

Story Skills RPG System

Draft version: 1.0.1

The Story Skills System (3S) was an attempt to design a simple yet fun RPG system with no levels or grinding. Thus games could be played forever without running out of suitably challenging encounters.

This is a stand alone guide to the basic mechanics of 3S which was invented for the story setting “Heroes of Verdenen”.

The 3S system, as you will soon see, is driven by story telling and follows a strong “make it up as you go along” model. It is designed to allow Narrator (aka GM/DM) and players to invent the story on the fly. The Narrator is encouraged to make up skills, attributes, and statuses to fit the story. While this might seem unusual, it is designed to encourage developing an immersive story to role-play within.

“No matter how many goblins you kill, when you face a giant dragon remember that you are still soft and squishy and taste good with ketchup.”

What will you need?

At the very least, you will need a pencil or pen, some paper and a few dice. You will need a couple of d8 and a handful of d6. A story setting would probably make life easier for the narrator.

The Narrator will need percentile dice.

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The 8 point skill scale

Everything in 3S is based on skills. Skills are used to tackle tasks (things you want your character to do). With few exceptions everything about your character is described by skills. Character skills can be one of 8 levels with each successive level being harder to achieve but granting stronger bonuses.

Level	Description	Points	Dice
Untrained	The skill level you would expect from someone who has maybe has never even heard of this task before	0	1d4 (1)
Novice	You are familiar with the task in theory but lack any practice	1	1d6 (1)
Amateur	Someone who has a chance of knowing what they are talking about	2	1d6 + 1d4 (2)
Competent	A reasonably well practised person with an employment worthy skill level	4	2d6 (2)
Professional	This skills of someone who does this for a living	8	1d8 + 2d6 (3)
Expert	Someone who has dedicated a substantial amount of time to becoming noted in this field	16	1d8 + 3d6 (4)
Master	One of a select few individuals who are famously good at this skill.	32	2d8 + 4d6 (6)
Genius	A person with a supernatural gift for this subject who has probably dedicated their entire life to this field to the exclusion of everything else.	64	2d8 + 5d6 (7)

Challenge and Difficulty

Tasks have a CL (Challenge Level) from 1 (Nominal) to 8 (Unthinkable). The player must roll successes equal to or above the CL of the task to achieve it. Tasks also have a DR (Difficult Rating) the DR determines how hard it is to achieve a success. The DR is the number that you must roll at or above to count as a success.

For example, Making a cheese and tomato sandwich might have a CL-1/DR-2. You would expect most people to make a reasonable go of it even if they have never tried before. On the other hand, making the sandwich so that it is good enough to set before the King while in the dark in an unfamiliar kitchen might have a CL-4/DR-4. Even a professional has a reasonable chance of failing.

Generally, CL is an indicator of the raw skill needed to make the thing happen while DR is a measure of the complexity of the task.

1. *Nominal*
2. Uncomplicated
3. Challenging
4. Difficult
5. **Hard**
6. **Taxing**
7. **Impossible**
8. **Unthinkable**

Skills

Transferable Skills

Transferable skills (TS) are your characters general strengths and weaknesses. They are grouped into four sets – Mind, Body, Technique, and Learning. Each character has one strong (Professional), two moderate (Competent), and a weak (Novice) TS set. These skill levels set the overall skill for all TS in the set. Additionally, you may have a number of points determined by your background to spend enhancing the individual skills in a given set.

As transferable skills (TS) are not usually tested directly they are not likely to change from one play session to the next. Transferable skills are the only skills not really subject to the “make it up as you go along” rule.

Transferable Skills			
Mind	Body	Technique	Learning
Charisma Intelligence Wisdom Focus	Dexterity Constitution Strength Reflexes	Movement Physicality Athletics Tools	Languages Literacy Study Recall

Background points

The narrator (or story setting) will usually provide you with a choice of a number of backgrounds. These backgrounds award (usually 14) points to be used to enhance specific skills in one or more of the transferable skill sets (for example, Movement and Tools in the Technique set).

Bonus Dice From Transferable Skills

Characters have a number of Transferable Skills which provide bonus dice to the skill up to the total number and size of the dice already available. An untrained check on, say, a swim skill from a character with an athletic skill set might have 1d8 + 2d6 (3 dice) available but could only add an additional 1d4 (1 die) for a total of 2d4 in an untrained skill check. This means that a character with a skill level of competent might, in the right circumstances, be able to attempt a difficult task.

Skill Competency Levels

Level	Points	Dice
Untrained	0	1d4 (1)
Novice	1	1d6 (1)
Amateur	2	1d6 + 1d4 (2)
Competent	4	2d6 (2)
Professional	8	1d8 + 2d6 (3)
Expert	16	1d8 + 3d6 (4)
Master	32	2d8 + 4d6 (6)
Genius	64	2d8 + 5d6 (7)

TS Bonus Dice Pool

The dice pool for each TS is the total of the dice for the group rank plus the dice for the individual skill. For example a character untrained in Athletics (1d4) but with Professional rank (1d8 + 2d6) in Technique would have a total of 1d8 + 2d6 + 1d4 (4 dice) in their dice pool for Athletics.

A few skills may have two forms. In these rare cases, the skills can be combined which the story setting will explain.

Specific Skills

Most of the time when we talk about skills we are talking about specific skills. Specific skills are the skills you have for doing things (fighting, praying, magic, etc.). Everything you do is a skill check. Skills come from a background, class, job, and hero style at character creation and from the Narrator thereafter.

Skill Advancement

Any specific skill that a character achieves success with in an untrained skill check may make a second skill check at DR+1 to attempt to become novice. All further progressions require story driven rewards up to a maximum of competent. The Narrator may choose to allow you a point towards a skill for any given day wherein you roll one success in a skill where the CL was equal to or higher than the dice you have for your skill level.

Skill ranks beyond competent are reserved for specialisations (class, job, and hero style). Progression to Professional competency and above must be completed by undertaking an Epic Accomplishment (such as winning a grand tournament, completing a master work or fulfilling an epic quest). It is recommended that the character only be allowed to do so when they have, since they reached their current rank, achieved at least as many successes at a hard (or harder) task as the point value of the next rank.

Achieving Genius rank in a skill is akin to the apex of the character's career. A character should only have one such skill and then only as the result of some extreme epic achievement worthy of worldwide fame.

Adding skills

During character creation you may gain a skill more than once. To combine these duplicate skills add the points from the above table for each skill rank. If the sum of the points is equal to a higher rank in that skill then this higher rank is your character's skill rank. If you fall short, note any points invested towards the next rank as you may be offered the opportunity to make up the difference through narrative means.

For example: Jack is rolling up a noble. He gains Arts and antiquities (Novice, Recall) from his background and Arts and antiquities (Amateur, Recall) from his class. That makes for a total of 3 points and so his rank is still Amateur. However, he takes the Trader job and takes Arts and antiquities as one of his Amateur skills so the total is now 5. His new rank is Competent and he has a point toward Professional for later in his career.

Modifying CL/DR by DR

Some situations call for a modification to CL/DR in terms only of DR. This can result in DR values of more than 6 (which is impossible as DR runs 1 to 6).

If DR changes to at least 2 or at most 6 then the DR changes are applied directly. Otherwise divide the change by 6 and add the result to CL, add the remainder as DR unless this would cause the DR to exceed 6 or drop below 2 in which case add an additional CL (if CL would drop past 1 it becomes 1). Thus, CL-1/DR-3 plus 6 DR becomes CL-2/DR-3; CL-1/DR-5 plus 3 DR becomes CL-2/DR-5; CL-5/DR-3 minus -14 DR becomes CL-3/DR-3 minus 2 DR which becomes CL-2/DR-3

Character Creation

Character creation starts with inventing a character concept that fits the story setting. If you are using a pre-built setting (recommended for novice narrators), it will probably have some suggestions or at least some mythology to give you ideas.

Background

Once you have have a concept agreed with your narrator, you should select a background that best fits your concept. If none fit, you may be able to modify one with the help of your narrator.

Backgrounds are a short hand to describe where the character has come from and what skills they might have picked up along the way. Backgrounds also supply points to customise the individual skills in a TS set.

Class

The class is the class of person you are playing. You should pick or create a class that best fits your character concept. Class determines things like moral outlook, lawfulness (or lack thereof) and general attitude to life.

A class may also provide skills that enable you to play as a character from that class.

Jobs

A job is what your character does to get buy in this world. It can provide a basic income (when worked) as well as a set of skills which increase very slowly over time.

The initial job taken during character creation grants certain bonuses which are not available if the job is taken later. It grants one professional, three competent, and four amateur skills from the list of available skills unique to that that job. It has a number of required skills which must be taken. At the end of each year you become a novice in one skill from your job list and gain 4 points to spend on skills from your job list.

Jobs have a set of pre-requisite skills which you must take as character skills when choosing that job later.

Hero Style

As an adventurer, your character has access to skills and abilities uncommon to someone of their job or class. Hero style is selected at character creation and cannot be changed later. It grants one

professional, two competent, and four novice skills from the list of available skills some of which may be unique to that that hero style.

At the end of an adventure (sometimes called a quest line, or story arc) in which you have played largely within your hero style, you gain 4 points to spend on skills from your hero style. These may be spent right away or saved for later.

Hero styles are generally tailored to the story setting and match up well to certain job, class, and backgrounds.

Fantastic abilities

Some story settings have spells, gods, super science, or other fantastic abilities. The story setting will give you more details as to how they work but usually these are simply skills like any other.

Glossary of terms

This is a summary of terms used in the 3S system. Where the descriptions says see such and such, it is referring to the section in this guide where you can find more information.

Challenge Level (CL)

The overall challenge of a task. The higher the CL, the more skill that is needed to attempt the task. CL denotes the number of successes the player must roll. CL runs from 1 to 8. See: **The 8 point skill scale**.

Character Creation

The process of creating a character. You will select transferable skill ranks and choose a background, class, job, and hero style. Character creation generally starts with coming up with a character concept. See: **Character Creation**.

Dice Pool

A number of dice available to you. In 3S your dice pool comes from your Transferable Skills (TS). See: **Transferable Skills** and **The 8 point skill scale**.

Difficulty Rating (DR)

At any given CL a task may have different degrees of difficulty. The DR is the value that must be rolled at or above for a roll to count as a success. DR runs from 2 to 6. See: **The 8 point skill scale**.

Epic Accomplishment

Something your character achieves that was above and beyond what an average person might accomplish in their life and worthy of social note. As a rule of thumb, an accomplishment should be considered epic if it is noteworthy enough to become part of the future historical record.

Narrator

The person telling the story. The Narrator will act the other characters you encounter and arbitrate and interpret dice rolls. The narrator role is similar to that of a Games Master or DM. The narrator will react to your character concept and attempt to build the story around it.

Rolling up (a character)

Creating a new character. You need to do this to join in a game or if your character has been killed off and you want to continue playing the story. See: **Character Creation**.

Skills

Abilities of your character. These are things you can do. Skills are generally verbs. All skills have a linked transferable skill from which bonus dice can be drawn. See: **The 8 point skill scale**.

Skill Rank

The level achieved in a given skill. Each rank grants more dice and has a higher associated point value. In story settings with Point Buy or Point Trade skill creation, this value becomes particularly important. Roughly speaking a higher skill rank indicates a greater level of skill. The lowest possible level in a skill is untrained (zero points) and, in theory, all characters have this rank in any skills they do not have listed. Some story systems or narrators may determine that some skills are trained only (meaning they are only available to those that have them). See: **The 8 point skill scale**.

Transferable Skills (TS)

Transferable Skills are a set of basic abilities that grant a bonus to some of your skills. See: **Transferable Skills**.

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