

This document expands upon the implementation of the Skills System as presented in the Frontiers Overview.

It also offers a few Variants and Alternatives for those who want a different version or different resolution system entirely.

Like the core Release document for this version of Frontiers, this Expansion is modular by design. Designers may adopt, modify, restructure, or discard sections as needed to serve their intended genre, tone, and balance goals.

What a Skill Is

A **Skill** represents trained expertise: disciplined study, repeated practice, or specialized experience.

A Skill does not determine whether a character may attempt an action.

It determines whether training provides a **mechanical advantage** when the action is attempted.

Skills are binary by default:

- You either have the Skill or you do not.
- A character without a Skill may still attempt the task normally.
- The difference is access to a **Skill Benefit**.

Skills represent “being good at something,” not merely being allowed to use something.

Skills vs Competencies

Frontiers distinguishes two separate mechanical concepts:

Skills

Skills represent refined execution and training.

They modify rolls.

Competencies

Competencies represent baseline operational proficiency.

They determine whether a character can properly use:

- Weapons

- Armor
- Complex tools
- Vehicles
- Magical systems
- Specialized equipment

Competencies do not grant Skill Benefits.

A character lacking the required Competency may attempt use at GM discretion, but may suffer:

- Disfavor
- Increased Difficulty
- Narrative restriction
- Partial functionality

Skills enhance execution.

Competencies grant access.

These systems are intentionally separate.

When Skills Apply

A Skill applies when the character's approach meaningfully involves:

- practiced technique
- specialized knowledge
- trained execution

Default adjudication:

- The **task** determines the Attribute.
- The **approach** determines whether a Skill applies.

If no Skill applies: - The character rolls normally using the governing Attribute. - No Skill Benefit is available.

Skill Benefits (Core Mechanic)

When a Skill applies, the player chooses **one Skill Benefit** before rolling.

Only one Skill Benefit may be applied per ♦Action or ★Activity unless a rule explicitly allows more.

If multiple Skills could apply: - Choose one Skill. - Choose one Skill Benefit.

Skill Benefits modify resolution mechanics.

They do not grant permission to attempt an action.

Skill Benefit 1: Favor

Gain Favor on either:

- the Resolution Die (d20), or
- the Gradient Die (d10)

The die receiving Favor must be declared before rolling.

Skill Benefit 2: Enhanced Attribute

Double the relevant Attribute Modifier for this roll.

This doubles only the Attribute Modifier.

It does not double:

- Equipment bonuses
- Level bonuses
- Flat numeric bonuses
- Other Skill effects

If the Modifier is negative, it is doubled normally.

Skill Benefit 3: Narrative Edge

If the roll succeeds:

- Gain a secondary narrative advantage consistent with the Skill.

Examples include:

- reduced time required
- improved positioning
- reduced collateral consequence
- preserved resources
- additional leverage

Narrative Edge:

- Does not reverse success/failure.
- Does not alter the rolled result.
- Must logically follow from the Skill and situation.

The GM finalizes scope.

Skill Scope and Construction

Each Frontiers-based system defines its own Skill list.

Skills should reflect:

- setting tone
- genre expectations
- campaign focus
- desired specialization density

Skills should be:

- broad enough to matter regularly
- narrow enough to distinguish characters

Examples:

- Athletics
- Stealth
- Persuasion
- Deception
- Medicine
- Investigation
- Survival
- Crafting
- Arcane Theory

Skills are a primary layer of character differentiation.

Gaining Skills

The engine supports multiple acquisition sources.

In Frontiers Beta 2026-1, Skills are gained through:

1. Origin / Background / Archetype

Character creation choices grant a fixed number of Skills appropriate to the narrative role.

These are system-defined.

2. Acuity Modifier

A character gains additional Skills equal to their **Acuity Modifier**.

If the Modifier is negative: - No Skills are lost. - The character gains no additional Skills from this source.

These additional Skills are chosen at character creation unless the system specifies staged acquisition.

3. Advancement

Systems may grant additional Skills through:

- Level advancement
- Narrative milestones
- Training arcs
- Downtime study

The engine does not mandate frequency but assumes Skills scale more slowly than Attributes.

Losing Skills

By default:

- Skills are permanent once gained.
- Temporary loss of access may occur through narrative or effects.
- Attribute reduction does not remove known Skills unless explicitly stated.

If a system ties available Skill slots directly to □Acuity Modifier dynamically, it must define which Skills become inactive if Acuity decreases.

Skills and Contested Resolution

When a roll is contested:

- Skill Benefits apply normally.
- Favor may be applied to the Resolution Die.
- Narrative Edge triggers only if the character wins the contest.

If the contest includes a Gradient roll: - Favor may be applied to the Gradient Die.

Skills and Multiple Rolls

If a single ♦Action requires multiple rolls:

- A Skill Benefit applies to only one roll within that action.
- The player declares which roll receives the benefit.

If rolls are treated as separate ♦Actions: - Each roll may receive its own Skill Benefit.

Skills and Action Economy

Using a Skill does not cost additional ♦AP.

Skill Benefits modify resolution only.

They do not alter Action cost unless an Ability explicitly interacts with them.

1. Multiple Applicable Skills

If more than one Skill could apply:

- Choose one Skill.
- Choose one Skill Benefit.

No stacking.

2. Skill Benefit Timing

Skill Benefits must be declared before rolling.

Retroactive declaration is not permitted unless the table agrees no new information was revealed.

3. Enhanced Attribute and Combined Bonuses

Enhanced Attribute doubles only the Attribute Modifier.

It does not double:

- bonuses from Abilities
- bonuses from equipment
- flat numeric bonuses
- Level-derived bonuses

4. Skill Without Competency

If a task requires a Competency and the character lacks it:

- Having a Skill does not override the requirement unless explicitly stated.

5. Competency Without Skill

A character with Competency but no Skill:

- May attempt the action normally.
- Does not gain a Skill Benefit.

6. Creating New Skills Mid-Play

If a system allows custom Skill creation:

- Define scope clearly.
- Prevent duplication of existing Skill domains.
- Record the definition for future consistency.

Variants modify the default Skill structure while preserving the core idea:

Skills represent training that modifies rolls.

These Variants remain broadly compatible with the Attribute, Resolution, and Action systems.

Ranked Skills Variant

Modifies: Skills are binary.

Under this Variant, Skills have ranks, such as:

- Trained
- Expert
- Master (optional, system-dependent)

Default implementation example:

- **Trained:** Choose 1 Skill Benefit per roll (as normal).
- **Expert:** Choose 1 Skill Benefit and gain an additional minor bonus (system-defined).
- **Master** (if used): Choose 1 Skill Benefit and gain expanded Narrative Edge or increased reliability.

Possible minor bonuses include: - +1 to the final Resolution total. - Favor on the Gradient Die only. - Expanded scope of Narrative Edge.

What Does Not Change: - Only one primary Skill Benefit may be selected per roll. - Skills still require narrative applicability. - Skills do not grant access (Competencies remain separate).

Design Impact: - Increases long-term differentiation. - Encourages specialization. - Requires careful tuning to prevent Expert from becoming mathematically mandatory. - Slightly increases progression complexity.

This Variant is best for systems emphasizing advancement and mastery tiers.

Fixed Benefit Variant

Modifies: Player chooses Skill Benefit each time.

Under this Variant, each Skill grants a predetermined Benefit selected when the Skill is gained.

Example: - Stealth → Always grants Favor on Resolution. - Medicine → Always grants Narrative Edge.
- Athletics → Always grants Enhanced Attribute.

Players no longer choose between Skill Benefits during play.

What Does Not Change: - Skills remain binary. - Skill applicability still depends on approach. - Only one Skill applies per roll.

Design Impact: - Reduces decision load during play. - Speeds resolution. - Makes Skills feel more mechanically distinct. - Removes tactical flexibility in exchange for clarity.

This Variant is useful for: - fast-paced games, - beginner-friendly systems, - tables that prefer reduced per-roll choice.

The following Alternatives replace the Skill framework more substantially.

Adopting these requires recalibration of Difficulty Ratings, encounter balance, and character differentiation assumptions.

These Alternatives are not drop-in compatible with the Default Skill structure.

Competency-Only Alternative

Remove Skills entirely.

Characters differentiate through:

- Attributes (raw capability)
- Competencies (access and operational proficiency)
- Abilities (special techniques and powers)

Under this Alternative:

- There are no Skill Benefits.
- All Resolution Rolls rely solely on Attribute Modifiers and other bonuses.
- Competencies determine whether a character may attempt certain tasks without penalty.

Example: - A character with Weapon Competency can use weapons normally. - A character without it may suffer Disfavor or increased Difficulty. - No one gains Favor or Enhanced Attribute from “being skilled” at combat.

Impact on Design:

- Reduces mechanical complexity.
- Removes per-roll decision load.
- Makes Attributes more dominant in resolution.
- Shifts character identity toward Abilities and equipment.

This model works best in systems emphasizing: - archetype differentiation, - equipment-driven gameplay, - or low granularity training.

Difficulty Ratings may need to be slightly reduced to compensate for loss of Skill Benefits.

Numeric Proficiency Alternative

Replace binary Skills with a numeric proficiency bonus.

Under this Alternative:

- Characters gain a proficiency value (e.g., +2, +3, etc.).
- When a task falls within a trained domain, add the proficiency bonus to the roll.
- There are no selectable Skill Benefits.

Proficiency may scale with: - Level, - Tier, - or training investment.

Example implementation: - Proficiency = +2 at low Levels. - Increases at defined progression milestones.

Impact on Design:

- Produces familiar d20-style scaling.
- Removes tactical choice between Favor, Enhanced Attribute, and Narrative Edge.
- Increases mathematical predictability.
- Requires Difficulty recalibration, as static bonuses increase reliability more than Favor does.

This Alternative supports systems that prefer: - consistent scaling, - reduced per-roll decision overhead, - clearer mathematical growth curves.

Descriptor-Based Alternative

Replace Skills with narrative descriptors or tags.

Descriptors represent character themes such as:

- “Former Thief”
- “Battlefield Medic”
- “Court Diplomat”
- “Arcane Scholar”

Descriptors do not provide fixed bonuses.

Instead, when a descriptor meaningfully applies:

- The GM may grant Favor,
- Reduce the Difficulty Rating,
- or allow broader Narrative Edge.

Descriptors function as permission and leverage tools rather than structured bonuses.

Impact on Design:

- Increases narrative flexibility.
- Reduces rigid skill lists.
- Requires strong GM adjudication discipline.
- Makes character identity more thematic than mechanical.

This model works best in:

- narrative-forward systems,
- low-combat or intrigue-heavy games,
- genre-emulation play.

Because descriptors are flexible, Difficulty Ratings may need to be slightly higher to account for frequent situational advantages.