

CORE ELEMENTS



Revised Edition

What is Core Elements?

Core Elements is a simple, comprehensible, and functional distillation of the world's most popular roleplaying system. This revision of the original Core Elements incorporates rules for using magic and fine tunes the character creation rules and combat rules found in the previous releases. Like previous editions of Core Elements, the entirety of this release is OGC with the exception of the title. Core Elements can be used either as a set of rules to play a game, or as the foundation of a game that you plan to publish. That said, however you choose to use the revised edition of Core Elements, I hope that you enjoy it.

Basic Character Abilities

In Core Elements, all characters are initially defined by six different basic abilities - physical and mental qualities that all sentient characters in a given setting are assumed to possess. These six different basic abilities are:

Strength (STR): Strength is a measure of your character's muscle and physical power.

Dexterity (DEX): Dexterity is a measure of hand-eye coordination, agility, reflexes, and balance.

Constitution (CON): Constitution represents your character's overall physical health and stamina.

Intelligence (INT): Intelligence determines how well your character learns and reasons.

Wisdom (WIS): Wisdom is a measure of willpower, common sense, perception, and intuition.

Charisma (CHA): Charisma is a measure of a character's force of personality, personal magnetism, ability to lead, and physical attractiveness.

For each ability, roll four six-sided dice (4d6) and total the three highest results to determine the ability's score. Each ability will have a modifier ranging from -4 to +4 based on its score as outlined on the table below.

Ability Score	3	4-5	6-7	8-9	10-11	12-13	14-15	16-17	18
Modifier	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4

Character Level

In addition to the six different basic abilities, characters are also defined by a number that serves as an abstract representation of the experience that they have accumulated throughout their life. This is the character's *level*. By default, characters in games that utilize Core Elements begin play at 1st Level.

The level at which a character begins play initially determines two different things - their *defense bonus* (DB) and *attack bonus* (AB). Both a character's initial attack and defense bonuses are equal to three times their level, divided by two and rounded up to the nearest whole number. For example:

Your character is a street smart, down and out private investigator who the referee has allowed to begin play at 3rd Level. This means that his initial attack and defense bonuses are $+5 [(3 \times 3) / 2 = 4.5, \text{rounded up to } 5]$.

Character Skills

In addition to the basic abilities and their level, a character is further defined by the *skills* that they possess. Characters initially receive *skill points* equal to eight plus their INT modifier ($8 + \text{INT} = \text{Skill Points}$) per level. These points are traded on a one-for-one basis to acquire *ranks* in a given skill. That said, note that because Core Elements is a merely a system - not a game that is tied to any one genre or setting - there is no pre-defined list of skills included herein. Skills in games that utilize Core Elements can be handled in one of three different ways, explained directly below..

First, a referee may create their own list of skills specific to the genre and setting of the game that they are running. Second, players may be allowed to create their own skills as they define their character, having them approved by the referee at that time (this is often referred to as 'free-form' skill creations). Finally, if neither of those methods suits you, hundreds of pre-defined skill lists exist in other OGL supplements and can be ported into games that utilize Core Elements with very little or absolutely no modification necessary.

Character Hit Points

Finally, the last step in defining a character in Core Elements is to determine their initial number of *hit points*. Hit points are an abstract representation of a character's ability to sustain physical damage. A character has a total number of hit points equal to 10 plus their CON modifier at 1st Level, and gains a number of hit points equal to the result of one six-sided die (1d6) roll plus their CON modifier per level thereafter. For example:

Your character has a CON modifier of +2, so at 1st Level she would have twelve initial hit points (10+2=12). When she becomes 2nd Level, you roll one six-sided die, add her CON modifier to the die result and then, add this final result to her current number of hit points.

How to Make Checks

In order to determine whether a character's action is successful, a player rolls one twenty-sided die (1d20), adds some numbers to the result of the die roll, and compares the final sum to a *difficulty class* (DC). If the combined total of the player's dice roll equals or exceeds the DC assigned to the action, then their character has successfully completed the action that they were attempting to perform.

When to Make Checks

Making a check means rolling dice, and any time that players are rolling dice, they're not focusing on their character. The only time that players should make checks is when a character is performing an action under duress - that is, when another character or force (including things such as darkness, nature, time, etc) stands between them and performing their intended action successfully.

Making Ability Checks

An *ability check* is called for whenever a character is attempting to perform an action that directly relates to one of the six basic abilities or when they are attempting to perform an action for which they possess no relevant skill. When making an ability check, the number that the player adds to the result of the d20 roll is the modifier of the single basic ability most closely related to the action being performed.

Making Skill Checks

A *skill check* is called for when a character is attempting to perform an action that directly relates to a skill that they possess. When making a skill check, the numbers that the player adds to the result of the d20 roll are the modifier of the ability most closely related to the action being performed and any ranks that the character possess in the single most relevant skill that they possess.

Making Attack Checks

An *attack check* is called for whenever a character attempts to strike an opponent in combat. When making an attack check, the numbers that a player adds to the result of the d20 roll are their character's AB and either their STR modifier (for melee attacks) or their DEX modifier (for ranged attacks), as well as any ranks in the single most relevant weapon or fighting skill that their character possesses which corresponds to the attack being made. For example:

Your character is engaged in a few rounds of fisticuffs with a sailor in the local tavern. You decide to swinf a haymaker at the sailor, so you roll 1d20 and add your characters AB, STR modifier, and Fisticuffs skill ranks to the roll result.

Making Defense Checks

A *defense check* is called for whenever a character attempts to parry or dodge an incoming attack during combat. When making a defense check, the numbers that a player adds to the result of the d20 roll are their character's DB, their DEX modifier, and any ranks in the single most relevant skill that they have which corresponds to the defensive action being taken. For example:

Your character is a master swordsman locked in mortal combat with his archenemy, who has just delivered a master sword blow aimed at your character. You choose to parry the blow, so you make a defensive check, adding your character's DB, DEX modifier, and ranks in his swordplay skill to the roll result.

Making Saving Throws

Finally, a *saving throw* is a special kind of check made whenever a character is trying to avoid

(at least partially) the effects of an outside force or condition (disease, insanity, etc). When making a saving throw, the numbers that a player adds to the result of the die roll are their character's DB and the modifier of the ability used to resist the force or condition (usually DEX, CON or WIS).

Assigning a Difficulty Class

For saving throws or character actions that is not being actively opposed by another character or creature, the referee assigns a difficulty class ranging from five (easy) to thirty (near impossible) or possibly even higher (a snowball's chance in hell).

When a character is attempting to perform an action that *is* being actively opposed (a combat attack or defensive sword parry, for instance) by an opponent, the player of the opposing character or creature makes a check and the result of that check serves as the DC.

Taking Turns in Combat

During combat, time in games that utilize Core Elements is divided into *turns*. During any given turn, a character may attempt to perform one action, making check as previously described. To determine the order in which characters can take those actions, at the start of a battle, each combatant rolls for *initiative*.

To determine initiative, each player whose character is involved in the combat makes a DEX ability check and adds his or her character's DEX modifier to the roll result. Characters act in order during combat, counting down from highest roll result to the lowest. In every round that follows, the characters act in the same order.

If two or more combatants have the same initiative roll result, the combatants who are tied act in order of total initiative modifier (highest first). If there is still a tie, the tied characters should roll again to determine which one of them goes before the other.

Health and Damage

Successful strikes in combat inflict damage equal to the sum of a weapon's *damage rating* (DR) of the weapon that inflicted the attack and the STR (for melee attacks) or DEX (for ranged attacks) modifier of the attacking character, less the *armor rating* (AR) of any armor that the defending character

is wearing. This damage is subsequently subtracted from the hit point total of the character who was struck.

Once a character's *hit points* have been reduced to zero, the character is disabled (not unconscious, but close to it); if their hit points are reduced to less than zero, but not less than -10, they are unconscious; and when their hit points have been reduced to less than -10, they are dead. Injured characters heal 1d6 hit points of damage per eight hours of *rest* that they receive..

Casting Magic (Option)

Incorporating magic into a game that utilizes Core Elements is a relatively simple affair that hinges on six different skills, each of which represents a type of magic, as described below.

Alteration: Alteration magic changes the physical properties of a character, creature or object; altering their body. Magical healing and shape changing, for example, fall under this category of magic.

Banishment: Banishment magic compels forces, items, or characters in the caster's immediate vicinity to depart. Examples of Banishment magic at work include dispelling a curse or turning undead.

Conjuration: Conjuration magic creates items or elements (magical or mundane in nature) where none previously existed. The creation of magical fire, for instance, falls under this category of magic.

Control: Control magic physically manipulates items or elements. For example, causing a flying arrow to stop in mid-flight or drawing shadows to oneself are both examples of Control magic at work.

Enchantment: Enchantment magic endows upon an a character or object magical properties that it does not usually possess. Magic swords and armor are all end products of Enchantment magic.

Summoning: Summoning magic calls to the caster creatures, characters, or elements that already exist but are not in the immediate area. Things commonly summoned include demons and alien gods.

To actually cast a spell, a player's character only needs to possess one or more of the skill above

and specifically describe what they are attempting to do with it (what they want the outcome of their spell to accomplish, if successful). After they have done this, they make a skill check as previously described and, if successful, the effect of their spell occurs as they described it.

Now, that having been said - casting spells is the *only* case in which characters may apply ranks from more than one skill to the result of their d20 roll when making a skill check. This is because different types of magic can be combined to produce certain effects. For example:

Your want your character to cast a cliché high fantasy 'fireball' spell, which the referee informs you will require skill in both Conjunction and Control magic, which your character possesses. When you make your skill check to determine whether or not your character successfully casts their 'fireball' spell, you may add his ranks in both the Conjunction and the Control skills to the d20 roll result.

Finally, you may be wondering just exactly how much damage an injurious spell does when it is successfully cast. Any spell designed to cause injury that is successfully cast causes an amount of damage to the intended target equal to the amount by which the player's d20 exceeded the DC for casting the spell, plus their INT modifier and their AB.

Character Growth

As characters interact with the world around them, they gain life experience. This experience (as previously mentioned), is reflected by a character's level. In games that utilize Core Elements, characters gain enough experience to increase a level after every two adventures that they see through to a conclusion or, in the case of a campaign, every four game sessions that they survive intact. Whenever a character gains levels, there are several different things that may be effected.

First, every time that a character gains a level, their player needs to roll a single six-sided die, add the character's CON modifier to the roll result, and then add then add the resulting number to the character's hit point total. Also, every time that a character gains a level, they receive a number of skill points equal to six plus their INT modifier. Finally, for every *third* level (3rd Level, 6th Level, 9th Level, etc) that

a character gains, a player may add *one* point to any *single* basic ability of their choice.

Note that when a character has one of their basic abilities increased in this manner, the modifier associated with that ability may change and such changes should be noted. That said, other aspects of a character that were effected by basic ability ratings during the character creation process are *not* recalculated when abilities are increased due to a character gaining a level.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Where are the classes, feats and skill lists?

A: Classes and feats are entirely optional facets of the system from which Core Elements is derived, thus they are not included here, as they aren't... uhm... core elements. Skill lists, on the other, are excluded from Core Elements because they tend to be unique to individual campaign settings.

Q: I'm new to the hobby. Can I use these rules?

A: Core Elements wasn't specifically designed with hobby newcomers in mind. Some prior familiarity with roleplaying games is recommended before you use these rules to run a game but, that said, you are the final judge of whether or not you are capable of utilizing these rules.

Q: Can these rules be used with other Open Gaming License (OGL) products?

A: Absolutely. The rules presented here are merely the core elements of the system. There are hundreds (if not thousands) of other OGL products that are compatible with these core elements, allowing you to forge your own customized version of this basic system.

Obligatory Legalese

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Core Elements Glossary

Abilities - Numeric values that represent the natural physical and mental aptitudes of a character.

Ability Check - A die roll of 1d20 + modifier made versus a DC to determine whether a character can successfully perform an action.

Attack Check - A die roll of 1d20 + attack bonus and STR or DEX modifier versus a DC to determine whether a character can successfully land a blow in combat.

AB - See Base Attack Bonus.

AR - See Armor Rating.

Armor Rating - A numeric representation of how much damage a piece of armor protects against.

Attack Bonus - A bonus applied to attack checks, representing a character's experience utilizing a weapon in combat.

Charisma - A numeric value that measures a character's social magnitude.

Constitution - A numeric value that measures a character's overall health and stamina.

Damage Rating - A numeric representation of how much damage a weapon or attack form inflicts.

DB - See Defense Bonus

DC - See Difficulty Class

Defense Bonus - A bonus applied to the defense check of a character, representing a character's innate survival instinct. Also used when making saving throws.

Defense Check - A die roll of 1d20 + defense bonus and STR or DEX modifier versus a DC to determine whether a character can successfully avoid a blow in combat.

Dexterity - A numeric value that represents a character's agility and sense of balance.

Difficulty Class - The target number that a player must meet or exceed in order for a check to succeed.

DR - See Damage Rating.

HP - See Hit Points.

Hit Points - A numeric abstraction of a character's ability to dodge attacks and sustain physical damage.

Intelligence - A numeric value that measures a character's ability to reason.

Level - A numeric abstraction of a character's life experience has accumulated during their travels.

Making a Check - Rolling a twenty-sided die, adding some numbers to the result, and comparing the final sum to a DC.

Modifier - The numeric bonus or penalty associated with an ability score.

Ranks - Numeric representations of a character's learned aptitude as it applies to skills. See Skill and Skill Points.

Rest - Period of time not marked by stressful activity or physical exertion.

Saving Throw - A special check made to attempt the avoidance of damage or harm being inflicted by a force or condition.

Skill - An aptitude, area of knowledge, or expertise that can be increased over time.

Skill Points - Points used to purchase ranks in a skill.

Skill Check - A die roll of 1d20 + modifier + skill ranks versus a DC.

Strength - A numeric representation of a character's raw physical power.

Turn - A unit of time in the game during which a character may attempt to perform one action.

Wisdom - A numeric value that measures a character's willpower and intuition.

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