

D&D 3RD EDITION

HOUSE RULES

SKILLS

A suggested system for revising the Speak Language skill.

SPEAK LANGUAGE (INT; TRAINED ONLY)

New characters receive 3 ranks in all automatic languages, which are always considered to be class skills; bonus languages are initially known at 2 ranks, and are considered to be cross-class skills (except for Bards). The PC's Intelligence modifier applies: penalty points reduce ranks at the start (players discretion), but never below 1 rank; bonus points buy extra language skills (and they must be spent on this skill only), as well as bonus languages.

Language ranks are bought according to the following table:

Rank	Fluency
1	A few basic concepts/words
2	Grade-school level (min to read/write)
3	Average fluency, accented
4	Well-versed, little accent
5	Expert, no accent/accent at will
+1	Learn a new alphabet (req'd for writing)
+1	Read/write a spoken language

Except for Bards, skill in any language other than a PC's native tongue(s) costs 2 skill points per rank as a cross-class skill.

Example: Krust, a half-orc, Int 3, has Common and Orc as automatic languages. At first level, he receives 3 ranks in each language. Krust's Int modifier is -4, therefore, he must reduce his language ranks by 4. By reducing his rank in both languages to 1 (the minimum), he will satisfy the -4 penalty. Krust will not be much of a conversationalist. A human with the same Int and only Common as an automatic language would simply reduce his skill ranks in Common to 1, the minimum. By contrast, Mealee, elf, Int 15, can speak Common and Elven at rank 3. Her Int bonus is +2. She picks Goblin and Orc as her bonus languages, and gets both at rank 2. She must be able to read and write at least one language in order to have a spellbook. She spends 1 language skill point to learn the Elven alphabet, and one to read and write it. She will not have to pay to learn a new alphabet for any language that uses the elven alphabet. On the other hand, she would do well to have friends who could read and write Common if she spends a lot of time in human communities, at least until she can learn to read/write it, which will cost her two skill points (class skill), including the new alphabet. If she had an Int 18 (+4), she could learn to read and write both of her native languages, improve her skill in those tongues by 1 each or by 2 in either, or spend the extra two points to improve her skill in Goblin or Orc by 1, or pick up a smattering of some other tongue, say, Draconic at 1 rank. She can also, of course, use her general skill points to buy more language ranks.

Speak Language checks should seldom be necessary, except under unusual circumstances. In everyday conversation, everybody can be assumed to "take ten," or even "take twenty" if necessary. If communication could be a problem, each party must pass a Speak Language skill check. Failure by 5 or less means that something "got lost in translation," but the character will realize this. Failure by more than five points means a mistranslation. Failure by more than 10 points means a major *faux pas*. Use the following table, modified if needed as per the Listen skill:

DC	Task
5	Basic words/concepts: name?, hungry, tired, hurt, etc.
10	Asking/following simple directions
15	Normal conversation, detailed directions or instructions
20+	Technical/specialized topics; complex directions/instructions
25+	Metaphysical debates, meaning of the Universe, etc.

For example, even Krust, with a penalty of -4 on his skill check, can "take ten" and get across basic concepts. If necessary (and if possible under the circumstances), he can "take twenty" and comprehend fairly detailed instructions (how he fares in the execution is another matter). The PC's are in a dangerous swamp and surrounded by Lizard folk. Mealee attempts to parley. She only bothered to waste two skill points to learn one rank of Draconic. Speak Language checks are proper here. The Lizard folk can "take ten" and pass their checks - Draconic is their native tongue, and the leader (at least) is of average fluency and is not feeling threatened. Mealee rolls a 5, plus her 1 rank, plus her Int modifier of +2, for a total of 8 - more than sufficient to initiate a dialogue. She attempts to communicate the party's peaceful intentions. This is fairly simple (DC10); she rolls a 15 + 3 = 18. So far so good. The DM makes an attitude check, and finds that the unfriendly Lizard folk have improved to indifferent. Mealee is feeling confident and decides to push her luck. She next asks them if they know where the black dragon lives, and for directions to it's lair. This is asking for detailed information (DC15). "Can you tell us where the scaly wyrm who breathes poison lives," she asks. She rolls a 1 + 3 = 4. Oops! She just called the chief a slimy worm with bad breath. Can she talk her way out of this one?