

Skills and Training

The magnificent instrument looked out of place in this hellish tomb, but Fergus knew that the secret to opening the doorway to the inner sanctum was to play the right tune on the enchanted harp that dominated this antechamber. Having prepared for this moment, knowing he would only get one chance to get it right lest the curse of this place claim him, he stepped up to the dais, took a deep breath, and began to play.

Creative players will want to perform more actions than can be covered by the game mechanics already covered (Attack vs. Defence, for example) – a crumbling wall must be climbed to reach an open window by which the characters have decided to gain entry to the ruined keep, and a stuck door needs a solid shoulder barge to open. Tabletop roleplaying games are set apart from their computerised cousins by the freedom of the players to do *anything!* And whilst it can be a challenge for the GM to adjudicate these actions fairly, a simple mechanism exists in Dragon Warriors to provide a fair and consistent mechanism for determining success.

Characters may not spend more experience points on skills and training than would cause them to drop a rank or take them below zero XP.

Untrained Aptitudes

The character's five primary abilities between them represent all the talents and raw skills the character has developed during their life. These skills are a useful mix of survival skills, general knowledge and a broad range of other abilities that may be useful on an adventure. In some cases, they simply represent an aptitude for something (like someone with a high Strength score having an aptitude for barging open doors) and other times they represent a skill the character has picked up, like swimming.

When a character wants to do something for which one of the existing opposed mechanics is unsuitable, the GM must first determine which of the character's five primary ability scores is most relevant to determining the success of the character's chosen action.

Having ruled which ability is relevant to the task in hand, the GM secretly assigns

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a difficulty to the task. Whilst it would be impossible to list every possible action, the following table provides some guidance on what would be a fair difficulty factor for a particular task.

Difficulty	Factor
Routine	5
Very Easy	8
Easy	11
Average	14
Hard	17
Very Hard	20
Nearly Impossible	23
Legendary	26
Impossible	29+

Once the GM has set the difficulty factor and the player is happy to undertake the task using the ability decided upon (without necessarily knowing how difficult it will be), the player then rolls 1d6.

If the character's appropriate ability score plus the result of the d6 roll is equal to or greater than the difficulty of the task, he succeeds. Otherwise, he fails with all the consequences of trying (for example, the character suffers falling damage from a failed climb, et cetera). The GM may also rule that some tasks require a series of ability checks to succeed for the whole task to succeed.

$1d6 + \text{Ability} \geq \text{Difficulty} = \text{SUCCESS!}$

Examples

A crumbling keep wall is assigned a difficulty factor of 11, as being relatively easy to climb, and the GM decides that Reflexes is the most relevant ability to climbing walls. Any character for whom the sum of their Reflexes score plus 1d6 is 11 or more can easily scale the wall and reach the open window. The GM decides that anyone who fails the roll will fall 1d10' and take damage accordingly.

A wooden door that has warped in its frame and become stuck is a much harder proposition and the GM assigns a difficulty factor of 15 for a character to barge it open. Any character whose Strength plus 1d6 equals 15 or more manages to burst the door open, but the GM decides that anyone who fails will take 1HP damage from a jarred and bruised shoulder as they bounce off the stout timbers.

In both cases, the players do not know the difficulty factor involved or the consequences for failure, the GM may tell them that the climb looks "relatively easy" or the door looks "firmly wedged", but looks can be deceiving – the wooden door could be nearly rotted through and the masonry of the ruined keep could be looser than it looks and liable to come away in the adventurer's hands as he starts to climb higher.

Working Together

Two characters, each with a Strength score of 12, do not have a combined Strength of 24. If two characters with the same Strength score collaborate, make a single roll with a +2 bonus. If a character with a lower Strength score assists, assign only a +1 bonus to the higher Strength score. If multiple characters are able to assist, assign an additional +1 bonus to the roll for each additional helper. GMs should make a call on how many characters can usefully assist with any Strength-based task.

Example

A rockfall has blocked part of the tunnel and whilst the smaller blocks are easy to remove, the GM decides that a large boulder must be cleared, which has a difficulty of 24 to shift! The GM also decides that no more than 4 people can usefully help.

Sir Balin and Thomas both have Strength scores of 15, so Balin gets a +2 bonus from Thomas's help. Two others with lower Strength scores also assist, for a further +2 bonus. In total, Sir Balin is attempting to shift the boulder with an effective Strength score of 19 and must therefore roll 5 or higher on 1d6 to roll the boulder out of the way.

It is not only Strength-based tasks that benefit from a little collaboration, though, and while it would be hard for several characters all to attempt to pick

the same lock, characters could work together to gather information from informants in a city, forage for food in the wilderness, et cetera, and the GM should provide bonuses to characters attempting a task when they work together where it is logical for the characters each to be able to do so.

Practising Skills

Raw talent (represented by the relevant primary ability) may not always be sufficient for the purposes of adventuring and wise adventurers will want to practise a specific task to become better at it. By spending experience and time, the character can learn a skill. The more this skill is practised (i.e., the more time and experience is spent on the skill), the higher the character's skill rank becomes and the easier it is for the character to accomplish the practised task. Under normal circumstances, the highest rank a character can have in any skill is 4, and each of these ranks adds 1 to the character's ability score for the purposes of performing the relevant task.

Example

Lyona needs to climb out of a pit she has unfortunately found herself after springing a trap. Lyona's Reflexes score is only 8, but she has 2 ranks in the climb skill, giving her an effective Reflexes score of 10 for her climbing roll.

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Skills an adventurer might choose to practise could include:

Any sport or athletic feat (for example, jump, climb, swim, horsemanship, acrobatics, juggling).

Any area of specialist lore (for example, animals, plants, politics, heraldry, law, history).

Any manufacturing or craft skill (for example, artistic painting, carpentry, pottery, weaving, jeweller, blacksmithing).

Interaction skills (for example, bribery, inquiry, disguise, public speaking, haggle, etiquette).

Any performance skill (for example, musical instrument, acting, oratory, et cetera).

Survival Skills (for example, fishing, hunting, foraging, mountaineering, desert survival, et cetera).

This list is by no means exhaustive. Whether a character learns any skills or not, all characters are assumed to have a breadth of knowledge and talents earned during their initial training that enables them to swim rivers, climb walls, bribe guards and forage in the wild without having a specific skill to do it. Skills merely provide the character the option to get better at these tasks over time.

Learning Skills

Learning a skill requires 2 months' training and 1XP, both multiplied by the new rank of the skill being obtained. The experience point cost reflects the character going outside his traditional professional training, distracting himself from improving in his profession as quickly.

Example

Fergus is looking to learn to play the harp. After 2 months' practice, Fergus learns the Harp skill to rank 1 and deducts 1XP. However, Fergus feels that this level of ability will be insufficient for the challenge of playing the enchanted harp, so spends a further 4 months (and deducts a further 2XP) bringing his skill rank to rank 2.

In total, Fergus has spent 6 months learning to play the harp and now adds 2 to his Presence score for the purposes of performing with a harp. However, during this time, Fergus has distracted himself from his professional training, so deducts 3XP.

The time to learn skills may seem long, but characters may train for up to three skills at the same time and may count time adventuring towards the total, so long as the skill was used at least once during the adventure.

Trained Skills

Whilst the simplicity of these rules assumes that characters have broad spectrum of skills on which to draw during their adventures, not all skills will be known by all players without any training. For example, would a knight with a Presence score of 15 and no musical training outperform a trained harpist with a skill of 4 but a Presence score of only 10? As with all of the rules presented to GMs in this book, some interpretation will be required to apply them to some of the circumstances in which the characters get themselves. The GM should be free to rule that characters are simply unable to perform the actions their players require of them without some training first.

Dragon Warriors is a roleplaying game, different from a board game or a computer game in that it is much more of a creative than a mechanical process. Whether GMs use the skills system or not, GMs should encourage players to give their characters as extensive and detailed backgrounds as they can. Players should also feel free to add to their character's backgrounds after their character has been created, although this should not be used as a means to be suddenly proficient in a skill when it becomes expeditious during an adventure!

Opposed Skills

For some actions, there is no set difficulty factor. When gambling, for example, success is dependent on being better than everyone else in the game. In these circumstances, an opposed skill test is required. Typically, any action that interacts with an inanimate object (for example, climbing a wall) can be made unopposed (i.e., the GM sets a difficulty factor the character must achieve in that task), but any task that involves other intelligent people or creatures should be opposed.

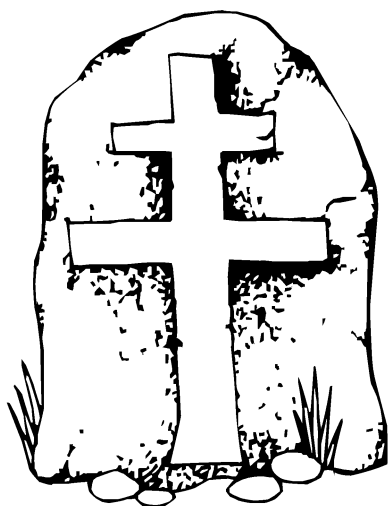
Many opposed tests are already catered for with the three existing secondary ability pairs: Attack vs. Defence, Perception vs. Stealth and Guile vs. Conviction. However, there are some 'grey' areas where skill will obviously help the outcome of a situation but a secondary ability score test also seems relevant. For example, when attempting to misrepresent a forged document as genuine not only relies on Guile vs. Conviction, but also the quality of the forgery. And picking someone's pocket is obviously going to be easier if a character has practised picking pockets before, but attempting to do so unnoticed will also depend on the Perception of the victim.

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In any use of skills, the GM must first rule which Primary Ability score is relevant to the task and the difficulty factor. For example, Reflexes is relevant to picking pockets and Intelligence is relevant to forgery. Having made the skill check, the character will gain a bonus to their secondary ability check equal to the amount by which the skill roll was made (or a penalty equal to the amount by which it was failed).

Example 1

The GM decrees that the difficulty of lifting the keys from the belt of an alert guard is very hard, requiring a pick pockets skill roll against a difficulty of 20. Remus succeeds with a total of 21 and now has the keys. Additionally, he has a +1 to his Stealth score for the purposes of the Perception vs. Stealth roll to see if the guard noticed him. However, if Remus had failed, not only would he not have lifted the keys, but he would have a penalty to his Stealth score equal to the amount by which he failed.



Example 2

Sorcerers are not allowed in the city of Ked so Lyona is carrying forged papers that make her out to be a travelling apothecary. These are simple documents and the GM established the difficulty of forging them to be only 15. However, unbeknownst to Lyona, the forger did a poor job and only got a 13 on his forgery skill roll. Lyona is now at -2 to her Guile score for the purposes of presenting the papers to the gatekeeper of Ked and passing herself off as an apothecary.

Notes

In any interaction, roleplaying modifiers are fundamental. If the other party members distract the guard during Remus's pick-pocketing attempt or if Lyona can talk convincingly about herb lore and medicine, the GM may adjust the difficulty of the skill roll or provide bonuses to the character's rolls.

The Dragon Warriors game is not an exercise in rolling dice and whilst the random element should be used to create tension and drama, it should not be slavishly used to the detriment of the players' enjoyment or excitement.

Special Cases

As with any rule, there will be special cases where what the character attempts will not follow some simple formula. For example, if a character attempts to disguise himself, he may make a Presence-based Disguise attempt, but disguises must pass both casual scrutiny (Perception) and social scrutiny (Conviction) and the GM may need to apply different modifiers in different situations.

Example

Caedmon is disguised as an Ogmandrian Archer, dressed in the traditional uniform of the Ogmandrian Guard and has altered his complexion with a dye to better blend in. As he is walking through a market square, a guard passes him. In this instance, Caedmon's disguise must pass a Perception vs. Stealth test (with a bonus or penalty to Caedmon's Stealth based on the quality of the disguise).

Later that day, Caedmon must interact with a border patrol, adopting the mannerisms and colloquialisms of an Ogmandrian Archer, which requires a Guile vs. Conviction test. The same bonuses from the disguise attempt that applied to his Stealth score, now apply to his Guile score.

Combat Skills

Characters start with a set of combat proficiencies and combat characteristics, but practice with weapons and armour can overcome non-proficiency penalties and even lead to mastery of weapons and armour that could not be achieved merely by progressing in their professional careers.

At the GM's discretion, the GM may include time spent adventuring towards the time required to learn a combat skill (or mastery) so long as the character uses the same weapon or armour type throughout that adventure.

Combat Proficiencies

Only knights are proficient in all weapons and armour, other professions suffer penalties to their Attack and Defence scores when wielding weapons or wearing armour with which they are unskilled. However, through practice with these specific weapons or armour types, these penalties can be offset.

For each rank in a weapon or armour skill, the character may reduce the non-proficiency penalty by 1 (to a minimum of 0). The maximum number of ranks a character can take in a combat skill is equal to their non-proficiency penalty for that weapon or armour (even if this is greater than 4).

Example

Lyona, looking to be more use in combat and less reliant on her spells, wishes to learn to use a bow. As a sorcerer, however, she suffers a -6 non-proficiency penalty.

After 2 months' practice with a bow, Lyona learns the Weapon Proficiency (Bow) skill to rank 1, and deducts 1XP. Now when Lyona uses a bow in combat, she is only at a -5 proficiency penalty.

If Lyona wished to negate the non-proficiency penalty for using a bow altogether, she would need to learn the Weapon Proficiency (Bow) skill to rank 6, at a total cost of 21XP and 42 months' training.

Example

Lyona, whilst now more effective in combat with her bow, feels she is not sufficiently armoured in mere leather and seeks to learn to wear ringmail armour effectively. Sorcerers suffer a -1 non-proficiency penalty whilst wearing ringmail, so only a single rank of Armour Proficiency (Ringmail) is required to offset this penalty. Taking 2 months and costing 1XP, Lyona is now proficient in wearing ringmail armour and no longer doubles the Reflexes penalty for wearing ringmail.

Once a character has reduced his non-proficiency penalty for an armour type to zero, he also no longer suffers the increased Stealth and Reflexes penalties.

A magicker wearing armour suffers a chance to miscast spells. However, because sufficient training in an armour type will reduce the Reflexes penalty for wearing armour with which he is non-proficient, this will also reduce the miscast chance accordingly.

Weapon proficiencies are slightly more restrictive in that if the character did not start proficient in a weapon, it must be learned as a separate skill, so a character not proficient in martial weapons must learn separate skills for each martial weapon (for example, 'sword' and 'handaxe') to offset the penalties when using these weapons. Additionally, a 'sword' skill does not reduce penalties when wielding a two-handed sword or shortsword.

Combat Mastery

Characters may wish to be more than proficient in weapons and armour and, just as magickers can master their spells, so any character could devote time to mastering their weapons and armour.

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All bonuses from weapon and armour mastery stack with magical bonuses, should the character be lucky enough to own such rare treasures. Also, these skills are unique to the type of weapon or armour mastery, there is not one single weapon mastery skill that makes a fighter master of all weapons. And not even all swords are the same – a shortsword is a very different weapon to master than a two-handed sword. As with most skills, the maximum rank of a weapon or armour mastery skill is rank 4.

The cost of these skills may seem steep to fledgling adventurers, who may prefer to use their hard-earned experience to improve in rank (improving their ability in all weapons and armour), but higher-ranked characters (especially those who may not be able to increase in rank further due to their Intelligence score) typically begin to truly master the tools of their trade.

Note that a character may only master armour or weapons with which they are already proficient. If the character wishes to master a weapon or armour type with which they are not yet proficient, they should train with that weapon until they no longer suffer a non-proficiency penalty.

At the GM's discretion, the GM may include time spent adventuring towards the time required to become the master of a particular weapon or armour type so long as the character uses the same weapon or armour type throughout that adventure.

Weapon Mastery

Each weapon has a training proficiency value, which is the sum of its armour bypass die and its base damage (without any modifiers for quality, Strength or magic, et cetera). For example, a basic sword (d8, 4) has a training proficiency value of 12, whilst a dagger (d4, 3) has a training proficiency value of 7.

The training proficiency value of the weapon determines the number of weeks for which the character must train to achieve rank 1 of the weapon mastery skill and the number of XPs he must spend at the end of that time. To earn subsequent ranks in weapon mastery, these values are multiplied by the rank for which the character is training.

Example

Sir Balin has wielded his trusty sword through many campaigns and now wants to train himself to master his blade. A sword has a training proficiency value of 12, which means Sir Balin must spend 12 weeks in training and 12XPs to become a rank 1 sword master.

Rank 2 in Sword Mastery would require 24 weeks' training and 24XPs.

In total, if Sir Balin wished to become a rank 4 Sword Master, he would need to train for 120 weeks and spend 120XPs!

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Despite the expense, however, the many benefits of weapon mastery may entice even junior professionals to invest a few of their hard-earned experience points: for each rank in a weapon mastery skill, the character benefits from the following when using that weapon:

The armour bypass die improves along the progression: d4, d6, d8, d10, d12, 2d6, 2d8, 2d10 (note that this does not impact the training proficiency value of the weapon).

The character's Attack score with that weapon improves by 1.

Damage dealt by the weapon increases by 1 at weapon mastery ranks 2 and 4.

Example

Now armed with 4 ranks in sword mastery, Sir Balin attacks with a sword with +4 to his Attack score and wields his blade as a (2d8, 6) weapon.



Armour Mastery

Knowing how to move in armour without it impeding combat manoeuvres is one thing, but for many adventurers, it is still nothing more than a passive barrier of leather and metal. However, through intensive training, a character may build on this knowledge to use their armour actively in combat, enhancing their combat skills and defences when bedecked in a suit of armour they have mastered.

For each armour type, the length of time (and cost in XPs) to master it is dependent on the armour's AF. The fighter must spend 1 month per AF per rank of Armour Mastery skill and expend double that number of XPs to achieve that rank.

$$2 \times \text{Armour Mastery Rank} \times \text{AF} \\ = \text{XP COST}$$

Example

Sir Balin, having mastered his sword, now wishes to master fighting in plate armour (AF 5).

First rank in the Plate Armour Mastery skill takes 5 months' practice and 10XPs. However, rank 2 will take 10 months' further practice and 20 additional XPs. In total, should Sir Balin seek to achieve rank 4 in Plate Armour mastery, he must spend a total of 50 months and 100 XPs.

Rank 1

The benefits of mastering armour begin at first rank, with the character benefitting from a bonus to his Defence score equal to his rank in Armour Mastery.

Rank 2

The character gets a +1 bonus to his AF when wearing armour he has mastered to at least rank 2.

Rank 3

Next, the character benefits from a +2 bonus to his Attack score when fighting in armour he has mastered to at least rank 3.

Rank 4

The final benefit at rank 4 reduces all the damage done to the character (except critical hits) in his mastered armour by 1 point.

Example

Sir Balin is now practised in all four ranks of plate armour mastery. For Sir Balin, plate armour now has an AF of 6 and he fights with +4 Defence and +2 Attack whilst wearing plate armour. Additionally, any blow struck against Sir Balin whilst he is wearing plate armour has the damage automatically reduced by 1.

Training Strength

Of all the character's primary abilities, Strength is the only one that can be improved through hard training. To increase his Strength score for the first time, a character must train for a number of weeks equal to the new score to which the character wishes to take his Strength and spend the same number of XPs. Subsequent improvements in Strength cost double this initial value. Strength may be improved a maximum of 5 times.

Example

Lyona wishes to improve her Strength score from 8 to 9, spending 9 weeks and costing 9XPs. To improve further, she would have to spend 18 weeks and spend 18XPs for each additional improvement to her Strength score, up to a maximum of 13.

Strength Injuries

If a character has suffered a major and/or crippling injury that affects his Strength score, it cannot be trained again until that wound is healed.

Training Spells

Magickers may practise their spells to be able to cast them as if boosted with a single magic point (or equivalent penalty to a mystic's psychic fatigue check).

To practise a spell requires 3 months of time per level of the spell and an equivalent number of XPs. The nature of this boost must be fixed at the time of the training (for example, if a sorcerer practices *Dragonbreath* to be able to cause an extra point of damage, he could not later cast *Dragonbreath* with increased Speed without spending an additional Magic Point during the casting).

A single spell may be practised multiple times, but each subsequent period of training the same spell doubles the cost in time and experience.

Example

To practise casting *Dragonbreath* to cause an extra Health Point of damage would take 3 months and cost Lyona 3XPs. To then also practise casting *Dragonbreath* to increase the flames' Speed by 1 would take a further 6 months and 6XPs. The next improvement would take 12 weeks and cost 12XPs, et cetera.