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PDQ# Basics

PDQ#'s core design concept pits a character's *Fortes* (called *Qualities* in other PDQ games) against *Difficulty Ranks*. Fortes are a measure of story-effectiveness rather than reality simulation and summarize a range of attributes, advantages, merits, skills, special equipment or relationships.

The PDQ# *Master Chart* (see below) is the foundation of PDQ#. When attempting a task, players roll dice plus the *Modifier (MOD)* from the Rank of the relevant Forte. To succeed, they must beat the *Target Number (TN)*, provided by either the *Difficulty Rank* of a task or the result of an opposing roll by another character.

NOTE - A number of elements found in the free PDQ Core Rules download, *Dead Inside*, *Truth & Justice*, and *The Zorcerer of Zo* do not appear here, some have been radically altered, and all new elements have been added to PDQ#. The PDQ# system appearing here is a simplified version of the underlying rules for *Swashbucklers of the 7 Skies*.

A free download of PDQ# can be found at

<http://www.atomicsockmonkey.com/freebies.asp>

PDQ# Master Chart

Level	As Forte Rank	Modifier to roll	As Difficulty Rank	Target Number
<i>Poor</i>	Notably Inept.	-2	A trivial task.	5
<i>Average</i>	Typical human capability.	0	Straightforward task.	7
<i>Good</i>	Better than usual; most professionals or talented newcomers.	+2	Complex task, requiring attention to detail.	9
<i>Expert</i>	Noted/famed professional; talent with skill to back it up.	+4	Intricate task, difficult and requiring sharp concentration, hard for a typical untrained person (Average).	11
<i>Master</i>	Acclaimed genius: talent with substantial skill behind it.	+6	Extremely difficult task, hard for most professionals in the field (Good).	13
<i>Impressive</i>	—	—	Ridiculously difficult task, hard for most skilled and experienced professionals in the field (Expert).	15
<i>Intimidating</i>	—	—	Ludicrously difficult task, one in a million shot, hard for most Masters of the field.	17
<i>Impossible</i>	—	—	Even Masters of the field cannot regularly accomplish this task.	19
<i>Inconceivable!</i>	—	—	The difficulty of this task beggars the imagination!	21+

PDQ# Characters

Elements of a PDQ# Character



Fortes

A *Forte* is a noteworthy talent, skill, relationship, or resource of a character. It is an inherently positive aspect; a strong point. A Forte represents a broad skill, field of knowledge, unique perspective, personality trait, special gift, or social connection. (Any relevant gear needed to properly take advantage of a Forte, like lockpicks for a Thief or a sword for a Musketeer, are assumed.)

If a particular Forte is relevant *at all* to an action or topic, the character may apply it when attempting that action or understanding that topic. This is called the *penumbra* (or “shadow”) of the Forte. Therefore, a player shouldn’t pick Fortes that are too narrow or its penumbra will be too narrow; too broad, and identifying the sorts of things that should fall under the penumbra becomes pointless. Proper word choice is key. The parameters for what’s “too broad” or “too narrow” are up to the individual GM.

Consider a character who has the Forte of “Pirate.” The penumbra of Pirate probably contains such things

as sailing, maritime crime, connections to other pirates, knowing pirate stories, fighting (especially on a ship), evaluating the worth of booty, intimidation, that sort of thing. (See also *Setting the Dials*, p. 28.)

IMPORTANT NOTE—If a PC wants to be particularly better at some Forte that might normally fall under the penumbra of another Forte—for example, taking “Musketeer” and “Fencing” separately—that is perfectly okay, provided that the player realizes that in exchange for the benefit of being able to use both Fortes at the same time (adding the MODs together; see p. 20) when they get into a scuffle, this character generation choice *limits* the total breadth of what the character can do.

Common Swashbuckling Fortes

Acrobatics, Brawling, Courtesy, Fencing, Firearms, Highwayman, Horsemanship, Knows the King, Musketeer, Pirate, Prankster, Repartee, Servant/Sidekick, Strong, Wealthy.

Forte Ranks

Fortes have Ranks that indicate increasing levels of proficiency (see also the *PDQ# Master Chart*). The numbers in square brackets following the Rank of the Forte show the Rank’s *Modifier* (or *MOD*)—how much is added to or subtracted from a 2d6 dice roll for resolving a *Challenge* (see p. 18) or from a 3d6 dice roll for a *Duel* (see p. 21).

IMPORTANT NOTE—At everything else, characters are neither noteworthy nor inept—that is, they’re Average [0]. They can attempt a 2d6 roll for any task, knowledge, or skill that is not specifically secret, technical, or esoteric. That is, while any character can look for the secret door in the library, it’s doubtful they’ll be able to successfully decode the encrypted battle-orders for the Musketeer regiment without at least one espionage or military Forte.

Fortes also absorb *damage* (see p. 25).

During character generation, players choose several Fortes to describe their characters. *Never fear*: if after play begins, a particular Forte sees no use and doesn’t really add to the characterization of a PC, the player and the GM can work together change it to something that fits better.

Swashbuckling Forte

Every *PDQ#* character has a particular swashbuckling specialty: some characters swashbuckle with swords, others with repartee, skullduggery, or sailing. A character's *Swashbuckling Forte* is the thing that they astound with, granting them a wider range of abilities in that Forte.

Any Forte can be a Swashbuckling Forte, but a character can only have *one* Swashbuckling Forte. (Further, by choosing a Swashbuckling Forte the PC helps the GM tailor his adventures to the PC's tastes.)

A character gets a discount on purchasing *Techniques* (see p. 6) chained to their Swashbuckling Forte, both during character generation and later advancement after play.

Foibles

A *Foible* is a failing or feature that presents opportunities for *interesting* failure. It is an inherent negative aspect of the character; a weak point stemming from ignorance, flawed understanding, physical or mental incapability, recurring duty(s), a particular penchant for trouble, or some other vulnerability. (Sometimes, a Foible gives a better idea of a character's motivation than *Motivation* itself; see p. 8!)

Players should pick a word or phrase that describes something that will be *fun* or *entertaining* to deal with during play. A recurring cabal of villains, an uncomfortable situation, or an activity that the character just regularly *flubs* are all possible Foibles.

Foibles are *unranked*—they do not add to rolls or absorb *damage* (see p. 25). They serve as constant *Story Hooks* (see p. 27) for characters. When a Foible comes *directly* into play, the *PC* gets *Style Dice* (see p. 10).

Common Swashbuckling Foibles

Drunkard, Enemy of the Crown, Greedy, Honorable, Loyal to the Crown, Naïve, Perfect Gentleman, Poverty, Proud, Secret Identity, True Love, Unrequited Love.

IMPORTANT NOTE—If a player makes his character's **Foible and Motivation** (see p. 8) the same thing—say, *True Love*—then those aspects will be a constant presence in his adventures. **True Love** will cause them trouble, but will also give them the strength to win through. This can be very fun, but limits the sorts of things that will happen to a character: their life will ultimately *revolve* around True Love.

NOTE—If a Foible ever needs to be rolled against (for a **Challenge situation**), treat it as a **Poor [-2] Rank Forte**. However, it *still* cannot absorb damage (see p. 25).

Player-Initiated vs. GM-Initiated Foibles

A character's Foible can come directly into game-play in two ways:

1. *The player specifically plays to the Foible*, allowing it to dictate their responses to a situation; or
2. *The GM tries to activate the Foible*, reminding the player that the character has that particular flaw.

In the first case, the player can and *should* remind the GM when playing to his or her Foible, earning a *Style Die* for good roleplaying. In the second case, the player can always refuse to go along with the GM's attempt . . . he or she just doesn't get the *Style Die*. In those cases, the GM can escalate, sweetening the pot with multiple *Style Dice* and making it a better offer. The player can always refuse, of course.

Activating a Foible is all about good characterization and putting complicated situations and difficult choices in the character's path -- not about hosing the character, and not about forcing a single direction or behavior for the player to follow. It's about giving the character—and player—a chance to act non-optimally (but in-character) in a situation for a later benefit.



Techniques

A *Technique* is a bit of inherent nature, training, or background that provides a bonus or benefit in specific, relevant situations. It's a bit of recurring style or flair of the character.

IMPORTANT NOTE—If a PC wants to be particularly better at some particular aspects of a Forte with a very broad penumbra—for example, chaining “*Situation: While Fencing*” or “*Vs.: the Cardinal’s Men*” to the “*Musketeer*” Forte is perfectly okay, because that is providing differentiation between the character’s general strengths compared to other Musketeers.

Then again, the character could take all Fencing-related Techniques on his Musketeer Forte, making him a specialist in fencing. That’s fine too.

However, taking “*Situation: While Fencing*” as a Technique of the “*Fencing*” Forte is just *Bad Form* (see p. 11).

When used in a Scene, a Technique can have one of two effects:

- ☛ **Roll & Keep:** When rolling, each Technique that comes into play allows an *extra die* to be rolled. The character then keeps the best 2 dice for Challenges or 3 dice for Duels and discards any other dice; or
- ☛ **Flat Bonus:** Each Technique that comes into play allows a +1 to the roll result per Technique used.

NOTE—Techniques are functionally the same as the *Be Impressive use of Style Dice* (see p. 13).

Each Technique can only be used once per Turn within a Scene, but multiple Techniques can be used at the same time. They can be used *before a roll* if a character wants to pull them in explicitly when doing an action, or *after a roll* when a character realizes that he has a Technique that covers the situation. (It’s up to the player whether they want to roll an extra die and assemble a better roll total from the dice they can keep, or just take the flat +1. The flat +1 usage of a Technique can be used to boost a roll total after the character has already succeeded.)

Techniques are *unranked*; this means they do not absorb *damage* (see p. 25). They appear on the character sheet in parentheses.

If a Technique *must* be used with a specific Forte, it is a *chained* Technique, and is usually listed on the character sheet near the Forte in question. Most Techniques are

chained Techniques. An *unchained* Technique can be used with any Forte.

Unchained Fortes are more “expensive” to purchase and have a wider scope than most Techniques. Chained Techniques are “cheaper” and are related to a specific Forte. Techniques chained to a character’s Swashbuckling Forte are cheapest of all.

Types of Techniques

There are five main types of Techniques:

- ☛ **Idiom:** Idiom is the “style” or “flavor” of the action undertaken. If the player describes their character’s actions and reactions according to their Idiom, they get a bonus. *Examples:* Acrobatic, Calculating, Drunken, Pedantic, Fierce, Languid, Sarcastic, Precise.
- ☛ **Location/Situation:** Some Techniques give a bonus in particular situations or places. *Examples:* City Streets, Bars & Taverns, At Court, Mounted, In Masked Identity, Shipboard, On Cluttered Ground, Under the Orders of a Superior, Kitchens, In Total Darkness, While Wounded, With a Partner.
- ☛ **Maneuver:** Some Techniques give a bonus in using a specific type of tactic, method, or stratagem. *Examples:* Convince, Dodge, Research, Parry, Specializes in Silken Goods, Lie, Throw.
- ☛ **Foes(s) or vs. [X]:** Some Techniques give a bonus against preferred targets. *Examples:* vs. Aristocrats, vs. Mounted Foes, vs. One’s Nemesis, vs. Soldiers, vs. Enemies of the State.
- ☛ **Tool or Weapon:** Some Techniques give a bonus in using a specific weapon or tool. *Examples:* Rapier, Crowbar, Cutlass, Saber, Lockpicks, Unarmed, Dual/Paired Weapons, Prepared Speech, My Father’s Forge, Found Objects/Scenery.

Characters can mix and match Techniques—all Locations, just Idioms, all Foes, or whatever.

Stacking Techniques

When stacking Techniques, only *one* Idiom can be active at any time.

Also, it is unlikely that many Techniques will align at one time for a particular situation. However, if they *do* align, characters should get *all* of the benefits!

What Sort of Technique is “Laughing, then Jumping Off of Something”?

That depends on how the player envisions it:

If “LtJ0oS” is seen as the character running around always grinning and bouncing around like a crazed monkey, that’s probably an Idiom (Think Douglas Fairbanks, Sr. in *the Mark of Zorro*).

If “LtJ0oS” is seen as the character striking a particular pose for great effect, that’s probably a Maneuver (Think Errol Flynn in *The Adventures of Robin Hood*).

Common PDQ# Fortes

Below is a brief list of Fortes commonly found in swashbuckling games. Bold indicates that the Forte is Core for PDQ#. At the GM’s option, some of the Fortes listed below might be contained within another’s penumbra (like Acrobatics for Pirate, or Wealth for Aristocrat, Repartee for Musketeer, etc.; see *Setting the Dials*, p. 28).

Acrobatics

Swinging on chandeliers, climbing down a rocky crevasse, hanging by one hand off a high balcony, leaping over tables, scaling a castle wall—*Acrobatics* (also called *Athletics*) is the Forte that lets you do it all.

Aristocrat

The *Aristocrat* Forte indicates good breeding, the knowledge of good manners, and a certain degree of status, wealth, property, political baggage (duties to liege and vassals, connections to other aristocrats), and *savoir-faire*. Aristocrat characters should *strongly* consider also taking *Minions* (see p. 8) and/or a *Sidekick* (see p. 9).

No Average [0] Aristos?

A character *can* take Average [0] Aristocrat, with the proviso that they (or their families) are of gentle birth, but limited means and/or title. If one wishes to play a disgraced, poor, provincial, or otherwise looked down upon by the rest of the noble class, taking Aristocrat as a Foible is an acceptable option. However, the PC should be prepared for a lot of sneering comments and treatment that is, at times, *worse* than that dished out to the peasantry!



Fencing

Fencing is a martial art, much more refined and potent than the simple “hack and block” of the common ruffian or soldier. Fencing also includes knowledge of fencing weaponry and various dueling traditions, as well as social connections and status with other fencers. It covers all sorts of swashbuckling combat—not just formal duels.

See also *The Duel*, p. 21.

Fencing: the Gentle Art of Slashing & Skewering

Fencing is the *sine qua non* of swashbuckling adventure; many characters will take it as their Swashbuckling Forte. Fencing is what separates swashbuckling heroes—and villains!—from the typical Guardsman, Pirate, or Merry Man: the cheap Techniques granted from a Swashbuckling Forte makes them *devastating* with a blade.

PCs without Fencing?

Player characters who do not take Fencing (directly, or effectively via another Forte like Musketeer) will suffer a disadvantage when it comes to sword-fighting Duels (see p. 21), as they will be using an effective Average [0] Forte to do so. That may be totally okay, depending upon the character conception and the thrust of the campaign. However, it is generally a good idea for a PC in a PDQ# game to have some access to Fencing in one of their Fortes.