

Everything you need to know about the Microlite20 Skill System....

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...but were afraid to ask.

For all it's lack of size, Microlite20 does an admirable job of allowing GMs to run pretty much any published D&D adventure on the fly without having to resort to hefty conversion tables and the like. It uses the familiar d20 mechanic and terms which mirror those of D&D. Hit points, attack rolls and damage are the same, whichever game you're playing.

But there are a few notable differences. Some systems were completely altered, with Skills list having the largest revision. I'm going to give you an insight into the hows and whys of the Microlite20 Skill system, and show you why I think it's The Best Skill System Ever.

How it works

But first, a quick recap of the Microlite20 Skills rules. Here they are in their entirety:

Quote:

There are just 4 skills : Physical, Subterfuge, Knowledge and Communication. Roll higher than the given Difficulty Class to succeed.

Skill rank = your level + any bonus due to your class or race.

Skill roll = d20 + skill rank + whatever stat bonus is most applicable to the use + situation modifiers

For example, Climbing would use Physical + STR bonus. Dodging a falling rock is Physical + DEX bonus. Finding a trap is Subterfuge + MIND bonus. Disabling a trap is Subterfuge + DEX bonus.

Note that there are no ?saving throws? in this game; use Physical + STR or DEX bonus for Fortitude and Reflex saves. Saving against magic (Will save) is usually MIND bonus + your level.

One of the key differences between the d20 skill system and Microlite20 is that ***the attribute modifier can change***. That's an important distinction; it makes the Microlite20 system much more powerful and flexible. It

means that just four skills can cover the entire D&D skillset, and more. [Here's a handy list](#) ^[1] of the D&D skills, converted into Microlite20 terms. I had originally shied away from putting together such a list as I felt it stifled Microlite20 in the same way that the D&D skill system stifled player creativity. More on that later.

One thing that is important to emphasize is that the attribute modifier can be different for different characters, ***even if they're doing the same task.***

For example, depending on the situation, Physical could be modified by the character's STR, DEX or MIND. When presented with a dungeon door that's barred from the inside, the rough-and-tough Fighter could try to charge it. That's a Phys+STR check against the toughness of the door (DC15, say). The Rogue could try to slide his sword through a crack in the door to push the bar out of the way. That would be a Phys+DEX check at DC10, and probably the best solution. On the other hand, a wily Mage would try to use leverage to lift the door from it's hinges - a Phys+MIND check at DC20 - a difficult check, but far from impossible.

Each character has used the Physical skill to achieve the same end result, but approaching the task differently merits a different attribute modifier. In general, that means each character would benefit most from playing to their own strengths - a character with a high MIND stat would benefit most from using cleverness to solve a problem, whereas a high STR Fighter's best muscle is..... well, his muscle :)

Setting the DC

As in the example above, the Difficulty Class can vary depending on how the player approaches the task.

When setting the DC, I think in terms of "What would Bob do?" - Bob being my imaginary 1st level commoner with no modifiers. Bob has straight 10s for all stats and no skill bonuses. He's the unheroic man on the street, and the benchmark by which heroes are measured.

In general, I recommend using only four DCs, especially at low levels:

DC	Level
10	Easy - 50/50 chance of Bob succeeding 1st time
15	Moderate - would succeed after several attempts
20	Difficult - would succeed only with luck on his side
25	Very Difficult - Bob needs some hefty modifiers and the Gods watching over him

I never use DC 5 - if it's that easy and out of combat, keep the game flowing by having the players succeed automatically. Anything that would be DC5 is automatically at least DC10 in combat anyhow. For example, crossing a crowded tavern without spilling your drink would be a DC5 Phys+DEX check. No roll needed. Crossing the same room during a bar fight would be DC15, at least!

It helps if there's always an easy way to solve a problem as in the example of the barred door above. While each character can find at least one solution to a problem and gain the benefit of their highest attribute, there's usually a path of least resistance to be found. All the players have to do is discover it!

At higher levels, encourage the players to come up with ever more heroic (and excessive!) solutions to problems. While a barred door might be a pause for thought to 1st level characters, by 10th level it's an

excuse for light relief. Your 10th level Fighter would have a +13 Phys and most likely automatically succeed at any DC15 Phys+STR checks - so encourage them to aim for DC20, at least: "I push the door down with my index finger and a grunt."

Modifiers and more

Modifiers are the GM's Best Friend. Even a plus or minus 2 can make a world of difference, especially at lower levels. If your Halfling Rogue is trying to persuade the City Guard to let them enter the Merchant's Quarter after dark (Comm+MIND, DC15), grant them a +2 because the guard recently won at dice and is in a good mood. Alternatively, give them a **minus** 2 because he lost but drop hints as to the guard's weakness.

Modifiers can make all the difference between success and failure. If the characters need to find a path through the Lizardmen Swamps (Know+MIND, DC20) then finding an old trail map (a +4 modifier!) might just save them from becoming Hooman Stew.

Encourage the players to work for those modifiers, and reward them for clever, creative thinking. It's what the game is all about, after all.

The Four Skills

Microlite20's four skills - Physical, Subterfuge, Knowledge and Communication - can be used to adjudicate pretty much any situation the game demands. When creating Microlite20 I toyed with more skills, and less (even zero) but these four hit the sweet spot for general play. Of course, if you want more, or want to chance these four, feel free!

Skills are also used to replace two of the three saving throws from D&D, with Phys+STR and Phys+DEX replacing Fort and Reflex Saves respectively. This gives Fighters their built-in boost to saves against Poison, etc, and Rogues (with their higher DEX) their improved Reflexes. It also means that the Phys skill is important to all players, regardless of class. Which leads us to.....

Why is Subterfuge so important?

This is a common question that's regularly repeated on the [ENWorld threads](#) ^[2], and the short answer is: it depends on your style of play.

It's true that the Subterfuge Skill covers a whole range of D&D skills, including Hide, Move Silently, Listen, Open Lock, Search and Spot. It's THE skill for Rogues, and will get regular use from all classes. That's because all of the Adventuring classes are a nasty, sneaky lot, and not to be trusted :)

If your games are revolve around Urban Adventuring or involve a lot of stealth, Subterfuge will see a lot of use. On the other hand, games involving a lot of dynamic action will more likely demand more Physical checks, and ones with lots of social interaction will require Communication. That's more of a matter of playstyle than anything.

For my money, I'd put Knowledge as a critical skill; a failed Know check at a critical moment could result in a TPK. Imagine failing a Know+MIND check and bringing the wrong magic weapons to bear against a Demon Lord.....

Fewer skills means more choice

Back in the days of Classic D&D, the players could do **anything**. With no straight-jacketed skill system to limit their choices, the players invented cool and clever solutions to problems. When faced with a 30' high statue with rubies for eyes they erected pulleys to lift and swing the rogue into place far above their heads. Try doing that in 3rd Edition D&D and the GM will be left scratching their head working out how to call for skill checks for **that**. The D&D skill system has become a list of what the characters can do, silently eliminating all other possibilities, and that's not a Good Thing.

Microlite20 is the best of both worlds; rather than provide a skills **list**, it provides a skills **framework**. This gives the players room to think of solutions rather than looking down a long list of skills to see what's most applicable to the task in hand.

Here's another example: Climbing. In D&D, that's a skill modified by STR. That's good if you're a Fighter, but not so good if you're a Wizard. In Microlite20, the character could use Phys+STR ("I pull myself up"), Phys+DEX ("I nimbly climb the cliff face"), Phys+MIND ("I take my time, working out the best route and carefully testing each handhold") or even Sub+STR ("I climb, quietly"). That adds much more flavour to the game and encourages each player to find their own, unique, solution.

Using existing D&D monsters

But what happens when you're running a published adventure, or using a Monster from the Monster Manual or SRD?

Simple; use them as is. It doesn't matter that the Orc makes a Listen check to see if it detects the PCs, or if the NPC fails a Spot check. The mechanics are the same (roll d20+modifiers against a DC), and the emphasis should always be on simplicity and speed of play. There's no need to convert **any** monsters or NPCs to Microlite20 before you use them. Just roll, and have fun!

Let's recap

The Microlite20 Skill System is your friend. It's flexible, and encourages imaginative play like no other. **And** it's mostly d20 compliant too.

What's not to love?

Microlite20 © Robin V. Stacey 2006-2008 [OGL](#) applies.

Links:

[1] <http://microlite20.net/node/24>

[2] <http://www.enworld.org/showthread.php?t=219419>