



# Skill FOCUS

# Talking

BY STEVEN PALMER PETERSON

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## INTRODUCTION

Scenes where the players and gamemaster get into character and act out their various parts put the roleplaying in roleplaying games. They are fun and allow for a kind of immersion that can make for memorable moments. However, they can also pose a problem.

On the one hand, it's a roleplaying scene—and we'd like to play it out via roleplaying, with players talking in character and the gamemaster playing the parts of various other people in the scene.

On the other hand, these scenes are still part of the game—and we'd like to account for the character's skill or talent via the rules mechanics of the game.

The traditional solution has been to talk out the scene via roleplaying, then have the player roll dice according to their character's ability at diplomacy or bluffing. The gamemaster then assigns a bonus or penalty based on how convincing the roleplaying part was.

This approach works well enough, but can often be unsatisfying if, for instance, the roleplaying was good but the dice-rolling wasn't. Moreover, if all the roleplaying amounts to is a modifier to a die roll, that can make the talking part, which is often the fun part, feel less important.

These rules take a different approach in an effort to make it feel more like the character's skills have a direct impact on the way the roleplaying of the scene plays out, without reducing the entire exchange to a die roll. The idea is to help the *player* be a better negotiator, by giving them some special benefits based on their character's skills.

The basic premise is that each of the major interaction skills, Bluff, Diplomacy, Intimidate, and Sense Motive, offer a variety of special **talking actions**. While roleplaying out an encounter, the player can make a skill check for their character and, if it succeeds, gain some special benefit during the roleplaying of the encounter.

For example, if Talarn tells the leader of a barbarian tribe that Talarn's group just took out the goblins in the nearby hills, then realizes that the barbarians were actually quite friendly with those goblins (perhaps by noticing all the weapons being drawn), then Talarn could use the Bluff skill's *Take Back* action to make it as if Talarn had never said that.

These talking actions are the essence of the book, and included in the following sections with their

effects and the difficulty of implementing them.

In some cases role-playing abilities can be used against players (such as lying or noting what is important to the player) but in many cases these abilities cannot be role-played well by the gamemaster. To account for this some ways of accounting for NPC skills are given toward the end.

## TALKING ACTIONS EXAMPLE

Following is an example of how a scene using the talking actions in this book could work out. Needless to say, not every roleplaying scene will be this thick with dice rolling, but it should serve as an example of how using the actions can supplement and reinforce the in-character roleplaying—instead of replace it.

Only one die roll was fudged in the writing of this scene, and likely not the one you suspect.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Talarn (Cha 20, Bluff +18), a smooth-tongued sorcerer a couple sides short of a d20, Harlan (Cha 14, Diplomacy +15, Sense Motive +10), a wandering knight who prefers to solve problems with words instead of arms, and Makya (Cha 8, Intimidate +7), a brutal raptor with enough teeth for several humanoids, find themselves faced with a pair of hostile and hungry hill giants while chasing Carter Marx, rogue demon-summoner.*

*Harlan sees an opportunity to talk their way out of this and pick up some extra clues on where Marx was heading, so he performs a Force Listen action from the Diplomacy skill, rolls a total of 23, and succeeds. The GM determines that since the combat hadn't quite begun, they've got a couple minutes to talk this out before the hill giants' hunger gets the better of them.*

*Talarn promptly blurts out "you gaffers there, you really should bathe more often if you want to stay around the movie set". Everyone gives him an odd look—the giants realize that they might have been insulted, and Makya gives Talarn a "I'm going to eat your familiar first, then you, if you screw up again" look—so Talarn recovers and attempts a That's Not What I Said action from Bluff, rolling a natural 1, for a total of 19, thus failing. Talarn tries to pass it off as something about baking but the hill giants distinctly remember the word "bathe" in the dialogue, and have such a powerful aversion to the concept that they step into nice reach and attack of opportunity range.*

*Makya thinks he might just skip the raven appetizer,*

**LIAR TRAP [DC 20/+0]**

You ask a question to which you already know the answer in order to draw the target into a lie. The specifics of the question don't need to be worked out, but if the player is clever enough to come up with something then grant a +2 bonus on the check. The question is phrased such that the target will receive some sort of advantage from answering with a lie—for instance, avoiding punishment or corroborating their story.

If the check succeeds and the target is currently in a pattern of lying to you about something, then they'll give the trap answer and you'll know that they are engaged in a web of deceit. This does not mean that you'll know what they're lying about—only that they've been lying or covering up something during this discussion.

If you discover that someone is lying to you, for the rest of the day you gain a +5 circumstance bonus to Sense Motive checks when resisting the target's Bluff checks.

If the target is attempting to be honest with you, then the gamemaster should make a Sense Motive check (DC 20) on your behalf. If that succeeds, then you know that the target is being honest.

To keep things more uncertain, the gamemaster should roll the target's opposing Sense Motive check in secret (don't Take 10 on this).

**Failure:** If the target's Sense Motive beats your Bluff check, then they know that you don't trust them.

**PLAY ALONG [DC 20/+0]**

You can go along with what your target is saying and act like you're engaged in the conversation even when you have no idea what the target is talking about. The target will interpret your vague and noncommittal responses in some way consistent with their world-view.

This provokes the target to spend more time talking (and thereby giving more information). The gamemaster should spend a few minutes continuing the conversation as if you were responding knowledgeably.

After that time is up, you can spend another Talking Action to attempt to extend the conversation, or try some other tactic.

You can also use this as a response when a target

asks you a question that you can't satisfactorily answer. The gamemaster should then act as if you gave a reasonably appropriate answer, and continue talking as above.

**Modifiers:** If you do have some relevant information, such as an overheard name, that you can trot out then you get a +2 bonus on your check, or higher if the GM determines you're your information is more complete.

**Failure:** Your cover is blown. The target realizes that you haven't got a clue.

**Example:** Talam finds himself talking to an occultist who mistakes Talam for the rogue fiend-friend, Carter Marx. The occultist is ranting on about a major conjunction of the planets that will make opening a gate to the ice-fiend mansion of Titan much easier. Talam, realizing that opening his mouth and saying anything of substance generally gets him in trouble, performs the *Play Along* action.

The occultist interprets Talam's silence as Marx's well-known scorn for underlings, and continues to blather, possibly revealing key information.

**QUICK CONFERENCE [DC 20]**

This allows you to call a quick break and confer with the other players on what strategy to take. This action effectively grants you the benefit of their advice, and represents the fact that you're likely not as good as your character at bluffing, but the help of your friends might make up for some of the difference.

This should not be able to be used as a form of telepathy or in place of a *message* spell, so the other players should not tell you things their characters' know—it's the players offering the advice, not the characters.

If all characters are in the immediate vicinity, then you can use the time to plan a strategy together. This represents your skill at working as a team.

**Failure:** You dither, but other than expending a Talking Action charge, you suffer no additional penalties.

**SNAPPY COMEBACK [DC 20]**

If you later come up with a snappy retort or comeback to something someone else said earlier you may make it such that your character said the snappy comeback retroactively.

Written and designed by Steven Palmer Peterson  
(sppeters@Second-World-Simulations.com)

Second World Simulations  
www.Second-World-Simulations.com

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