



Bullet Points

Skills and Feats

by Charles Ryan


Welcome to the twenty-first installment of *Bullet Points*. I'm Charles Ryan, one of the designers of the **d20 Modern Roleplaying Game**. I'm here to answer your questions about the game, offer advice on tricky issues, and give you a little peek into the minds of the designers. You'll be hearing from me every couple of weeks.

If you've checked out the earlier installments of *Bullet Points*, you know the format. Every two weeks I pick an issue that's provoked a lot of questions or comments, begin with a general discussion of the topic, and then answer specific questions related to it. If there are any unrelated but pressing questions in my mailbox, I might tackle them at the end of the column, but only if there's room and they can't wait for an appropriately themed column.

Skills and Feats


This installment is dedicated to skills and feats. I've received a lot of questions that require meaty answers, so let's skip the preamble and get right down to it!

Questions and Answers

 I've been wondering where the traditional and domestic skills (such as brewing, butchering, cooking, leatherworking, pottery, spinning, tanning, tailoring, weaving, and so on) fit into the d20 Modern Craft skill structure. I suppose some of them could be subsumed into Craft (structural), or Craft (visual arts), or maybe even Survival, but in many cases, any choice seems to be a bit of a stretch.

The Craft skill is used to make things, so some of your examples (such as butchering) don't really fit the bill. Those that do probably should be covered by the Craft skill, but as you point out, most of them don't really fall into any of the existing categories.

I don't have a full set of rules for you, but if you need a house rule, I recommend the addition of a single, broad-based Craft category -- perhaps Craft (handicrafts). Have a look at the skill descriptions for Craft (mechanical) and Craft (structural) to get some guidelines on setting DCs.

 The book says that the maximum rank for a class skill is 3 + character level. For a cross-class skill that's a class skill for another of your hero's classes, it's the same (3 + level). What is the maximum rank for a cross-class skill that isn't a class skill for any class your hero has?

In that case, the maximum is half of what it would be for a class skill -- in other words, (3 + level) divided by 2. To clarify the situation, here's a breakdown.


Let's say you're adding a level to your character, who is already a Fast hero 2/Smart hero 1. You are

adding another level of Smart hero to make her a Fast hero 2/Smart hero 2). Now let's look at three different skills: Search, Tumble and Jump.

Search is a class skill for Smart hero. You can buy ranks in it at the rate of 1 rank per skill point, and the maximum rank is 7 (new character level + 3).


Tumble is not a class skill for Smart hero, but it is for Fast hero. Because it is a cross-class skill for Smart hero, you can buy ranks in it for that class at the rate of 1/2 rank per skill point. Since it is a class skill for one of your hero's classes, however, the maximum rank is 7 (new character level + 3).

Jump is not a class skill for any of your character's classes. Because it is a cross-class skill for Smart hero, you can buy ranks in it at the rate of 1/2 rank per skill point. Since it has never been a class skill for your character, the maximum rank is 3-1/2 (half the maximum rank for a class skill).

 **I have a question about hacking. The book says you can't take 20 on a Computer Use check to defeat computer security. But if you used a recursive function that just kept trying usernames and passwords (on a server that is running log-in services, obviously), would that qualify as taking 20? That technique almost always works -- it just takes a while and generates a lot of network noise that can tip off the admin that something is up.**

Because the technology and techniques for computer hacking are complex and ever-changing, we've kept the rules somewhat abstract rather than making specific rules for specific techniques. It's assumed that any attempt to defeat computer security involves a variety of techniques used in some combination that's appropriate for the challenge at hand. The situation is similar to using the Disable Device skill to open a lock. We don't have special rules for different types of lock mechanisms because that level of detail generally adds a lot of complexity without making the game much more fun.

If your gaming group is comfortable with a higher level of detail regarding computer security, then by all means feel free to break down hacking activities into specific tasks, each with its own DC and time requirements. If you're using that level of detail, you could allow a character to take 20 when performing certain types of hacking activities.

 **If my character wants to hack a bad guy's computer, I can find the DC for the task in the Computer Use skill description. But what about my own computer? What type of security can protect it from bad-guy hackers? What can I do to make it harder for them?**

We don't have any official rules that allow players to set the DCs for security on their own computers, other than the fact that a desktop computer or notebook computer has minimum security (DC 20). For players who want more than that, I can recommend the following house rules.

There are essentially four precautions a character can take to increase the security level of his computer: create security software, buy security hardware, isolate the computer, and keep an eye on the machine.

Create Security Software: This option essentially falls under the write program task. Success on the check increases the DC for attempts to breach the computer's security by +2. For every 5 points by which your check result exceeds the required value, the security DC rises by another +2. For example, if you get a result of a 31 on your Computer Use check to create security software, the DC for attempts to breach the computer's security increases by +6 (+2 because you succeeded on the check, and +4 because you

exceeded the required DC by 10). The benefits from multiple attempts to create security software do not stack, but you can take 20 on the check to write the program.


Buy Security Hardware: A hero can purchase a piece of security hardware known as a firewall. The purchase DC depends on its level of security -- average security is purchase DC 18; exceptional security is purchase DC 25. A computer can have only one firewall in place at a time, but your hero can also create security software to improve the security provided by his firewall.

Isolate the Computer: To isolate a computer, all your hero needs to do is unplug it from the internet or turn it off. An isolated computer cannot be used to access the internet, but your hero can dramatically reduce the opportunities for hackers to reach his computer simply by isolating it when not online.

Keep an Eye on the Computer: Finally, a bit of extra vigilance may let your hero know when hackers are attempting to access his computer. When a hacker attempts to defeat a computer's security and fails the check by 5 or more, a hero who is on the lookout for breaches knows an attempt has been made.

Can a hero use unarmed attacks with the Agile Riposte feat?

Since a character can't normally make an attack of opportunity unarmed, she can't use Agile Riposte with an unarmed attack under normal circumstances. However, if the hero has a feat or other special ability that allows her to make attacks of opportunity while unarmed (for example, the Combat Martial Arts feat), she can do so with the Agile Riposte feat.

 **Maybe it's just me, but the book's explanations of the Two Weapon Fighting feat seem difficult to understand. Is the extra attack with the off hand actually a second attack, or is it just an addition to the regular attack? In other words, if it was real time, would a hero make the attacks at the same time or one after the other (*BANG* or *bang-bang*)? Also, on page 138, item number 2 at the top left says, "The Two Weapon Fighting feat lessens . . . the off-handed penalty by 6." But the description of the feat doesn't mention that aspect.**

This question really covers several points, but I'll try to be succinct in my answers.

You can choose to interpret the second attack in any way you wish. Mechanically speaking, when a character fights with two weapons, it's as if she's making two separate attacks. Wherever it matters, count the attack rolls (and the resulting damage) as separate attacks. For example, if your hero deals 7 points of damage with her regular attack and 9 points of damage with her off hand attack, you don't add those values together to see if she's forced the opponent to make a massive damage check because they're considered separate hits. But if you'd like to imagine that your character is delivering a whopping two-handed blow rather than two quick jabs, that's a fine bit of description.


As for the discrepancy between page 138 and the description of the Two Weapon Fighting feat, go with page 138. Item number 2 and Table 5-3 are correct. With the Two Weapon Fighting feat, the penalty for the attack with the primary hand is reduced by 2, and the penalty for the off hand attack is reduced by 6.

 **I'm confused about the Double Tap feat. Does the -2 penalty apply to just the second shot or to both shots?**


You really are confused. A character using Double Tap makes a single attack, and the -2 penalty applies to

that attack. A successful hit deals an extra die of damage.

The attack does use up two bullets, and when you get right down to it, that really represents two pulls of the trigger. But it still counts as only a single attack, and you make only one attack roll for it.

 **If a hero uses the Double Tap feat with iterative attacks does he get a cumulative -2 penalty for each time he uses it? In other words, if his attack bonus would normally be +17/+12/+7 and he used Double Tap on all three attacks, would he be attacking at +15/+10/+5 (-2 on each attack), or at +11/+6/+1 (-6 on each attack, since he used the feat three times)?**

The former supposition (-2 on each attack) is correct. Think of each iterative attack as a separate attack. On the first, the hero's normal bonus is +17. If he chooses to use Double Tap, the -2 penalty makes it +15. On the second attack, his normal bonus is +12. Again, he could choose to use Double Tap (or not -- the choice is made for each attack independent of what he does with his other attacks). If he uses the feat again, his attack bonus is reduced to +10. The same principle applies to his third attack.

 **When a character uses the Dead Aim Feat, does the bonus apply to every shot she takes in the next round, or only to the first?**

After the character spends the required full-round action, the bonus applies to her very next attack roll. In other words, she gets the bonus only on the next shot she takes, not on every attack she makes in the next round.

Do you have a rules question about the d20 Modern Roleplaying Game? Send it to bulletpoints@wizards.com. For the quickest possible answer, please put the topic of your question in the subject line and keep the question as succinct as possible. If you have more than one question, feel free to send two or more emails -- but for best results please include only one question per email unless your questions are very closely related to one another. Please don't expect a direct answer by email. Check back here every other week for the latest batch of answers!

About the Author

Charles Ryan was one of the designers of the *d20 Modern Roleplaying Game*. He has been designing and editing games for more than twelve years. His other credits include such diverse titles as the *The Wheel of Time Roleplaying Game*, *Deadlands*, *Millennium's End*, *The Last Crusade*, *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*, *Dune: Chronicles of the Imperium*, and *Star Trek: Red Alert!*, to name just a few. Charles served as Chairman of the Academy of Adventure Gaming Arts & Design, the professional organization of the games industry, from 1996 through 2001. He lives in Kent, Washington with his lovely wife Tammie, three cats, two rats, and a dog. He works for Wizards of the Coast, Inc.



©1995-2005 Wizards of the Coast, Inc., a subsidiary of Hasbro, Inc. All Rights Reserved. Wizards is headquartered in Renton, Washington, PO Box 707, Renton, WA 98057.