

# Dozens RPG

A Role-Playing System by Uri Lifshitz

The Dozens role-playing system comes in three flavors: Freeform, Player-driven, and Full. The aim is for new players to start off with the Freeform version, transitioning to the Player-driven version once they feel more comfortable, eventually graduating to the Full version.

## Difference between the versions

- ◆ In Freeform the players roll whenever the GM asks for it. High is good, low is bad, and everything else is at the GM's discretion.
- ◆ In a Player-driven game, the players know if they succeeded or failed a roll: a result of 1-5 is a failure, while a 6-12 is a success. Players also decide what their characters excels at, and add an appropriate bonus to the roll.
- ◆ The Full version contains a bunch of extra rules for specific actions, such as aiding other characters, working in opposition to other characters, and more.

## Development Principles

I've been using Dozens for years in convention and introduction games. It's very easy to explain and run; a d12 is exotic for people who are unfamiliar with RPGs; critical failures and successes are not too rare (16.6% of the rolls!); and it provides a good methodology on how to introduce an understanding of the rules to the players while playing.

Dozens was designed with these principles in mind: Easy to learn, few rolls, single die type, and interesting results (critical failures and successes) shouldn't be too rare.

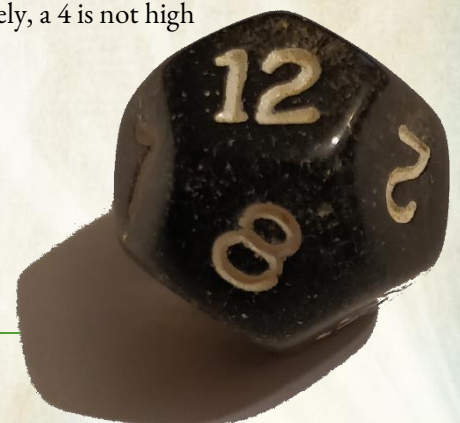
## GM Guidelines

1. Story, fun or GM call can trump any rule at the GM discretion.
2. Risky choices should be handled by rolling a d12 and adding relevant bonuses if such exist.
3. Only roll if the result would lead to an interesting outcome, be it a success or a failure.
4. If an action's outcome has no importance, just assume it's a success and move on.
5. Assign bonuses, not penalties.

## Freeform Dozens

If you are running a game for people who are unfamiliar with role-playing games, you probably don't want to start off with a long-winded explanation of the mechanics. Simply state that the outcome of every action is determined by a roll of the 12-sided die and that a higher result is always better.

Tell players when and why they roll ("roll the die in order to see if you manage to climb over the electric fence") and explain the outcome that follows the result ("unfortunately, a 4 is not high enough. You slip and fall, suffering a massive shock").



## Player-driven Dozens

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In Player-driven Dozens a lot of the narrative control is at the hand of the players. The players describe their actions and the outcome is determined based on the end result of the die roll plus any bonuses:



**1 - Critical Failure** - A completely terrible and unlikely result occurred. The GM will describe the specifics, but player ideas and input should be appreciated.

**2-5 - That didn't go as planned...** - You fail to accomplish your task in the manner you planned. This doesn't necessarily mean that you failed; you might have succeeded but caused unforeseen complications to arise.

**6-11 - Success** - You succeed and do something cool!

**12 - Critical Success!** - You succeeded far beyond any reasonable prediction, probably by sheer luck.

It's important that the player knows the result of their actions immediately after the die is rolled. The immediate feedback prevents any gap of tension between the declaration of the action and the result.

### Describing the Outcome

While the GM has the power to narrate the die's result, by default, we suggest to give that power to the players as often as possible. You can prompt them using phrases such as "How exactly did you do it?", "Give us a description" or "Why don't you tell us how that hurt you?".

## Full Dozens

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This section describes additional rules for the Dozens system.

### Character Proficiencies

Each character has a specific skill they're really good at, for which they get a +2 on their rolls. This should be specific in a way that relates to the character, the world and the story. "Wielding the sword of my ancestors" is a good proficiency, "Fighting" is too general.

Each character also has two things that they are kinda good at, for which they get a +1 on their rolls.

My paladin is really good at **Sword fighting (+2)** and can also perform a **Healing touch (+1)** and also good at **Being a good listener (+1)**.

As for everything not covered by a character's proficiencies, the GM decides if they can or can't do it. As a rule of thumb, allow everyone to at least try, unless you feel the suggestion doesn't make sense.

Character proficiencies don't stack, only the highest apply.

### Character Background

After writing what your character is really good at and also good at, add "Because of ..." and complete the rest. For example "My paladin is really good at **Sword fighting (+2)** because **they were trained by the great sword master Zilian** and can also perform **Healing touch (+1)** because of **their strong ties with their god Odin** and they are a **good listener (+1)** because **they grow up with five siblings**".

### Handling Challenges and Difficulty Rating

Any challenge that the party tries to overcome has a difficulty rating (or DR) assigned to it, the number of successes required to overcome the challenge. If no DR is specified, assume the challenge requires one success to overcome.

If you manage to score a number of successes equal to the DR of the challenge, it is taken out of the conflict. If the challenge is a creature, this doesn't necessarily mean that they are dead or unconscious; they could run away, burst into tears, start begging for their life or accept the character's arguments.

If a character tries to overcome a challenge but fails, provide a bonus to an opponent or an ally on their next attempt. This represents taking advantage of the characters' failed attempt either by an enemy capitulating on the failure or an ally learning from the failure and trying a new approach. It can also represent a very limited success, one that makes the challenge somewhat less difficult ("I loosened it up for you").

For example, suppose there is a magical lock on a door that requires 1 success to open. A wizard tries to unlock the door and fails. The GM decides that the wizard still managed to loosen the lock a bit, so now any following try will have a +1 on the roll.

A challenge but can take many forms. It can refer to a single enemy (e.g. a swordsman guarding the hallway, with DR1); a group of creatures each, with different difficulty ratings (e.g. two goblins with DR1 and a hobgoblin commander with DR3); or a whole group that operates as a unit (many kobolds, counting together as DR5). This flexibility allows you to scale the difficulty of a challenge, and how prominent it should be in the narrative.

### Taking Damage

Harm in Dozens is abstracted, representing physical injury, emotional anguish, or an expenditure of effort. A player character takes damage when another character rolls a success against them, or at the GM's discretion when they fail in a risky attempt (climbing down from a tall balcony, calming a raging bull or standing up to a bully).

NPCs don't track damage. They are defeated after the player characters score a number of successes equal to their DR.

As a rule, each player character can take 3 points of damage before they can no longer participate in a scene. The exact nature of "not being able to participate" depends on the circumstances. It may be that the character is unconscious, running away crying or paralyzed in pain.



### **Aiding Other Characters**

If a character is trying to collaborate with another character, have the first character make a roll, granting the second character action a +1 on a success or a +4 on a critical success. If the aid action fails, add +1 to the opposition's next action. On a natural 1 just make everything worse in any way you can think of.

### **Initiative**

The GM decides who goes first. If the order is unimportant then let the players have their turn first. If you want to create a sense of danger, have the monsters go first. If it's critical to know who does something first, have both parties make an opposed roll, the higher result wins.

### **Granting Bonuses**

If the players do something smart or cool, reward them for it. Consider giving a +1 or +2 bonus in the following cases:

- ◆ You can grant a bonus before attempting a specific action if a player describes something really creative or cool (for example, swinging from the chandelier rather than just taking the stairs).
- ◆ You can grant a bonus to all of the next rolls in a specific scene (for example if all the characters planned something together, like a well thought out back heist or if they got some magical support for an activity).
- ◆ You can grant a bonus to all the initial rolls in a challenge (for example if the party planned an ambush to their enemies). This is your call.

Avoid imposing penalties. If you feel an action would result with a penalty, then give a bonus to the opponent's next action ("you slip and now the orc has an easier time focusing on his next attack") or raise the number of successes needed to complete the challenge ("you twist the lock in your hand and now it's going to be more difficult to pick it open").

### **Opposing Actions**

When there's a need to resolve an immediate conflict between two opposing characters, whether PCs or NPCs, both roll and whoever rolled higher has their way. Such rolls can resolve issues such as "who grabbed the magical orb first" or in case of a dual, who struck the first blow.

Note success or failures for both parties as normal. For example, a hero and a foe both reach for a magical orb, rolling a 5 and a 2, respectively. The hero wins the opposed roll and therefore grabs it first; however, since the result is a failure, the GM determines that the orb then slips from the hero's hand, falls and rolls away.

### **Example of play -**

Jane (the GM): OK, guys, the troll lifts his club and moves toward you, what do you do?

Aviv (Paladin): I lift my sword and swing at the vile beast (rolls a 6, adds 2 due to his "wielding my sword for justice"). A success!

Jane (The GM): Awesome, the troll tries to counter with his club and (rolls a 3) fails, your sword cuts the troll's club nearly in half. You'll need another success to finish him off.

Eran (Bard): I play an annoying tune on my bongo drums to distract the troll (rolls a 2, adds 1 for "grabbing attention"). Damn, that's a failure.

Jane (the GM): OK, apparently the troll knows that tune and he likes it! He becomes energized and you'll need 2 more successes to finish him off.

## GMing Special Effect

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When running a Dozens game it is important to remember that Dozens is a system that encourages characters success, imaginative storytelling and active participation from the players. The GM does not have a lot of mechanical tools to influence the game. However Dozens have GMing Special Effects. Special Effects are new rules, added to a game for a specific session or a specific campaign in order to evoke a specific feeling for that duration. You can create your own Special Effects rules but while doing so remember these basic guidelines: A Special Effect should have both (a) a clear game mechanic effect on the characters and (b) evoke emotional effect on the players.

Here are some GMing Special Effects for example:

### **Turning of the Screw**

During a session, turn to a specific player and ask "What is the worst thing that could happens to the characters? What would really mess up their plans?" Once that player respond inform the players that that thing actually happened. Make sure to ask each of the players this question during that session or campaign so they will all feel that they took part in shaping the narrative.

The objective of this special effect is to create a turn for the worse in the lives of the characters, making the story more dramatic. It also has the added value of giving the players narrative control on the story. This effect can be used if you want to enhance the tension or give a substantial advantage to the antagonists before letting the player characters start to overcome their opposition. This effect is a set up for greater things to come. Think of the movie "Star Wars: the empire strike back" as written this way. Setting up a huge obstacle for a future triumph.

### **Doubt (Inner Conflicts)**

If a player character experienced an event that might cause them to doubt one of their proficiencies or their place in the world such as a sudden realization or a horrifying betrayal have all positive modifiers turn into negatives.

This special effect is meant to get a player to experience the anguish a player character feel after a dramatic moment that cause the character to doubt their abilities or it's sources. It may give your game an additional sense of dread or melancholy.

### **Heroic Spotlight**

Allow each player to automatically succeed in one challenge without rolling.

This effect allow the players to have their moment in the spotlight. It can be for one character at a time, for example as part of fast forwarding a scene where you simply allow a character to overcome an obstacle or when an encounter is done and you let everyone describe their final action in order to make the finale more heroic. This effect allows each player to have a moment to shine in and a chance to show off their characters skills.



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