

Collaborative One-shot Generala System
Basic Edition

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Introduction

COGS (Collaborative One-Shot Generala System) is a rules-light tabletop roleplaying game for groups of two or more people. While originally made for one-shots, it is entirely usable for long-form stories.

This rulebook is the free, Basic edition of COGS, and provides readers with all of the rules of the game. In addition, it acts as the System Reference Document (SRD) to the Collaborative One-shot Generala System.

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What is a Roleplaying Game?

For those new to the medium, a roleplaying game (RPG) is a game in which players take the roles of characters in a story, narrating what they say and do. These games have varying rules to supply engaging content and challenges for the players.

COGS is a “tabletop” or “pen-and-paper” roleplaying game. Tabletop RPGs are typically played in person over one or more game sessions, using dice or cards to add elements of random chance to play. COGS uses sets of five six-sided dice, specifically.

Supplies

To play COGS, you need a group of people (four to six suggested) to play with, at least one set of dice, paper, and writing supplies. While typically played in person, tabletop games have grown popular online in recent years. As a result, many virtual tables and die rollers exist in place of real ones.

Common Terms

- **Xd6:** Six-sided dice. The 6 refers to the number of sides on the die (*d*). *X* is a variable referring to the number of dice rolled.
- **Session:** A period of time when the group sits at the table (or virtual equivalent) to play the game. Sessions end when the group decides that the story has reached a good stopping point (or the players can no longer play).
- **Session 0:** A session spent creating Player Characters, deciding how or if they know each other, and how they connect them to the world.
- **One-Shot:** A story played for only one session. Due to the short length of a one-shot, these stories lack a Session 0.
- **Campaign:** A story that is played over the course of many sessions. A campaign has no set length; some can last months or even years.

Planning the Story

In addition to players and supplies, a group needs a story to roleplay through. This story can be anything the group can think of, ranging from fan fiction for a famous franchise to an original narrative of the group's own. Usually, the Narrator creates the idea for a story.

Stories in COGS can range from fantasy adventures to crime dramas or detective noir. However, in addition to deciding the story's genre and setting, groups must consider its length. Generally, stories in tabletop RPGs fall into one of two types: **One-Shots** and **Campaigns**.

One-Shots are played for a single session. Meanwhile, campaigns are played over multiple sessions. While RPGs are unscripted, players can compare a one-shot to a short story or a movie. In contrast, a campaign can be compared to a novel or television series.

Establish Group Rules

While planning the story, groups should create rules to agree on what is or is not physically possible. For example, in a modern-day setting, humans can only lift heavy objects like boulders or cars with their bare hands with superpowers or other fantastic abilities.

Groups should also decide how to address various uncomfortable topics in the story. For example, one group may avoid depictions of violence or mature topics. Another group may "fade to black," skipping awkward scenes as they arise. Groups can find safety tools such as the *X-Card* or *Lines and Veils* online.

Group Roles

After deciding on group rules, everyone decides their role in the group. Most group members become **Players**, while one member becomes a special type of Player called the **Narrator**. These roles generally stay the same throughout the entire story.

The Players

Each **Player** creates a single **Player Character** (shortened as **PC**). Players take the roles of these characters throughout the story, speaking in character and describing their actions. In short, Players create PCs to become the main characters of a story.

While PCs are the story's main characters, they do not have to be heroes. In a suitable story with a willing group, Players can take the roles of all sorts of different characters, ranging from the morally grey to the shamelessly evil.

Regardless of the story, Players should try to be mindful of each other. While Players may have elaborate plans for their character, everyone must remember that no PC is the sole protagonist of the story. COGS is a game that works best when all the Players work as a team.

The Narrator

The **Narrator** creates however many **Narrator-Player Characters (NPCs)** for short) are needed for the story. NPCs range from the Player Characters' friends, loved ones, and allies to their rivals and worst enemies. The only difference between PCs and NPCs is the Player controlling them.

In addition to portraying NPCs, the Narrator controls the game's world, describing locations and lore as they arise. Lastly, acting as a referee, they have the final say in all matters. In short, the Narrator supplies reliable narration of what happens in the story.

Narrators oversee many of a story's parts, which can make it an intimidating role to take for the first time. However, this responsibility comes with its rewards, as it gives a Narrator the control needed to guide the story in a direction fun for everyone at the table.

While Narrators have the most control over the story, they must work with their players to tell it. For example, the Narrator may plan to move the story to a new location, but the PCs want to stay where they are. The Narrator should improvise around that choice, either moving NPCs closer to the players or adding some new danger to staying in that area.

Character Creation

Characters in COGS have a mix of story-related aspects, such as names and backstories, and game-related aspects, such as Traits and Items. These details are all written on a character sheet.

Some character sheets span several pages, while others can fit onto one index card. Several example sheets are provided at the end of this rulebook.

Character Ideas

While creating a character can be confusing, it can be simplified by deciding “what” a character is before “who” they are. For example, a PC being a talented swordsman or a genius hacker is more critical to know than the character’s personality or even their name.

Traits

Traits describe a character’s physical, mental, or social qualities, such as *Strong*, *Witty*, or *Good-Looking*. In addition, they represent a character’s skills, such as *Swordsman*, *Trader*, or *Underwater Basket-Weaver*.

Some Traits provide a lasting effect for as long as characters have them. For example, a *Broken Arm* Trait will always prevent a character from taking any actions using the affected arm.

Groups should discuss the scope of Traits to avoid disputes. For example, a group should decide if a character with the *Good-Looking* Trait is attractive to all or if the Trait only applies to specific groups.

Character Traits are not set in stone after creating a character and can be gained or lost throughout a story. For example, one character may gain Traits such as *Strong* or *Swordsman* after extensive training. Another character may lose their *Good-Looking* Trait after a horrible accident.

Changes in character Traits may occur over many sessions as the story progresses, after any time-skips, or during/following climactic story points, such as conflicts against powerful foes.

Items

Items are anything characters wear or carry on their person, such as tools, food, or clothing. Characters can use Items for their usual purposes, or for any unusual ones agreed upon by the group. For example, while most would use a *magical glowing sword* for combat, characters may also use it as a flashlight.

There is no limit to the number of Traits or Items a character can have. Some Items can be **merged**, such as a bow and arrow or the clothes in a character’s outfit. In addition, multiple of the same Item can be **stacked**, sharing space on a sheet, and written as *Item (X)* or *X Items*, “X” being the number of Items.

Similarly to Traits, characters can gain or lose Items as the story progresses. For example, one character may buy an Item, while another may create it on their own. Some Items may even break after heavy use or have a one-time usage. For example, a sword may break during a fight against powerful foes, and characters cannot eat food twice.

Free Traits and Items

Players may give Player Characters certain “free” Traits or Items at no cost. Examples of free Traits include personal details such as a PC’s gender or race. Similarly, except for armor or magical/high-tech Items, a character’s worn clothing Items are considered free. PCs may also possess money suitable for their character as free Items.

In stories where every Player Character has certain Traits or Items, these Traits or Items should be free. For example, every PC should have Traits like *Magician* or *Wizard* for free in a world where everyone uses magic. Similarly, a *Company Badge* should be a free Item if every Player Character works for the same company.

Core Dice Gameplay

Rolling For Actions

Most of the time, Players can act out their characters without issue, their actions playing out as described. However, tasks requiring effort or skill (such as fighting, studying, or haggling) require that a Player or Narrator make an **action roll**, rolling a “hand” of five dice to succeed.

- **Five of a Kind (5 points):** All five dice show the same number
(e.g., five 1s or five 6s)
- **Four of a Kind (4 points):** Four dice show the same number
(e.g., four 1s or four 6s)
- **Straight (4 points):** All five dice show serial numbers
(e.g., “1, 2, 3, 4, 5” or “2, 3, 4, 5, 6”)
- **Full House (3 points):** Three dice show one number, and two dice show another (e.g., three 1s and two 6s)
- **Three of a Kind (2 points):** Three dice show the same number
(e.g., three 1s or three 6s)
- **Two Pairs (2 points):** two dice show one number, and two dice show another
(e.g., two 1s and two 6s)
- **One Pair (1 point):** Two dice display the same number
(e.g., two 1s or two 6s)
- **Bust (0 points):** None of the above combinations

Some hands contain “smaller” hand types worth fewer points within them. For example, a **Full House** has both a **Three of a Kind** and **Two Pair** hand within it. In these cases, a Player is allowed to use a smaller hand despite the lower point value.

Action Difficulty

The Narrator assigns action rolls a **Target Number** (shortened as **TN**) of points. Actions succeed when a character scores at least the roll’s Target Number. An action’s difficulty determines its Target Number, ranging from 1 point for easy actions to 5 points for near-impossible actions.

Narrators decide the Target Number for an action roll based on how difficult the specific action is to perform. For example, heavier objects are harder to lift, darkness makes it harder to find things, and more specific or secretive information is harder to recall.

For example, character A makes a roll to search for an elephant at the zoo. This action is easy and has a TN of 1 or 2. However, if they look for something smaller such as a mouse, the Target Number will increase by 1 or 2 points. The TN would further increase if character A searched within a dark or densely cluttered area.

When to Roll

If an action is too easy and would needlessly slow a story, the Narrator can skip a roll. For example, a character should not need to roll for actions such as eating or breathing, with few exceptions. As such, they would instantly succeed in these tasks.

In addition, the Narrator may refuse a PC’s roll if the action is impossible, such as a character with broken arms trying to play an instrument. In such a case, their action would instantly fail.

Action rolls add an element of random chance to a story by deciding if a character succeeds or fails in their action. If the outcome of a roll would not affect the story, a Player should not have to make one.

Scoring High or Low

When a character scores above the Target Number of an action roll, they perform better than average at the task. The action in question decides how this is reflected in the story. Common effects of scoring above the Target Number include attacks dealing more damage to enemies, timed actions resolving more quickly, and tasks succeeding more stylishly.

One example of an action resolving more quickly is a character making a roll with a Target Number of 3 to clean up a pile of books in four minutes. Rolling a hand worth 4 or 5 points may allow them to clean up the books in half or a quarter of the time, respectively.

Examples of actions succeeding more stylishly are more varied, and groups should handle these effects in ways specific to the action. For example, one character may use their high roll to make flashy moves as they cross risky terrain easily. On the other hand, another character may score very well on a roll to perform music, stunning their audience.

Conversely, characters perform increasingly worse as they score lower than the action's Target Number. For example, failed attacks damage the attacker (see "Damage"), timed actions take longer to complete, and characters fail actions in increasingly painful or pathetic ways.

Group Rolls

In some situations, two or more characters can make a **group action roll** to act together. In a group action roll, all characters involved make action rolls, then add their point totals together to decide the roll's success. Actions that groups can perform together include attacking or frightening enemies, moving heavy objects, or working with large machinery.

Contested Rolls

When two or more characters act against each other, each character or group involved can make a **contested roll** or **group contested roll**, respectively. Contested rolls are made for actions that allow characters to compete, such as attacks, arguments, or arm-wrestling matches.

The Narrator does not assign a Target Number to contested rolls; The character or group that scores the most points is victorious in the contest, and their action succeeds. If a tie occurs, the Narrator may declare a draw, have each side reroll, or decide the winning party on their own.

Success on a tied contested roll is limited, with the winning side making little progress or their victory coming at a cost. For example, a character should only win a foot race by a very slim margin, or may trip and injure themselves as they cross the finish line.

Characters do not have to contest actions. For example, a PC may choose to open themselves to an attack or give up a competition. In such a case, the forfeiting character has a hand point value of 0.

Re-rolling Dice

When rolling for actions, characters may receive one or more **boons**. Each boon an action receives allows the user to reroll any number of dice in their hand one time. When rerolling a die, the new result replaces the previous one, and the reroll cannot be reversed.

Characters can receive one boon by expressing their action in detail (such as describing an attack or speaking in character when trying to charm someone). In addition, backstory details (such as growing up in a town being explored) can be described to this end.

Characters can receive up to two boons for using helpful Traits or Items for a roll. For example, they can use *Strong* to lift heavy objects, *Haggler* to barter, a *Crowbar* to pry objects open, or a *Cloak of Invisibility* to hide. These boons can be split between two Traits, two Items, or one of each.

Players will not receive action description boons from saying any Traits or Items used for the action. Rather, these boons serve as rewards for flavorful language that helps immerse the group in the story.

Limits on Boons

If group members decide that a description, Trait, or Item is not helpful to an action, it will not grant a boon. For example, if a Player cannot explain how their character's *Stuffed Animal* can help in a skirmish, it will not supply their roll with a boon.

The Narrator may activate unhelpful Traits or Items to make a roll more difficult. For example, the Narrator may trigger a PC's *Out of Shape* Trait or *Oversized Shoes* Item as they try to run. These Traits and Items prevent useful ones from being used, leaving fewer potential boons for the roll.

Sample Actions

The following are several lists of actions characters can perform and Traits helpful and harmful to them. This list is open, solely offering actions characters will often take regardless of the story the group plays.

Action Overlap

Sometimes, the lines between different actions can become blurred, and the group may need help deciding the type of action the character takes. In such cases, the group must consider why the character is rolling in addition to what they are doing.

Physical Actions

- **Chase** - Chase after a target or race against other characters. This may be on foot or using a vehicle or animal. This roll is usually contested.
Helpful Traits: *Fast, Nimble, Runner*
Harmful Traits: *Broken Leg, Out of Shape, Slow*
- **Craft** - Create an Item. This can range from cooking food to building gadgets. Items that are harder to make increase the TN of this roll.
Helpful Traits: *Crafty, Dexterous, Inventor*
Harmful Traits: *Meathead, Spacey, Clumsy*
- **Muscle** - Use strength to move heavy objects, climb, break or charge through obstacles. Heavier or harder objects raise the TN of this roll.
Helpful Traits: *Meathead, Strong, Tough*
Harmful Traits: *Out of Shape, Tired, Weak*
- **Parkour** - Move quickly through an area, perform feats of acrobatics, or catch your footing. Trickier maneuvers increase the TN of this roll.
Helpful Traits: *Agile, Dexterous, Nimble*
Harmful Traits: *Clumsy, Out of Shape, Slow*
- **Pilot** - Control a vehicle or ride an animal. More difficult-to-control vehicles or animals increase the Target Number of this roll.
Helpful Traits: *Driver, Pilot, Rider*
Harmful Traits: *Clumsy, Motion-Sick, Tired*
- **Sneak** - Remain unheard or unseen by other characters, conceal Items, or perform sleight-of-hand tricks. This roll is usually contested.
Helpful Traits: *Nimble, Sneaky, Thief*
Harmful Traits: *Clumsy, Nervous, Noisy*
- **Spot** - Search for hidden characters/Items, aim ranged Items, or hunt/gather food. Smaller targets and darkness raise the TN of this roll.
Helpful Traits: *Alert, Eagle-Eyed, Scout*
Harmful Traits: *Distracted, Spacey, Tired*

Mental Actions

- **Compose** - Create a work of art, literature, music, software, etc. The size and complexity of the work increase the TN of this roll.
Helpful Traits: *Artsy, Crafty, Writer*
Harmful Traits: *Distracted, Idiot, Uncreative*
- **Investigate** - Search for hidden clues, question a character, or study a specific topic. Well-hidden clues and details raise the TN of this roll. This roll is contested when questioning another character.
Helpful Traits: *Curious, Detective, Studious*
Harmful Traits: *Distracted, Meathead, Spacey*
- **Medicine** - Offer a character (in some cases, the user) medical aid. Harder-to-treat wounds and diseases increase the TN of this roll.
Helpful Traits: *Calm, Doctor, Survivalist*
Harmful Traits: *Clumsy, Idiot, Nervous*
- **Recall** - Remember information about a particular character, item, place, history, etc. More specific knowledge raises the TN of this roll.
Helpful Traits: *Scholar, Smart, Wise*
Harmful Traits: *Forgetful, Idiot, Spacey*
- **Resist** - Remain calm and withstand the effects of alcohol/drugs, intense feelings, or attacks on the mind. More potent drugs and emotions raise the TN of this roll. Otherwise, this roll is contested.
Helpful Traits: *Tough, Iron-Willed, Passionate*
Harmful Traits: *Distracted, Nervous, Weak*
- **Teach** - Teach another character about a specific topic. Ideally, the teacher should be experienced with the subject they are teaching. More complex topics increase the Target Number of this roll.
Helpful Traits: *Skilled, Teacher, Wise*
Harmful Traits: *Distracted, Forgetful, Nervous*

Social Actions

- **Bargain** - Barter/haggle with other characters or bribe them for favors. Deals favoring the character increase the Target Number of this roll as they get steeper. Otherwise, this roll is contested.
Helpful Traits: *Frugal, Silver-Tongued, Trader*
Harmful Traits: *Greedy, Nervous, Spacey*
- **Charm** - Use deception, flattery, good looks, or other social skills to get on another character's good side. This roll is generally contested.
Helpful Traits: *Friendly, Good-looking, Liar*
Harmful Traits: *Awkward, Honest, Ugly*
- **Disguise** - Use some form of disguise or camouflage to impersonate someone or something else or mimic another character's speech, mannerisms, or behavior. This roll is generally contested.
Helpful Traits: *Actor, Invisible, Sneaky*
Harmful Traits: *Clumsy, Good-Looking, Ugly*
- **Incite** - Awe, enrage, inspire, scare, or otherwise sway the mood of other characters. Influencing more characters raises the Target Number of this roll. Otherwise, this roll is contested.
Helpful Traits: *Inspiring, Loud, Passionate*
Harmful Traits: *Awkward, Calming, Quiet*
- **Perform** - Entertain other characters with acting, music, poetry, party tricks, or other performing arts. More challenging performances and larger audiences increase the Target Number of this roll.
Helpful Traits: *Actor, Dexterous, Performer*
Harmful Traits: *Clumsy, Nervous, Tired*
- **Soothe** - Calm down angered, confused, or scared characters, people and animals alike. The TN of this roll increases when soothing more restless characters. Otherwise, this roll may be contested.
Helpful Traits: *Calming, Friendly, Quiet*
Harmful Traits: *Loud, Meathead, Passionate*

Advancement

Trait and Item Modifiers

As the PCs advance through a story, they will gain **modifiers**, number values added to a Trait or Item, such as *Swordsman (+1)*. When used in action rolls, this value is added to the point total of a hand. A Trait or Item may have a modifier as high as +2.

Traits and Items gain modifiers if improved in some way. For example, a character's *Musician* Trait may earn a positive modifier when it changes to *Skilled Musician* or *Master Musician* after extensive training. Likewise, a masterpiece or enchanted instrument will likely gain a positive modifier, as it can play music better than usual.

Conversely, particularly hindering Traits and Items can gain modifiers as low as -2. Traits with negative modifiers range from flaws to diseases and injuries. Meanwhile, Items with negative modifiers are usually damaged or broken. Several examples of modifiers in play are listed below.

- Character A makes an action roll with a TN of 4 and rolls a hand worth 3 points. Their Traits and Items have a total modifier of +2. With their hand's total point value increased to 5, their action succeeds.

Modifiers in Character Creation

When creating characters, modifiers are worth 1 Trait or Item. Positive modifiers cost 1 Trait or Item, while negative modifiers award 1. For fairness, PCs should have roughly the same total Traits and Items as usual after applying any modifiers.

Focus

In addition to Traits and Items, characters possess **Focus**, depicted by either physical tokens or numbers on their character sheets. Players can use Focus to add points to a roll at a rate of one point per token. Focus is used before deciding a roll's outcome.

All characters in contested rolls can use Focus, adding more until one side has the most points (or the Narrator calls a draw). The Narrator can restrict the use of Focus on a roll as needed.

All characters have a maximum number of Focus tokens decided by the group. At the start of a session, each PC's Focus returns to this maximum. Like Traits and Items, characters can gain more maximum Focus as stories progress and the PCs grow.

When a PC rolls a "Bust" hand (either without rerolling or after any rerolls), all PCs each regain one Focus. Groups may also allow characters to recover Focus by resting. For example, a night of sleep may recover all of a character's Focus, while an hour of light activity recovers 1d6 Focus.

In addition to action rolls and contested rolls, characters can spend Focus on using Techniques and moving additional zones in conflicts (described in "Techniques" and "Maps and Zones," respectively).

Techniques

Some characters possess **Techniques** - skills and abilities too complex to perform using normal rolls. Common examples of Techniques include signature moves and magic spells. Techniques can also depict the effects of Items, such as the explosions of bombs.

Techniques do not require a roll to succeed, with rolls solely deciding their degree of success. However, Techniques require Focus to use. In addition, Focus cannot be used to increase a Technique's roll.

As a baseline, a Technique costs one Focus to use. It can affect a single character or object in the user's zone (see "Maps and Zones"). This can apply to the user themselves or an Item they own. In addition, when using the Technique, the user may roll to deal damage, if applicable.

Technique Modifications

Modifications (shortened as **Mods**) are applied to a Technique to change its cost and effect. Mods are added to a Technique when first creating it. The different Mods and their effects are explained further in this chapter.

Multiple Technique modifications reference rules first explained in later chapters. For this reason, it is recommended to read the rest of this rulebook before creating any complex Techniques.

Technique Restrictions

Groups should discuss when Techniques are suitable to use for different actions. For example, while a "Fireball" Technique can set something ablaze, it would not help put it out. If a Technique is not suited to a task, it will not necessarily succeed and may be entirely unusable.

The group should also ensure that Techniques the PCs can use make sense from a narrative perspective. To this effect, a group can decide that Techniques require specific Traits or Items to use. For example, casting a magic spell may require Traits such as *Magician*, *Sorcerer*, or *Wizard*.

Effect Mods

Focused (Focus cost + 0): Focus can increase rolls made for this Technique. Therefore, it is advised to only add this Mod to Techniques that also have **Requires a Roll**. Alternatively, the user can roll a d6 to decide the maximum Focus the Player can add.

Requires a Roll (Focus cost - 1): The Technique requires an action roll or contested roll (based on the Technique's effect) to succeed. It is advised to apply this Mod to Techniques with effects that can be avoided or resisted, such as most attacks.

Boosted Roll (Focus cost + 1): The Technique can gain boons and modifiers from one Trait or Item. Traits and Items may be consumed forever when used in this way. Focus cost + 1 for each Trait or Item added.

This Mod is intended for rolls that work in odd ways. However, if the Technique involves standard rolls such as attacks or sample actions, Players can apply **Game Changer** instead.

Game Changer (Focus cost + 2): The Technique changes the rules of COGS. This Mod is only added to a Technique once, allowing for any number of changes. Examples of these changes include:

- Adding or removing Traits or Items from characters
- Allowing characters to act outside of their turns
- Changing how dice are rolled (including which dice are used)
- Granting or restricting the use of Focus
- Making characters weak, resistant, or immune to damage.

Extended (token cost + 1 to + 3): The Technique's effect persists after use. The duration of the Technique may be a rolled or set length. This cost increase varies on the span of the Technique. Effects with a Focus cost increase of 1 resolve within minutes, while increases of 2 resolve within a day. Focus cost increases of 3 last forever or until dispelled by the user.

Targeting Mods

Long Range (Focus cost + 1): The Technique may target a character or Item in any zone. This Mod may also require the user to have a line of sight to their target (see "Ranged Attacks"). If a group is not using zones, members can apply this Mod multiple times to increase the range of the Technique by set amounts.

Extra Targets (Focus cost + 1): The Technique targets one additional character or Item. A Technique cannot possess both **Extra Targets** and **Area of Effect**. Focus cost + 1 for each added target.

Area of Effect (Focus cost + 2): The Technique affects all characters within a chosen area of effect (AoE for short). This AoE may be a whole zone or a shape such as a line, circle, triangle, or square. If the AoE is a shape, the group decides its default size. In addition to characters or Items, the Technique can target the terrain of an area itself.

If the area of effect affects a zone, Focus cost + 2 per extra zone. If the AoE is a shape, the Focus cost increase for this Mod is multiplied by the shape's increase in size. **Long Range** is only needed for an AoE Technique when the effect is centered in a zone the user does not occupy.

Alternative Cost Mods

Prepared (focus cost - 1): The Technique takes an extra turn in a conflict to prepare. The user pays the focus cost when preparing and cannot take or contest actions for the rest of the round. On the user's next turn, the Technique takes effect. This consumes the user's action for both turns.

Recharge (focus cost - 1): After using the Technique, the user cannot take or contest actions for the rest of the round. Focus cost - 1 for every additional round that the user must spend recharging.

Recoil (focus cost - 1): The Technique damages the user when used. Focus cost - 1 for each point of damage dealt to the user. Groups should discuss what Traits this Technique inflicts on its user.

Miscellaneous Mods

Misc. Change (Focus cost - 1 or + 1): The Technique has a change in its effect not described by other Mods. The exact change decides whether the cost of the Technique increases or decreases.

This Mod is applied to narrative changes such as the Technique only working at night (Focus cost - 1) - and changes to the effects of other Mods, such as an AoE only affecting one side of a conflict (Focus cost + 1).

Keywords

Below is a list of keywords used to shorten descriptions of Technique effects. It is advised for groups to use these keywords or create their own when creating Techniques for their stories.

- **Avoidable:** Targets can contest the effect of this Technique. However, they cannot counter-attack on a success (see "Damage" on Page 14).
- **Close/Long Range:** The Technique's range is the same zone (Close) or any zone (Long). Long Range requires the Mod of the same name.
- **Knockback:** Damage with the Knockback keyword moves a character back instead of giving Danger Levels (see "Damage"). The knockback damage is equal to the number of zones the character is moved.
- **Reaction:** This Technique can be used on any character's turn in a round, though only in response to a specific trigger. This effect requires the **Game Changer** Modification.
- **Piercing:** Damage dealt with this Technique ignores Armor Levels or Damage Boxes (if either are used). This effect requires **Game Changer**.
- **Poison:** Damage from this Technique is dealt at the end of every round. This effect requires **Extended**.

Conflicts

Throughout a story, the PCs will likely enter many **conflicts**. Conflicts in COGS include physical battles, verbal arguments, tests of will, and any other source of tension in the story. When characters' goals go against each other, a conflict begins.

Conflicts place characters on distinct **sides**. Generally, a conflict consists of two sides: the Player Characters and their foes. However, the PCs may sometimes face multiple groups of enemies fighting against each other. Other times, Player Characters may find themselves at odds with one another, the opposing PCs forming their own sides in the conflict.

Goals

A character's current goal decides their side in a conflict. For example, while the Player Characters may want to save the world, their foes trying to take it over wish to defeat the PCs to ensure their success. The goals in conflicts between these two groups may be as simple as defeating the enemy or as complex as stopping a bomb unnoticed.

A conflict ends when one side achieves its goal or when all characters on opposing sides are defeated or surrender. A character surrenders when they stop fighting for their side's goal. For example, one combatant may flee as their allies are defeated. Meanwhile, another may join their former foe after being swayed to their side.

Rounds and Turn Order

Conflicts are split into **rounds**, during which each character present takes a **turn**. Before a round starts, Players decide the turn order of the PCs within their side. Meanwhile, the Narrator chooses the turn order of any NPCs within their own groups. Characters share a turn when performing group actions.

Rounds always begin with a character on the Players' side. Turns then alternate between each side until all characters have taken a turn. If the PCs form multiple sides, the Narrator chooses the order between them.

During their turn, a character can make one action, contested action, or use one Technique. Characters attack by using contested rolls to hit and damage their foes at the same time (see "Damage"). Fighting foes head-on is risky, as this can damage the attacker instead. For this reason, it is recommended to find other ways to subdue enemies.

While making an attack is an action, contesting one with a roll is a **reaction**. Reactions are, quite simply, actions made in response to other actions. Characters can make as many reactions as they wish in a round.

Conflicts can be played without rounds or defined turn orders. Instead, Players may opt to use a "popcorn" turn order, moving between characters as they see fit. While this can work in conflicts without many combatants, round and turn order rules are advised for conflicts with six or more characters.

Maps and Zones

While not needed, one way to keep games engaging is to include maps of areas the PCs will explore. Maps can be as complex as scenes from books or video games or as simple as index cards covered in notes.

Using **zones** is advised for combat scenes if using a map. Zones are divisions drawn on a map defining its general areas. Characters can generally only interact with characters and objects within their current zone. They must move to another zone to interact with something inside it.

During their turn, a character may move anywhere inside their zone or to the nearest edge of an adjacent zone, so long as nothing blocks their path. Characters may move before, during, or after their actions. Characters can spend Focus to move additional zones, at a rate of one Focus per zone.

If characters form a group, they must occupy the same zone throughout their action. If one character moves to another zone, the rest of the group must move with them. In addition, all characters in a group must spend Focus if they wish to move additional zones.

Zone Alternatives

Zones are the primary method described in COGS for resolving distances on maps. However, groups can adapt the rules to other ways of designing maps, such as grids, hex tiles, or measuring physical distances.

When using square or hex tiles, groups must decide the size of each tile. For example, a group may decide that each square/hex tile is one meter across and that a character can move up to 5 meters/tiles on their turn.

When using physical sizes, the group decides how far each character can move on the map, using a ruler or tape measure to track distances. For example, a group may decide that a character can move between 5 and 10 inches on the map during their turn.

In addition to deciding how far characters can move, groups must also decide what characters can interact with and the range of their Items. For example, a group may decide that characters can only interact with objects in an adjacent tile or that a character's weapon can only shoot up to 10 inches away on the map.

Ranged Combat

During a conflict, characters can attack from another zone if they use a ranged Item such as a bow, laser gun, or a rock picked off the ground. As usual, a character attacking from another zone makes a contested roll against their target. If the target rolls higher in this roll but cannot make a ranged attack themselves, they neither take nor deal any damage.

In addition, characters need a line of sight to attack from afar. To determine if characters have a line of sight, make a line between the character and their target with a straight object like a ruler or tape measure. If no large objects block the line, the characters have a line of sight with one another.

Damage and Death

Damage

When a character loses a contested roll in a conflict, they take **damage**. The amount of damage taken equals the point difference between the characters' rolls. When characters take damage, they gain negative Traits based on the type of conflict, such as being *injured* in a fight.

Traits received from damage are given **Danger Levels (DL)** defining their severity, starting with Danger Level 1 for 1 damage. Each further point of damage raises the DL by 1 or gives the character an additional Danger Level 1 Trait.

Traits of Danger Level 1 or 2 are **minor**, such as *Cuts* or a *Bruised Ego*. DL 3 and 4 Traits are **severe**, such as a *Lost Limb* or *Exile from a country*. Lastly, Traits of DL 5 or higher are **critical**. These can kill a character (see "Character Death") or otherwise remove them from the conflict.

Damage can also reduce Trait and Item modifiers at a rate of 1 DL per -1 modifier. Traits or Items can only take damage if directly involved in a conflict. For example, a sword would not take damage in a debate.

Group members decide how to spread DLs between Trait severity, number, and modifiers. The Narrator then describes how the character is affected by the damage. Below are examples of damage in play.

- During a swordfight, Character A beats Characters B and C in a group contested roll by a difference of 3. Characters B and C each take 3 damage and gain Traits such as *Lost Limb* or *Bleeding Cut* (-2).
- Character C shifts 2 of their damage to their *Suit of Armor* (+1). The Item's modifier is reduced by 2, becoming a *Suit of Armor* (-1).

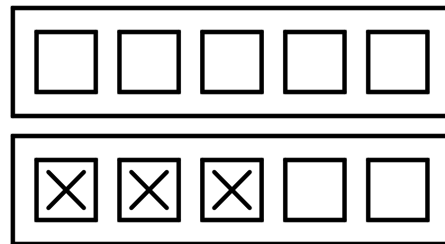
Variant Rule: Armor Levels

Some groups may choose to use **Armor Levels**. When using these rules, clothing and armor Traits each have an Armor Level (AL) of at least 0. Characters are unaffected by damage so long as it does not exceed their Armor level. For example, a character with an Armor Level of 2 is only affected by damage if they take three or more.

Clothing Items have an Armor Level of 0, while protective Items made to serve as armor have an AL of 1. In addition, an Item's Armor Level is raised or reduced by its total modifier. For example, a Suit of Armor (+1) has an Armor Level of 2 instead of 1.

Variant Rule: Damage Boxes

Other groups may choose to use **Damage Boxes**. Damage boxes are a row of five checkboxes that shield a character from damage. When a character takes damage, they mark that many boxes instead.



When a character's fifth checkbox fills, they become prone to the effects of damage again for the rest of the round. That character's damage boxes are all cleared at the start of their next turn. Listed below are examples of damage in play using damage boxes.

- Character A beats Character B in a contested roll by 2 points, dealing 2 damage. As a result, Character B marks 2 damage boxes. As Character B already had 1 box marked, they now have 3 marked boxes.
- Character C takes 3 damage in a fistfight with 3 boxes already marked. They then mark their last 2 boxes and gain a Bruised Trait (DL 1), clearing their boxes at the end on their next turn.

Other Sources of Damage

While losing contested rolls in conflicts is the most common way characters take damage, they can also take damage from failed action rolls. When failing an action roll, the character may take damage equal to the difference between their roll and the action's TN.

An action roll should only damage a character if rolling for dangerous actions, such as avoiding traps, handling hazardous materials, or trying to resist the effects of harmful substances.

Healing

Damage is generally not permanent, and characters can recover damage through various means. At the end of sessions, Players may roll to clear a number of their characters' damage boxes equal to the roll's point value. The Narrator can award boons to this roll for any noteworthy moments in the session that the Player's PC provided.

In addition, some characters may be able to heal themselves or others. Character healing abilities may directly affect either damage boxes or character Traits. Generally, characters heal using Items or Techniques.

Before using it in a story, groups should discuss the effects and limits of healing. Regardless, characters will only sometimes have access to healing abilities. Instead, they may need to spend time resting to recover from damage, much like real life.

Character Death

In real life, many have survived all sorts of dangerous events. For this reason, COGS characters cannot be instantly killed by damage, no matter how much they may take. Instead, Players decide when a character dies. Though the Narrator has the final say in a character's fate, a Player's choice should matter the most for their own PC.

Regarding death, the effect on the story should be more critical in deciding a character's fate than the result of a damage roll. A character's death or survival should have a lasting impact on the story, affecting both the character themselves and those around them.

For example, the group should kill off cocky characters for underestimating their foes, rather than for taking severe damage. However, the character may instead narrowly survive their injuries, the near-death incident changing them and forcing them to grow as a person.

While severe Traits of DL 3 or higher will not outright kill a character, they will create problems for them. The narrative impact of Traits should factor into the character's survival. A group may choose to let a character succumb to injuries or other afflictions to end their suffering.

When a character dies, their Player usually creates a new one to rejoin the other PCs in the story at a later time. However, Players should never discard the character sheets of their fallen PCs. Suppose the group is playing a fantasy or science-fiction story where resurrection is possible. In this case, it is best to save a sheet in case the chance presents itself.

Appendix

Making an Index Card Character Sheet

