
SISU

TABLETOP ROLEPLAYING GAME

PLAYER GUIDE

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What is Sisu?

It is a Finnish word, but sisu is more than just a word; it embodies the spirit of resilience, determination, and perseverance in Finnish culture. It is pronounced "See-Soo".

Sisu is a tabletop roleplaying game (TTRPG) — a collaborative, imagination-driven experience you share around a table with friends. If you've never played one before, here's the idea: one person takes on the role of the **Game Master (GM)**, who designs a world, sets the scene, and portrays the people and dangers the group encounters. Everyone else plays as a **player character (PC)** — a unique individual they've created with their own strengths, weaknesses, and personality.

There are no winners or losers. Instead, the group works together (or sometimes against each other) to navigate whatever situation the GM presents — whether that's a tense investigation, a desperate firefight, or a conversation with a shady contact. When you want your character to do something uncertain, you roll dice to find out what happens. You should not consider this game to be the players vs the GM, rather the GM is there to guide and facilitate an entertaining shared experience. The rules below spell out exactly how that works.

All you really need to play is this rulebook, some dice, a character sheet, and a group of people ready to tell a story together.

Creating A Character

Write your character name at the top of the portrait box. Write your title or profession at the bottom of the portrait box. Draw a picture of yourself and/or describe your looks in the portrait box.

Assign your character stats for Body, Mind, Sense, and Sisu by distributing d8, d6, d6, d4 for an already skilled character or d4, d4, d4, d4 for a non-skilled character (GM decides). Then select one stat to boost, going up by one die type — for example, d4 becomes d6, d6 becomes d8, and d8 becomes d10.

The GM will say how much money you start with. Starting equipment can either be purchased or alternatively each player may start with one weapon and one tool.

Fill in your armor value, ranging between 0 and 3, depending on what you have equipped. Fill in your speed in spaces (default 6). Fill in your max and current HP (default 10) and max and current FP (should match HP).

Select **2 skills** (observing any prerequisites) and **1 flaw**.

Ability Check Stats

BODY	Your measure of physical prowess. Includes things like strength, dexterity, balance, physical precision, stealth, and constitution.
MIND	Your ability to comprehend complex ideas, do research, understand things, keep your composure, steel your resolve, resist manipulation.
SENSE	Your powers of persuasion, magnetism, artistic flair, general likability, knowing contacts, manipulating others, and lying.
SISU	Your power of determination, assertiveness, and improvising. Can be used as a catch-all when not sure which stat to use.

Armor

Armor value is subtracted from any incoming damage. Total armor value can never go above 5. It is possible for armor to break and become ineffective. Armor may affect your speed.

Speed

In a single move, you can travel up to your speed value in square spaces (normally 5×5 feet). Your default speed is 6. Some environmental conditions, outside influences, or other modifiers may change this value.

Health Points (HP)

Damage causes you to lose HP. If you drop to 0 you are unconscious and dying — without healing you will die in 30 minutes. HP cannot go below 0.

A **short rest** (1 hour) lets you regain d4 HP. A **long rest** (6 hours) restores all HP.

Fatigue Points (FP)

Certain attacks, using skills, or strenuous activities can cause you to lose FP. Using a skill costs 1 FP unless otherwise stated. If your FP falls to 0, at the start of each turn you must make a BODY (4+) ability check or suffer 1 damage to HP. While at 0 FP you also cannot use any skills. A short or long rest restores all FP.

Skills

Skills provide bonus modifiers for ability checks or combat. Every player starts with 2 skills. More may be added when upgrading. You can apply a single skill benefit to each ability check if it makes logical sense. Using a skill costs 1 FP unless otherwise stated.

Flaw

A flaw is something that may cause problems for the player. Every player starts with 1 flaw, chosen and approved by the GM. This flaw may change later or more may be added.

Inventory

A player may carry up to 9 items; the 10th causes **encumbrance**. **Bulky** items take 2 inventory slots (GM decides what is bulky). Being encumbered halves your speed and causes disadvantage on attack and ability checks. Very small items may take no slots at GM's discretion.

A Turn

A single turn consists of **1 move**, **1 action**, and **1 bonus action** in any order. Bonus actions are very quick things: a short phrase, a hand gesture, switching/dropping a weapon, etc. Healing or standing from prone are full actions. The GM determines what counts as a bonus action.

Non-combat Turn

Players may announce actions at any time. Once a player starts, others must wait unless hindering or assisting. A player may take multiple turns in a row if nobody else wants to act. The GM may announce NPC/monster turns.

Combat Rounds

A single round of combat consists of everyone involved performing 1 turn, lasting 5 seconds (12 rounds per minute). The round includes all players and enemies involved in combat.

Initiative

Often turn order is logically clear. Some skills let a character act first. In cases where turn order is not clear, all participants roll SISU die — highest acts first.

Ability Checks

When a player wants to perform a difficult action, they roll the die assigned to the relevant ability stat. You may also roll any equipment die that makes sense for the situation. Take only the highest result. The GM sets the target value; being over or under may grant bonuses or problems.

Advantage

Roll two of the same ability dice (and any equipment dice), choose the highest result. All applicable modifiers still apply.

Disadvantage

Roll two of the same ability dice (and any equipment dice), choose the lowest result. All applicable modifiers still apply.

Assisting Others (non-combat)

If logical, the GM may allow another player to assist, granting a +1 or +2 bonus (GM discretion).

Hindering Others (non-combat)

If logical, the GM may allow another player to hinder, applying a –1 or –2 penalty (GM discretion).

Attacking

As an action, players, monsters, and NPCs can attack. Once an attack is declared, a damage check is performed.

Damage Check

Players, monsters, NPCs and breakable objects can take damage against their HP.

The attacker rolls their ability die (and any weapon dice) and takes the highest result after modifiers — this is the **damage value**. The target rolls their associated ability die (usually BODY) and adds their armor value and any other modifiers — this is the **defense value**. Damage to HP = damage value – defense value.

Rolling a natural 1 on all rolled dice: weapon used is damaged (drops one die level).

Rolling the highest number on all rolled dice: target's armor is damaged (–1 defense) and may gain a lasting wound.

Unarmed melee damage checks are always at disadvantage unless specified by a skill.

Advantage / Disadvantage on Damage Checks

Roll two damage dice (weapon or unarmed), choose the highest (advantage) or lowest (disadvantage). All applicable modifiers still apply.

Other Modifiers

If a player can explain why a modifier should apply and the GM agrees it makes logical sense, it may be allowed — e.g., applying poison to a blade for +1 damage or the poisoned condition.

Short Rest

Taking a short rest requires 1 hour of relaxing activity. You regain d4 HP and all FP.

Long Rest

Taking a long rest requires 6 hours of sleep. You regain all HP and FP. If you do not have a long rest once every day, your FP will drop to 0.

Upgrading A Character

Whenever the GM sees fit — at milestones or adventure completion — you may upgrade your character with at least one of:

1. Upgrade any ability die 1 level (max d12)
2. Gain a new skill (max 10 skills)
3. Suggest improvement to an existing skill (at GM discretion)

You may also change your flaw if it makes sense. In some cases another flaw may be added. All upgrades are at the discretion of the GM.

Weapon Modifiers

Players may occasionally find improved weapons. An improved version goes up a die level to a maximum of d12. Very rarely, a weapon could be d20.

Weapons can become worn or damaged, causing them to go down a die level or take a –1 or –2 damage penalty until repaired. Armor can also become worn or broken and need to be replaced.

Example Equipment

Melee Weapons

Weapon	Requirement	Attack Die	Notes
Knife, Dagger, Club, Staff	d4 BODY	d4	—
Axe, Machete, Short Sword, Spear	d6 BODY	d6	—
Katana, Samurai Sword, Glaive	d6 BODY & Martial Arts	d8	Bulky
Long Sword, Mace, Battleaxe	d6 BODY	d8	Bulky

Ranged Weapons

Weapon	Range	Attack Die	Notes
Sling, Dart	8 spaces	d4	—
Hand gun	20 spaces	d6	—
Bow	20 spaces	d6	Bulky
Rifle	40 spaces	d8	Bulky

Example Equipment (cont.)

Armor

Armor	Armor Bonus	Speed Penalty	Notes
Shield	+1	—	Bulky
Lite armor	+1	—	—
Medium armor	+2	–1 space	Bulky
Heavy armor	+3	–2 spaces	Bulky

Miscellaneous

Item	Effect	Notes
Medkit	Restore d6 HP, 3 uses	Bulky
Adrenaline Shot	Restore d6 FP, 1 use	—
Rope with grappling hook	50 ft	—

Conditions

All condition self-recovery checks are made at the start of each subsequent turn, unless otherwise stated by the GM.

Blinded Can't see; auto-fails checks requiring sight. Attacks against have advantage; own attacks have disadvantage. <i>Self-recovery: 10 min</i>	Confused –2 penalty on all MIND and SENSE ability checks. <i>Self-recovery: MIND (≥6) or 10 min</i>	Deafened Can't hear; auto-fails checks requiring hearing. <i>Self-recovery: 10 min</i>
Dying Requires healing within a timeframe (default 30 min, or GM-determined) or suffer a lasting wound or death. <i>Self-recovery: GM determined</i>	Encumbered Speed halved. Disadvantage on attack checks and ability checks. <i>Self-recovery: Reduce items to 9 or fewer</i>	Frightened Disadvantage on all ability checks and attacks while the source of fear is visible. Cannot move toward the source. <i>Self-recovery: MIND (≥6) or 10 min</i>
Grappled Speed becomes 0. <i>Self-recovery: BODY (≥ opponent BODY roll)</i>	Incapacitated Cannot take actions or reactions. —	Invisible Attack checks against have disadvantage; own attack checks have advantage. —
Paralyzed Incapacitated, cannot move or speak. Attack checks against have advantage. <i>Self-recovery: 10 min</i>	Poisoned Disadvantage on attack checks and ability checks. <i>Self-recovery: BODY (≥6) or 1 hr</i>	Prone Disadvantage on non-ranged attacks. Adjacent attacks against have advantage; ranged attacks against have disadvantage. <i>Self-recovery: Take an action to stand</i>
Restrained Speed becomes 0. Attack checks against have advantage; own attack checks have disadvantage. —	Stunned Incapacitated, cannot move, can speak only falteringly. Attack checks against have advantage. <i>Self-recovery: MIND (≥6) or 10 min</i>	Unconscious Incapacitated, unaware of surroundings, drops held items, falls prone. Attack checks against have advantage. <i>Self-recovery: 10 min (unless Dying)</i>

Lasting Wounds

Occasionally a player may suffer a permanent or long-lasting injury from a major event or in place of death. The GM determines when these happen and if they are recoverable over time.

Example Skills

Acrobat <i>Prereq: BODY ≥ d6</i> +2 to BODY ability checks requiring balance, climbing, jumping, or swinging.	Bash Master <i>Prereq: BODY ≥ d6</i> +2 on attack checks with all blunt weapons.	Blade Master <i>Prereq: BODY ≥ d6</i> +2 on attack checks with all bladed weapons.
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Example Skills (cont.)

Body Builder <i>Prereq: BODY ≥ d6</i> +2 on BODY strength ability checks.	Book Smarts <i>Prereq: MIND ≥ d6</i> +2 on MIND research ability checks.	Brawler <i>Prereq: BODY ≥ d6</i> No disadvantage on attack checks for unarmed attacks.
Charmer <i>Prereq: SENSE ≥ d6</i> +2 on SENSE manipulation ability checks involving other intelligent creatures.	Craftsman <i>Prereq: SISU ≥ d6</i> +4 to SISU ability checks for crafting and repair.	Deceiver <i>Prereq: SENSE ≥ d6</i> +2 on SENSE disguise, bluffing, or deception ability checks involving other intelligent creatures.
Hacker <i>Prereq: MIND ≥ d6 and SISU ≥ d6</i> +4 to MIND ability checks for infiltrating computer systems and electronics.	Healer <i>Prereq: MIND ≥ d6</i> Gain 1 HP (for yourself or someone adjacent) every minute.	Investigator <i>Prereq: MIND ≥ d6</i> +4 to MIND ability checks when investigating a location.
Iron Resolve <i>Prereq: BODY ≥ d6</i> +2 on BODY endurance ability checks.	Lockpicker <i>Prereq: MIND or SISU ≥ d6</i> +4 to MIND or SISU lockpicking ability checks.	Martial Arts <i>Prereq: BODY ≥ d6 and MIND ≥ d6</i> Allows use of martial weapons and no disadvantage on unarmed attacks.
Precise <i>Prereq: BODY ≥ d6</i> +2 on BODY dexterity ability checks.	Quick To Act <i>Prereq: SISU ≥ d8</i> Can choose to act first when determining initiative. Recharges on short/long rest.	Range Master <i>Prereq: BODY ≥ d6</i> +2 on attack checks with all ranged weapons.
Second Wind <i>Prereq: BODY ≥ d6</i> If HP or FP falls below 2, react to roll d4 and regain that many HP or FP. Recharges on short/long rest.	Smooth Talker <i>Prereq: SENSE ≥ d6</i> +2 on SENSE ability checks when trying to convince someone to do or believe something.	Stealthy <i>Prereq: BODY ≥ d6</i> +2 on BODY sneaking ability checks.
Tracker <i>Prereq: MIND ≥ d6 and SENSE ≥ d6</i> +4 to MIND or SENSE ability checks when attempting to track someone or something.		

GM Hints

Setting Difficulty

When setting a target roll value to meet or exceed for a check, use this table as a guide.

Roll Target	Difficulty	Description
1–3	Trivial	Nearly guaranteed success. Use only when there is only a slight chance of failure.
4–6	Easy	A starting character has a fair shot. Good for simple tasks where failure is possible but unlikely.
7–9	Moderate	Requires a d6 or better to succeed reliably. The right default for most meaningful challenges.
10–12	Hard	A d8 or higher is needed for a decent chance. Most untrained characters will fail.
13–15	Very Hard	Even skilled characters may fall short. Expect to rely on modifiers and assistance.
16–18	Severe	Only top-tier characters with favorable modifiers have a real shot. Success should feel hard-won.
19+	Extreme	Extreme difficulty with very high chance of failure.

Roll Results

When determining success or failure for a check, use this table as a guide.

GM Hints (cont.)

Margin	Outcome	Description
7+ above	Critical Success	Super impressive success! Comes with unexpected bonuses.
4–6 above	Strong Success	Accomplished with room to spare. The GM may offer a small additional benefit.
1–3 above	Success	The task is completed cleanly with no complications.
Exact match	Marginal Success	Just barely succeeded.
1–3 below	Near Miss	Task fails, but the GM may allow a partial outcome or a retry at a cost.
4–6 below	Failure	Clear failure. Leaves a minor complication or setback in its wake.
7+ below	Critical Failure	Catastrophic failure! Comes with severe consequences.

Extra Resources

Online rules PDFs and character sheet — <https://sisurpg.com/resources>

Examples of play in fantasy and modern settings — <https://sisurpg.com/exampleplay>

Thanks & Inspiration

Sisu would not exist without the games that came before it. **Dungeons & Dragons** established this hobby's core vocabulary. **Tales From the Loop** and **Kids on Bikes** showed that light mechanics can tell great stories, shaping Sisu's approach. **Cairn** influenced inventory, fatigue, and the fiction-first philosophy. Thank you to all four communities.

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