M:tG Drafting for Dummies

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1)

"What is a draft?" In the context of Magic: the Gathering (which all questions will be answered in), a draft is a limited event format. You and several friends or strangers or both get together, sit at a table, and make decks from a collective pool of cards.

Before going through how to draft, here is some terminology explained:

- Pod: A pod of players is a group at a draft. The best size for a pod is 8. Drafts might have multiple pods, where each pod plays only with players in the same pod.

- Chaff: This will refer to the token and basic in the pack, or the cards that players get forced to pick.

- Force: Eventually, you will have only one card left to pick from. This is your force.

- Limited: A style of playing the game where you have access to a limited card pool.

- Sealed: Similar to a draft, but you open you packs and add all the cards from each. No passing involved.

- Format: A set of rules to play M:tG by. Other formats include Legacy, Vintage, Modern, EDH, Kitchen Table, and Pauper. This is not an exhaustive list.

- Constructed: Any format where you create a deck before playing.

- Set:

- Block:

- Pack: A M:tG booster pack.

- Crack: Depending on usage, it means either to open a pack, or the cards you got from the pack

- Rarity: How hard to find the card is. The rarities are:

[[PICS OF SYMBOLS WITH COLOURS FOR EACH RARITY]]

Some rare cards are harder to find than others.

Alright, now on to "How do I draft?" It's fairly simple. You start by getting seated with your pod, and everyone gets three packs. If there are multiple types of packs, ask which order to open them in. Once the drafting begins, everyone opens their first pack, selects a card in secret and removes it from the pack, then passes the rest of the pack to the next player. The player you don't pass to will pass you some cards. From them, you once again select a card in secret, remove it, and pass the rest along. Repeat for three packs.

Quick note:

On your first pack, you pass left. The second has you passing right. Pack three you pass left.

The cards you picked become your Draft Pool. These are the cards you are allowed to make your deck from, not including basic lands. At this point, you and the rest of the pod will make a deck (minimum 40 cards), and then start playing each other. If the event has prize support, the top few players will win more packs.

Now that the mechanics of the draft are explained, let's delve into some philosophy (important things?).

First, buying a pack of M:tG cards is basically gambling. You are paying an amount of money, and hoping to get cards valued at more money. Unlike most gambling, you are expected to break even. However, this includes the commons and uncommons and basic land you get, which most people do not care to trade for. In fact, most people will leave behind all the commons and uncommons they got during the draft. However, this assumption is no longer true when opening multiple packs. The value of some cards is enough to skew the average enough that you break even if you open enough packs.

Back to the point, cracking packs is a form of gambling. Does that extend to drafting? Depends on how you look at it. A very important distinction to make here is that skill matters. Knowing what to pick, what to play, even just knowing what is in the set can give you an edge. The stronger your edge, the more likely you are to win. If you win, you are pretty much guaranteed to make your money back (15(buy in) compared to 13.5(3 packs) + 27(6 prize packs).

Second, every meta is different. A meta is a group of players. More specifically, it is the playstyle of the group of players. In terms of drafting, meta differences will be most noticeable when it comes to player personalities and colour choices. The nature of a draft is to level the playing field, which also resets the meta. For reference, you might find one EDH meta is full of land destruction, and another is only combo-control, while a third is hyper competitive.

Whether or not you like your meta (and if you don't, you should try some other places to play) you should try playing somewhere else occasionally. Switching up the meta will let you interact with other people of varying skill levels, and you might be forced to learn to play in your non-favourite colours. All in all, it will make you a better player.

Ultimately, Magic: the Gathering is, like any other game, about having fun. If your idea of "fun" is crushing your opponents, this is the game for you. If you like playing politics, or just want to be an enabler, this is the game for you. If you like hiding in an invincible fortress, this is the game for you.

What drafting does is remove the "Money Wall". The Money Wall is when you have a good deck, but can't make it better because you can't afford to. If you are playing a hyper competitive game, this matters. If you are playing anything else, this doesn't. A VERY important point that needs to be made:

A very expensive deck will lose to a very cheap deck if the cheap deck's owner knows how to play it. If you play any constructed format, play testing your deck will be more beneficial than getting a Black Lotus (the most expensive card of the game at $20k USD).

Removing this wall means that everyone is on an even playing field. The more skilled (and sometimes the lucky) players will win more often than the wealthy players.

Finally, a regular group of drafters will become friends. These people can leak into other aspects of your life. You will get on a first name basis with these people, you will banter with them, you may even stay up all night playing with them. If you let it happen, you will find yourselves interacting outside of drafting or Magic.

2)

When picking cards, there are several principles to work with. These include B.R.E.A.D., Quadrants, Archetype, and more. For the sake of brevity, this book will only discuss the major styles, as there as many styles as there are players.

Without going into the different styles of drafting, there is an overall thought that goes into the whole thing:

* You want your deck to be better than your opponents’
* Therefore, you want your cards to be better than your opponents’
* Finally, you want to pick better cards than your opponents

This process states that picking the better cards will give you a better deck which will give you victory. Generally speaking, this is true. What the different styles do is attempt to judge a card based on different standards, allowing you to then take the best card available.

So, you open your first pack. What do you take? A good rule of thumb is to pick the rare. This isn't always true (maybe it's a bad card, and one of the uncommons is better), and you might be passing the rare pack 2 or 3.

Alright, so you picked the rare. This will usually be the cornerstone of your deck. For example, if it's a blue creature that does things when you cast spells, you would want to go more spell heavy than normal. For your second pick, you will try to find something that synergizes with that card, or does something awesome on its own. For each card after, you try to do the same.

Another good rule of thumb is to keep your colours as few as possible. While going multiple colours is a strategy, it makes it harder to play individual cards. This can be balanced out by playing mana fixers. A mana fixing card is one that allows you to generate multiple, or any, types of mana, which makes it easier to play multicoloured spells. You will also see cards with multiple of the same mana cost. These can be difficult to play in decks with three or more colours, and not a lot of fixing.

Each new set will rework the archetypes. An archetype is a general playstyle that many different cards can adhere to. For example, in [[SET]] there was the [[COLOUR(S) ARCHETYPE]]. This archetype synergized many different cards together, allowing drafters to play it regularly, as they could make it work with different card pools. When a new set comes out, the archetypes change as the new cards are added. [[ADD SET+1 ARCHETYPE]]. In general, you have control, tempo, aggro, [[ETC]].

When making your deck, you should decide early on to be either hyper focused or more diverse. A hyper focused deck will try to do one thing, and one thing only. For example, you might get all the spells tha6t deal direct damage (like modern burn). A diverse deck will try to be able to handle anything thrown at it, and eventually make the opponent run out of cards while it has many options remaining (like modern midrange).

Once you finish your deck, the rest of the cards you drafted are your sideboard.

3)

Bombs

Removal

Efficient spells

Aggro

Dregs

The B.R.E.A.D. principle states that, when picking a card, you should focus on the top, then work your way down.

A bomb is a big hitter, or something evasive. These are usually cards that can win you games by smashing face, will kill other creatures by blocking, and will make your opponent use removal on them.

Removal cards, well, remove things from the board (the playing field). They can kill creatures, exile enchantments, make your opponent sacrifice things, and to a lesser extent they include counterspells and deathtouch. They are spells that try to go 1 for 1 (one card (kill spell) for one card (creature)).

Spells that go 2+ for 1 are efficient spells. These result in what is called Card Advantage (having more options than your opponent). Such a spell could be draw three cards (you lose 1 and draw 3, netting 2), a card that reads "Counter target spell. Draw a card" which nets you one (spell and countered spell balance out, then you draw a card putting you one ahead), or "Opponent discards two cards" (you lose one, your opponent loses two, a net of one). Another kind of spell that falls under this are spells that replace themselves. Things like "Make target creature unblockable. Draw a card" (lets you attack and nets you a card). Ramp spells (a spell that nets you extra mana) belong here. Finally, creatures that do multiple things fall under here, although they are usually classified as bombs.

Aggro is all about going wide (lots of creatures, as opposed to going tall which is a few large creatures). Spells that make multiple tokens, cheap creatures, direct damage, these are the hallmarks of aggro.

Finally, we have the dregs. These are the cards that, for whatever reason, no one wanted. They are not necessarily bad cards, they just don't usually fit the deck anyone is attempting to make.

Bombs. Big things. Examples. Why they’re useful. Examples of non-creature bombs (i.e. make 20 tokens, wrath, deal 20 damage, etc.). When to take them, and when to pass them.

Removal. Examples. Which ones are better than others. How to make a good judgement call on which removal to take.

Efficient spells. Two for 1. Good draw. Counter-draw. Examples (Staff of Domination).

Aggro. Beats. Cheap fast things. Mixes well with other cats. Weaknesses.

Dregs. Usually forced. Not always bad, could be that no one is playing the right colour/playstyle. How to integrate (if desired) into the deck.

Other. Ramp. Draw. Good stuff. Hate draft. Would these fall under E?

4)

Quadrants

[[Have a chapter after these three that says something like "After a lot of practice, you will think to yourself 'These theories are all wrong, I have a better way of picking', and you may be right. However, these theories have been crafted by experts with years of experience, so at the very least try to incorporate them into your style"

or "After a lot of drafting you will come to develop your own style of drafting. This is fine. There is no 'Best' theory, at least not yet, and no way of always drafting a perfect deck"]]

[[I should also have a small chapter on some MtG theory like tempo

http://mtg.gamepedia.com/Category:Magic\_theory]]

[[A quick chapter about the basics

https://1d4chan.org/wiki/Magic:\_The\_Gathering\_Gameplay\_Principles]]

[[Have a very short chapter before these three talking about some misc. evaluation techniques. Have it after.

The vanilla test. Find that tappedout post where the guy defines an actual formula to use. The purpose of the vanilla test is to define a baseline for continued evaluation. If it has a good CMC to PT ratio, it starts at a better evaluation point than a card like scornful egoist.

The setup cost. Things that are powerful, but require a turn or two or a mana investment. Stuff that sues energy, or stuff like mind’s eye (the pay 1 draw)

Not conceding. Just because you know you’re about to lose doesn’t mean they do. It also lets you see more of their deck, which can help with sideboard choices.

When selecting a card, don’t just think about how it will do in a perfect scenario. Also think about how it will do in bad one.

http://magic.wizards.com/en/articles/archive/limited-information/tools-trade-2015-06-17]]

[[READ THIS, DIDNT WORK ON TABLET https://www.reddit.com/r/magicTCG/comments/2ebnra/quadrant\_theory\_how\_to\_evaluate\_cards\_more/]]

imagine a grid

|

|

----|----

|

|

top left is parity

top right is ahead

bottom left is opening

bottom right is behind

Read this again and incorporate it: http://magic.wizards.com/en/articles/archive/li/quadrant-theory-2014-08-20

Same: http://www.manaleak.com/mtguk/2017/06/what-is-mtg-quadrant-theory-and-what-do-you-do-when-it-doesnt-work/

A good deck will look like a circle, or at least have a few in each grid, with the majority being early and parity

Consider the set you are drafting. If it is a synergy heavy set then you can influence your rankings based on if you have a synergous card or have the chance of getting one (better rank if the card you need is a common)

Also, obviously, if you have settled into two colours take that into account. Hate drafting, while still a thing, will be discussed later.

Talk about how much each quadrant is weighted. If you are ahead, you don’t really care. If you are behind, you need something great.

[[Find a card that fits all four quadrants (doom blade or path to exile?), and find four cards that each fit a separate quadrant]]

[[Also talk about how some cards (like Illusory Angel) can be hard to define]]

Different players can be in different quadrants

Not all quads will be hit by a player

Opening is probably the most important part of the game. It is where you say, "I am here" and attempt to dominate the board. If you have a better opening than your opponent, it is hard for them to recover.

Opening or Developing. Both players are playing cards from their opening hands, and establishing themselves as the aggressor or the control player. This is the early part of the game, and one that is critical to how the rest of the game will play out.

Parity. Both players have played most or all the spells from their hands, but neither has been able to establish a dominating board position. It's a stalemate, with the top of the deck providing the only fuel available to both players.

Winning. You have two big flying creatures attacking in the air while your walls gum up the ground, for example. If nothing changes, you win the game in three turns. This is one possible winning board state.

Losing. See Winning, but the opposite. You are being beaten down by some threats you can't handle, and you need an answer fast.

Parity is when both players are at roughly the same state. usually, when this happens, neither player can attack for one pf two reasons:

- the other will block, either wiping the board or coming out ahead

- it will leave them open to too much damage

examples of this state include

One player has an important creature [[name something powerful without first strike]] and the other player can kill it (with something like [[deathtouch]])

both players have roughly the same amount of creatures

the other player has something that cannot be killed (like oketra double strike god)

a card fits in the Parity quad if it can help you escape this state. spot removal fits here, disablers (i.e. arrest) fit here, neuters fit here (i.e. -x, -0). board wipes do not fit in this section, as they result in parity, unless they are one sided (In Garruk’s Wake). card draw fits here, discard fits here, land destruction fits here.

Ahead is when you are ahead. the cards for this section either keep you here or put you farther ahead.

can’t remember this quad

Behind are cards that help you escape from a bad position. this is where board wipes belong. card draw fits here as well, if it is powerful enough. mass token generation fits here. anything that worsens your opponent’s state while advancing yours belongs here.

a card should fit in one of those quadrants (hence the name of the drafting style). the closer to the center a card is, the more well-rounded, the more opportunity to be useful, but not necessarily more powerful.

of course, you should not go too into a single quad. you should diversify, so you will always have a good play to make.

[[examples]]

as you may have noticed, many cards fit in multiple quadrants. a good deck will, when laid out on the grid, look like an eyeball, a circular outside with a dot in the middle ([[is this true? add a picture here).

5)

Archetypes

drafting on this style is the most difficult, as it requires knowledge of the deck you are attempting to build, the skill to draft around missing cards, and enough luck to get as many important pieces as possible.

really, an archetype is less a deck and more a concept or ideal. [[go into this more]]

archetype drafting is, at its core, very simple. it is a 5-step process

1 you review the cards in the set

2 you determine the best decks that can be built

3 you "fuzz" the decks, to allow for chance (these are the archetypes)

4 after fuzzing, you should have a good idea what the core cards for each deck are. if not, determine those core pieces

5 you draft one of those archetypes

the complexity comes into play when you break down each step.

"review the cards in the set". simple enough, just a long process as there are usually 200-300 cards in a set

"determine the best decks". this is where things get tough. how do we define "best"? is it merely a replacement for "powerful"? or "synergous"? this definition is subjective, but the objective of this step is always the same. find a few decks (try to hit all the colours) that work very well. some examples are:

blue white zombies

green black -1/-1

red black aggro

"fuzz the deck". here, you work out what the core pieces of the decks are. what pieces are necessary for this function? what pieces are flexible? what concepts or keywords must be in the deck? what truly makes the deck shine?

for example, let’s take UW zombies. well, there are no real core cards. as long as you have a lot of blue and white creatures with embalm, you’re good to go. from this conclusion, we can say that all the pieces are flexible, however the keyword "embalm" is a necessity. as for what makes the deck really shine, we can say that the token doubler excels here, as does the white black zombie that drains your opponent’s life. now, when you go draft, you have this archetype to work towards.

now, let’s also look at GB -1/-1 tribal. truly, the deck is lackluster without hapatra. therefore, she is the core of the deck and should be picked over other pieces. after that core, the concept that must be in the deck is -1/-1. things like [[name some cards]]. those pieces are very flexible. if you cannot get enough pf these, how should you proceed? the deck does not have many creatures, so removal and some cheap creatures are good choices. how to make the deck excel? the red black minotaur that puts -1/-1 counters on creatures would do great, as would card draw. you would have a pretty good chance of having the green god be able to attack.

blue white zombies

core cards are the embalm creatures. bonus cards are token doublers and lords.

green black -1/-1 tribal

core card is really hapatra, then enough tribal to make it work

red black aggro

core cards are efficient creatures. bonus cards are things like the minotaur that is removal, burn, and removal

as you can see, these decks are powerful, but can be difficult to draft. therefore, you must be decisive enough to stick with an archetype once you begin drafting it, while flexible enough to deviate from the archetype.

[[TODO: Add pics of the named cards, and explain their interactions. Have a picture of Hapatra, then an arrow going to a pic of one of the -1/-1 makers, then a pic of a token.]]

6)

A "Strong" Card

what makes a card string? you can boil it down to being efficient, but that is too broad for this.

a good card is one that is useful at any point in a game, one that can help you win, one that strengthens your state while weakening your enemies.

e [[examine platinum angel, that white sweeper that makes tokens, and exsanguinate]]

if there are good cards, there must be bad cards, right? this is correct. a bad card is one that does not do anything for you, or is too high costed to be feasible, or puts you in too hard of a state to win.

[[examine the combo card for omniscience, and other dependent cards]]

a lot of cards are "strong", but only when they are on the right deck. cards like [[hapatra, hannah, UB mill 10]]. these are all good cards, but only strong on decks that can utilize them.

thus, our definition must expand to include cards that synergize well. or maybe we create a new card type, "Dependent Strong", which evaluates a card within the context of the deck it is a part of.

[[examine the cards we rated as weak above]]

while it (most likely) won’t be relevant, a concept you should be introduced to is one called "strictly better". this where you compare two cards, and they are the same, except for one doing more. it can be hard to grasp without an example, so here are a couple:

[[a couple of five drop exile all creatures, one with delirium]]

[[mystic elf and llano war elves or we the one that untaps lands is called]]

"if every card is good in a deck, how will I know what to draft?" well, that is what you will learn in the upcoming chapters, where we discuss drafting styles. this is just to teach you how to evaluate cards, so you can pick the best card for your deck.

[[TODO: Not in this chapter, but discuss the knowledge level at the table. stuff like people talking about choices and playstyles, double sided cards, lack of colours passed to you, cards that are missing from a pack the second time you’ve seen it, all the ways of telling what an opponent is drafting]]

7)

a flexible deck reacts to threats before they disrupt you

a resilient deck is disrupted and powers on anyway

are multiple win cons flexible or resilient? is protecting your single win con flexible or resilient?

maybe say that the label isn't the important part, as long as the deck does all or most of the things

on the TO comments, mindablaze makes a good point that both flexible and resilient decks fall under the broader category of "Adaptable", but at opposite ends. maybe rework the 7 characteristics into 3 pairs and a singleton? Maybe just the ones that make sense being paired together?

also, don’t equate a card being flexible with the deck being flexible. a deck is made of cards, but is greater than the sum of its parts, and must be considered as a single unit.

"Defining the Aspects of Strategy" would be a good chapter

instead of talking about the seven aspects, make my own grouping?

Adaptability

Output

also talk about how playstyle affects these elements. an aggressive style that burns through cards vs a controlled style that only plays things when necessary. use casting giant growth as an offensive vs defensive spell as an example.

winning quickly can overrule the need for a sustainable deck, if you can consistently win quickly

talk about single cards fitting multiple cats, like cryptic command and nahiri the harbinger and the new exert dragon and some old cards

TODO: A chapter about play tips. how to bait removal and counter spells, when to trade and when to not block, when to counter (especially if you have multiple in hand), when to use removal, etc.

also discuss how different decks have different definitions. an aggro decks version of sustainable is different than a control decks, for example

TODO: say that draft is a decent way to learn. if you understand the basics (untap, draw, one land, play, maybe run through them quickly) a draft at your LGS is great. the magic, the gaming community, is friendly. there are some bad apples, there always are, and it’s probably not the best idea to go on a release night, but it’s a good place to learn how to play.

mention that these are important to understand, bit you won’t need to be too strict for draft.

rule of 9 is interesting but irrelevant. maybe 9 "effectively different" cards? i.e., ponder and brainstorm or demonic and vampiric tutor

mention that some things, like cohesiveness and consistency are determined mostly by the cards you draft

To be honest, is this necessary? Your deck is mostly decided on by the cards you take. Since you will be taking more than 40 cards, I suppose this is useful. I certainly don't need to go too big on it. A single chapter, a few pages for each category.

Should I use card examples or deck examples? Deck examples. I'll use the same deck for all of them, and a second deck that will be different in each of them.

Maybe instead of saying Effectiveness is a separate cat, say that effectiveness is the culmination of all the rest? Maybe go into some detail, but preface with a "You can just read the summaries of each section, as they are more relevant for constructed play. While the knowledge is useful, it won't have too much of an impact in a draft".

8)

Choosing colours. Usually determined in the first pack. If pack two, can still go multi coloured. In pack 3, can splash (if single colour or have lots of fixing) a third. More than this is not recommended.

9)

Aggressive techniques. Cutting people out of colours. Hate drafting.

10)

Defensive techniques. Hate drafting. Confusing your pass as to what colours you’re taking. Dealing with being cut out of a colour.

11)

Deck construction. 40 cards. Can go over, but it is usually best to stay at 40. Ask people from other pods (if they exist) to critique and play against your deck. 16-18 lands (depending on curve and ramp), 18-24 creatures (depending on deck style), and the rest non-creatures.

12)

Sideboarding. The rest of your picks. Place things like Negate there. Basically, useful but specific cards. If your opponent’s deck causes something to be not useful, swap it. After each round, skim your deck, see if there is anything you think would be less useful than a SB card.

13)

Variants. Two headed. Sealed. Chaos. Conspiracy. Cube.

14)

Misc. Drafting is about having fun. You can usually opt to take store credit instead of packs as prize. Bring sleeves, some dice, and lands. Make an EDH deck! Bring your EDH deck! If you lose to someone, ask them to critique your deck. Eventually, you will lose to a poorly built deck. Don’t sweat it. If you pull a card worth $$$, check if it is in standard. If it is, it will most likely drop in price when it rotates out (link to whatsinstandard). Trade/sell it. If it is a brand-new card in a set that just came out, do the same thing. Some card types though (i.e. Expeditions, masterworks) are good to hold onto. Picking the money card vs the good for your deck card (personal preference). If you know a card is an option, leaving mana open to cast it to mind game your opponent

//TODO:

Go through channel fireball and tappeout for knowledge

In the basic concepts chapter, explain that drafting is basically gambling, but you're expected to break even. Also discuss what a meta is, and trying out different shops to find the right meta for you, and how it can be useful to switch metas (even for only one draft) every now and then.

Read:

<https://mtggrindersaus.wordpress.com/2015/06/11/early-drafting-techniques/>

<http://www.mtgsalvation.com/forums/the-game/limited-sealed-draft/limited-archives/140253-drafting-in-regards-to-bread>

<http://tappedout.net/mtg-forum/modern/the-modern-brewers-bible-part-1-getting-into-the-format-overview/>

<http://tappedout.net/mtg-forum/limited/2hg-in-amonket/#c3020862>

<http://tappedout.net/mtg-forum/limited/amonkhet-draft-archetype-discussion/#c3020064>

<http://tappedout.net/mtg-articles/2013/aug/10/pandoras-deckbox-characteristics-strong-deck/>

<http://tappedout.net/mtg-forum/general/community-discussion-what-makes-a-card-good/>

Turn BREAD stuff into a single chapter (basic styles or something). Talk about Quadrant drafting (below), make this another chapter. Then, talk about Archetype drafting (again, another chapter).

Quadrant drafting:

This is dividing the game state into four different quadrants, and figuring out how helpful a card is in each stage or quadrant. They are;

**Developing**: This is the opening part of the game, when everyone is playing their opening hands. A good example of a card that's useful here is [[Elvish Mystic]]

**Parity**: This is when you and your opponent are pretty even. Probably there are a few creatures on the board, but either no-ones attacking or people are just swinging away at each other’s faces and no-one's ahead. A card that might be useful here is something like [[Gruul Charm]]. It can allow you to swing in unblocked, or get rid of some pesky fliers.

**Winning**: This is when you're ahead. You've got more creatures than your opponent, and you're attacking profitably each turn. Cards that are useful here are things [[Act of Treason]] effects. You don't want to focus too much on this quadrant as generally, if you're winning, any sort of spell is likely to keep you there.

**Behind**: This is when you're behind. Maybe the opponent's got more creatures than you, or they've got an evasive creature that's eating out your life total. Cards that are good here will stabilize the board and start helping you pull back from behind. An example is something like [[Wrath of God]], or big defensive creatures like [[Soul of Theros]]

If you break down the game like this, you can start to see what makes good cards good, and it's useful for analyzing cards you haven't seen before. If you want to know more, check out the Limited Resources Podcast, particularly #248 (I Think, it might be +-1), where they discuss it more and how to use it.

Talk about card advantage

Talk about the characteristics of a strong card and deck