

GURPS[®]

Fourth Edition

POWER-UPS[™] 6

QUIRKS



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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	3	<i>Power Quirks</i>	12
Publication History	3	Looks and Mannerisms	13
About the Author	3	<i>Dress Codes</i>	13
About <i>GURPS</i>	3	Mental Quirks	17
1. QUIRKY SUBJECTS	4	Meta-Game Quirks	21
<i>Hard vs. Soft</i>	4	Physical Quirks	22
Quirky Effects	4	Preferences and Aversions	25
Changing Quirks in Play	5	<i>Alternative Sexuality Quirks</i>	26
<i>Is Five Enough?</i>	6	Preoccupations	27
<i>Afflicting Quirks</i>	7	<i>Alcohol-Related Quirks</i>	29
2. THE QUIRKS	8	Skill Quirks	30
<i>Quirky Names</i>	8	Social Quirks	32
Convictions	8	Supernatural Quirks	33
Disadvantage Variations	9	INDEX	35
Exotic Quirks	12	QUIRK-LEVEL DISADVANTAGES	35
		QUIRKS	36



INTRODUCTION

Few things breathe life into a fictional person as surely as interesting peculiarities and foibles. In an RPG, however, noting such traits on a character sheet is dicey . . . if they're interpreted prescriptively, the hero can end up hamstrung by life's smallest wrinkles and curveballs. Fortunately, **GURPS** accounts for this and provides a way to strike a balance: *quirks*. These colorful traits enable you to personalize PCs with aplomb, yet their modest price tag (-1 point apiece) formally excuses you from full-sized problems.

Despite their light weight, quirks are heavy hitters. Hand a dozen players the same list of stats and ask each one to add five quirks (the recommended number), and you'll see a dozen distinctive characters in play! Being essentially player-defined, quirks are a potent customization tool. At the same time, their point cost is trivial enough for both GMs and players to feel comfortable prioritizing individuality over game balance, which isn't true of big-ticket disadvantages.

GURPS Power-Ups 6: Quirks opens with a few words underlining and expanding the role of quirks, and then launches into an extensive collection of worked examples. You can use these as written, adapt them to individual PCs, or simply peruse them for inspiration. They should provide you with endless ideas for memorable *people* to inhabit your game worlds.

PUBLICATION HISTORY

This is the first edition of **GURPS Power-Ups 6: Quirks**. It includes all the quirks defined as formal character traits in **GURPS** publications up to February 2013 – notably those from the **GURPS Basic Set**, **GURPS Bio-Tech**, the **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy** series, **GURPS Horror**, **GURPS Low-Tech Companion 1: Philosophers and Kings**, **GURPS Supers**, **GURPS Thaumatology**, and *Pyramid*. These are relatively few

in number; upward of 80% of this material is original. However, NPCs found in **GURPS** publications as far back as 1986 inspired many of the new quirks!

A quirk is a minor defining feature that makes a character seem real and unique.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sean “Dr. Kromm” Punch set out to become a particle physicist in 1985, ended up the **GURPS** Line Editor in 1995, and has engineered rules for almost every **GURPS** product since. He developed, edited, or wrote dozens of **GURPS Third Edition** projects between 1995 and 2002. In 2004, he produced the **GURPS Basic Set, Fourth Edition** with David Pulver. Since then, he has created **GURPS Powers** (with Phil Masters), **GURPS Martial Arts** (with Peter Dell’Orto), **GURPS Zombies**, and the **GURPS Action, GURPS Dungeon Fantasy**, and **GURPS Power-Ups** series . . . among other things. Sean has been a gamer since 1979. His non-gaming interests include cinema, mixology, and Argentine tango. He lives in Montréal, Québec with his wife, Bonnie.

About GURPS

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Errata. Everyone makes mistakes, including us – but we do our best to fix our errors. Up-to-date errata pages for all **GURPS** releases, including this book, are available on our website – see above.

Rules and statistics in this book are specifically for the **GURPS Basic Set, Fourth Edition**. Page references that begin with B refer to that book, not this one.

CHAPTER ONE

QUIRKY SUBJECTS

A “quirk” is a minor feature that sets you aside from others. It has a negative point value, but it is not *necessarily* a disadvantage. You may take up to five quirks at -1 point apiece . . . and if you do, you’ll have five more points to spend.

While quirks have a small cost, they are a large part of what makes a character seem “real,” and merit no less thought than big-ticket items. A “valid” or “legitimate” quirk meets one of these criteria:

- It occasionally requires you to make a specific choice, or to have your character engage in a particular action or behavior. This needn’t be especially inconvenient, but it must be something that you have to *do* in the course of the game – it can’t be completely passive. Such quirks are nearly always mental in nature, and epitomize “not *necessarily* a disadvantage.”
- It causes a small game-mechanical drawback very occasionally or when engaging in a narrow set of actions. This might be a penalty to a dice roll, but it need not be. Equally good possibilities include modest bonuses to rivals’ rolls, diluted effects taken from full-sized disadvantages, small expenditures of time or money, and meta-game restrictions (e.g., forbidden abilities or rules options). Quirks like this *are* minor disadvantages. A mental quirk might work this way; physical and social quirks *always* do.

Hard vs. Soft

Players will notice that roleplaying-only quirks have “soft” effects while minor disadvantages have “hard,” unavoidable ones. That isn’t a problem – nobody has to take *any* quirks at character creation, and players are welcome to avoid those that penalize or complicate actions. There are two things to remember, though.

First, the player must roleplay “soft” quirks or receive fewer bonus character points (*Enforcing Quirks*, p. 5). Losing just one point this way compensates for the quirk left unplayed; missing *several* points makes the quirk a “hard” liability indeed. Roleplaying mini-disadvantages is encouraged, too, but the GM has the recourse of enforcing in-game effects (penalties, expenses, etc.) instead of meta-game ones (docking points). Thus, gamers who tend to forget quirks are better off choosing ones that have concrete drawbacks.

Second, quirks can be acquired in play (*Gaining New Quirks*, p. 7). Such traits represent madness, injuries, curses, and other Bad Things. They’re *meant* to be disadvantageous and thus “hard,” not minor roleplaying hooks. You can end up with these whether you like it or not!

As quirks in the first category are a “roleplaying-only” concern rather than a matter of rules, they’re lightly represented in Chapter 2. The primary goal of *GURPS Power-Ups 6: Quirks* is to establish fair “mini-disadvantages.”

QUIRKY EFFECTS

What minor drawbacks are fair? That can be tricky to nail down, but here are some *rough* guidelines:

Penalties to Success Rolls: -1 on the character’s rolls to act (e.g., attribute, skill, or active defense rolls) or to resist something (Will rolls vs. Influence skills, self-control rolls for disadvantages, etc.) – or on *allies’* rolls to assist him – in occasional circumstances.

Reaction Penalties: -1 to reactions toward the character from a small class of people, or at most 1/3 of the time (e.g., 5-6 on 1d).

Bonuses to Rivals’ Rolls: +1 to *others’* Influence rolls on the character, or on attempts to identify or notice him, in occasional circumstances.

Disadvantage Effects: *Qualitative* effects of full-sized disadvantages, infrequently or in rare circumstances. Think in terms of applying divisors (to adjust for frequency of appearance, people affected, self-control roll, etc.) and limitations sufficient to cut disadvantage cost to -1 point.

Social Inconveniences: Undesirable-but-minor social situations, significantly less serious than Dependents or Enemies, that arise on a 6 or less on 3d.

Extra Contingencies: Uncommon external effects (e.g., magnetism or True Faith) or dice rolls that most other people don’t need to worry about *do* matter for the character. For a quirk, this means an additional minor headache on rare occasions, not serious harm or incapacity.

Restricted Options: Required choices – much as for roleplaying-only quirks – worded in terms of actions, rolls, or rules options that are flatly forbidden but only occasionally relevant.

Extra Expenses: Lost or wasted cash equal to about 10% of the character’s income, as a lump sum monthly or in smaller chunks whenever the quirk crops up. The figure can be much higher for mandatory expenditures on *useful* things he gets to *keep*.

Speech Mannerisms

Speaking oddly is grounds for *many* interesting quirks.

Distinctive Speech

The way you talk makes you easy to identify. You might have a distinctive accent, a fondness for particular expressions or quotations, quirk-level Disturbing Voice (p. B132) or Stuttering (p. B157), or an incontrovertibly sesquipedalian vocabulary – be specific. Whenever somebody is searching for *you in particular* and you can't avoid speaking, you suffer -2 on rolls to pass as someone else and others have +2 to attempts to identify you.

This is twice as bad as Distinctive Features (p. 14) because it doesn't mark you until you open your mouth.

Fast Talker

This doesn't mean you're good at Fast-Talk – you just talk *too fast*. You have -1 to rolls against Administration, Leadership, and similar skills when speaking complex instructions (not when barking one-word orders), and give others -1 to their rolls to understand you, most often IQ rolls like those on p. B24.

Forbidden Word

Quirk-level Cannot Speak (p. B125). There's one *important* word that you can't utter, whether due to a psychological aversion or a supernatural curse. To make this relevant, the GM may have it crop up as a password, assess penalties to others' rolls to understand you as you pussyfoot around the concept, or have enemies exploit this as a way to identify you.

Inaccessible Idioms

You possess an ordinary voice – an exceptional one, if you enjoy the Voice advantage – but you're out of touch with how ordinary people *really communicate*. This is common among those who've grown up in enclaves or been imprisoned for a long time . . . not to mention old-timers, cold-sleepers (“One *million* dollars!”), time-travelers, and immortals. When you must “sell” an idea, typically using Diplomacy, Fast-Talk, or Propaganda, you roll at -1 unless your audience shares your background.

Involuntary Utterance

Being unable to avoid a vocalization is a verbal version of Dead Giveaway (pp. 13-14), working like Distinctive Features (p. 14) and Obvious (p. 12) by turns. This could be a trivial Neurological Disorder (p. B144) or a symptom of a serious condition like the zombie plague (“Braaaains!”).

Loud Voice

You may *think* you're whispering into the throat mike or speaking *sotto voce*, but you aren't – others can hear every word! This is a disadvantageous form of Penetrating Voice (p. B101) [1]. You get the benefits of that perk, but as you can't turn it off, you *also* have a level of Noisy (p. B146) [-2]: -2 to Stealth whenever you must coordinate with allies by voice while being sneaky, or +2 to eavesdroppers' Hearing when you're conversing normally and don't wish to be overheard. It all adds up to a quirk.

Third Person

You don't seem to know the word “I”! You habitually call yourself by your name or an alias. The GM may occasionally assign -1 to others' reactions or rolls to understand what you're talking about. This is especially suited to silly campaigns.

Stereotype

You always dress, speak, and otherwise behave like a clichéd member of a group with a reasonably strong identity: African-Americans, jocks, Spartans, wizards, etc. Whenever you interact socially with a member of that group, you must roll against the *lower* of Acting or Disguise (both default to IQ-5). Success means you seem amusingly eccentric; failure gives -1 to all reaction and Influence rolls, and critical failure gives -2.

If you're actually *good* at this, use Epitome (p. 14) instead. You can't have both.



Token

You have a prized possession that comforts you, be your investment in it emotional or superstitious. The actual quirk name should identify the item: “Always chews on a pipe,” “Carries a lucky charm,” “Has a favorite hat,” etc. This article need not be valuable, but it has to be *yours* – no generic items! It *can* be (and often is) Signature Gear.

If your Token goes missing, you'll be distracted: -1 on all IQ, Will, and Per rolls, skill rolls based on those scores, and self-control rolls, save for those that specifically concern recovering your possession. Signature Gear will find its way back to you in a day or two, erasing the penalties. For anything else, roll vs. Will daily; success lets you get over the problem, at which point you must buy off or replace Token.

While a sneak thief can get the upper hand this way, no penalties apply if your Token is clumsily snatched, knocked from your grasp, etc. in plain view. You'll simply make it your mission to get it back . . . If it's *broken* in your sight, immediately replace Token with another quirk – probably a somewhat dark one.

Record-Keeper

Many people keep a journal, photo album, or other record of events in their life. This is unwise if you engage in crime, black ops, undercover investigations, or similar – what if someone were to steal, copy, or just get a good look at your memoirs? If you have a quirk like “Keeps a journal” or “Photographs his work,” the GM has leave to introduce events that make this a problem for you once in a while. Documentation secret or secure enough that this could never happen isn’t worth a point!

Minor Addiction

You may take Addiction (p. B122) as a quirk if you’re dependent on a substance that works out to 0 points under the rules. There’s no need to record the mechanical details. A smoker whose habit is casual rather than highly addictive might have “Smokes cigars”; a devout coffee drinker, “Coffee addict”; and a stuntman with an old injury, “Pops over-the-counter painkillers.” Such quirks are more colorful and concise than fussy notation like “Addiction (Tobacco; Cheap; Legal),” “Addiction (Caffeine; Cheap; Legal),” and “Addiction (Pain pills; Cheap; Legal).”

Physiological dependency is a physical quirk, while psychological dependency is a mental one. Not all psychological dependency involves drugs. Someone who becomes irritable when deprived of pornography, soap operas, video games, etc. – or who blows excessive time or money on such things – might follow the rules for Daily Ritual (p. 28), Expensive Habit (p. 28), or Ill-Advised Hobby (pp. 28-29) but note Minor Addiction on his character sheet, if the player likes the sound of that better. Just don’t count it more than once!

As with full-fledged Addiction, alcohol presents a special case; see *Minor Alcoholism* (see boxed text).

Obsession

You may take an almost-rational and not especially unusual Obsession (p. B146) as a quirk, to reflect a minor goal. For instance, you hope to get just enough money to buy your own farm (or boat, or spaceship, or castle), you dream of starting a band, you want to visit a hard-to-reach country (or *planet*), or you seek a specific job.

“Almost-rational” and “minor” are relative. If you’re a wealthy 17th-century French nobleman, “Hopes to save enough to buy a farm” wouldn’t count – you could buy a farm outright! “Dreams of joining the Musketeers” would work, though. For a poor *métayer* (sharecropper), the farm would be a fair Obsession; becoming a Musketeer would not.

A quirk-level Obsession mainly affects choices (roleplay it!), but if others learn of it, they get +1 to attempts to manipulate you using it or give you -1 to resist or detect such manipulation (GM’s choice). For instance, Greed (12) alongside that Obsession about owning a farm means rolling at 11 or less to resist shady deals involving farmland.

Alcohol-Related Quirks

No intoxicant is as storied as alcohol. Drunkenness and alcoholism are fertile ground for quirks, provided that the gaming group is comfortable with stories that include these themes. Specific examples appear below, and several other quirks could be adapted to the cause: drinking can exacerbate Nervous Stomach (p. 25), trigger Personality Change (p. 20), and eventually cause Shaky Hands (p. 24); a common Vow (p. 9) is never to drink alcohol; and Alcoholism can be Extremely Limited (pp. 10-11) and support all manner of Disadvantage Embellishments (pp. 9-10).

The GM should review *Alcoholism* (p. B122) and *Drinking and Intoxication* (pp. B439-440) before allowing these quirks. Similar traits might exist for other intoxicants.

Alcohol Intolerance

Alcohol “goes right to your head.” You become intoxicated much more quickly than normal. You get -2 on any HT roll related to drinking.

Former Alcoholic

You used to have Alcoholism, but you’ve shed the addiction so successfully that you *don’t* have to roll to resist booze if it’s offered – you really have learned to handle things. However, being teetotal is sometimes socially inconvenient, and you may get slightly twitchy or terse in the presence of drink (-1 to self-control rolls).

Friendly Drunk

Whenever you’re *tipsy* (p. B428), instead of applying the -1 to IQ to your Will when you resist Influence rolls, apply the same -2 you have on self-control rolls. When you’re *drunk*, Will to resist others’ manipulations is at -4 rather than the usual -2. The deeper you are into your cups, the more trusting you are of others – even relative to other drunks.

Horrible Hangovers

You suffer an additional -3 to any penalties the GM assesses for excessive drinking the previous evening, and add three hours to hangover duration.

Minor Alcoholism

By the book, Alcoholism is worth -15 or -20 points. Yet countless fictional characters drink too much with few effects beyond joviality. In a larger-than-life campaign, the GM might permit a cheap, legal Addiction without the special -5 points for “insidious” or the assumption that the drinker *always* drinks to incapacitation (although booze has its usual effect if he does!) – it mostly leads to spending too much on liquor, an Expensive Habit (p. 28). Give the resulting quirk a euphemistic name like “Hits the bottle,” “Loves his drink,” or “Lush” to distinguish it.

Sleepy Drinker

Booze makes you fall asleep. Whenever you drink, you must make a Will roll alongside each HT or Carousing roll. Failure means you fall asleep, and will stay that way until awakened or you get a full night’s sleep.

INDEX

- Advantages, quirk versions, 30, 32.
- Alcohol-related quirks, 9, 10, 29.
- Aversions (quirks), 25-27.
- Belief quirks, 8.
- Claim to Hospitality, quirk version, 32.
- Clothing quirks, 13.
- Cognition quirks, 31.
- Conviction quirks, 8-9.
- Disadvantage variations, 9-12; *see also* *Quirk-Level Disadvantage index*.
- Dress-code quirks, 13.
- Exotic quirks, 12-13.
- GURPS**, 3, 8, 20, 21; **Basic Set**, 3, 6, 22; **Bio-Tech**, 3, 23; **Dungeon Fantasy**, 3, 6, 34; **Horror**, 3, 17; **Low-Tech Companion 1: Philosophers and Kings**, 3; **Supers**, 3; **Thaumatology**, 3, 21; **Martial Arts**, 21; **Mass Combat**, 6; **Powers**, 8; **Power-Ups 2: Perks**, 14, 30; **Power-Ups 5: Impulse Buys**, 21; **Gun Fu**, 21.
- Looks-related quirks, 13-14.
- Magic-related quirks, 33-34.
- Mannerisms-related quirks, 13-14.
- Mental quirks, 17-20.
- Meta-game quirks, 21-22.
- Mini-disadvantages, *compared to roleplaying-only quirks*, 4; *definition*, 4; *effects*, 4-5; *enforcing*, 5; *limiting number*, 6.
- Physical quirks, 22-25.
- Point-spending quirks, 21.
- Power quirks, 12.
- Preference quirks, 25-27.
- Preoccupation quirks, 27-30.
- Pyramid magazine, 3; *see also* **GURPS**.
- Quirks, *acquired in play*, 4; *as disadvantage variations*, 9-12; *buying off*, 7; *changing*, 5-7; *definition*, 4; *disadvantage buy-off and*, 7; *effects*, 4-5; *empty slots*, 5-6; *enforcing*, 5; *gaining new*, 7; *naming*, 8; *number of*, 6; *overlapping*, 5; *stacking*, 5; *see also specific quirk categories and quirk indexes*.
- Racial quirks, 12-13, 18, 33-34.
- Roleplaying-only quirks, *compared to mini-disadvantages*, 4; *definition*, 4; *effects*, 4; *enforcing*, 5; *limiting number*, 6.
- Sexuality quirks, 14, 15, 18, 23, 26, 28.
- Skill quirks, 30-32, *Influence skill-related*, 14-15, 18.
- Social quirks, 32-33.
- Standard Operating Procedure, quirk version, 30.
- Supernatural quirks, 33-34.

QUIRK-LEVEL DISADVANTAGES

- Absent-Mindedness, 10.
- Addiction, 28, 29.
- Alcoholism, 10, 29; *disadvantage embellishment*, 9.
- Amnesia, 10.
- Bad Smell, 10.
- Bad Temper, 10; *disadvantage embellishment*, 10.
- Bloodlust, 11.
- Bully, 11, 20; *disadvantage embellishment*, 10.
- Callous, 11, 19; *disadvantage embellishment*, 15.
- Cannot Learn, 21.
- Cannot Speak, 9.
- Charitable, 20; *disadvantage embellishment*, 10.
- Chronic Depression, 20.
- Chronic Pain, 22.
- Chummy, 11, 17.
- Clueless, 19.
- Code of Honor, 9.
- Colorblindness, 23.
- Combat Paralysis, 22.
- Compulsive Behavior, 27, 28.
- Compulsive Carousing, 10.
- Compulsive Gambling, 10.
- Compulsive Generosity, 10.
- Compulsive Lying, 11; *disadvantage embellishment*, 9.
- Compulsive Spending, 10, 28.
- Compulsive Vowing, 10.
- Cowardice, 11, 17.
- Curious, 10, 20; *disadvantage embellishment*, 9.
- Deep Sleeper, 24.
- Dependent, 32.
- Destiny, 34.
- Disturbing Voice, 16.
- Dread, 33-34.
- Duty, 32.
- Dyslexia, 31.
- Enemy, 32.
- Extra Sleep, 24.
- Fearfulness, 18.
- Flashbacks, 19.
- Frightens Animals, 11.
- Gluttony, 10, 11.
- Greed, 11.
- Guilt Complex, 20.
- Gullibility, 18.
- Ham-Fisted, 24.
- Hard of Hearing, 23.
- Hidebound, 18.
- Honesty, 9, 11, 30.
- Impulsiveness, 17, 19.
- Increased Consumption, 23.
- Incurious, 10, 20.
- Innumerate, 31.
- Intolerance, 26.
- Jealousy, 11.
- Kleptomania, 11.
- Lame, 23.
- Laziness, 19.
- Lecherousness, 28.
- Light Sleeper, 24.
- Loner, 10, 11, 20.
- Low Pain Threshold, 23.
- Low Self Image, 18.
- Lunacy, 18.
- Maintenance, 22.
- Manic-Depressive, 17.
- Miserliness, 11.
- Neurological Disorder, 16, 24.
- Night Blindness, 24.
- Nightmares, 10.
- No Sense of Humor, 11, 20.
- No Sense of Smell/Taste, 22.
- Non-Iconographic, 31.
- Obsession, 28-30.
- Oblivious, 18.
- Odious Personal Habit, 11, 20.
- Overconfidence, 10, 11.
- Pacifism, 11, 18.
- Paranoia, 11, 20.
- Penetrating Voice, 16.
- Phobia, 11, 26.
- Pyromania, 10.
- Reputation, 33.
- Reprogrammable, *disadvantage embellishment*, 27.
- Restricted Diet, *quirk level*, 22.
- Revulsion, 34.
- Sadism, 20; *disadvantage embellishment*, 10.
- Secret, 28, 33; *disadvantage embellishment*, 9.
- Secret Identity, 33.
- Selfish, 10, 11, 20; *disadvantage embellishment*, 15.
- Selfless, 10, 11, 19.
- Sense of Duty, 11.
- Short Attention Span, 18.
- Shyness, 11.
- Social Disease, 25.
- Social Stigma, 33.
- Split Personality, 20, 34.
- Squeamish, 26.
- Stubbornness, 18; *disadvantage embellishment*, 9.
- Stuttering, 11, 16.
- Supernatural Features, 34; *example*, 12.
- Susceptible, 24-25, 34.
- Trademark, 30.
- Trickster, 30.
- Truthfulness, 10, 11; *Disadvantage Embellishment*, 9.
- Unfit, 22.
- Unluckiness, 11.
- Unusual Biochemistry, 24; *example*, 12.
- Vow, 9.
- Workaholic, 11.
- Xenophilia, 17.

QUIRKS

*For a quirk that shares the same name as a disadvantage, see the **Quirk-Level Disadvantage** index on p. 35.*

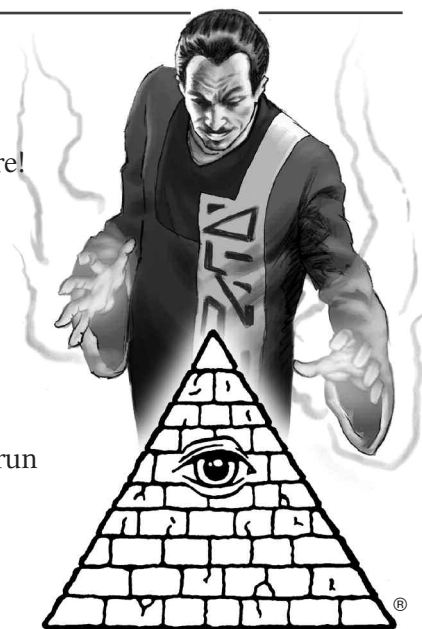
- Abrasive, 20.
- Acceleration Weakness, 24.
- Aches and Pains, 22; *example*, 12.
- Admiration, 25-26.
- Affected by Magnetism, 12.
- Alcohol Intolerance, 29.
- Allergy, 22.
- Alternative Sexuality, 26.
- Ambitious, 18.
- Amoral, 15.
- Appearance Change, 10.
- Argumentative, 20.
- Aristocratic, 15.
- Atheist, 8.
- Attentive, 17.
- Bad Posture, 13.
- Bitter 20.
- Blunt, 20.
- Boring, 18.
- Born Goon, 18.
- Bowlegged, 22.
- Broad-Minded, 17.
- Bulky Frame, 22; *example*, 12.
- Can Be Turned By True Faith, 33-34; *example*, 12.
- Can't Read Music, 31.
- Cannot Float, 12; *example*, 12.
- Care, 22.
- Careful planner, 30.
- Careful, 17.
- Carries backup weapons, 30.
- Chauvinistic, 17.
- Checkered Past, 32.
- Cheerful, 15.
- Clean freak, 30.
- Clumsy Runner, 22; *example*, 12.
- Cold Intolerance, 25.
- Collector, 27.
- College Incompetence, 34.
- Combat Hesitancy, 22.
- Complicated, 32.
- Compulsion, 27-28; *example*, 12.
- Congenial, 17.
- Cooperative, 18.
- Cosmetic Eyeglasses, 13.
- Credulous, 18.
- Crude, 20.
- Cruel, 20.
- Crush, 26.
- Cyclothymic, 17.
- Cynical, 20.
- Daily Ritual, 28.
- Damned, 34; *example*, 12.
- Dead Giveaway, 13-14, 34; *examples*, 13, 16, 34.
- Dead Weight, 22; *example*, 12.
- Decisive, 17.
- Delusion, 17.
- Delusional Competence, 17.
- Depressing, 20.
- Desirous, 18.
- Determined, 18.
- Disadvantage Embellishment, 9-10; *examples*, 9-10, 15, 27, 29.
- Disciplined, 18; *options*, 25.
- Dishonest Face, 14.
- Dislike, 26.
- Dislikes haste, 27.
- Disorganized, 18.
- Distinctive Features, 14.
- Distinctive Speech, 16.
- Distractible, 18.
- Docile, 18.
- Doesn't trust banks, 30.
- Dorky, 18.
- Dreamer, 18; *options*, 25.
- Dual Identity, 33.
- Dull, 18.
- Dull Taste or Smell, 22.
- Dweeby, 18.
- Easily Frustrated, 18.
- Easily Influenced, 18.
- Easily Mistaken Sex, 14.
- Easily Suppressed Disadvantage, 10; *examples*, 19, 20, 24, 28.
- Easily Winded, 22.
- Eavesdropper, 28; *example*, 12.
- Enthusiastic, 15.
- Epicure, 28.
- Epitome, 14; *example*, 13.
- Expensive Habit, 28; *examples*, 13, 29.
- External Mood Influence, 18; *example*, 12.
- Extra Drawback, 21.
- Extremely Limited Disadvantage, 10-11; *examples*, 15, 20, 25, 33.
- Extrovert, 17.
- Faithless, 15.
- False Memory, 17.
- Fashion Disaster, 14.
- Fast Talker, 16.
- Fatalistic, 20.
- Fatigues Easily Under Loads, 22.
- Favor Owed, 32.
- Fickle 20.
- Flirtatious, 28.
- Forbidden Word, 16.
- Forgetful, 19.
- Former Alcoholic, 29.
- Foul-Mouthed, 20.
- Friendly, 17.
- Friendly Drunk, 29.
- Gallant, 15.
- Glimpses of Clarity, 19.
- Gloating, 20.
- Grudge, 32.
- Hated by (Group), 33.
- Heat Intolerance, 25.
- Hedonist, 28.
- Hero Worship, 26.
- High-Frequency Hearing Loss, 23.
- High-Pressure Intolerance, 13.
- High Rejection Threshold, 22.
- Hoarder, 28.
- Horrible Hangovers, 29.
- Humble, 19.
- Hungry, 23; *example*, 12.
- Idealistic, 19.
- Ignoble, 15.
- Ill-Advised Hobby, 28-29.
- Imaginative, 19.
- Impatient, 19.
- Inaccessible Idioms, 16.
- Inappropriate Manner, 14-15.
- Incompetence, 31; *magic college*, 34.
- Insensitive, 19.
- Interviews Badly, 15.
- Involuntary Ability Use, 10.
- Involuntary Utterance, 16.
- Ironic, 20.
- Jovial, 15.
- Layabout, 19.
- Lazy Skill, 31.
- Legalistic, 9.
- Like, 26.
- Limited Colorblindness, 23.
- Limited Hearing Loss, 23.
- Literal-Minded, 19.
- Loud Voice, 16.
- Low-Frequency Hearing Loss, 23.
- Low-Pressure Intolerance, 13.
- Martial, 15.
- Math-Shy, 31.
- Melancholy, 20.
- Methodical, 19.
- Mild Dyslexia, 31.
- Mind-Numbing Magnetism, 15.
- Minor Addiction, 29.
- Minor Alcoholism, 29.
- Minor Handicap, 23.
- Mirror-Image Disadvantages, 11.
- Missing Disadvantage, 15.
- Missing Teeth, 23.
- Missing Toes, 23.
- Mitigated Disadvantage, 11-12.
- Mouthy 20.
- Name-Bound, 34; *example*, 12.
- Nano-Fever, 12.
- Nerdy, 18.
- Nervous Stomach, 25.
- Neutered, 23.
- Never raises voice, 30.
- Nostalgic, 19-20.
- Nosy, 20.
- Obvious, 12; *example*, 12.
- Oily, 15.
- Optimistic, 15.
- Outgoing, 17.
- Overcautious Habit, 30; *example*, 13.
- Overspecialization, 31-32.
- Overweight, 23; *example*, 12.
- Pain-Sensitive, 23.
- Pensive, 15.
- Perfectionist, 20.
- Persistent, 18.
- Personality Change, 20.
- Pessimistic, 20.
- Philosophical, 8.
- Phony, 15.
- Photosensitivity, 24; *example*, 12.
- Playful, 15.
- Poor Night Vision, 24.
- Posh, 18.
- Positive Secret, 33.
- Practical Joker, 30.
- Precise, 15.
- Preferred Looks, 26.
- Preferred Tactics, 26-27.
- Pressure Intolerance, 12-13.
- Pretense, 33.
- Prickly, 20.
- Proud, 20.
- Pushy, 15.
- Record-Keeper, 29.
- Red Tape, 33.
- Religious, 8.
- Residual Personality, 34.
- Responsible, 20.
- Responsive, 20.
- Restless Sleeper, 24.
- Restricted Casting Style, 34.
- Risk-Taking Behavior, 30; *examples*, 13.
- Romantic, 15.
- Rule of 15, 34.
- Rules Exclusion, 21.
- Salacious, 15.
- Sanctimonious, 20.
- Sarcastic, 20.
- Scornful 20.
- Scummy, 15.
- Secret Powers, 33.

Secretive, 20.
 Self-Imposed Limit, 27.
 Sensualist, 28.
 Serious, 20.
 Sexless, 23.
 Shaky Hands, 24; *example*, 12.
 Sharpens weapons at every opportunity, 30.
 Shocking Affectation, 15; *examples*, 13, 20, 26.
 Show-Off, 32.
 Skimpy dresser, 15.
 Sleep of the Dead, 24.
 Sleepwalker, 24.
 Sleepy Drinker, 29.
 Sleepyhead, 24.
 Slightly Unusual
 Biochemistry, 24;
 example, 12.
 Slow Reflexes, 24.
 Smug, 20.
 Soft Spot, 27.
 Speech Mannerisms, 16.
 Spell Signature, 34.
 Spell Susceptibility, 34.
 Staid, 20; *options*, 10, 25.
 Stereotype, 16; *example*, 13.
 Strikes with precision, not speed, 27.
 Substance Intolerance, 25, 29.
 Successful at (Ability), 21.
 Sunburns Easily, 24; *example*, 12.
 Supernatural Dislike, 34; *example*, 12.
 Superstition, 9.
 Susceptible to (Item), 24-25, 34.
 Suspicious, 20.
 Sybarite, 28.
 Symbol-Shy, 31.
 Taboo Traits, 21.
 Tactless, 20.
 Talkative, 15.
 Tattletale, 30.
 Taunting, 15.
 Temperature Intolerance, 25.
 Tests Positive for (Condition), 25; *example*, 12.
 Thin Skull, 25.
 Third Person, 16.
 Timid, 18.
 Tiny Hands, 25.
 Token, 16; *example*, 13.
 Tone-Deaf, 25.
 Trademark, 30.
 Treacherous, 20.
 Trivial Destiny, 34; *example*, 12.
 Trivial Reputation, 33.
 Trivial Secret, 33.
 Twitchy, 25; *example*, 12.
 Unbelievable at (Ability), 21.
 Uncongenial, 20.
 Ungentlemanly, 15.
 Unimaginative, 18.
 Unwelcome Accessory, 13; *example*, 22.
 Variable Quirk, 21-22.
 Villain-Worshipper, 15.
 Vindictive, 20.
 Willful Ignorance, 9.
 Wishy-Washy, 15.
 Won't carry a load, 27.

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