10s instead of just one and keep whichever rolled higher.

Challenges:

There are times when quick thinking and short, simple actions aren't enough to get the job done. Often, your character will be called upon to solve a complex problem or navigate a whole series of obstacles. Scenes like these are called challenges. They can involve anything from investigating a mystery to talking down an angry mob.

A challenge works just like a roll but with one important addition. Every time you succeed on a roll you generate points called **Impact**. Impact measures how effective the action you just took was in winning the challenge. Almost everything that gives you a modifier also generates Impact. How much Impact you make is determined by two things: the kind of modifier you used (i.e. skills or aspects) and what you rolled on the d10.

Making Impact:

A challenge has started! Roll the d10 and add your modifier. . .

If your roll is lower than the DL:

Nothing happens. You have no Impact on the challenge.

If your roll is equal to or higher than the DL:

You generate Impact equal to whatever the modifier you used calls for (see "Impact" below) plus the number that came up on the d10. So if you were trying to beat a Hard DL using a modifier of +4 and rolled a 5 (for a total of 9), you would make the modifier's Impact rating +5.

During a challenge, the Narrator will have a goal or conclusion in mind and will then come up with the total amount of Impact necessary to reach it. This total is usually based on how many players are participating in the challenge and how many rounds the Narrator expects it to take. This total is called the Challenge Threshold. When the total Impact that you and the other players make reaches or exceeds the threshold, the scene ends and you win the challenge. This will often result in rewards, information, or fix some misfortune that has befallen your group.

To symbolize the progress you make along the way, the Narrator takes the Challenge Threshold and uses it as a pool of points that are grouped together into smaller goals or obstacles. Every time your character performs an action that tackles the situation head on, it will reduce the number of points in one of these groups. When the total reaches zero, your group will receive a benefit or some sign that they're on the right track. When your character takes an action that either indirectly helps out or eases the pressure of the situation in general, the Impact you make reduces the Challenge Threshold.

For example:

Tired of their constant meddling, Alsjo of the Cunning has sent a band of dwarven thugs to rough up Jim, Alex, Luna and Armisen. The group of three thugs intercepts our heroes as they're travelling through a bad part of town. The thugs approach the group with icy stares and short tempers.

The Narrator, seeing that there are four players and not wanting this challenge to take up too much time (not more than 2 turns), decides to set the Challenge Threshold at 30. When the group reaches 30 Impact, the confrontation will end and the dwarves will cough up the name of who they're working for. The Challenge Threshold of 30 gives the narrator 30 points to work

with, which she parcels off into 10 points for each thug. This means that as the players work through the challenge, there'll be fewer thugs to deal with.

Alex and Jim take the direct approach and draw weapons, hoping that big talk and a ready gun will get the menacing dwarves to back down. The narrator decides that they must roll against a Hard DL. Jim uses his Command skill which gives him a +3 to his roll. He gets a 5 for a total of 8. Since he's beaten the DL, Jim makes 5 Impact from the gun (for more on that see "Impact" below) and 5 from the die roll. Jim has made 10 total Impact so far. Alex follows suit as he has Command with a +5. His roll is a 3, meaning he has barely made it. Alex generates 8 Impact: 5 from the gun, 3 from the die roll. Together they have made 18 points of Impact!

The Impact is applied directly to one of the thugs causing his points to drop to zero (10 to start minus 10 Impact). The remaining points wear away the resolve of one of the remaining thugs. Having completely lost his nerve, the narrator decides that the dwarf brought to 0 points immediately runs away.

Luna and Armisen decide to instead call for help; Luna does this by calling 911, Armisen by screaming and making a big scene. Luna and Armisen use their relate skill as it gives them a +6 and +3 to their rolls respectively. Again, the DL is set at Hard. Both succeed at their rolls (it's a lucky day for our gang), Luna getting a 3 and Armisen getting a 6. Relate generates Impact equal to the character's Presence which for Luna is 5 and for Armisen is 3. 5 + 3 brings Luna's total to 8, while 3 + 6 brings Armisen's total to 9. Together they have generated 17 points of impact.

The GM decides that this action is more of an indirect help, so instead of reducing points on the would-be attackers, she lowers the Challenge Threshold by 17. It has now dropped from 30 to 14.

Since Alex and Jim already generated 18 with their rolls, this means our heroes have won the challenge! Having been thoroughly intimidated and facing incoming backup, the dwarves will easily cough up the name of their boss and scam.

Impact:

Just like with modifiers, your skills and aspects generate Impact. For skills, the amount of Impact made is usually tied to one of your attributes. For aspects, the amount of impact will be written in the descriptions of the various powers. The section of this book on skills and aspects will tell you exactly how much Impact you can expect to make.

Additionally, your character may be using a piece of equipment to help him perform an action. Equipment has its own ratings for Impact that replaces what you would have gotten without it. A fully stocked doctor's bag, for instance, will generate 10 Impact when you make a successful Medicine roll. Without the doctor's bag you'd make as much Impact as your Wits attribute – which is 6 at the very most. If a piece of equipment would ever generate less than what you'd make without it, you instead get a +1 bonus to Impact – using a tool is always a good idea! The equipment section of this book will tell you the full details of which equipment gives you how much Impact.

To give you an idea of how much Impact your actions can make, see the list below:

Average skill or attribute roll without equipment:	8
Average aspect without equipment:	9 – 10
Skill or aspect with simple equipment:	10 – 11
Skill or aspect with adequate equipment:	12
Skill or aspect with good equipment:	15
Skill or aspect with really good equipment:	17

Challenge Threshold of an average challenge: 66
(Hard or Rare DL, five players, expected to last 3 rounds)

This list doesn't include bonuses your character may be getting from an expertise or other magical effects. Sometimes a bit of magic can be just as good as an expensive piece of equipment.