

TRACKING

Adventurers sometimes choose their path by following the tracks of other creatures—or other creatures might track the adventurers! To track, one or more creatures must succeed on a Wisdom (Survival) check. You might require trackers to make a new check in any of the following circumstances:

- They stop tracking and resume after finishing a short or long rest.
- The trail crosses an obstacle, such as a river, that shows no tracks.
- The weather conditions or terrain changes in a way that makes tracking harder.

The DC for the check depends on how well the ground shows signs of a creature's passage. No roll is necessary in situations where the tracks are obvious. For example, no check is needed to track an army advancing along a muddy road. Spotting tracks on a bare stone floor is more challenging, unless the creature being tracked leaves a distinct trail. Additionally, the passage of time often makes tracks harder to follow. In a situation where there is no trail to follow, you can rule that tracking is impossible.

The Tracking DCs table offers guidelines for setting the DC or, if you prefer, you can choose a DC based on your assessment of the difficulty. You can also grant advantage on the check if there's more than one set of tracks to follow, or disadvantage if the trail being followed passes through a well-trafficked area.

On a failed check, the character loses the trail but can attempt to find it again by making a careful search of the area. It takes 10 minutes to find a trail in a confined area such as a dungeon, or 1 hour outdoors.

TRACKING DCs

| Ground Surface | DC |
|-------------------------------------|----|
| Soft surface such as snow | 10 |
| Dirt or grass | 15 |
| Bare stone | 20 |
| Each day since the creature passed | +5 |
| Creature left a trail such as blood | -5 |

SOCIAL INTERACTION

During a social interaction, the adventurers usually have a goal. They want to extract information, secure aid, win someone's trust, escape punishment, avoid combat, negotiate a treaty, or achieve whatever other objective led to the interaction in the first place. The creatures they interact with also have agendas.

Some DMs prefer to run a social interaction as a free-form roleplaying exercise, where dice rarely come into play. Other DMs prefer to resolve the outcome of an interaction by having characters make Charisma checks. Either approach works, and most games fall somewhere in between, balancing player skill (roleplaying and persuading) with character skill (reflected by ability checks).

RESOLVING INTERACTIONS

The *Player's Handbook* provides guidelines for balancing roleplaying and ability checks in a social interaction (see chapter 8, "Adventuring," in that book). This section adds to that material by providing a structured way to resolve a social interaction. Much of this structure will be invisible to your players in play and isn't meant to be a substitute for roleplaying.

1. STARTING ATTITUDE

Choose the starting attitude of a creature the adventurers are interacting with: friendly, indifferent, or hostile.

A **friendly** creature wants to help the adventurers and wishes for them to succeed. For tasks or actions that require no particular risk, effort, or cost, friendly creatures usually help without question. If an element of personal risk is involved, a successful Charisma check might be required to convince a friendly creature to take that risk.

An **indifferent** creature might help or hinder the party, depending on what the creature sees as most beneficial. A creature's indifference doesn't necessarily make it standoffish or disinterested. Indifferent creatures might be polite and genial, surly and irritable, or anything in between. A successful Charisma check is necessary when the adventurers try to persuade an indifferent creature to do something.

A **hostile** creature opposes the adventurers and their goals but doesn't necessarily attack them on sight. For example, a condescending noble might wish to see a group of upstart adventurers fail so as to keep them from becoming rivals for the king's attention, thwarting them with slander and scheming rather than direct threats and violence. The adventurers need to succeed on one or more challenging Charisma checks to convince a hostile creature to do anything on their behalf. That said, a hostile creature might be so ill-disposed toward the party that no Charisma check can improve its attitude, in which case any attempt to sway it through diplomacy fails automatically.

2. CONVERSATION

Play out the conversation. Let the adventurers make their points, trying to frame their statements in terms that are meaningful to the creature they are interacting with.

Changing Attitude. The attitude of a creature might change over the course of a conversation. If the adventurers say or do the right things during an interaction (perhaps by touching on a creature's ideal, bond, or flaw), they can make a hostile creature temporarily indifferent, or make an indifferent creature temporarily friendly. Likewise, a gaffe, insult, or harmful deed might make a friendly creature temporarily indifferent or turn an indifferent creature hostile.

Whether the adventurers can shift a creature's attitude is up to you. You decide whether the adventurers have successfully couched their statements in terms that matter to the creature. Typically, a creature's attitude can't shift more than one step during a single interaction, whether temporarily or permanently.

Determining Characteristics. The adventurers don't necessarily enter into a social interaction with a full understanding of a creature's ideal, bond, or flaw. If they want to shift a creature's attitude by playing on these characteristics, they first need to determine what the creature cares about. They can guess, but doing so runs the risk of shifting the creature's attitude in the wrong direction if they guess badly.

After interacting with a creature long enough to get a sense of its personality traits and characteristics through conversation, an adventurer can attempt a Wisdom (Insight) check to uncover one of the creature's characteristics. You set the DC. A check that fails by 10 or more might misidentify a characteristic, so you should provide a false characteristic or invert one of the creature's existing characteristics. For example, if an old sage's flaw is that he is prejudiced against the uneducated, an adventurer who badly fails the check might be told that the sage enjoys personally seeing to the education of the downtrodden.

Given time, adventurers can also learn about a creature's characteristics from other sources, including its friends and allies, personal letters, and publicly told stories. Acquiring such information might be the basis of an entirely different set of social interactions.

3. CHARISMA CHECK

When the adventurers get to the point of their request, demand, or suggestion—or if you decide the conversation has run its course—call for a Charisma check. Any character who has actively participated in the conversation can make the check. Depending on how the adventurers handled the conversation, the Persuasion, Deception, or Intimidation skill might apply to the check. The creature's current attitude determines the DC required to achieve a specific reaction, as shown in the Conversation Reaction table.

CONVERSATION REACTION

DC Friendly Creature's Reaction

- | | |
|----|---|
| 0 | The creature does as asked without taking risks or making sacrifices. |
| 10 | The creature accepts a minor risk or sacrifice to do as asked. |
| 20 | The creature accepts a significant risk or sacrifice to do as asked. |

DC Indifferent Creature's Reaction

- | | |
|----|--|
| 0 | The creature offers no help but does no harm. |
| 10 | The creature does as asked as long as no risks or sacrifices are involved. |
| 20 | The creature accepts a minor risk or sacrifice to do as asked. |

DC Hostile Creature's Reaction

- | | |
|----|--|
| 0 | The creature opposes the adventurers' actions and might take risks to do so. |
| 10 | The creature offers no help but does no harm. |
| 20 | The creature does as asked as long as no risks or sacrifices are involved. |

Aiding the Check. Other characters who make substantial contributions to the conversation can help the character making the check. If a helping character says or does something that would influence the interaction in a positive way, the character making the Charisma check can do so with advantage. If the other character inadvertently says something counterproductive or offensive, the character making the Charisma check has disadvantage on that check.

Multiple Checks. Certain situations might call for more than one check, particularly if the adventurers come into the interaction with multiple goals.

4. REPEAT?

Once a Charisma check has been made, further attempts to influence the target of the interaction might be fruitless or run the risk of upsetting or angering the subject creature, potentially shifting its attitude toward hostility. Use your best judgment. For example, if the party's rogue says something that pushes a noble's attitude toward the party from indifferent to hostile, another character might be able to diffuse the noble's hostility with clever roleplaying and a successful Charisma (Persuasion) check.

ROLEPLAYING

For some DMs, roleplaying comes naturally. If it doesn't come naturally for you, don't worry. The main thing is for you to have fun portraying your NPCs and monsters and to amuse your players in the process. You don't need to be a practiced thespian or comedian to create drama or humor. The key is to pay attention to the story elements and characterizations that make your players laugh or feel emotionally engaged and to incorporate those things into your roleplaying.

BEING THE NPC

Imagine how a character or monster you bring to life would react to the adventurers. Consider what it cares about. Does it have any ideals, flaws, or bonds? By working such things into your portrayal, you not only make the character or monster more believable, but you also enhance the sense that the adventurers are in a living world.

Strive for responses and actions that introduce twists into the game. For example, an old woman whose family was killed at the hands of an evil wizard might regard the party's wizard with grave suspicion.

However you roleplay a character or monster, the classic advice for writers holds true: show, don't tell. For example, rather than describe an NPC as shallow and self-centered, have the individual act the way you would expect a shallow, self-centered person to behave. The NPC might have off-the-cuff answers for everything, an over-willingness to share personal anecdotes, and a desperate need to make himself or herself the subject of every conversation.

USING YOUR VOICE

Most of what you say during a session will be at a consistent level. For dramatic effect, be ready to shout out a battle cry or speak in a conspiratorial whisper.

Also, characters and monsters with distinctive voices are memorable. If you're not a natural mimic or actor, borrowing distinctive speech patterns from real life, the movies, or television is a good place to start. Practice different voices and impersonations of famous people, then use those voices to bring your NPCs to life.

Experiment with different speech patterns. For instance, a barmaid and a city magistrate probably use their words differently. Similarly, peasants could speak in earthy dialects, while rich folk talk in haughty drawls. Let a pirate NPC say, "Arrrr, maties!" in your best Long John Silver voice. Let intelligent monsters unfamiliar with Common stumble along with awkward grammar. Let drunkards and monsters mutter with slurred speech, while lizardfolk hiss their threats.

In any interaction with multiple NPCs, make sure the adventurers remain the focus. Have the NPCs talk to them, not so much to each other. If possible, let one NPC do most of the talking, but if multiple NPCs need to talk, give them distinct voices so the players know who's who.

USING YOUR FACE AND ARMS

Use your facial expressions to help show a character's emotions. Scowl, smile, grin, snarl, pout, cross your eyes—do whatever it takes to make the character or monster memorable to the players. When you combine facial expressions with an unusual voice, a character truly comes to life.

Though you don't need to stand up out of your chair, you can use your arms to bring even more life to an NPC. A noble could chop the air with one hand while speaking in a deadpan monotone, while an archmage might express her displeasure by silently rolling her eyes and massaging her temples with her fingers.

ENGAGING THE PLAYERS

Some players enjoy roleplaying and interaction more than others. Whatever your players' tastes, your lively portrayal of NPCs and monsters can inspire players to make just as much investment in portraying their characters. This makes social interactions an opportunity for everyone to become more immersed in the game, creating a story whose protagonists have depth.

To make sure everyone has something to do during a roleplaying-heavy game session, consider one or more of the following approaches.

Appeal to Player Preferences. There are in-game activities that players enjoy more than others, as discussed in this book's introduction. Players who like acting thrive in interaction situations, and it's fine to let those players take the spotlight. They often inspire other players by their example, but make sure those other players have an opportunity to join in the fun.

Players who like exploring and storytelling are usually amenable to roleplaying, as long as it moves the campaign forward and reveals more about the world. Players who like problem-solving often enjoy figuring out the right thing to say to shift an NPC's attitude. Players who are instigators like provoking reactions from NPCs, so they're often easily engaged—though not always productively.

Players who like to optimize their characters and slay monsters also like to argue, and having conflict within an interaction can help those players embrace roleplaying. Still, creating combat connections to an extended interaction (such as a corrupt vizier sending assassins to kill the adventurers) is often the best way to keep action-focused players engaged.

Target Specific Characters. Create situations where characters who might not otherwise be engaged with a social interaction have to do at least some of the talking. Perhaps the NPC in question is a family member or a contact of a particular adventurer and talks only to that character. An NPC of a certain race or class might listen only to characters he or she feels a kinship with. Creating a sense of importance can be a great way to get specific players engaged, but don't shut out players who are already roleplaying.

If a couple of players are dominating the conversation, take a moment now and then to involve the others. You can do this in character if you like: "And what about your hulking friend? Speak, barbarian! What will you pledge in exchange for my favor?" Or just ask the player what his or her character is doing while the conversation is going on. The first approach is better for players who are already comfortable speaking in their characters' voices. The second approach works better for players who need encouragement to engage in a roleplaying scenario.

OBJECTS

When characters need to saw through ropes, shatter a window, or smash a vampire's coffin, the only hard and fast rule is this: given enough time and the right tools, characters can destroy any destructible object. Use common sense when determining a character's success at damaging an object. Can a fighter cut through a section of a stone wall with a sword? No, the sword is likely to break before the wall does.

For the purpose of these rules, an object is a discrete, inanimate item like a window, door, sword, book, table, chair, or stone, not a building or a vehicle that is composed of many other objects.

STATISTICS FOR OBJECTS

When time is a factor, you can assign an Armor Class and hit points to a destructible object. You can also give it immunities, resistances, and vulnerabilities to specific types of damage.

Armor Class. An object's Armor Class is a measure of how difficult it is to deal damage to the object when striking it (because the object has no chance of dodging out of the way). The Object Armor Class table provides suggested AC values for various substances.

OBJECT ARMOR CLASS

| Substance | AC | Substance | AC |
|---------------------|----|-------------|----|
| Cloth, paper, rope | 11 | Iron, steel | 19 |
| Crystal, glass, ice | 13 | Mithral | 21 |
| Wood, bone | 15 | Adamantine | 23 |
| Stone | 17 | | |