

Skill Challenges for Mutants & Masterminds

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 Class 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 DC, 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 Class. So, 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 DC and have a high modifier. You can also use challenges to attempt heroic actions, even when faced with a high DC. In these cases, spending a hero 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 Gamemaster has final say whether a challenge applies to a specific situation. Each challenge imposes either a +5 modifier to a check's -DC 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 per cent 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, penalised, 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, described in the following section.

Acrobatics Challenges

- ▶ **Accelerated Acrobatics:** You can try to cross a precarious surface faster than normal. If you increase the Difficulty Class by 5, you can move your full speed as a move action. Moving twice your speed in a round requires the penalty plus two skill checks, one for each move action. You can also accept this penalty to charge across a precarious surface; this requires one skill check per multiple of your speed (or fraction thereof) that you charge.
- ▶ **Perfect Balance:** In return for increasing the Difficulty Class by 5, you move with such grace and agility that you maintain your dodge bonus to defence while balancing.
- ▶ **Perilous Balance:** You can shake or disturb the surface on which you are balancing (e.g. swaying on a tightrope). If your check succeeds after increasing the Difficulty Class by 5, you keep your balance and impose a +5 modifier on the Difficulty Classes of all Acrobatics checks that others must make on the surface until the next round.

Bluff Challenges

- ▶ **Conversational Paralysis:** In return for a -5 penalty to your Bluff check, a successful check dazes your target for one round. Your claims are so strange or outlandish that the target can do nothing but sputter or reel in confusion. This skill challenge does not work in combat situations (for that, see the **Distract** feat in the **Feats** chapter of *M&M*). Each additional -5 check penalty you accept increases the duration of the effect by one round.
- ▶ **Durable Lie:** In return for a -5 penalty on your check, your target believes your bluff longer than usual. The target continues to act as you wish for an additional round. You can apply another -5 penalty to extend this to two rounds. This skill challenge does not work with the feint use of Bluff.

Climb Challenges

- ▶ **Accelerated Climb:** You can try to climb more quickly than normal. By accepting a +5 DC modifier to your check, you can move half your speed

instead of one-quarter your speed while climbing. You can accept this challenge twice, for a total DC modifier of +10, to move at your normal speed while climbing .

- ▶ **Fighting Climb:** By accepting a +5 DC modifier to a Climb check, you can maintain your dodge bonus to defence while climbing .
- ▶ **Secured Climb:** If you take a +5 DC modifier to your Climb check, you do not have to make a Climb check to maintain your position if you take damage. You climb in such a way as to brace yourself for any attacks.

Craft Challenges

- ▶ **Fast Work:** You may add +5 or +10 to the indicated Difficulty Class to craft an item. This increase allows you to make the item faster than usual, reducing the time to half or one-quarter normal, respectively.

Diplomacy Challenges

- ▶ **Combat Diplomacy:** You can make a Diplomacy check in combat as a full-round action by accepting a +10 modifier to the Difficulty Class. Opponents in combat with you are considered hostile. An unfriendly opponent doesn't attack you unless you give him reason to do so. An indifferent foe stops fighting altogether, while a helpful one actually joins your side, even turning against former allies.

Disable Device Challenges

- ▶ **Hide Tampering:** If you add +5 to your Difficulty Class, you can conceal any tampering with a device. Anyone who inspects the device must make a check against your Disable Device check result to notice your tampering. On a failed check, it goes unnoticed.

Disguise Challenges

- ▶ **Face in the Crowd:** With a -5 penalty to your check result, you can craft a disguise that is less likely to draw attention. Only people who specifically single you out and try to notice your deception receive Notice checks to do so. Guards and other passive observers take no special notice of you unless you draw attention to yourself or interact directly with them.
- ▶ **Quick Change:** You can adopt a disguise as a full-round action by taking a -5 penalty to your check. However, anyone who comes within one visual range increment of you (usually 10 feet) automatically sees through your disguise due to its hurried and makeshift nature.

Escape Artist Challenges

- ▶ **Conceal Efforts:** In exchange for a +5 to the DC, you can conceal your efforts to escape. Anyone who inspects your bindings must make a Notice check with a Difficulty Class equal to your Escape Artist check result. If the Notice check fails, they do not notice your efforts to escape. So, for example, you could leave your bonds seemingly intact so a villain doesn't realise that you're actually free.

Drive Challenges

- ▶ **One Hand on the Wheel:** By taking a +5 Difficulty increase to your Drive check, you can perform a standard action in the same round as your Drive check with no penalty.

Challenges and Opposed Checks

Some challenges, if successful, use the result as the Difficulty Class of the opposed roll (such as Hide Tampering for Disable Devices and Conceal Efforts for Escape Artist). This has the unusual side effect that the more difficult a task was for the person doing the challenge, the more difficult it is to undo that effort if the hero was successful. This can be especially compounded if a character accepts multiple challenges; for example, if a character takes two Fast Task challenges and a Hide Tampering challenge on a Disable Device check, and he's successful, he will have made it more difficult by +10 for his work to be noticed, because his final DC was raised by +10!

If this seems counterintuitive, you may want to add the modifiers from any challenges that don't specifically affect the opposed check as a bonus to the opposed check. In the previous example, the +10 from the Fast Task challenges would be added to any Notice checks to spot the Hide Tampering efforts.

Gather Information Challenges

- ▶ **Discrete Inquiry:** While looking for news and information, you keep a low profile. You increase your Gather Information check DC by +5, but you avoid leaving any clues about the information you seek. If your check fails, you may be detected as normal, but you still avoid spreading clues about what you were trying to find.

Intimidate Challenges

- ▶ **Forceful Intimidation:** By taking a -5 penalty on your Intimidate check, you can force your subject to take an action that is against his interests (but not life threatening).
- ▶ **Mass Intimidation:** You can attempt to intimidate more than one subject at a time. You suffer a -2 penalty to your check per opponent beyond the first (instead of the usual -5 penalty for a skill challenge).
- ▶ **Powerful Intimidation:** In return for a -5 penalty to your Intimidate check, you can either increase the penalty you inflict for demoralising a foe by -1. You can take this challenge multiple times to increase the demoralise penalty.

Notice Challenges

- ▶ **Accurate:** In return for a -5 penalty to your Notice check, you can treat a normally inaccurate sense (such as hearing) as accurate for one round. A successful check tells you the exact spot a subject occupies. A failed check means you don't notice anything.
- ▶ **Lip Reading:** By careful observation of the movements of some one's mouth and lips, you can tell what he is saying. Lip reading is a +5 increase to the DC of your Notice check.

You must be within three Notice range increments of the speaker and be able to accurately see him speak. You must also be able to understand the speaker's language. You have to concentrate on reading lips for a full minute before making the Notice check, and can't perform some other action during this time. You can move at half speed but not any faster, and must maintain a line of sight to the lips being read. If the check succeeds, you understand the general content of a minute's worth of speech, but may still miss certain details.

If the check fails, you can't read the speaker's lips. If the check fails by 5 or more, you draw some incorrect conclusion about the speech.

The GM rolls the Notice check so you don't know whether you succeeded or failed and therefore don't know whether or not any information you picked up is accurate. You can spend a hero point to re-roll a lip reading attempt, but you do so "blind," not knowing what the original die roll result was (and therefore whether or not you can do better). You can retry a failed attempt at lip reading once per minute.

Pilot Challenges

- ▶ **One Hand on the Wheel:** By taking a +5 Difficulty increase to your Pilot check, you can perform a standard action in the same round as your Pilot check with no penalty.

Sense Motive Challenges

- ▶ **Combat Clarity:** For a -5 penalty to your skill check, you increase the bonuses provided by the combat sense use of Sense Motive by +1. You can take this challenge up to twice on a single check. The penalties you suffer for a failed check do not increase.
- ▶ **Read Situation:** For every +5 you increase the DC of your Sense Motive check, you learn one fact about the situation at hand when evaluating a situation (see **Sense Motive** in the **Skills** chapter of *M&M*). The GM may tell you things like someone's apparent goal(s), the nature of an interaction, and so forth.

Stealth Challenges

- ▶ **Accelerated Stealth:** You can move up to your normal speed in exchange for a -5 penalty to your Stealth check. In return for a -20 penalty to your check, you can move faster than your normal speed, such as by running or charging.
- ▶ **Slip Between Cover:** You can make a Stealth check at a penalty to quickly cross an area lacking cover or concealment without automatically revealing yourself. For every 5 feet of open space you cross, you take a -5 penalty to your Stealth check. You also take the normal Stealth penalties for moving faster than half your normal speed and such. For example, you could slip past a 5-foot open doorway without being seen, or duck from shadow to shadow. Characters with the Hide in Plain Sight feat don't need cover or concealment to hide, so these rules do not apply to them. The same is true for characters with the Concealment power, since they're capable of making their own concealment.
- ▶ **Vanishing:** Stealthy characters in the comics regularly "disappear" when no one is watching them. This is essentially a use of Stealth to hide when the character has some concealment or a distraction (no one looking directly at him, essentially). It requires a Stealth check with a -5 penalty, and the character must be within a normal move action of an exit, or some cover or concealment (a window, skylight, ventilation duct, etc.). A successful check means the character seems to disappear; an observer looks only to discover he is gone. Characters can use Bluff or

Intimidate to gain the momentary distraction needed to vanish in this way. Those with the Hide in Plain Sight feat do not need this challenge, as they can already make Stealth checks without the need for cover or concealment.

Swim Challenges

- ▶ **Accelerated Swim:** For a +5 DC increase, you increase your swimming speed by one-quarter your normal speed. You can take this challenge up to three times to increase your swimming speed up to your normal speed. You suffer the normal effects of failing your Swim check.

Option: Challenges as Feats

Optionally, the GM may wish to allow characters to spend 1 power point to acquire any listed challenge as a feat. This allows the character to use that challenge at any time without a check penalty or increase in Difficulty Class.

For example, Raven takes the Perfect Balance challenge as a feat, paying 1 power point for it, as usual. Now Raven maintains her dodge bonus to defence while balancing at all times, with no increase in the Difficulty Class of her Acrobatics checks.

For standard challenges acquired as feats, the feat only applies to a specific task. So, for example, if you choose the Fast Completion challenge, you need to specify a task, such as the feint application of Bluff, or making an item with Craft. If you take Risky Prospect, you need to specify the two checks (and the skills used for them) and if you take Simultaneous Action, you need to specify the two tasks. Once specified, these things do not change.

For challenges you can take multiple times, the GM may allow a ranked feat that works in the same way. However, beware of such feats providing too much of a routine bonus; keep in mind that even with a skill challenge feat, the character must first succeed on the necessary skill check to gain the bonus.

If skill challenges are available as feats, then players can also spend hero points to acquire them temporarily for their characters. In essence, a player can choose to spend a hero point to allow a character to perform one particular skill challenge without a check penalty or DC increase. You may choose to allow the option to spend a hero point in this way even if skill challenges are not available as feats, just as a new feature of hero points, if you wish.