

Spell Variations
for
GURPS Magic
and
GURPS Grimoire

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Introduction

Some base spells lend themselves to Variation; that is, they may be cast with a twist so as to achieve a different but related effect. The Varied spell may or may not have a different casting cost, time to cast, duration, etc. Examples in *GURPS Magic* include such pairs of spells as Sleep / Mass Sleep, Wizard Eye / Invisible Wizard Eye and Fireball / Explosive Fireball. Rather than treating each Spell Variation as a completely new spell and determine its characteristics anew, GMs may opt for the following rule, which codifies the Variations possible.

The GM has final say as to which base spells may be Varied and as to which of the listed Variations are possible in his world. If Spell Variations are used, the following spells should be stricken from the *GURPS Magic* base list: Explosive Fireball, Invisible Wizard Ear, Invisible Wizard Eye, Mass Daze, Mass Sleep and Mass Suggestion.

Use of the Spell Variations increases *GURPS'* already considerable spell list to truly impressive proportions. Even if the learning rule is rejected, the GM should consider the descriptions of the Variations as guidelines for spell design.

Spell Variations may also be used as an extension of the Improvised Magic rules (unpublished).

Learning Variations

All Variation spells are Mental skills of the indicated difficulty, based not on the character's IQ+Magery, but *on the parent spell*. At least a half-point must be put in a Varied spell before it can be used. Some Variations have *prerequisites* (other than the base spell itself); these must be known at 12 or better before the Variation may be learnt.

A prerequisite of "Magery +1" means that the mage must have at least one more level of Magery than the unvaried spell calls for. Stone Missile, for example, requires Magery 1; Burst Stone Missile would require Magery 2. Spells that require Magery 3 to start with may not be subjected to a "Magery +1" Variation.

Only mages may learn Variations; aside from that, the only other restriction on Varied spells is that the mage's skill level with them cannot exceed his skill level with the base spell.

For example, the Burst Variation is a Hard one. If Mansa Ali knows Fireball at 15 and Wood Missile at 14, a half-point in the first and a point in the second would give him Burst Fireball at 12 and Burst Wood Missile also at 12. He could spend up to 4 points in each, bringing them up to the parent spells' levels. Later on, should his skill with Fireball or Wood Missile increase, his skill with the corresponding Burst spell would also increase.

Variations as Meta-Skills

A completely different way of playing the Variations is to treat them like Meta-Skills. Each Variation learnt this way can be applied to any spell the mage knows; this allows for greater flexibility, at the price of a lesser chance of success.

Learning Variations

All Variations are Mental/Very Hard skills. Eidetic Memory grants a +1/+2 to IQ when learning them. Magery does *not* help—it doesn't add to IQ.

The prerequisites should be changed to the corresponding College skills (see p. M76 and the College Skill Refresher sidebar). For example, the Invisible Variation would have the Light College skill as prerequisite instead of the Invisibility spell.

Another possibility is to substitute Words (see p. 00 [Improvised Magic Revisited]) for College prerequisites.

Using Variations

The caster simply rolls against his spell skill *and* against his Variation skill. Range modifiers apply only to the spell roll; modifiers for ritual, for mage injury or for time, energy and skill trade-offs apply to *both* rolls.

Several Variations may be combined together. For example, one could try to cast a Burst Penetrating Fireball; this would call for a Burst roll, a Penetrating roll and a Fireball roll. The order in which the Variations are applied makes no difference to the final spell result.

With the GM's assent, some Variations may be applied to other Variations, ad infinitum. For example, a mage could learn Burst Fireball, then Penetrating Burst Fireball. Permutations in the sequence of Variations result in the same spell; thus, Penetrating Burst Fireball is identical to Burst Penetrating Fireball.

The Variations

Burst (Hard)

Prerequisite: Magery +1

The caster may spread his fire, as per p. B121; since the RoF equivalent is 4 per Burst, this means a single Burst may not be spread over more than 4 hexes (one spell per hex). The Burst is treated as a single spell for casting resolution purposes, but each spell copy resolves its attack separately. Subjects resist Burst Regular spells at +1 for the first Burst, +2 for the second and so on.

The thrower of a Burst Missile rolls against the appropriate Spell Throwing skill, modified by the Recoil of the underlying spell, to hit each individual target. The base Recoil penalty is *doubled* if the caster's base Spell Throwing skill is less than 12 (see p. B120). Double the Recoil penalty for the second Burst, triple it for the third and so on.

Blocking spells may also be Burst, for the express purpose of foiling Burst spells. For example, if several spells from a single Burst were aimed at a mage, he could only Catch one...unless he knew Burst Catch Spell. Likewise, unless he knew Burst Ward, a mage could Ward someone from only one spell from a Burst.

Burst Fireball, Lightning and Sunbolt do cumulative damage, like Laser fire (p. B120).

The Recoil numbers of the ***GURPS Magic*** Missiles are -1 for Curse-Missile; -2 for Fireball, Ice Dagger and Lightning; and -3 for Ice Sphere, Poltergeist and Stone Missile.

The Recoil numbers of the ***GURPS Grimoire*** missiles are -1 for Concussion, Spider Silk and Sunbolt; -2 for Acid Ball; and -3 for Throw Spell.

Cost: Each spell copy costs double. Any cost reduction the caster may be entitled to due to high skill with the Variation is applied to the *total* cost of the Burst, not to the individual spell cost!

Time to cast: Unchanged (so most Burst Missiles can be cast in 1 second).

Variations as Meta-Skills (continued)

Variation Results

If the spell roll fails, the Varied spell fails. If the Variation roll fails but the spell roll doesn't, the spell takes normal effect, but the caster still spends the extra energy. If the Variation roll is a critical success, there is no extra Fatigue expenditure. Critical successes with the spell roll are left to the GM's discretion. If *both* rolls are critical successes, the GM should be *very* generous. If either roll is a critical failure, all Hell breaks loose.

Turning a Varied Spell into a Base Spell

A Varied spell may be added to the base list through the usual process of spell research (p. M15). However, the researcher is assured that the goal is reachable and actually has most of the thaumatological work behind him. As a consequence, the GM should be generous when deciding the research time necessary and the modifier to the research roll (or Thaumatology roll; see p. G7).

The GM may tweak the spell's description somewhat, modifying the prerequisites, the casting time or cost, duration, etc. He will also decide on the multiplier to apply to the base magic item cost to obtain the new spell's magic item cost. Turning a Varied spell into a base spell allows the character to teach it to other mages; it also allows him to create the corresponding magic item.

Cloud (Hard)

Prerequisite: Stench

The Varied Regular spell manifests itself as a Cloud of magical “gas” that affects an area and all those within it. The “gas” is heavy and will “roll” downhill. The rate of dissipation will depend on the area and the presence of wind; indoors, it will usually last until the spell expires, but outdoors on a windy day it may last only 10 seconds or so. The Cloud is thin and wispy; it does not obstruct sight and is noticed on a Vision roll (applying modifiers for lighting, distraction, etc). The underlying Regular spell must be targeted at beings; examples include Hinder, Compel Truth, Blur and Sleep. Spells that have a one-time effect (e.g. Pain, Deathtouch or Terror) will “attack” each potential victim only once, on the turn it enters the Cloud.

Duration: 1 minute or less.

Base Cost: Double the base spell's Cost; minimum radius of two hexes. May not be maintained.

Devious (Average)

This Variation may be applied to any spell save a Blocking or an Information spell. The Varied spell's point of origin is displaced away from the caster. This may deceive Information spells or cause bystanders to conclude that somebody else is a mage if the spell is displaced to where he is standing. Range penalties are measured from the *caster's* position. The displacement, in hexes, is applied as an additional range penalty.

Extra Cost: 1 for every 5 hexes of displacement, rounding up.

Explosive (Hard)

The Varied Missile spell damages things in nearby hexes: 1 die less in adjacent hexes (or on someone standing in the target hex but not hit by the Missile itself), 2 dice less in hexes 2 distant and so on.

The Missile must *not* be a solid, nor already have an explosive-like effect; currently, only Acid Ball (splash effect), Fireball, Lightning and Sunbolt are eligible.

Cost: Doubles; the damage range in number of dice is unchanged.

Styles of Magic

On some worlds, magic is organized under a number of “schools” of magic, each noted for its “style”. This is an extreme form of the Guild system and is very similar to the organization of religion by Temples.

Most mages belong or have belonged to a School. This is similar to a priest's belonging to a Temple: the mage takes on Duties, Vows, etc, and receives in return a Patron (and possibly a Reputation, Enemies, etc) and Variation training. Ex-school members will simply drop the now-irrelevant advantages and disadvantages.

Outside of the Schools, a mage may still learn Magic, but he must then proceed without a teacher (see pp. B83 and M5) and could very well make an Enemy of the established Schools in the process.

School Styles

Each School's Style consists of a list of Primary, Secondary and Optional skills.

Most skills will be spells (including Variations), although a few magic-related skills may also appear, such as Body Sense, the various Spell Throwing, Magic Breath, Magic Jet, Thaumatology...

Primary skills

These reflect the main focus of the School. All Primary skills must be known to a similar degree; a spread of two levels is allowed. At least one character point must be invested in each Primary skill.

Fan (Hard)

The Varied Jet spell creates several Jets issuing from the mage's fingertips, each aimed at a different target. The targets may be at varying ranges and may be hit by Jets of differing power, but they must all lie in the caster's front arc. The caster is limited to the number of available fingers, although he may use both hands. Each attack is resolved by a separate roll against the caster's DX-4 or Magic Jet skill, at -1 per additional target—for example, if the caster Fans five Jets at three targets, each Jet is resolved at -2.

Cost: Double the total cost of all the Jets. The base spell's range limitation is still in effect.

Fast (Average)

Prerequisite: Haste

The Varied Missile spell flies faster, allowing it to reach a greater range in a second. The game effect is that both the 1/2D and Max ranges are increased. Spider Silk is not eligible.

Extra Cost: 1 per 25% increase. If the Missile's speed (equal to Max range, in hexes per second) reaches or exceeds 400, it becomes supersonic: treat the resulting bang as a free Thunderclap spell, the “subject” of which is the Missile's line of flight.

Fleeting (Average)

This Variation allows the caster to create Fleetingly enchanted objects or areas. Unlike normal Enchantments, a 16 is not an automatic failure. Limiting Enchantments and “Creation” Enchantments (such as Golem, Homunculus, Powerstone, Scroll and Spell Stone) are *not* eligible. Materials specified in the Item description may be foregone at a GM-specified penalty (for example, Fleeting Shape Fire could be cast on a staff that did not mount a \$300 ruby at a penalty of, say, -2).

Examples of Fleeting Enchantments include: Fleeting Cornucopia (2 to cast, 1 to maintain) to avoid running out of arrows; Fleeting Dancing Weapon (10 to cast, 5 to maintain for a one-pound weapon) to strike from a safe distance when you need more than the single attempt that Winged Knife or Poltergeist offer; Fleeting Hex (2 to cast, 1 to maintain) as a threat or joke or to avoid the loss of one's blade in combat; Fleeting Name (4 to cast, 2 to maintain) to prevent someone from using your Staff if they grab it; Fleeting Speed (5 to cast, 3 to maintain) in the early turns of battle to allow more rapid use of, say, a Fireball wand.

Duration: 1 minute.

Cost: 1/100 of the energy cost to cast the base Enchantment or create the base Item (round up, minimum of 2), half to maintain.

Time to cast: 2 seconds.

Styles of Magic (continued)

Secondary skills

These are either taught only to the better students of the school or are given less attention throughout the curriculum. All Secondary skills must remain at least one level below the worst Primary skill. Once all Primary skills reach 15, the Secondary skills may be learnt to any level, even surpassing the Primary ones.

Indeed, training in the Primary skills usually stops once they reach 15, until at least one point has been put in each Secondary skill.

Optional skills

These skills are offered by the School, but are not an essential part of the curriculum. They may be completely ignored by the character without penalty. All Optional skills must remain at least two levels lower than the worst Primary skill; they *may* be learnt to higher levels than the Secondary skills.

Cost

The Style's cost is 1 point per Primary skill and 1 point per college. Minimum cost is 5 points.

Fragmenting (Very Hard)

Prerequisites: Magery +1, Shatter

The Varied Missile spell affects both its target and things nearby. When it hits, it explodes into hundreds of little fragments, which do fragmentation damage (see p. B121). The radius of effect is five times the number of dice of damage the fragments do.

The Missile must be a solid; currently, only Stone Missile and Ice Sphere are eligible.

Cost: Cost triples; the damage range in number of dice is unchanged.

Grandiose (Average)

Prerequisites: Light, Sound and Odor

Special effects accompany the Varied spell's casting. This may be a puff of smoke, a blast of sound, a flash of light, a gout of flame, a brimstone stench...anything flashy and showy. The special effects can surround the caster, the subject or the caster-to-subject line. The special effects cannot have any serious game effects or benefits: the puff of smoke would dissipate too fast to cause anyone to lose aim on the caster; the blast of sound could, at worst, distract; the flash of light would certainly not blind anyone; the gout of flame would not inflict damage on anyone nor ignite anything; the stench could not actually nauseate anyone. At the GM's option, this may be a dangerous Variation in High or Very High mana.

Extra Cost: 1 or more, depending on the grandiosity of the desired effect. Very simple effects may be achieved for free if the GM agrees (such as creating colored Grandiose Fireballs).

College Skill Refresher

Skill in a College is not studied directly; rather, it is gained and improved by knowing spells of that College. Knowledge of spells at skill 11 or less does not grant any College skill. Each spell known at skill 12 to 15 grants one level of College skill; each spell known at skill 16 to 19 grants 1 1/2 levels of College skill (round down); each spell known at skill 20 or better grants two levels of College skill.

College skills may not be greater than 20 or the mage's IQ+Magery, whichever is less.

Example: A mage knows three Air spells at skill 11, four at skill 14, three at skill 19 and one at skill 20. This grants him an Air College skill of $3*0 + 4*1 + 3*1\frac{1}{2} + 1*2 = 10\frac{1}{2}$, rounded down to 10.

Guided (Hard)

Prerequisite: Magery +1

The Varied Missile spell lasts more than one turn in flight, allowing the caster to throw it farther or to attack again in case of a miss. Missiles that fly beyond their usual maximum range simply take longer to get there; there is no special modifier to damage and range is its own penalty.

Until the Missile hits a target or is absorbed by an obstacle, it may attack every turn or be flown in a holding pattern by the Guiding mage. Each attack is resolved in the usual manner. On a critical miss, the Missile is lost...or attacks the caster!

The Missile may also be Guided around a corner to attack an unseen target; this is a Wild Swing. Obstacles which block the Missile-to-target line but not the caster's line of sight may be Guided around at a -3 penalty to the skill roll to hit.

The caster may Guide the Missile back to his hand, catch it (DX, Throwing or Spell Throwing roll required) and then hold it for a while before throwing it again. The Missile may be enlarged while held.

When flying the Missile in a holding pattern, it will go around once per turn in a circle with a radius equal to one-sixth of the Missile's Max range or more often if flown in a smaller circle. For example, Guided Lightning zips around 17 times per turn in a circle one hex in radius —A great way to keep things from approaching that central hex!

The caster *cannot* move a holding circle into a target's path (so as to get more than one attack), but the target *could* stumble (or be lured) into the Missile's circular path.

Spider Silk may be Guided around corners and obstacles; the Variation will not extend its range.

Extra Cost: 1 per turn of Guiding (including the turn on which the Missile is thrown). This cost is not reduced by high skill. Concentration is required.

Fleeting Runic Enchantments

As detailed on p. M82, enchantments can be created that require Activate Runes to use. This makes normally permanent enchantments (such as Accuracy and Puissance) *fleeting*, in the sense that they now have a limited duration. For weapons and armor, this duration is typically “one fight”, as the GM judges. Once Activated, an enchanted weapon could be passed from fighter to fighter; it does not inactivate if simply dropped or put aside for a few turns.

Eldritch Rays of Power

GURPS Magic does not specify whether Regular and Area spells have any visible component when cast (i.e., rays going from caster to subject) —this decision is entirely left to the GM. Maybe there aren't any. Maybe the “rays” exist, but are visible only to someone using Mage Sight or Aura. Maybe there's always a visible manifestation, such as a stab of light. Certain Variations are affected by the GM's decision on this point.

If there are no Eldritch Rays of Power, Devious has no obvious effect on Regular and Area spells. Grandiose may be used to *add* visible effects to Regular and Area spells. If, on the other hand, there *are* Eldritch Rays of Power, then Devious may be allowed with Regular and Area spells.

Invisible (Hard)

Prerequisite: Invisibility

The Varied spell becomes invisible. This Variation may be used on Missiles and on Regular spells having a physical manifestation, such as the “Wizard [Body Part]” spells, the Jet spells and such spells as Breathe Fire, Electric Missiles, Flaming Weapon, Lightning Stare and so on. The Variation affects the *spell*, not its subject, so an Invisible Body of... or an Invisible Zombie are *not* possible. Neither can it be used on spells of the Illusion & Creation college. Other combinations, although legal, are just plain silly: Air-Golem, Flash, Light Jet, Mirror...

Viewers using Aura, Identify Spell, Mage Sight or See Invisible will see the spell (making for a normal defense). If the target is aware that he is being attacked and can see the caster, he defends at a penalty given by the caster's range from him (Range Table, p. B201); otherwise, no active defense is possible!

Cost: +1 to cast and to maintain.

Time to cast: Doubles.

Knockback (Average)

Prerequisite: Apportation

The Varied spell inflicts Knockback damage instead of physical damage.

Extra Cost: The caster may double the Knockback inflicted by doubling the energy cost. Any further increase requires Extra Effort.

Mass (Hard)

The Varied Regular spell affects an area and all those within it. The underlying Regular spell must be targeted at beings; examples include Tanglefoot, Invisibility and Drunkenness.

With Mass Hallucination, each victim will hallucinate something different, giving rise to a resistance bonus if they compare notes (“Check out the horns on that critter!” “Horns? I don't see any horns...Wait a minute!”). With Mass Loyalty, the Base Cost would be multiplied if *any* of the subjects does not know the caster or is a foe of his—it only takes one!

Base Cost: Equal to the spell's Cost; minimum radius of two hexes. GMs may wish to restrict some particularly potent spells (such as Shapeshift Others, Entombment or Body of Flames) to a per-hex cost rather than use the Area spell costing formula.

Time to cast: 1 second per energy point; minimum casting time equal to the underlying spell's.

Holding Spells

An interesting GM option is to allow Regular and Area spells to be held just like Missiles.

As with Missiles, only Blocking spells may be cast (at a -2 penalty) while holding a spell. If the holding mage is injured, he must roll vs. Will or “drop” the spell—this usually means the spell takes effect on him (GM's decision).

Holding a spell costs an extra point of Fatigue at casting time, just like when canceling.

The “Held” Meta-Skill

If the GM wants mages to “pay” for the privilege of Holding spells, he can treat Holding as a Mental/Very Hard skill, along the same lines as Variations as Meta-Skills (see the sidebar).

Penetrating (Very Hard) ***Prerequisite: Magery +1, Find Weakness***

The Varied Jet or Missile spell bypasses a certain number of points of the subject's Damage Resistance. The underlying spell must be one that delivers physical damage to a single being; examples include Steam Jet and Ice Dagger. Spells that already bypass PD and/or DR (such as Electricity spells in the case of metallic armor) are not eligible.

Extra Cost: 2 per point of DR bypassed. The extra cost is paid both at casting and at maintenance time.

Tiring (Average) ***Prerequisite: Fatigue***

The Varied spell inflicts Fatigue damage rather than physical damage. Useful when trying to incapacitate, rather than kill, an opponent. There is no extra cost to cast or maintain.