

GAME PLAY

A session of *True20* resembles one or more chapters from a novel. The Narrator and the players get together and tell a story by playing the game. The length of the game session can vary, from an hour or two to four hours or more. Some adventures are completed in a single session, while others take many sessions. You can choose when to stop playing, and you can start up again anytime later.

Just like a story, a *True20* adventure consists of a series of *scenes*. Some scenes are fairly straightforward, with the heroes interacting with each other and the supporting cast. In these cases the Narrator generally just asks the players to describe what their heroes are doing and in turn describes how the other characters react and what they say and do.

When the action starts happening, such as when the heroes are staving off a disaster or fighting villains, time becomes more crucial and is broken down into *rounds*, each six seconds long, and the players generally have to make die rolls to see how well their heroes do.

DIE ROLLS

There are a number of different die rolls in *True20*, although they all follow the core system of a d20 roll plus modifiers versus a Difficulty. The three main die rolls in *True20* are checks, attack rolls, and saving throws.

CHECKS

To make a check, roll a d20 and add your modifier for the appropriate trait (ability, skill, and so forth). You always want to roll high. Rolling 20 before adding modifiers (called a natural 20) is not an automatic success, and rolling 1 before adding modifiers (a natural 1) is not an automatic failure, unlike attack rolls, which differ from checks (see Attack Rolls later in this Introduction and Chapter 6 for more information).

Check = d20 + modifier versus Difficulty

DIFFICULTY

A check's Difficulty is a number set by the Narrator that you must equal or exceed with your check result to succeed. So, for a task with a Difficulty of 15, you must have a check result of 15 or better to succeed. In some cases, the consequences of a check vary based on how much higher or lower the result is than the Difficulty.

SAMPLE DIFFICULTIES

Difficulty	Example (Skill Used)
Very easy (0)	Notice something large in plain sight (Notice)
Easy (5)	Climb a knotted rope with a wall to brace against (Climb)
Average (10)	Hear an approaching guard (Notice)
Tough (15)	Rig a wagon wheel to fall off (Disable Device)
Challenging (20)	Swim in stormy water (Swim)
Formidable (25)	Pick an average quality lock (Disable Device)
Heroic (30)	Leap across a 25-foot chasm (Jump)
Superheroic (35)	Convince the guards that even though they've never seen you before, they should let you into the fortress (Bluff)
Nearly impossible (40)	Track an expert hunter through the woods on a moonless night after days of rainfall (Survival)

OPPOSED CHECKS

Some checks are opposed checks. They are made against the result of someone else's check. Whoever gets the higher result wins. An example is trying to bluff someone. You make a Bluff check, while the Narrator makes a Sense Motive check for your target. If you beat the target's Sense Motive check result, you succeed.

For ties on opposed checks, the character with the higher modifier wins. If the modifiers are the same, re-roll.

OPPOSED CHECK EXAMPLES

Task	Skill	Opposing Skill
Sneak up on someone	Stealth	Notice
Con someone	Bluff	Sense Motive
Hide from someone	Stealth	Notice
Win a horse race	Ride	Ride
Pretend to be someone else	Disguise	Notice
Steal a key chain	Sleight of Hand	Notice

TRYING AGAIN

In general, you can try a check again if you fail, and keep trying indefinitely. Some tasks, however, have consequences for failure. For example, failing a Climb check might mean you fall, which might make it difficult to try again. Some tasks can't be attempted again once a check has failed. For most tasks, once you've succeeded, additional successes are meaningless. (Once you've discovered a room's only secret door using the Search skill, for instance, there's no further benefit from additional Search checks.)



CIRCUMSTANCE MODIFIERS

Some circumstances make a check easier or harder, resulting in a bonus or penalty to the modifier for the check or a change to the check's Difficulty.

The Narrator can alter the odds of success in four ways:

- Grant a +2 bonus to represent circumstances improving performance.
- Grant a -2 penalty to represent circumstances hampering performance.
- Reduce the Difficulty by 2 to represent circumstances making the task easier.
- Increase the Difficulty by 2 to represent circumstances making the task harder.

Bonuses to your check modifier and reduction to the check's Difficulty have the same result: they create a better chance of success. But they represent different circumstances, and sometimes that difference is important.

TIME AND CHECKS

Performing a particular task may take a round, several rounds, or even no real time at all. Most checks are move actions, standard actions, or full-round actions. Some checks are instant and represent reactions to an event, or are included as part of another action. Other checks represent part of movement. The distance the character jumps when making a Jump check, for example, is part of the character's move action. Some checks take more than a round to use, and the rules specify how long these tasks require. See The Combat Round later in this chapter for more information.

TOOLS

Some tasks require tools. If tools are needed, the specific items are mentioned in the description of the task or skill. If you don't have the appropriate tools, you can still attempt the task but at a -4 penalty on your check.

A character may be able to put together impromptu tools to make the check. If the Narrator allows this, reduce the penalty to -2 (instead of -4). It usually takes some time (several minutes to an hour or more) to collect or create a set of impromptu tools, and it may require an additional check as well.

CHECKS WITHOUT ROLLS

A check represents performing a task under a certain amount of pressure, with uncertain results. When the situation is less demanding, you can perform with more reliable results. Applying these rules can speed up checks under routine circumstances, cutting down the number of die rolls players need to make during play.

WHEN TO ROLL DICE

True20 provides systems to handle most situations likely to come up during a game, but these systems are just guidelines. Ultimately, it's up to the Narrator to decide exactly what happens in any given situation. The Narrator also decides when various checks and other die rolls are necessary to resolve a situation.

Generally speaking, it's possible to handle a lot of challenges and routine issues in the game using the guidelines given in this section, particularly the rules for taking 1, 5, 10 and 20, and comparison checks. For example, if you know a hero can simply take 10 and succeed at a task under routine circumstances, there's no reason to bother rolling dice; just assume the hero succeeds and move on. This helps to maintain the narrative flow of the game and makes the times when you *do* start rolling dice more dramatic, since all the focus is on the action.

TAKING 1

If your total bonus on a check is equal to or greater than the Difficulty, you will succeed regardless of what you roll on the die. In this case, the Narrator might not require you to roll at all and just assume you succeed, since it's a trivial effort for someone of your capability. If the check has varying levels of success, you're assumed to achieve the minimum possible (as if you'd rolled a 1). You can choose to make a roll to achieve a greater level of success, or the Narrator may assume a greater level of success, depending on the circumstances.

TAKING 5

Rather than rolling a check, you can choose to take 5. Calculate your result as if you had rolled a 5 on the die. Taking 5 is sufficient to automatically succeed on an easy (Difficulty 5) task, assuming a base modifier of +0. For more difficult tasks, you need a greater bonus (from higher abilities or skill ranks) to take 5 and succeed. Otherwise, you need to use one of the following options, or roll the die and take your chances.

TAKING 10

When you are not in a rush and not threatened or distracted, you can choose to take 10. Instead of rolling for the check, calculate your result as if you had rolled a 10. For average (Difficulty 10) tasks, taking 10 allows you to succeed automatically, assuming a base modifier of +0. Unlike taking 1 or 5, you cannot take 10 if distracted or under pressure (such as in a combat or action situation). The Narrator decides when this is the case.

TAKING 20

When you have plenty of time, and when the task carries no penalty for failure, you can take 20. Instead of rolling the check, calculate your result as if you had rolled a 20. Taking 20 means you keep trying until you get it right. Taking 20 takes about twenty times as long as making a single check, or about 2 minutes for a task requiring a round or less. If there are potential consequences for failing the check, such as setting off an alarm or slipping and falling, you cannot take 20 on it.

COMPARISON CHECKS

In cases where a "check" is actually a simple test of one character's capabilities against another, with no luck involved, the one with the higher modifier or score wins. Just as you wouldn't make a "height check" to see who's taller, you don't need to make a Strength check to see who's stronger. The ability scores tell you that. When two characters arm wrestle, for example, the stronger character wins. In the case of identical bonuses or scores, just flip a coin to see who wins.

CHALLENGES

Challenges reflect a capable character's ability to perform some tasks with superior panache and efficiency. They allow heroes to achieve greater results by making already difficult checks harder.

To take a challenge, increase a check's Difficulty by 5 or suffer a -5 penalty to the check result. In return, you gain an extra benefit in



addition to the normal effects of a successful check. If you fail due to the penalty or increased Difficulty, however, you suffer the normal results of failure. Note that, if failing by more than a certain margin imposes a particular outcome, you suffer that outcome as normal if you fail to meet your newly increased Difficulty. For example, a character who misses a Disable Device check by 10 or more accidentally sets off the device. If the standard Difficulty is 20 and your challenge increases it to 25, then you accidentally set off the device with a skill check result of 15 or less, instead of the usual 10 or less.

You can accept more than one challenge to a check. In some cases, you can take a challenge more than once to gain its benefits multiple times. These are noted in the challenge descriptions.

Generally, challenges allow you to gain added benefits when you face a relatively low Difficulty and have a high modifier. You can also use challenges to attempt heroic actions, even when faced with a high Difficulty. In these cases, spending a Conviction point can help ensure success with all the added benefits of the successful challenge.

STANDARD CHALLENGES

The challenges in this section apply to any ability or skill check. The Narrator has final say as to whether a challenge applies to a specific situation. Each challenge imposes either a +5 modifier to a check's Difficulty or a -5 penalty to the check result.

FAST TASK

You reduce the time needed to complete the check. If the check is normally a full-round action, it becomes a standard action. A standard action becomes a move action, while a move action becomes a free action. For checks requiring time in rounds, minutes, or longer, reduce the time needed by 25 percent per challenge. You cannot make a check as a free action via challenges if it normally requires a standard action or longer.

CALCULATED RISK

You can take a calculated risk on one check to make a follow-up check easier. For example, you could use Disable Device to overcome an initial

safeguard to make disarming the whole trap easier. If you succeed at this challenge, you gain a bonus on the second check equal to the total penalty you accepted on the first. The two checks must be related and the first, penalized, check must carry some consequence for failure (that is, it cannot be a check where you can take 20).

SIMULTANEOUS TASKS

You can accept a challenge in order to perform two checks simultaneously. To attempt simultaneous checks, make the challenge check, followed by a second check using the same or a different trait. Your secondary check suffers a -10 penalty or a +10 increase in Difficulty. The combined task requires the same time as the longest normal task, so if both tasks require a standard action, you accomplish the simultaneous use in a single standard action rather than two.

In addition to these standard challenges, various skills have specific challenges associated with them. These are given in the skill's description in **Chapter 2**.

AID

Sometimes characters work together and help each other out. In this case, one character (usually the one with the highest bonus) is considered the leader of the effort and makes the check normally, while each helper makes the same check against Difficulty 10 (and can't take 10 on this check). Success grants the leader a +2 bonus for favorable conditions. For every 10 full points the helper's check exceeds the Difficulty, increase the bonus by +1, so a result of 20–29 grants a +3 bonus, 30–39 a +4, and so forth. In many cases, outside help isn't beneficial, or only a limited number of helpers can aid someone at once. The Narrator limits aid as appropriate for the task and conditions.

TYPES OF CHECKS

There are three main types of checks: skill checks, ability checks, and power checks.



SKILL CHECKS

A skill check determines what you can accomplish with a particular skill (sometimes whether you're trained in that skill or not). It is a roll of $d20 +$ your rank in the skill and the skill's key ability score against a Difficulty. Skill checks sometimes have gradations of success and failure based on how much your total roll is above or below the Difficulty. For example, if you fail a Climb check, you don't make any progress. If you fail by 5 or more, you fall.

ABILITY CHECKS

An ability check is like a skill check, but measures raw ability, like strength, endurance, or intellect. It is a roll of $d20 +$ your ability modifier against a Difficulty. Ability checks tend to be all or nothing (you can either accomplish the task or you can't), although there are sometimes gradations of success or failure. Attempting a skill check without training (in other words, without ranks in the skill) is an ability check.

EXAMPLE ABILITY CHECKS

Task	Ability
Forcing open a jammed or locked door	Strength
Tying a rope	Dexterity
Resisting injury, holding your breath	Constitution
Navigating a maze	Intelligence
Recognize a stranger you've seen before	Wisdom
Getting yourself noticed in a crowd	Charisma

POWER CHECKS

A power check measures a character's capability with a supernatural power. It is a roll of $d20 +$ your power rank (adept level +3) plus the power's key ability score against a Difficulty. See **Chapter 4: Powers** for details on power checks.

ATTACK ROLLS

An *attack roll* determines whether or not you hit an opponent in combat. It is a $d20$ roll + your attack bonus. The Difficulty is your target's Defense, which measures their ability to avoid attacks. If you equal or exceed your target's Defense, your attack hits. Otherwise, you miss.

A roll of 20 on the die (called a *natural 20*) means the attack hits automatically and may be a *critical hit*. A roll of 1 on the die (a *natural 1*) means the attack automatically misses.

SAVING THROWS

Saving throws allow your hero to avoid different forms of danger, including injury, traps, poisons, tricks, and even supernatural powers. A saving throw is a $d20$ roll + the appropriate ability score (Constitution for Toughness and Fortitude saves, Dexterity for Reflex saves, and Wisdom for Will saves) and the appropriate save bonus, along with any bonuses from feats, special abilities, and the like.

Saving throw Difficulty is based on the potency of the hazard, such as the power of an attack or the strength of a disease or poison. Like skill checks, there are sometimes gradations to a saving throw's results. For example, a Toughness save may result in no damage at all if you beat the Difficulty, but could result in a glancing blow, a stunning blow, or an immediate knockout if you fail, depending on how much the roll misses the Difficulty.