**Fantastic Beasts and How to Frame them:**

**Galdr’s Guide to Summoning (as a Conjurer) [5e]**



“Put That Thing Back Where It Came From Or So Help Me…”

(Sometimes it is best to feed your minions. It keeps them happy.)

Image: [“Sacrifice” by nJoo](https://www.deviantart.com/njoo/art/Sacrifice-59563180)

So, you wish to embark on the most involved, demanding, expensive ordeal in 5e. Conjuration, specifically summoning, is for the truly patient, driven, and mad. I praise your passion, but I fear your masochism may not be as rewarded as you may wish. This is primarily because of two things: Your capstone is not Durable Summons; it’s a spell (*Gate* to be precise). Also, your zenith falls squarely in the realm of DM cooperation. I will address DMs specifically at the end, because, if not for their buy-in, you are better off playing some other school of magic or settling for being the premier peddler of control spells more in line with [Treantmonk’s “god” wizard](http://www.enworld.org/forum/showthread.php?450158-Treantmonk-s-Guide-to-Wizards-5e). This is not a slight to either of those roles; you would do well to look into TM's style of play. However, you also want to wield the power of true control over very powerful beings. That borders divine, but is in another domain than Treantmonk’s fine guide to wizardry.

Some notes. As this is a playstyle guide for a particular subclass, I do not go into the exhaustive pros and cons of all the class features. I highly recommend (twice!) Treantmonk’s guide for wizards. “Don’t touch. Blast only for fun. Control, control, control” is a simplistic summation of his tenets for the “god” wizard. If you choose the conjurer-as-summoner’s path, you will tend to look a lot like his “god” wizard until you get past level 10 anyway. You’re the best at it, because a good percentage of battlefield control spells are conjuration—spells you no longer have to worry about losing concentration on in combat at level 10. *Congrats!*

I digress. Let me define who summoners are. Those who wish to play this particular flavor of wizard may feel resonance with the following description.

**The Sorting Hat Declares: You are a Conjurer!**

School of Conjuration as defined in the PHB states, “As a conjurer, you favor spells that produce objects and creatures out of thin air. You can conjure billowing clouds of killing fog or summon creatures from elsewhere to fight on your behalf. As your mastery grows, you learn spells of transportation and can teleport yourself across vast distances, even to other planes of existence, in an instant.”

This depiction sort of runs through the Conjuration spell roster, but leans heavily on your mastery mainly lying in being a sophisticated Uber. “Malazar, make sure you have the book from the library found in the Castle of Impregnable Defense, so you don’t dump us in a lake like you did last time you casted *Teleport*.” These spells can be (and are) fun, but you likely became a *conjurer* because you wish to conjure more than yourself and a friend from point A to point B.

Conjurers are the experts at ripping powerful creatures from the comforts of their sanctuaries and placing them under your command. You specialize in stealing potent beings from either the Elemental Planes or the Outer Planes in order to smash your enemies without breaking a sweat (leave the sweating for the Big Stupid Fighter). The Big Bad Evil Guy (or Girl) has planned out his defenses against four to five adventurers. He has not anticipated the arrival of a small army of elementals, fey, or fiends alongside them. Surprise the BBEG. Slip inside his defenses via your well-placed *Plane Shift* (another conjuration spell), summon a mephit (or twenty), and laugh maniacally as you overwhelm their lair’s minions with your own superior forces.

That’s the beauty of being a summoner as a conjurer. You tip the scales in your party’s favor by setting conditions to suit their needs and to deny the enemy their own preferences. Those transportation spells make great ways to get your BSF and glass cannon into and out of trouble. The enemy wants to focus on one character? Too bad, you whisked them away and replaced them with either the BSF or a summoned minion. Your cleric fails that climb check and begins to fall off a cliff? Benign Transposition to change places with the hapless sod and then Misty Step back to safety--all in the same turn. You, conjurer, have read the Rule Book to the Multiverse and you exploit it to your own profit. That is the beauty and wonder of your School. Embrace it, exploit it, and enjoy the fruits of your labor.

**An Arcanaloth Wrote Your Contract**

Congratulations, you have maintained your conviction to become a summoner. Now, for the bad news hinted at above: Your skillset takes nearly every level in the character progression to come to full fruition. If you are playing with the PHB only, you have it even worse. You do not see a summoning spell until level 7 (discounting Find Familiar. While the most familiar--du-dun-sh--and beloved summoning spell, it’s not why you joined the cult of conjurers. Though please do pick this staple, you will enjoy it--especially if your DM is kind enough to entertain Volo’s variant rules for familiars, which is suiting for a conjurer as much as a Chain warlock). This means that the majority of your development will be on all those other aspects of conjuration: clouds, transportation, and object creation. Do not be disheartened. Here is the silver lining in your long road ahead: You ultimately wield the power to bind beings to your will that are level 20 and beyond.

The creators of 5e have sprinkled your toolkit to supreme command along the wizarding spell list. If you are familiar with Treantmonk’s guide to “god” wizards (see, the Rule of Three survives even into 5e), then you will see the spells you require in orange or red highlights with multiple questions (generally along the lines of, “How am I exactly supposed to get X being into my inverted circle?!?!”). These spells that befuddled the “god” wizard will become staples for the conjurer. Your toolbox is built well before you are ripping open gates to the lowest levels of Hell and plundering it for your own Blood War.

Conjuration is perhaps the school that requires the most preparation. All wizards love study. You love it most. You read every last bit of esoteric grimoire you can get your hands on in the hope of finding those dastardly secret true names and the hidden locations of talismans for your preferred minions. A diviner can start plucking the strings of fate from the moment they choose their School. An enchanter bewitches people even from level one. Necromancers get into their ooky groove by level 5 or 6. You come in last in progression, but when you do, you have the ability to dramatically shift the game to another dimension of play.

A summoner’s toolkit looks something like this (by spell level):

Level One

*Find Familiar:* As stated, your classic spell to call up a magical pet. These mundane appearing animals are in fact spirits, and they provide some great benefits both RP and mechanics wise. They provide the Help action, which means your rogue and BSF get advantage on their attack rolls. Nifty. This is a ritual.

*Unseen Servant:* Some would say this is summoning. I’d say this is more like minor Jedi tricks. It is a “force” that acts like a servant. Good for cleaning, cooking, pouring you fresh wine, grabbing that esoteric book where you wrote down that particular archfiend’s true name, and scrubbing the blood circle off your floor from the last summoning. Ritual spell.

Second Level

~~(Second level offers you nothing as a summoner. Congratulations. You get to shove people with a~~ *~~dust devil~~* ~~or~~ *~~flaming sphere~~*~~, or wrap them up in a~~ *~~web.~~*~~)~~Edit: Thanks, Nyxies, for the nudge to add a spell added by WotC toward the end of last year. You do have *dust devil*, *flaming sphere*, or *web*, which are great control spells. However, you also have a splendid option in the following:

*Flock of Familiars*: This concentration up to one hour conjuration spell multiplies your familiars from one to three (or more when cast at a higher level). You extend their range of telepathy and your perception through them to one mile--which is a significant power leap appropriate to the spell level. Now you can comb the catacombs in multiple directions, and benefit from a swimming quipper, a flying owl, and a slinking cat at the same time (though they must remain all the same kind of celestials, fey, or fiendish spirits). This spell lets you also exhibit greater control and mobility on the battlefield, since you can cast touch spells through one of your trio on your turn. So, while two provide *help* to allies (or yourself) to grant advantage on attacks, the third can extend your *shocking grasp* or a *cure wounds* if you happen to have some cleric spells from racial features, feats, or multiclass features.  
  
In short, this addition empowers a conjurer to feel more like a summoner starting at level three due to the added variety and versatility of this spell.

Third Level

*Animate Dead*: But that is necromancy! Stay with me. You are now a level 5 or 6 wizard. With PHB only, you will not see a summoning spell yet. This is your holdover. You get a zombie or skeleton to do your bidding for 24hrs. Recast to reassert control. This is handy for giving you a minion. Is it an evil spell? 5e offers revenants (neutral undead) and possesses other abilities that grant undead minions to players (I’m looking at you Hexblade); if it is not to your taste, simply leave it be. But if you need a lower level means to conjure up a mook to take those thousand poison needles to face from the trapped door, I offer you this.

***Magic Circle*:** So we begin. The first tool of worth toward your ultimate diabolical plans. You have two versions within this spell. One to keep certain types of creatures out; this can be circumstantially useful (say, if you summon creatures you have no intention of controlling--or are risky to try to control--and you want a safe-ish place to watch the chaos). The other version is what you are after. It creates an inverted circle that wards everyone *outside* from what is *inside*. This spell will be the foundation of what is to come. Too bad this comes at spell level 3 and the rest of your tools come much later. This abjuration essentially will act as the circular cage you cast your summons into. This spell is not a ritual, but may as well be as it takes one minute to cast. It also costs 100gp in materials to cast (consumed). Might I suggest starting to charge a fee for your teleportation taxi services?

Fourth Level

***Conjure Minor Elementals*:** Finally a true summons! You summon one CR2 or lower elemental, two CR1 or lower elementals, four CR1/2 or lower elements, or eight CR1/8 or lower elementals. The selection at some of these CRs is limited. However, this will give you one to eight friendly elementals for up to one hour (concentration). Again, casting time of one minute, so this is not a combat spell--though, with your class feature of Focused Conjuration at level 10, you can cast this with relative impunity; you won’t lose concentration, but you will lose hit points. Plan accordingly. Upcasting this spell increases number of elementals under your command. This can become a small army that can overwhelm both combat and your enemies (5e has them go all at once as they share an initiative. That can be as many as 24 steam mephits on the attack!).

*Faithful Hound*: This spell I lump into the *Unseen Servant* category. You get a spectral hound that does a few tricks: Stay, Watch (invisible, visible, and Ethereal targets), Alert, and Bite. It won’t follow you, so this is purely a long rest protection plan. At fourth level, you’d probably only use this if you happened to have it prepared (you have better priorities) and you did not burn this slot casting other things (like summoning your elemental minions). Don’t pick this for spell or summoning progression. I’d happily scribe it into my book for those slow days at home base when you don’t want anyone sneaking up on you while you study better summoning spells.

Fifth Level

***Conjure Elemental:*** This is the upgrade to the spell above. This takes one minute and requires you to choose a suitable 10ft space for the elemental you want--so, the trend with summons continues. You are not casting this in combat, and you need to either find suitable terrain or prepare your own (like build a bonfire, or ask your divine spellcasting friends to create some water). However, the result is a CR 5 or lower elemental under your command. Note that the GM dictates what you summon, but you have control over what the summoned creature does--unless you lose concentration on the spell. Then the elemental is free to do as it pleases for the duration of an hour from the time you summoned it. Upcasting increases the CR you can summon.

***Planar Binding:*** Now we begin to see the shape of things to come. You attempt to bind a creature from another plane to your bidding. This spell has a casting time of one hour. *Magic Circle* has a duration of one hour. You do the math. This spell, well, spells that part out: *Typically, the creature is first summoned into the center of an inverted magic circle in order to keep it trapped while this spell is cast*. How do you get the (likely non-compliant) creature summoned into the circle? You cast one of your *conjure* spells and designate the circle as your chosen “un-occupied space.” If PHB only, you have *conjure minor elemental* and *conjure elemental* at your disposal when you first acquire this spell. More spells, with greater options for binding, will come later. This is a great spell for making agents throughout the multiverse; the creature initially stays on the same plane you bound it (the summoning spell extends to incorporate the new duration of *Planar Binding*): However, the creature can travel freely (via a portal or transportation spell \*cough\* \*cough\*) about the planes in service to you. Note, they are not made friendly to you with this spell. Upcasting *Planar Binding* grants you up to one year and a day of service. The creature gets a CHA save, which is nice because it is a rarer proficiency. This spell costs 1000gp in materials per cast. (I told you this was an expensive profession. I would point you to Mordekainen’s Conjurer’s Relief Fund...but who am I kidding. Better go rollover some dungeons to pay for your domination).

Seventh Level

***Forcecage:*** I describe this below in the additional spells a conjurer will want in his or her repertoire. However, as I wrote the advice, I realized this is a staple for summoners. With a duration of one hour (no concentration) and no save except to leave magically (CHA at that), this is the spell you want to cast right after you drag a being from its native plane. Set it up as a cage conveniently around that *magic circle* you laced on the ground, and now you have an imprisoned planar waiting to be *bound*. Note the 1,500gp cost for materials. You have the pay for power.

*Magnificent Mansion:* While not an immediate contribution to the summoner’s trade, this is useful for creating a space where you can conduct your summonings without the interference from the outside environment. This is your first spell that creates an extradimensional space large enough and that lasts long enough (24 hours no concentration) for your summoning needs. The material components are a pittance, and the statement is obvious: You are a rising master of the arcane. Glass Cannon, please take your boots off, that rug is kashmir. Would you like a feast while I prepare my *magic circle* in the ritual chamber?

***Plane Shift:*** Why a transportation spell? Because this is *the* transportation spell for a summoner. You want those esoteric tomes filled with juicy true names. This is how you get to the forbidden planes of existence where the secrets to making your summonings more powerful might be found. That archmage has hidden everything on a demiplane? Conveniently you got access to his tuning fork and made a duplicate. Time to rob him blind while he handles your minions wrecking his library on the Material Plane. These tuning forks to planes are not cheap at 250gp a piece. The DM may rule some materials extremely rare. However, this is part of your patient, persistent trek to ultimate domination.

Eighth Level

***Antipathy/Sympathy:*** A god wizard once asked, “how am I supposed to get the creature into the magic circle exactly?” This is one of the ways you get them into that dratted inverted circle. With a duration of ten days, this fits into your niche of uber preparation. You get to set up your wards just how you like them, and you can have multiple of these spells in place. *Antipathy* set near the place where you plan to cast *Gate* to help push them along, with *Sympathy* over the *magic circle*. *Voila!* You have a conveyor belt for your summons. It is also helpful to put *antipathy* on your BSF, who preferably has Sentinel as a feat by now, which lets him step out in front of the portal and keep the critter on the straight and narrow path to being *bound*. This spell does offer a WIS save, which repeats upon the target being harmed. However, at this point, it has bigger problems (like that *Forcecage* you erected).

***Demiplane:*** Here is some of that high level sweetness. If your DM deemed conjuration a dark art alongside necromancy, you now have infinite secluded spaces to hold your summonings (and your summons). You can build your own wizard’s study, filled with your favorite books, artifacts, and wards (getting a cleric or tome warlock to cast *Forbiddance* on the areas within a demiplane that you want especially protected might be useful). You can set up prisons, guild halls, stables, warehouses, breweries, etc...all for the cost of a somatic spell. This spell is also useful for whisking away a particularly troublesome minion who refuses to obey. *Banishment* sends them home. *Demiplane* entombs them (Did I mention *Forbiddance*?). Creatures tend to become more compliant after a few centuries in isolation. Duration for the portal this spell creates is one hour (no concentration), but *Dispel Magic* cast by a friend will allow you to seal the hatch on the same turn, just before the clever sod gets a chance to make a run for it.

*Maze:* An honorable mention for a summoner. This is another means to punish a particularly unruly minion. Send them here to make Int checks (not a save). Duration 10 minutes (concentration), so it is not as permanent or as emotionally petrifying for the target as *Demiplane* (which you could conceivably have built a maze within during your free time). This lets you ride out the clock on your one hour summons when they break free during the final minutes.

Ninth Level

Ah, we have made it. This spell level is what you have been slavering for secretly (or not so secretly) since you rolled up your conjurer. So begins the dramatic leap in power toward demigod status.

***Foresight:*** Advantage on all checks, saves, and attack rolls. Enemies have disadvantage on attack rolls. This is better cast on you, so you can cast other ninth level spells. But it is priceless for the beings you are now attempting to control. Duration 8 hours (no concentration).

***Gate****:* Here it is. Your capstone. You can open a portal with precision into any location (barring a Divine or Planar Ruler laying the ban hammer on all portals into their presence and/or domain). You call forth the true name of a person whilst on a separate plane of existence and they are forced to come through the gate to the nearest unoccupied space. If you’ve done everything right and used all of your tools you’ve collected, this space is a *magic circle*. Hopefully you have assistants to cast other particularly useful spells like *Forcecage*. The creature is free to do as it pleases. Rarely do powerful beings respond happily to your unannounced invitation to join you. Duration is one minute (concentration), so I would recommend dropping concentration right after if you do not want them simply running back through the portal. Materials cost 5,000gp. At this point, that is worth every copper for what you plan to do. One thing to consider with this spell: You can name anyone so long as you name their name. Need to save a friend from a Baatezu prison? Summon them with *Gate*. Need to capture a lich on the Material Plane and do not want to stroll through his *Tomb of Horrors*? Set up your Demiplane prison and *Gate* them in. Acerak may or may not be his true name; if it is, relish in turning the tables on the trap-happy necromancer. (Again, I do like the combination of *Forbiddance* on a space within the Demiplane versus Undead for this. Have your BSF standing with *Sympathy* and its weapon of choice ready to bring the pain: Both of you will be smiling while the DM goes prematurely bald). Unfortunately, *Planar Binding* does not allow you to take control of anything other than elementals, fey, celestials, or fiends. That said, at this point, you can take control of significantly more powerful creatures than any other summoning spell allows. You are not making *planar allies* that you barter with for temporary service; you are making servants that you control. *An important note*: Your School of Conjuration capstone was Durable Summons. *Gate* is a conjuration spell. Summoning a creature through *Gate* will add 30 temporary HP to them. That doesn’t sound like much, until you think of what you want to summon with a *Gate*. Handy for a BSF jumping into a fight. A deadly buff for that Pit Fiend if you fail to contain it.

***Imprisonment:*** This is the spell you cast after you summon a creature you know better than to attempt to control--or that falls outside of *planar binding*. This is good for the BBEG you portal’d to your position and now have trapped in a *Forcecage*. The materials are unique to each casting, and requires 500gp per hit dice of the target. Target gets a WIS save. You are a summoner. You prepare for your enemies. I recommend setting conditions so that this spell goes off without a hitch, as it is expensive (Just like the rest of the tools of your trade). Duration is until dispelled (no concentration).

***Time Stop:*** This spell lets you conduct multiple rounds of actions within the span of one. This is infinitely superior to Action Surge. When you want to get off the *Forcecage*, drop the *Gate*, and begin casting *Planar Binding* in one turn, this is the spell you use. The fey you summoned won’t know what hit it before it’s frantically making that CHA save to GTFO.

***Wish:*** Everyone loves this spell. You love it too. This is how you cast *Planar Binding* without having to conduct an hour-long ordeal or pay the material component. You can also mimic those other summoning spells that you do not have access to (but I would not recommend spells too far down the list; you have greater priorities than woodland creatures. Yes, even you, Radagast). Parties are your friends, and this is one reason in particular. Have your cleric pal cast *Gate*, utilizing the true name you found on your obsessive search to level 17. Then you get to cast *Wish* and revel in your new minion who happens to be yours for a year and a day. Take that, planetar. You’re an emissary of a mortal now (and none of your “This is not according to my alignment!” business *Planar Ally* allowed its celestial heart to opt out of your questionable tasks. There will be no negotiations either.). You could *wish* a being to be your permanent slave, but either the DM will say no (spell wasted) or you could lose the *Wish* spell entirely. Dangerous odds when you can amass an army of year-and-a-day agents to send around the multiverse.

**Here’s Your Tab…**

If you have been adding the cost of spell components, you quickly realize the Noble background may have been more profitable than the Sage (Daddy Duke Warbucks, I need your patronage for my School…)

*Magic Circle*: 100gp/cast

*Planar Binding:* 1000gp/cast

*Forcecage:* 1500gp (optional, recommended)

*Gate*: 5000gp

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

*Total*: 6,500-7,600gp\*/summons

\*This excludes any wards, tuning forks, teleportation circles, consultations, tomes, *resurrections*, extra spells from other casters, and any other incidental expenses along the way.

Learning the spells and true names are not cheap. Getting to a sufficient level is not cheap. Getting the right help and set up from the party is not cheap. This is where you patiently remind them of all the teleportation services you rendered; the BBEGs you have helped snare in *Demiplanes*; and the lodging you have provided in your *Tiny Huts, Galder’s Towers,* *Mansions*, *Mighty Fortresses*, and *Demiplanes*. You’re calling in favors at this point to make the step from conjurer of useful objects and pests to controller of powerful beings. The party will be happy when they find a solar has joined them as a guide and guardian across the planes, or you give the BSF an ancient dragon for a mount (Might want to suggest he makes friends with it during the course of the year, or he is in for a nasty surprise after “and a day.”)\*\*

*\*\*Someone might say, “Galdr, you cannot* bind *a dragon with* Planar Binding. *You are right. RAW, you cannot. However, you can cast* True Polymorph *on a sufficient level fiend or celestial (Pit Fiend and Solar are good examples)*. *Now you have an ancient dragon in your service.*

**A Little Help From Our Friends**

If you have access to the supplemental books, you gain spells like *Summon (Lesser/Greater) Demons* and *Infernal Calling*. These spells make you a true summoner as early as level five, and make a great addition to *Animate Dead*. Yes, addition. You want willing minions. These additional spells give you rancorous minions. They are not friendly; the demons attack non-demons and the devils seek to subvert your will. However, they are a way to get a fiend for your *Planar Binding* when the time comes, well before *Gate*.

I think these spells attempt to represent the lore behind summoning in *D&D*. You are stealing creatures from their homes to do your bidding. They have their own agendas and plots, but you have disrupted them. As such, no, they are not jolly well happy to be amid the Material Plane. While they are here, they will make the most of it. For demons, that is wanton destruction. For Devils, that is wily corruption of mortals (Yes, you *are* a mortal). You have to be the cannier character and seek to turn that chaos to your own advantage.

One of the ways goes back to the slogan for this guide: “How to Frame Them.” While a kitschy remark about *magic circle*, you also have the opportunity to make people blame other creatures for your actions. Given the range of some of these summoning spells, you can conceal yourself on a covered balcony and release fiends into the crowds. This requires no verbal commands on your part. Even if you lose (or release) concentration on *Greater Demons*, the demons persist. This allows you to *teleport* or *plane shift* out of the crime scene. If you want to stir up the *Blood War*, sow discord in Celestia, or simply torment a despot in his tightly-wound society, these spells let you.

With *Planar Binding* and advanced levels, this is how you get your fiendish advisors. Chain Warlocks get an imp. You can have a Shadow Demon or Bearded Devil. At even higher levels, you can have higher aspirations by upcasting the spell *Infernal Calling*. Have fun trying to control your *bound* advisor. But hey, not everyone gets to walk around with a princeling of devils as their aide! Take that, Chain Pact.

Further, these spells emphasize the roleplaying aspects of your character. You collect a devil’s talisman, and you have some sway over the infernal creature. Obviously, as stated, learning a creature’s true name has great power with *Gate*. It also gives advantages when trying to control these fiends through summoning spells.

The warlock sells his soul in a pact for power. You bind others souls in pacts for power. It feels so sinister that you may well end up on the Lower Planes when your time comes (if you don’t start your own *Clone* factory first).

**What is the Real Bottom Line**

Summoners have it tough. You have mechanical reasons to hate your life, as well as roleplaying reasons to hate your life. You are everyone’s enemy. From a mechanics standpoint, you are whiling away levels to scrape up enough spells to *attempt* a summons. When you do, you have no guarantee your costly efforts of experience or expense will net you more than a quick tour of the Outer Planes as a petitioner. From a roleplaying perspective, your hankering for true names, talismans, and meddling with creatures with considerable power makes you a nuisance--perhaps even a nemesis--to certain beings and perhaps even your party. Said beings may have the capability to harass, harm, or (Bahamut forbid) *summon* you.

That said, you gain a raw and terrible power. When properly done, you will have minions ranging from mephits to Pit Fiends, angels to ancient dragons. These pets you can send on missions across the multiverse, doing your bidding with plausible deniability. You were not there. The demon is lying--it *is* a demon after all.

This sort of trickery potential, as well as the nature of some of your spells, may lend you needing to boost an often dump stat for wizards: Charisma. However, a well-to-do wizard is not altogether foreign, and that persuasion ability can go a long way with convincing your minions your way is the right way. Warlocks can sacrifice an invocation for proficiency in these skills. You can get them with a background. With the right race, that doesn’t hinder you too much, and some items can assist you with the pesky social skills. Take a page from many NPC’s playbooks and get a Charisma-enhancing item: If a necromancer can dupe do-gooders into doing ill, you can con fiends into more righteous roles.

**Summoner’s Spell Selection**

The following spells are specifically to enhance or protect you as you summon things. You are meddling with dangerous creatures. As such, your arsenal will likely include the following:\*

*Protection Against Good and Evil:* This spell is ok, and your *circle* will do most of the heavy lifting. However, back-up is nice, as is *Bless* from the party cleric. (Have the cleric cast these sorts of spells).

*Nondetection*: Your early career life insurance policy. You will want this until you can cast *Mindblank* or get a ring of *Mindshielding*. Your trade makes you a target. Make yourself a hard target to track.

*Banishment*: You don’t like what a creature you summoned is doing? You’ve lost control of it? Send it home. It wants to be there anyway. This is a spell to have prepared any time you decide to summon creatures. (“Jane didn’t prepare *Banishment*. Jane now serves an Arcanaloth and scrubs blood circles from its floors.”)

*Geas*: This one may come in handy indirectly. Summon a creature into a *magic circle*. Cast *Geas* to oh say, “Uncover the true name of [insert creature], “Spy on [insert creature hiding on the Lower or Elemental planes],” or “locate and kill [“so-and-so in the City of Brass”].” Let the summons duration end and send them home. The mileage on this will depend on your DM and the creature; however, this is a way to create agents in the multiverse earlier on in your character progression. Unlike *Planar Binding,* the creature is not bound to the plane where you summoned it. This relies on knowing the creature’s name or having some familiarity with them, so that you can re-summon them at a later time for a progress report (if you care for that sort of thing). This spell lasts for 30 days, so I would recommend summoning them before it ends. You can then re-cast as needed. They get a WIS save each time you cast it. *Planar Binding* is better.

*Hold Monster*: You are no longer in control of a minion? Now it is paralyzed. They get a WIS save each round for the duration of a minute (Concentration). This spell can give you a breather, and on some targets let you draw that inverted circle around them.

*Legend Lore*: Want to know a true name? This is a long shot, but the spell can get you pointed in the right direction of where the Archfiend’s name can be found. Costs you 450gp in materials, 250gp of which the spell consumes per casting.

*Scrying:* You need to scout out that library of forbidden knowledge? Or, have you discovered the grotto where the devil left his talisman? This might be helpful in your preparations to *teleport* into the place. However, note that the more clever and powerful a target is, the more likely you will be misled or denied access with divination spells.

*Seeming:* This is purely for confusing the enemy. Send your mephits in looking like the despot’s soldiers. I recommend putting at least one character or minion in the lot with the ability to speak (preferably, intelligently at that). Look at the BBEG’s confusion when his minions are warring with each other. Where did your *Staff of Magi* get off to, BBEG? Check the conjurer’s *bag of holding*.

*Forcecage*: Do you want to build the Thunderdome? This is how you trap a BBEG in with your horde of minions (such as that particularly powerful planar you *bound* to do your bidding). No save unless the creature attempts to leave magically. This comes in two variants: a cage with 20ft on a side allows for your summons *and* the BSF to get some power slam action on the poor sod you chose to snare; spells can go in and out of the cage. You can make a seamless cube with 10ft on a side that allows no spells in or out (handy against casters of superior power); this still has room enough for the BSF and a minion to rip into the BBEG, albeit it’s cozy (Yes, you can leave a *cloud* in there, but likely the boss has a superior CON). The creature cannot leave the area via teleportation or planar travel without making a CHA save, so this spell is handy for containing powerful planars. With a duration of one hour (no concentration), this is a prudent alternative or addition to *magic circle* to allow you to *bind* a creature to your will. 1,500gp in materials to cast.

*Sequester*: This spell is an odd one, and you may ask what a summoner has use of suspending a creature in hibernation. If you’ve ever wondered why the dungeons are filled with creatures that should either a) be dead due to centuries without food and water, or b) have returned home to their native planes, this is one of those reasons. A clever mage sets the condition, “When intruders enter the antechamber” and behold the hidden, slumbering tarrasque-turned-guardian awakens to maul the would-be raiders. At 5,000gp a cast, the cost is nothing to snuff at.

*Mighty Fortress*: Not in the PHB, but this spell is great for creating that Keep your party always wanted. You get to control the floor plan. I’d recommend a secret ritual chamber where you have plenty of room to conduct those summonings. Not because the party frowns on your work (You’ve been adventuring together long enough for them to get a clue what you are up to), but secrecy makes it less tempting for them to interrupt your work. To make it permanent, have the party chip in: 500gp per cast, requiring 52 casts to make permanent, is not cheap.

***Mindblank****:* You’ve drawn a bullseye on your back with all your meddling. This spell is the preferred method Arcanaloths use to conceal themselves from their enemies; take a page from their book and make yourself undetectable even to *Wish*! Immune to charm and psychic damage is a plus (Mindflayers will find your secrets-rich mind particularly delectable). Duration 24 hours (no concentration).

*Polymorph/Mass Polymorph/Shapechage/True Polymorph:* I lump these all together, because they give you generally the same thing. The distinction is quantity, quality, and capability. These are big distinctions. However, each is a different way to make minions versatile and meatier. Sure, you could cast this on the BSF, but that’s dicey as they may not appreciate being a T-Rex (though they should; it’s freakin’ awesome). Your bound minions have no say. They get to become your mount, your flying mount, your bodyguard, your escort to an aristocratic ball (Don’t kiss the succubus. It doesn’t end well). The self-only uses are also there. You as a summoner have the privilege of being familiar with seeing most kinds of unique creatures from across the planes. They are your pet obsessions (cue drums). *Shapechange* lets you still do wizardy things in a form you have seen; *True Polymorph* lets you become those things for “real.” Unlike the temptation you may have, unless your campaign is planning to go Epic or Gestalt, don’t perma-*polymorph* yourself into a celestial, dragon, or yugoloth. You lose all those skills you have worked so hard to obtain.

\*Not an exhaustive list. I commend those who lay out every spell with rendered verdicts on their usefulness. I simply want to emphasize several essential or useful spells to increasing your survival rating as a summoner.

**A Final Word to GMs (Moderation Please, My Good Modrons):**

The appeal of a summoner relies mostly in part on your investment, more so than the player’s. Yes, it is their craving for control over powerful beings in the *Monster Manual* that starts this quest--but you quickly reward or ruin it with your own rulings. *Sage Advice* has placed the power of selecting the specific creature summoned in your hands when it comes to *what* steps out of the summoning spell. As such, I want to address the real power behind the curtain, and especially appeal to the modrons in the community to let the zerths have their day.

Whenever you read about a particularly powerful spell or creative combination on forums, you tend to see “nerf,” “OP,” and “broken” in response to these incantations. Unfortunately, these remarks come from the GM community as well as the players. For many, the fear of balance quickly leads to heavy-handed uses of the magical GM weapon *+5 Ban Hammer of Player Smiting*. The issue I have with this tendency stems from *Dungeons and Dragons* being a *roleplaying game.* It has mechanics to support the storytelling, which allow for measured growth of both characters and challenges as well as conflict resolution. The game also has a magical aesthetic that enables characters to begin as cantrip wielders who in the end become purveyors of wondrous power. By levels 17-20, they are facing fantastic foes who have Legendary Actions (See? it’s right there in the name). If the players’ characters were meant to be only a scalar dice rolling competition against large HP threats, then Evocation would be the only/main school of magic and this would be a small-scale wargame. Some play *D&D* this way, which I guess suits them; while summoning can add interesting layers to hack’n’slash gameplay, those groups tend to frown on qualitative solutions to mechanical combat. Since, at large, *D&D* is not merely about grinding, potent spells exist that bypass mere *sock-em bop-em* duels and transform the game through intangible qualities. Qualities that tend to make more mechanically inclined players and GMs unsettled or even frustrated. My hope is to aid the good modrons of the world with some suggestions.

Now, I realize that philosophy brings many protests. It is a generalized statement for one. It targets a demographic who would counterclaim that players abuse spells and class abilities to overshadow their peers and distort the game itself. The philosophy may come across as alienating for three. However, in identifying this problem I mean to open an opportunity: You, DM, wield the greatest power over the multiverse. Gradually lending some of that to your players is part of the fun of this interactive game. You are the Patron and your players are applicants coming to you with their character concepts. Summoning is perhaps the clearest link between you (GM) and your player: They get to pit their monsters to battle your beings “summoned” from the *MM* and *DMG*. The players have many disadvantages already built into the game: Their minions are often not inherently friendly, their minions come with a quantity and duration limit significantly less than yours, and their spell slots and components are both naturally restrictive and inherently expensive. You do not need to wield the +5 *BHOPS* in order to limit a pesky player’s use of summoning. You have the power to shape the multiverse in other naturally restrictive ways. A master at the trade can empower their players while redirecting their character’s ambitions into mutually profitable avenues. Here are some examples with the hopes of inspiring confidence in your ability to control the flow of the game without railroading your wizards into mundane tracks.

When a character/player expresses an interest in playing a summoner, take the opportunity to define the world they are about to play in. Is planar transit readily available? Are they aware of beings beyond the Material universe? To what extent? Even as a novice Conjurer, they can still be experts in their field compared to NPCs of similar CR (especially if they took feats or cross-classes to gain Expertise). Let them be so, albeit with much room to grow. Even in a world where the materials to jump planes is scarce, your characters can have heard legends, seen instances, or found suggestive tomes. The quest toward summoning is a full character progression and a long-lasting story arc full of potential for you as well as them, as outlined in the guide above. If your player wants to find a devil’s talisman or learn a celestial’s true name, then they’ve already put themselves on a journey that leads into mythic hazards and hardships. They’ve also loaded their character with more plot hooks than a meat factory: They need rare gems, spells, and knowledge, which lend to adventures, conspiracies, and betrayal—especially if they ever become successful even at the minor summoning of elementals and lesser demons. These creatures rarely forget the person who ripped them from their worlds to play a little role in his or her own plots. Your players have now cherry-picked enemies for you to later inflict upon them and dropped them into the story at large that you are trying to tell together.

A real concern is for those special types of players I like to call *mechanical necromancers*. These are the ones who come to the table with aberrative amalgams of five classes that somehow add up to twenty character levels and looks more like the degenerative child of a Beholder and a Picasso painting. Modrons, let me be clear: These aberrations are less often from Limbo as they are the perverted sire of Mechanus. These makers of Frankenstein creations often care little for story and all about supposed statistical advantages. These are worthy of your *+5 Ban Hammer of Player Smiting*. These are also generally easy to spot. A GM worth their salt may attempt to mentor the wielder of these forbidden arts, or at least direct him to a table where such a character can be played.

Conjuration, especially in its premier role as summoner, requires creativity and control. That is why I liken them to them zerths: The iron-willed molders of the infinite potential that is Limbo. Conjuration is supposed to look like them in many ways, even from the beginning with its Minor Conjuration. Turning that distinctive class feature into some lame 3d print version of whatever random object robs the character (and player) of their distinctive role—that’d be like saying Portent only applies after the character conducted some ritual divination or *Hypnotic Gaze* ends if your enchanter happens to blink. RAW, the ability has obvious limitations: The item is worthless (0 GP), obviously is a magical effect (so cannot be pawned off as the real thing), and dissipates should it deal/receive damage. Letting a character work within these confines to produce intricate objects doesn’t go against the RAW (it does not name level of complexity or any required skill in said trade as a prerequisite to produce an item)—this makes a conjurer that wizard who is useful to others because he can give them solid help with their tasks, say giving a hammer to a smith or a long pick to a thief. Or, for my Mechanus-loving friends, a timepiece to a modron.

The reason I deviate to describe this initial ability is because a conjurer-as-summoner really doesn’t have too many gimmicks up until levels 10-17. Yes, the school of conjuration provides a ton of control and transportation spells, which they will make great use of. But, the initial idea of a conjurer is often as a summoner. Finding familiars is as common as wielding wands in the wizarding community. Summoning requires a lot of time to arrive, and when they do, it is usually up to you to make that rewarding. Once you have sufficiently provided opportunity for the player to shine in that role they have been waiting for (likely) months to try, you have the pleasant task of punishing him with the in-game consequences already insinuated into 5e’s mechanics and lore. Asmodeus doesn’t appreciate the mortal toying with his lieutenant. I hope the spellslinger chose *Mindblank* in his spell selection!

I acknowledge summoners do not fit well in all games or all scenarios. To be sure, that is the case with many niche roles in *D&D*. For games going to level ten, this role may never even truly appear. However, even in one-off games or modules, summoners can have some fun. *Tomb of Horrors* is a good example. A character can try to wrestle control of a monster in Acerak’s lair, which may earn them the personal hatred of the necromancer (who I imagine hates other spellcasters already, so have fun hammering them doubly for that).

The bottom line is that creativity is part of the expression of this game. Summoning monsters has been a trope of villains, but also exists as an opportunity for characters. The Paladin has his *Find Steed*. The Ranger has her *Animal Companion*. Let the conjurer have his minions. When and if the clever zerths get uppity, remind them who is still the master conjurer at the table: The Wizard Behind The Screen. You.

That devil with a true name has a bigger, badder, brother, who wants a new pet conjurer. In the words of a Jedi Master, “There is always a bigger fish.”

Happy games, wherever you call home in the Outlands.

-Galdr

***Important Disclaimers:***

-Obviously, this is a not a product of *Wizards of the Coast*, cannot be construed as *Sage Advice*, and does not represent any organizations or affiliates of said companies.

-While I endorse Treantmonk’s guide to wizards, we are neither associated nor does he necessarily condone or endorse the summoner’s playstyle. He likely does not know this guide exists; even if he did, I imagine it is not his preferred brew.

-I write largely tongue-in-cheek, from the perspective of a powerful and snobbish wizard looking down his nose at the multiverse. This is intentional; any offense is not (especially to subscribers of BSFs, GCs, of more cautionary readings of RAW and mechanical playstyles!). I love paladins, sorcerers, and modrons. I play these classes. I do. I promise.

-The summoner is niche. So incredibly niche that you may not ever see them at your table. That’s fine. These 8000 words are meant to offer guidance to the 1/1,000,000,000th in the community that has a wild hare to play some devious manipulator of other worldly beings.

-If the *Planescape* jargon that slips into the above guide distracts you, then you’re a barmy clueless that needs his soddin’ brainbox examined…ahem, I mean to say, I hope it does not blind you to the advice to be gained from reading this guide. Yes, I am relic from the Cage and respectful of the Lady. Let this greybeard be.

-As ever, I am open to feedback. If you love this guide, then great. If you hate it, ok. The wonder of the internet is that you can simply ignore anything on it. For real, this is not binding like *Planar Binding* or a fiend’s *Pact.* If you don’t believe me, re-read disclaimer 1. This is where I prefer my happy modrons: They tend to give mechanical instruction and advice vice a Xaositect’s bewildering praises or rage. This guide is written in the spirit of being helpful. I would appreciate if you extend the same courtesy.