2D20 System SRD: Characters

System Resource Document for 2D20 System RPGs, 2022 Edition

Anatomy of a Character

Characters are composed of several distinct elements that collectively serve to depict how that individual interacts with the worlds around them, both in game terms and in story terms. These elements may vary somewhat between versions of the **2D20 System**, but the most common forms are **Attributes**, **Skills**, **Focuses**, **Talents**, **Traits**, and **Features**. Together, these paint a picture of who the character is, what they are good at, and how they view the world around them.

Characters are, broadly speaking, divided into two types for the purposes of play:

- **Player Characters** consist of all the characters used by a player to participate in the game. Player Characters are the protagonists or main characters of the game. Each player decides how their Player Character will act in the scenes framed by the Gamemaster. This chapter is focused mainly on Player Characters and covers a few different methods of creating them.
- **Non-Player Characters** are all those characters not directly controlled by the players. They're normally introduced and directed by the Gamemaster, though if an NPC would be friendly to the Player Characters, the Gamemaster may allow the players to direct that NPC during Conflicts. Non-Player Characters are described fully in their own chapter, and their creation is described in the Gamemaster's Chapter.

Attributes

Each character in a **2D20 System** game is defined by several attributes: normally 6, but sometimes more or less than that. These embody the character's intrinsic physical and mental capabilities, when compared between characters, and they help depict the ways that the character prefers to approach problems.

These Attributes are **Agility**, **Brawn**, **Coordination**, **Insight**, **Reason**, and **Will**. Each Attribute has a rating which determines its measure, with higher numbers reflecting greater ability. For Player Characters, these Attributes range from 7 to 12, with 8 representing an average capability. Some characters and creatures may have Attributes lower or higher than this, and special abilities that increase their capabilities further; this is described in the Adversaries chapter.

A character may encounter situations for which more than one of their Attributes are applicable. In these cases, it is important to consider the context of the situation, and how the character is choosing to approach the problem. The Gamemaster may choose which Attribute is most applicable to a situation if more than one could be used, but if the GM does not pick, then the player may select whichever of the applicable Attributes they wish.

- **Agility** is a mixture of speed, balance, and muscle memory, and is responsible for much of a character's movement and similar activities. An Agile character is quick and moves with certainty and precision.

- **Brawn** is the character's fortitude and ability to endure physical hardship, as well as their ability to employ force. It also encompasses the character's endurance, and their general health and physical conditioning. A Brawny character is strong and hardy.
- **Coordination** is the character's fine motor skills, hand-eye coordination, accuracy, and sense of time and rhythm. Coordinated characters tend to be good shots, good drivers and pilots, and excel at sleight of hand and other delicate, precise tasks.
- **Insight** is the character's perceptiveness, instincts, and their ability to comprehend the world around them. Insightful characters are observant and shrewd, and may often be said to have 'street smarts' or be wise.
- **Reason** is the character's ability to apply logic, intellect, and the known facts to a situation. Reasoning characters tend to be lucid, rational or contemplative, and are often driven by a need to learn or understand.
- **Will** is the character's sense of self, their mental strength, and their sense of self-discipline. Wilful characters tend to be single-minded, even stubborn, and they can have extremely forceful personalities.

Skills and Focuses

In addition to the six Attributes, each character is trained in several Skills, which encompass the various activities and proficiencies that a character is likely to need during their adventures. Each Skill is rated from 0 to 5, with each rating representing a differing level of training, expertise, and natural aptitude. Player Characters are unlikely to have a 0 in more than one Skill – Player Characters are expected to be competent, broadly-capable protagonists.

As standard, there are six broad Skills: **Fight**, **Know**, **Move, Operate**, **Survive**, and **Talk**. These Skills can be mixed and matched with the Attributes above and will overlap in a few ways.

- **Fight** covers the character's ability to use, and defend against, violence. It is most often used when making attacks, but it can also be used to judge threatening situations, and covers a practical understanding of weaponry, combat styles, and strategy. A character might use **Fight** with...
  - **Agility** to dodge out of the way of an attack, or to make a melee attack.
  - **Brawn** to defeat an enemy while grappling, or to brace against an incoming attack with a shield or similar defensive item.
  - **Coordination** to attack an enemy from a distance, or to defend against an attack by parrying or ducking behind terrain.
  - **Insight** to discern if a situation is an ambush or trap, or to judge how much of a threat (or how capable in a fight) someone else is.
  - **Reason** to devise a plan or strategy for a battle, or to survey the aftermath of a battle and be able to tell who or what was involved.
  - **Will** to warn allies of an imminent threat so that they react, to threaten someone with the use of force, or to keep their nerve amidst the clamour and horror of battle.
- **Know** covers the character's learning, education, and accumulated knowledge, as well as the character's ability to find more information. It is most useful when trying to research information, or when trying to remember facts about something. Other Skills can contain an element of knowledge, but the Know skill tends to go into greater detail or contain a lot more of

the technical or theoretical sides that practical experience might not encompass. A character might use Know with…

- **Agility** to perform a studied manoeuvre or series of motions, or to avoid a hazard or obstacle by recalling a pattern, sequence, or vulnerability.
- **Brawn** to exert precise force or leverage to move or break an object or obstacle that might otherwise be impossible to shift, or to resist the effects of an environmental phenomenon with knowledge of how to protect against exposure.
- **Coordination** to perform a delicate procedure, or to follow a set of precise instructions properly.
- **Insight** to gain useful information from observation alone, to avoid being deceived by falsified or biased information, or to devise a theory from incomplete information.
- **Reason** to perform research on an unfamiliar subject, to form a plan or theory from studying all the available data, or to try and convince someone else using facts and logic.
- **Will** to retain the composure to study something horrific or disturbing, or to argue with someone else over the facts.

- **Move** covers the character's ability to navigate their environment. It is most often used to traverse difficult terrain or move freely despite dangerous conditions, but it can also be used to move unnoticed, pass unseen, or remain undetected while moving. A character might use Move with…
  - **Agility** to move quickly through difficult conditions, to remain balanced while moving on a precarious surface, or to avoid hazards while moving.
  - **Brawn** to move while burdened by a heavy load, to continue moving despite fatigue, to force themselves through an obstacle, to scale vertical surfaces, or to swim.
  - **Coordination** to move through a hazard or obstacle that requires careful timing or extreme precision.
  - **Insight** to judge how difficult or dangerous a route is, or whether it can be traversed at all, or to select the quickest or safest route with only limited information.
  - **Reason** to navigate a route or course using a map or other navigation tools, or plan a path through a hazard by studying patterns and signs.
  - **Will** to continue moving despite physical pain or other debility.

- **Operate** covers the character's ability to utilise complex tools, such as vehicles and other items of technology, as well as the character's knowledge of how those tools work. A character might use Operate with…
  - **Agility** to make a vehicle evade a hazard or attack quickly, or to perform some technical activity requiring considerable quick movement.
  - **Brawn** to operate stuck or rusted machinery by brute force, or to perform an arduous, repetitive technical activity.
  - **Coordination** to operate a vehicle effectively, or perform precision adjustments, repairs, or operations on a device or machine.
  - **Insight** to judge the capabilities of an unfamiliar machine just by quick observation, or to make a reasonable guess at the nature of a fault or problem with a machine.
  - **Reason** to determine the function or capabilities of a machine by studying it intently, or to design modifications or alterations to a machine (or even a whole new machine).

- o **Will** to push a machine past its limitations despite signs of imminent failure, or to continue with a dangerous technical activity despite the risks.
- **Survive** covers a character's resistance to threats and harm, as well as a character's ability to handle and navigate dangerous environments. A character might use Survive with…
    - o **Agility** to move carefully or quickly through familiar dangers or obstacles.
    - o **Brawn** to resist physical debilities such as poison or disease.
    - o **Coordination** to disable a trap or create something to mitigate a hazard, or to provide medical attention.
    - o **Insight** to notice or anticipate a threat, hazard, or other peril, or to diagnose the nature of a debility.
    - o **Reason** to analyse a hazard to determine a safe way to avoid it, or to study a debility to figure out how to treat it, or to resist intellectual or logical debilities such as illusions or deception.
    - o **Will** to resist mental or psychological debilities such as fear or panic.
- **Talk** covers a character's ability to relate to and interact with people. Much of this Skill is active – it deals with talking to people – but knowing how to talk to people also means the character knows how other people talk too. Other Skills can contain an element of social interaction, often in narrower or more specific circumstances, but those rely a lot on context. A character might use Talk with…
    - o **Agility** to grab the attention of others through dance or other motion, or to be able to discern relationships and connections between people through their movements.
    - o **Brawn** to use size or strength to grab attention, coerce, or compel others, or to endure long-winded or tiring interactions without showing signs of fatigue.
    - o **Coordination** to use fine body language and subtle physical contact to help persuade or manipulate another, or to be able to read body language and other signifiers to gain more information about someone.
    - o **Insight** to judge the mood or emotions of others, or to use their observations of others to sway their opinions.
    - o **Reason** to use logical arguments to persuade others, or to determine the logical flaws in another's position.
    - o **Will** to rally or inspire others during a difficult situation, to intimidate through determination or force of will, or to command the attention or respect of others through presence and bearing alone.

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GM Guidance: Observation and Research

One of the most common things that a Player Character will attempt during a game is to try and learn more about the world around them. This may be a short-term matter – attempting to spot if there's a peril or hazard nearby or trying to find something hidden – or it might be something longer and more difficult, such as surveying the scene of a crime or researching an unknown foe.

These sorts of activities are easily handled in the **2D20 System**, using the *Obtain Information* Momentum Spend. A Test specifically to find information should have a low Difficulty – 0 or 1 – though it may be

higher if the information would be especially tricky to obtain. Success should provide basic information, with players given the opportunity to learn more by spending Momentum to ask questions.

If the information is vital for the players to learn – it is necessary to move the story forwards – then the Gamemaster should keep the Difficulty low and/or allow the Player Characters to Succeed at Cost to receive the most vital information (and Momentum may provide them with extra context or the ability to gain additional useful details).

Crucially, observation and knowledge of a subject are not limited to a specific skill; a character with a high Fight is likely to know more about combat, weapons, and tactics, for example., rather than needing a separate "knowledge: warfare" skill.

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Focuses

A character's Skills are broad, but Focuses allow a character to demonstrate talent for narrower areas of expertise, representing specialisation and the kind of advanced training that comes from deeper study and practical experiences. Focuses are not tied to any specific Skill, and can be applied to any Skill Test a character attempts, so long as the Focus would logically benefit the Skill Test being attempted.

Player Characters will normally have six Focuses. Each Focus should be narrower than the Skills described above, but they shouldn't be so narrow that they don't come up in play. Further, because there is no specific link between Skills and Focuses, a Focus may be valuable for Skill Tests using various Skills – for example, a Focus in Firearms can easily be used for Fight Tests, but it also has potential uses with the Know skill to represent the character's knowledge of guns.

A selection of example Focuses are below, grouped by the Skill they are most likely to be used with. This is far from an exhaustive list, however, and players are encouraged to devise their own, with the Gamemaster having a veto over any that are too broad or don't fit the game.

- **Fight:** Brawling, Swords, Firearms, Martial Arts, Explosives, Archery
- **Know:** History, Science, Geography, Engineering, Linguistics
- **Move:** Acrobatics, Climbing, Swimming, Stealth, Ride
- **Operate:** Aircraft, Computers, Electronics, Explosives, Ground Vehicles, Watercraft
- **Survive:** Concentration, Resilience, Medicine, Counsel, Streetwise, Wilderness, Tracking, Society, Repair
- **Talk:** Persuade, Deceive, Intimidate, Negotiate, Etiquette, Innuendo

Talents

A character is more than the sum of its parts, and a characters Attributes, Skills, and Focuses alone do not give a full picture of what they are truly capable of. Player Characters are the protagonists of their own stories, and it is Talents that help set these individuals apart from the rest. These characters have a way of interacting with the world that lets them overcome impossible odds and triumph when others may falter. These tricks and knacks are Talents.

Talents are additional benefits that a character possesses, that define areas of speciality, the advantages of their personal approach to circumstances, and other decisive and definitive abilities. These normally take the form of a bonus – extra d20s, re-rolls, bonus Momentum, the ability to use a different Skill in a

situation, and so forth – that applies when the character is performing certain activities or taking a specific approach to a situation.

Many Talents have one or more specific Requirements. These are conditions that must be fulfilled before the Talent can be selected, such as having a Skill at a specific rating or above.

Beyond that, each Talent has a condition and a benefit. The condition is the circumstance under which the Talent can be used, and the benefit is what the character gains from meeting that condition.

Constructing a Talent

As already noted, each Talent has a condition, and a benefit. These can be broken down into several common tendencies, though these are not hard-and-fast rules, but rather rough guidelines.

Conditions are the circumstances in which the Talent's effect applies. This might be mechanical in nature – using a specific game option, such as buying dice, using a certain Attribute or Skill, etc. – or they may be more narrative in nature, such as performing an activity that relates to a specific field, or during a specific kind of situation. Common mechanical conditions are listed below; narrative conditions are harder to summarise so succinctly, but largely follow the same pattern as below, replacing "specific Attribute or Skill" with some fiction-driven state.

- The character buys one or more bonus d20s with Momentum, on a Skill Test using a specific Attribute or a specific Skill.
- The character buys one or more bonus d20s by adding to Threat, on a Skill Test using a specific Attribute or a specific Skill.
- The character assists another character on a Skill Test using a specific Attribute or Skill.
- The character receives assistance on a Skill Test using a specific Attribute or Skill.
- One of the character's nearby allies attempts a Skill Test using a specific Attribute or Skill.
- The character attempts a very specific type of Skill Test (such as one using a specific Attribute and Skill).
- When the character succeeds on a Skill Test using a specific Attribute or Skill.
- When the character uses Momentum for a specific purpose.

Benefits are what the character gains when meeting the listed condition. Some benefits are greater than others, however, and should be used sparingly and with care, by narrowing the conditions (so that the more powerful benefit can be used less-frequently, such as changing the condition from "specific Attribute or Skill" to "specific Attribute **and** Skill"), or by adding some caveat or negative consequence (so that using the benefit is a choice rather than a default effect). Common benefits are below:

- The character may re-roll a single d20. *As a more powerful effect, re-roll the entire dice pool; this should come with some greater limitation*.
- You gain a unique Momentum Spend, normally costing 1 or 2 Momentum.
- You gain a unique option for spending Determination/Fortune.
- You reduce the Difficulty of the Skill Test by 1.
- You ignore any increases to Difficulty of a specific type (unfamiliarity, lack of tools, darkness, etc.).
- You may reduce the cost of buying the first d20 on the Skill Test to 0. *This is a powerful effect, and should be accompanied by some limitation*.

- You gain a single point of Bonus Momentum, which must be used in a specific way. Note that Bonus Momentum cannot be saved – if it is not spent, it will be lost.
- You reduce the cost of a specific use of Momentum by 1, or removes the cost entirely.
- You may use a different Attribute or Skill than would normally be called for.
- You may ignore the first Mishap suffered on the Skill Test.

If a more powerful effect is used, the following are common caveats or consequences that can be used to provide balance.

- The benefit comes at the cost of increasing the Mishap range by 2.
- The effects of a successful Skill Test are only temporary, lasting until the end of the scene (if the effect would normally be permanent) or for a single round (if the effect would last.
- The Talent can only be used once per scene.
- The character must add 2 to Threat to use the Talent.
- The character must accept a Complication after the Talent's effects are resolved.
- A use of Momentum the Talent grants can only be paid for by adding to Threat instead of spending Momentum.
- Using the Talent consumes some finite resource (other than Momentum, Threat, or Fortune).

Instead of these, some Talents may provide a flat benefit to some derived ability, such as an increased amount of maximum Stress, or extra damage dice or a damage effect on a particular type of attack.

Example Talents
Constructed using the method listed in the previous section, the following Talents are common to many versions of the **2d20 System**. Individual Talents cannot be selected more than once.

- **Advisor:** When you select this Talent, select a single Skill. Whenever you assist an ally and you use that Skill, the ally you assist may re-roll a single d20 in their dice pool.
- **Bold:** When you select this Talent, choose a single Skill. When the character attempts a Skill Test using the chosen Skill, and they buy one or more d20s by adding to Threat, they may re-roll a single d20 in their dice pool. You may select this Talent multiple times, once for each Skill, but you may not select any Skill which has already been selected for the Cautious Talent.
- **Cautious:** When you select this Talent, choose a single Skill. When the character attempts a Skill Test using the chosen Skill, and they buy one or more d20s by spending Momentum, they may re-roll a single d20 in their dice pool. You may select this Talent multiple times, once for each Skill, but you may not select any Skill which has already been selected for the Bold Talent.
- **Collaboration:** When you select this Talent, select a single Skill. Whenever an ally attempts a Skill Test using that Skill, you may spend one Momentum, to allow them to use your score for that Skill, and one of your Focuses (if applicable).
- **Constantly Watching:** Whenever you attempt a Skill Test to detect danger or hidden enemies, reduce the Difficulty by 1.
- **Dauntless:** Whenever you attempt a Skill Test to resist being intimidated or threatened, you may add a bonus d20 to your dice pool.
- **Mean Right Hook:** The character's unarmed attacks gain the *Vicious 1* damage effect.
- **Studious:** Whenever you spend one or more Momentum to *Obtain Information*, you gain one bonus Momentum, which may only be spent on *Obtain Information*.

- **Tough:** The character's maximum Stress is increased by 3.
- **Rapid-Fire:** When the character makes a ranged attack, they may count the weapon's Burst quality as 1 higher than normal.

Personal Traits

Characters may have a few Traits that define persistent or permanent elements of their existence. Traits are essentially descriptions of the important parts of the character, in a single word or short phrase. Alongside a character's Values – which cover the character's personality, motivations, and beliefs – Traits help define what the character is and what they can do, and they can be employed in the same way as Traits for a location or situation, such as to increase or reduce the Difficulty of a Skill Test.

In some games, this may be a character's species, or it may be a character's nationality or heritage, or some other description of their origin, encapsulating all manner of differences big and small. These are both positive and negative, and influence how the character interacts with their environment and how characters interact with one another.

A character may obtain Traits because of things that happen to them during character creation – life-changing events that will define them going forwards – and they may occasionally gain more during play. This may be something about the character, such as a debility or impairment the character suffers from, or the influence of some external force, such as the impact of a harrowing experience.

Traits are neutral and can be applied both positively and negatively. There is no fixed number of Traits a character will have, though in most games a character will have at least one, reflecting heritage or origin. Traits, and their effects upon play, are described in full in **Chapter 1: Core Rules**.

Values

Values are not used in all games but may be used if the game is using Determination, as they are a means by which characters spend and use Determination.

When a character is created, the character's Player creates statements that describe the attitudes, beliefs, and convictions of that character. These are not simple opinions, but the fundamental structure of the character's morals, ethics, and behaviour. They are the things that define who a character is as a person, why they behave the way they do, and what drives them during times of struggle and hardship.

One type of Value is a relationship. Where most Values reflect something internal about the character, a relationship reflects a bond between two characters, or a character and an organization, specifically how the character regards the other party described by the Value. This bond doesn't have to be positive — old grudges and resentments can have a definitive effect upon a character's Value — but it must be something significant, and something that shapes who the character is and how they act.

However, a character's Values are not static. They are potent driving forces for the character; people evolve and grow with their experiences, and in many cases, things that once felt like unshakeable beliefs may come to be seen differently as time passes. There will be opportunities during play to alter a character's Values, and Values are an important part of how characters grow and develop over time.

Values differ from Traits (above) in that they describe what the character believes. They are statements about how the character regards the universe around them, and they are both subjective and potentially

changeable. How Values are used in play is described in the section on **Determination** in **Chapter 1: Core Rules**.

Creating a Character

Character Creation and Advancement

The following method can be used to create player characters for a **2d20 System** game.

Assembly

This method allows a player to create precisely the character they want, and it is relatively straightforward. With this method, the player picks the component pieces of the character, within some constraints – and play can begin soon after.

However, there is little structure to this approach, meaning that a player should have a solid idea of the concept they want to create before they start, as the method provides little in the way of guidance.

Fortune

A character begins this process with five Fortune. During character creation, the character may spend Fortune to gain extra points or options in each of the steps below. If a character has any Fortune remaining at the end of character creation, that is the number of Fortune points that they will have at the beginning of each adventure.

Step 1: Define Truths

The player chooses two Truths. These should be a word or short phrase that sums up what the character is about – who they are, and what they do. The simplest way to approach this is to use the character's profession, their place in society, a major relationship they have to a person or organisation. The character's Truth is the character's most definitive, most essential nature, boiled down to its most straightforward form.

A character's second Truth should reflect a quirk, flaws, personal struggle, impulse, habit, drive, personality trait, backstory, personal agenda, or something similar. This Truth should always reflect something that could cause problems in the character's life, as they can be invoked to grant the player Fortune, in exchange for suffering some related Truth.

After defining two Truths, the player may spend one Fortune to select one additional Truth.

Step 2: Select the Character's attributes

The player should assign the character's attributes. There are two methods that can be used here, but regardless of which method is used, only one attribute may be increased to 11 or above during character creation.

- Assign the following values, in any order, to the character's attributes: 11, 10, 10, 9, 9, 8.
- Start each attribute at 6, and then divide 15 points between the six attributes.

After assigning attributes, the player may spend one Fortune to increase two attributes by +1 each.

Step 3: Select the Character's skills

Next, the player assigns values to the character's skills. There are, once again, two methods that can be used here. Regardless of the method used, only one skill may be increased to 4 or above during character creation

- Assign the following values, in any order, to the character's skills: 4, 3, 3, 2, 2, 1.
- Start each skill at 0, and then divide 15 points between the six skills.

After assigning skills, the player may spend one Fortune to increase two skills by +1 each.

Step 4: Select the Character's Focuses

The player then selects four focuses. These can be chosen freely.

After selecting focuses, the player may spend one Fortune to select two additional focuses.

Step 5: Select Talents

The player selects three talents. These can be chosen freely, though some talents may have their own restrictions or prerequisites.

After selecting talents, the player may spend one Fortune to select one additional talent.

Step 6: Determine Wealth and Equipment

The character begins character creation with a total of 10 requisition points to obtain their starting equipment, and they may select any items which have a restriction rating of 3 or lower.

The player may spend one Fortune to increase the character's starting requisition points by 2.

Alternatively, the player may regain one Fortune by reducing the character's requisition points by 2.

Step 7: Derived Values

The character has maximum Stress equal to the highest of their Brawn or Will, plus their Survive skill.

The character adds bonus damage to their attacks based on their skills: a character adds [CD] equal to their Fight score to all weapon attacks, and [CD] equal to their Talk score to any mental attacks.

Play!

The character is ready to play!

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Creation in Play

This option allows a character to be partially-created before the first session, while leaving many of the specifics undefined until after the game begins.

Go through steps 1 and 2 as normal, but during step 3, use the fixed array method, placing only the two highest values.

The remaining four skill values, as well as the character's focuses, talents, and Feature, as well as the character's Wealth and equipment can be assigned during play – at a moment where a character element is required, the player may make a choice about it immediately.

These choices should all be made during the first session of play. If any choices remain unmade by the end of the first session, the player should decide upon them between sessions.

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Character Advancement and Rewards

One of the enjoyable aspects of a roleplaying game is watching the development and growth of a player character over the course of their adventures. Players in *2d20 System* games have several options available to them to develop and customise their characters after character creation.

Gaining Experience

During each adventure, players will have numerous opportunities to gain **experience points**, or **XP** for their characters. Some of these will come from circumstances that occur naturally during play, while others will come from milestones in the adventures themselves, awarded by the GM.

Adversity: Characters typically gain XP from facing difficult situations, from making mistakes, and from suffering the consequences of their actions. A character gains XP from each of the following situations:

- **Pain:** A character gains one XP each time they suffer one or more Harms.
- **Failure:** A character gains one XP each time they fail a skill test with a Difficulty of 3 or higher.
- **Mistake:** A character gains one XP when they invoke a Truth to gain Fortune.
- **Opposition:** Each character gains one XP each time the GM spends three or more Threat in one go.

Achievement: Characters can also gain XP from achieving goals and accomplishing significant feats. Periodically, the GM should award 1 XP to each player (individually, or all at once) after the completion of a key scene or the end of some important event. In total, each player should receive 2-4 XP from these achievements.

Declaration: A player may, once per adventure, make a declaration about a situation; only one player may make a declaration per session. This declaration must make the situation more difficult, more complicated, or otherwise make things harder for the player characters, such as a player declaring that a specific NPC is an old nemesis of their character, or that their character isn't welcome in a specific location because of some past event. If the GM approves the declaration, then the GM immediately gains 3 Threat. If the situation is resolved in the player characters' favour, however, then each player receives one additional XP, in addition to any others gained during that scene.

Spending Experience

Between adventures, a player may spend the XP their character has gained to gain **advancements**. Each advancement is an increase to a single attribute or skill, a new focus or talent, or some other reward for the character. A player may only buy a single advancement after each adventure. Each Advancement costs 10 XP.

- **Attributes:** The character improves one of their attributes by +1. No attribute may be increased to more than 12.
- **Skills:** The character improves one of their skills by +1. No skill may be increased to above 5.
- **Focus:** The character gains one additional focus.
- **Talent:** The character gains one additional talent.

There are other ways for a player to change their character beyond advancements, but they are more limited or come with some other cost.

Retraining: A character may choose to retrain some element of themselves between adventures. The character may retrain one of the following areas between adventures, and a character may not retrain *and* buy an advancement for the same area at the same time (so, a player could not advance an attribute *and* retrain their attributes at the same time).

- **Attributes:** Reduce one of the character's attributes by 1, and then increase a different attribute by 1.
- **Skills:** Reduce one of the character's skills by 1, and then increase a different skill by 1.
- **Focuses:** The character loses one of their existing focuses, and then gains a new focus in its place.
- **Talent:** The character loses one of their existing talents, and then gains a new talent in its place.

Adjusting Truths: As more persistent elements of a character, Truths cannot be easily altered, gained, or lost. However, this does not mean that they are permanent, and significant situations can cause them to change. In either case, this requires working with the GM to find an outcome that's interesting and will continue to matter in play.

A character's Truths can be changed in situations where the situation within an adventure dictates they should change. For example, if a character's Truth is reflective of their job, then losing that job can cause that Truth to change, as could gaining a promotion or gaining a different job, or it could cause the Truth to be lost (this cannot reduce the character to 0 Truths). At the GM's discretion, a sufficiently significant event in an adventure can allow a character to spend 10 XP on gaining an additional Truth to reflect that event's impact upon the character; this counts as an advancement, though the GM may choose to reduce the cost at their discretion.

Character Variants

Alternate Attributes

Depending on the themes and style of the game, there may be a different number and/or assortment of Attributes used to define characters. This section deals with a few of the possibilities for varying the number and assortment of Attributes.

Fewer Attributes

Some versions of the *2D20 System* may use a smaller number of Attributes for characters. These might fall into a few different patterns. Fewer attributes reduces the variations and diversity between characters, but can make for simpler characters and faster play overall.

Three Attributes: Three is the fewest Attributes that a version of the *2D20 System* should use. These three Attributes are likely to be broad categories, such as **Body** (covering physical activities), **Mind** (covering mental or intellectual activities), and **Presence** (covering social interactions) though **Presence** may be switched out for **Spirit** (covering mystical or supernatural activities) in settings with such elements.

Four Attributes: Four Attributes allows for a more reasonable range of variation than three does, often to provide a split between physical and mental actions. A common selection of Attributes for this might be **Agility** (physical activities relying on speed and coordination), **Might** (physical activities relying on

brute strength or resilience), **Insight** (mental activities relying on instinct, experience, wisdom, and perception), **Wits** (mental activities relying on intellect and quickness of thought).

More Attributes

Other versions of the 2D20 System may use a larger number of Attributes for characters. This can increase the complexity of characters and may result in some Attributes being used less frequently than others. However, it can also increase the variety and diversity between characters.

Eight Attributes: Eight is the largest number of Attributes that a character should have and allows a reasonable split between physical and mental Attributes, with four Attributes for each. **Agility**, **Coordination**, **Strength**, and **Endurance**, cover physical activities (the same as the normal Attributes listed above, with Brawn split into Strength and Physique, for active and reactive uses, respectively), while **Insight**, **Reason**, **Will**, and **Personality** for mental activities (with Personality taking the social interaction elements from the other three Attributes).

Seven Attributes: The above list can be reduced by either removing **Personality**, or by collapsing **Strength** and **Physique** into **Brawn**.

Different Attributes

There are a few other variations of Attributes that can be used in *2D20 System* games. A different selection of Attributes may be helpful for conveying specific themes or a specific genre.

Example 1: The following selection of Attributes are intended to emphasise highly intelligent, highly competent individuals, with a specific focus on the methods a character uses to make decisions and solve problems. In turn, this also de-emphasises the physical aspects of action.

- **Control** deals with clarity, precision, self-discipline, and coordination.
- **Daring** deals with quickly responding to peril or danger, taking bold risks, and acting without planning.
- **Fitness** deals with physical conditioning, health, resilience, and the use of brute force.
- **Insight** deals with instinct, experience, and emotional intelligence.
- **Presence** deals with a character's force of personality, drive, and ability to command attention.
- **Reason** deals with logic, analysis, and careful planning.

Example 2: The following selection of Attributes deal with frenetic physical action, derring-do, and pulp heroism. It deemphasises the more static, reactive, or cerebral aspects of actions, merging them into different approaches towards action.

- **Cunning** covers a character's ability to spot weaknesses and exploit flaws in opponents and situations.
- **Daring** covers a character's ability to function when in peril or when movement is important.
- **Empathy** covers a character's ability to understand and heal others.
- **Might** covers a character's ability to apply force to the world around them.
- **Passion** covers a character's attempts to lead, love, or entertain.
- **Reason** covers a character's actions that relate to the mind and senses.

No Skills Variant

This variant adjusts how characters create their Target Number for Skill Tests and is often better suited for games and genres where a character's proficiency matters less than their willingness to leap into the fray and their will to succeed. It also works particularly well with sets of attributes that emphasise specific approaches to problem-solving, such as those example variants above.

This will either use a single attribute, or a pair of attributes.

In the **single attribute** variant, each Attribute is rated from 6 to 16, rather than from 7 to 12 as normal. In addition, characters do not have Skills. Instead, the attribute score serves as the Target Number.

If the character has an applicable Focus, then each Focus will have a specific score of their own, and the character will score two successes for each die that rolls equal to or less than that Focus' score.

In the **paired attribute** variant, each Attribute is rated from 4 to 8, rather than from 7 to 12 as normal. In addition, characters do not have Skills. Rather, when attempting a Skill Test, the player or Gamemaster selects two Attributes, and adds their scores together to create the Target Number.

If the character has an applicable Focus, then they will score two successes for each die that rolls equal to or less than the lower of the two Attributes. Note that this results in a larger Focus range than normal, which will slightly increase a character's chances of scoring multiple successes.

For example, if a character is attempting a Skill Test using their **Cunning 7** and **Might 6** Attributes, they would have a Target Number of 13, and if they had an applicable Focus, it would score two successes for each die that rolled 6 or less.

Alternative Skills

The short list provided above is far from the only way to handle Skills. Some ***2D20 System*** games may require a different approach to a character's Skills, often to emphasise specific themes or aspects of play, or to increase variation between characters and allow for more specialisation.

One of the simplest ways to change the style of the Skill list is simply to rename the existing Skills. The default list uses five verbs to cover the kinds of activities that a character will be doing during a game. However, this might not be sufficiently evocative for some games, requiring that some or all of them have their names changed to better evoke the intended themes.

Expanded Skill Lists

Depending on the intended themes and genre of a game, the players and Gamemaster may wish to expand the list of Skills characters can be trained in. This will have a few effects.

Firstly, a larger Skill list allows characters to specialise more in specific areas: when creating the character, they can more easily emphasise some Skills more than others, due to having a greater number of Skills to choose from. However, conversely, this can result in characters feeling less broadly competent, as the larger number of Skills means there may be more areas where a character is less capable.

Secondly, a larger Skill list can allow for greater mechanical variation between characters – if there are separate Skills for different types of combat (melee or ranged), or even different forms of weapon (rifle or pistol, sword or axe), a character can choose to emphasise specific forms of combat rather than being

skilled in combat overall. However, this larger list can be trickier and fiddlier to track, particularly in conjunction with numerous different Attributes. Beyond a certain point, it may be wise to combine a larger Skill list with the Paired Attributes and Skills variant, below, to reduce the number of calculations a player must do on a regular basis.

Additionally, a larger list of narrower skills may clash with the way Focuses are handled by default; Focuses should normally be somewhat narrower than Skills are, and this doesn't work particularly well when the Skills become narrower, as the Focuses either cover the same conceptual space as Skills, or they become too narrow to see regular use. As a result, a larger list of narrower skills often works well if combined with the **No Focuses** or **Expertise and Focus** variants discussed later.

There are two basic ways to expand the Skill list. The first is to simply add new skills to the existing list. This normally works with one, or maybe two additional Skills, particularly to cover an area that isn't already covered by the existing list, such as adding a Skill to cover mystical or supernatural abilities (though, in some cases, magic and the supernatural could be covered by the existing Skills, depending on how those abilities are integrated into the game).

The second is to take one or more of the existing Skills and break it into several narrower Skills. This is an extremely flexible method, especially for emphasising specific types of activity – a game that places an emphasis on soldiers and combat may break up the Fight and Survive Skills into several smaller Skills, for example.

Several examples of this, arranged by Skill, can be found in the table below. The table is split into several different columns, with each column showing how particular Skills can be broken down further. This isn't the only way to approach breaking down these Skills, and not all the examples below may be applicable to all games or genres. Further, not all Skills need to be broken down to the same level for all games: a game that emphasises investigation, with very little attention paid to combat may leave Fight intact as a single skill, while expanding the Know and Talk skills out to cover lots of different areas of expertise.

Basic Skill	1st Breakdown	2nd Breakdown
Fight	Melee	Unarmed Combat Simple Melee Weapons Martial Melee Weapons
	Ranged	Archery Thrown Weapons Pistols Rifles Heavy Weaponry
Move	Athletics	Climbing Running Swimming
	Acrobatics	Balance Contortion Jumping
	Stealth	Hiding Moving Silently

	Pilot	Aircraft Ground Vehicles Watercraft
Know	History	Ancient History Recent History Military History Forgotten Histories
	Science	Biology Chemistry Physics Mathematics
	Technology	Electronic Engineering Mechanical Engineering Structural Engineering Computers
Talk	Coerce	Extort Inspire Threaten
	Deceive	Impersonate Misdirect
	Negotiate	Commerce Compromise Haggle
	Society	Etiquette Politics
Survive	Discipline	Concentration Mental Strength
	Wilderness	Flora & Fauna Tracking
	Resilience	Toughness Afflictions
	Healing	Medicine Counsel

Regardless of how they are added, each new Skill requires a description, noting what sorts of activities the Skill covers and what it might do in combination with each Attribute.

Character Roles

One alternative approach to Skills is to shift what they represent. Instead of specifically covering the things that a character is proficient in and knowledgeable about, they deal more with the character's place in a group dynamic and how well they fulfil one of a small number of roles important to the kinds of activities that the Player Characters will be undertaking. Games that use Character Roles should typically have three to six such roles.

For example, a classic fantasy "dungeon crawl" game may have four roles: **Warrior** (fighting, defending others, tactics), **Priest** (knowledge of religion, channelling divine energy, communing with gods), **Rogue** (sneaking, spying, scouting, and disabling obstacles and hazards), and **Mage** (casting spells, arcane lore,

understanding of supernatural beings), covering the common archetypes and activities that a character will perform during such an adventure.

Similarly, a game based upon a spy thriller may have roles of **Control** (strategic decisions, big-picture planning, coordinating individuals), **Tactical** (use of weapons, engaging in combat), **Infiltration** (stealth, finding and disabling security systems, entering and leaving secure places), **Espionage** (interpersonal techniques, manipulating and understanding people), and **Technical** (hacking, surveillance devices, electronic warfare).

Regardless of the selection of Roles selected, every character will have a rating in each one, even if that rating is only a 1. While a character will naturally have a Role that they excel in, and that's the role they'll expect to use much of the time, they may be forced by circumstances into situations where they must use a different Role, perhaps even their lowest rated one.

Roles may include a considerable amount of overlap: situations where a single activity could be accomplished with more than one Role. In these situations, the Role chosen may give the Gamemaster guidance as to *how* the activity was performed – using our spies Roles above, a Tactical solution may be very different to an Infiltration solution, even if they both accomplish the same end.

Mechanically, though, Roles function essentially the same as Skills do – each Role is rated from 1 to 5 and combined with a single Attribute to create a Target Number. If a character has an applicable Focus – useful for showing specialisations within Roles – then they will score extra successes for each die that scores equal to or less than the Role's rating.

Paired Attributes and Skills
In some cases, especially where there are many different Skills (12 or more), it may become fiddly to have so many different combinations of Attribute and Skill, and a need to either remember, or calculate, so many different Target Numbers for different circumstances. This variant provides an alternative approach that, while slightly more restrictive, should speed up play and make the game easier to learn in these situations.

Rather than being able to freely select an Attribute and Skill for a Skill Test, each Skill is associated with a single Attribute, and all Skill Tests using that Skill will use that Attribute as well. The Gamemaster should decide when they choose to use this variant, which Skills are paired with which Attributes, and this will not change during the game under any circumstances.

Using this variant, the Gamemaster will call for Skill Tests by referring only to the Skill being used – as each Skill is only used with a single Attribute, the Attribute does not need to be mentioned.

Alternative Focuses
Focuses normally serve to allow a character a greater chance of multiple successes on a Test covering a subject or activity they have specialised in. The following variations allow this to be handled in different ways, or to account for changes in the rules for Attributes or Skills.

No Focuses
The most straightforward variant, this also reduces character variation. It works particularly well with the No Skills variant discussed earlier in this chapter, or other games where specialisation isn't considered meaningful enough for the rules to account for.

With this variant, characters do not have any Focuses. Whenever a Skill Test is attempted, do not check to see if a character has a relevant Focus; instead, any die that rolls equal to or less than the character's Skill (or other Focus range, if Skills are not being used) scores a Critical Success. In short, characters are *always* assumed to have an applicable Focus.

Focus Ratings

This variant allows for slightly increased variation between characters and allows a character to demonstrate different degrees of specialisation. However, it does add an extra number to keep track of, which may add extra complexity.

Each of a character's Focuses is accompanied by a rating from 2-5 (everyone scores a Critical Success on a 1, so a Focus rating of 1 would be irrelevant). This rating is used to determine the Focus range for all Skill Tests for which the Focus is relevant, instead of using the character's Skill. So, for a character taking a **Reason + Know** Test, using a Science Focus of 3, the character would score two successes for each die that rolled 3 or less, as 3 is the character's Focus rating.

Expertise and Focus

This variant is best used in situations where there are many different Skills, as discussed earlier.

Using this variant, each Skill has two ratings, an Expertise, and a Focus; these ratings are 0-5 as normal, and may often be denoted as X/X, with the Expertise before the slash, and the Focus after. Characters do not have a separate list of Focuses: Focus is instead a separate factor of Skill.

Whenever a character attempts a Skill Test, any die that rolls equal to or less than that Skill's Focus rating scores two successes instead of one. With this variant, if the Skill has a Focus rating of 0, then it cannot score two successes on any result, as it is impossible to roll 0 or less. Thus, this changes the rule that a character without an applicable Focus will score two successes on a roll of a 1: that rule no longer applies if this variant is used.

Other Arrays

Depending on the style, tone, and genre of the game you're creating, or the setting you're using, the typical combination of attributes and skills might not be the best fit. The following concepts can be used in place of one or other of attributes and skills, depending on the needs of the game.

It is valuable to think of these ideas as 'questions':

- **Attributes** and **Skills** can be thought of as asking "what" the character is doing
- **Character Roles**, discussed above, ask "who" the character is
- **Drives** ask "why" a character is attempting a task
- **Approaches** ask "how" a character is attempting an action

Drives

In this variant, characters have a short list of Drives—personal beliefs, motivations, or deeply-held values—which replace either attributes or skills. These have the same range of ratings, with a higher rating represent a more strongly held belief: if Drives are rated 4-8, then a character with a 4 may barely care about that subject, while a character with 8 in the same Drive might regard it as the most important thing.

Choosing Drives can have a *massive* impact upon a game, and they should be chosen very carefully. They will represent the central themes and impactful conflicts of the game, with every test now including the question of "*why are you doing this?*" alongside more practical matters. Keeping this list small is useful, to maintain this emphasis: 4-6 different Drives should normally be sufficient to encapsulate the themes you want in your game.

These drives should naturally be things which can conflict with one another, though you should avoid having drives which are simple opposites: a character who feels strongly about *Individuality* probably also feels strongly (but in the opposite way) about *Community*, . Rather conflicts should arise when drives pull a character in different directions: having to choose between *Truth* and *Peace*, or between *Order* and *Justice* can make for compelling struggles for a character to face.

Another consideration is whether you want characters to only have **positive drives** or only to consider **important drives**.

If you opt for **positive drives**, then a high rating in a drive *also* means that the character believes in the subject of that drive: a high rating in Truth makes an honest character, a high rating in Duty makes someone dutiful, and so forth. This makes for simple drives, and easy roleplaying prompts, but characters may end up somewhat stereotypical.

On the other hand, **important drives** can add depth at the cost of greater complexity. A character with a high rating in a drive has *strong feelings* about that subject, but those feelings are not necessarily positive ones. A high rating in Truth might indicate someone who is honest, or someone who revels in deceit and making their own truth, while a high Duty might represent someone dutiful or someone who regards duty as indistinguishable from servitude. Making distinctions between these different kinds of beliefs means that this variant pairs very well with the **Drive Statements** variant, which lets the player define specific statements to give context to their drive scores, and have those statements impact the mechanics of the character. Drive statements work similarly to **Values** (above) but are tied specifically to a single Drive.

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Drive Statements

If you're using Drive Statements in your game, there is an additional step to the process for attempting a skill test: choosing a Drive.

This reflects your character's motivation and drive behind the action—why you're doing what they're doing. Some of your values come with a statement. These describe the most important aspects of what your character believes, providing both advantages and limitations. To select which Drive to use, the player should look at their Drive statements and pick the one most appropriate to the situation. This will not necessarily be the most advantageous as values can often be a disadvantage in some circumstances. The Drive linked to that statement is the one you must use for the test. If multiple statements are appropriate, the player may choose which of those Drives to use. If none of the statements apply the player should choose one of their values that does not have a statement to use in the test.

When you wish to use a value, you *must* check to see if the statement agrees with the action.

- If the value statement agrees with the action, then you can use that value on this skill test. In addition, you are allowed to spend a point of **Determination** (described in **Chapter 1: Core Rules**) on that skill test if you wish. You cannot spend Determination if the value you're using has no statement.
- If the value statement clashes with the action—the value doesn't support the action, or the action goes against the value—then the Gamemaster may offer you a point of Determination and ask you to make a choice about the value: either comply with the value or challenge it. If you comply, you suffer an immediate complication on the action you're attempting (see **Complications**, later), which could include being unable to carry out the action. If you challenge the value, you can use it in the skill test, but the statement is crossed out immediately after the skill test is resolved, and you can't use that value until you've recovered it—you now doubt how you feel about that value and can no longer rely on it. If you don't want either of those options, you may refuse the point of Determination and choose a different value instead.

If the value you're using has no statement, then you may choose to use it, without restriction.

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Possible Drive Sets

As noted in the main text, a group of Drives should collectively enshrine the themes you want to be central to your game, and on the types of motivations you want to encourage during play. This means that the individual Drives are important, but so too are how they relate to one another as a group of concepts.

A game of grand politics and intrigue may be defined by **Duty**, **Faith**, **Power**, **Justice**, and **Truth**, for example, where these differing motivations—and attitudes towards each motivation—create a natural tension between player characters, but also within each individual player character, as they are forced to assess which of these things they prioritise when two of them conflict.

The tone of each Drive can be valuable for shaping the tone of the game too. A game of virtuous knights may have the seven virtues of Christian tradition—**Chastity**, **Temperance**, **Charity**, **Diligence**, **Kindness**, **Patience**, and **Humility**—reinforcing the themes of the game by encouraging players to act in ways that reflect those themes. By contrast, a game of supernatural monsters constantly tempted by darker urges might base its themes upon the seven deadly sins—**Lust**, **Gluttony**, **Greed**, **Sloth**, **Envy**, **Wrath**, and **Pride**—and create tension because the game's mechanics encourage players to yield to their characters' worst nature.

Indeed, this kind of 'negative' drive set, where all the drives are bad things, can make for an interesting dynamic, especially if there's a cost for using the highest-rated drives: perhaps the loss of some scarce resource the character possesses, or adding to Threat.

Approaches

In this variant, a character has a short list of approaches, which can be thought of as the method or manner of performing an activity. This typically is paired with a character's skills, turning a skill test into a question of "what are you doing, and how?".

This variant works well in lighter, more freeform games with less in the way of strict action rules, as it lends itself well to evocative description by both the players and the GM, and more detailed rules for action scenes can interfere with this.

A common set of approaches recommended are below, but there's no reason you need to stick with these for your own game or use those specific terms. However, using adverbs for these, and then verbs for each of the skills in your game, allows you to describe a skill test in natural-sounding language (such as "move carefully" or "fight boldly"), which can make the game feel more approachable to inexperienced players.

- **Boldly** describes actions taken with daring and decisiveness, which are often flashy and noticeable and intended to draw attention.
- **Carefully** describes actions taken with caution and patience, trying to avoid setbacks or problems, but at the cost of things sometimes taking longer.
- **Cleverly** describes actions where cunning, logic, knowledge, and quick-wits are vital, such as out-thinking a foe, or solving a puzzle.
- **Forcefully** describes direct, straightforward, often brutal action, even if that makes for a messy outcome.
- **Quietly** describes sneaky, subtle action, trying to avoid drawing notice, even if it takes longer or has a limited effect.
- **Swiftly** describes hasty, rapid action, especially when you need to achieve your goals quickly, even if the outcome is noisy.

From a GMing perspective, approaches also provide context for setting a difficulty, as well as deciding *how* an action is likely to succeed or fail, or the kinds of complications likely to crop up: someone trying to disable a machine *carefully* is likely to fail through being overly cautious, or taking too long, but they'll probably succeed with the machine intact and functional, while someone trying to disable it forcefully is likely to break the device, and may fail by making too much noise or causing collateral damage.

A useful alternate set of Approaches can be to borrow the Four Temperaments from ancient medicine; these ideas are a common shorthand for character types in storytelling, with groups of four or more heroes often each defined by leaning towards a specific temperament. These deal a little more with the mood and outlook of a character and lack the "natural language" advantage of adverb approaches, but they're a simple way to define a character both mechanically and in roleplaying terms all at once. Think of the ensemble or main supporting cast of a favourite TV show or series of books, and you'll be surprised how many fit into these patterns.

- A **choleric** character, likened to the element of fire, is likely to be ambitious and passionate, but also hot-headed and impatient.

- A **melancholic** character, likened to the element of earth, are thoughtful and organised, but tend to be moody perfectionists.
- A **phlegmatic** character, likened to the element of water, is likely to be relaxed, perceptive, and kind, but often stubborn or reluctant to act.
- A **sanguine** character, likened to the element of air, is often sociable and optimistic, a beacon of easy charisma, but they're impulsive, and easily bored.