

Beginner's Guide to Savage Worlds

The most important number in the Savage Worlds' gaming system is 4. Whenever your character attempts an action like shooting, climbing, spellcasting, etc., you roll a die. The action is successful on a roll of 4 or higher. The threshold is almost always 4, but there's one very prominent exception: fighting hand-to-hand. When swinging a weapon, the roll must match or exceed the opponent's defensive stat (Parry) which is listed on the character sheet and varies from character-to-character.

An experienced gamer will immediately notice two issues with a system where almost all rolls require a 4 or higher to succeed. If the target number is always 4, that means all actions have the same chance of success regardless of the difficulty level of the action. Also, all characters have the same odds of success when attempting an action regardless of experience, attributes, etc. Both of these issues are addressed as follows.

In order to make some actions more difficult than others, the Game Master (GM) announces a modifier based on the difficulty of the action being attempted. For example, climbing a steep hill and climbing a sheer cliff both require a die roll of 4 or greater to succeed since 4 is the standard threshold of success, but the GM might give a character a +1 modifier on a die roll to successfully climb a hill and a -2 modifier on a die roll to climb a cliff because climbing a cliff is more difficult than climbing a hill. A roll of 5 indicates the character fell when climbing the cliff because the modified roll is $5-2=3$ which is less than 4. Besides the GM assigning modifiers, there are also some common modifiers listed in the rule book (i.e. shooting at a prone target is -2). This system isn't as granular as a d20 system, but it's simple and provides varied game play.

The second issue mentioned above is how to make different characters better at certain actions based on experience, attributes, etc. given that 4 is always the target die roll. Take a look at a [sample character sheet](#). The character sheet lists the character's attributes: Strength, Agility, Smarts, Spirit, and Vigor (for D&D players, these are similar to Strength, Dexterity, Intelligence, Wisdom, and Constitution). Note that there is a die type next to each attribute, not a number. The sheet also lists character skills which are basically the same as D&D skills. Skills are assigned a die type as well. Important note: attacks are considered skills in Savage Worlds and are handled the same way as any other skill. Fighting is rolled for hand-to-hand attacks, Shooting for most ranged attacks.

The bigger the die type, the better the character is at that attribute or skill. A character with Strength d10 is stronger than one with Strength d4. An expert marksman may have a high Shooting skill (d12). Remember, you're almost always trying to roll a 4 or higher. That's more likely to happen if you're rolling a 12-sided die than if you're rolling a 4-sided die. As characters gain experience in a Savage Worlds campaign, they get to roll bigger dice. It is effectively the same as getting a bigger attack bonus or pumping points into a skill in a d20 system. Note: the only dice used in Savage Worlds are d4, d6, d8, d10, and d12.

Example #1 (incomplete):

This is not a complete example of how to play, but it puts together everything described to this point. Say your character wants to shoot a revolver at an enemy character. Attacks are skills in Savage Worlds. You look up the Shooting skill on your character sheet. The value is a die type, not a number. Say it is d8. The GM tells you that the enemy has cover and gives you a -2 modifier to hit the target. You roll an 8-sided die and subtract 2 from the roll. Say you roll a 6. The net Shooting roll is $6-2=4$. As has been stated numerous times, 4 or higher indicates success when not swinging, so your shot hits the enemy. You now roll the damage listed for the revolver. Before describing how damage is dealt, there are a few more very important rules to describe.

Wild Die: All player characters and some of the monsters get one Wild die. The Wild die is always a d6. Whenever you make a roll to see if an action was successful, you get to roll your Wild die in addition to the die from your character sheet. You take the highest of the two die rolls to determine whether or not the action was successful. The skill die roll and the Wild die roll are never added together. The higher roll is used and the other is discarded. There are some rare exceptions where you don't get to roll a Wild die which the GM will specify.

As an example of using the Wild die, say your character attempts to climb a rope. The rope is difficult to climb and the GM announces a -1 modifier to the climb roll. Say the Climbing skill is listed as d8 on the character sheet. You roll the d8 and a d6 Wild die. Choose the higher roll, then subtract 1 for the modifier. Remember that you're always trying to roll a 4 or higher after modifiers are applied to successfully perform a skill, so you need to roll a 5 or higher on either the d8 climbing skill die or the d6 Wild die to climb the rope without falling. Since you almost always get the Wild die, it quickly becomes second nature to grab the die listed on your character sheet and an extra d6 Wild die and roll both, taking the higher roll.

Raise: If a roll exceeds the target number (which is usually 4) by 4 or more *after* modifiers are applied, that is considered a Raise. In most cases, 8 is the threshold for a raise (4+4). Most actions have additional benefits when a Raise is rolled. For example, when attacking, extra damage is typically dealt on a Raise. For acrobatic actions, a Raise might allow extra movement after the action. It's possible to get more than one Raise on a single roll. Each multiple of 4 over the target number is another Raise. If the target number is 4, 4 to 7 is a success with no Raise, 8 to 11 is a single Raise, 12 to 15 is two Raises, 16 to 19 is three Raises, etc. In situations where the target number is something other than 4, Raises are multiples of 4 above that number. Modifiers are applied before Raises are calculated. There are not always additional benefits for Raises, but sometimes the bonuses are huge. Always tell the GM if you got any Raises.

Ace: Any time you roll the highest number on a die (i.e. a 10 on a d10), that is considered an Ace. You get to roll the die again and add both rolls together. This can

repeat multiple times with all rolls being added cumulatively. For example, say your character is attempting to climb a rope. Look up your climbing skill on your character sheet. Let's say it's a d4. You roll the d4 and your Wild die which is always a d6 to see if the climb was successful. Say you roll a 4 on the d4 which is an Ace. You get to roll the d4 again. Say you get another 4. You roll it again and this time you get a 3. The total is $4+4+3=11$. Say the Wild die roll was a 6 which is an Ace on a d6. You roll the d6 again and get a 2. Your Wild die total is $6+2=8$. You always take the higher of your skill roll and your Wild die roll (11 and 8 in this example) and discard the other, so your Climb roll is 11. Let's say the GM gives you a -2 modifier because it's raining and the rope is wet. Your net roll is $11-2=9$ which exceeds the standard target (4) by 5. That's a successful climb with one Raise.

Rules Summary

To recap, when your character takes an action, look up the die type for that action on your character sheet (d4, d6, d8, or d12). Roll that die and your Wild die (always d6). If you roll the highest number on either die, that's an Ace and you get to roll the die again adding the new roll to the previous roll. This can happen multiple times if you are lucky. Take the highest of the two results and discard the other, then apply all modifiers from the GM and/or the rule book. If the total matches the target number (usually 4) or exceeds it, that's a success. For each multiple of 4 by which you exceed the target number, you get a Raise which may have additional benefits. This method applies to all skills, attacks (since they are considered skills), and attribute tests (i.e. Strength roll).

No Skill: A skill not listed on your character sheet may be attempted. Say your character falls into the water and needs to Swim but your character sheet does not list Swim as a trained skill your character possesses. You can attempt to Swim by rolling a d4. You get a -2 modifier since you don't have the skill. The d4 and -2 modifier apply for all skills not listed on your character sheet. You still get to roll the Wild die, and you can ace either die as normal, so there is always hope. Additional modifiers are cumulatively applied, i.e. -2 for difficult swimming conditions from the GM combined with -2 for not having the Swimming skill = -4 on the roll. Take the highest result of the d4 and Wild die (d6) rolls and then apply all modifiers to see if your character sinks or swims. As usual, a result of 4 or higher is a success.

Damage & Toughness: Damage is based on weapon type and is rolled after a successful attack skill roll (or spell, etc.). The damage stats for your weapons are listed on your character sheet. If you pick up a new weapon not listed on the sheet, look up the stats in the rule book. Some weapons have a damage stat like: Str + d6. Say your character's Strength attribute is d8. Roll a d8 and a d6 and add the rolls together to generate the damage for the weapon. You don't get the Strength die unless Str is specifically included in the weapon damage. You also do not get the Wild die when rolling damage, but you do get Aces. If you roll an 8 on the d8 or a 6 on the d6 in the example just mentioned, you get to roll again (Ace) and add to the damage.

All characters and creatures have a stat on their character sheet called Toughness. It's one of the few stats that is a single number rather than a die type. The damage rolled must meet or exceed the attacked creature's Toughness to have any effect. A roll below the Toughness is considered a glancing blow that did no significant damage. It takes both a successful skill roll (usually Fighting or Shooting) to hit the creature and a damage roll that meets or exceeds the creature's Toughness in order to inflict any damage. If the damage roll exceeds the creature's Toughness by 4 or more, that is a Raise on the damage which can be very significant (see Wounds below).

Shaken: Shaken is a keyword indicating that a character is nicked, bruised, or otherwise rattled. Characters can become Shaken by failing tests of will, fear, and most commonly, taking damage. If a creature not already Shaken is dealt damage, the first thing that happens is that the creature becomes Shaken. This is always the case. A Shaken creature can take no actions other than free actions until its Shaken condition is removed (fortunately moving at full movement rate is considered a free action so the character can flee). Shaken status carries over from round to round. There are several ways to recover from being Shaken: Soak all Wounds as explained below (see Bennies), receive magical or mundane medical healing, or make a successful Spirit roll. Spirit is a character attribute like Strength. Its value is a die type (i.e. Spirit = d10). A Spirit roll occurs each round when a Shaken character receives initiative. The character gets a free Spirit roll (Spirit die and Wild die) prior to acting. A roll of 4 or higher on either die removes the Shaken condition. Once Shaken is removed, the character may take free actions immediately and a full action the following round assuming he/she is not Shaken again from another attack. The character gets a full action immediately if the Spirit roll results in a Raise (8 or higher). Note: Many of the lesser, non-player characters simply die when damaged once as opposed to being Shaken.

Wounds: Wounds are how characters keep track of the damage they have taken. Characters can take up to 3 Wounds before they fall. A Wound is taken when a successful attack skill roll is made to hit the character and the damage rolled meets or exceeds the character's Toughness (listed on the character sheet). Characters can also be damaged by falling, being burned, etc. Any time the character being damaged is not currently Shaken, the first Wound goes to causing the character to be Shaken instead of inflicting a Wound. Once the character is Shaken, subsequent sources of damage cause Wounds. But, and this is a big but, each Raise on a damage roll is treated like an additional source of damage, so an undamaged character can be Shaken and take a Wound on a single attack if the damage roll results in a Raise. A single damage roll resulting in multiple Raises inflicts even more Wounds.

Say an unshaken, unwounded character with Toughness 5 is hit for 15 damage by a rifle shot. 15 damage vs. 5 Toughness is a successful attack plus 2 Raises (15 >= 5+4+4). Since the character's Toughness is 5, 5 damage was enough to injure the character and the first injury always goes to making the character Shaken. The two Raises each add a Wound. So the previously uninjured character is now shaken with 2 Wounds from a

single blast. If the character was already Shaken, he/she now has 3 wounds and one more wound will cause the character to drop. Of course a character may be attacked multiple times in one round by different sources or by sources with multiple attacks, and each damage roll can result in multiple Raises. The lesson here is that even the biggest, baddest character can go from undamaged to sliced-to-bits in a hurry.

Disabled: This is a very significant rule. Characters get a -1 modifier to all rolls per Wound taken. Wounds remain on a character until healed. The negative modifiers apply to every roll (Fighting, Shooting, Healing, Climbing, Strength, Spirit, etc), so it's very difficult to do anything once a character is wounded.

Dying: A character can take 3 wounds and still function (that equates to 4 sources of damage since the first damage causes the character to be Shaken). If a character with 3 wounds is damaged again, the character drops. The character is not dead, but must make a Vigor roll and draw an Incapacitation card. Vigor is a character attribute like Strength and is listed on the [character sheet](#). The Vigor roll has a modifier of at least -3 since the character has 3 Wounds (see Disabled). Follow the results on the card. The character might avoid death with a good draw, but something very bad is sure to happen. In all cases, your character will be unconscious for the remainder of the battle.

Bennies: At the beginning of each adventure, players receive 3 Bennies (tokens). The GM sometimes hands out extra Bennies during the adventure for good plays. A Benny can be paid by a player to:

- Re-roll any die roll (with a couple exceptions)

- Remove Shaken status even if the character has taken Wounds (no roll required)

- Soak Wounds** about to be taken

The first two uses are self explanatory. Soaking Wounds works as follows. When a character takes one or more Wounds from a single attack, the player may immediately spend a Benny to make a Vigor roll as a free action. Vigor is a character attribute like Strength and is listed on the [character sheet](#). A successful Vigor roll eliminates one Wound before it is taken and each Raise associated with the Vigor roll eliminates another Wound if the attack is poised to inflict multiple Wounds. If the character has zero Wounds after Soaking but is Shaken, the Shaken status is also removed. An attempt to Soak must be made immediately after damage is dealt from a single attack. Only one attempt at Soaking may be made per attack although Bennies may be spent to re-roll the Vigor roll as many times as the player has Bennies. Soaking does not remove existing Wounds, only Wounds about to be taken. Soaking is usually an excellent use of a Benny.

Madness: When a character sees a Mythos creature, there is the potential for the character to go insane by taking mental anguish damage. Mental anguish damage functions in a similar way to physical damage. If the character is not Shaken, the first

damage causes the character to be Shaken. After that, madness is taken. Madness is tracked separately from physical wounds, so it's possible for a character to be afflicted with both kinds of wounds simultaneously. If the character suffers more than 3 madness, a Spirit roll is made and a card is drawn from the Insanity deck. Just like physical wounds, madness also subtracts 1 from all dice rolls per wound until healed. Also similar to physical wounds, you may use a Benny to attempt to Soak (rationalize) madness at the time it is being taken. In all cases, characters suffering a fourth madness will be catatonic for the remainder of the battle.

A successful Spirit roll (4+) saves against a sanity attack. Spirit is an attribute like Strength and is listed on the character sheet. If the save fails, the GM rolls mental anguish damage against the character's Sanity (also listed on the character sheet). For example, if a character's Sanity is 3 and the mental anguish damage rolled is 7, that is successful damage with one Raise ($7 >= 3+4$), so the character is Shaken and takes one madness, or if the character was already Shaken, two madness are taken. Note: Even though the wound types are different, there is no distinction between being Shaken from physical wounds and mental anguish. A character is either Shaken or not Shaken.

Some Mythos creatures may attempt to control characters. A successful Spirit roll saves against the control attempt, however, the Corruption attribute listed on the character sheet is used as a negative modifier on the Spirit roll against attempts to be controlled.

Movement: Standard movement is 6". A character may move before or after taking an action like shooting. Running adds a d6 to the base 6" (no Wild die) and gives a -2 penalty to trait tests should any be required. Each wound on a character reduces movement by 1".

Aim: Characters can shoot each round. However, spending a full round aiming a ranged weapon and waiting until the following round to take the shot adds +2 to a character's Shooting skill greatly increasing the chances of hitting the target. Characters should always aim when time allows.

Called Shot: Players may optionally announce a Called Shot prior to rolling their Shooting skill. Calling the shot means that the character is aiming at a specific body part (i.e. I'm calling a shot to the right arm). Aiming for a limb gives the Shooting skill roll a -2 modifier. Shooting at a character's head is a -4 modifier. The reason to try a Called Shot is that Limbs have a chance to be disabled when hit by a called shot, and a shot to the head does +4 damage. Sometimes called shots are the only way to hurt creatures that have high Toughness but have specific vulnerabilities.

Shooting in Melee: When attempting to shoot a foe who is engaging a character in an adjacent space, use the target character's Parry (see character sheet) as the target number for the Shooting roll instead of 4. Only pistols may be fired while in tight melee.

When shooting from a distance into melee, on a Shooting roll of 1 (1 or 2 for shotguns), a random target is hit.

Multiple Actions: Your character can take extra actions each round. This includes extra attacks. Each action including the normal action incurs a -2 modifier per extra action. Characters with a good Shooting skill and time to aim will often take an extra shot because they still have a good chance to hit after subtracting 2 from each shot. If a gun is holstered, a character might draw the gun as an action and shoot in the same round with a -2 modifier applied to the Shooting roll (there's no roll to draw but it counts as an action). The same penalty applies to any set of actions. If a character climbs a barricade, jumps down, and swings a sword at an enemy, the Climbing, Jumping, and Fighting rolls are all at -4 (cumulative -2 for each action beyond the first).

Fanning the Hammer: A character may fire off a 6 shot volley in one round from a revolver (assuming the gun has enough ammo) at -4 to each Shooting roll and may aim at different, pre-specified targets. Critical failure is generally not good when fanning the hammer.

Shooting Distance: Ranged weapons list their distance on the character sheet (i.e. 12/24/48). The first number is the limit of short range which is an unmodified shot. The second number is the limit of medium range which is a -2 modifier (i.e. 13-24"). The third number is the limit of long range which is a -4 modifier (i.e. 25-48").

Initiative: A poker card is dealt to each player at the beginning of each round. The highest card goes first. There are jokers in the deck which supersede all other initiatives and also give the character drawing the joker +2 to all trait and damage rolls during the current round (not skill rolls). If a King of Clubs club member (listed on character sheet) gets the king of clubs initiative card, the player receives an extra benny. Initiative may also be held so that a character can act later in the round.

Critical Failure: When a 1 is rolled on both the normal die and the Wild die, you must alert the GM that you rolled snake eyes. You are not allowed to use Bennies to re-roll in this case. The GM decides what bad things happen on a critical failure.

Healing: Attempting to heal a physical wound requires 10 minutes of uninterrupted game time and is a skill roll listed on the character sheet. Some characters do not have the skill, but any character may attempt to heal (see No Skill). A successful roll removes one Wound. Raises on the Healing skill roll remove extra wounds. Healing madness works in a similar fashion except it requires 20 minutes of game time in a peaceful location and only characters having the Knowledge (Psychology) skill may make an attempt. Natural healing requires at least five days of resting.

Casting Spells and Using Magical Devices: A Knowledge (Mythos) skill roll is made when casting a spell. If the roll is successful (4 or higher), the spell goes off as described. On a

failed roll, the spell fails and the caster takes mental anguish damage as described by the spell (typically 2d6). The damage is rolled against the character's Sanity stat (see character sheet) and madness caused in this way cannot be Soaked. A critical failure on a spell causes a backlash effect as determined by the GM. Spell points are not used so spells may be cast as often as desired.

Test of Will: Characters may gain an advantage on opponents via intimidation or taunting. Intimidation and Taunt are skills listed on the character sheet (if the character possesses either skill). An opposed roll, Intimidation vs. Spirit or Taunt vs. Smarts, determines if targeted opponents are affected. If successful, the intimidating or taunting character gets +2 to his next action against the affected opponent, and on a Raise the opponent is Shaken.

Cooperative Rolls: Characters can aid their companions when performing certain actions like healing a wounded character or trying to move a heavy object. The supporting characters roll their skill roll first. Each success and each Raise give a +1 bonus to the roll of the character performing the action up to a maximum of +4. For example, if a doctor is trying to heal wounds on an injured character and two other characters attempt to help the doctor, the two supporters each roll their Healing skill rolls first. Say one of the supporting characters rolls a 3 and the other rolls a 10. The first character fails to help since Healing requires the standard roll of 4 for success, but the second one is successful with one Raise ($10 >= 4 + 4$). Next the doctor rolls his Healing skill and adds +2 to the roll (+1 for the success and +1 for the Raise). The only roll that counts in determining if any wounds are healed is the doctor's roll. The support rolls only give the doctor bonuses.

Retreating and Defending: When retreating from melee or in a situation where a character is unable to (or does not wish to) take action other than movement, the retreating character can (and should) assume a defensive posture. Defending gives the character a +2 bonus to Parry. Opponents in melee get a free swing when the character they are fighting attempts to run away, so defending makes it more difficult for that attack to hit. Unarmed characters cannot enhance their Parry, and in fact, armed attackers always get +2 when fighting an unarmed character.

Fatigue: Certain actions cause fatigue. The GM will keep track of fatigue. Fatigue gives characters negative modifiers on their dice rolls.

Edges and Hindrances: These are listed on the character sheet and may affect the character's attributes and skills as well as some of the basic rules like Movement. They are also used to enhance roleplaying.