



The Sapio System (v1.0)

The Sapio System is a roleplaying game ruleset that utilizes Spiral Dice. It is a lightweight, setting-agnostic, flexible framework for telling the stories of one or more characters controlled by players, in a world managed by a game master. The “Spiral” name reflects the mechanics embedded in the dice, which inject complications or drama into scenes as the characters move through the shared imaginative space.

Sapio leverages the dice to create a dynamic story from a few simple elements. Character descriptors are quick to craft and are the primary influence on how likely a character is to succeed at a given task. Actions taken by the characters are not confined to skill lists, so characters are free to “try anything” in response to challenges they may encounter. Finally, Action Sequences provide a cinematic framework for tense group moments like combat or chases, with constantly evolving action aided by the complications from rolling Spiral Dice.

The Sapio System draws on many sources of inspiration which will be familiar to veteran roleplaying game players. In its “tag-based” Professions and Qualities, it draws inspiration from FATE and is similar to Barbarians of Lemuria. Its custom dice draw inspiration from FATE and Genesys. Its narrative design is heavily influenced by the “Powered by the Apocalypse” games.

Sapio is a system that can help tell many stories, from players with all possible life experiences. Those varied experiences all contribute to making our stories better! Everyone is welcome to play, regardless of race, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, religion, or disability. To accommodate others at your table, we encourage you to seek out and employ RPG safety tools, and to respect the boundaries of other players.

The first portion of this guide is addressed to the players and should be read by both the players and the GM. The second portion should be read by the GM and is addressed to them.

(BREAKOUT) *What is a roleplaying game?* A roleplaying game, or RPG, is a game where you and other players take on roles in an imagined world. Through discussing what is happening with the other players, much like “playing pretend,” you create a shared story of what the characters say and do, the challenges they meet and overcome, and the relationships they build. In a traditional roleplaying game like Sapio, several players each play one player-character (PC), while a single player is the game master (GM). Like a narrator or video game application, the GM represents the other non-player characters (NPCs) and elements of the world. The game should be collaborative - all voices can contribute in the conversation even if each player has their own domain. The rules of an RPG exist to assist everyone in making a

story together by providing an unbiased framework, especially for doing challenging things like swaying NPCs, overcoming obstacles, or navigating dangerous encounters.

In Brief, How Sapio Works

The next section will tell you how to create your character **elements**, and subsequent sections will provide detail on **Luck**, **Special Talents**, and other mechanics.

When your character attempts something where the outcome is uncertain and there are consequences to failure (like swaying a standoffish NPC or running through a collapsing hallway), your GM will ask you to describe how you go about it and what you intend to accomplish. Then, the GM will tell you the **target number (TN)** for your roll. You start with one Spiral Die, and will invoke **character elements** to pick up additional Spiral Dice, adding them to your **dice pool**. A larger **dice pool** increases the character's chance of success. Once the **dice pool** is built, you roll a **check** to determine the results.

★ (**Hits**): These symbols denote progress towards and above success. You need to roll a number of these equal to or above the TN to succeed.

⌋ (**Spare**): These symbols denote the presence and degree of (usually) beneficial effects encountered or triggered in the course of attempting an action, and offset with **Spirals**.

© (**Spiral**): These symbols denote the presence and degree of complications encountered or triggered in the course of attempting an action, and offset with **Spare**.

After the roll, the GM narrates the consequences of success or failure, taking into account net ⌋ or ©. Net ⌋ allow the rolling player to introduce a beneficial twist, while net © encourage the GM to introduce a complication.

Special Situations:

- **Special Talents** may change how the roll proceeds, either by adding dice, changing **TNs**, or generating automatic ★, ⌋, or ©.
- A character may also have accumulated several points of **Luck** in the course of play, which the player may spend one-for-one to add additional dice before rolling.
- If another player describes how their character helps and invokes an appropriate **element**, add an additional die to the pool.
- A character may have **Injuries** or **Stresses** which increase the **TN** for the roll.

Characters in Sapio

The Elements of a Character

These are the **elements** that comprise your character (known as a player character or PC) mechanically:

- A **Profession**, consisting of two words and describing the primary set of skills your character possesses
- One or more **Specializations** under that Profession, each corresponding to a single skill or area of expertise
- One or more **Side Professions**, each consisting of two words and describing a secondary set of skills your character has
- One or more **Specializations** under each Side Profession, each corresponding to a single skill or area of expertise
- One or more **Qualities**, (usually positive) descriptors of your character's mental, physical, social, spiritual, or arcane traits

In addition to character elements, your character also has the following traits:

- One or more **Special Talents**, unique abilities of your character
- A **Principle** and a **Worst Impulse**, each of which is a short phrase describing your character's best and worst nature

To see a character sheet that tracks your character elements, go to the end of this guide.

Character Elements

Characters in Sapio are built out of **elements** which represent what they can do, and to some extent, who they are. To create a character, first come up with a concept for a character that fits into the setting of your game, as presented by the GM. Before you put concrete elements in place, think about what type of person might be enjoyable to play, whether for their adventurous daring, social acumen, fighting prowess, interesting outlook, or whatever else interests you. Once you have a clear picture of an interesting individual, you will translate their description into elements.

Professions and Specializations

Main Professions: A Main Profession is the package of skills that your character possesses, based around a concept like "Shopkeeper" or "Arcane Knight" or "Desert Commando." Your character's Main Profession is central to the concept of the character, so you should carefully choose the wording and work with your GM to be clear on the associated skill set. The

Profession should be two or less words, and encapsulate what you want your character to be good at. This does not have to directly describe their actual day job - it should evoke the core talent set that defines them, even if their means of making money does not.

For instance, a Main Profession of “Roof Runner” tells everyone that your character is adept at moving from building to building along rooftops. You might expect that your character will be good at acrobatics, quickness, and agility related endeavours. Your character will probably also know the city’s layout, have a good sense for gauging distances, and know their way around building exteriors. They may work as a gas station clerk during the day, but that’s not what defines them!

When building the dice pool, players may invoke their Profession to pick up two dice if it is fully applicable, or one die if it is partially applicable, in addition to the one starting die they get for each roll. A Profession that is not relevant to a given action contributes no dice to the pool. Therefore, make sure that you and your GM are on the same page about what your Profession means and will contribute full or partial dice to.

Side Professions: A Side Profession functions just like a Main Profession, but contributes only one die to the pool when invoked. This represents something else your character is good at, allowing space for your character to have a multidimensional skill set. In relation to your character concept, this might be a skill set that their upbringing gave them, or that they pursue as a hobby, or that they do for their job - whatever extra dimension you wish to bring. As part of character advancement, a character can gain additional Side Professions.

Specializations: A specialization is a single skill or topic within a Profession that your character excels at. When you imagined your character concept, you probably envisioned them doing something (like firing a gun or entertaining a room), and those are perfect candidates for Specializations. The Desert Commando might have “Wilderness Survival,” and the Arcane Knight might have “Pyromancy.” Your Roof Runner might take something like “Leaping” to reinforce their high-flying nature, or something like “Quick Escapes” to indicate that they slip away from danger easily.

You may invoke your character’s specialization to add a die to the pool when it is applicable. As part of character advancement, players may choose to learn additional Specializations within their Main and Side Professions.

Qualities

Your character likely has a few traits that define them. When you think of your character, you probably envision a few positive attributes that set them apart, and these are what should become your character’s Qualities. Qualities are (usually) adjectives that define your character even outside of their skill set, applying to a wide range of situations. Your character may be strong, smart, beautiful, eloquent, or just plain slippery. Our Roof Runner is probably “Agile,” but perhaps they are also “Perceptive” or “Durable” or “Likeable.” Qualities may help bolster their Main Profession or round out their capabilities in other arenas.

Note that Qualities should not be so broad that they could conceivably apply in any situation. For instance, “Lucky” and “Competent” are so generic that they could apply to any task, and therefore should not be used.

On a given roll, a quality may be invoked to add a die to the pool if it is relevant to the situation. Only one Quality may be invoked for each check.

Example Qualities:

<i>Strong</i>	<i>Lithe</i>	<i>Crafty</i>
<i>Battle-hardened</i>	<i>Sneaky</i>	<i>Creative</i>
<i>Towering</i>	<i>Strong-willed</i>	<i>Inventive</i>
<i>Heavy</i>	<i>Stoic</i>	<i>Magnetic</i>
<i>Imposing</i>	<i>Empathetic</i>	<i>Charismatic</i>
<i>Inconspicuous</i>	<i>Perceptive</i>	<i>Charming</i>
<i>Durable</i>	<i>Intuitive</i>	<i>Gorgeous</i>
<i>Tough</i>	<i>Knowledgeable</i>	<i>Scary</i>
<i>Unflappable</i>	<i>Smart</i>	<i>Magically Trained*</i>
<i>Agile</i>	<i>Kind</i>	<i>Magical*</i>
<i>Quick</i>	<i>Friendly</i>	<i>Anointed*</i>
<i>Dextrous</i>	<i>Likeable</i>	

**In a setting with magical or divine abilities, the GM may require that characters possessing these abilities must take both a specific Quality and a Special Talent to use them (See Adapting Sapio to Fit Your Game: Magic)*

Special Talents

Special Talents are unique abilities for a character that differentiate them from others with similar Professions and Qualities. Your character is extra special in some way, where their nature or good luck always conspire to give them a little boost. Unlike character elements, Special Talents do not have to add dice to the player’s die pool when rolling.

Each one is a way to “break the rules” in some way, and they can be customized within each session or campaign. The GM will work with you to determine what is permissible within the setting. They could be:

- Something a character can always do, such as find something or know something.

Examples

- *Weather Sense - This character always knows what the weather will be tomorrow*
- *Small Contraption - This character can always create a small useful contraption from parts stored on their person*

- A situation in which a character adds bonus dice. Note that for this type of Special Talent, the GM should make sure the situation is not common (ideally applicable less than 1/3 of the time for relevant rolls).

Examples

- *One with the Forest* - This character adds a bonus die to all checks made within temperate wooded areas
- *Friend of the Dwarves* - This character adds a bonus die to all social checks made to interact with dwarves

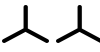
- A situation in which a character always reduces the TN for a check.

Examples

- *Hide in Plain Sight* - The TN to hide for this character is never more than 4
- *Usually Bloody* - This character may ignore the TN increase from a single Injury

- A situation in which a character modifies the results of the roll.

Examples

- *Deadly Aim* - This character generates one additional ★ if they succeed in a check to shoot a bow
- *Lucky in Love* - This character adds  to all checks related to romance or seduction.

- Codification of other abilities not encompassed by Profession or Hobby, especially supernatural or magical ones.

Examples

- *Teleportation* - This character can take a minor Stress (fatigued) to teleport a distance of up to 100 ft.
- *Spellcaster* - This character can cast magical spells

Note: Special Talents affect die rolls, but they are not invoked like character elements, and therefore may not be used to help another character. Special Talents only apply when your character is focal.

Principles and Worst Impulses

Your character is not just their capabilities; Principles and Worst Impulses define the nuances of their nature. Each of these takes the form of a word to a phrase, and they provide incentives for you to lean into your character's nature. Our "Roof Runner" may have the Principle "Violence is not the answer" and the Worst Impulse of "Stealing isn't a big deal," indicating that they believe you shouldn't ever hurt others but liberating their valuables is just fine.

Principle: This is the character's "better nature," the idea that they gravitate to when helping others.

Worst Impulse: This is the character's vice, flaw, or bad habit, which inevitably results in trouble for others or themselves.

In Sapio, these generate Luck or provide Bonus dice in certain situations.

- When a character resolves a situation or achieves a common goal with others, either by making a sacrifice according to their Principle or overindulging in their Worst Impulse, they add a bonus die to their roll.
- When a character gets into trouble by pursuing their Principle over their own wellbeing, they gain 1 Luck.
- When a character gets into trouble by indulging their Worst Impulse at a bad time, the most inconvenienced other character (focal character chooses) gains 1 Luck.

There is always a cost when a Principle or Worst Impulse comes into play - they don't add dice or generate Luck just because you are portraying your character. To add a bonus die, the character must "sacrifice" or "overindulge." Our Roof Runner wouldn't add a bonus die to a roll just for running away or avoiding violence, but would add a bonus die to insert themselves into a dangerous situation to stop the violence. For generating Luck, the character must pursue their Principle or Worst Impulse at an inconvenient or dangerous time, or to an extent that it creates issues - they are making a new problem where there was none. If a character whose Worst Impulse is "Everything can be gambled on" makes a minor bet with no real implications, that doesn't generate Luck. If they go out of their way to make a bet with an antagonist or authority that could turn out poorly for the group, that generates Luck.

As with calling out character elements when building the dice pool, it is the player's role to call out when their Principle or Worst Impulse comes into play. Seeing as you get bonus dice or Luck for it, you'll want to point it out!

Building a Starting Character

To build a starting character:

- Pick a **Profession**
- Pick one **Specialization** under that Profession
- Pick a **Side Profession**, but no **Specializations** (yet) under that Profession
- Pick two **Qualities**
- Pick one **Special Talent**
- Pick a **Principle** and a **Worst Impulse**

Example Characters

Name: Maddox Matthews

Main Profession: Roof Runner

Specializations

- Leaping
- Quick Escapes

Side Profession: Underground DJ

Specializations

- Street Contacts

Qualities

- Agile
- Durable
- Perceptive

Special Talents

Good Night Eyes: Maddox treats TNs in all but complete darkness the same as normal light.

Dropping In: Maddox generates additional ★★ if she succeeds on a check to attack from above.

Principle: Violence is not the answer

Worst Impulse: Stealing isn't a big deal

Name: Master Trobenius

Main Profession: Academy Wizard

Specializations

- Thaumaturgy
- Transmutation

Side Profession: Freshwater Fisherman

Specializations

- Wading

Qualities

- Studious
- Friendly
- Magical

Special Talents

Spellcasting: Trobenius can cast magical spells, according to this setting's spellcasting rules.

How Did that Get There: Trobenius can always find a small piece of fishing equipment on his person.

Principle: Knowledge should be preserved

Worst Impulse: Lecturing people

Advancement

After a consequential session, the player may choose from one of the following options for their character:

- Learn a new Specialization within their Profession
- Learn a new Specialization within their Side Profession or gain a new Side Profession (in addition to their current ones)
- Gain an additional Quality
- Gain an additional Special Talent

What is a consequential session? The GM will determine this, either formally (“A consequential session is one where you complete a score”) or informally (*See Adapting Sapio to Fit Your Game: Luck and other Gamifiers*).

Each selection from the list above is an *advancement*. Advancements should reflect the natural progression of the character within the narrative or reflect a trait the character is showing that isn't on their character sheet. However, they could also be prior training coming to the fore - you should work it out with the GM in that case. The player must select all types of advancement once before being able to select the same one again. This is called completing an *advancement cycle*. Upon completion of an advancement cycle, the player may additionally do one of the following things:

- Change a single word in one of their Professions
- Swap a Side Profession with their Main Profession (with Specializations following the associated Profession).
- Change a Quality to something else

This change reflects the ability of characters to stray from their initial course and become something else than they started as. Their skills may subtly shift, or they may emphasize one skill set more than another, or their personality and physical qualities may change.

Using The Spiral Dice

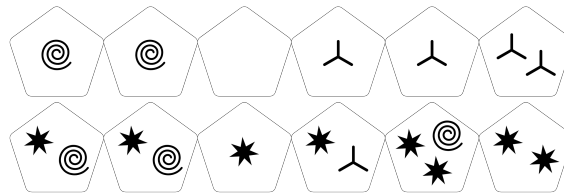
Spiral Dice have twelve faces, with ★ (hit), ㄣ (spare), and ◎ (spiral) symbols on them. You will roll a pool of these dice and count the symbols to determine success at any actions when the outcome is uncertain and there are consequences to failure.

★ : These symbols denote progress towards and above success.

ㄣ : These symbols denote the presence and degree of (usually) beneficial effects encountered or triggered in the course of attempting an action, and offset with Spirals.

◎ : These symbols denote the presence and degree of complications encountered or triggered in the course of attempting an action, and offset with Spares.

Spiral Dice Faces



When to Roll

When your character attempts something where the outcome is uncertain and there are consequences to failure, your GM will ask you to describe how you go about it and what you intend to accomplish. State what your character is trying to do and how they are attempting to do it - this step is important for determining the results!

The GM will set a Target Number (TN) between 1 and 5, with higher numbers indicating a more difficult task. In the case of using a piece of equipment, whether a gun or an oscilloscope, the target should be the difficulty of using the equipment to accomplish the task. For instance, searching quickly in a large dark room for a note might be a TN 4, but doing so with a flashlight (using the flashlight to search for the note) might be a TN 2.

You will consult your professions and qualities to determine how many dice to roll (your “dice pool”). The player building the dice pool is the “focal player,” and their character is the “focal character.”

When you invoke a character element, name it and add one or more dice to your pool, as follows:

1. You always start with one die. Pick one die up.
2. Your Main Profession could be partially or fully applicable, or your side profession could be applicable.
 - a. If your Main Profession is fully applicable, invoke it and pick up two dice.
 - b. If your Main Profession is partially applicable or your side profession is applicable, invoke it and pick up one die
3. Depending on which Profession you are using, you may have a Specialization within it that is applicable. If it is, invoke it and pick up another die.
4. One of your Qualities may be applicable. If so, invoke it and pick up another die.
5. Finally, certain Special Talents, situations, or spending Luck may give you one or more bonus dice. If so, pick the dice up, to the maximum of six dice. If this would increase the maximum beyond six dice, each two bonus dice beyond the maximum instead reduce the TN by 1.

You may only invoke one Profession, one Specialization associated with the invoked Profession, and one Quality for a given roll, even if others might be applicable.

A dice pool can never have more than six dice - one to start, up to two from a Profession, one from a Specialization, one from a Quality, and one or more bonus dice. If the number of dice exceeds the maximum pool size of six dice, each two bonus dice beyond the maximum instead reduces the TN by 1.

After you build the dice pool, you roll a “check” to determine the results. Count up the number of ★ and compare them to the TN - if the number of ★ equals or exceeds the TN, your character accomplishes what they intended. ★ beyond the TN indicate higher degrees of success. Count up the number of ㄣ and ©, offsetting them until the net ㄣ or © remains.

Net ㄣ: The player who rolled says what else happens within the context of the scene, usually providing their character an advantage. The fictional effects of ㄣ should make sense in the scene, and in general should not overshadow success or failure in importance. More ㄣ dictate a larger effect. The GM has final say as to whether the addition makes sense, but should be open to player additions. Examples:

- Someone becomes impressed or enamored
- Intentionally or unintentionally, the environment is altered
- An ally arrives just in time
- A foe flees or departs
- The character ends up in a good spot
- The situation is especially lucrative or advantageous
- A situation or piece of information is better than previously thought

- The character avoids attention
- An ally gains an advantage
- A foe is caught at a disadvantage

Net ©: The GM says what else happens within the context of the scene, usually complicating or worsening the narrative for the characters. The fictional effects of © should make sense in the scene, and in general should not overshadow success or failure in importance. More © dictate a larger effect. Examples:

- The character gains a foe
- The environment is altered
- A foe arrives or slips away
- An ally is put in jeopardy or harmed
- A foe gains an advantage
- The character or an ally is caught at a disadvantage
- A situation or piece of information is worse or different than previously thought
- A hard truth is revealed
- The character is given a hard choice
- A new threat or revelation surfaces

Invoking an Element

When a player invokes a Profession, Specialization, or Quality, that character element is dedicated to the task it was invoked for. If the task is ongoing, that character element cannot be invoked again for a simultaneous task. When a character helps another, the character element they invoke may likewise not be invoked again for a simultaneous task. If you are invoking your Side Profession of Wilderness Guide and your Quality of Perceptive to lead your group through the wilds, you cannot invoke them to check for pursuers. If you are invoking your Quality of Strong to hold up a collapsing mine brace, you can kick the cave spiders attacking you but you won't be able to use that Quality for the check.

The only exception is a character's Main Profession, which may be invoked for simultaneous tasks after the first invocation. Invoking it the first time contributes two dice as normal, but subsequent invocations contribute only a single die each time. When invoked in this manner, the Main Profession must be *fully* applicable to contribute this die.

Special Situations when Rolling




Receiving Help: When another character helps the focal character, the assisting player explains how their character does so and invokes an applicable Profession, Specialization, or Quality. The focal player may add a bonus die to the focal character's roll, up to the maximum of six







dice. If the addition of bonus dice would increase the total pool beyond six dice, each two bonus dice beyond the maximum instead reduces the TN by 1.

Only character elements (Professions, Specializations, and Qualities) may be used to add a die in this way. Special Talents, Principles, and Worst Impulses are not invoked in the same fashion and cannot be used.

Using Luck, or following a Principle or Worst Impulse: When the focal player has Luck available to spend, they may spend Luck one for one to add bonus dice to their pool before rolling. If the character is following their Principle or Worst Impulse in their attempted action, they add a bonus die. They may add as much Luck as they have available if they wish, but this cannot push the number of total dice above six. For every two dice beyond six, the TN is reduced by 1.

Injuries or Stresses: Stress and Injuries at the Moderate or Severe level (see Injuries section) increase TNs for actions that they are relevant to. A Moderate Injury or Stress increases the TN by 1, and a Severe Injury or Stress increases the TN by 2. Multiple applicable Injuries or Stresses may affect the TN, in which case only the largest penalty is applied.

Special Talents: Special Talents (see Special Talent section) may impact the building of the dice pool in some circumstances, such as adding bonus dice. They may also reduce TNs or generate automatic , , or .

Improbable Success: If all dice rolled show   (regardless of ) , but the roll still does not meet the TN, the player may add an additional die and reroll. If the rolled dice also show   but the combined  do not meet the TN, repeat.

Luck

Luck is a resource that your character gains for enhancing the story through their choices (as opposed to the results of a roll or a GM narration). In addition to gaining Luck through Principles and Worst Impulses, your character can be given Luck directly by the GM for making compelling choices that deepen or complicate the narrative. At the GM's discretion, it can be used as a reward for specific character actions or milestones. (*See Guidance for GMs: Using Luck*)

In general, characters should expect to receive between 1 and 3 Luck per session. You can spend Luck one for one to add bonus dice to a roll, up to the maximum of six dice. If this would increase the maximum beyond six dice, each two bonus dice beyond the maximum instead reduce the TN by 1.

Action Sequences

Action Sequences are scenes where multiple characters attempt high stakes actions together. These include fighting, escaping a deteriorating situation, or wide-ranging chases. They may be short and immediate, or remain tense for a much longer period of in-game time. A skirmish

might last a few minutes, while fleeing through the night could last hours. If characters are collectively engaging in something risky together, it is likely an Action Sequence. These sequences play out using the rules for giving and receiving help, with a few modifications.

Action Sequences in Play

The flow of an Action Sequence is partly structured and partly narrative, with all characters acting at each dice roll. On each turn, the action will evolve as all of the characters and NPCs act. Different characters will take the spotlight and help each other directly or indirectly, but every turn, everyone is doing something!

Think of it like a chaotic action scene in a movie - time continuously progresses as the camera zooms around to each character, stopping on each one to frame their struggle. Actions of characters in the background might include punching their way through mooks, or moving to a new position, or holding up a toppled pillar, or still working on that lock!

- Action Sequences proceed in rounds, broken up into turns. A turn operates in narrative time, taking from a few seconds to much longer depending on the scene.
- At the start of each turn, the GM frames the current action, telling the players what their characters and any NPCs are doing, and what state the environment is in. Players decide who will be the focal character, and the focal player describes what they will do. In general, the character attempting the most bold, effective, or dangerous action should be focal for the turn. Other players decide what their character will do, either to support the focal character or do something else in parallel. These characters are known as “supporting” characters when it is not their turn, although they may not be directly supporting the focal character. They could, for instance, be charging a group of minions in a totally different direction.
 - When a supporting character assists the focal character, they may invoke one element to add a bonus die. This assistance may include providing a distraction, or keeping threats busy, or directly giving the focal character a boost of some kind.
 - Invoked elements remain invoked within a given *round*, so players must decide whether to invoke them for their own check or to use them to assist others.
 - Especially helpful support, as with especially helpful assistance in general, may provide additional bonus dice at the GM’s discretion.
 - All players, even those whose characters are not supporting in any way, describe what their characters do for the turn.
- The GM sets the TN based on the difficulty of the action attempted by the focal character
 - Clever or tactically sound actions should be rewarded with a lower TN

- Defensive actions should likewise have a lower TN
- The focal character rolls the dice, taking into account any assistance
- The GM updates the action, narrating successes, failures, and the actions of the supporting characters in the background and any enemies or NPCs. If the focal character or supporting characters were attempting something risky and failed or rolled Spiral, they might take an Injury or Stress at this point. Then, the next turn begins.
- Within a round, each character that is participating in the Action Sequence must be focal for a turn.
- The round ends and a new round begins when all characters have been the focal character once.
- The turn order does not have to be the same on new rounds.
- If a character is threatened at the start of the round, they *must* take a turn sometime during the round and roll the dice as a focal character, even if they only intend to hide or run away. If engaging the threat is entirely optional, characters may “enter the fray” at the beginning of any given round, in which case they must take a turn that round.

Adjudicating Outcomes

During these Action Sequences, there are a few rules of thumb for adjudication within each turn:

- When a roll directly addresses the group goal of the sequence, Successes should always progress the action towards it
- Threats which are ignored should always result in minor injuries, or worse. If a supporting character disengages from a threat to assist, use ☉ to deal them Injuries.
- Actions that are risky and have potentially harmful consequences on failure should deliver Injuries on failure.
- ☉ should be used to add complications centered around the focal and assisting characters, including Stresses and Injuries.
- ⚓ can be used to remove obstacles, injure enemies besides the central enemy, or allow multiple invocations of elements, but should never be used for direct progress towards the goal of the sequence.

Players in the Action Sequence

The Focal Character: The focal character is at the center of their turn’s action. From the perspective of a film, they are in the center of the frame, even if action is going on around them. When you are the focal character, you may be locked in battle or hiding in the corner, but it is up to you to narrate what your character is doing, which sets the direction of the turn and the

meaning of your roll. You will also decide how to spend \curvearrowright , if any remain, and remember that you can use it to make the actions of supporting characters more effective (and potentially more interesting). You are charting the outcome of your turn.

Supporting Characters: Supporting characters are off to the side during the focal character's turn. They are either out of frame or not in the center. When you are supporting, wait for the focal player to describe what their character is doing, and don't attempt to steal the spotlight by following on with a complex action. If you have a plan to ensnare someone with rope, saying "I am going to go off looking for rope" or "I am readying rope from my pack" is a good supporting action. Saying, "I am going to find some rope, tie a knot with it, and then try to lasso the head baddie" is too much. Similarly, if the focal character is charging ahead, simply saying "I am going to charge in with them" is enough. When it's your turn, you have the opportunity to make your action more complex. Further, keep in mind that the focal character can spend \curvearrowright to bolster your supporting action, so leave the complex narration of those situations to them after they roll!

Example Action Sequences

Example 1: Gang Fight

Micah the Gang Leader (played by Jeff), Nora the Huggable Heavy (played by Lisa), and Chip the Street Macguyver (played by Doug) are about to throw down with Dominic and other members of the 7th Street Gang.

GM: *Alright, this looks to be a gang fight, so we're in an Action Sequence. The 7th Street Gangers are coming down the alley at you. They're not armed, but they're definitely looking for a fight, and Dominic is in front. What do you do?*

Jeff: *Dominic's mine - I'm charging in and taking a swing at him.*

GM: *Alright, you're focal this turn. Anyone helping?*

Lisa: *I want to draw the attention of the rest of the 7th Street Gang and keep them off of Jeff.*

Doug: *I'm holding back and looking for an opening, I think.*

Jeff: *Alright, we talked about how I can fight as a Gang Leader, and I'm Quick, so with the one I always get, that's four dice.*

Lisa: *I'm invoking Imposing to keep them off of you, so take another! I puff myself up and extend my arms outward and kind of mosey forward towards the rest of them.*

GM: *Great. The target is 3 to hit Dominic.*

Jeff: *Alright, five dice. <rolls> Success with one extra Hit! No Spare, no Spiral.*

GM: *You hit him hard. You're not sure if it's his jaw or his neck, but there's a little bit of*

crunch to it as you swing through. He doesn't go down but he scoots back a bit and looks for how to get the upper hand. Meanwhile, Nora has drawn the attention of the other gangers who have all detached to head towards her and Chip is holding back. Who's next?

Lisa: *I think that has to be me. I want to start grabbing people and throwing them into each other, causing chaos and using their numbers against them. Anyone helping me?*

Jeff: *I'm locked up with Dominic - I'm not turning my attention away.*

Doug: *Yeah, I'm still holding back for the moment...*

Lisa: *Just me then!*

GM: *Alright, you're taking on a bunch of people, so your target is 4.*

Lisa: *That's fair. Well, I'm a Huggable Heavy and I've got Crowd Control as a Specialization, so that's four dice for me. <rolls> Fail! Only three hits, but I got two Spare. Can they be super focused on me, like they crowd around me while they hit me?*

GM: *Absolutely. The gangers start crowding around and just pummeling Nora - take a Moderate Injury. Dominic and Micah are circling each other, jabbing and shoving each other away, and Chip is still biding his time. Speaking of, it's your turn, Doug!*

Doug: Now's my moment! I think it's time to rescue Nora. I'm going to run in there with a flying kick and break up that group.

Jeff: I'm still engaging Dominic.

Lisa: Can I help? I think Huggable Heavy applies fully, so I can invoke it again to keep them busy.

GM: I think that's fair. Chip takes an extra die. Because everyone is distracted, I'm putting your target at 2.

Doug: Alright, well my Side Profession is Martial Artist, so I get a die for that, none of my Qualities apply, but I get Nora's. Three dice for me. <rolls> Success with one Spiral.

GM: You fly in there and kick one guy pretty hard in the ribs, and he bumps into another of them and it creates a little clearance for Nora, but as they're pushed backward one of them scratches Nora's face. Nora, take a Minor Injury for a scratched face. We're back to the top of the round! Most of the gangers are facing off with Nora and Chip, and Dominic and Micah are facing off with each other. Dominic looks a little rough, but

he whips out a butterfly knife and spins it. Who's up?

Jeff: Oh, I am definitely taking first slot again. I'm guessing I'm doing it alone? I am going to catch his hand at the right opportunity and get that knife. Gang Leader, Quick, and I am spending a Luck on this one to get to five dice.

GM: Okay, your target is 2 - you actually cracked him pretty hard last time and he's still blinking it off.

Jeff: <rolls> Success with 3 Spare! I want to jab that knife into his thigh.

GM: Yeah, he's winded and injured and he goes to take a swing at you, and you get inside and catch his wrist, then just jam it downward into his leg. He howls in pain and stumbles back away from you.

Jeff: I yell, "Get the hell out of here you punks!"

GM: I think we're out of the Action Sequence now. His boys are coming to his aid but definitely trying to get him out of there.

Example 2: Wolves

Drotho the Wilderness Guide (played by Jeff) and Zella the Northern Princess (played by Lisa) have been traveling on foot at night, fleeing an approaching army, and they hear the sounds of wolves approaching.

GM: *From the light of your lantern you just barely catch the reflections from several sets of eyes, out in the trees. Slowly, they come forward, and there are half a dozen wolves slinking towards you. It's hard to see them clearly in the darkness, but from the way they're looking at you, their intent is clear. So, who's focal? What do you do?*

Lisa: *Ah! Wolves! I'm definitely finding a place to hide.*

Jeff: *While she's doing that, Drotho is going to take a torch from my pack, open up my lantern, and light it on the fire inside. Then I'm going to make some wide arcs with it to try and drive away those wolves.*

GM: *Okay, looks like Drotho is focal. Fire is a good call, so that's a TN 2 to drive away the wolves.*

Jeff: *Okay, Wilderness Guide plus Resourceful, that's four dice. <rolls> Success with one Spare. I want to scare the leader the most.*

GM: *Yeah, perfect. Zella scrambles away somewhere. Drotho sweeps the torch around, holding the lantern in his other hand. The biggest wolf approaches and Drotho jabs the torch forward, and it actually yelps a bit, turns, and slinks directly away. You see a few others follow - it looks like*

you've effectively scattered them and they're keeping their distance.

Lisa: *So they're gone!*

GM: *There might be stragglers. Is Zella still hiding?*

Lisa: *Definitely. I want to find the biggest overturned tree and make myself small among the roots.*

Jeff: *I think I'd still be sweeping to keep the wolves away, and I'm also not sure where Zella is.*

GM: *Right. But this is an easy check because of how effectively you scattered them last turn. Target is 1.*

Lisa: *Well... I'm Small, so that gives me one extra die, for two dice. <rolls> Oh no! Failure and two Spiral!*

GM: *Oh no! With a roll like that, you tuck yourself deep within some tree roots, but you look up and there is a shaggy wolf looking right at you. It dives at your exposed ankle and latches on! Take a moderate Injury.*

Lisa: *I definitely cry out in pain.*

GM: *It looks like the wolves have melted away except for this straggler, and Drotho hears Zella cry out somewhere off behind him. Lisa, I think Zella is going to start this round as focal because she's in the thick of the action.*

Jeff: *Alright, but I'm rushing back brandishing my torch and I'm going to contribute a die with Wilderness Guide.*

Lisa: I'm kicking and shouting and trying to get this thing off of me. I don't think I have any relevant elements, but I'm going to spend my 2 Luck!

GM: The target is a 3 on this one.

Lisa: Alright, with Drotho's die and 2 Luck, that takes me up to four dice! <rolls> Success, one Spiral.

GM: Okay, you manage to kick it right in the nose, but the wolf sort of gnaws a little bit as it backs up and you're going to take a minor Injury from that. It hears Drotho coming and turns to face him, so it's ignoring Zella now.

Lisa: Oh, I keep kicking it.

Jeff: And I'm shoving that torch right in its face to get it away.

GM: Alright, I think Zella's continued kicking is going to contribute a bonus die, but it will open her up to risk, Lisa.

Lisa: I'm okay with that at this point.

Jeff: Alright, I already invoked Wilderness Guide so that's just one die now, one die for Resourceful, plus a bonus die is four. <rolls> Success and a Spare. I think I want this guy to yelp from getting singed, and I want to hear those wolves retreating off into the distance.

GM: Yeah, you shove the torch in its face and Zella is kicking it, and the wolf turns tail. You hear light yelping from the whole group as it rejoins its group and they retreat. Zella's ankle isn't looking so hot, but you've successfully driven them all away.

Threats

The preceding sections showed you how to create a character and how to use your character elements to interact with challenges they may face. Your GM, and sometimes the other players, will introduce these challenges across the course of play (*See Guidance for GMs: Challenges and Enemies*). This section tells you what happens when your character is hurt or overwhelmed, and has rules for those (hopefully rare) instances where two characters come into conflict.

Injuries and Stresses

Sometimes, in the course of their adventures, characters will be wounded or rattled. This harm to the character is tracked as Injuries and Stresses, which follow similar rules to each other. Stresses are temporary conditions or mental states that may clear when the character has time to gather themselves and rest, while Injuries are physical wounds that require more time to heal. They are each recorded as one or two words, and labeled as either Minor, Moderate, or Severe.

- A character has two boxes for Minor, two boxes for Moderate, and one box for Severe.
- A second Minor of a similar nature increases the level to Moderate (erase the Minor and record as Moderate)
- A second Moderate of a similar nature increases the level to Severe (erase the Moderate and record as Severe)
- A second Moderate or Minor of a different nature is recorded in the second box - it does not increase the level
- If all boxes at the appropriate level are full, record subsequently incurred Injury or Stress at the next higher level but do not erase the lower level Injuries or Stresses
- A second Severe Injury or Stress debilitates the character - they are unconscious, bleeding out, or overcome to the point that they are not functional

Stress and Injuries at the Moderate or Severe level increase TNs for actions that they are relevant to. A Moderate Injury or Stress increases the TN by 1, and a Severe Injury or Stress increases the TN by 2. Multiple applicable Injuries or Stresses may affect the TN, in which case only the largest penalty is applied.

Outside of magical or advanced scientific healing in some settings, time spent resting is required to heal up. Use the following rules for downgrading and clearing Injuries:

- Stresses clear when the character is able to rest long enough to fully gather themselves. This may be a few minutes or a full night, depending on the nature of their Stress.
- A Severe Injury downgrades to a Moderate Injury after one month spent resting
- A Moderate Injury downgrades to a Minor Injury after one week spent resting
- A Minor Injury clears after one full day spent resting.

- If your character has access to relevant medical supplies, your GM may permit a check for you to reduce the severity of an Injury shortly after receiving it. The GM should determine the TN of this check based on the circumstances.

A note on Stresses: Whether in or out of an Action Sequence, Stresses can add consequences outside of bloody confrontation, and can be used to raise the stakes for a variety of situations. Camping or traveling unprepared, traveling too fast, not sleeping enough, drinking too much, and even intense emotional situations* can lead to Stresses. If the GM wants their game to focus on non-combat challenges, they should ask players how they go about situations like these and call for a roll, where they will take Stresses as a consequence of failure.

**As noted in the intro, please use RPG Safety Tools if your characters will be participating in intense emotional experiences.*

Weapons and causing Injury

When characters engage in bloody confrontations, they often use weapons of differing lethality. A kitchen knife is a less deadly weapon than a katana, for instance. Weapons have a “base” injury level that they inflict. When a character gains a weapon, note whether this level is Minor, Moderate, or Severe. As examples:

Minor: Knife, low draw weight bow and arrow, .22 caliber pistol

Moderate: Sword, large dagger, spear, handgun, hunting rifle

Severe: Sniper rifle, shotgun, chainsaw

When a player rolls to attack someone with a weapon, hitting the TN should result in the specified damage. The damage “upgrades” with additional ★ in excess of the TN, according to the following values:

Minor -> Moderate: ★

Moderate -> Severe: ★ ★

Severe -> Death: ★ ★ ★

Character versus Character

Characters don’t always get along with each other, and may have direct confrontations, bloody or not. In the case of a simple confrontation requiring a single roll, the “defending” player sets the TN by invoking character elements. The TN starts at 1, and each invoked element increases the TN instead of adding a die. The TN may only be increased to 5. Players may not add luck to this.

If the two characters are engaging in a fight, the above method should be used, but expanded to an Action Sequence with the aggressing character starting as focal. Both characters go within a

round, and elements invoked to raise TNs remain invoked through the round as if they had been invoked normally.

Guidance for GMs

Sapio provides support for surprising narrative developments, and is light enough in rules that it can be run “off the cuff.” Your job as the GM is to sketch out the setting, describe the world and entities outside of the players’ characters, and introduce complications and challenges that spur those characters to action. The rules of the system provide openings to introduce twists into the narrative, and with a little preparation, you’ll be able to use them to spin engaging stories with your players.

Setting, Tone, and Premise

Whether you’re running a setting from a book, or one from a universe in another fictional work, or one of your own design, it is your job to introduce it to the players. Give them enough information to latch onto the core ideas of the setting. You may also have a predetermined tone or premise for the campaign - make sure the players are aware of it before they build their characters. All of these things can be determined either collaboratively or beforehand - whatever framework you and your players prefer is the right one.

At the point where they are ready to craft their character concepts, work with them to make sure the concepts make sense within the setting. In a game about slaying monsters, a character that has no interest or utility in combat may derail the game for others. Of course, if everyone wants to play noncombatants, perhaps the premise should be revisited. As the character concepts are translated into character elements, you should oversee the process to ensure that the elements are both reasonable and aligned with the tone and setting of the game.

Pacing and Creating Adventures

There are many excellent, system-agnostic guides on how to create compelling adventures, and a variety of methodologies for doing so. This section will not attempt to replicate those, but will speak to how to utilize the Sapio system to get the most out of your adventures. It assumes that you have a premise and a hook, and a few locations and NPCs detailed ahead of time.

First, think through what the session is likely to be about. Write down 4 uses for Spiral, specific to your expected session, that would reinforce the tone and setting within the session. Do the same for Spare. Make the descriptions specific enough that they would be easy to use on the fly, but vague enough that you could see them being inserted at several points. When the right situation arises during the game, you can bring them out and hit just the right tone. If the game drags at any point, you can also bring one out, without a roll, to increase urgency and pick the action back up.

Second, think about what mood you want to strike among the players. For a grittier mood, present tougher challenges (higher TN), use Spiral to break their equipment, deal Stress, or inflict Injuries to assisting characters, and provide them little opportunity to recover. Have them

roll TN 0 checks, modified by Injuries or Stress, to do relatively simple things. To make the game lighthearted, use Spiral to introduce more neutral complications like embarrassment, narrative twists, or putting NPC allies into trouble. To make the adventure more gonzo, use Spiral to introduce more far-fetched complications. Regardless of what you choose, add two uses of Spiral and two uses of Spare to your list that reinforce the tone.

Finally, remember that you don't have to use the Spiral and Spare possibilities you have written down. If something else makes sense at the moment, go with that!

Setting Target Numbers

In general, you should provide your players with a variety of challenges across each session. Do not shy away from TN 1 checks - while they are the lowest level, they are not guaranteed and are actually tough for untrained characters. Moreover, they can still prod the story forward through Spiral and Spare! When the characters are in a good position or are approaching a problem from an angle you like, reward them with a TN 1 check.

Likewise, set TN 4 or TN 5 checks when appropriate in the narrative, and let them use Luck and teamwork to try to overcome them. A TN 4 should be called for when a character is trying to do something "the hard way," powering through instead of looking for a good angle. A TN 5 should be called for when a character truly seems to have no chance of accomplishing the task.

TN 0 (Easy): These are tasks that are not challenging for the average untrained person, and should generally not be rolled. However, if injuries or other modifiers increase the target number of tasks so that they become challenging, this TN serves as a base for those adjustments.

Example: Walking down a few flights of stairs, opening a heavy door, lifting a slightly heavy object, reading simple instructions, navigating an area with appropriate signage

TN 1 (Average): These are tasks that would be challenging for the average untrained person, but not difficult for a trained individual.

Example: Jogging a few miles, kicking down a normal door, lifting a heavy, unwieldy object, finding appropriate information in an advanced text, navigating an urban area with spotty directions, hitting a stationary target with a weapon

TN 2 (Challenging): These are tasks that present some challenge even to a trained person.

Examples: Running a half-marathon, kicking down a heavy door, lifting an object not meant to be lifted by one person, finding appropriate information in a poorly organized, dense text, navigating an unfamiliar area with no direction or maps, hitting a target that is defending itself

TN 3 (Hard): These are tasks that are difficult even to well-trained people.

Examples: Running a marathon, breaking through a security door, lifting an object that is affixed in place, inferring missing information within a confusing text, navigating a shifting area, hitting a target that is trained in evasive maneuvering

TN 4 (Very Hard): These are tasks that push the limits of what is possible, with even trained people expected to fail.

Examples: Running an ultramarathon, breaking through a reinforced security door, pulling a building structure apart, inferring missing information from fragmented texts in multiple languages, navigating a collapsing area with no information, hitting a far away target that is trained in evasive maneuvering and taking cover

TN 5 (Impossible): These are tasks that seem beyond possible, that only the luckiest and most skilled should even attempt.

Examples: Running over 100 miles, breaking through a thick concrete barrier, finding information from bizarre texts written in an unknown language, escaping a collapsing area with no exit, hitting a far away target you do not know the position of

TN 6+ (Beyond Impossible): Setting a TN at 6 or more should only be reserved for tasks that you do not want the characters to be able to do. They may still succeed, but it's highly unlikely.

Calling for Rolls and Adjudication

A key principle in the Sapio system is that rolls provide potential turning points for the narrative, and should never be asked for “in a queue,” either across characters or for a single character. For a single character, this means that when a character attempts to do something with multiple sequential stages, those stages should be condensed into a single roll. In other systems, climbing a building to look for a fleeing adversary might be two rolls - one to climb and one to look. In Sapio, you as the GM should clarify the intent of the action chain and allow the player to invoke any character elements that address the overall goal.

For “group checks,” where all characters are trying the same thing, always have a single character roll, with help. Use this framework when calling for a single character’s roll:

- When the attempted action requires a single success for group success, such as searching for something or trying to recall a piece of information, have the *best-suited* character roll, with help as provided from the party.
- When the attempted action requires a single failure for group failure, such as sneaking around without being caught or traversing adverse conditions, have the *worst-suited* character roll, with help as provided from the party. In this case, be sure to only allow characters to assist if the player can describe some tangible assistance.

Following the Momentum: When a character attempts an action, the player will describe what they are trying to do, and invoke character elements to improve the roll. Perhaps they will receive help as well. In other words, they are explaining their Intent and Methods to you. When they roll, the dice will reveal the outcome of the attempt through Hits, Spirals, and Spare. To adjudicate, “follow the momentum” provided by the Intent and Methods, through to the dice outcome. Intent, Methods, and Spiral or Spare may help inform *how* and *why* they failed or succeeded at the task, in addition to adding narrative complications. When you describe the

results, it is helpful to start from what they were trying to do and how, and continue the description through to the end. Saying “you fall off the ledge” is less exciting than “you were trying to really grip it with those meaty hands, and it was working, but then you fully pulled a loose rock off of the cliff face and lost your balance. You tumble off, and a mini slide of loose rock has taken away a part of the ledge! Looks like your friends behind you may be stuck.”

Hitting them with Consequences: As GM, you will not roll the dice. You dictate the state of the world and the actions of NPCs, but you never roll to attack the PCs, or trip them, or deceive them. When a player rolls for their character to attempt something risky, follow through with Injuries, Stresses, or other consequences if they fail, dictated by the risk they took on.

Using Luck

PCs can use Luck to increase their chances of success on rolls. The most reliable way that they receive Luck is through getting into trouble according to their Principle. Feel free to award more Luck at your discretion for excellent ingenuity or deepening the narrative. You may also add to the ways a PC receives Luck in either of these ways:

For one-shots: Allow characters to start with 2 Luck.

For longer campaigns: Create one or two additional “generators” of Luck. Think of the types of things PCs might do in your game that can happen one or two times a session, and reward them for the *attempt*, at the beginning of whatever they are trying. A Luck generator could be approaching a dangerous challenge, proselytizing to new people, representing your family line, or commencing a criminal act. Once they begin these actions, award a Luck whether they succeed or fail.

Running Action Sequences

Action Sequences are likely the most unfamiliar to those who have GMed other RPG systems. They incorporate the helping mechanics, mechanics for invoking elements, and principles for group checks, but they also introduce a new structure that can feel forced until you become familiar with it.

The key to action sequences is that *everything is in motion*, but one character is the focus. All PCs and NPCs act on every turn (not just every round), so that one turn encapsulates as much action as a round in a traditional RPG. However, until a PC becomes the focus on their turn, they will experience less risk and reap less rewards. Spiral might dictate that a non-focal PC suffers a minor injury or is maneuvered into a worse position, but should never be used to fully shift their narrative by dealing them a grievous wound or taking them out of the action entirely. Likewise, if one character is engaging the head evil NPC, they shouldn't be able to dispatch that NPC until their turn. As mentioned in the first section on Action Sequences, this plays out much like a sequence in a movie, where characters in the background might run into hardship off-screen, but don't truly succeed or fail until the camera turns to them.

Your primary job as the GM is to set the scene, update the narrative, and repeat. What this means is that before a turn, you describe what the NPCs are doing and the current state of the surroundings. The focal PC acts, aided by others or with others doing other things in the background. After they roll, you narrate their success or failure and evolve the scene to the next moment by narrating what happens to the NPCs and other PCs, and potentially the surroundings. If the PCs took risky actions and failed or had complications, they may receive Injuries or Stresses at this time. The scene is once again set, and the next focal PC acts. Although characters each have their own turns, *every roll is a group roll* that affects the entire Action Sequence.

As a final piece of advice, not everything has to be an Action Sequence. The Sapio system supports freeform narrative, and many situations can be resolved without moving to structured turns. When the back-and-forth between you and the players can be handled one at a time with ease, such as in a duel or fully separate scenes, you don't need an Action Sequence. But when you've presented a complicated, dynamic situation and everyone's responses are important and layer on each other, an Action Sequence is likely what you need.

Challenges and Enemies

At a fundamental level, challenges and enemies can be dictated on the fly, without the need to prepare them ahead of time. At each attempt to overcome, influence, affect, or attack, you need only consider how hard it would be and apply a TN. However, a bit of preparation can be a safeguard against getting stuck, so you can use the following framework to create challenges and enemies or NPCs.

First, write down a name and any description you'd like. Then, consider the types of things that are challenging about this person, place, or event. Write down 3 or 4 of these, with a TN, in the form of "TN X to Y". For example "TN 4 to convince of most things" or "TN 3 to climb the outside wall." Write down any special ways they might present challenges, like magical phenomena or abilities. Finally, write down two ways you might spend Spiral in an encounter with them.

If it is an enemy, also record the level of Injury they can sustain before expiring. Human NPCs are likely the same as PCs (2 Severe Injuries to defeat), but large creatures, aliens, or supernatural entities might be tougher and be able to sustain more Severe Injuries before being defeated.

With just this information recorded, you will be able to smoothly present challenges to the players when they arise.

Adapting Sapio to Fit your Game

Sapio runs "out of the box," especially for one-shots, but it is meant to be adjusted to fit different settings and premises. The core of the system is the freeform elements and their relationship to rolling dice and adjudicating outcomes. Those core features are presented and discussed in the

preceding sections. Beyond that, its components are meant to be tweaked, and additional subsystems can be employed to model the specifics of your premise.

In short, the way you tweak Sapio to fit your game involves these steps:

1. Set expectations or make lists for Professions and Special Talents
2. Consider what Target Numbers mean for your game
3. Make a custom list for Spare and Spiral
4. Keep, alter, or swap out Luck, Principles, and Worst Impulses
5. Add relevant extras

The first three subsections (Basics, Spare and Spiral, and Luck and other Metacurrencies) provide guidance on some standard adjustments that you will want to make (1-4 above), and the subsection on Specific Adjustments provides suggestions for how to implement a few common setting-specific features. Finally, the section on *What to Use Sapio For* suggests limits to what you may try to achieve with Sapio.

Basics

The basic adjustments may be nearly invisible to the players. First, lay down expectations about what types of Professions a player can choose. Obviously they should fit within the setting, but there may be additional considerations. For instance, if your setting is about regular people encountering danger, you may want players to choose a “normal” Main Profession that isn’t suited to crises or combat situations. In a Zombie game, you may want one Profession to be from their life before Z-day and one to be from their current life. Other finer-grained guidance may be appropriate - in a setting with magic, you might require that anyone who makes a mage must include their specialty in their Profession name (e.g. “Pyromancer,” “Chronomancer,” but not “Mage”), and then allow only partial dice from that Profession on casting other types of magic. If you want to tightly control the allowable Professions, make a list! However, bear in mind that some of the fun of Sapio is finding the exact right two words to describe your character concept.

Specializations follow a similar pattern to Professions. If your game is about something, specializations related to it should be precise. For instance, in a game heavily focused on magic, “Pyromancy” might be an acceptable Specialization but “Magic” would not. Specializations that won’t come up much in your game can be more general. Our Roof Runner might be able to take “Parkour” in a game about teenage angst, but in a game specifically about Parkour, should take something more specific like “Vaulting” or “Rolling.”

Special Talents can likewise be restricted to fit your concept. For a sprawling campaign, you may wish to allow a variety of kinds of Special Talents so that players can feel like their characters are truly unique. In a tightly controlled game about Wizards, you might have every character own a familiar and require that a Special Talent be spent to describe how it aids the

Wizard. In a one shot, it is fastest to just drop Special Talents altogether - they take the longest for players to settle on!

Finally, you want to be sure you have a strong understanding of Target Numbers. In a game where everyone is playing a human, lifting up a cow might be a TN 4 and knocking down a house would be higher than a TN 5, but in a game where everyone is playing a dragon, lifting up a cow might be a TN 0 and knocking down a house might be a TN 1. When magic is rare and dangerous, casting a spell might be a TN 3, but if it's ubiquitous, it might be a TN 1. As a general rule, consider the base expectations for what the PCs have in common. A TN 1 should be "challenging for an untrained character," which means a character with no relevant Professions, Specializations, or Qualities. If the specifics of your setting suggest that magic or wilderness survival or martial arts are skills for even "untrained" people, then the difficulty of those actions should be reduced.

Spare and Spiral

Part of planning sessions and challenges is creating a few uses for Spare that evoke the feel you are aiming for. Doing so allows you to adapt Sapio to a variety of genres, while the additional uses in this guide provide generic options for complications. To make Sapio feel right for your genre and setting, the key adjustments you will make are to the uses of Spare and Spiral. Tweaking Spare and Spiral is just like writing down uses for a given session, but you're doing it for the full game. This is a critical decision, so take your time with it! The lists you make will drive new narratives for everyone who plays. Feel free to scrap the original list and make your own, or just add to it as a gentle guide for players and GMs.

Spare: Spare tells players what lucky breaks they can expect within the narrative, but a lucky break looks different in different genres. If your game is about courtly intrigue, then saving face, getting noticed, or learning a secret are evocative uses for Spare. If your game has a component about desert survival, finding water and shade or preserving resources may be good uses for Spare. Keep the uses general enough that it's up to the players to fully interpret them, and make sure there are at least 6 and no more than 12.

Spiral: As critical as adjustments to the Spare list are, the Spiral list is even more critical. Spiral introduces the unexpected twists that put a pit in the characters' stomachs and become new problems for them to solve. What you choose for Spiral will dictate the flow of the game, so choose carefully! For a courtly intrigue game, losing someone's favor, the sudden appearance of a foe, or a secret being learned by a foe are all good uses. For a game of desert survival, the breaking of a key piece of traveling gear or the distant appearance of a ravenous predator would be appropriate. Once again, keep these general enough that they can be interpreted by a GM, and make sure that there are at least 6 and no more than 12.

Luck and other Gamifiers

Luck, and its ties to Principles and Worst Impulses, is a serviceable way to "gamify the narrative" that can support a one-shot or a sprawling campaign. If you want to keep your

adventures very open-ended or maintain the focus on a very specific goal over a short in-game time period, don't worry about changing it!

However, you may want to create a specific cadence to sessions or campaigns, where the protagonists trace recurring narrative trajectories.

Exploring a dungeon, escaping or defeating the danger within, and returning to civilization to spend the spoils on equipment and merriment.

Planning a big score, executing it, evading the heat, and returning to your vices.

These are tailored *core game loops*. To reproduce those experiences, you need to either replace Luck or augment it with additional "gamifiers." Below are two ways to nudge players into narrative loops with their characters.

Luck generators: A quick way to reinforce the types of actions you'd like the protagonists to take is to expand the situations from which they gain luck. Adding more Luck generators will help them make short term decisions that align with the core game loop. If you want your characters to go dungeon delving, give them a Luck point when they progress to a new floor (including the first) or secure a certain amount of treasure. Using one or two additional Luck generators is usually sufficient to induce them to play along. If you think it's getting too crowded, you can always remove Principles and Worst Impulses.

Progression: A longer-term way to encourage certain types of play is to define what a "consequential session" is for determining character advancements. A game where a consequential session requires resolving a problem from the character's backstory will create an incentive to explore their past, whereas one where a consequential session requires that they defeat a powerful enemy will create an incentive to seek out powerful enemies.

Status changes: Finally, for a more complex long-term gamifier, allow characters to obtain standing bonuses in exchange for reaching certain states of the narrative. In a post-apocalyptic game where characters are trying to make a safe haven for themselves, you might set criteria that stocking up on medical supplies provides bonuses to medical checks within the safe haven, stocking up on weapons provides bonuses to checks to defend the haven, and so on. These should be able to be lost as well, which is a convenient hook to drive action on the part of the characters. The core game loop of such a game would clearly involve acquiring supplies. In an intrigue game, tiered "status" levels based on the esteem of the other courtiers, with associated bonuses to certain social checks, can reinforce that status is a tangible and desirable resource. The core game loop of a game like that would involve jockeying for status.

Taken together, you can make and fine tune the gamifiers within Sapio to target the core game loop you are trying to achieve.

Specific Adjustments

Magic

Magic takes many different forms across different systems. Because the ability to bend the rules of reality has the potential to skew the game in the favor of the magically inclined, most systems attempt to “balance” its potential with that of mundane characters. At a basic level, Sapio already does this because precious character elements need to be spent on magical Professions, Specializations, and Qualities, and Spiral has much more potential to cause mayhem when magic is involved. Around that framework, a system built on daily spells, freeform spell construction, or domains of magic are all appropriate. Presented below is a basic implementation:

Characters must take both a Quality (magical) and a Special Talent (spellcaster) in order to cast spells. Taking the Spellcaster Special Talent provides access to two “domains” of magic (pyromancy, telekinesis, chronomancy, divination, illusion, etc.). Within any domain, the spell that can be cast is freeform. Every casting starts at a TN 2, unless the caster is under duress or the spell is particularly complex. Spells have a “standard” impact with 2 Hits, and a bigger impact beyond it. Every time they cast a spell, the character takes a Minor Stress of Fatigued, with Spare potentially nullifying it and Spiral potentially exacerbating it (among other possible uses for Spiral). If the spellcaster maintains an effect, their character elements remain invoked until the spell ends (and therefore can't be invoked for a second spell).

Spellcasters add an extra step to their progression cycle, where they gain an additional domain. This slows their progression in Professions, Specializations, Qualities, and Special Talents compared to other characters.

Armor

Armored enemies are tough to hurt. When you do so up close, your TN is higher and you risk retaliation for failing. When you do so from afar, your TN is still higher.

For PCs, the armor system could be more complex, but a simple implementation is as follows:

Characters with a Quality that represents physical robustness (e.g. Stalwart, Strong, Sturdy, Muscled) may wear Armor. A character without a relevant quality may wear Armor, but they have a Moderate Stress of “Burdened” while it is equipped. There is only one level of Armor, and if a character wears less armor than this, it may benefit them in the narrative but does not provide Armor. If it applies (e.g. it covers the appropriate area and protects against the correct type of injuries), Armor reduces the severity of a given Injury by one level. Spiral can be used to break Armor in certain situations.

Cybernetic Enhancements and Magical Gear

Cybernetic enhancements and magical gear both vastly expand the capabilities of characters. The Sapio core rules assume that characters' abilities can be described in terms of their

aptitudes, but fantastic gear challenges that structure. The best way to incorporate Cybernetic Enhancements and Magical Gear is to treat the items as Special Talents. However, they don't always have to have an explicit mechanical benefit if they expand the capabilities of a character. A bag that is much larger on the inside, for instance, needs no descriptors in terms of Hits and Spare. If you intend to run a "gear heavy" campaign, consider reducing the number of Special Talents that characters gain when they progress.

Sentient species (non-humans, human variants)

Depending on the setting, sentient playable characters can be created in a few ways.

- If you want to have their species/variant be a defining set of cultural features and abilities (weapon proficiencies, wayfinding, magical aptitude, etc.), add Species as a skill package the same way a Side Profession is used, with Specializations available. When included this way, players will be invoking their Species often, bringing it to the forefront of their character identities.
- If you want Species to have a much more muted role as a set of supernatural or inhuman features (e.g. resistance to fire, trance instead of sleep, flight), package these as a single Special Talent and allow players to select it in place of their starting Special Talent.
- You can use Species as a Quality, but it is not recommended. If a player wants to play as a scrawny Orc, the meaning of Orc when invoked as a Quality is vague because Orcs are typically portrayed as tough. It's also somewhat reductive if the game will deal with inter-Species conflict, collapsing each different Species to a stereotypical nature.
- Finally, you can choose to represent Species as a choice in roleplaying or the taking of specific Qualities and Professions, without explicitly representing it in the mechanics. This fully deemphasizes its importance.

What to Use Sapio For (and What Not To)

Sapio is adaptable across a wide range of settings and tones. With the right adjustments discussed above, it can be light and heartwarming, gory and horrific, or epic and sweeping. Use Sapio for your game if you want to:

- Use light rules that are easy to remember
- Allow players to build whatever characters they want
- Adjudicate any action in a similar fashion, without skills or Moves
- Collaboratively narrate results as the game progresses
- Be surprised by twists as both GM and player
- Roll the dice less frequently than some games and stick to the results
- Build encounters and NPCs quickly but evocatively
- Reward players and characters who make good choices in the moment

However, the following things are not playstyles that jibe well with Sapio. Do not use Sapio if you want to:

- Enforce a high degree of mechanical balance among characters
- Play a game with fine-grained tactical complexity in combat
- Play a game with tactical synergies from selecting sets of character features
- Have strong mechanical guidance as to what your character should do
- Roll the dice a lot