# Fiat

## Diceless Role-playing Compact

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"Reality is what you can get away with."
-Robert Anton Wilson

## General Play

Your character can do anything you want that seems reasonable for a character of their type to do. This has no cost and almost always normally succeeds. The GM is the ultimate arbiter of what is reasonable given setting constraints and character abilities.

If one character struggles or contests against another character then the one with better ability normally wins. However the loser may opt to bring about a stalemate over the issue being contested by putting themselves at a disadvantage in some other way. Alternately the loser may be given a chance to withdraw or retreat provided they either have some means to do so or the winner doesn't press their advantage.

If two characters contesting against one another are evenly matched then either both will lose, both will stalemate, or one will win but at a high cost (relative to the type of contest being undertaken). In a stalemate either character can opt to try winning at a high cost but if both characters make the attempt they both pay the cost and both lose or stalemate anyway. Bids to win at a high cost normally can not be withdrawn.

This is generally outlined in the table below:

| Ability | Outcome Options |
|---|---|
| Clearly Superior | Outright success |
| Evenly Matched | Stalemate ⇄ Success at a price |
| Clearly Inferior | Loss ⇄ Retreat ⇄ Stalemate at a price |

What is reasonable can shift based on the preparation a character undertakes. For instance a character with average strength is going to find it tough to heave a car at someone else. But if the same character has an engineering degree and is given time to build a trebuchet then heaving that car suddenly becomes a lot more plausible.

## Skewing The Odds

There are two basic ways to skew the odds: Spending tokens and favorable circumstances.

Improving the circumstances is relatively straightforward. In some cases this takes the form of specific steps taken, procedures employed or particular maneuvers used to increase the chances of a given result. This could include cover fire provided by one character to decrease another character's chances of getting shot as they run across a battlefield, or a detailed scheme to black out a city grid so as to shut down a building's computer systems.

In other cases a particular tool may help skew the odds, or passive environmental effects such as weather and terrain could play a more substantial role in shaping the success of a given action.

But some folks don't have time for careful planning, a mind for clever banter, elegant tools at hand, or any other situational advantage. For them there is sometimes a quicker way:

## Spending Tokens

The easiest way to improve the likelihood of success is by spending tokens. The more tokens spent the more liberty the player has to narrate the outcome of their character's actions:

| Tokens Spent | Likelihood | Example |
|:---:|---|---|
| 1 | **Trivial** - Circumstances are in your favor. Slightly unusual events might work to assist you. | Average person overcomes talented person. |
| 2 | **Amazing** - Either you pull off something really hot or fate is giving you a high five today. | Weak person overcomes talented person. |
| 3 | **Uncanny** - Things you accomplish seem to stretch credibility.  Is that physically possible? Clearly there was some exposition missing. | Weak person pins a bear while wrestling. |
| 4 | **Bizarre** - Events unfold in a way that no one could've predicted, possibly defying even rational causality. | Weak person pins an elephant while wrestling. |

Of course as one player spends tokens to make an action succeed so can another player.  If both players spend enough tokens to even the odds then the conflict may end in a stalemate.

When players bid tokens toward an objective the tokens are spent if the action succeeds or is a stalemate.  However if one of the players who bids tokens then loses the contest outright anyway then the loser's gets their tokens returned to him.

For any given setting the GM may place a limit on the number of tokens that one character can spend at a time.  Generally games with a more "over the top" aspect will provide more tokens, allowing characters more liberty to defy setting conventions with their actions.  By contrast "grittier" games will more likely limit the number of tokens expendable at one time, or at least limit the range of effects they can produce.

Some settings may even have different types of tokens such as "Might" or "Mana" which may only be used to enhance specific sorts of actions in various ways.


## Gaining Tokens

Tokens may be gained in various ways, again depending on details of the setting or the tone of the game.  Generally some upper limit is also established on how many tokens a character can have at one time.

Perhaps the simplest method is to reward a specific number of tokens over time, either once per game session, or once per period of in-game time (ie. Every morning the characters wake up

with a new token or with their tokens reset to maximum.).  But in some cases other replenishment methods might be preferable, for instance gaining tokens for:

- Clever ideas or insights.
- Good use of description and style.
- Characters accomplishing specific sorts of tasks (ie. Recharging a power source, meditating to regain psychic strength, etc.).

As always the particular methods should be tailored to the setting and intended style of play.


## Baseline

The Baseline defines what is "normal" given the setting, what all the PCs and even most NPCs have in common.  It is the level of capability and understanding that any character has before advantages and disadvantages (including Attributes) are applied.  The baseline will depend heavily on the setting.  A game centered around giant brutal robot warriors is likely to have different norms that a game focusing on the intellectual and social pursuits of studious, anthropomorphic woodland creatures (ala Betrix Potter).

The setting's baseline need not be specified in every detail, although every aspect the players take an interest in should probably be defined so they know how to define their characters as similar or different to these norms.  Common aspects to establish include:

- Do characters generally have human appearance and abilities or is there some other creature that predominates in the setting?
- Can all characters read and write?
- Can the average character pilot vehicles?  And if so which kind.
- What kinds of knowledge would it be trivial for a character to have or be able to speculate about?  Are there any specific things the characters would not be likely to know?
- Are there any abilities that are common in the setting but which would be strange in the real world?


## Advantages

Advantages are "good stuff" that a character has.  Each one allows a character to do a specific thing or range of things that they couldn't do otherwise.  This doesn't necessarily mean they're particularly good at doing that thing (being good at the thing is what Attributes are about).

In some cases a character without a particular advantage will still be able to compete on even footing against a character with an advantage.  This depends on the ruling of the GM of course,

but normally factors such as the nature of the activity and the relative magnitude of the character's Attributes.

For instance Jimbo (a character with the *Mind Control Spell* Advantage) is trying to control Liza. This Advantage is empowered by the *Charisma* Attribute which Jimbo has at human baseline level. However, Liza has the *Willpower* Attribute at "Human Great" level. Willpower is used to defend against this use of Charisma and the GM rules that since Liza's Willpower is clearly superior she wins the contest unless Jimbo either opts to spend Tokens or "Stalemate at a price".

Certain "universal" advantages (those covered by baseline qualities) cost nothing. They are automatically available unless the character takes a disadvantage.

Other advantages do have a varying cost depending on their rarity, magnitude, and scope. Rarity corresponds how common the advantage is in the setting. Magnitude indicates the degree of power or mastery provided by a given advantage. Scope relates how broad a set of abilities the advantage covers. The total point cost for a given advantage then is determined as follows:

Point Cost = Rarity rank x Magnitude rank x Scope rank

**Advantage Magnitude**

| Rank | Power Level | Description | Examples |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Trivial | This ability can't accomplish much on it's own. | A plentiful supply of fire crackers. The ability to cook basic recipes. |
| 2 | Moderate | Can accomplish effects of average ability. | Access to a source of M80s. The ability to cook basic meals without recipes and even "wing it" with moderate success. |
| 3 | Powerful | Can accomplish effects of expert ability. | Access to a supply of dynamite. The ability to cook gourmet meals and invent new flavors on the fly. |
| 4 | Legendary | Can accomplish truly superior effects. | Access to bombs or missiles. The ability to combine flavors in bizarre yet tasteful combinations. |
| 5 | Incredible | Can accomplish effects that are difficult to believe. | Access to a nuclear device. The ability to make an appealing meal entirely from dirt. |
| 6 | Unearthly | Can accomplish effects of terrifying magnitude. | Destructive powers that could level a state. The ability to prepare a half rotted human corpse well enough to make people's mouths water. |
| 7 | etc. | Anything even more powerful. | You own the Death Star or can make sustaining meals out of (literally) nothing. |

**Advantage Rarity**

| Rank | Rarity | Description |
|------|--------|-------------|
| 1 | Common | Has familiar effects. |
| 2 | Uncommon | Not too unusual but less frequently seen. |
| 3 | Rare | Has an effect that almost never takes place in this setting. |
| 4 | Bizarre | An effect unheard of in this setting. |

**Advantage Scope**

| Rank | Number of tasks allowed. |
|------|--------------------------|
| 1 | Accomplishes one specific task. |
| 2 | Can be used to accomplish or assist a few (usually related) tasks. |
| 3 | Can be used to accomplish many tasks (again: usually related though). |

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**Examples**

**Electrical Engineering**
In a modern day setting this skill is an Advantage with the following qualities:
**Rarity (1)** - The fruits of electrical engineering are common and the ability is pretty well established as "normal".
**Magnitude (1+)** - Someone who can fix radios, ground vehicle electrical systems, and household appliances is probably at least rank 2.
**Scope (3)** - Electrical engineering really allows a broad range of activities.
**Point cost (3 per Magnitude)**: 1 x 1 x 3 = 3. Minor hobbiest knowledge of electricity would only be a 3 point cost. However higher magnitudes, indicating greater understanding and additional innovative ability, would have higher point costs.

**Resurrection**
In a fantasy setting there is a spell which brings the recently dead (those dead for only a few days) back to life.
**Rarity (3)** - While not considered impossible this spell is almost never used, possibly due to it's high cost or certain disturbing aspects of it's casting.
**Magnitude (5)** - Restoring inanimate flesh to life is still considered a relatively powerful skill set even on the world in question.
**Scope (1)** - Bringing life back to the dead is only one task. This spell does not necessarily heal wounds or perform any other related tasks.
**Point cost (15)**: 3 x 5 x 1 = 15. More powerful variants of this spell may exist, healing all wounds as well or allowing the rotted and long dead to be restored to life; however such spells would probably have higher rarity and magnitude ranks.

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Advantages may in some cases have pre-requisites, for instance "Surgeon" may require a "Mammalian Anatomy" skill, and the "Fireball" spell might require the "Magical Theory" skill or "Elemental Familiar" advantage as pre-requisites. Pre-requisites generally have a very broad Scope and should always be at least somewhat useful in their own right. Also Advantages of higher Scope or Magnitude may in some cases subsume those of lower rank, though this is not always the case.

| Example |
|---|
| In the previous example of the electrical engineering advantage a character might start out with magnitude 2 skill (cost: 6 points), but later decide to spend points to increase it to magnitude 3 (cost: 9 points).  In such a case character would simply pay the additional 3 points necessary to bring their existing skill up to the new level.<br><br>However in the fantasy setting in question spells are more discrete sets of instructions rather than broadly useful skills.  So in this setting the character would have to purchase an entirely different spell in order to cure the disease that caused someone to die.  Fortunately removing sickness is a significantly easier and more common effect, possibly only costing 6 points or so. |

## Disadvantages

Disadvantages are qualitative bad things.  Generally a character who has a disadvantage will fail in some activity or at least be significantly impaired when performing it in comparison to characters without the Disadvantage.

While Advantages cost a certain number of points, Disadvantages actually supply a number of points.  However, although Advantage cost is calculated by multiplying the values of Magnitude, Rarity, and Scope, Disadvantage cost ignores Rarity and only looks at the product of Magnitude and Scope as indicated in the tables below:

**Disadvantage Magnitude**

| Rank | Quality |
|---|---|
| -1 | Minor impairment. |
| -2 | Significant impairment. |
| -3 | Overwhelming or debilitating impairment. |

**Disadvantage Scope**

| Rank | Number of tasks allowed. |
|---|---|
| 1 | Inhibits one specific (but story influencing) task or presents a challenge only occasionally. |
| 2 | Inhibits a few (usually related) tasks or presents a challenge frequently. |
| 3 | Inhibits a large number of tasks (again: usually related though) or presents a nearly constant challenge. |

Disadvantages are sometimes linked to specific Advantages, indicating consequences for using said Advantages, or activation costs for an Advantage.

One common occurrence of this linkages is Advantages which cost a specific number of tokens to activate. The scope of such a Disadvantage is dictated by the nature of the Advantage it is attached to. The Magnitude of the Disadvantage is related to the number of Tokens per use of the Advantage as well as their rarity.

Typically, for an Advantage whose activation consumes a moderately common type of Token, the magnitude is: 1 token cost to activate = -1 rank, 2 tokens = -2 ranks, 3 tokens = -3 ranks, etc.

For an Advantage consuming a Token that is difficult to come by the magnitudes might be doubled: 1 token = -2CP, 2 tokens = -4, etc.


## Attributes

Attributes are commonly used abilities that most characters have. They indicate magnitude of talent in very general areas of ability. Many baseline abilities default to a character's Attributes in determining their magnitude.

Attributes may also combine with some other Advantages to determine their magnitude or effectiveness and high Attribute ranks may or may not substitute for various Advantages, depending on the GM's discretion. However all other relevant abilities being equal a character with a better rank in a pertinent Attribute will win against one with a lesser Attribute in a contest.

Each Attribute category typically comprises a scale with a magnitude of 0 on the scale being free and a baseline Attribute value. Higher values are purchased as Advantages while lower values are treated as Disadvantages. A typical scale for Attributes centered on the human norm is as follows:

**Attribute Values**

| Magnitude | Rarity | Scope | Point Cost | Quality |
|-----------|--------|-------|------------|---------|
| -3 | n/a | 3 | -27 | Sub-human (or absent) |
| -2 | n/a | 3 | -12 | Human Impaired |
| -1 | n/a | 3 | -3 | Human Poor |
| 0 | n/a | 3 | 0 | Human Baseline |
| 1 | 1 | 3 | 3 | Human Good |
| 2 | 2 | 3 | 12 | Human Great |
| 3 | 3 | 3 | 27 | Legendary |
| 4 | 4 | 3 | 48 | Super-human |
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 60 | Deemed impossible |

* - Note: This scale assumes an average human as the baseline for the setting. In some settings humans may not be the baseline and thus a different word could be used.

Different GM's may incorporate different combinations of Attributes in a game, but a typical set of Attributes might include:

**Strength** - Physical force and endurance.
**Constitution** - Resistance to physical damage, poison, and disease.

**Dexterity** - Ability to manipulate objects with speed and accuracy.
**Agility** - Ability to react and move the body as a whole gracefully and a precisely.

**Intellect** - Memory and deductive power.
**Willpower** - Resistance to being mentally swayed.

**Perception** - Sensory acuity.
**Intuition** - Social understanding and aesthetic insight.

**Affinity** - A character's believability or ability to generate a sympathetic reaction in others.
**Awe** - The ability to invoke courage, fear, or respect in others.

## Items

Some tasks simply can not be accomplished without a particular sort of item. These items don't necessarily provide any particular benefit to the task but, nonetheless, are crucial tools in it's completion. Examples of this might include bullets when trying to shoot someone, or a soldering iron when trying to repair a circuit board. On the other hand some items may increase the chances of skill success (such as a particular type of bullet causing more damage), and other items may execute a task on their own (such as automatic pilot on an aircraft).

A character is generally assumed to posses the most basic versions of any tools they'd need to accomplish their skills. Other better versions of a tool may be purchased as if they were skills of the same magnitude. Any such accouterments that a character permanently possesses are considered to be "bonded" to the character. Essentially this means that the character can never lose the item except temporarily and will eventually be able to recover it.

Items found can generally be bonded to a character if enough skill points are available to cover their cost. There may however, be some items which are so potent or central to the story that the GM will not allow them to become bonded.

## Templates

A template is generally a list of the norms or modifications that skew a character from the baseline condition. A template most commonly mixes some specific combination of Advantages and/or Disadvantages to suggest a desired concept that could not elegantly be represented by a

single Advantage or Disadvantage alone.  Four frequently used types of templates are:  Power Templates, Race Templates, Occupation/Lifestyle Templates and Item Templates.

**Power Templates** - These are perhaps the most basic of templates and most commonly include a list of Advantages which a given unusual ability (or "power") incorporates.  In some cases a power may also have side-effects or drawbacks represented by associated Disadvantages that come with it.  Some power templates may simply suggest that a certain type of token be used to assist the power's activation.

Examples of Disadvantages associated with a power might include:

- **Activation Procedure** - The procedure used to activate a given power takes significant time.
- **Backlash** - The power has some form of unwanted mental or physical side-effect.
- **Consumes Resources** - Some sort of materials must be used to activate or sustain the power.
- **Requires Assistance** - Others must help in order for the power to be activated or sustained.
- **Requires Tokens** - Tokens must be spent to activate the power.  Possibly a specific type of Token must be used.

**Race Templates** - In most roleplaying games the term "race" has nothing to do with ethnicity among human groups, but rather indicates more species-related or innate metaphysical differences between creatures.  Race templates use a variety of techniques to suggest these differences.  Templates may indicate unique Advantages or Disadvantages that a race is likely to have, or which they are required to have.

Additionally templates can simply suggest a range within which a character's abilities are likely to fall.  This can be done by skewing the "Rarity" scale for given Advantages within a Race.  In these regards a Rarity of 0 is considered a baseline trait for the given trait.  However, to keep character purchase costs fair when one rarity scale is shifted up another should be shifted down by a proportional ammount.  While this practice is not absolutely necessary, it's probably a good idea when designing races which will commonly be allowed as PCs.

**Class Templates** - These are suggested combinations of Advantages and/or Disadvantages that characters are likely to adopt if they partake in a given lifestyle or occupation common to the setting.  Class Templates are typically more learned than innate and thus are generally less binding than Racial Templates.

**Item Templates** - Some abilities come not from learned or innate abilities, but instead from some object the character possesses. Common everyday items are normally just ignored from a point-cost standpoint, but some rarer or more powerful items provide unique benefits and challenges which are simulated with a combination of Advantages and Disadvantages. Common Disadvantages included in Item Templates might include:

- **Fragile** - The item is easily broken or otherwise made inoperable, typically it can be repaired after the fact though.
- **Easily Lost/Stolen** - The item is of a size and shape that it may easily be removed from the character's possession.
- **Bulky** - The item is difficult to transport to necessary locations due to it's size.
- **Malfunctioning** - Either internal or external influences cause the item to periodically cease functioning or function not as desired.

## Apples, Oranges, & Description

Magnitude ratings can give a good idea how powerful a given ability is, but be careful when applying them as a means to judge the outcome of a contest. For one thing two Advantages may have the same rank, but one may be more suited to dealing with a given contest than the other. A Magnitude of 1 in the "Orange" Advantage might beat a Magnitude 2 or 3 "Apple" Advantage when it comes to dosing a character with vitamin C.

But more importantly: Do not rely on the Advantages alone. Advantages are only there to allow you to do cool stuff. It's the cool stuff it's self that actually does the winning.

A character may have weaker powers relevant to the task at hand, but if that character has a more reasonable (or in some genres *more dramatic*) explanation for how they should win the task at hand then, even given their lesser abilities, that character might win anyway.

Remember, the more clear, clever, and inspiring the description, the better your chance of success …not that it hurts to have the Ability ranks to back up your description.

## Out of Character Knowledge

In some cases the players occasionally gain information about events and conditions of which their characters have no awareness. This information is generally referred to *out of character* (OOC) knowledge. In many games the players are expected to act and empower their characters as if this knowledge was not available since it would be "unrealistic" for the character to suddenly gain knowledge just because their player had it.

However, even though the <u>character</u> doesn't necessarily act consciously on the information doesn't mean the <u>player</u> has to totally ignore OOC knowledge either. If it makes the story go to everyone's liking and no one disagrees then it's perfectly ok for a player react to OOC

knowledge as long as their character has plausible reasons in the context of the story for the actions they take.

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**Example**

PC1 descends into a mine shaft to check for a treasure rumored to be down there while PCs 2 and 3 guard the top of the shaft. While PC1 is looking around down a tunnel PCs 2 and 3 are attacked by a large group of thugs.

PC1's **player** is aware that the other PCs are getting attacked, but the character is unaware of this fact since he's too far away to hear. Normally this might mean that PC1 has to sit by while the others get to do something exciting. But PC1's player decides that PC1 has forgotten his pick-axe and has to go back and get it. On the way back he hears the fighting and hurries up the shaft to get a piece of the action.

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## NPC Scenes

Most of the action scenes in the RPG will revolve around the PCs actions and observations. However, the ability of players to use out-of-character knowledge could lead to some interesting story motivating NPC scenes. NPC scenes are sequences of events that the GM narrates which the players are then aware of but their characters are not.

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**Example**

A hundred miles north in realm of Umbrage the dwarven agent Roth, one of the most feared men on the continent, has been held for the better part of a decade in prison by the ogres. Through years of work he's shaved a huge sliver from one of his cell bars to produce a sort of spring-steel short-bow. Yesterday he made a bloody escape after firing pieces of silverware through several of the guards throats. Now he's at large and probably intent on serving his undead masters from the Old Kingdom again.

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If the players think the scene is interesting enough they can find reasons for their characters to get involved with the repercussions of that scene.

A few words of caution though to GMs deciding to use NPC scenes:

Try to keep NPC scenes *brief*. The rpg.net forums are littered with player horror stories about GMs narrating entire fight scenes between NPCs while the PCs were only able to watch from the sidelines.

Remember: The story should focus largely on the PCs and what they get to do. NPC scenes should mainly be used to set the stage for the PCs actions rather than to upstage the PCs and make their actions seem insignificant.