

RealTime

Playing Against The Clock

a roleplaying game by Frank J. Perricone

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In most roleplaying games, the relationship between "real time" (the time which the players experience) and "game time" (the time which the characters experience) is highly variable. Some activities that take the characters hours, days, or weeks (like traveling cross-country) takes seconds or minutes to play out; other activities that may only take a few seconds or minutes (like combat) can take hours to play.

When you're playing RealTime, real time and game time are the same. Everything takes the same amount of time to play out as it takes the characters to do. Every second of pulse-pounding action the characters live through, the players will experience as well.

How RealTime Works

Genre and Setting

RealTime is inspired by the hit TV show 24 and its predecessor, the movie Nick Of Time. This might suggest it is only suitable for use in the modern day setting and the action genre. And in fact, there are strong advantages to using the modern day. When you're pressed for time (and if you're playing RealTime right, you should always be pressed for time), it's a lot easier to stick with a world you already know inside and out. If you have to stop to figure out how much a bronze ducat is worth, or remember the proper title for addressing a Vice Chancellor, under circumstances where your character shouldn't need to know those things, you're working at a disadvantage. That's why the starter adventures are also set in the modern day and the action genre.

However, there's no reason to limit yourself to these choices forever. RealTime works just fine in pretty much any genre and setting you care to use it in, as long as the pace of the action is key, and the GM is able to avoid any activities that inevitably take a long time (like sailing across an ocean) without breaking the feel of the genre or setting. Many genres can have stories told in real time, and more than a few have (other examples include the western High Noon, certain episodes of ER,

and even an episode of the sitcom *Mad About You*). In fact, some lower-tech settings can be easier to run in RealTime simply because weapons, transportation, and devices are slower, so it's easier to keep up with the fastest events in your game. Even so, I recommend you save experimentation with these genres and settings for later, after you've gotten somewhat comfortable with RealTime.

Campaigns and One-Shots

By its nature RealTime is ideally suited for one-shots, since no one can sustain the pace of a RealTime game for more than a few hours. It's possible to break out of that mold, though. You could create an episodic game where each session is assumed to be back-to-back in time with the previous session, the way episodes of *24* come a week apart but follow immediately after one another in game time. This weakens slightly the real-time element, because it becomes impossible to have the real-world clock match the game-time clock (unless you're willing to meet at different times each week, or reset your clock and play in a windowless room!). But it does make it possible to break a story up into smaller slices, or build a larger story (like the full day story of *24*) than you could reasonably do in a single sitting.

Another option is to treat different sessions the way *24* treats different seasons. If you play for four hours once a week, set things up so something exciting happens to your characters for a four-hour period once a week, the same way Jack Bauer has one hellish day each year. Things can happen in the intervening, "off camera" times, of course. But they should either be inconsequential things, or things which can be expressed in the form of backstory during the course of the RealTime game. (Examples from *24* include all the backstory about Jack's work in Germany, expressed during the first season during conversations, mostly with Senator Palmer; or how we learned at the beginning of the second season how Kim came to be working for the Mathesons.) Backstory can be filled in only in the course of the actual story – there are no flashbacks because the clock is always ticking.

Or just stick to using RealTime for one-shots, which is where it has its greatest impact anyway.

Making It Work

Keeping up with real time is a big challenge, for the entire group, not just the GM. To accomplish this ambitious goal, we need several elements. First, we need a very, very simple rules set. There's no time to move figurines, look up rules or charts, or do calculations. It has to be simple so it can be fast, and so the player doesn't have to spend too much time or effort thinking about it. After all, the player only has as much time to think in character as does her character, so she can't afford to spend a lot of time on rules. Nor does the GM have time to think about them; he has to have actions resolved as fast as they'd happen. That can only happen if the rules are simple enough that the player can figure out the results on her own some of the time.

But fast rules are not only not enough, they're barely a start. There are a number of other adjustments the group will have to make to their play, in order to keep up with real time, and to coordinate camera time and downtime. They'll have to be ready to nudge themselves out of a few preconceptions about how roleplaying games work, and do a lot of work to keep everything clicking. In short, they really have to want to engage in this experiment; if anyone is dubious about making it work, it won't, because there's no slack in which to deal with even one person's reluctance.

One of the big differences everyone will have to get used to is the fact that the players are very nearly as responsible for the game's success, and the coordination of the story, as is the GM. In most games, the GM carries most of that responsibility. Players do have to think about things like spotlight time, building up suspense, maintaining a mood, and cooperating with the story. But they're mostly making sure that they don't foil or sabotage the GM's efforts to achieve those things. They don't make things happen, they just avoid preventing them from happening. In RealTime, they'll have to actively work, all the time, to support these things, almost as much as the GM does. In short, they'll have to do things that many people consider "metagaming".

The most important and most visible example is coordinating their actions and off-camera time. They'll need to make sure that, at any given moment, the camera only has one place to be, and anything happening off-camera is either unimportant (e.g., driving across town) or able to be summarized when the camera returns (e.g., running a decryption program on a disk's contents). This works both ways. If Jack is about to do something interesting, no one else had better be doing anything interesting; and if Jack is about to do something boring, someone else had better be about to do something interesting.

This can be most challenging when the characters are split up into separate groups. But you can't just avoid splitting up to avoid the problem. Sometimes you might need to be doing something relatively boring and time-consuming, like driving across town. If the group is all together during this time, there's no chance for the camera to find somewhere more interesting to be. Sometimes you can relax and enjoy a quiet moment to talk in character, make plans, etc. But don't rely on it. If you leave a long stretch with nothing to keep the camera busy, the GM might throw something into the story to fill up that time. Nothing livens up a drive across town like a pursuing van full of machine-gun-toting thugs, or a slippery road tossing your car off the embankment, or finding out that the car was sabotaged. On the other hand, if the group split up beforehand and some of the others have some interesting, camera-worthy things to do, there's no need for such dangers.







When the characters are together, and all doing things at once, the only way to keep perfect parity with time is for everyone to be talking at once. Players will need to think like screenwriters, making sure that there's only so many things going on at any moment, taking turns. It's not enough to simply cede the spotlight to other players; they must also actively creating spaces in their own actions into which other player's actions can be fit.

Trying to think about rules and the game world, keep these screen-writing requirements in mind, and also keep up with your character in real time, isn't easy. Expect to fall behind now and then. RealTime includes a few mechanisms for catching back up (Commercial Breaks and Plot Twists). And if they're not enough and the clock gets irretrievably away from you, go ahead with the game anyway. You'll hit the clock more closely next time. (And you've had fun this time.)

The first part of this document describes the rules, but the latter part, which gives hints and guidelines for ways to keep up with real time and keep the story flowing, is the more important part.

Stuff You'll Need

Dice, Or Not

RealTime can be played either with dice or diceless. All mechanical game elements will be done by comparing a character's skill against a target value; without dice, it's a simple comparison, so you either can or can't do what you're attempting. If you prefer an element of randomness (I do), you'll add in the roll of one or two FUDGE dice (depending on the kind of action). FUDGE dice are six-sided dice marked with two  (blank) sides, two  (plus) sides, and two  (minus) sides.  counts as +1,  as -1, and  as 0, so the average roll is zero. Thus, on an average roll, you can do the same things you could have done in a diceless version, but there's room for you to be up to two points better or worse.

If you're using dice, it's best if everyone has their own dice, because you won't have time to pass them around or search for them. FUDGE dice can be purchased from Gray Ghost Games and many other places. A "GM's Pack" has enough dice for an entire group (each player needs two). In a pinch you can also use a program like Prism Dice (<http://personalpages.tds.net/~huntergreen/prismdice/>) or FUDGE Dice! (<http://www.palmgear.com/software/showsoftware.cfm?prodID=1988>), or just use markers to color two sides of an ordinary white pipped six-sider with red ink, and two more sides with green ink.

A Stopwatch

In addition to the usual roleplaying staples (pencils and pens, note paper, Doritos, etc.) you'll want to have a stopwatch. In fact, you might want to have several – the GM will definitely want at least one, and the players might benefit from having one too. It's also encouraged that you have a clock prominently visible to everyone in the room. Bring in a few extra if needed, so the idea of time, and the pressure of it counting down, is in everyone's face the whole game.

Tokens

Later you'll need three colors of some kind of tokens, something that can be passed around the table as needed and quickly counted. Poker chips are ideal for this, and they can be had for a couple

of bucks at any toy or discount store. (They even come in packs of three colors!) A typical pack of poker chips contains 50 white, 25 red, and 25 blue, and that's a fair number to have for an ordinary-sized (4-6 players) group, though it might be a little tight for larger groups or more eventful adventures. A second box of chips ensures you'll have plenty even after you lose some. If you're not going to use poker chips, whatever you use should come in three colors, and one of the colors should be about twice as many as the others. The colors don't matter, though if you have a choice, I recommend black, red, and white (with twice as many white as the others). By the way, the tokens will represent Commercial Breaks, Wounds, and Plot Twists, and you'll learn more about them and their uses in later sections.

Characters

The Character Sheet

A RealTime character sheet works best if printed on cardstock. Here's what the character sheet looks like:

Name _____ Appearance _____ **RealTime**
 Gender ___ Age _____ Background _____

<input type="checkbox"/>	Drive	fly, ski, ride a horse, pilot a spaceship, chase a car, sail a yacht	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Fight	shoot, punch, hack, throw a knife, find good cover, estimate foe's forces	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Heal	first aid, medicine, diagnosis, identify poison, calm a panicked person	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Know	figure out, understand, perceive, find something hidden, know trivia	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Move	run, sneak, climb, athletics, sports, maintain balance in zero gravity, pick a pocket	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Persuade	convince, influence, intimidate, seduce, haggle, read someone's emotions, sing	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Resist	resist persuasion, pain, magic, fear, your own worst impulses	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Use	make, fix, operate, identify, analyze devices and equipment	<input type="checkbox"/>	

If possible, print the target value table on page 6 on the back of the character sheet. It'll be a handy reference during play.

Obviously, you don't need to restrict yourself to an appearance and background that fits on this sheet. Those spaces are just meant for a few summarizing words, so you can easily remember them at a moment's glance. For example, Jack Bauer's character sheet probably says CTU Agent, L.A. Office under Background, and maybe his appearance is listed as 5'10", ruggedly handsome. But elsewhere there's a page or two of more description of him, his past, his personality, and anything else the player and

GM need to know. Probably no more than a page or two, especially if this will be a one-shot game. There just isn't enough time in a RealTime game for much more.

Skills

The core of the character sheet is the eight skills by which every character is defined. The character sheet also has a few key examples of what those skills are used for. In some cases, an action could be done with either of two skills – though it might be harder to do with one than the other. For instance, identifying if a car that's running rough has been tampered with could be either a Drive or a Use skill, though it'd probably be easier (have a lower target number) as a Use roll.

Here are some examples of what different values in the skills allow you to do. These values can also be used as target values (see Unopposed Actions on page 8 for more about this).

Target	Difficulty	Example
1	Routine	M1: climb a ladder
2	Really Easy	K2: find a book at the library
3	Fairly Easy	D3: drive across town in traffic
4	Moderate	H4: set a broken bone
5	Hard	R5: resist interrogation
6	Very Hard	U6: hack into the local bank's computers
7	Extremely Hard	F7: snipe at a target 200m away holding a pistol on a hostage
8	Nearly Impossible	P8: persuade a happy person to do something suicidal

Target values listed in the examples are in an abbreviated form: the first letter of the skill, followed by the target value. H4 means a Heal action with a target of 4.

Note that in some games, GMs might change the list of skills, or even the number of skills, to reflect different worlds or genres. See the Alternate Rules section on page 23 for more about this.

If the question of languages comes up, there are two options. The simplest option is to let the character make a Know roll to determine if he knows enough about the language in question to say or understand whatever is needed. If a character has done this in the past and demonstrated a knowledge of a particular language, simply assume he knows that language in the future without rolling. This is suitable if languages are not likely to be a large part of the story.

The alternative is to assume that every character knows his native language, plus one language for every point of Know above 3. For instance, someone with a Know of 6 would start knowing his native language plus three others. The player can determine the languages ahead of time, or with the GM's permission, pick languages known on the fly during the game as long as he has an unused slot for a language. This alternative rule is more complex but might be useful if languages are likely to be important to the game.

Character Creation

As always, the first step in character creation is to create the concept of the character and flesh it out. You shouldn't worry about numbers until you've got the character firmly in mind. Most players should probably write up their page or so of background before they proceed to do anything else. The concept is far, far more important than the numbers, even more so in RealTime than in most roleplaying games.

Once the conceptual part is done, the mechanical part is simple. Start with 30 points. The GM might modify the starting amount for unusual games to reflect more or less skilled characters.

Distribute these points over the skills, choosing values from 1 to 6 in each one. Higher numbers indicate higher skills. See Skills on page 6 for examples of the kinds of things you can do with various values of skills.

For each skill, you should also choose a specialization of that skill, and write it down on the space to the right. Add two to the skill and write that in the space next to the specialization. That's your effective value in that particular specialization. For example, if you have a 4 Drive, you might then have a 6 Helicopter. Other examples of specializations include Subduing, CPR, Ancient History, Football, Impersonation, Resisting Torture, and Computer Cracking. If you try to take a specialization that's too broad, the GM has permission to whap your knuckles with a ruler.

Here's an example character:

Name Jack Bauer Appearance 5'10", ruggedly handsome **RealTime**
 Gender M Age 36 Background CTU Agent, L.A. Office

4	Drive	fly, ski, ride a horse, pilot a spaceship, chase a car, sail a yacht	6	Navigating L.A. Traffic
6	Fight	shoot, punch, hack, throw a knife, find good cover, estimate foe's forces	8	Unarmed Combat
2	Heal	first aid, medicine, diagnosis, identify poison, calm a panicked person	4	First Aid
3	Know	figure out, understand, perceive, find something hidden, know trivia	5	Strategy & Tactics
5	Move	run, sneak, climb, athletics, sports, maintain balance in zero gravity, pick a pocket	7	Sneak
6	Persuade	convince, influence, intimidate, seduce, haggle, read someone's emotions, sing	8	Bluff
3	Resist	resist persuasion, pain, magic, fear, your own worst impulses	5	Resist Fear
1	Use	make, fix, operate, identify, analyze devices and equipment	3	Communications Systems

Equipment

Players should jot down some notes about equipment their characters start the game with, and check the list out with the GM to verify that the items on the list are appropriate. As equipment

tends to be pretty dynamic, do this on scrap paper. Equipment isn't usually as important in RealTime as in most games, save for a few key important items found or obtained during an adventure (like a CD-ROM containing important evidence).

Commercial Breaks and Plot Twists

The last step of character creation is simple: the GM hands out tokens representing Commercial Breaks (black chips are ideal, but blue is a fair substitute) and Plot Twists (the most numerous ones, therefore usually white). Both of these can either be assigned to individual players, or pooled by the entire group, and players can give or trade them freely. The GM may also keep some of them for himself.

How many of each do players get? Multiply the number of hours of the session by four, and divide that many Commercial Breaks up amongst the players (and optionally the GM). Thus, you'll have an average of four Commercial Breaks an hour. You'll see how to use Commercial Breaks on page 14.

The number of Plot Twist tokens given out by the GM depends on the adventure. A typical adventure might be worth two Plot Twists per hour for each player. The GM may increase this amount for adventures which involve more over-the-top plot twists. Like Commercial Breaks, Plot Twists can alternately be given to the entire group in a pool, rather than to individual players. In addition, the GM keeps as many Plot Twist tokens for himself as each player gets. You'll see how to use Plot Twists on page 14.

Actions

Unopposed Actions

An unopposed action is when a character is simply trying to achieve something, but that's not in opposition to another character trying to prevent it or accomplish the opposite. For instance, trying to break into a secured data file on a computer is an unopposed action.

The difficulty of the task is used to assign a target. See the table on page 6 for examples of target values. If you're playing diceless, you can simply compare the relevant skill (minus one for every Wound the character has – see Wounds And Healing on page 11) against the target. If the skill is equal or greater, the action succeeds; otherwise, it fails. If you're playing with dice, you can automatically assume a success if the skill exceeds the target by at least two, or a failure if the target is greater by at least two. (For instance, Jack Bauer can always climb a ladder or find a book at the library; no need to roll. But he can never hack into the bank's computers, no matter what he rolls.) When the target is within two points of the skill, roll two FUDGE dice, add them to the skill, and compare that to the target.

The margin by which the character succeeds or fails can be used by the GM to determine the result. For instance, if you're trying to hack into the bank's computers enough to find out someone's balance, and the GM says that's a target of **U6**, but your roll is a **U7**, the GM might determine that you not only get the balance, but also complete access to the account. That's because the target would have been **U7** if you'd been trying to get complete access to the account. If you'd rolled **U8**, the GM might have determined that you got access to everything in the bank system, because the target to get that level of access would have been **U8**.

Expediting this process is key to making the game go smoothly. When the player is describing the action, she should already be rolling the dice (if necessary), so that she can finish the sentence with the roll. For instance, "I fire the crossbow, Fight 4" (said all in one breath). Alternately, once the GM knows what is being attempted, he can set a target – perhaps by simply holding up a number of fingers – so that the player can proceed straight into the action's results. For instance, "I fire..." and the GM already knows what the character is doing and holds up three fingers, so the player continues "...the crossbow and hit the target!" (There are more hints about making the timing of actions work in the section *Maintaining Real Time When Playing* on page 17.)

Opposed Actions

An opposed action is whenever one character is doing something that another character is trying to prevent, or outdo, or compete with. For instance, playing tennis is an opposed action (Move against Move); so is trying to sneak past a guard (Move against Know).

In this case, the GM doesn't need to set a target value. However, he may optionally give one side or the other a few points to reflect an advantage. For instance, in a tennis match, if one character happened to be playing on his home court, the GM might give that player a one point advantage. If someone put itching powder in one character's clothes, that might be worth a three point advantage to the other player. If Jack is trying to sneak past a guard, and it's dark and the guard isn't paying much attention, that might be a two point advantage for Jack; but if he was dragging a clanky chain, that might be a two-point advantage to the guard. In a fair fight, there's no advantage.

Once this has been determined, the players involved, or the player and the GM, compare their relevant skills; if one has the advantage, that's added to her skill. If playing with dice, each participant rolls one FUDGE die and adds that to his roll as well. (As with unopposed rolls, there's no need to bother with the dice if the difference between skills plus advantage is more than two, since the outcome is predetermined anyway.)

Whoever rolls higher wins. If the guard rolls higher, he hears Jack; if Jack rolls higher, he gets by without being detected. The GM judges what happens in case of a tie; for instance, the guard notices Jack, but not until he's already gotten well past. The GM may also use the margin of difference to determine how successful the winner is. A tennis match settled by rolls differing by one was a close game, but if the rolls differed by four, someone got trounced.

As with unopposed rolls, players and GMs should always have character sheet in hand, skill picked out, and dice ready to roll, and should make the roll while still describing the action, and read off the result immediately afterward.

Characters Working Together

When two or more characters are cooperating on a task, and it's the kind where people can benefit from working together instead of just getting in each other's way, they all roll simultaneously. The player with the highest result keeps it, then adds one to it for every other player whose roll is no more than two less than her roll. That's the effective result of the entire team.

For example, Jack, Paula, Tony, George, and Michelle are trying to get into a secure facility. The key to getting in is a transmitter they took from the hideout of an arms dealer, which transmits an encrypted signal on a specific frequency to unlock a door. Unfortunately, during a gunfight Jack dropped it into a puddle, and now parts of it are fried. They don't have time to get it repaired; they need to get into the facility right now. They decide to collaboratively brainstorm on a way to jury-rig it up to a ham radio rig they happen to have with them.

The GM declares this an unopposed action with a target of **V7**, and everyone rolls. Jack's roll is 4 (he has only a 1 in Use, but a 3 in Communications Systems, and the GM decides to allow that to apply, plus his FUDGE dice come up **□** and **⊕**). Paula rolls 6, Tony rolls 3, George rolls 2, and Michelle rolls 5. Paula rolled best so she takes her 6 and adds 1 for every other roll that was 4 or better: Jack's and Michelle's rolls. Thus, her result is 8. The GM rules that the team is able to get the transmitter working; Paula did most of the work, though Jack and Michelle contributed ideas that proved not only useful, but essential.

Combat

One-On-One Combat

Combat can be the most difficult part of the game to do in real time. This is especially true in the modern day, when weapons can fire shot after shot far faster than a person can say "I shoot at him" (or even simply point fingers in the shape of a gun and say "Blam!") and roll the dice. However, whenever the combatants square off one on one, combat can be resolved as a Fight opposed action, where a single roll represents an entire sequence of attacks over the course of about a minute. With a little cooperation from the players, this will probably be your most common kind of combat; all

it requires is that the characters focus on one opponent at a time. It abstracts away the details of the individual blows and movements, but nowhere near as much as in Team Combat (described on page 12), so it represents the best compromise between speed and detail.

Do an opposed action between the Fight skills of the two combatants. The GM should assign an advantage based on such factors as weapon type, cover and armor, position, etc. No tables are provided for amounts for these factors because combat is going to be much more quick-and-dirty than that (to keep up with real time and focus on the action), and because it's assumed that the combatants' Fight skills already represent their ability to make the best use of whatever cover, position, and other strategic factors are available in the situation, over the course of the entire minute. And just a few points of advantage can be decisive; in this system, skill is more important than situation, just like in action movies and TV.

The results of the Fight opposed action are interpreted as follows:

- Tie: Both characters become wounded (see below)
- Beat By 1: The losing character is wounded.
- Beat By 2: If the winner's attack is lethal (e.g., gun, sword, knife) the loser is incapacitated but not killed (though at the GM's discretion, he may be near to death). If the attack is non-lethal (e.g., punch, billy-club, pepper spray) the loser is stunned or dazed, and at the attacker's mercy for one minute before he recovers. If the attacker presses the attack, he has an advantage of 3 on the next roll.
- Beat By 3: If the winner's attack is lethal, the loser is dead or quickly dying. Otherwise, the loser is knocked unconscious, and won't come to for a while.
- Beat By 4 Or More: The outcome is whatever the winner wants it to be.

Whatever the result, the player or GM can then spend up to a minute describing the battle, elaborating the details as desired, if there's nothing else going on that requires the camera. Otherwise, that minute can be used to resolve other actions going on at the same time, including other one-on-one fights happening in parallel.

Wounds and Healing

The GM gives anyone who is wounded one Wound token (e.g., a red poker chip). From then on, the character is at -1 to all actions for each Wound – subtract one from all skills or rolls for each token. Anyone with eight Wounds is incapacitated.

To heal someone, make an unopposed Heal action, where the target is equal to the number of Wounds the victim has. The GM may adjust this target up or down depending on situation or the

availability of medical equipment. Success removes one Wound (the player gives the token back to the GM), plus another Wound for every point over the target. Each attempt takes a few minutes.

For instance, Rick has been wounded, and has 5 Wounds, so the target to heal him is H5. Kim's Heal skill is 4, but since she doesn't even have a first aid kit available, the GM increases the target by 1 to H6. Luck is with her, though, and she rolls ⊕ and ⊕ on her FUDGE dice, just making the target. Rick's player gives back one of the Wound tokens and now has 4. Kim decides to make another go at it; this time her target is H5, and again luck is with her, because she rolls a total of 6. This lets Rick give away 2 Wound tokens, leaving him with only 2. Kim makes one more try, now against a target of H3, but her luck runs out; she rolls ⊖ ⊖, for a total of 2, so she doesn't accomplish anything.

Blow-By-Blow Combat

There are some situations where you want to resolve individual attacks, one by one, and when you have time to do so, too. This is only possible when attacks happen sporadically with gaps of time in between. For instance, a sniper looking for opportunity fire might wait for a while before taking the shot, then only take one or two quick shots before the opportunity passes. A few combatants protected by lots of cover might take the occasional pot-shot while trading questions and insults. During a car chase, people might take shots at the other car only when traffic allows an opportunity. People fighting with slow or complex weapons will have time between shots while they reload, rearm, or recalibrate. Enemies stalking each other through a darkened house will spend a lot more time creeping than shooting (think of the final scene of *Silence Of The Lambs*). Or a surprise attack might give the first to strike a chance to end the battle before it begins. All these cases allow resolving a single blow.

By the nature of the situations you'd resolve in this way, you don't need to know about concerns like initiative and movement. If there's enough going on that you don't already know who gets to act when, you should probably be using Team Combat (see page 12).

A blow-by-blow attack is an opposed action, with the attacker's Fight skill applied against the defender's Move skill. If the defender is held, helpless, or unaware of the attack, use a 1 instead of the defender's actual Move skill. Some reasons to give one side or the other advantage include using a ranged weapon at a long range, the defender being encumbered or having restricted movement, the presence of cover, etc.

If the defender wins or the result is a tie, the attack misses. Otherwise, the result is the same as in one-on-one combat (see page 11).

Team Combat

When you have a big battle with a bunch of people doing things too fast to be resolved in real time, but where you can't square off characters one by one, you can always fall back on doing a

team combat. Like one-on-one combat, this abstracts away the individual blows and movements, leaving them to be elaborated by the players and GM based on an overall resolution. It also abstracts away even more detail, such as who fired the shot that took down a particular enemy. But you can keep up with even a frantically quick gunfight without everyone shouting "Blam!" and rolling dice constantly.

First, each team decides how aggressive they want to be. More aggressive attackers are willing to take more damage themselves in order to inflict more damage on the enemy. The options are cautious (-1), normal (0), aggressive (+1), or desperate (+2). Next, resolve a team combat as an opposed action, but use the Characters Working Together rules (on page 10) to determine the total roll for both sides. Don't forget that since this is an opposed action, each combatant only rolls one FUDGE die.

The aggressiveness choice of the losing team is ignored. How aggressive the winning team was determines how vicious the fight was, and how much damage was taken on both sides. In the case of a tie, the higher aggressiveness choice is used, but both teams take damage as if they lost.

Damage needs to be figured out for every combatant. Take the number of points by which the winning team won, and add their aggressiveness choice. For each combatant on the losing team, add to this number one FUDGE die. If the result is 0 or less, that combatant escapes unscathed. Otherwise, that combatant is damaged as if she'd lost a battle by that many points, according to the combat results chart on page 11. Then, for each member of the winning team, add the aggressiveness choice to one FUDGE die, and damage that member the same way.

For instance, a street gang needs to infiltrate a building that's being patrolled by police. The gang sends three members to take out two units of police (four members in each) to open a path for the rest of the gang to get in. They're aggressive (+1) because they need to take out this police unit, and don't mind getting wounded or even captured, since if the whole operation works, their gang compadres will be able to bust them out of jail later. But they're not desperate, because they still have to take out the second police unit after this. Both the gang and the police are using lethal weapons. The police's aggressiveness is normal (0).

When the opposed action is played out, the gang wins the roll by two. Since the gang wins, their aggressiveness choice (+1) is applied, and the police's choice (0) is ignored. Thus, the damage to each policeman is equal to the roll difference (2) plus the aggressiveness (+1) plus one FUDGE die. The first policeman rolls a \oplus , so he takes damage as if beaten by 4 ($2 + 1 + 1$), so the gang can decide what happens to him – perhaps they'd like to cripple him but leave him alive, forcing the other police unit to come to his rescue. The second policeman rolls a \ominus , so she takes damage as if beaten by 2 ($2 + 1 - 1$) and is merely incapacitated. The third rolls \oplus , so is the same as the first. The fourth policeman rolls \square , so is killed ($2 + 1 + 0 = 3$).

The damage to the gang is equal to the aggressiveness (+1) plus one FUDGE die. The first gang member rolls \square , so is wounded ($1 + 0 = 1$). The second rolls \ominus ; since $1 - 1 = 0$, he escapes unharmed. The third rolls \oplus , so is incapacitated ($1 + 1 = 2$).

If instead the battle had been a tie, the gang's aggressiveness (+1) would still have ruled, but both teams would have taken damage based on a single die roll plus the +1 aggressiveness. With the same die rolls, two police would be incapacitated, one wounded, and one unharmed, and the gang would take the same damage as above (one incapacitated, one wounded, one unharmed).

Commercial Breaks and Plot Twists

Using Commercial Breaks

At any time, a player declare a Commercial Break by turning in one of her tokens (taking it out of play). The game stops for exactly three minutes (use your stopwatch!), during which players may talk or plan out of character, go to the bathroom, or do anything else they like, without worrying about the timing in the game. However, they can't do anything in character. It doesn't matter who invokes a Commercial Break, the game stops for everyone.

When the three minutes is up, the game resumes. Ideally, the game should be assumed to have continued to follow the real-time clock during the commercial break, so that the break ends three minutes of game time after it began. However, the GM may declare beforehand that, to make the game a little easier, no time elapses in game at all during a Commercial Break. (In this case, the three minutes should be made up when possible by padding out other things that happen in the game.) This lets the players use Commercial Breaks to catch their breath even during intense moments of fast action. Commercial Breaks can also be used in this way by the GM to catch up if the game falls behind the clock. Note: playing a Commercial Break right after an especially tense "cliffhanger" moment is to be encouraged!

Using Plot Twists

A Plot Twist is a moment when something happens that changes the story. It might be a coincidence, a surprise revelation, the arrival of unexpected support, or someone who we thought was gone coming back. It might be to the PCs' advantage, or against them, or neither. Ideally it's something no one could have predicted – or at least none of the characters.

At any time, a player can "buy" a Plot Twist by spending one or more of those tokens, giving them to the GM, who adds them to his own cache of Plot Twist tokens. Then the player in essence takes over the GMing duties for a moment by describing some event or fact. Other players can contribute Plot Twist tokens to cover the cost of the event if desired. In fact, the group can decide to pool all Plot Twists all the time, though even so, Plot Twists are always spent by a specific player

who will be the one to describe the events that result from it. (And remember, those events must be described in real time!)

How many tokens an event costs depends on the event, though no Plot Twist can ever cost less than one token. Add the following numbers of tokens:

- Affects only your character: 1
- Affects another PC or closely-allied NPC: 2
- Affects another NPC: 3
- Affects a small group: the highest cost for any member of the group, plus 1
- Affects a larger group or an entire area: 5

- Requires a big coincidence (e.g., your lawyer happens to be in the diner across the street): +1
- Requires a retcon of previous events (e.g., your lawyer isn't on vacation in Maui after all): +2
- Requires a flagrant violation of continuity (e.g., your lawyer is actually a Russian spy): +3

- Requires someone to act out of character (e.g., James Bond panicking): +1
- Requires someone to act especially in-character (e.g., James seducing a beautiful woman): -1

- Solves a problem for your character or a closely-allied character: +1
- Creates a problem for your character or a closely-allied character: -1

- Changes something in the adventure's plot: +2

- Builds on your character's background or backstory: -1

Once the cost for the Plot Twist has been determined, hand the tokens to the GM. No matter what the Plot Twist and its cost, the GM can always refuse it (by returning the tokens) or alter it (possibly returning some of the tokens).

For example, suppose your character has been thrown into jail for some questioning, but he really needs to be somewhere else right now because a virus is about to be released in Vancouver and only he knows how to stop it. Having his lawyer show up to bail him out would cost 3 (affects an NPC: 2, solves a problem for your character: +1). Having his lawyer happen to be in the diner across the street, so she can get there immediately, adds 1 for a coincidence (unless it was established beforehand that she always eats at that diner at this time of day). Being bailed out instead by a gun-toting thug trades one problem for another, so it only costs 2. And if that thug happens to be someone you once bailed out of jail and dragged off at gunpoint years ago, thus building on your backstory, it only costs 1. But if it turns out that the reason he's dragging you off to that U-Store-It is because all that stuff about the virus was a red herring to cover up the real plan (involving diverting big cash transfers through the Federal Reserve), that would cost 3. (And likely cause the GM to hand back two of those tokens and strike that last part, unless his adventure plans are flexible enough to absorb this change in the plot.)

The GM can also spend his own Plot Twist tokens in the same way to invoke Plot Twists of his own. Costs are the same, except that the costs for PCs and NPCs are reversed. When the GM spends these tokens, he gives them back to the players of the affected characters, and they can spend them again. Thus, Plot Twists can be passed back and forth between player and GM throughout the game; they are never taken out of play.

Why does a GM need Plot Twists, when GMs can simply describe any events they like anyway? In RealTime, the GM can certainly describe events, even surprising and unexpected ones, whenever he likes. But normally, he should spend Plot Twists any time that the events he's describing aren't provided for in the original adventure description. Thus, he'll use Plot Twists to help get the story back onto track when events threaten to pull it off (for instance, to prevent a lucky PC from killing off a villain who's going to be needed later in the story), or to help make up for lost or excess time when the game's parity with real time has slipped, or when he needs to cover for something he didn't account for when designing the original adventure, or when he needs to fiddle with the game's progress in order to ensure that suspense and tension reach climaxes at the appropriate times and in the appropriate circumstances. Sometimes he's playing them on behalf of the villains or NPCs in the same way players play them on behalf of their own characters, and sometimes he's just using them for plot concerns.

Having the GM buy Plot Twists from the players, and vice versa, helps maintain a balance in the game, so that everything that pulls the game away from the original plot is countered by something that pulls it back. This models the "karmic balance" of TV and movie plot twists, where the more crazily things go bad for the heroes, the more crazily they go well later.)

At the end of a typical game, almost all the Plot Twists will be in the GM's hands. Players have a lot more reasons to spend Plot Twists than do GMs.

Development

Improving Skills

When you're playing RealTime in an extended or multiple-session campaign instead of a one-shot, the GM can provide for character improvement. This won't always be appropriate; if the game starts with competent characters, they probably won't improve much from one adventure to another. (Few if any of the characters in 24 really got better at anything between seasons, for instance.) But in cases where it is appropriate, the GM should give 0, 1, or 2 points to each character. As a rule of thumb, the total number of points the GM gives out should be equal to the number of hours in the game. The GM can divide them up evenly, or portion them out based on how well the players played their characters, how many goals they achieved, or how many learning opportunities they took advantage of. You can spend these points to improve skills (no higher than 8, though). When you improve a skill, the specialization also improves the same amount, so it's always two higher than its base skill.

Maintaining Real Time When Playing

Identifying Slow, Medium, and Fast Actions

As a player, you have to think not only about what your character will do, but also how long it will take, and how it will fit in with other actions going on in the game. Of course, this is only possible if you have a good sense for how long an action takes. It will be helpful for you to have a stopwatch on hand, and sometimes you'll want to get up and walk around and act out some of the actions your character is taking as you're describing the actions. But you won't have time to figure out how long it takes before deciding to take the action, so you'll need to think on your feet.

Once you have a fair idea how long an action will take, you'll also need to have an idea of how long the same action will take to describe. You can then divide up all actions into three types: fast (things that take more time to say than do – like firing a gun at someone), medium (things that take about the same amount of time to say as to do – like logging into a computer), and slow (things that take longer to do than say – like driving to the 7-Eleven). You might be surprised at how few actions are fast, but they'll cause the most problems!

Slow Actions

Slow actions are useful because they leave some "slack" time in which to do things like letting other players take their actions, figuring out die rolls, taking notes, thinking, or even going to the bathroom. Sometimes you can turn medium or even fast actions into slow actions by simply finding more efficient ways of saying things. For instance, describing several actions in one, more abstract description can save time. Instead of "I listen at the door," waiting for a response, then "I unlock the door and carefully open it little by little, peering inside", you could just say "I cautiously listen, then open the door". You might not feel comfortable with leaving out details because you're afraid the GM will zap you: "you never said you checked it for traps!" Don't worry – the GM needs you to save time and won't punish you for doing so, not in RealTime!

Medium Actions

Medium actions take only a little bit of finesse to keep up with. First, you need to do game stuff (like rolling dice and adding up totals) at the same time as you're saying the action. Just go straight from the statement to the outcome. If it's a straightforward enough action that you can make a reasonable guess about what the difficulty is, roll, add, compare, and then describe the outcome, all in one sentence. "I slip the splints into place and fasten the straps. 'Now, don't move that leg more than you have to for the next few hours.'" You can do the same thing if you're not sure what the difficulty is, but the GM reacts to your description by holding up fingers indicating the difficulty. If you don't know and the GM hasn't figured it out yet, just tack your total roll onto

the end of the description. "I count out my beads as I recite the invocation of the spell, finishing with 'Begone, foul demon!', total 5." This lets the GM flow directly into describing the result.

The other trick with medium actions is when multiple players have their characters on camera at the same time, and they're all doing medium actions at the same time. The only way to keep up is to have everyone talking at once! To avoid that, try to convert some of the medium actions to slightly slow ones, to make some "slack" time in which other players can do their actions, using the methods described above for slowing down fast actions. Another approach is to talk in character about what you're going to do. "Okay, Wash, you start the ship up; Zoë, do a security scan, and Simon, see what you can do about Jayne; I'll try to fix this relay." Assuming Wash, Zoë, and Simon choose to follow orders, there's no need for their players to spell out their actions. They can simply nod or say "I do that", or just roll wordlessly and get on with the results.

Fast Actions

Fast actions are the real problem. Usually what you need to do is put a bunch of fast actions together and call them one more-abstract medium or slow action. That's what one-on-one combat and team combat do: they replace a bunch of fast actions (individual attacks) with one slow action (an entire exchange of attacks and defenses). Sometimes you can do the same thing with other actions, as in the example of cautiously opening a door.

You can also keep up with real time by talking in character about the actions (talking is always a medium action, since it always takes as long to say something as to say that you're going to say it!), so when it's time to actually do the actions, you can be brief (as brief as "I do that"). For example, "Okay, what I'm going to do is pull out the lever, then before the engine can spin, I'll drop the lever, punch the code in with my right hand, and hold the mask over my face with my left hand. Don't worry, I can do it fast enough, I've done it before. Ready? Here goes nothing!" Now you can do that complex action in an instant – just roll the dice, the GM will know exactly what you do, even though it only takes as long as the dice roll takes.

For some actions, you can say them a lot faster by not saying them at all: for instance, just like when you were a child, point your finger like a gun, flick your thumb, and say "Blam!" – that's much faster than saying "I shoot at Charlie" (and you can still be rolling dice with your other hand).

What if you really can't justify talking about your actions, and you can't sum them up into one medium or slow action? Perhaps the best thing is to avoid that action, but when that's not an option, go ahead anyway. The game will fall a few seconds behind real time. Hopefully a slow action will come up soon that'll let you get the game back on time, and it'll all add up in the end. If you can't make it add up, perhaps a Commercial Break is the only way. (Though the GM will be looking for ways to create situations that will call for slow actions, so don't give up too soon.)

Splitting Up

One of the most common problems with roleplaying games is the conundrum of whether to split up the player characters or keep them together. In-game reasons often suggest splitting up is a good idea, but the players rightly resist, because a split-up group doesn't make for good roleplaying. Each player has to wait with nothing to do while the GM handles the other group, and keeping everything in sync is difficult. And it's extra work for the GM. Most roleplayers have gotten in the habit of finding excuses to stick together.

All of that can be true in RealTime, but sometimes, it's just as important to find reasons to split up the group! Often a split-up group gives you some flexibility in handling time, particularly in the area of covering boring stretches of time while your characters are getting from place to place, or doing very slow actions. All you have to do is cede the camera to another subgroup and the game keeps flowing. This is good for everyone, because if you have nowhere else to turn the camera during those boring stretches, odds are the GM will make them interesting by improvising some kind of complication. If all you're trying to do is get to the bus stop, the last thing you need is an improvising GM along the way!

Of course once you've split the group up, you'll need to coordinate the actions of the various parts of the group. It's best if the time you're spending checking your luggage and getting your ticket validated is the same as the time that your teammates are infiltrating the airport's control tower, so that by the time they're past the guards, hooked into the mainframe, and in place, you're already on the plane and ready to take over the tracking system, while they take care of the tedious tasks of manipulating the radar to cover up your activities. You have to think like a screenwriter and make sure there is only one place the camera wants to be at any given moment. Of course, there's no reason you can't keep two interesting threads of parallel action going at once, by keeping in communication (with walkie-talkies, telepathy, cell phones, or an ansible) so they blend into one thread of action; but that's more difficult to coordinate.

Making Use Of Down-Time

There's one more thing you can do to help the game along, and that's see to your own out-of-game needs when you have time. If you need to update an equipment list, refresh your drink, tell someone about your promotion, use the necessaries, or heat up another slice of pizza, make sure you're doing it at a time when your character is doing something equally uninteresting to the camera. If your character is off-camera, think of what you can be doing to take care of such issues now while you have time. If you don't have anything to do, see if there's a way you can help the other players keep up with the clock. Even if you can't take notes for them, they'll appreciate it greatly if you use the time to refresh their drinks and get them a slice of pizza, and they may do the same for you later when your character is frantically dodging the stormtroopers and trying to disable the tractor beam while their characters are just unloading cargo.

Maintaining Real Time When GMing

Most of the things that GMs need to do to maintain real time are the same things the players need to do, and many more are considerations made while designing adventures (to be described in a separate document). But there are some unique things the GM can do while playing to keep the game and the clock working together.

Resolving Actions

It's even more important than with most games that the GM be intimately familiar with the rules, in particular with target values. Fortunately, there aren't that many rules to be familiar with. But you won't have time to think about rules much. It might be helpful to spend a little time before your first game thinking of challenges – things that might come up in the game, and even more usefully, things that probably won't – and then figure out the target for someone attempting to do those actions. A little practice will go a long way.

Once you can come up with targets at a moment's notice, as a player starts describing an action, start anticipating what she's going to say and figuring out the target even before she finishes saying it. Once you're relatively sure, hold up fingers for the target value; or watch the roll so you can indicate success or failure with a thumbs up or down while she's still finishing her description of the action. This will help the player speed along with the resolution, all in the same sentence. This is especially important for medium actions.

Handling Perception

You may have to roll for whether anyone notices something fairly often during some adventures. Have a cheat sheet of character perceptions (make sure it includes Know, Use, and any relevant specializations likely to come up in the adventure) so you can quickly roll against them. If you're using dice, since FUDGE dice come in sets of four per color, let the player hold two and hold the other two yourself – that way you can roll a big handful of all the dice for all the PCs at once (note their colors on that cheat sheet) to do a mass perception roll. This task is a great place where a computer program can speed things up and make them easier.

Dealing With Players

Be sure to do things that encourage the players to play in ways that help you keep up with real time, and to stay within the conventions of whatever genre, style, and mood you're setting. If a player takes his actions quickly and decisively, and describes them the same, don't punish her for not spelling out in tedious detail all the precautions she might have taken. Sure, in real life you might need to go through all those details, and in a typical roleplaying game, the GM might be picky

about them. After all, there's no way to know whether they forgot to do a small detail that will turn out important.

But in RealTime there isn't time to quibble. Instead, rely on the character's skills. Suppose a character suspects that someone has tampered with a car engine to reduce its efficiency, and is checking for signs of sabotage. Trying to keep up with real time, the player doesn't describe in explicit detail what she checks; she doesn't specify that she's checking for booby-traps, for instance. But you know there is one. If the character has a good Know skill, let the player roll on it to notice the booby-trap anyway. You're just assuming that the character knows to take care of details even if the player doesn't have time to describe them.

Watch for players who aren't cooperating with the team effort to make time work. If a player is allowing other players to cede the camera to her, but isn't ceding the camera back to the others, or is always talking over other players, interrupting action, and generally hogging the spotlight, take steps to prevent it. Don't punish the player – she probably doesn't even realize, she's probably just doing what she would have done in any other roleplaying game and forgetting to do the “screenwriter” element of the game. Just quietly remind her when an opportunity arises, and until then, nudge the camera off her to other characters, even if you have to do it by forcing her actions to take a while.

For instance, if she's trying to key in a password to access an encrypted file, and meanwhile it's getting towards time when another character's action needs camera time, you might rule that the password is long and complex and takes a while to type in correctly, or even that the computer locks up and needs to be restarted. Without a hint of recrimination, simply note, “This will take you a few minutes, but that's good, because we need to see what's happened to Kaylee and River anyway.” Odds are she'll take the gentle reminder that she's been neglecting screenwriter concerns, and do a better job of it when the camera gets back to her, at least for a while.

Of course if she keeps stubbornly refusing to cooperate, it's time for sterner measures. These are best done by out-of-game means, rather than by trying to punish the character in the game. Take the player aside (you might want to use a Commercial Break or some slack caused by a set of slow actions for this) and remind her about the need to find ways to dovetail actions with other actions. Don't forget that this is hard to get in the hang of, so be forgiving, then jump back into the game.

Things Outside The Game

If you have food or snacks at your games, try to use ones that don't take a lot of time to prepare, or are very involving to eat. Save the fancier stuff for a week you're playing some other game. Finger food is good, though messy finger food can be bad. You score extra “that was cool!” points if you can arrange the food to be the same thing that the characters will be eating at about the same time, and that also helps strengthen real time – if it takes that much time to eat, it takes that much time to eat!

Designate a period of time, probably at the beginning of the session, for socialization. Encourage people to talk about how their weeks went, what's been going on in their lives, etc. Also give some time for people to talk about "business" concerns: what will we be playing next week, who's bringing the pizza, etc. Don't start the game until you're sure everyone's worked all of this stuff out of their system! (This is good advice in any game, but vital for RealTime, which has much less tolerance for momentum-breaking moments of out-of-character chatter.)

Make a schedule for the game. Have an idea for when the game should start, when it's supposed to end, and when you expect the game to reach various points along the way. Inform players, before the game, what the designated start and end times are. Use the schedule to hurry or pad out the progress of the story to keep close to schedule. Often, in-game events and the actions of NPCs will help set the schedule, but you should also set target times for PC activities to be completed by. Setting one "milestone" per hour should keep you on time without turning the game into a railroad.

Think about any special needs your group has before the game begins, and whether they could have any effect on time. If so, work in accommodations for these needs beforehand. For instance, if a player might have medical needs to take a break in the middle of the game, try to provide a reason for that player's character to be out of the action for the same time, or if you can't, to stop the whole game around that time. Keeping up with real time is great, but seeing to your player's needs is more important, so if you have to stop the clock, stop it.

Some things that interrupt the flow of time in real time can be adapted to the game by simply making an in-game parallel. For instance, if the player needs a smoke break, maybe her character smokes too. That way, if the player absolutely can't go another minute without a smoke, but doesn't want to miss the action, you can say with perfect aplomb, "if you can't go without a smoke neither can your character". If a phone call interrupts the game and a player has to take the call, have that player's character get a similar call on her cell phone. But don't take this too far. If a player insists on taking a phone call that doesn't seem important to you, it's probably fair to say that her character also insists on taking a phone call that doesn't seem important to the other characters. But if it really is important, it's just tacky to try to translate that into the game.

When You Have Too Much Time

More often than you might expect, you'll probably find that you have too much slack time. That is, you have time when the players are doing boring things like trying to get from one place to another, or waiting for something to be analyzed. Usually, the best way to fill in these lulls is to let the players talk in character – either planning, plotting, and trying to figure stuff out, or doing "character stuff" (there's always time for characters to flirt, argue, negotiate, and banter with one another!). Another possibility is to throw just enough interestingness into whatever dull thing they're doing, to pad out the time. (If you've watched the second season of 24, think of any scene involving Kim for examples of this. Though frankly, I bet you can do better!)

Finally, especially when it's later in the game, a good way to fill in the time is to cut the camera to some NPCs and play out their scene. (Try not to be self-conscious about it!) Almost any action movie or TV show will occasionally let you see the villains, or innocent bystanders, doing stuff without any of the main characters on screen; this lets you do the same thing. It might help to plan some of these scenes out ahead of time (especially if you know that there'll be a long gap in the PCs' actions) so you can make a good balance between giving too much away, and doing enough to be tantalizing and colorful.

When You Don't Have Enough Time

Commercial Breaks can be used to make up time when you're starting to fall behind. Even if you are letting the clock tick during the commercials, you can still get a bit more time from a Commercial Break. A Commercial Break can give you a chance to think things through, so you can act more quickly when the show comes back on, and thus, catch up with the clock. You can also hide a certain amount of time slippage inside a Commercial Break because no one is going to closely scrutinize how much time something takes if it happens when the camera is turned off.

Sometimes the best way to make up for falling behind the clock is to make things take longer by interposing interruptions and complications. Of course you don't want to get carried away and make players feel like they're being punished with arbitrary problems. You can do this easily by making sure that some of the time, these interruptions are beneficial to the characters. If a PC's cell phone rings, sometimes it should be good news!

Alternate Rules

The eight skills listed are suitable for most any action genre game and many other genres and settings. However, some worlds and games might require some change to the list of skills. For example, if the game is set in an emergency room, the GM might combine skills, eliminate some, and then subdivide the Heal skill into several more specific skills, to better reflect the needs and focus of the game. (It's handy to make sure each skill starts with a unique letter, so you can still express targets with a convenient abbreviation like **M3**.) For example, a game set in an emergency room might use the skills shown on the sample character sheet on the next page.

When a character needs to do something that isn't covered by any of them, you can just assume they do a competent but not a great job. Make sure when you write the adventure that the skills match the challenges! That won't stop the players from driving the ambulance, but it will help avoid the situation where their success at doing so is key to the outcome of the adventure.

There's no reason that the game has to have eight skills – though it's probably best that you don't veer too far from that, to keep things quick but allow characters to be different. If you change the number of skills, you should change the number of points players start with; each skill added or removed should change the number by 3.

Name _____ Appearance _____ **RealTime ER**
 Gender _____ Age _____ Background _____

<input type="checkbox"/>	Comfort	bedside manner, get information from reluctant patients, break bad news gently	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Diagnose	identify obscure conditions, determine appropriate treatment, give a "bullet" summary	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Epidemiology	identify and treat diseases and viral infections, know about public health issues, advise on prevention	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	First Aid	stop bleeding, apply sutures, set broken bones, calm a frantic patient, do CPR, use a crash cart	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Medicine	prescribe and apply medicines, recognize effects of drugs and medicines, avoid negative interactions	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Nursing	put in an IV, handle patient care, intubate, handle catheters, do obstetrics, calm unruly patients	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Resist	resist persuasion, pain, fear, your own worst impulses, and the stresses of your job	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Surgery	perform surgical procedures, identify the right procedure to use	<input type="checkbox"/>	

You might add a skill if your game world includes some "extra" element like magic, telepathy, space flight, or conspiracy theory, which isn't ruled by any of the other skills, or which is important enough to be split off. In this case you'll also want to create a chart for the players saying what target values will accomplish what kinds of things, so you and the players will have the same idea about this skill and what it can do. For instance, in a world where demonology is a secret art used to accomplish magical ends through the summoning and control of demons, a new skill, Thaumaturgy, might be added to the existing eight skills, and players get 33 points to spend on those nine skills. You should provide a set of target values for what can be done with Thaumaturgy, and let the players get familiar with it before the game, if their characters would be familiar with it. It might look like this:

Target	Difficulty	Example
1	Routine	T1: none (unaware of the presence of demons)
2	Really Easy	T2: suspect the presence and actions of a demon
3	Fairly Easy	T3: identify a demon's type and power level
4	Moderate	T4: summon a minor demon
5	Hard	T5: control a minor demon
6	Very Hard	T6: banish or take over a minor demon; summon a major demon
7	Extremely Hard	T7: control a major demon
8	Nearly Impossible	T8: banish or take over a major demon

In actual play you'd want something with more detail, that explains what constitutes a minor or major demon, what they could do or be made to do, etc.