

The Universal Task Profile

Editor's Note: Devoted *Traveller* players have been using the Universal Task Profile (UTP) system for more than two years, and their constant play-testing of the system has honed it to a fine edge. The original system, designed by Joe Fugate and Gary Thomas for their *Traveller Digest* magazine, had only a few of the many options now in the present system. Over the past 24 months, *Traveller Digest* adventures (eight so far) have picked the system apart, and put it back together, better and better each time.

We have had a tremendous response to the basic concept. Our German publisher saw the system and wanted it for their translation. Our Italian publisher wants the new system for his *Traveller* translation. We are convinced that this system is a major improvement for *Traveller*, and it is being integrated into the new *MegaTraveller* scheduled for later this year. Here is an advanced look at a key part of the next edition of *Traveller*.

The UTP provides *Traveller* players and referees with a comprehensive system for defining and resolving tasks. The UTP is valuable in an adventure session for impromptu, on-the-fly task definitions. It serves to add immediate depth to an on-the-spot situation. The UTP is also valuable because it requires that a player make definite use of his character's skills and characteristics. Using the UTP, referees can create a catalog of tasks for

future reference.

FORMAT

The components of the UTP are:
Introductory Phrase: A brief phrase (beginning with *To*) explaining the specific task that this UTP covers.

Task Specification: A series of items which define the kind of task and what it takes to attempt this task. The items are:

Difficulty: Indicates the relative difficulty of the task (see chart). From this, the basic roll (on 2D6) needed to succeed can be determined.

DIFFICULTY

Task	2D6 Roll
Simple	3 +
Routine	7 +
Difficult	11 +
Formidable	15 +

DMs: Indicates which skill(s) and which characteristic(s) are judged most crucial to task success. Generally, DMs are limited to these two items. Other factors influence the task difficulty, rather than becoming additional DMs. The DMs are added to the 2D6 roll for the task attempt, and are determined as follows:

For crucial skills, use the character's skill level as the DM. At the referee's option, a related skill can be used at a handicapped level. If the character attempting the task has no skill (not even skill level-0) in the crucial skill, make the task at least

one level harder and perhaps even *impossible*. Optionally, the combination of the character's intelligence and education may substitute for lack of skill (this represents all of the character's intellect, knowledge, and experience brought to bear).

For crucial characteristics, use the character's characteristic divided by five as the DM (drop fractions, the DM range is 0 to 3); the absolute maximum DM is ± 8 . Regardless of DMs, a natural roll of 2 is a *fumble* and results in automatic failure.

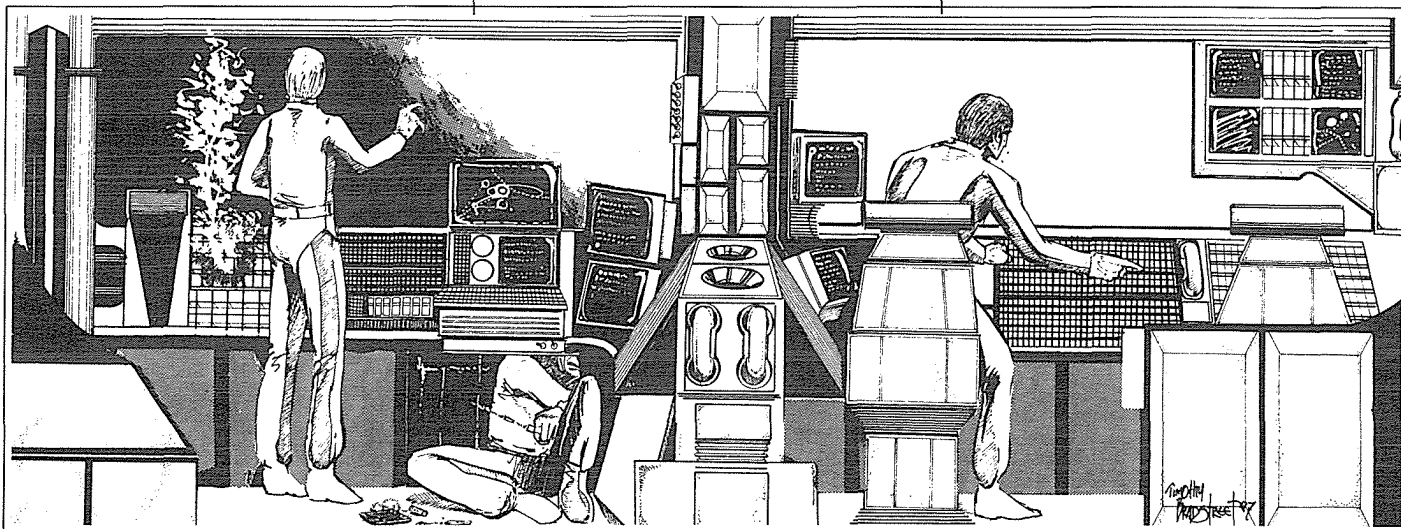
Time: Indicates the base time period for the task attempt. The task attempt (successful or not) is assumed to take an average of ten UTP time periods. (Some tasks may have the time period omitted, in which case the task is assumed to be *instant* and the time duration roll is ignored.)

To determine the actual duration of the task attempt, use the following method:

UTP Time period \times (3D - DMs) (the absolute minimum is 3 time periods).

Task Qualifier: Indicates some special condition that applies to the task. (An understanding of task failure, task retries, and task mishaps is needed to fully understand how to use a task qualifier: see the section *Failure and Task Retry* and the section *Mishaps* for details). The task qualifiers are:

Standard: If no task qualifier is present, the task is a *standard* task. The standard task is a task which: 1) has an outcome that is certain; 2) has only a mild



element of risk; 3) Requires the crucial skill to avoid an increase in difficulty; 4) can be performed by one character alone.

Hazardous: A hazardous task runs a much higher risk of mishap if the attempt is unsuccessful.

If the character fails in an attempt of a hazardous task, roll 3D6 (instead of 2D6) on the *failure table*.

Safe: A safe task is the opposite of a hazardous task. Roll 2D6 on the mishap table as with a standard task, but if a mishap occurs, the mishap type is always *superficial*.

Uncertain: If the result of a task attempt is largely opinion or, because of the nature of the task, if immediate feedback on how successful the task has been is not possible, then declare the task to be uncertain. With an uncertain task, those associated with the task have some idea of how successful the task attempt was, but they are not certain.

When a character is attempting an uncertain task, both the player and the referee roll for the task attempt. The referee's roll is hidden from the player, and serves to modify the result of the player's roll.

<i>If the player's roll:</i>	<i>If the referee's roll:</i>	<i>The player gets:</i>
Failed	Failed	No Truth
Failed	Succeeded	Some Truth
Succeeded	Failed	Some Truth
Succeeded	Succeeded	Total Truth

EXPLANATION OF RESULTS

No Truth: The player is totally misled as to the success of the task attempt. Completely erroneous information is given.

Some Truth: The player is given some idea of the success of the task attempt. Some valid information is given. Notice that it is possible for the character to fail at the task attempt and still get some helpful information, although he can not know for sure this is the case.

Total Truth: The player is not misled in any way as to the success of the task attempt. Totally valid information is given. Notice that the player may still not believe all the information he is given, even though it is the complete truth.

Sensor readings, interchanges between characters (including any task which might require a reaction roll), psionics, computer programming, repairs, and research are all good candidates for uncertain tasks. The section *Further Uses of the Uncertain Task* provides additional insight into using the uncertain task.

Unskilled OK: If the crucial skill is not essential to a successful task attempt, declare the task to be unskilled OK. Do not increase the task difficulty if the character attempting the task does not possess the "crucial skill." Most tasks should be skilled, the *unskilled OK* task is an exception.

Team N: Certain tasks may require close teamwork by multiple characters at the same time. The number of characters desired is indicated by N. One more than N or one less than N is possible, but not optimum. "Team" may also specify a range of 1-N, indicating that a variable number of characters in the close team effort is okay. One task roll is made for the attempt; double the lowest skill level possessed from among the participants, and use the best characteristic level from among the participants to determine the task DM. If the task attempt fails, all participants roll for failure; those that fail determination cannot participate in a future team attempt unless

they wait the required ten time increments. No matter how many mishaps are rolled, roll only once on the mishap table.

Notice that the best teams are those in which the skill levels of the participants are roughly equal. The close teamwork defined here is not to be confused with a loose team effort. Loose team effort is covered in the *Cooperation* section.

Referee Paragraph: As flexible as the UTP is, it cannot cover all combinations of circumstances or conditions. Whenever such special conditions exist, the UTP is immediately followed by a paragraph labeled *Referee*. Some examples:

Referee: This task is non-repeatable; only one attempt is allowed.

Referee: Any mishap causes a security alert to sound.

Referee: If any non-Scout character attempts this task, it becomes *difficult*.

General Format Guidelines: Experience has shown that the UTP should be easy to find in a body of adventure text. To facilitate this, it is recommended that the UTP be listed in its own paragraph preferably bounded by one blank line above the UTP and one blank line below the UTP, as shown:

To locate the source of the strange hum: routine, recon, int, 1 min (unskilled OK, hazardous).

Referee: Any major or destroyed mishaps automatically become minor mishaps.

Failure and Task Retry: If the needed difficulty roll is not obtained, the task attempt is unsuccessful and has failed; roll on the following table:

FAILURE TABLE

<i>Die</i>	<i>Failure Type</i>
2	Reroll
3+	Retry
7+	Check Determination
11+	Mishap (2D6)
15+	Mishap (3D6)

For ordinary (non-hazardous) tasks, roll 2D6; for hazardous tasks, roll 3D6.

EXPLANATION OF RESULTS

Retry: The character failed the task, but can retry it again with no penalty.

Check Determination: The character failed the task; the character must stay determined to retry the task without penalty. Staying determined is a task:

To stay determined: Difficult, endurance, intelligence, Instant.

Referee: Endurance and intelligence combined represents a character's force of will. If successful at staying determined, the character can retry the failed task with no penalty. If unsuccessful, the character has two choices: 1) retry the failed task immediately, but the task difficulty increases one level; 2) retry the failed task at no increase in difficulty by waiting 10 times the actual duration of the failed task before retrying the task again. A *formidable* task increased in difficulty becomes *impossible*, that is, failure is permanent. No more

retries are possible until circumstances change enough to allow a new UTP to be defined for the task. Jack-of-All-Trades skill provides one free retry per level of skill (representing the character's resourcefulness).

Mishap (2D6): The character failed the task; roll 2D6 on the *mishap table*.

MISHAPS

If a mishap occurs from a roll on the *failure table*, roll the indicated number of dice (either 2D6 or 3D6) on the table below.

MISHAPS

Die	Mishap Type
2	Reroll
3+	Superficial (1D6)
7+	Minor (2D6)
11+	Major (3D6)
15+	Destroyed (4D6)

After correcting the effects of the accident, the task reverts to *check determination*, should a retry be desired.

Mishap (3D6): Same as *Mishap (2D6)*, except roll 3D6 on the *mishap table*.

EXPLANATION OF RESULTS

Superficial (1D6): Impose superficial damage on some device/vehicle involved in the task and/or 1D6 wounds to the character.

Minor (2D6): As above, except impose minor damage and/or 2D6 wounds.

Major (3D6): As above, except impose major damage and/or 3D6 wounds.

Destroyed (4D6): As above, except impose destroyed damage and/or 4D6 wounds.

A specific mishap is always preferred to these general results; where possible, spell out specific mishaps in the referee paragraph. If mishap results seem inappropriate, the referee should retroactively declare the task to have been a safe task, and implement a *superficial* mishap.

GENERAL DAMAGE AND REPAIR

Whenever an object (device or vehicle) is damaged, in the absence of detailed rules for diagnosis and repair, use the following procedure:

Diagnose the Problem: The standard diagnosis task is *routine (uncertain)*; the referee must determine DMs and *time*.

Once the player's diagnosis task roll is successful, establish a UTP for performing the repairs based on the damage level, as per figure 6, below. Repairs can be made without a successful diagnosis at an additional cost multiplier of 1D6 (just replace the entire assembly if it can't be determined what's wrong).

For *repairs in the field*, increase the task difficulty one level. For *lack of tools*, increase the task difficulty one level. For *lack of spare parts*, increase the task difficulty one level. All of the above difficulty increases are cumulative.

If an object has *minor* damage, any subsequent damage is automatically increased in severity by one level. Thus, if the object already has *minor* damage, another *minor* mishap is

GENERAL DAMAGE AND REPAIR

Damage Level	Operate?	Repair Task	Repair Cost*
Superficial	Yes	Simple	1D6%
Minor	No	Routine	1D6 × 1D6%
Major	No	Difficult	2D6 × 5%
Destroyed	No	Formidable	2D6 × 2D6 × 5%

*Percentages are of the price when new.

Repair Task and *Repair Cost* are for repairs done at a shop.

changed to *major* instead; a *major* mishap is changed to *destroyed*. *Superficial* damage is not cumulative; it's just more scratches.

If an object had *major* damage that was last repaired in the field (not yet taken into the shop), any task using that object is automatically *hazardous* (high risk of another breakdown). This lasts until the original *major* damage is totally repaired in the shop.

Complex Objects: Certain objects (e.g. vehicles, robots) are very complex with many sub-systems. If the referee wishes, he can specify that an object is a complex object, and vary the damage procedure slightly, as follows:

One system is defined as the *primary system* (the main reason the object works or is useful: on a civilian vehicle this is the locomotion system, on a military vehicle it's the weapons, on a robot it's the brain).

The other systems are *secondary systems*. One or more secondary systems exist. It is up to the referee to specify what these systems are.

Roll for damage as normal: if the result is *superficial* or *minor*, reroll for the damage level to a secondary system; if the result is *major* or *destroyed*, reroll for the damage level to the primary system. Specific damage rules tailored to a complex object are always preferred to these general rules; where possible, spell out specific sub-systems with the complex object design or spell out specific damage suggestions in the referee paragraph.

SPECIAL TASK ATTEMPTS

The player can specify that his character is performing a special task attempt. Each type of task attempt has its own advantages and disadvantages:

Standard: The standard task attempt (in the absence of any other specification by the player) assumes that the character is taking a reasonable amount of care while performing the task. This is the normal task attempt.

Hasty: If the player wishes, he can request that the task attempt be a hasty one, which tends to shorten the task duration at the expense of difficulty. Increase the task difficulty at least one level; double the DMs before subtracting them from the *time* roll (a hasty attempt may take less time).

Cautious: The cautious attempt provides a way to reduce the risk of failure or mishap when attempting a hazardous task, at the expense of task duration; it is just the opposite of a hasty task attempt. However, a cautious attempt is only allowed on a hazardous task.

When a cautious attempt is specified for a hazardous task, the DMs may also be subtracted from either the *failure table* roll or the *mishaps* roll (the player's choice, specified before rolling for the task). This benefit is not free; double the 3D6 time roll before subtracting the DMs from it (a cautious attempt may take more time). The maximum DM that may be

subtracted from either table is -4 . Thus if the character has the maximum DM of -8 , a DM of -4 may be applied to both the *failure table* roll and the *mishap table* roll.

SUBTASKS

Many tasks can be divided into a sequence of subtasks. A good example of this is the UTP general repair task, which is subdivided into diagnosis and repair tasks. Additional depth and enjoyment may be added to a situation by dividing it into a string of subtasks, rather than using just one big "macro" task.

However, not every macro task should be subdivided. In fact, there are times when a particular task should be one task roll, and then there are other times when the same task should be a string of subtasks. Keep in mind the relevance of the task to the overall adventure. Insignificant tasks should be kept to a single macro task, if they are even to be considered as a task at all.

Also keep in mind that as more subtasks are created, the chance that a mishap will occur increases proportionately. To minimize this effect, try to limit the subdivision to two or three subtasks in most cases.

The risk of a mishap brought on by task subdivision can also be reduced by: 1) defining some of the subtasks to be at a lower difficulty level than the difficulty level of the overall "macro" task; 2) declaring certain subtasks to be safe tasks.

COOPERATION

A task can also be divided into required and supportive subtasks, allowing characters to cooperate toward a common goal. The required subtasks must be accomplished for the "macro" task to be accomplished, while the supportive subtasks simply enhance the efforts of those attempting the required subtasks.

Establish which required task is enhanced by which supportive tasks. If over 50 percent of the supportive tasks related to a single required task succeed, one determination roll is waived on the required task if it fails.

FURTHER USES OF THE UNCERTAIN TASK

A particularly useful technique with the uncertain task is to substitute referee judgment for the purely random secret roll. As an example, consider character interaction. Using tasks with character interaction skills can interfere with genuine role-playing. Is there an easy way to implement tasks in character interaction without eliminating the opportunity for the player to really role-play the situation if he wants? Yes, there is. First, treat all intercharacter tasks as uncertain, and then: 1) define a UTP for the situation, and have the player make the task roll; 2) either role-play the situation or let the player present his argument (whichever method you normally use); 3) rate the quality of the player's presentation and arguments as either success or failure, instead of using the referee's secret roll.

If the result of the uncertain task is *total truth*, roll 1D6 + 6 on the *reaction table*. If the result of the uncertain task is *some truth*, roll 2D6 on the *reaction table* as normal. If the result of the uncertain task is *no truth*, roll 1D6 on the *reaction table*. Remember, if the player fails the task roll, he must roll for failure. If a mishap occurs, always implement a negative DM (the exact DM is up to the referee) on the *reaction table* roll.

Notice what can happen with this approach. A good presentation or argument from the player can do a lot to save an unlucky task roll, or even to save a mishap. This method also works well because it lessens the pure randomness typically seen in *reaction table* rolls.

SUMMARY

The UTP has been designed to be easy to remember: notice that the three basic tables used all have the same 3/7/11/15 breakdown, with each number 4 more than the last. With a little practice, you should find the system easy to remember and be able to use it strictly from memory.

One Final Note: Be creative in your application of seemingly inappropriate results. Random dice have no idea of the difference between a challenging adventure and an utterly frustrating one. Use the UTP system as your tool—don't let it use you.

—Joe D. Fugate Sr.

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