

PART 3

The Rules of Magic





CHAPTER 10: SPELLCASTING

MAGIC PERMEATES THE WORLDS OF D&D AND most often appears in the form of a spell. This chapter provides the rules for casting spells. Different character classes have distinctive ways of learning and preparing their spells, and monsters use spells in unique ways. Regardless of its source, a spell follows the rules here.

WHAT IS A SPELL?

A spell is a discrete magical effect, a single shaping of the magical energies that suffuse the multiverse into a specific, limited expression. In casting a spell, a character carefully plucks at the invisible strands of raw magic suffusing the world, pins them in place in a particular pattern, sets them vibrating in a specific way, and then releases them to unleash the desired effect—in most cases, all in the span of seconds.

Spells can be versatile tools, weapons, or protective wards. They can deal damage or undo it, impose or remove conditions (see appendix A), drain life energy away, and restore life to the dead.

Uncounted thousands of spells have been created over the course of the multiverse's history, and many of them are long forgotten. Some might yet lie recorded in crumbling spellbooks hidden in ancient ruins or trapped in the minds of dead gods. Or they might someday be reinvented by a character who has amassed enough power and wisdom to do so.

SPELL LEVEL

Every spell has a level from 0 to 9. A spell's level is a general indicator of how powerful it is, with the lowly (but still impressive) *magic missile* at 1st level and the earth-shaking *wish* at 9th. Cantrips—simple but powerful spells that characters can cast almost by rote—are level 0. The higher a spell's level, the higher level a spellcaster must be to use that spell.

Spell level and character level don't correspond directly. Typically, a character has to be at least 17th level, not 9th level, to cast a 9th-level spell.

KNOWN AND PREPARED SPELLS

Before a spellcaster can use a spell, he or she must have the spell firmly fixed in mind, or must have access to the spell in a magic item. Members of a few classes, including bards and sorcerers, have a limited list of spells they know that are always fixed in mind. The same thing is true of many magic-using monsters. Other spellcasters, such as clerics and wizards, undergo a process of preparing spells. This process varies for different classes, as detailed in their descriptions.

CASTING IN ARMOR

Because of the mental focus and precise gestures required for spellcasting, you must be proficient with the armor you are wearing to cast a spell. You are otherwise too distracted and physically hampered by your armor for spellcasting.

In every case, the number of spells a caster can have fixed in mind at any given time depends on the character's level.

SPELL SLOTS

Regardless of how many spells a caster knows or prepares, he or she can cast only a limited number of spells before resting. Manipulating the fabric of magic and channeling its energy into even a simple spell is physically and mentally taxing, and higher-level spells are even more so. Thus, each spellcasting class's description (except that of the warlock) includes a table showing how many spell slots of each spell level a character can use at each character level. For example, the 3rd-level wizard Umara has four 1st-level spell slots and two 2nd-level slots.

When a character casts a spell, he or she expends a slot of that spell's level or higher, effectively "filling" a slot with the spell. You can think of a spell slot as a groove of a certain size—small for a 1st-level slot, larger for a spell of higher level. A 1st-level spell fits into a slot of any size, but a 9th-level spell fits only in a 9th-level slot. So when Umara casts *magic missile*, a 1st-level spell, she spends one of her four 1st-level slots and has three remaining.

Finishing a long rest restores any expended spell slots (see chapter 8 for the rules on resting).

Some characters and monsters have special abilities that let them cast spells without using spell slots. For example, a monk who follows the Way of the Four Elements, a warlock who chooses certain eldritch invocations, and a pit fiend from the Nine Hells can all cast spells in such a way.

CASTING A SPELL AT A HIGHER LEVEL

When a spellcaster casts a spell using a slot that is of a higher level than the spell, the spell assumes the higher level for that casting. For instance, if Umara casts *magic missile* using one of her 2nd-level slots, that *magic missile* is 2nd level. Effectively, the spell expands to fill the slot it is put into.

Some spells, such as *magic missile* and *cure wounds*, have more powerful effects when cast at a higher level, as detailed in a spell's description.

CANTRIPS

A cantrip is a spell that can be cast at will, without using a spell slot and without being prepared in advance. Repeated practice has fixed the spell in the caster's mind and infused the caster with the magic needed to produce the effect over and over. A cantrip's spell level is 0.

RITUALS

Certain spells have a special tag: ritual. Such a spell can be cast following the normal rules for spellcasting, or the spell can be cast as a ritual. The ritual version of a spell takes 10 minutes longer to cast than normal.



It also doesn't expend a spell slot, which means the ritual version of a spell can't be cast at a higher level.

To cast a spell as a ritual, a spellcaster must have a feature that grants the ability to do so. The cleric and the druid, for example, have such a feature. The caster must also have the spell prepared or on his or her list of spells known, unless the character's ritual feature specifies otherwise, as the wizard's does.

CASTING A SPELL

When a character casts any spell, the same basic rules are followed, regardless of the character's class or the spell's effects.

Each spell description in chapter 11 begins with a block of information, including the spell's name, level, school of magic, casting time, range, components, and duration. The rest of a spell entry describes the spell's effect.

CASTING TIME

Most spells require a single action to cast, but some spells require a bonus action, a reaction, or much more time to cast.

BONUS ACTION

A spell cast with a bonus action is especially swift. You must use a bonus action on your turn to cast the spell, provided that you haven't already taken a bonus action this turn. You can't cast another spell during the same turn, except for a cantrip with a casting time of 1 action.

REACTIONS

Some spells can be cast as reactions. These spells take a fraction of a second to bring about and are cast in response to some event. If a spell can be cast as a reaction, the spell description tells you exactly when you can do so.

LONGER CASTING TIMES

Certain spells (including spells cast as rituals) require more time to cast: minutes or even hours. When you cast a spell with a casting time longer than a single action or reaction, you must spend your action each turn casting the spell, and you must maintain your concentration while you do so (see "Concentration" below). If your concentration is broken, the spell fails, but you don't expend a spell slot. If you want to try casting the spell again, you must start over.

RANGE

The target of a spell must be within the spell's range. For a spell like *magic missile*, the target is a creature. For a spell like *fireball*, the target is the point in space where the ball of fire erupts.

Most spells have ranges expressed in feet. Some spells can target only a creature (including you) that you touch. Other spells, such as the *shield* spell, affect only you. These spells have a range of self.

Spells that create cones or lines of effect that originate from you also have a range of self, indicating that the origin point of the spell's effect must be you (see "Areas of Effect" later in this chapter).

Once a spell is cast, its effects aren't limited by its range, unless the spell's description says otherwise.

COMPONENTS

A spell's components are the physical requirements you must meet in order to cast it. Each spell's description indicates whether it requires verbal (V), somatic (S), or material (M) components. If you can't provide one or more of a spell's components, you are unable to cast the spell.

VERBAL (V)

Most spells require the chanting of mystic words. The words themselves aren't the source of the spell's power; rather, the particular combination of sounds, with specific pitch and resonance, sets the threads of magic in motion. Thus, a character who is gagged or in an area of silence, such as one created by the *silence* spell, can't cast a spell with a verbal component.

SOMATIC (S)

Spellcasting gestures might include a forceful gesticulation or an intricate set of gestures. If a spell requires a somatic component, the caster must have free use of at least one hand to perform these gestures.

MATERIAL (M)

Casting some spells requires particular objects, specified in parentheses in the component entry. A character can use a **component pouch** or a **spellcasting focus** (found in chapter 5) in place of the components specified for a spell. But if a cost is indicated for a component, a character must have that specific component before he or she can cast the spell.

If a spell states that a material component is consumed by the spell, the caster must provide this component for each casting of the spell.

A spellcaster must have a hand free to access these components, but it can be the same hand that he or she uses to perform somatic components.

DURATION

A spell's duration is the length of time the spell persists. A duration can be expressed in rounds, minutes, hours, or even years. Some spells specify that their effects last until the spells are dispelled or destroyed.

INSTANTANEOUS

Many spells are instantaneous. The spell harms, heals, creates, or alters a creature or an object in a way that can't be dispelled, because its magic exists only for an instant.

CONCENTRATION

Some spells require you to maintain concentration in order to keep their magic active. If you lose concentration, such a spell ends.

If a spell must be maintained with concentration, that fact appears in its Duration entry, and the spell specifies how long you can concentrate on it. You can end concentration at any time (no action required).

THE SCHOOLS OF MAGIC

Academies of magic group spells into eight categories called schools of magic. Scholars, particularly wizards, apply these categories to all spells, believing that all magic functions in essentially the same way, whether it derives from rigorous study or is bestowed by a deity.

The schools of magic help describe spells; they have no rules of their own, although some rules refer to the schools.

Abjuration spells are protective in nature, though some of them have aggressive uses. They create magical barriers, negate harmful effects, harm trespassers, or banish creatures to other planes of existence.

Conjuration spells involve the transportation of objects and creatures from one location to another. Some spells summon creatures or objects to the caster's side, whereas others allow the caster to teleport to another location. Some conjurations create objects or effects out of nothing.

Divination spells reveal information, whether in the form of secrets long forgotten, glimpses of the future, the locations of hidden things, the truth behind illusions, or visions of distant people or places.

Enchantment spells affect the minds of others, influencing or controlling their behavior. Such spells can make enemies see the caster as a friend, force creatures to take a course of action, or even control another creature like a puppet.

Evocation spells manipulate magical energy to produce a desired effect. Some call up blasts of fire or lightning. Others channel positive energy to heal wounds.

Illusion spells deceive the senses or minds of others. They cause people to see things that are not there, to miss things that are there, to hear phantom noises, or to remember things that never happened. Some illusions create phantom images that any creature can see, but the most insidious illusions plant an image directly in the mind of a creature.

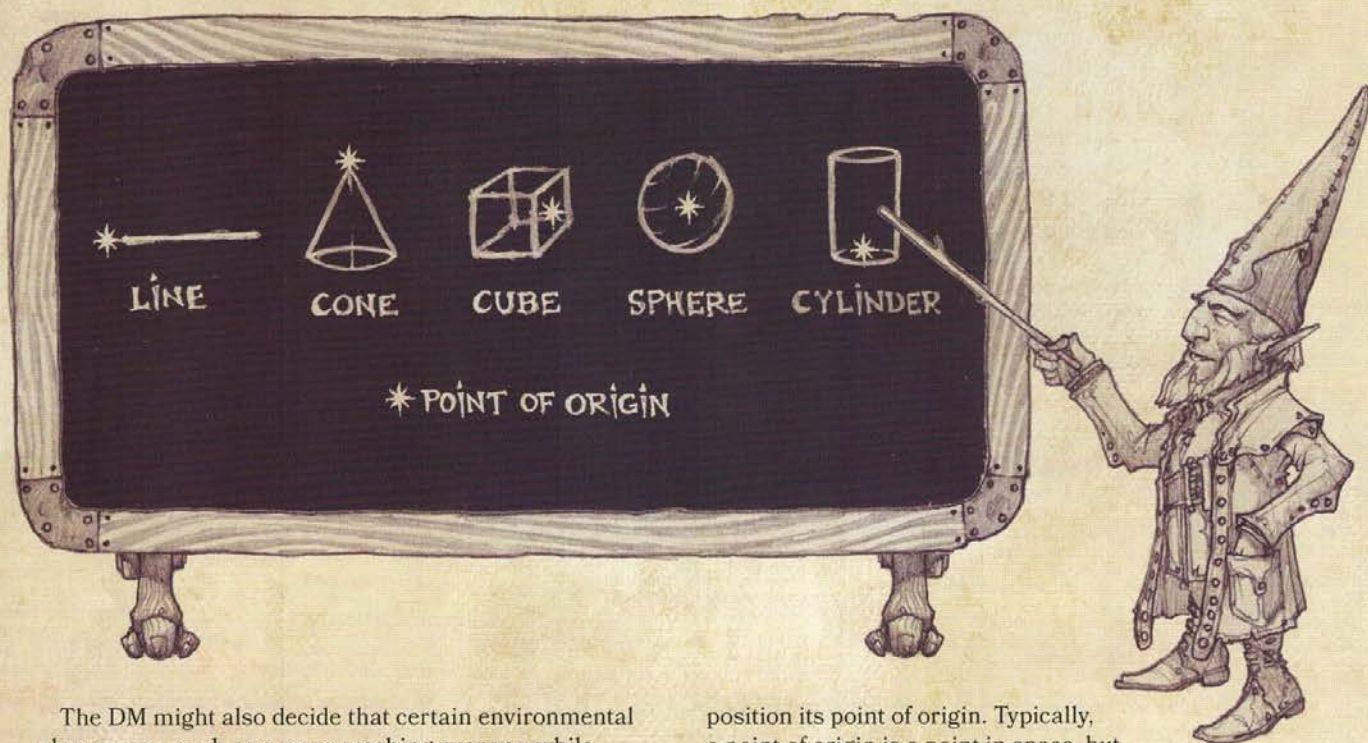
Necromancy spells manipulate the energies of life and death. Such spells can grant an extra reserve of life force, drain the life energy from another creature, create the undead, or even bring the dead back to life.

Creating the undead through the use of necromancy spells such as *animate dead* is not a good act, and only evil casters use such spells frequently.

Transmutation spells change the properties of a creature, object, or environment. They might turn an enemy into a harmless creature, bolster the strength of an ally, make an object move at the caster's command, or enhance a creature's innate healing abilities to rapidly recover from injury.

Normal activity, such as moving and attacking, doesn't interfere with concentration. The following factors can break concentration:

- **Casting another spell that requires concentration.** You lose concentration on a spell if you cast another spell that requires concentration. You can't concentrate on two spells at once.
- **Taking damage.** Whenever you take damage while you are concentrating on a spell, you must make a Constitution saving throw to maintain your concentration. The DC equals 10 or half the damage you take, whichever number is higher. If you take damage from multiple sources, such as an arrow and a dragon's breath, you make a separate saving throw for each source of damage.
- **Being incapacitated or killed.** You lose concentration on a spell if you are incapacitated or if you die.



The DM might also decide that certain environmental phenomena, such as a wave crashing over you while you're on a storm-tossed ship, require you to succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw to maintain concentration on a spell.

TARGETS

A typical spell requires you to pick one or more targets to be affected by the spell's magic. A spell's description tells you whether the spell targets creatures, objects, or a point of origin for an area of effect (described below).

Unless a spell has a perceptible effect, a creature might not know it was targeted by a spell at all. An effect like crackling lightning is obvious, but a more subtle effect, such as an attempt to read a creature's thoughts, typically goes unnoticed, unless a spell says otherwise.

A CLEAR PATH TO THE TARGET

To target something, you must have a clear path to it, so it can't be behind total cover.

If you place an area of effect at a point that you can't see and an obstruction, such as a wall, is between you and that point, the point of origin comes into being on the near side of that obstruction.

TARGETING YOURSELF

If a spell targets a creature of your choice, you can choose yourself, unless the creature must be hostile or specifically a creature other than you. If you are in the area of effect of a spell you cast, you can target yourself.

AREAS OF EFFECT

Spells such as *burning hands* and *cone of cold* cover an area, allowing them to affect multiple creatures at once.

A spell's description specifies its area of effect, which typically has one of five different shapes: cone, cube, cylinder, line, or sphere. Every area of effect has a **point of origin**, a location from which the spell's energy erupts. The rules for each shape specify how you

position its point of origin. Typically, a point of origin is a point in space, but some spells have an area whose origin is a creature or an object.

A spell's effect expands in straight lines from the point of origin. If no unblocked straight line extends from the point of origin to a location within the area of effect, that location isn't included in the spell's area. To block one of these imaginary lines, an obstruction must provide total cover, as explained in chapter 9.

CONE

A cone extends in a direction you choose from its point of origin. A cone's width at a given point along its length is equal to that point's distance from the point of origin. A cone's area of effect specifies its maximum length.

A cone's point of origin is not included in the cone's area of effect, unless you decide otherwise.

CUBE

You select a cube's point of origin, which lies anywhere on a face of the cubic effect. The cube's size is expressed as the length of each side.

A cube's point of origin is not included in the cube's area of effect, unless you decide otherwise.

CYLINDER

A cylinder's point of origin is the center of a circle of a particular radius, as given in the spell description. The circle must either be on the ground or at the height of the spell effect. The energy in a cylinder expands in straight lines from the point of origin to the perimeter of the circle, forming the base of the cylinder. The spell's effect then shoots up from the base or down from the top, to a distance equal to the height of the cylinder.

A cylinder's point of origin is included in the cylinder's area of effect.

LINE

A line extends from its point of origin in a straight path up to its length and covers an area defined by its width.

A line's point of origin is not included in the line's area of effect, unless you decide otherwise.

SPHERE

You select a sphere's point of origin, and the sphere extends outward from that point. The sphere's size is expressed as a radius in feet that extends from the point.

A sphere's point of origin is included in the sphere's area of effect.

SAVING THROWS

Many spells specify that a target can make a saving throw to avoid some or all of a spell's effects. The spell specifies the ability that the target uses for the save and what happens on a success or failure.

The DC to resist one of your spells equals $8 + \text{your spellcasting ability modifier} + \text{your proficiency bonus} + \text{any special modifiers}$.

ATTACK ROLLS

Some spells require the caster to make an attack roll to determine whether the spell effect hits the intended target. Your attack bonus with a spell attack equals your spellcasting ability modifier + your proficiency bonus.

Most spells that require attack rolls involve ranged attacks. Remember that you have disadvantage on a ranged attack roll if you are within 5 feet of a hostile creature that can see you and that isn't incapacitated (see chapter 9).

COMBINING MAGICAL EFFECTS

The effects of different spells add together while the durations of those spells overlap. The effects of the same spell cast multiple times don't combine, however. Instead, the most potent effect—such as the highest bonus—from those castings applies while their durations overlap.

For example, if two clerics cast *bless* on the same target, that character gains the spell's benefit only once; he or she doesn't get to roll two bonus dice.

THE WEAVE OF MAGIC

The worlds within the D&D multiverse are magical places. All existence is suffused with magical power, and potential energy lies untapped in every rock, stream, and living creature, and even in the air itself. Raw magic is the stuff of creation, the mute and mindless will of existence, permeating every bit of matter and present in every manifestation of energy throughout the multiverse.

Mortals can't directly shape this raw magic. Instead, they make use of a fabric of magic, a kind of interface between the will of a spellcaster and the stuff of raw magic. The spellcasters of the Forgotten Realms call it the Weave and recognize its essence as the goddess Mystra, but casters have varied ways of naming and visualizing this interface. By any name, without the Weave, raw magic is locked away and inaccessible; the most powerful archmage can't light a candle with magic in an area where the Weave has been torn. But surrounded by the Weave, a spellcaster can shape lightning to blast foes, transport hundreds of miles in the blink of an eye, or even reverse death itself.

All magic depends on the Weave, though different kinds of magic access it in a variety of ways. The spells of wizards, warlocks, sorcerers, and bards are commonly called **arcane magic**. These spells rely on an understanding—learned or intuitive—of the workings of the Weave. The caster plucks directly at the strands of the Weave to create the desired effect. Eldritch knights and arcane tricksters also use arcane magic. The spells of clerics, druids, paladins, and rangers are called **divine magic**. These spellcasters' access to the Weave is mediated by divine power—gods, the divine forces of nature, or the sacred weight of a paladin's oath.

Whenever a magic effect is created, the threads of the Weave intertwine, twist, and fold to make the effect possible. When characters use divination spells such as *detect magic* or *identify*, they glimpse the Weave. A spell such as *dispel magic* smooths the Weave. Spells such as *antimagic field* rearrange the Weave so that magic flows around, rather than through, the area affected by the spell. And in places where the Weave is damaged or torn, magic works in unpredictable ways—or not at all.

