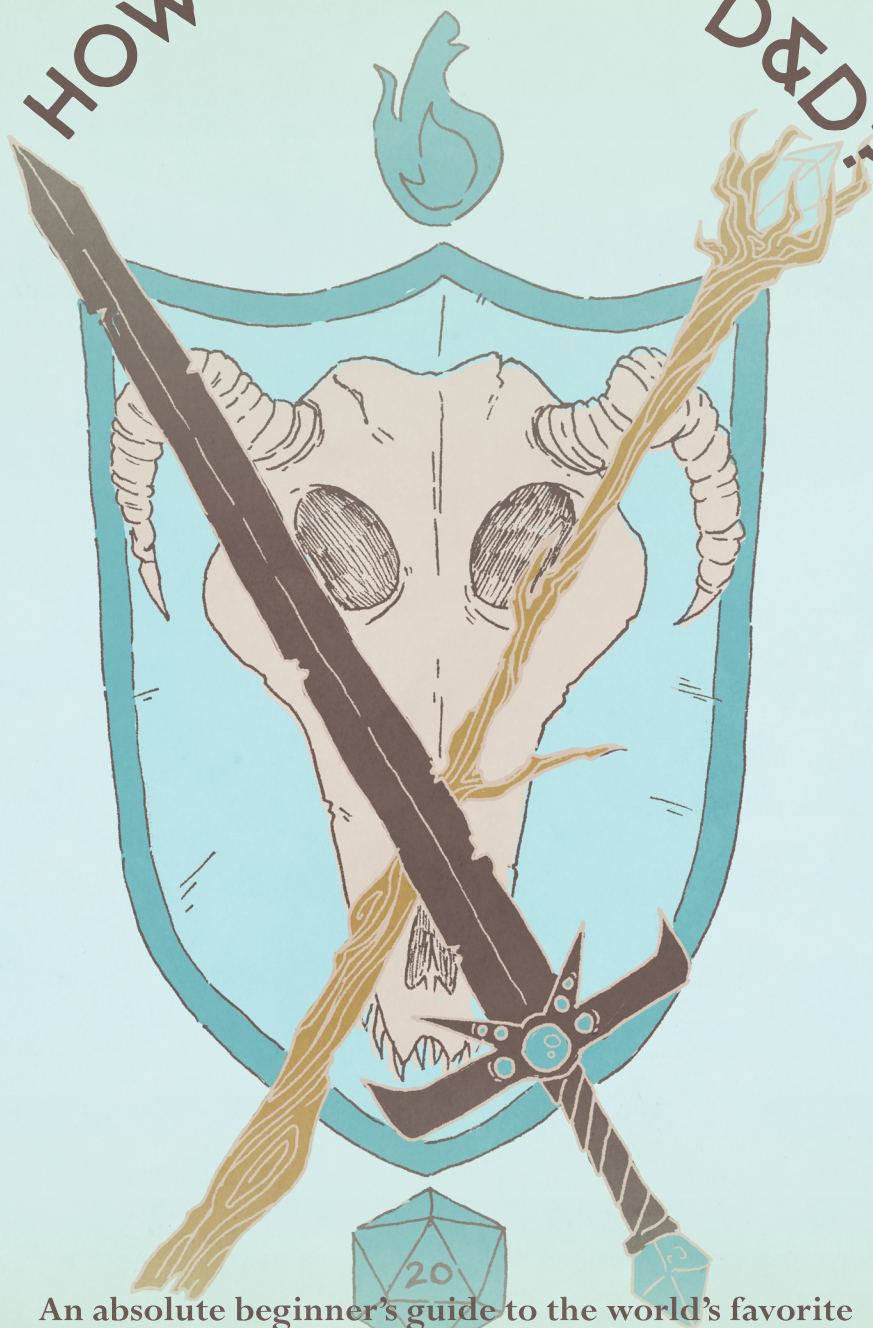


HOW DO I PLAY D&D?



An absolute beginner's guide to the world's favorite roleplaying game, featuring frequently asked questions about character building and adventuring

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>How does this game work?</i>	4
<i>What do I need to play?</i>	6
<i>What kind of character can I play?</i>	7
<i>What are stats?</i>	10
<i>What is proficiency?</i>	12
<i>How do you use skills?</i>	13
<i>When do you roll dice?</i>	14
<i>What do dice do?</i>	16
<i>What is AC?</i>	17
<i>How does fighting work?</i>	18
<i>How does magic work?</i>	21
<i>Formula Cheat Sheet</i>	24

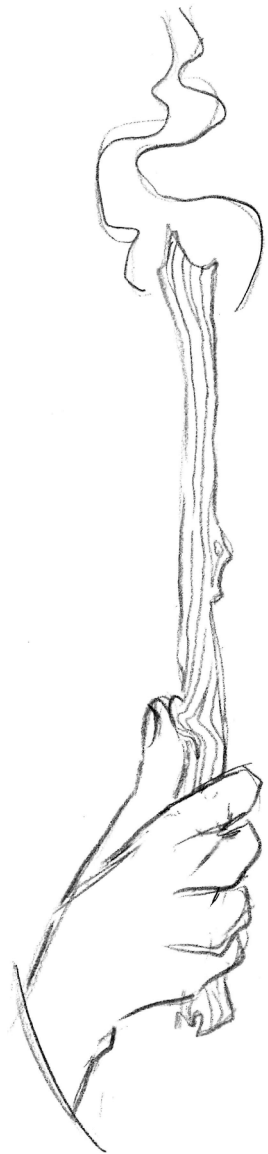
HOW DOES THIS GAME WORK?

So you've heard about this "Dungeons & Dragons" all the kids are playing nowadays, but the 300+ page manual is intimidating? Want to play but worried that you won't be good at it? Don't stress out - the reason so many artists and writers love D&D is because tabletop roleplaying is collaborative storytelling. It's not a game to "win" (although your character will probably be fighting enemies), it's a game that helps create immersive storytelling experiences.

Here's the absolute basics:

- The people playing the game are the players (ideally 2-5 of them) and the Dungeon Master (DM). Everyone creates the game's story together! The job of the DM is to steer the story but not rigidly control it.
- Each of the players acts as a player character (often called a PC) and the DM acts as the world around the PCs, including all the other characters in that world (non-player characters, or NPCs).
- D&D has canon worlds with pre-written adventures. These are fun to play around in if you have a group that would prefer to do less worldbuilding. However, many DMs choose to set the adventure in a custom world. They might pick and choose elements from the D&D canon or build something new from the ground up. For example, the Player's Handbook has a lot of notes about the culture of each playable race. That information may or may not be relevant, depending on whether your game is set in a canon or custom world!

A cool factor of tabletop roleplaying is that you can ignore the rules if they don't work for the story you want to tell. The rules are just there to

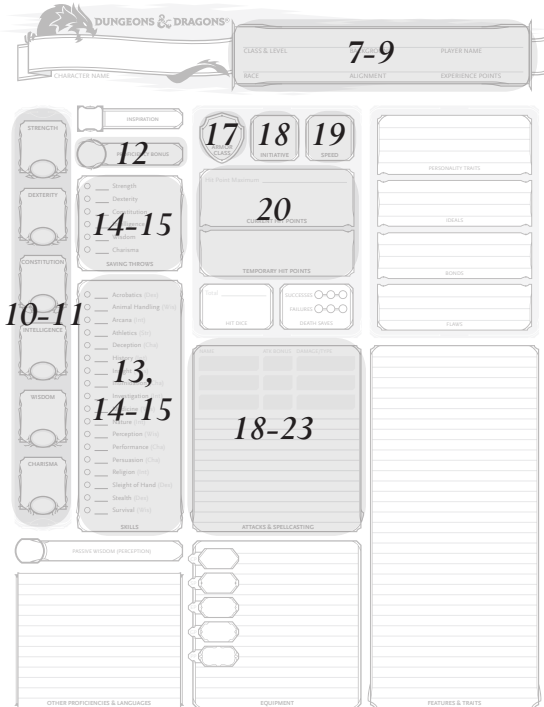


add random elements to the game and help guide the gameplay. Most groups use house rules rather than sticking directly to the book. For example, the flavor text in the Player's Handbook can be ignored if you're not playing in a canon D&D world. As another example, I don't find inventory management very interesting, so in every game I've played in we've ignored the table of item costs in the Player's Handbook. Of course, talk to your group to decide if you all want to change, add, or ignore any rules! You don't have to be playing by the rules in the book, but you do all have to be playing by the same rules.

A couple of notes: Although some of the info in this guide applies to any edition of D&D, the specifics are about 5th edition D&D. 5th edition (5e) is the most recent edition, the edition that is currently having content produced for it, and (in my opinion) the most beginner-friendly edition.

Finally: D&D is great and classic, but ultimately there are easier roleplaying systems out there. If you're looking for a story focused system that has rules you can pick up in a single session, Dungeon World has a similar feel to D&D. However, if you were already invited to a D&D game or you specifically want to play D&D, continue reading!

Info about these sections on your character sheet can be found on these pages:



WHAT DO I NEED TO PLAY?

A set of dice

A set usually includes 7 dice of various shapes

A character sheet

Can be downloaded online for free

A Player's Handbook (costs ~\$30)

Alternately, you can get the "Starter Set" which costs roughly \$15 and will get you started with pre-generated characters and info for your first 5 levels.

1+ friends to play with!



WHAT KIND OF CHARACTER CAN I PLAY?

When you pick a character, the first thing you usually pick is your character's race and class.

Character Race

Your character's "race" is really their species. They can be of any skin tone or ethnic background (depending on the world you're playing in). The playable races are:

- Dragonborn
- Dwarf
- Elf
- Gnome
- Half-Elf
- Half-Orc
- Halfling
- Human
- Tiefling



While your character's race will probably influence their backstory if you choose to write one, it will have relatively little effect on gameplay. You get one or two special features along with your race. The more important factor is your class.

Character Class

This isn't about how much money you have - character classes are representative of your character's training and job. Picking your class will influence what you're good at doing in the game. It also suggests what kind of upbringing your character has had, and what their attitude toward the world might be.

Of course, any character can have any personality! While it's fun to lean into character classes and create a Beyoncé bard, it can also be fun to create a character who's more reluctant - a doubting cleric or a rebellious warlock. Here's what each of the classes' play styles are like and where to allocate high stats to play them effectively:

Barbarian

Play one if you want to:

hit really hard and charge into battle

Maximize: Strength, Constitution

Bard

Play one if you want to:

support your friends and insult enemies to death

Maximize: Charisma, Dexterity

Cleric

Play one if you want to:

heal your friends and have a lot of spell options

Maximize: Wisdom, Constitution, Strength

Druid

Play one if you want to:

shapeshift and cast nature-based spells

Maximize: Wisdom, Constitution

Fighter

Play one if you want to:

hit really well and use any weapon

Maximize: Strength or Dexterity, Constitution

Monk

Play one if you want to:

fight with your hands and pretend you're in a kung fu movie

Maximize: Dexterity, Wisdom

Paladin

Play one if you want to:

hit really hard and pray a lot

Maximize: Charisma, Strength

Ranger

Play one if you want to:

use ranged weapons and move quickly

Maximize: Dexterity, Wisdom

Rogue

Play one if you want to:
backstab enemies and sneak around

Maximize: Dexterity, Intelligence or Charisma

Sorcerer

Play one if you want to:
use powerful but unpredictable magic drawn from nature or dragons

Maximize: Charisma

Warlock

Play one if you want to:
do a few spells really well and be super goth

Maximize: Charisma

Wizard

Play one if you want to:
cast many strong spells in a range of categories

Maximize: Intelligence

Multiclassing

When you level up, you have the option to take levels in different classes. However, this is pretty complicated, so I wouldn't recommend it for new players.



WHAT ARE STATS?

Stats are a general indication of what your character is good at. You can think of stats as the basic moves in the game.

Stat scores range from 0-20. A score of 10 is considered average, so any score above a 10 means your character is good at doing that thing. Below 10 means that thing is a weak point for your character. It's good to have scores both above and below 10! The most interesting characters are very good at a couple things and very bad at many things, rather than being just okay at everything.

However, the 0-20 score isn't what you'll actually use to calculate things in the game. That number translates into a stat bonus, which is the number you'll add or subtract from rolls. Here's a chart showing what stat score corresponds to what stat bonus:

Negative Bonus

- 0-1: -5
- 2-3: -4
- 4-5: -3
- 6-7: -2
- 8-9: -1

Neutral Bonus

- 10-11: 0

Positive Bonus

- 12-13: +1
- 14-15: +2
- 16-17: +3
- 18-19: +4
- 20: +5

Stats bonuses also influence many other things on your character sheet, like HP, your attacking power, your ability to cast magic, your armor, and how good you are at each skill.

Stat scores can be calculated in a number of ways. One way is to roll a set of dice and use the random numbers generated as the numbers you can pick from for each stat. Another way is to give players a pool of points and let them assign that many total points to stats. Your DM will let you know how they expect you to calculate your stats.

Strength

A high score indicates:

You're extremely buff

This influences:

How well you can swing around a melee weapon; how well you can cling to cliffsides or jump across canyons

Dexterity

A high score indicates:

You're a gymnast

This influences:

How good you are with bows; how fast and dodgy you are

Constitution

A high score indicates:

You can drink anyone under the table and you never get sick

This influences:

How much HP you have; how well you resist poisoning

Intelligence

A high score indicates:

You went to college

This influences:

How good you are at casting spells if you're a wizard (or rogue or fighter that uses magic); how good you are at knowing facts

Wisdom

A high score indicates:

You have common sense

This influences:

How good you are at casting spells if you're a cleric, druid, monk, or ranger; how good you are at noticing things

Charisma

A high score indicates:

You draw people to you easily

This influences:

How good you are at casting spells if you're a bard, paladin, sorcerer, or warlock; how good you are at making friends and influencing people

WHAT IS PROFICIENCY?

Your proficiency bonus is a number that increases as your character's level increases. This is indicated in the chart near the beginning of your character's class section in the Player's Handbook. It means what it sounds like - it's a general bonus you get for being proficient in certain things.

When you make many types of rolls, you get to add your proficiency bonus to specific things that your character is good at. The things that your proficiency bonus gets added to are:

- Certain skill checks, depending on what skills you've chosen to be proficient in
- Certain saves, depending on what class you're playing
- Attack rolls, for both weapon and magic attacks
- Any equipment you're proficient in, depending on what class you're playing (including armor)

For example, if you're proficient in the Stealth skill, you roll **[1d20+Dexterity Bonus+Proficiency Bonus]**. If you're not proficient in Stealth, you can still use the skill but instead you'll just roll **[1d20+Dexterity Bonus]**



HOW DO YOU USE SKILLS?

Skills are additional moves you can make in the game. If you think of stats as a general indication of what your character is good at, skills are specific things your character is good at.

When making your character, you'll have to pick a few skills to be proficient in (the ones you can pick from are indicated in the class sections in the Player's Handbook). Certain skills are associated with certain classes - for example, a fighter can know Athletics, but a wizard can't because fighters are strong jocks and wizards are frail nerds. However, you can use any skill, even if you don't have proficiency in that skill.

Skills can be used any time you think you can make a case to use them. In addition, sometimes the DM will also ask you to roll a certain skill when they're introducing a new element into the situation.



WHEN DO YOU ROLL DICE?

You roll dice whenever you encounter something in the world that presents a challenge. Many times, the DM will tell you when and what to roll. But you should also take initiative as your character, and choose to do challenging things! When your character faces a challenge, you make a move against that challenge. The moves you can make are your stats, skills, and class features. However, the stat and skill moves are deliberately vague. For example, the “stealth” skill can be used against any challenge from sneaking into a dragon’s lair to leaving an awkward family reunion without being accosted by a distant relative. Rather than feeling limited by the moves you’re skilled in, consider how the moves you’re skilled in might be used against the challenge you’re facing!

There are two basic types of rolls you can make:

Checks

- Checks are made when your character is acting on something.
- For example, if you want to climb up a cliff, you could make an Athletics check to conquer that challenge.
- Checks can be either stat checks (Strength, Dexterity, Constitution, Charisma, Intelligence, Wisdom) or skill checks.
- Attack rolls are a type of check that uses your weapon’s associated stat bonus or your spell attack bonus

Saves

- Saves are made when something is acting on your character.
- For example, if an enemy tries to ambush your character, your DM might ask you to make a Dexterity save to notice in time and get out of the way of the challenge.
- You can only roll a save using a stat, not a skill.
- Many spells force the enemy to make a save against your magic casting ability!

All of the gameplay numbers come from just a couple of things: the dice you roll, which are random, and the scores you've assigned your character's stats. Stat scores range from 0-20. A score of 10 is considered "average" - you don't get any bonuses or negatives from it. Your actual stat score comes into play a lot less than the bonus or negative derived from that score. See page 8 for more information about stat scores.

The basic formula for both checks and saves is
[1d20 + Associated Stat Bonus + Proficiency Bonus If Applicable]

The only exception is for stat checks, which never have a proficiency bonus added to them. See page 12 for info on the proficiency bonus.

As long as you know what you want to do, your DM can tell you what check or save you should roll!
The great thing about roleplaying is that you can try to do literally anything.



WHAT DO DICE DO?

d20

- The most commonly rolled die in D&D systems!
- Used for checks and saves

d12

- Used for really big weapons, spells

d10

- Used for big weapons, spells
- The 0 is actually 10!

d8

- Used for medium-big weapons, spells

d6

- Used for medium-small weapons, spells

d4

- Used for small weapons, small spells

Rare: d100

- Also known as “percentile dice.”
- Usually this actually a set of 2d10, one of which is labeled 10, 20, 30 etc. rather than 1, 2, 3. Add the 2 dice together to get your total roll.
- Used for generating random information from tables in the Player’s Handbook or other D&D books.

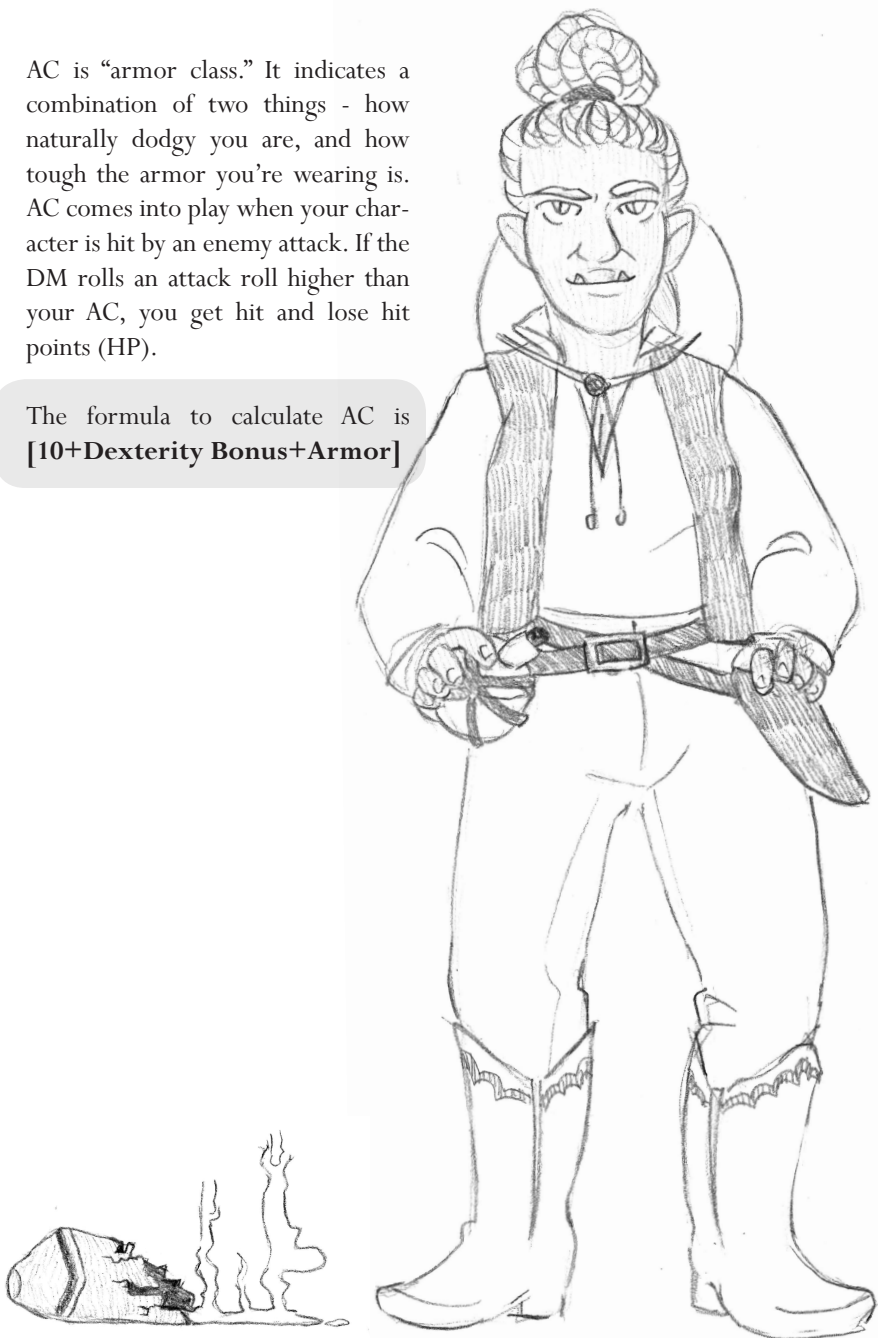
Rare: d2

- This is just a coin flip!

WHAT IS AC?

AC is “armor class.” It indicates a combination of two things - how naturally dodgy you are, and how tough the armor you’re wearing is. AC comes into play when your character is hit by an enemy attack. If the DM rolls an attack roll higher than your AC, you get hit and lose hit points (HP).

The formula to calculate AC is
[10+Dexterity Bonus+Armor]



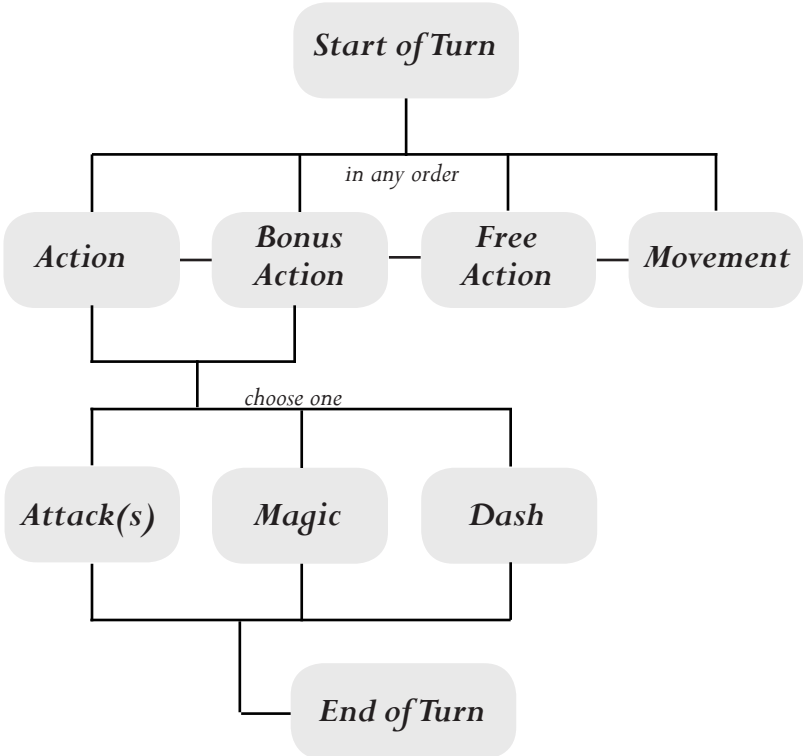
HOW DOES FIGHTING WORK?

If you've ever played a turn-based fighting game, D&D works very similarly. In each round, every character gets a turn, and they have a certain number of things they can do on each turn.

Initiative

Before you start fighting, everyone rolls initiative. This determines the order everyone will attack in. The basic roll for initiative is **[1d20+Dexterity Bonus]**

Once initiative is decided, each person's turn contains some or all of these actions:



Action

You get one action per turn, which may consist of one or more attacks (depending on your class and level), one spell, or an extra movement (called a dash).

Free Action

Talking, roleplaying, or other small action.

Attack

Depending on your class and level, you get one or more attacks per action.

To make a successful attack against an enemy, you have to roll an attack roll (to see if you hit) and then a damage roll (to see how much damage you do)

The basic roll for an attack is **[1d20+Weapon's Associated Stat+Proficiency Bonus]**

The basic roll for damage is **[Weapon Damage Dice+Weapon's Associated Stat]**

You can find info about specific weapon damage on pages 146-149 in the Player's Handbook.

Bonus Action

Certain class features or spells in the game give you a bonus action, which works the same as the regular action. You just get to do that skill or spell as an extra action. You can only have one bonus action per turn, even if you have more than one skill or spell that gives you a bonus action.

Movement

Most characters can move 30 feet per turn, but some classes and races have different movement speeds. Unless you're playing with miniatures and sets, most D&D fights happen in the theater of the mind, so the exact distance between things is often fudged.

Magic

You can only cast one spell per action, unless the spell has a casting time of "bonus action," "instantaneous," or "reaction"

Check out the Magic section to learn about casting spells.

Taking Hits

On the DM's turn, they will make attacks against the players.

Depending on what is hitting you, the attack will be against your armor class (AC) or the DM will ask you to make a saving throw.

When an enemy makes a hit against you, it reduces your hit points (HP) by a number the DM will tell you until you are healed or enough time passes.

Reactions

Certain class features and spells will say you can use them as a “reaction.” This means you can use them during battle when it's not your turn. For example, as a monk, you can reduce damage from projectile weapons — and even catch them — as a reaction.

However, you only ever get to use one reaction per round of turns.

Attacks of Opportunity

If you're engaged with an enemy in melee battle (standing within 5 feet of each other, in game terms), and either of you wants to move away, the other one gets an attack of opportunity. When they turn their back on you to run away, you get an opening to try to get in one normal melee attack against them, even if it's not your turn. However, this also works in reverse, so be cautious about running from enemy to enemy during battle!

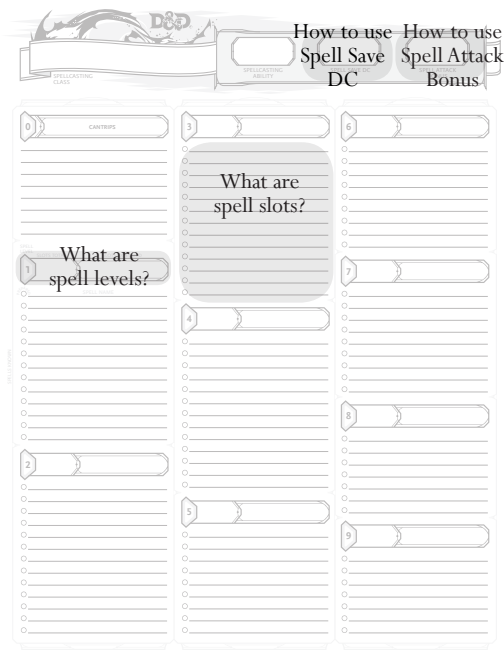
Disengaging

If you do need to escape from an enemy and want to avoid an attack of opportunity, you can disengage. In game terms, this means using your action to safely take a 5 foot step backward, out of melee range. However, to actually get to safety you'll have to also use your movement to run away, which means disengaging fully will take your entire turn unless you have a feature that gives you a bonus action.

Fighting is complicated, but don't feel bad about taking it slow at first! It's fine to have to double-check how spells and attacks work.

HOW DOES MAGIC WORK?

Info about these sections on your spell sheet can be found in these sections:



Magic is the most complicated aspect of D&D, but it's essential to most D&D settings and most classes use at least a little bit of magic.

There are 2 basic systems of magic in D&D:

“You always know a certain set of spells, but only those spells.”

What this means: You've memorized or written down certain spells, and those are the ones you know how to cast.

Bards, rangers, sorcerers, warlocks, and wizards use this system.

“You potentially know all your class spells, but can only use some of them each day.”

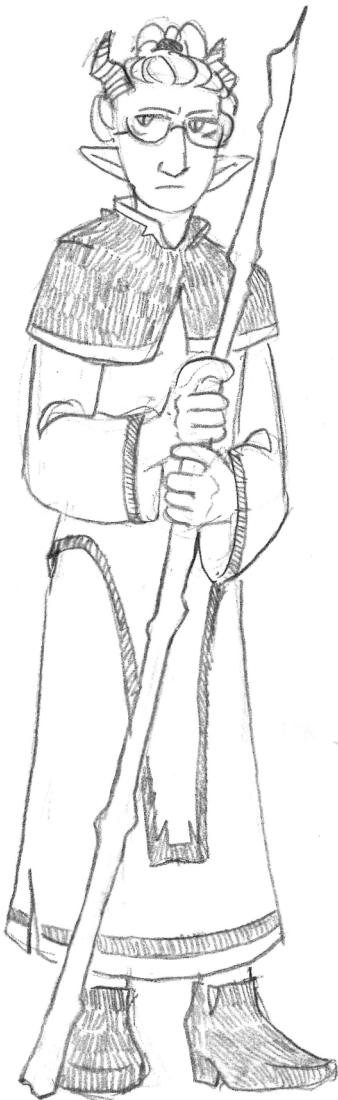
What this means: A higher power grants you certain spells every day when you pray for them.

Clerics, druids, and paladins use this system.

What are spell levels?

There are 9 levels of spells. As your character gains levels, they will eventually gain access to higher level spells.

However, spell levels do not correspond 1:1 with your character's level. There are 20 character levels in the Player's Handbook but only 9 spell levels.



Okay, spells levels are confusing as hell. Why are there only 9 spells levels but 20 character levels? I don't know! All I can say is when you level up, check out the table in the Player's Handbook at the beginning of your class description that will tell you how many spells you have have at each spell level. It'll also tell you how many spell slots you have.

What are spell slots?

Yep, spell slots. You get a certain number of spell slots for each level of spells you know.

Spell slots are markers of how many spells you can cast at that level per day.

Spell slots are NOT the number of spells you know at that spell level! That's a different number, and it varies from class to class. Look at your class description for how to figure this out for your class.

Think of each spell like a task you have to check off your to-do list. You can only do so much in a day before you crash. Small tasks, like level 1 spells, don't take up a lot of energy, so you can do more of them. Big tasks, like level 5 spells, take up more energy, so you can only do a couple of them. (Some spells take up no energy at all, and you can do them forever - those are called cantrips!)

What types of spells can you cast?

The list of all spells in 5e are in a section near the end of the Player's Handbook. The number of and options for spells you know will vary depending on your class - read the class description and list of spells carefully.

There are 3 basic types of spells:

Spells that force a save roll (How to use Spell Save DC)

Most spells fall into this category.

You say what spell you want to cast, and what save the DM needs to roll. This info is in the spell's description in the Player's Handbook.

If the DM's save roll is lower than your Spell Save DC then the spell hits with full effect. If it's an attack spell, you get to roll damage.

The formula to calculate your Spell Save DC* is
[8+Proficiency Bonus+Spellcasting Stat Bonus]

**If you're playing a monk, you also use this formula to get your ki save DC. Ki moves work like spells, but you use the moves described in the monk class section rather than drawing from the list of spells like other spellcasting classes.*

Spells that require an attack roll (How to use Spell Attack Bonus)

Some spells work like ranged or melee weapon attacks.

For these spells, you have to roll an attack (and then damage, if you hit), the same way someone attacking with a physical weapon would.

The basic roll for an attack is **[1d20+Spell Attack Bonus]**. The spell attack bonus is **[Spellcasting Stat Bonus+Proficiency Bonus]**

Note on spell damage:

Spell damage does not have anything added to it! To calculate spell damage, you just roll the dice indicated in the spell description.

Buff spells

For most buffing or healing spells, you just make one roll to see how effective the spell is. This information is in the spell's description.

FORMULA CHEAT SHEET

Checks & Saves

[1d20 + Associated Stat Bonus + Proficiency Bonus If Applicable*]

**Only for skill checks and saves, not stat checks. Also, only if you're proficient in that skill or save.*

Armor Class

[10+Dexterity Bonus+Armor]

Initiative

[1d20+Dexterity Bonus]

Weapon Attacks

[1d20+Weapon's Associated Stat+Proficiency Bonus]

Weapon Damage

[Weapon Damage Dice+Weapon's Associated Stat]

Spell Save DC

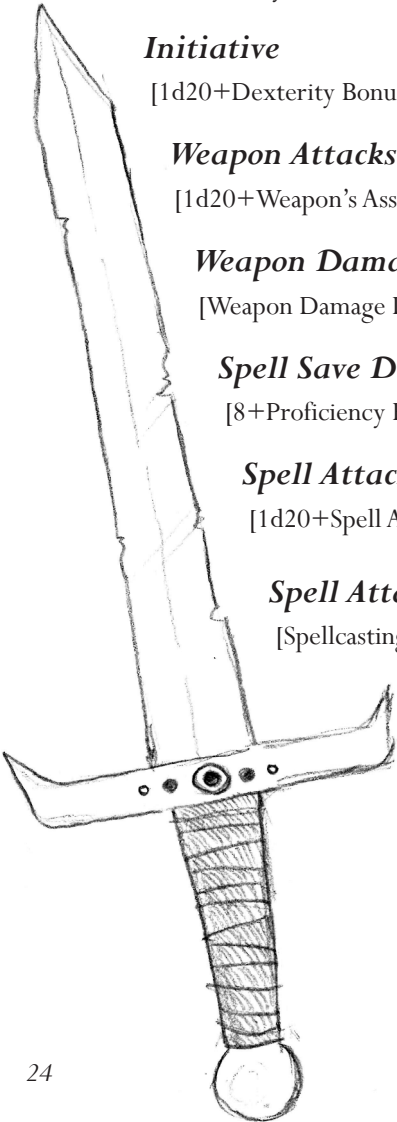
[8+Proficiency Bonus+Spellcasting Stat Bonus]

Spell Attacks

[1d20+Spell Attack Bonus]

Spell Attack Bonus

[Spellcasting Stat Bonus+Proficiency Bonus]





Thanks for reading!

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