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The core already resolves a conversation. It says to use whichever Attribute fits the approach, take Favor from a Voice Skill, and that **one roll usually settles a social beat**. It also says the best social play often never touches the sheet.

Both of those are right, and this module doesn't replace either.

What it is for is the narrow case the core leaves alone: the conversation that is the session, where one roll would throw away the hour the table wants to spend. A hearing. A negotiation with somebody who has every reason to say no. An argument in front of a crowd where every sentence closes a door behind you.

This is one worked answer, and other good ones exist. It adds no new resolution layer and changes no core rule.

Structure can make social play worse

Combat without rules is mush, so a combat module is almost always an improvement. **Conversation isn't like that**. It already works, at every table, with no system at all. A social subsystem that gets reached for too often replaces the part of the game people are best at with dice.

That applies to the scene layer below, not to the reputation layer, which costs nothing at the table and only asks the GM to remember who owes whom. Everything in the second half is built to be put away.

Influence Is an Encounter

Not a new mode, and not a parallel one.

The engine defines an **Encounter** as a tempo rather than a fight, and that was deliberate: the moment a counted mode gets defined as combat, every other kind of conflict becomes a special case of it. An argument where order and timing matter is already an Encounter by the engine's own definition.

So everything structural is in hand. Rounds and Turns, ♦ Action Points, ► Initiative, and Reactions paid out of the ♦AP you did not spend. A thing said is an ♦ Action and costs **1 ♦AP** unless something says otherwise.

What the module adds is what the other side has to lose, and how you take it.

Two Layers

The module is in two halves and they run at different speeds.

	Runs	Answers
Reputation	Between scenes, across a campaign	What a faction thinks of you before you open your mouth
Influence	Inside one scene	What happens now that you have

Either half works without the other. A game can track standing and never roll a social contest. A game can run contests and have nobody remember them afterwards. They are better together because the first decides where the second starts, and that is the only connection between them.

Before You Reach For This

Answer these before anything else. A system that has not answered the first will reach for this module constantly and wonder why its game got worse.

Is this conversation the scene, or part of one?	Part of one, and the core's single roll is correct. The whole scene, and there is something here worth using
What can actually be won?	Name it before dice. If the answer is "whatever the winner wants", nothing is at stake and everything is
What does it cost the one doing it?	If influence is free, it is strictly better than a weapon, and a table will work that out in one session

The third is the one systems get wrong. A sword costs ♦AP, risk, and the possibility of being hit back. Talking has to cost something too or it becomes the answer to everything.

Reputation

A faction's opinion of the party, tracked as a position on a ladder instead of a score.

The ladder

Five bands. A party sits in one of them with each faction, and moves a band at a time.

BandHostileWaryKnownTrustedSworn

They willturn on youdeal, dearlydeal fairlyopen doorstake a risk

Openingno sceneDisfavorevenFavortheir offer

Known is the default and the middle is wide. Most factions, most of the time, will deal with anybody who turns up with something to trade. The bands either side of it are where play happens, and the two ends should be rare enough that reaching them is a story.

Hostile isn't a worse price. It's no conversation. That asymmetry is deliberate: a party can buy their way out of Wary, and can't buy their way out of Hostile, which is what makes the fourth step down frightening.

It is never one number

Standing is tracked per faction and never globally. A single reputation score collapses into a discount, and a discount isn't a relationship.

Separate standings mean the party's position is a direct read of who they have been getting along with, and a party on bad terms with everyone who moves goods finds out the hard way. It also makes the interesting question possible: **who do you spend to keep?**

Three to six factions is the workable range. Fewer and the map is a line; more and nobody remembers where they stand.

What moves it

Not points. **A band moves when the faction learns something about the party that changes what they would risk on them.**

Up	A debt paid when it would have been cheaper not to. A thing returned. Taking their side where it cost you
Down	A promise broken. Being caught taking. Siding against them in public
Neither	Anything they never found out about

That third row carries the whole system. **A faction reacts to what it knows**, so the real question in play is never was that good or bad but who saw. A party that does something unforgivable with no witnesses has a secret instead of a reputation, and secrets are better play than scores.

What it buys

Price	What things cost, where your economy prices them
Access	Which rooms, which people, which questions get answered
Credit	Whether they act before being paid
Shelter	Whether somewhere is safe to stop

Shelter is the one with teeth in a game that also runs travel. Somewhere glad to see the party costs nothing to stop at, which turns the social map into a supply map, which is why a party will walk an extra day to stop somewhere friendly.

It does not drift

Standing doesn't decay with time. A party that helped a faction two years ago is still owed, and letting that wear off punishes players for the campaign having a middle.

What does move it without the party acting is **other people talking**. Helping one faction visibly can cost a band with their rival, and that is the only automatic movement the module recommends. Name which pairs are opposed before play, keep it to two or three, and apply it only when the act was public.

Axes, if you want them

A band says how much they will risk. It doesn't say what they think you are. Systems that want the second thing track one or two axes alongside it:

Axis	Moves on
Straight ↔ Slippery	Whether you did what you said you would
Soft ↔ Hard	What you were willing to do to people in the way

A faction then reacts to position as well as band: the same Trusted standing reads differently to a guild that values a straight dealer and a crew that values a hard one. **This is a second system and it earns its place only in a game about factions rather than a game with factions in it.** One axis is plenty. Two is the ceiling.

In the Room

Where the scene starts

If the game runs both layers, **the band sets the opening position** and nothing else carries over. Trusted opens at Favor, Wary opens at Disfavor, Known opens even, and Hostile doesn't open.

That is the whole connection, and it's deliberately thin. Standing should not also reduce what it costs to win, shorten the scene, or pre-decide the outcome, or a well-connected party stops having scenes at all and starts collecting discounts.

Three approaches, and they aren't variants of one another. Each decides something different about **what winning an argument is**. A system picks one and runs it everywhere.

	Winning is	The play is	Suits
Wearing them down	Outlasting them	Volleys, until one side has nothing left	Courts, hearings, long negotiations
Closing their options	Leaving them one way out	Closing the options they had	Intrigue, interrogation, brinkmanship
Arriving with leverage	Having come prepared	Spending what you found out	Investigation, heists, politics

Leverage is the cheapest and the most Frontiers-like, because it settles the scene on what the party did in the sessions before it. Wearing them down is the fullest. Closing their options is the strangest, and the one tables remember.

Wearing them down

Both sides have something to spend, and the argument runs until one of them is out.

The pool

Each side holds **Ground**, a number measuring how much argument they have left in them. You lose it the way you lose ground: a step at a time, and you notice. It isn't **+** HP, it doesn't persist, and it's rebuilt from scratch for every scene that uses this approach.

A character's Ground	10 + half the sum of ● Acuity and ▲ Resolve Ranks , rounding up
An NPC's Ground	Whatever the scene needs. A clerk has little, a magistrate has plenty

That formula isn't new. It's the engine's own □ Mental Defense, built from the two Attributes that already guard the mind, so a character who invested in holding their nerve is better at this without a second stat line.

On the d18 and d20 you can read Ground straight off the sheet, because there it is □ Mental Defense. On the d100 it isn't: that Ruleset builds Mental Defense as $3 \times$ half the same sum, which is a subtraction from a percentile Target instead of a pool, and it comes out around 3 where the others come out around 11. Use the formula above on all three and ignore the d100's printed Defense for this purpose.

The volley

A volley is a **Contest**. Both sides roll, both pick the Attribute that fits what they're actually doing, and the engine's existing Contest Threshold settles it: higher Modified Result wins, and only the winner's Gradient Die is read.

Roll	When you are
◆ Vigor	Leaning on them. Presence, bulk, the implication of force
☆ Deft	Charming, deflecting, changing the subject before it lands
● Acuity	Catching the contradiction, producing the fact
▲ Resolve	Holding a line, refusing to be moved, outlasting

A **Voice Skill** grants Favor, as it does anywhere else. It never decides whether you may speak.

The loser's Ground falls by the winner's Gradient, read as a number: 1 on a Negative band, **2** on Standard, **3** on Positive. A winner whose own Gradient came up Negative won the volley and made a mess of it, which is worth exactly one step.

That averages **2 a volley on all three Rulesets**, which isn't a coincidence and is checked in Reading the Rulesets. A system wanting shorter scenes doubles it.

Ending it

When a side's Ground reaches **0**, they're done arguing. They have not been convinced, and that distinction is the whole of it.

The loser	And so
Concedes	They give up the thing that was named at the start
But sets the terms	They choose how it is given up, and the winner lives with that

It almost never ends in an outright win, and that is the point. The winner gets the thing. The loser gets to decide what it costs. A magistrate who has been argued down still writes the order, and writes it narrowly.

Scale the compromise to the Ground the winner had left: nearly full, and the concession is clean. Scraping, and the loser gives it up in the most expensive way available to them.

Closing their options

Nobody is worn down. Their options are taken away one at a time, until only one is left, and that one is the outcome.

Writing the doors

Before the scene, the GM writes **three to five ways out** the other side currently has. These aren't secrets and they aren't plot. They are the honest answers to what could this person do instead of what the party wants?

A quartermaster asked to release supplies he has no authority over can: **refuse outright** · **send them to his superior** · **demand a bribe** · **stall until the convoy leaves** · **give them up and report it afterward**

Closing them

Each volley targets **one named door**, and the player says which. A success closes it. A failure closes nothing and costs the speaker, because the other side now knows what they're trying to do.

The scene ends when **one door remains**. That's what happens, and nobody needs to decide whether it was a win.

Doors left	What the scene was
1	A cornered person doing the only thing left
2	A real choice, made under pressure
0	Not possible. The last door never closes

The last door never closes. Everyone always has one thing they can still do, and that rule is what stops this becoming a way to make people into furniture. If the party closes everything, the remaining door is whatever the other side would do with no good options at all, which is usually worse for everyone than the thing the party wanted.

Why it works

A door is concrete. "Convince the quartermaster" is a vague thing to roll against; "stop him sending us to his superior" is a specific thing a player can think of an approach for. It converts persuasion into target selection, which is a decision, and decisions are what a table came for.

The cost is preparation. **Every scene needs its doors written beforehand**, and a GM who improvises them will write ones the party can close.

Arriving with leverage

The roll isn't against the person. It's against **what you have on them**.

A Difficulty Threshold is set by what the party brings to the conversation, not by the Δ Resolve of whoever is across the table. Arrive with nothing and the number is brutal. Arrive knowing about the shipment, the brother, and the debt, and it is a formality.

What you bring	DT
A fair offer	12
Something they want, or a real threat	8
Something they cannot afford you to say	4
Nothing but the request	no roll

Arriving with nothing isn't a hard roll, it's a no. The scene was decided before anybody sat down, and saying so out loud is the clearest possible signal that this approach rewards the legwork.

Those are starter numbers on the d18 and d20 ladder; the d100 expresses them differently, in Reading the Rulesets.

What it is doing

It moves the decision out of the conversation. Nobody here wins an argument by being eloquent in the moment. They win it because of three sessions of asking questions, and the scene becomes the place where that work gets spent.

That suits a game where the party investigates, prepares, and then goes in. It suits a game about improvisation badly, and a table that wants to be clever at the table will find it flat. Use one of the other two for those.

Leverage has to be findable

Leverage has to be gettable. If the GM doesn't put the shipment, the brother and the debt where a party can find them, every scene resolves to a flat no and the party stops trying.

Name the DT before the roll, or at least say which rung. The player should know whether they walked in prepared, because that is the entire information the approach exists to deliver.

What Talking Costs

Something has to come off the speaker, or talking is free and therefore always correct.

The engine's answer is $\ominus$ Fatigue, and it needs no adaptation: the core calls it a cost any kind of pressure can impose, and holding your nerve through a hostile hour is pressure. It's also the right shape, because $\ominus$ Fatigue is what a character does to themselves rather than what is done to them.

Losing a volley	Nothing. You lost ground, that is the cost
Pushing after you have lost	1 $\ominus$ Fatigue to re-enter a scene you have already conceded
Carrying the scene alone	1 $\ominus$ Fatigue at the end, if one character made every roll

That last row is the one that changes tables. A party that lets its talker do all the talking watches them come out of it worse at everything else, which is the same lesson a party learns about the one character who always goes first through doors.

Mind the track it shares

$\ominus$ Fatigue is also what a forced march and an overspent $\curvearrowright$ Energy pool cost, and it maxes at 5. A system running this module and a travel system and a magic system on the same track will find characters collapsing from a combination nobody designed.

Check the total load before adopting. If it is too much, the usual fix is to make influence cost $\curvearrowright$ Energy instead, which is a shallower pool but refreshes hourly.

What Influence Cannot Do

The limits are the module, and a system that leaves them out has built a mind control system by accident.

It cannot make someone act against what they are	A loyal guard can be talked into looking away. They cannot be talked into opening the cell
It cannot produce information they do not have	Pressure gets you what they know. It is excellent at getting you what they are guessing
It cannot be retried because it failed	A refusal is an answer. Coming back needs something new, which is leverage whether or not you are running it
It cannot work on someone who will not engage	Walking away is always available, and it beats everything here

Write the first line into your system in some form. Everything else is tuning; that one is what keeps influence a conversation rather than a spell.

Players

Nothing here is used on a player character without that player agreeing to it, scene by scene.

This isn't a courtesy. A social system that binds PCs takes away the only thing a player actually controls, and the table will discover it hates this halfway through the one scene where it matters.

What does work, and works well:

- **A player may offer themselves as a target**, which is how you get the scene where one character talks another down and both players want to find out.
- **NPCs may use everything here on each other**, in front of the party, with the party deciding whether to interfere.
- **The GM may say what an NPC's pressure feels like** without rolling, and let the player decide what it does.

Reading the Rulesets

The three Rulesets read the Gradient in different numbers of bands, which matters here because wearing them down spends the Gradient directly.

Ruleset	Gradient	Bands	Average Ground taken
d18	1d6	Negative 1-2 · Standard 3-4 · Positive 5-6	2.0
d20	1d10	Major Neg 1 · Minor Neg 2-3 · Standard 4-7 · Minor Pos 8-9 · Major Pos 10	2.0
d100	units digit	Positive 0-1 · Standard 2-7 · Negative 8-9	2.0

All three average two a volley, despite 33/33/33, 10/20/40/20/10 and 20/60/20 splits. A scene budgeted on the d18 runs the same length on the other two, which is the useful fact: the approach transfers between Rulesets without retuning.

What differs is the texture. The **d18** gives a third of volleys at each weight, so scenes swing. The **d100** puts 60% of volleys at Standard, so they grind. The **d20** is the only one with a genuine five-band spread, and a system there can use **1-5** instead of 1-3 for a sharper, shorter scene.

Leverage on the d100

The d100 has no DT ladder, so the leverage rungs don't convert, they re-express. That Ruleset sets difficulty by choosing which of a character's three Targets is rolled against, and there are only three:

What you bring	d18 / d20	d100	Odds
A fair offer	DT 12	Challenging , half Score	~35-38%

What you bring	d18 / d20	d100	Odds
Something they want, or a real threat	DT 8	Routine, the Score	~70%
Something they cannot afford you to say	DT 4	Trivial, Score × 1½	~96-99%

The fourth case, arriving with nothing, has nowhere to go. **The d100's hardest tier sits at about 35%, where the d18 and d20 ladder reaches 8% at DT 16**, so that rung can't be expressed as a difficulty on the d100 at all.

Don't invent a fourth tier to hold it. **Take the hint: the d100 is telling you that rung was never a roll.** The rule holds on all three Rulesets, and it's what this approach has been saying throughout. Preparation is the system, and a party that walks in empty has already resolved the scene.

The Core Rules It Builds On

Everything here comes from the Rulesets, unchanged.

- **The Encounter is a tempo.** The engine defines it by how time is counted, so a conversation that turns on order and timing is already one.
- **Contest Threshold:** two characters opposing each other both roll and compare Modified Results. A Contest is always rolled, never taken as a Score, and **only the winner's Gradient Die is read.**
- **Ties:** the two sides may not be using the same Attribute, so the engine's recommendation is GM discretion, deciding which approach had the edge.
- **Interaction:** the core treats most of it as pure roleplay, picks whichever Attribute fits the approach, and takes a Voice Skill as Favor on top. Its stated default is a single check per beat.
- **Mental Defense:** 10 + half the sum of ● Acuity and △ Resolve Ranks on the d18 and d20; 3 × that half-sum on the d100.
- **Fatigue:** a cost any kind of pressure can impose. Each point is −1 on every roll on the d18 and d20, and −5 on the Target on the d100.
- **Skills grant Favor** and never decide whether something can be tried, so no approach is gated behind owning a Voice Skill.

A Worked Standing

Not a timeline. **Where one party sits after eleven sessions**, and what each position cost them.

Faction	Band	How it got there
The lockkeepers	Trusted	Returned a body they could have sold, in front of witnesses
The gate office	Wary	Nothing proven. A clerk remembers them in a corridor they had no business being in
The river crews	Known	Three years of ordinary trade and no trouble either way

Faction	Band	How it got there
Harrow's people	Hostile	They know exactly what happened to the second cart, and it is not a rumour

Four factions, four different positions, none of them a number. Reading across is the whole point: **the party's standing is a readable account of what they have done and who was watching.**

What it means in play, on one afternoon:

- They can stop with **the lockkeepers** for nothing, which is three stretches of upkeep they don't spend.
- They can get into **the gate office**, but the scene opens at Disfavor and the clerk is already composing his report.
- **The river crews** will deal at the true price and won't take a risk, which is exactly what Known is for.
- **Harrow's people** aren't a scene. They are a thing that happens to the party on the road.

The last line is the one worth noticing. **Hostile stopped being a social problem and became a travel problem**, which is where a reputation layer earns its place in a campaign rather than a session.

Tone Is Yours

This module sets structure. How much a conversation can do, and what it takes out of the people having it, come from choices it doesn't make for you:

- Whether you run one layer or both. Reputation alone is a perfectly good game.
- Which approach the scene layer runs on, which is the largest of these by some way.
- How many factions there are, and which pairs are opposed.
- Whether a band can move on one act, or only on a pattern of them.
- What the hard limit is on what influence can make someone do.
- Whether NPCs can use any of it on the party, and under what agreement.

A game where talking is cheap and frequent plays as farce or as court intrigue. One where it is rare and expensive plays as a thriller. Neither needs different rules, only different settings.

Add-Ons

None of the following is part of the module. Each is a lever that changes how influence feels, not how it works. Take them one at a time.

Each is listed with what it costs, not only what it buys.

Audience

A third party is watching, and the real target is them. Volleys are resolved against the person in front of you, and the Gradient says what the room made of it.

Turns an argument into a performance and gives the rest of the party something to do. It needs the GM to track two outcomes at once, and the second one is invisible until later.

Standing as leverage

When running leverage, what the party is owed counts as something they bring. Good terms with a faction move the rung by one.

Ties influence to whatever reputation system the game already has, which makes both worth more. It needs that system to exist first, and it makes well-connected characters strictly better at this.

Giving ground on purpose

A character may concede a volley without rolling, and take back **1** $\ominus$ **Fatigue** or one closed door.

Makes losing a move instead of an accident, and rewards players who know when they're beaten. It also lets a canny player stretch a scene past its natural length.

Written terms

The winner names the concession in one sentence, out loud, and it's binding on the fiction. Anything not in the sentence was not won.

Stops the drift where a successful roll expands afterwards into whatever the winner wanted afterwards. The cost is a beat of bookkeeping at the end of every scene.

Two against one

Several characters may work the same target. They share the target's Ground, act on their own $\blacktriangleright$ Initiative, and the target picks one of them to roll against each Round.

Lets a party gang up, which is realistic and fun. It also makes attrition scenes short, so raise the target's Ground by the number of extra speakers.

Nothing to say

A character with no relevant Skill, no leverage and no standing may be ruled unable to open at all. They have no way in, and nothing is being taken from them.

Hard, and it suits games where who you're decides who will hear you. It will sideline a player, so it needs to be known at character creation rather than discovered in the scene.

Using This Module

1. **Decide which layers you want.** Reputation runs on its own. The scene layer runs on its own. Most games want the first before the second.
2. **Name three to six factions** and say which pairs are opposed. Start every party at Known.

3. **Pick one approach** for the scene layer, if you're running it. Don't run two.
4. **Write the limit.** One line on what influence can't make a person do, before anything else.
5. **Decide what a scene costs the speaker**, and check the $\ominus$ Fatigue load against everything else already spending that track.
6. **Agree the rule for player characters** at the table, out loud, before the first scene.
7. **Use the scene layer once**, then put it away for a few sessions and see whether anybody misses it. If nobody does, the core's single roll was right for your game.

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