Roleplaying 101

Since many people in this class are new to roleplaying, let's start with the basics – Roleplaying is **acting with a few rules**. Roleplaying games (of the traditional paper-and-pencil variety) require a Storyteller (or Game Master) and some number of players, usually three to six. The players portray characters, like actors in a play. The storyteller sets the scene, portrays characters that the players meet, and generally tries to keep the story interesting.

There's really no winning or losing in roleplaying games, just like there's no winning or losing in a play. Some characters may prosper and meet their goals, while other characters may end up brokenhearted or even dead. The players and the storyteller serve as the writers, actors, director, and audience of their own play!

The true goal of a good roleplaying game (like any game) is to have fun, which is often accomplished by suspending disbelief, pretending to be someone else, and being part of an exciting story. Many players also enjoy collecting items, defeating enemies, and gaining power within the game world. At the same time, the Storyteller will attempt to present challenges and opportunities for the characters in the game, hopefully facilitating an interesting story for all involved.

For this assignment, we are providing you with a very simple roleplaying game system. This system is designed with first-time roleplayers in mind, and is optimized for simplicity, not realism.

As mentioned above, each player will portray a character. Each character will have the following statistics:
Attributes, **Skills**, and **Inventory**

Attributes
Every character has three attributes:
Physical, **Mental**, and **Social**
These attributes are represented by a number between 3 and 18, where the human average is 10 and higher is better.
- A character's **Physical attribute** will determine his/her sheer strength, manual dexterity, health, and general athletic ability.
- A character's **Mental attribute** will determine his/her observational skills, ability to think quickly, memory, and general intelligence.
- A character's **Social attribute** will determine his/her persuasion abilities, attractiveness, communication skills, and charisma.

When creating the characters for the game, the Storyteller can determine an attribute at random by rolling three 6-sided dice, or s/he can simply pick numbers that will lead to an interesting story.

Skills

Every character also has some skills. These rules provide only the most general skills; the Storyteller should feel free to invent new skills to fit his/her own game. Each skill has a few details:
Skill Name, **Associated Attribute**, and **Actual Skill**

Here is the basic list of skills:
Physical Skills
- Unarmed Combat (martial arts, wrestling)
- Melee Combat (close range weapons)
- Long-Range Combat (guns, bows)
- Combat Defense (dodging, blocking)
- Athletics (non-combat physical activities)
- Stealth (sneaking around, thievery)

Mental Skills
- Investigation (observational skills)
- Science (general book knowledge)
- Medicine (first aid, physiology)
- Computers (using technology)
- Repair (fixing things, breaking things intentionally, finding parts)

Social Skills
- Leadership (diplomacy, organizing a group)
- Performance (any type of performance for an audience)
- Intimidation (scaring people to do what you want)
- Subterfuge (telling lies and detecting them)
- Style (etiquette, social grace, general physical appearance)

Each character gets a certain number of "skill points" to distribute among his/her skills. 20 "skill points" is probably a reasonable number, but the Storyteller can use whatever number s/he'd like, and need not create all characters with the same number of skill points.

To calculate a character's **Actual Skill**, use the following formula:

Associated Attribute – 10 + Skill Points Allotted = Actual Skill

Each Skill Name should be written on a player's character sheet with the Actual Skill number nearby. It's possible for Actual Skill to be negative.

Skill Checks

Throughout the game, players will want their characters to do things. In many cases, the Storyteller can simply describe what happens. For instance, assume Ira is a player and Jesse is the Storyteller:

Ira: I walk up to the bar and sit down.
Jesse: The bartender is an attractive young woman; she looks at you inquisitively.
Ira: I order a glass of water.
Jesse: She begrudgingly brings you a glass of water.

Obviously Ira's character will automatically be able to walk up to a bar and order a glass of water – no skill check is needed. On the other hand, if Ira's character wanted to seduce the bartender, Jesse might call for a **skill check**. A skill check occurs as follows:
1. A character attempts to do something that won't automatically work
2. The storyteller decides the appropriate skill (e.g. Style) and difficulty (a number between 5 and 40, where higher is harder.)
3. The player roles a 20-sided die and adds his/her matching Actual Skill.

If the total rolled plus Actual Skill is equal to or greater than the difficulty, the character succeeds. If the total is less than the difficulty, the character fails. A natural 20 always succeeds, and a natural 1 always fails. At his or her option, the Storyteller may consider the margin by which the skill check succeeded or failed, and exaggerate the results accordingly. Here are some examples of skill checks and their difficulties:

- Singing a well-rehearsed song in front of eager listeners (Performance skill, difficulty 5)
- Sneaking around an unfamiliar location at night without getting caught by a single guard (Stealth skill, difficulty 15)
- Investigating an outdoor crime scene after a week of rain and snow (Investigation skill, difficulty 35)

If the Storyteller wants the characters to have super-human powers like wizards or superheroes, the easiest way of including that is to create a few more skills.

Inventory

Inventory is simply a list of the **stuff** the character has on-hand, or owns. The Storyteller may choose to omit this portion of the character sheet, though players will often find inspiration based on possessions. The inventory can be as simple as the clothes on the characters' backs, or it could include a magic lamp.

Combat

At some point during the game, the characters may end up in a fight. Many roleplaying games turn into wargames during fight scenes; some players and storytellers enjoy this approach to roleplaying very much, and many roleplaying systems include detailed rules for combat. For this assignment, it's not necessary to have "realistic" rules for fights, and instead we present a very simplified approach.

At the beginning of combat, the Storyteller should describe the scene of the fight to the players. Ideally this should be done with a visual aid (like a map), though a verbal description may also suffice.

The players describe what their characters initially will do during the fight. Each attack is a skill check, where the difficulty can be effected by Combat Defense Skill of the foe, terrain, visibility, armor worn, magical weapons, etc. The Storyteller picks a difficulty, then the attacker rolls a 20-sided die and adds the appropriate Actual Skill (like Unarmed Combat.) If the skill check succeeds (equal to or greater than the difficulty), then the attack hits. After all the characters involved in the fight have had a chance to attack once, everyone redeclares their intentions for what to do during the next "round" of combat.

Characters have a maximum amount of hit points equal to their Strength attribute. By default, each successful attack does 1 point of damage, though the Storyteller may decide that some weapons or especially fierce martial artists can inflict more than one damage on a successful hit. If a character reaches 0 hit points, s/he falls unconscious and will die without medical attention. A normal human recovers one hit point per day, given sufficient rest.

Obviously these combat rules are very simplified, and they rely on the Storyteller to moderate the combat and keep the game interesting.

Sample Character Sheet

Player: Ira Fay
Name: Leo Lantham

Attributes
Physical: 11
Mental: 14
Social: 9

Skills	Skill Points	Actual Skill
Physical		
Unarmed Combat	0	1
Melee Combat	0	1
Long-Range Combat	5	6
Combat Defense	2	3
Athletics	0	1
Stealth	3	4
Mental		
Investigation	5	9
Science	1	5
Medicine	2	6
Computers	0	4
Repair	0	4
Super-Vision	2	6
Super-Hearing	3	7
Social Skills		
Leadership	1	0
Performance	0	-1
Intimidation	0	-1
Subterfuge	2	1
Style	0	-1

Inventory
Cell phone, Digital watch, Wallet with ID and $60 cash, Pistol,
Digital camera, chapstick, matches, polaroid picture of a woman

Sample Character Sheet
Player: Bob Rost
Name: Mugrug the Angry

Attributes
Physical: 15
Mental: 8
Social: 12

Skills	Skill Points	Actual Skill
Physical		
Unarmed Combat	6	11
Melee Combat	4	9
Long-Range Combat	0	5
Combat Defense	2	7
Athletics	0	5
Stealth	0	5
Whirlwind Attack	4	9

 (a special attack against multiple nearby opponents)

Mental		
Investigation	0	-2
Science	0	-2
Medicine	1	-1
Computers	0	-2
Repair	2	0

Social Skills		
Leadership	1	3
Performance	0	2
Intimidation	4	6
Subterfuge	2	4
Style	0	2

Inventory
Magical Dwarven War Axe, Small Shield, Backpack, Gold Coins, Pouch with some herbs, 10 ft of barbed wire, a ring that's too small to fit on any of your fingers.

Combat Examples
Default difficulty to hit someone in combat:
10 + target's Combat Defense Actual Skill

Modifiers to the difficulty roll (remember these are just guidelines)
Target has light armor: +3
Target has heavy armor: +6
Target is very small: +6
Target is very large: -6
Target is surprised: -4
Target is kneeling: -2 (or +2 if attacking with a ranged weapon)
Target is laying down: -4 (or +4 if attacking with a ranged weapon)
Attacker is trying to do extra damage: +5 (or more)
Attacker is trying to attack two different people at once: +10
Attacker is blind: +8
Target is immobilized: -8
Attacker is using a very familiar weapon: -1
Attacker is using an unfamiliar weapon: +1
Target is partially concealed: +2 to +6
Target is completely concealed: +8 (same as if attacker is blind)
Attacker is on higher ground: -1
Target is on higher ground: +1
Target has magic armor or other effects: +1 or more
Attacker has a magic weapon or other effects: -1 or more
Target is doing nothing but defending against attacks: +5
Target is moving: +1 or more

There are many other possible modifications; use these as a guideline, and don't be afraid to modify them and improvise.

Margin of Success Example
Mugrug the Angry has captured a spy and wants to interrogate him. The Storyteller decides that the difficulty of the skill check should be 10. Mugrug rolls a d20 and add his Interrogation skill.

- **Roll of 4 + Skill of 6** = 10, marginal success. Mugrug learns some basic information.
- **Roll of 3 + Skill of 6** = 9, failure. Mugrug doesn't get any information.
- **Roll of 20** + Skill of 6 = 26, automatic amazing success. The spy spills all the secrets he knows, and then tells his whole life story.
- **Roll of 1** + Skill of 6 = 7, automatic horrible failure. Not only does the spy not tell anything, but Mugrug actually reveals some key information to the spy, or maybe the spy escapes!