

Fudge on the Fly

by Rob Donoghue

1. Introduction

Fudge on the Fly is a method of character generation that allows games to begin immediately, with only a few moments required for character generation. It does this by allowing players to select their character's skills during play, when the situation arises which calls for them. This has a number of benefits in addition to its speed - most notably it spares players the annoyance of failing to purchase the "right" skills. Every skill purchased will be one that proves itself useful during play. The revelation of character skills over the course of play also allows for the same sort of character discovery that is common in books and film.

2. The Basics

The core of this model is expressed with the character sheet, which includes the adjective ladder from Poor to Superb, and has slots next to each step. By default, there is one step next to Superb, two next to Great, three next to Good, four next to Fair, five next to Mediocre and any number of slots next to poor. Laid out on the page, it will look a lot like this:

Superb					
Great					
Good					
Fair					
Mediocre					
Poor					

3. Character Generation

Character Generation is composed of four steps:

- A. Name the Character
- B. Write a Blurb
- C. Describe a Flaw
- D. Choose a Talent

A. Name the Character

Hopefully, this step is self explanatory. Come up with a name that you think sounds neat, and which is not too hard for everyone else to remember, or else you run the risk of acquiring a nickname.

B. Write a Blurb

The character blurb is the one or two sentence summary of the character. It should not be longer than one or two sentences, perhaps twenty words. The goal of the blurb is to express the nature of the character, not their history or personality. This is an example of an awful blurb:

Third daughter of the Duke of Glockenberry, her father held her mother's death in childbirth against her, remaining cold and distant as she grew up. Alienated, she sought friends among the castle's staff, finding surreptitious comfort in their company, and retreated into books. As she grew older, she matured into a beauty, and her father turned his eye towards arranging a politically beneficial marriage for her. Left with no other option, she fled the castle in the night with nothing but a horse, a stolen sword, and the coins that were to have been her dowry.

If this is the story, that's great, but that's something to share with the GM, not to worry about in character generation. The blurb version of the above might read:

Shut-in daughter of aristocracy fleeing an arranged marriage.

When in doubt, err on the side of simplicity.

C. Describe a Flaw

Every character has a flaw, be it an internal weakness or an external threat. It could range from a drinking problem to a sworn enemy or to a doomed romance. Flaws need be neither large nor small, and have no specific mechanical effect, they're just part of the character. As such, they don't need to be in specific categories or lists, instead, simply describe the character's greatest flaw as succinctly as possible. Examples include "Bad temper", "Hunted by Cardinal Estreban of the Inquisition", "Fond of the ladies" and so on.

The sole caveat is that if the flaw involves another character, like an enemy, it's important to name them. Otherwise the GM is obliged to make the unnamed NPC a monkey, a ninja, or a pirate.

D. Choose a Talent

Think of the one thing the character's really good at, be it fencing, poetry, being keen-eyed, breaking things, or whatever else the one thing they excel at, above all others, is. Be a little specific. "Fencing" is reasonable, but "Killin' things" might be a little broad. Let your GM know what this talent is, and if they say it's ok, write it down in the box next to the word "Superb" on the character sheet.

4. Skills in Play

When the GM calls for a skill check, she'll usually call out what skill is necessary for the task at hand. Players who have other skills they think might be appropriate can chime in and the GM will decide if they're appropriate and assign any penalties to suit. The kicker is that starting characters have no skills on their sheet other than their talent, which they have at Superb.

Whenever the GM calls for a roll, players have a few options:

If they have the skill, they may roll it.

If they don't have the skill and have a blank slot on their character sheet, they can write the skill down in that slot. They now have that skill at that level, and can roll it.

Otherwise, the character writes the skill down in the "Poor" row, and may roll the skill at that level. Note that there is no limit on how many skills a character can have at Poor. If they run out of slots, they can just add more to hold the extra skills.

What this means is that players are effectively choosing their characters' skills on the fly. Narratively, the characters are assumed to have always had the skills, it is simply that they are revealed to the audience, as they would be in a movie or novel, at that point in the story.

5. Fudge Points

A player should be awarded one extra Fudge Point at the end of any session where their flaw was a significant detriment to their activities.

6. Development

From time to time, usually after the completion of a story arc, the GM may call for a period of development. During a development period, players can reconsider their character's strengths and weaknesses in terms of how that character may have changed or grown during that time. Each development period consists of a few steps:

A. Write a new blurb

Assuming the character has grown or changed in some way, rewrite their blurb to reflect their new status. Make sure to keep a record of the old blurb: this creates a record of the character's history which can be quite useful.

B. Consider the Flaw

If the character has overcome their flaw, or a more interesting flaw has come up, the player may opt to change the flaw to reflect this.

C. Rearrange Skills

The player may rearrange skills within their steps, moving skills up and down no more than one step. The final distribution should remain in the stepped pattern on the character sheet.

7. Optional Rules

A. Stats

The default system assumes that only skills exist, and that anything that can be covered by stats like strength and toughness should be covered by appropriate skills. The failure of this model is when used in conjunction with combat systems which use stats as mechanical modifiers. In such a system, it's entirely possible to consider all such stats to be Fair (+0) and not worry about them.

However, if it is important to your game to include stats, you may use any system you like for assigning stats without creating a problem. However, if you wish to assign stats in the same spirit which skills are assigned, it's a simple matter of creating similar slots for stats, and allowing players to choose them as they come up.

For example, in a game that uses Strength, Toughness, Resolve and Wits, the core character sheet might look more like this:

STATS		SKILLS				
	Superb					
	Great					
	Good					
	Fair					
	Mediocre					
	Poor					

This would mean that the character can set one stat at Great, one at Good, one at Fair and one at Mediocre, and they may do so over the course of the game, in the same manner as skills.

B. Fate on the Fly

This model applies equally easily to Fate as it does to Fudge. Simply update the ladder and replace the Stat boxes with however many aspects you consider appropriate. As a rule of thumb, having the pyramid apex at Superb with 10 aspects seems the easiest model.

ASPECTS		SKILLS				
	Superb					
	Great					
	Good					
	Fair					
	Average					
	Mediocre					

If an aspect has more than one box, simply enter it more than once. No single aspect can be entered more than 3 times.

C. Advancement Options

Development exists as written to allow characters to evolve in a natural way. Interests and pursuits can grow more or less important, and the character can change to suit. The idea is that the young barbarian can eventually become a wise elder because he's changed his focus, not because he's added some political skills to his bucket of whupass. However, advancement, in the sense of characters growing more capable over time, is a classic staple of gaming, and many players would be uncomfortable without it.

The GM may declare any period of development (ideally one which takes place after a significant point in the game, such as the defeat of a major enemy or achievement of an important goal) to also be a period of advancement. When this happens, the player gets to add one more slot to one of his steps, which skills may then be moved into according to the normal development rules. Which step gains a slot depends on what advancement period this is.

Advancement	Add Slot To
First	Mediocre
Second	Fair
Third	Good
Fourth	Great
Fifth	Superb
Sixth	Legendary

These steps are additive, so a character who has had three advancement periods will have extra slots at Mediocre, Fair and Good.

7. For Gamemasters

On the Fly can also be used for NPCs. After all, when an NPC is introduced, you usually only have a few things sketched out about them: one or two important skills, maybe an aspect or two, and some sense of how they'll play out in the scene. Statting up such a character fully is typically a waste of time, but sometimes a situation arises where you suddenly need to know what the Ambassador's Fencing skill is. Alternately, your players may latch onto one of your "throwaway" NPCs, in which case you find yourself needing to flesh them out a little. In these situations, the GM may build the NPCs sheet identically to that of a PC.

The easiest way to represent an NPC is in terms of their "apex skill": the skill they have the highest rating in. The bulk of situations can usually be covered by simply detailing the apex skill and the two skills immediately beneath it. This allows a simple template:

Name		
Rank	Skills	
Flaw		

So a beat cop might be a minor character, so his apex skill is ranked at only good. The on the fly version might look like:

Name	Dirty Beat Cop	
Rank	Skills	
Good	Guns	
Fair		
Flaw	On the take.	

While our Ambassador, a more important character, might look like this:

Name	Ambassador Horace Whitley IV	
Rank	Skills	
Great	Diplomacy	
Good	Fencing	
Flaw	Easily offended.	

A. Fate Variant

For Fate, just remove the flaw, and add in two aspects.

Name			
Aspect	Rank	Skills	

So in the case of our cop:

Name	Beat Cop		
Aspect	Rank	Skills	
Dirty	Good	Guns	
Guilt	Fair		

And the Ambassador:

Name	Ambassador Horace Whitley IV		
Aspect	Rank	Skills	
Connected	Great	Diplomacy	
Touchy	Good	Fencing	

9. Example of Play

Deborah sits down to make a character. She wants to play a political type, a minor but ambitious noble. With that in mind, she gets started.

Name: She steals from one of her favorite books, and takes the name Baroness Diane Nichelli.

Blurb: This one's easy: "Ambitious, scheming noblewoman."

Flaw: There are a number of options. Enemies is a strong contender, but since Diane is still a minor player, Deborah opts for something more internal and decides that Diane is "Arrogant."

Talent: Deborah thinks about a number of skills that might be useful for a politician, and decides she wants Diane to be an excellent judge of character, especially of a person's honesty. She could probably call this "Sense motive" or even "Sense Lies" but she opts for the more colorful "Cold Read".

Name	Baroness Diane Michelli				
Blurb	Ambitious, scheming noblewoman.				
Superb	Cold Read				
Great					
Good					
Fair					
Mediocre					
Poor					
Flaw:	Arrogant				

The game begins and a conspiracy of coincidences result in Diane fleeing into the night on horseback. The GM asks what her riding skill is. She has none on her sheet, and Deborah gives it a moments thought. While Diane is hardly a jockey, she has been taught the fundamentals, so she writes down "Riding" next to Mediocre.

Later, there is a question of how she's going to pay for her gown and servants for the upcoming ball, so Deborah quickly scribbles down "Wealth" next to Great, and the issue is resolved.

At that ball, Diane is accosted by another lady of the court in a most unladylike fashion. The ensuing scuffle calls for a brawl check. Deborah thinks Diane has no real talent for brawling, and writes it down next to "Poor". Thankfully, her opponent is not much better.

At this point in the game, her character sheet looks like this:

Name	Baroness Diane Michelli				
Blurb	Ambitious, scheming noblewoman.				
Superb	Cold Read				
Great	Wealth				
Good					
Fair					
Mediocre	Riding				
Poor	Brawling				
Flaw:	Arrogant				

A. Example of Development

In time Diane's sheet is fully fleshed out:

Name	Baroness Diane Michelli				
Blurb	Ambitious, scheming noblewoman.				
Superb	Cold Read				
Great	Wealth	Lying			
Good	Dagger	Observe	Diplomacy		
Fair	Fashion	Gossip	Dance	Administrate	
Mediocre	Riding	Athlete	Sing	Codes	Hysterics
Poor	Brawl	Fencing	Swimming	Stealth	
Flaw:	Arrogant				

She goes through the steps of development:

New Blurb: Ambitious Lady of the Court, renown for her parties.

Consider Flaw: Arrogant has done well for her, but she's made some delightful enemies, so she replaces it with "Enemies with the Viscount Breneal".

Rearrange Skills: While she's mostly happy with the current layout, She wants to make a few changes. Codes are proving more valuable than dances, so she swaps Codes and Dance.

Additionally, Gossip has proven much more useful than Dagger, so she swaps the two of them. Ideally, she'd like to move Gossip up to Great, but she can't move it two steps in one development period. Now, her sheet reads:

Name	Baroness Diane Michelli				
Blurb	Ambitious, scheming noblewoman.				
Superb	Cold Read				
Great	Wealth	Lying			
Good	Gossip	Observe	Diplomacy		
Fair	Fashion	Dagger	Codes	Administrate	
Mediocre	Riding	Athlete	Sing	Dance	Hysterics
Poor	Brawl	Fencing	Swimming	Stealth	
Flaw:	Enemies with the Viscount Breneal				

10. In Summary

Fudge on the Fly is designed to be fast and easy to use. It's a flexible concept that can be easily adapted to almost any approach to play, and can be adjusted to a variety of flavors through the simple addition and subtraction of slots. It plays to one of Fudge's strengths in stepping away from mechanical character creation and just stepping into the story where things "make sense" to a lot of gamers. At the same time, any player who is uncomfortable with choosing skills on the fly is naturally welcome to fill in their slots ahead of time, so it should not prove too difficult a compromise.

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Postscript

Butch Curry did the layout for this PDF version of Fudge on the Fly. He made a few editorial changes in the process, but really, it wasn't anything major. He hopes Rob doesn't mind.

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Rank	Skills	
Flaw		

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