

# Fail Forward Cheat Sheet

Use this table behind your DM screen for quick inspiration. When the dice let the party down, these pivots keep the story moving. Just pick the one that fits your world and explain it as part of the action!

Category	Check Type	The 'Fail Forward' Result
<b>SOCIAL</b>	Persuasion (Merchant)	The merchant gives you the discount, but he recognizes you and says, “Next time, you owe me a very big favor.”
	Deception (Getting past a guard)	Your lie works! The guard lets you pass, but he’s so impressed by your “official orders” that he insists on escorting you directly to the Captain to “help” you out.
	Intimidation	You successfully scare the informant into talking, but they are so terrified that they scream for the city watch as they run away, or they give you the info but omit one crucial, dangerous detail out of spite.
<b>PHYSICAL</b>	Athletics (Stuck Door)	The door crashes open, but your momentum knocks your torch into a puddle, leaving you in total darkness as a portcullis slams shut behind you sealing the exit. Or the door opens with a loud crash and the athlete tumbles in and falls prone in front of enemies.
	Athletics (Chasm Jump)	You make the leap, but your gear snags on a jagged rock and now you’re hanging upside down over the edge.
	Sleight of Hand (Lockpicking)	The lock clicks open! But your tools snap inside with a loud “ping,” alerting a nearby sentry. Or you open the lock, but your lockpick is damaged, so future lock picking will be at disadvantage (until you can get it fixed/replaced).
	Stealth (Sneaking)	You stay quiet, but you drop a key or item behind you, or get distracted trying to lift a coin from a sleeping guard’s belt.
<b>MENTAL</b>	Arcana (Potions)	You recognize it as a healing potion, but it’s expired. It heals you, but your skin turns blue for an hour and you have the hiccups. Or... You can’t identify the liquid, but you accidentally spill a drop on your leather boot—and the leather instantly turns into solid stone. It’s a Potion of Petrify, and now you have a very heavy left foot.
	History (Knowledge)	You recall the fact, but it’s 50 years out of date. Alternatively, you recall the Pharaoh’s name, but realize the “secret entrance” he used was sealed shut by a collapse centuries ago. Now you need a new way in!
	Investigation (Hieroglyphic Puzzle)	You brush a pressure plate; the door slides open, but the room begins filling with sand—the clock is ticking!
<b>COMBAT</b>	Melee Attack (Ruins)	You miss the enemy, but your heavy swing knocks over a cracked pillar, creating difficult terrain that blocks their path.
	Ranged Attack (Market)	A gust of wind catches the arrow. It misses the enemy but thuds into a fruit cart, causing a merchant to scream for city guards.
	Critical 1 Miss	You swung too hard and didn’t connect the way you thought you would, and now off balance and making yourself prone. Or, You miss the goblin, but your blade sparks against the stone wall, igniting a nearby tapestry. Now the room is filling with smoke!