

## Note

From source to source, I only note changes and additions from the last source. For example, in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, the rules state that initiative is rolled in a Skill Challenge (SkCh). In the *DMG Errata*, this is changed to not rolling initiative for SkCh. I do not mention this rule in the *Dungeon Master's Guide 2* section, which means that for this source the rule as it is in the *DMG Errata* holds.

Re-stated, I do not note what has remained the same, although if something changed between the first source and the second source, and between the second and third sources changed back to how it had worked in the first source, I would track this change. If something is mentioned once and not mentioned again in later sources, it is functionally included in those sources.

I tried not to include advice at all, but where advice seems to skirt the line and become a de-facto rule or rule option, I included it. Examples and advice that are mentioned in one source but not in another are not usually mentioned as having been taken out. This is an exception to the rule above where I state that I note all changes from the prior source.

## Sources

1. *Dungeon Master's Guide* (2008)
2. *Dungeon Master's Guide Errata* (2008)
3. *Dungeon Master's Guide 2* (2009)
4. *Rules Compendium* (2010)
5. *D&D Essentials Dungeon Master's Book* (2010)
6. *Gamma World 7th Edition Expansion: Legion of Gold* (2011)
  - a. This is not a part of the *Dungeons & Dragons 4th Edition* game line, but it uses a modified version of the 4e rules. Its Skill Challenge rules are clearly in conversation with those in the 4e line.

## Changes Over Time

### *Dungeon Master's Guide* (2008)

- Basics: PCs make skill checks to accumulate a set number of successes before they reach a set number of failures. Former case = achieve the goal, latter case = failed in achieving it.
- Steps in designing SkCh:
  - 1. Goal and Context.
    - What's the goal and what obstacles are in the way of the goal?
    - SkCh can be used as part of a combat encounter or they can account for all the action in an encounter of their own.
  - 2. Level and Complexity.
    - Level chosen determines the DC of the skill checks involved (detailed elsewhere). Choose based on level of challenge.
    - Complexity chosen determines how many successes are needed and how many failures can be borne:
      - Complexity 1 — Successes 4 — Failures 2
      - Complexity 2 — Successes 6 — Failures 3
      - Complexity 3 — Successes 8 — Failures 4
      - Complexity 4 — Successes 10 — Failures 5
      - Complexity 5 — Successes 12 — Failures 6
    - choose based on significance of challenge. Each complexity is equivalent of that number of monsters of the SkCh's level.
    - Starting point: use the level of the party and moderate DCs. Easy DCs reduce the level of the SkCh by 1, and hard DCs increase it by 2.
    - Reducing the number of failures that can be borne by half increases the level by 2.
  - 3. Skills.
    - Choose the skills that are natural solutions to the problem the SkCh presents. These are the Primary skills.

- Players can use any skill in the SkCh that makes sense in context, but if it is not a Primary skill, the DC for the check is Hard. These are labeled Secondary skills.
    - A Secondary skill can never be used by a single character more than once in a SkCh. (unclear whether this means a character can use different Secondary skills on different turns or not).
  - 4. Other Conditions.
    - Time pressure? Costs associated with using certain skills (gold)? Perhaps use of Utility Powers or Rituals can allow the use of special skills (as Primary? unclear), give bonuses to the check, or even give automatic successes.
  - 5. Consequences.
    - Success means, in addition to success in the fiction (a changed situation), which can include treasure and the like, XP. The same XP as a number of monsters of its level equal to its complexity.
    - Failure means no XP, and obviously fictional failure to achieve the goal and a changed situation.
- Running a SkCh: Roll initiative! Every player must make a skill check on their turn. A Secondary skill may be used only once by a single character in a given SkCh.
  - Group checks: allow one character to be lead, others help. Everyone rolls the same skill. 10+ on help provides +2 to lead check to a max of +8.
  - Informing the Players: tell them at least some of the Primary skills at the start of the challenge, some of the action to be taken, and some of the fictional consequences for failure. Tell them when a check has succeeded or not.
  - Can give +2 or -2 to any given roll to reward creativity or punish "the opposite".
  - If you want to include an opposed check in a SkCh, use the opponent's passive check as the DC (10 + base skill check bonus)
  - In Combat: You can add a SkCh to a combat encounter, using it as you would a monster to determine the correct challenge level. For example, for a party of five characters at level 7, three level 7 monsters plus a SkCh at level 7 with a complexity of two is equal to five level 7 monsters for purposes of the encounter.
  - Timescale: SkCh can be run on a longer timescale, where a check equals an hour, a day, a week, etc. Perhaps success/failure in intermittent Encounters acts as a success/failure in the SkCh.

- Make a spread of Primary skills, so that the SkCh is relevant to every character.
- A further potential limit, at the DM's discretion, is to limit a given Secondary skill as only being able to contribute 1 success to the entire SkCh.
- Occasionally, a skill check can do something instead of granting a success or failure—a minor benefit or penalty (example: on a journey challenge, everyone having to make an Endurance check or lose a Healing Surge).
- Applications/Rules that are in the example Skill Challenges that are not covered in the main rules text:
  - "Opening" a new skill as a Primary skill due to success on a check. This new skill can only be used to earn one success in the SkCh.
  - Gaining knowledge from a success that using another skill results in an automatic failure.
  - Having a success/fail also give +2/-2 to the next character, regardless of skill they use.
  - Having a success/fail also give +2/-2 to the next character if they use certain skills.
  - Success/fail not counting as such but giving +2/-2 to next character's check, regardless of what skill they use.
  - Failure closing off all further use of that skill.
  - Failure increasing the DC of all further checks in the SkCh.
  - A certain skill having to be used by two different characters in a round, and in another example by one character every round, with failure additionally causing everyone to lose a Healing Surge.
  - GP expenditure as requirement to use a certain skill.
  - In a combat, everyone having to make a check as a free action every round or suffer -2 to defenses against a trap (+2 on success).

#### *DMG Errata, 2 July 2008*

- All "Failure" values in the Complexity table are set at 3.
- Initiative is no longer rolled. Players do not act in a set turn and therefore there is no requirement that every player act in the SkCh.
- Secondary skills are not automatically hard, but moderate or hard depending on context.

*Dungeon Master's Guide 2 (2009)*

- Updated Complexity Table, in line with the errata numbers above:
  - Complexity 1 — Successes 4 — Failures 3
  - Complexity 2 — Successes 6 — Failures 3
  - Complexity 3 — Successes 8 — Failures 3
  - Complexity 4 — Successes 10 — Failures 3
  - Complexity 5 — Successes 12 — Failures 3
- Note also that the Skill Check DC by level table has changed (DCs have decreased across the board), although that is a change more broadly applicable to the game as a whole than just Skill Challenges.
- Designing a SkCh:
  - Come up with "as many as seven" useful skills, either Primary or Secondary, or about the number of PCs + 2.
    - Aim for 2-3 Secondary skills with the rest being Primary.
  - Try to have half of the relevant skills come from the following list (six or more classes feature them on their class list): Arcana, Athletics, Diplomacy, Dungeoneering, Endurance, Heal, History, Insight, Intimidate, Nature, Perception, Religion.
  - Feature skills the party is trained in heavily. If you use skills they aren't trained in, use easy DCs.
  - Primary skills count directly to the success count of the SkCh.
  - Secondary skills do not. It is unclear whether they can contribute to the failure threshold. A successful check can, however:
    - Cancel out a failure
    - Give one or more characters a bonus to a check with a Primary skill
    - Allow a character to reroll another skill check
    - Open up the use of another skill
    - Increase the max number of successes that a Primary skill can contribute to the party's total.

- Other actions can contribute to success: spending money, using Powers or Action Points, combat encounters, rituals, and the passage of time can contribute successes or do any of the things that Secondary skills can do.
  - A good rule of thumb is to allow the above to act as Secondary skills, with a relevant Daily Power or relevant Ritual granting 1 automatic success.
- You can break SkCh into sections (Beg, Mid, End), where after achieving a certain number of successes the SkCh moves to the next phase where a new set of Primary skills replaces the old. Moving to the next phase can also be triggered by a success with a certain skill, reaching a certain number of failures, a change of scene initiated by the characters, every PC has acted once, or some amount of time has passed.
- A skill check in a SkCh should accomplish one of the following:
  - Introduce a new option that the PCs can pursue, a path to success that they didn't know existed.
  - Change the situation—sending them to a new location, introducing a new NPC, or adding a complication.
  - Grant the PCs a tangible consequence for success or failure, one that influences their future decisions.
- Frame the SkCh such that the party are actors/aggressors rather than passive participants/defenders.
- In Combat:
  - Don't do SkCh of Complexity 3 or higher.
  - Assign each skill check an action type (Standard, Move, Minor).
- Group Checks now work this way: everyone makes the same skill check, and the group earns a success if a certain set number of rolls beats the DC (half, just one, etc).
- Maximum Successes: You can limit the number of successes any given skill can contribute to the SkCh.
  - The Complexity of the SkCh is a good baseline number to use as a max.
- "Allow reasonable use of the aid another action in skill challenges, but rein it in if the characters start to abuse the privilege"
  - I'm glad we all understand what "reasonable" means in this context as well as "abuse"
- Stages of Failure

- At your option you can assess penalties in response to failed individual checks: lose a Healing Surge, take damage, characters must spend time/money making up for the failure, the skill gets "closed off" for use for the rest of the SkCh, character is dazed or stunned for a turn (combat), next check using a specific skill takes a penalty.
- Stages of Success
  - At your option, you can have successes in a SkCh move the characters partway toward their goal, earning pieces of information, weakening the enemy, getting part of the way to the destination, etc.
    - okay, really, how else would you do it? Isn't this what a Skill Challenge *does*?
- Branching Challenges allow for different successful outcomes. If there are multiple competing goals within the party during the SkCh, each goal must meet the Successes needed number to be achieved. Whichever one reaches the number first, wins.
  - If you do this, don't set the Complexity higher than 3 as it's too many successes to be reasonable.
- Applications/Rules that are in the example Skill Challenges that are not covered in the main rules text:
  - SkCh in combat: success reduces monster power, failure adds more monsters.
  - A certain skill being closed off after a set number of successful checks with it, then being re-opened after a set number of successful checks in the SkCh overall.
  - Each failed skill check results in a brief, minor combat encounter.
  - Requiring the use of specific skills in a specific order.

### *Rules Compendium (2010)*

- The DM "either informs the players when the SkCh begins or lets it begin quietly."
- As the SkCh begins, the DM can prompt players to make checks, or let them decide when to make them.
- "The DM can have the adventurers act in initiative order or in some other order of his or her choice."
- "The DM might tell the players which skills to use, let them improvise which ones they use, or both."

- Most skill checks are against a Moderate DC of the SkCh's level (this is in keeping with prior versions of the Skill Challenge rules). However, after a character has made a successful skill check, later uses of that skill by the same character in the SkCh are against a Hard DC.
- Group Checks use Easy DCs.
- A SkCh should include at least 4 ways to gain a success against a Moderate DC.
- Updated Complexity Table (the first three rows are unchanged; the last two rows have been added):
  - COMPLEXITY - SUCCESSES - FAILURES - ADVANTAGES - TYPICAL DCs
  - Complexity 1 — Successes 4 — Failures 3 — None ————— 4 Moderate
  - Complexity 2 — Successes 6 — Failures 3 — None ————— 5 Mod, 1 Hard
  - Complexity 3 — Successes 8 — Failures 3 — 2 ————— 6 Mod, 2 Hard
  - Complexity 4 — Successes 10 — Failures 3 — 4 ————— 7 Mod, 3 Hard
  - Complexity 5 — Successes 12 — Failures 3 — 6 ————— 8 Mod, 4 Hard
- Advantages:
  - These are rules modifications included in SkCh of Complexity 3 or higher, per the Complexity Table.
  - The DM chooses from the following list of Advantages a number of times as indicated on the Complexity Table:
    - A success against a Hard DC counts as two successes: one against a Hard DC, the other against a Moderate DC (per the "Typical DCs" row in the Complexity Table).
    - A success against a Hard DC removes a failure instead of counting as a success.
    - A success against an Easy DC counts as a success against a Moderate DC.
    - A success against a Moderate DC counts as a success even though the PC has already gained a success against a Moderate DC using the skill.
  - The DM either determines in advance which of the Advantages come into play or lets the players' creative use of skills determine this.
  - "If a group of adventurers has members who can easily achieve the moderate and the hard DCs of a challenge, then fewer of these advantages are necessary in that challenge."



- Information on how to determine when a character can easily achieve a Moderate or Hard DC are not given.
- It is now said that SkChs as a part of combat "typically" have a Complexity of 2 at the highest.
- There is no longer a list of recommended Primary skills based on skill frequency in classes. Now there is the simple recommendation to try to include Physical, Social, and Knowledge skills in SkChs.
- Secondary skills can now contribute 1 Success to the SkCh each. At the DM's discretion that can instead provide some other benefit along the lines of what is written in the *DMG2*—although what they can do is much less clear, with a few examples thrown out rather than the more hard-and-fast options in the *DMG2*.
- Characters earn XP regardless of whether the SkCh is a success or a failure.
- The example of play shows a subtle shift of emphasis from examples in previous sources: failure taxes resources or complicates things but doesn't actually result in the group failing to reach a pre-scripted conclusion to the SkCh.

*D&D Essentials Dungeon Master's Book (2010)*

- Identical in functionality to the *Rules Compendium*.

*Gamma World 7th Edition Expansion: Legion of Gold (2011)*

- The emphasis on failure being success with a cost continues, both in the advice and the examples.
- Advantages are removed. The Complexity Table is updated accordingly.
- Group Checks are not mentioned.
- Initiative is not mentioned.
- Help is not mentioned.