

How to Make a Skill Check

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Skill checks are a fundamental part of the game, used to determine the success or failure of a character's actions. Whether your character is trying to climb a wall, decipher an ancient text, or persuade a stubborn NPC, skill checks provide the mechanics that resolve these challenges. Here's a general overview of how to make a skill check:

1. Understand the Skill Check Basics

- **Roll a d20:** At the core of every skill check is a roll of a 20-sided die (d20).
- **Add Modifiers:** To your d20 roll, you add any relevant modifiers. These typically include:
 - **Ability Score Modifier:** Each skill is tied to one of your character's ability scores (e.g., Strength, Dexterity, Wisdom). The modifier for that ability score is added to the roll. If they have ability focus in the skill, then add that too.
 - **Skill Bonus:** If your character is proficient in the skill being used, they add their skill bonus, which might increase with level or due to special training.
 - **Situational Modifiers:** Environmental conditions, equipment, magical effects, or class abilities can provide additional bonuses (or penalties) to your roll.
- **Calculate the Total:** The sum of your d20 roll and all applicable modifiers gives you your check result.

2. Compare to the Difficulty Check (DC)

- **Target Number (DC):** The Dungeon Master (DM) sets a target number known as the Difficulty Check (DC) that your check result needs to meet or exceed to succeed.
- **Success:** If your check result is equal to or greater than the DC, your character successfully accomplishes the task.
- **Failure:** If your check result is lower than the DC, your character fails to accomplish the task, and the consequences depend on the specific situation.

3. Special Rules to Consider

- **Natural 20 Rule:** Rolling a natural 20 (a 20 on the die before adding modifiers) automatically succeeds, regardless of the DC. This rule emphasizes the chance of heroic success in even the most challenging situations.
- **Teamwork Bonus:** When the whole party attempts an action collectively (e.g., searching a room), they can make a single skill check using the highest relevant ability modifier in the group. This check is made with advantage, meaning you roll 2d20 and take the higher result. This represents the combined effort and teamwork of the party.
- **Ability Focus:** Characters may have an Ability Focus in certain abilities (marked on the character sheet). When making a check involving an Ability Focus, the character adds a bonus equal to their level divided by 2 (rounded up). This bonus reflects the character's particular strength or expertise in that ability.

5. When to Make a Skill Check

- **Challenging Tasks:** A skill check is typically called for when a character is attempting something that has a chance of failure. Routine tasks that a character would reasonably succeed at without difficulty usually don't require a check.
- **Opposed Checks:** Sometimes, your skill check is opposed by another character or creature's check. In these cases, both sides roll, and the higher result wins.
- **Group Activities:** For tasks where the whole group is involved (like searching a room or tracking a trail), consider using the teamwork bonus instead of individual checks.

6. DM's Role in Skill Checks

- **Setting the DC:** The DM decides the difficulty of the task and sets an appropriate DC. This can be adjusted based on the environment, the character's approach, or other factors.
- **Narrating Outcomes:** The DM describes the outcome of the skill check, adding narrative flavor to the success or failure. For example, if a character fails to climb a wall, the DM might describe how they lose their grip and fall, possibly taking damage or making noise that alerts enemies.

4. Example of Making a Skill Check: Climbing

Situation: A character is trying to climb a steep rock face to reach a higher level in a dungeon.

If the character has a skill that would apply, like a Thief with the Climb skill, then:

Step-by-Step using a Skill:

1. **DM Sets the DC:** The DM determines that the DC for climbing the rock face is 15.
2. **Roll the d20:** The player rolls a d20 and gets a 12.
3. **Add Modifiers:**
 - The character is a Thief with a **Dexterity modifier of +3**.
 - They also have **Ability Focus** in Dexterity, giving them an additional +2.
 - The character is proficient in the **Climb skill**, which gives them a +5 bonus due to their training.
 - The character's **Ability Focus** in Dexterity provides an additional +1 bonus (assuming they are level 2).
4. **Calculate the Total:**
 - The character's total modifiers for the climb are +3 (Dexterity), Focus +2, + 5 (Climb skill) + 1 (Ability Focus) = +11.
 - The roll of 12 + 11= 23
5. **Compare to DC:** The total of 23 is higher than the DC of 15, so the character successfully climbs the rock face.

Note on the Climb Skill:

The **Climb** skill (with a starting bonus of Dexterity +5) is particularly advantageous for Thieves. These characters can use their dexterity and agility to scale walls, cliffs, and other obstacles that might be challenging for others. This skill allows them to bypass barriers, access hidden areas, and gain strategic positions in combat or exploration.

Handling Climbing Without Proficiency

If a character does not have proficiency in a specific skill, they must rely on their ability scores and creative problem-solving to attempt the task. Here's how to handle climbing and similar challenges when a character lacks the relevant skill proficiency:

1. **Review Ability Scores:** If a character does not have proficiency in the Climb skill, they will use their relevant ability score to attempt the climb. In the case of climbing, this typically involves Dexterity.
2. **Describe the Approach:**
 - **Creative Use of Abilities:** The player should describe how they would use their ability score to address the challenge. For climbing, this might involve:

- **Dexterity:** If the character lacks proficiency but has a high Dexterity score, they might use their agility and nimbleness to find handholds and footholds.
- **Strength:** If Dexterity is low, but the character has high Strength, they might use their physical strength to pull themselves up, focusing on sheer force rather than finesse.

3. Roll and Modifiers:

- **Roll a d20:** The player rolls a d20 and adds their relevant ability score modifier.
- **Situational Modifiers:** Apply any relevant situational modifiers, such as equipment or environmental factors.

4. Calculate the Total:

- **For Example:** If a character has a high Strength score but low Dexterity, they might roll a d20 and add their Strength modifier instead of Dexterity.
- **Example Calculation:**
 - Roll: 12
 - Dexterity Modifier (if using Dexterity): +2
 - **Total:** 12 (roll) + 2 (Dexterity) = 14 (if Dexterity is used)
 - **Alternative:** If using Strength instead:
 - Roll: 12
 - Strength Modifier: +4
 - **Total:** 12 (roll) + 4 (Strength) = 16

- 5. **Compare to DC:** Check if the total meets or exceeds the DC set by the DM. If it does, the character succeeds in the climb.

Using Teamwork:

Assisting Others: A Thief who successfully climbs the wall might assist other

players by dropping a rope or setting up gear. This action can grant the following climbers an advantage.

Teamwork Bonus: When the Thief drops a rope, other players can use the teamwork bonus to attempt their climb. This involves using the highest relevant ability bonus in the group and rolling with advantage (2d20, taking the higher result).

Example of Teamwork in Action:

1. Thief Climbing:

- The Thief rolls a d20 and adds their Dexterity bonus, Ability Focus on Dexterity +2, Climb Skill bonus +5 for a total of 23, successfully climbing the wall.
- The Thief then drops a rope to assist the others.

2. Other Characters Climbing:

- Characters without proficiency in Climb but with decent Dexterity or Strength use the rope for an easier climb.
- Each of these characters rolls with advantage due to the Thief's assistance:
 - Roll 1: 8
 - Roll 2: 14
 - **Advantage Total:** 14 + Dexterity/Strength modifier.

3. Outcome:

- The advantage helps increase the chance of success, making it easier for other characters to meet or exceed the DC.

Conclusion

Skill checks are a straightforward yet versatile mechanic that drives the action and outcomes in the game. By understanding how to roll, apply modifiers, and compare against the DC, players can confidently navigate challenges and contribute to the unfolding adventure. Whether they succeed or fail, each check adds to the story, creating memorable moments for everyone involved.