GURPS® Fourth Edition

Social Engineering™

BACK TO SCHOOL™

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INTRODUCTION

Gaining new abilities has been one of the big payoffs for characters in roleplaying games from the very beginning. *GURPS* offers rules that handle this in a variety of ways, including several methods of learning. Whether the PCs hit the books or learn from the school of hard knocks, the players can account for the effects on their skills and other abilities.

But the biggest strength of *GURPS* has always been its *options*. Different players and different campaigns have different needs. *GURPS Social Engineering: Back to School* helps you custom-fit the learning rules to your game by clarifying existing approaches, providing new ones, and offering guidelines on which alternatives to use. Tools in the box include:

- Monthly study rolls to track how much a character is learning.
- Detailed accounting of time spent on various kinds to learning, and for which abilities.
- Optional rules that account for the benefit of each activity in a class or a program of study.
- Spending earned character points on new skills and other traits.
- Intensive training and heroic learning that grant new abilities at an accelerated rate.
- How teachers and schools affect the learning process.
- Bringing learning to life in dramatic classroom scenes and training exercises, and exploring the relationships between learners and teachers.

The result? A toolkit for running learning and teaching the way *you* want, be that as an adjunct to an existing game or as the focus of a brand-new school-based campaign. Whether your players want quick training in martial arts or disarming explosives, or seek entire sessions in remote monasteries or superhero academies, *Back to School* will give them what they're looking for!

PUBLICATION HISTORY

This is the first edition of *GURPS Social Engineering: Back to School.* It expands on the learning rules in the *GURPS Basic Set,* and takes specific elements from *GURPS Martial Arts, GURPS Powers, GURPS Social Engineering,* and *GURPS Ultra-Tech.*

Why don't we save the world domination stuff for recess?
– Miss Kyle, in **P.S. 238**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

William H. Stoddard is a professional copy editor, specializing in scientific and scholarly publications in fields ranging from aerospace technology to literary history. Fortunately, he likes reading nonfiction; his research library fills several shelves, and he regularly visits the nearest university library. His other pleasures include cooking, reading science fiction and alternate history, and running and playing in roleplaying games, which he has been doing since 1975, when he first encountered *Dungeons & Dragons.* His previous work for Steve Jackson Games includes *GURPS Low-Tech* and *GURPS Social Engineering.* He lives in San Diego with his cohabitant Carol, two cats, two computers, and far too many books!

ABOUT *GURPS*

Steve Jackson Games is committed to full support of *GURPS* players. Our address is SJ Games, P.O. Box 18957, Austin, TX 78760. Please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE) any time you write us! We can also be reached by e-mail: **info@sjgames.com.** Resources include:

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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.

If the technology a skill is based on hasn't been invented, you can't learn the skill!

Spells

Like cinematic skills, spells have no default and are normally learned from a teacher. Many have some level of Magery as a prerequisite – and only casters with Magery 0 can use spells in normal-mana areas. Most spells have other spells as prerequisites, forming elaborate chains (see **GURPS Magic** and **GURPS Magic Spell Charts**), but the GM is free to modify these.

In standard **GURPS** magic, casting a spell takes as little as a second, so the words and gestures required can't be very elaborate. Although spells are IQ-based, learning them is more like acquiring a physical skill through drill (p. 32): Nearly all the "study" time is spent practicing the spell over and over until you get it exactly right.

In a different interpretation, learning a spell means grasping a set of arcane concepts for which the words and gestures are merely a mnemonic. This allows learning magic from books alone, but at only *1/4* of the rate of study with a teacher. A monthly Thaumatology roll allows self-study at the normal rate – that is, *half* as fast as with a teacher.

A GM who wants to make magical studies more exciting can allow eight hours spent becoming familiar with a spell (*Familiarities*, p. 10) to permit casting it at default: IQ + Magery - 6 if Hard, or IQ + Magery - 7 if Very Hard. The student can then practice casting it under favorable conditions that grant bonuses (see **GURPS Locations: Worminghall** for one treatment), but with a risk of critical failure, until he accumulates the rest of the required study time. Alternatively, he can cast it at default in an emergency and apply *Points-Based Learning* (pp. 5-7) if he succeeds. The GM may use these rules for *any* spell, regardless of whether it has prerequisites or requires Magery. *Untrained Skill Use* (below) provides another approach.

Wildcard Skills

Wildcard skills (see p. B175 and **GURPS Power-Ups 7: Wildcard Skills**) have two uses. On one hand, they simplify character design, saving time and emphasizing high concept over realistic detail. For this purpose, *every* character's skills might be wildcards. Wildcards are studied in the same ways as other skills – they just cost triple the points and thus take three times as long to learn. Instead of studying Mathematics (Applied), Physics, and Astronomy, for example, a student would take Science! courses.

On the other hand, wildcard skills were originally designed to fit the heroes of cinematic campaigns, who are more broadly capable than ordinary people and can do anything the plot requires in a broad general area. In such a game, *most* people have realistic skills, possibly aided by Talents – but the heroes (and master villains) have wildcards.

The protagonists of cinematic campaigns may take exactly the same training as the supporting cast, but where a supporting character's time qualifies as study of Engineer (Clockwork) or Guns (Pistol), a hero's time counts toward Inventor! or

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UNTRAINED SKILL USE

For many skills, the GM may treat reading a suitable reference work or following a repair manual's instructions as allowing concurrent skill use without training. You *must* take extra time (p. B346) to do this; if the task is one for which that would make no sense (e.g., most uses of combat skills), consulting a text provides no benefit. If the skill has a default, add the extra time bonus to it; if it has no default, treat it as defaulting to attribute-4 if Easy, attribute-5 if Average, attribute-6 if Hard, or attribute-7 if Very Hard – but only while you're consulting the handbook!

Manuals of higher quality (*Equipment Modifiers,* p. B345) allow levels of extra time beyond the usual five: +1 for good, +2 for fine, or +TL/2 for best quality. Claiming +6 requires 60× as much time; +7, 120×; +8, 240×; +9, 500×; +10, 1,000×; +11, 2,000×; and +12, 4,000×. This *can* be combined with the added level Methodical (p. 22) allows.

A student with no points in a skill can learn from a teacher who has no points in the skill but access to suitable books, provided that the teacher's default skill is at least as high as the student's. This fits the classic trope of the teacher staying one chapter ahead of a class.

The GM may treat this kind of default skill use as on-the-job learning. The requirement for extra time precludes quick points-based learning.

Fleeting Competence

In some adventure fiction, heroes can briefly glance over manuals covering fighting styles, weapons, vehicles, ticking bombs, and so on to gain fleeting competence at unknown skills. This *cinematic* option requires 1d seconds (for skills used in combat time scale) or one scene (for prolonged activities, such as tool use or vehicle handling out of combat), and a roll against the *better* of IQ or Speed-Reading, at +5/+10 for Eidetic/Photographic Memory. On a success, add your margin to your default, with a minimum of +1 and a maximum equal in size to the default penalty (e.g., +5 for DX-5); on a critical success, add +1d extra. This edge bleeds away at +1 per second or per skill roll – but the GM may allow adventurers to pay 1 FP per second or roll to delay the loss. Better win that duel fast!

This doesn't really suit a realistic campaign, but the GM could allow a roll to erase *familiarity* penalties temporarily with a quick glance at the user manual.

Gun! skill. He may take widely scattered courses, practice with varied tools or weapons, and/or read in multiple fields, yet have it all add up to a single broad capability – that's the *cinematic* part. In some genres, *any* time suitably spent may apply toward a wildcard skill; e.g., tea and conversation with a fencing master might help improve Sword! skill.

Alternatively, *Initiation* (p. 8) may be the usual or *only* way to study wildcard skills. In this case, the GM may allow a character who already has points in non-wildcard skills to convert them into points in the wildcard as a fringe benefit of going through initiation – but only if unspent points are *also* invested in the wildcard.

When making monthly job rolls, Short Attention Span can have one of two different effects, depending on who the campaign's viewpoint characters are:

● If you're a *teacher,* a single self-control roll is required. Failure means wandering off your lesson plan, not making a lesson plan, being distracted by personal concerns, or similar. Don't make a skill roll – you accomplish nothing that month! Your students can attempt to master the subject on their own.

● If the focus is on *students,* only part of their class time is useful. Study rolls have a penalty based on the teacher's self-control number: -9 for Short Attention Span (6), -6 for (9), or -3 for (12). Short Attention Span (15) is amusing or annoying to students, but hinders learning no more than the Distractible quirk (p. 22).

Shyness

This disadvantage gives a penalty to Teaching rolls: -1 if Mild, -2 if Severe, or -4 if Crippling.

SKILLS FOR TEACHERS

Besides Teaching (p. B224), a number of skills can be of help to teachers.

Acting

Acting can be used to cultivate a persona; see *In the Classroom* (p. 26).

Brainwashing

Standard Brainwashing is sometimes used with *Coercive Teaching* (p. 20).

The Brain Hacking variant can be used in futuristic settings with advanced cognitive technologies. While it often involves direct physical modification of the brain's internal structure, that isn't required – any more than hacking a computer requires opening up the case. Immersive virtual experiences based on advanced knowledge of brain functions can have similar effects, perhaps enhanced by drugs. This can be used coercively, but applications also include accelerated learning (*Cognitive Programming,* p. 7) and therapy for mental disadvantages. Memetics (a Talent; see **GURPS Power-Ups 3: Talents,** p. 12) can provide bonuses to this "software" version of Brain Hacking.

Expert Skill

Teachers often know the following specialty in low-tech settings:

Bardic Lore is a body of knowledge in verse form, taught by bards or sages in a (usually) nonliterate society. It can substitute for Diagnosis, Geography (Regional), History, Law, Naturalist, Occultism, or Theology within the society's range of knowledge. Roll vs. Expert Skill (Bardic Lore) instead of Research to recall a relevant piece of information. You can add any knowledge you've successfully versified (p. 16) to this skill's scope.

ALTERNATIVE SKILLS FOR TEACHERS

In addition to skills that *aid* teaching, there are some that partially take its place.

Expressive and Communicative Skills

Several skills can be used to create an instructional work in some medium (*Medium of Instruction,* p. 18):

Artist (various specialties) is used to prepare instructional posters, exhibits, or other visual materials. A new specialty, *Artist (Virtual Arts),* is used to create virtual environments (p. 30). This specialty and *Artist (Illusion)* default to each other at -4, and a teacher with the ability to create illusions can compose instructional illusions.

Poetry is used to create the kind of verses that make up Expert Skill (Bardic Lore) (above). The Versification technique (p. 16) can enhance its benefits.

Public Speaking is used to prepare and deliver an informative speech or lecture.

Writing is used to compose a text that conveys information. It can also complement Public Speaking.

Modifiers: Equipment Modifiers (p. B345), if applicable; *Time Spent* (p. B346); a complementary skill roll (p. 16) against Research; any complementary skill rolls made by creative assistants.

Margin of success or failure determines the work's quality, and hence the modifier it gives to Teaching or monthly study rolls:

Failure by 4+: Nothing usable!
Failure by 1-3: Crude improvisation (-2).
Success by 0-11: Competent work (no modifier).
Success by 12-17: Good-quality work (+1).
Success by 18-23: Fine-quality work (+2).
Success by 24+: Best possible work (+TL/2, rounded down, minimum +2; +4 for a work based on abilities such as Illusion).

Propaganda

As with Brainwashing (above), Propaganda is used to transmit ideas or forms of behavior to people who aren't seeking to learn them and may be actively resisting them. Resistance calls for a Quick Contest of Propaganda vs. average Will in the target population. However, propaganda has no "teacher"; the material is disseminated to its audience in the hope of getting them to respond. Effects on behavior rarely rise above quirk level. An expressive or communicative skill can complement Propaganda rolls.

ACADEMIC ORGANIZATIONS

A lot of instruction is carried on by organizations. Nearly all organizations have to provide *some* form of training to new members; many teach actual skills. In some cases training is dispersed throughout the entire organization, the role of which is limited to setting standards; many forms of apprenticeship work this way. In others, an organization maintains a separate internal branch for training – a school. Schools can also function as freestanding organizations whose *purpose* is to offer instruction.

Either type of school can be as small as a one-person operation. Such a teacher will often be described by a character sheet. But it may be useful to describe the school as an organization as well or instead.

Teaching as a one-person organization is a freelance job. Teaching in a larger organization is often a regular job, with a set monthly pay rate. See *Job Rolls* (p. 19).

STATISTICS

Schools can be described as organizations in the style of *GURPS Boardroom and Curia.* The following guidelines apply:

Members: The members of most schools are their instructors and staff. Students can count, too, if they teach as well as study, if their work earns income for the school, or if they elect or control the school administration. Simply paying the school for instruction doesn't suffice, however. Usually, students are better described as clients or customers.

Contacts: A school can be treated as a Contact for Teaching and as a Contact Group for subjects it teaches, if these are defined as skills; elementary schools usually provide only Teaching. Skill levels in the areas of instruction may be 12-18 if education is the organization's only major function, but can range up to 21 for a research institute, major temple or monastery, or similar institution.

Patron Value: Many schools have resources worth less than 1,000× starting wealth for their TL (Patron Value 10 points) – perhaps as low as 2× starting wealth for a single eccentric with a handful of students. Such smaller organizations can be assigned lower Patron Values as discussed on p. 41 of *GURPS Social Engineering:* 5 points for at least 100× starting wealth, 3 points for at least 20×, 2 points for at least 5×, or 1 point for at least 2× (the suggested minimum for any school with actual facilities). Larger schools are certainly possible, but running them is much like being a politician or a corporate manager; the people in charge will have almost no contact with the teachers, let alone the students, and little time to spend on adventuring or personal interests.

Type: A school is by definition a Teaching organization. Schools are commonly Commercial, Government, or Religious as well; those that provide advanced instruction may also be Research organizations. Schools of interest to adventurers are often Military in character (associated with *Drill,* p. 32) or Trade associations such as guilds (associated with *Apprenticeship,* p. 31).

Rank: Discussed under *Rank and Assistance* (below).

RANK AND ASSISTANCE

Rank in schools follows the rules in *GURPS Social Engineering* (notably *Variant Costs of Rank* on pp. 14-15 of that work) and *GURPS Boardroom and Curia.* It usually costs less than 5 points/level and doesn't normally raise Status in society at large. Rank in a university faculty might be assessed as follows: nominal hierarchical position with title [1/level] + chain of command [1/level] + typical resources [1/level] + not dominant or unique [-1/level] = 2 points/level. A society in which scholars are deeply respected as servants of the state, the community, or humanity might add legitimacy [2/level], making cost 4 points/level. This form of Rank *would* also grant Status based on point cost: no bonus for 0-9 points (Rank 0-2), +1 for 10-24 points (Rank 3-6), and +2 for 25-39 points (Rank 7-8). In practice, schools rarely have more than four or five levels of Rank.

Rank within a school grants the ability to make requests for aid through an assistance roll (AR) based on the teacher's Rank and the level of Patron the school is equivalent to (see *Statistics,* above). *GURPS Social Engineering: Pulling Rank* offers detailed rules for this. Many schools are too small to count even as 10-point Patrons, however; costs of one, two, three, or five points are common.

THE PRICE OF INSTRUCTION

The cost of formal education depends on the pay scale for the TL and on the quality of the instruction. A simple measure of quality is a school's value as a Contact for Teaching. This reflects not only its teachers' inherent skill but also class size (*Teaching Skill and Class Size,* pp. 17-18), the complementary skills (p. 16) of the school staff, and the quality of the facilities (pp. 28-29). Multiply typical monthly pay for Average wealth by the corresponding percentage on the table below; the result is the price of one character point's worth of teaching.

In a campaign where Teaching rolls are made – either for single lessons or as monthly job rolls – use the indicated Teaching skill. If instruction is treated simply as a purchasable commodity, assume that an effective skill of 15, 18, or 21 gives students a bonus: +10%, +20%, or +40% to hours of learning gained, *or* +1, +2, or +4 to monthly study rolls.

Contact Skill	Percentage	Examples
Teaching-12	5%	One-room school, on-the-job training
Teaching-15	10%	Typical school, small college, trade school
Teaching-18	25%	Good private school, university, professional school
Teaching-21	100%	Elite university, advanced institute

The school's needs may also dictate some of their skills. Make sure that their point totals allow for these requirements.

Setting up a school can be an option for the heroes of an ongoing campaign; e.g., an established team of supers might establish a training program, either for children with inherited powers or for newly empowered adults. Such a school's very *existence* may be an innovation! The founders will often emphasize training new personnel, but if they plan to teach there themselves, they may regard it more as a marketable service.

TROPES

Schools appear as settings in diverse genres: academies of magic in fantasy, *salles d'armes* in swashbuckling adventure, colleges filled with eccentric academics in horror tales, orbiting spaceships in science fiction. But there are story elements that recur in all these stories, regardless of genre.

Change of Pace: You've been through a big crisis – a final exam, or a life-and-death struggle – or you have one coming up. You and your friends take some time off: going on a short trip, visiting a bar or a bathhouse, or just hanging out. Such episodes offer a break in tension and an opportunity for characterization.

Clubs: You and your fellow students have joined a club, or formed a new one. A big theme in anime and manga, where it often substitutes for *Unlikely Allies.* Clubs can be built as organizations (see **GURPS Boardroom and Curia**).

The Eccentric: There's an instructor at your school who doesn't fit in. In a student-oriented campaign, he may be your Contact or Patron (or Enemy!); in a teacher-oriented one, he's the subject of faculty gossip. In *any* campaign, he's one of the administration's headaches.

Initiation: It's your first day, or your first year, and you're at the bottom of the social scale – and the older students want to make sure you know it. How will you cope?

The Library: It's amazing what you can find on the shelves (see *Searchable Archives*, p. 30): old yearbooks with clues to school history, obscure grimoires, expensive reference books . . . In many school campaigns, the library is bigger than any real school could afford – often filled with special collections and hidden annexes.

Live Ammo: Your instructors believe in the educational effects of actual danger, and include it in training exercises. This may take any form from military training under actual fire (not aimed to hit, but accidents happen!) to "danger rooms" for supers.

The Rival School: Your school has an opposite number that people compare it with (*Rival Schools*, p. 33). You face its students in sporting events, duels, or contests of magical skill. In supers campaigns, apprentice heroes may go up against apprentice *villains!*

Sparring Practice: Your martial-arts school, or the combat-arts course at your regular school, has its students practice their skills against each other. Scenes of fighting practice can provide regular punctuation to game sessions (see *Tests*, p. 8).

Sports: Students at your school participate in sports and possibly compete with other schools. You may be a player or a member of the cheering audience. In more-fantastic genres, school sports may include anything from broomstick riding to fighting battles in vintage tanks!

To the Barricades: There's a revolution going on in your country, and naturally the students have been drawn in. This is your chance to leave the classroom and fight for justice – or join in the councils of the revolution's leaders.

Town vs. Gown: Your school is in a city, or just outside one – and it's a small city and a big school, so the students are a very visible presence, one the "townies" resent (see *External Communities*, p. 33). This may lead to rude remarks and bar fights, or to rioting and lynching. Related tropes for younger students are clashes between public and private school students, or between day students and boarders at the same school.

Uniforms: Whether it's sailor suits, wizards' robes, or masks and tights, students at your school are known by what they wear.

Unlikely Allies: Early in your school career – maybe on your first day! – you encountered them: other students who became your closest friends, despite totally different backgrounds and goals. When you had strange experiences, or took up some risky venture, you turned to them . . .

Hogwarts, Hogwarts, Hoggy Warty Hogwarts,
Teach us something, please,
Whether we be old and bald
Or young with scabby knees. . . .
– Hogwarts school song, from J.K. Rowling,
Harry Potter and the Sorceror's Stone

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The wise student hears of Tao and practices it diligently.
The average student hears of Tao and gives it thought now and again.
The foolish student hears of Tao and laughs aloud.
If there were no laughter, Tao would not be what it is.

– Tao Te Ching

"Now that's true," Sokrates said. *"And perhaps what I shall teach is not what they expect me to teach."*

– Jo Walton, **The Just City**