

ABILITY CHECKS

WHEN TO MAKE ABILITY CHECKS

It's up to the DM to let players know when to make ability checks. Players tell the DM what their character is doing, and there are three possible options:

No roll: The DM simply narrates whether the character succeeds or fails. There are lots of reasons why the DM may not call for an ability check roll. If the DM decides that the outcome is reasonably certain, or that there is no interesting consequence for failing the check, there is no point in stopping the flow of the story to roll the dice.

Hidden roll: The DM may roll behind the screen to see if the character succeeds. This is most commonly done when the character wouldn't know whether they were successful or not. If you are searching for a secret door and don't find one, you shouldn't know whether you didn't find a door because there isn't one, or whether you didn't find it because of a poor roll.

Player roll: If the outcome is uncertain, if there are consequences for failure, and if the character would know whether they succeed or fail, then the DM will ask the player to roll the ability check.

While there are no consequences for rolling a natural 1 or natural 20, the difference between your ability check total and the DC may have an impact on the quality of your success or failure. For example, failing a Charisma (persuade) check by 3 may have no consequence, but failing by 10 or more might mean the NPC is offended and refuses to talk to you further.

VARIANT D10 RULE

One of the problems with using a d20 for ability checks is that the roll of the dice has a far greater impact on the chance of success than any bonuses from skill or talent. Everything else being equal, a master in a skill (+6 proficiency bonus) will only succeed 20% more often than his apprentice (+2 proficiency bonus), which doesn't seem right.

To address this, we're going to use a variant rule that uses 2d10 for all ability checks and contested rolls, with the exception of initiative. Initiative, attack rolls and saving throws will continue to use a d20 as normal.

Using 2d10, the majority of rolls will be in the 8-14 range. This puts a bit more emphasis on proficiency and ability bonuses, and reduces (at least a little) the influence of good or bad luck. It's less likely that highly skilled characters will fail easy tasks, or that an average farmer beats the muscle-bound barbarian in an arm wrestle.

When rolling 2d10 with advantage, the player rolls 3d10 and drops the lowest die. When rolling with disadvantage, the player rolls 3d10 and drops the highest die.

When an ability check triggers a special result on a 1 or a 20 (like a halfling's Lucky trait), use the following adjusted rules: A result that triggers on a 1 now triggers on a roll of 2-3. A result that triggers on a 20 now triggers on a roll of 19-20.





