

# D&D Style Guide: Writing and Editing

We have two primary resources for the house style of DUNGEONS & DRAGONS products:

*The Chicago Manual of Style*, 17th edition  
merriam-webster.com

This guide takes both of those works as its foundation, so it focuses on matters of style and spelling that are particular to D&D products, where we depart from or expand on the recommendations of those works.

## USING *CHICAGO*

*The Chicago Manual of Style* is a gold mine of guidance for writers and editors. If you aren't familiar with it or have used only an earlier edition, start with the following chapters and sections:

- Section 5.250, "Glossary of Problematic Words and Phrases." Not sure whether to use "alternate" or "alternative"? Feeling as if "indicate" appears a bit too frequently in D&D rules? This section addresses these matters, among many others.
- Chapter 6, "Punctuation." This chapter is the authoritative reference for how to correctly use commas, colons, semicolons, dashes, and other punctuation in our publications.
- Chapter 7, "Spelling, Distinctive Treatment of Words, and Compounds." The whole chapter is worth skimming, but the treasure trove is at the end: section 7.89. That section addresses the many conundrums related to compound words.
- Chapter 9, "Numbers." When to use numerals and when not to—that's the meat of this chapter.

If you're the copyeditor of a D&D manuscript, make sure to look at section 2.77, a useful checklist of things to tidy up before you dive into your copyediting.

## GENERAL RULES

The rules in this section apply to all D&D products, whether RPG books, board games, novels, or something else.

## TITLES AND TRADEMARKS

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### DUNGEONS & DRAGONS

In a print publication, set the name of our brand in small caps: DUNGEONS & DRAGONS. The ampersand should be the same size as the capital letters. If the font you're using makes the ampersand smaller, don't set the ampersand in small caps.

On the web and in any other context where small caps are unavailable, capitalize the brand name with no special typographic treatment: Dungeons & Dragons.

The abbreviation, D&D, is neither set in small caps nor italicized.

***D&D Not Synonymous with the RPG.*** Bear in mind that DUNGEONS & DRAGONS encompasses various games, novels, and worlds. The brand name is not synonymous with the tabletop roleplaying game. That game is the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS Roleplaying Game. Inside a product for that game, it is acceptable to refer to the game as DUNGEONS & DRAGONS or D&D.

***Editions of the RPG.*** In a departure from previous usage, we spell out and lowercase references to editions of the roleplaying game. We write "fifth edition," for instance, not "5th Edition." We prefer to use an edition designation as a modifier of another term—"the fifth edition *Dungeon Master's Guide*," for example.

Our internal documentation occasionally uses edition abbreviations like 4E and 5E. In other contexts, such abbreviations should appear only in a table, a conversion document, or in an informal text.

### TEXTS ABOUT D&D SETTINGS

Your main references for our worlds, such as the Forgotten Realms and Dragonlance, should be guides that we provide or official products published for the fifth edition of the D&D roleplaying game.

Don't rely on Internet searches to give you the right answer to questions about a D&D setting. The Internet contains contradictions, misinterpretations, and outright fabrications. Both Wikipedia and the Forgotten Realms Wiki, for instance, contain some unreliable information.

Also, beware of relying solely on D&D products from previous editions. They often present conflicting or outdated information about a setting.

If you have a question that isn't answered in one of our guides or products, please contact us.

## TYPOGRAPHIC TREATMENT OF PRODUCT NAMES AND OTHER TRADEMARKS

The name of a publication, board game, or miniatures set is capitalized and italicized. Examples include *Castle Ravenloft* (board game) and *Forgotten Realms Campaign Setting* (book). Another example is the *Basic Rules*, the free version of the game available online. Initially we didn't italicize it; we do now.

Any other trademark of ours is capitalized and romanized. Examples include computer games, campaign settings, play programs, and product lines, such as *Forgotten Realms* (setting), *D&D Encounters* (play program), and *D&D Dungeon Tiles* (product line).

## SYMBOLS

A trademark symbol (™ and ®) appears the first time a trademark appears on packaging, on a cover, or in marketing material.

Trademarks appearing on the web or in the interior of books don't receive trademark symbols. The titles of most recent products are trademarked. A list later in this guide presents some of our trademarks with their symbols.

## ISSUE NUMBERS

When referring to an issue of a magazine, write the italicized title followed by a numeral that is not italicized. For example, you would write *Dragon* 100, not *Dragon* #100 or *Dragon* 100.

## ADVENTURE CODES

Many classic adventures for the tabletop roleplaying game have codes, such as I6 and DL1. Such a code is not part of the adventure's title and is not italicized. The code is a short way to refer to an adventure and should not be used in a context where the adventure's title has not been stated.

## ALPHABETICAL ORGANIZATION

- **Unless some other logical order prevails, lists, spells, stat blocks in a bestiary, etc. should all be organized alphabetically. We use letter-by-letter alphabetization. When comparing,**

### HIGH FANTASY

A typical D&D story or adventure is part of the high fantasy subgenre of fantasy fiction, with the epic scope characteristic of that subgenre.

D&D is about small bands of characters embarking on adventures together. Teamwork and friendship are a huge part of what makes D&D distinct as a brand. The lone knight fighting a dragon is less characteristic of D&D than an adventuring team fighting a dragon. People on their own get into trouble; a team that works together can triumph.

Elements of humor or tragedy are fine, so long as they are true to the facts of the brand and don't overtake the general tone. When in doubt, think about properties like the Lord of the Rings or Game of Thrones. If a situation would seem out of place there, it probably doesn't belong in D&D. For instance, there are moments of humor with the hobbits, but ring wraiths aren't used for gags.

**ignore spaces and continue comparing until you hit the first comma or parenthesis (Chicago 16.59; see also 16.61 for a more detailed example):**

fir  
Fire, Elemental Plane of  
fireball  
fire bolt  
fire elemental

**Microsoft Word Warning.** Microsoft Word's handy alphabetization tool (Table < Sort) sorts paragraphs word-by-word, NOT letter-by-letter! If using this tool, recheck the entries and tweak their order as needed to be letter-by-letter.

**When NOT to Alphabetize.** Sometimes within a section a different order will make more logical sense, like ordering dragon stat blocks by age category. There should always be a clear organizing principle; consider what method will be most helpful and intuitive for users.

## GENDER

We expect gender neutrality whenever the gender of a person is unknown or irrelevant. We don't assume that our readers are of a particular gender identity.

### ACHIEVING GENDER NEUTRALITY

See *Chicago* 5.255 for tips on achieving gender-neutral language. Use "he or she" sparingly, and avoid "he/she" and "s/he" altogether. Also, don't alternate between "he" and "she" in an attempt to be inclusive.

In rules text, we prefer to achieve gender neutrality by writing in the second person whenever possible.

We allow the use of "they," "their," "them," and "themselves" when referring to a person whose gender is unknown. But you must ensure that the pronoun's antecedent is clear if more than one person appears in the context. See *Chicago* 5.256 for a discussion of this topic.

### GENDER AND FANTASY RACES

"Man," "woman," and their plurals are fine for describing the gender of people. For example, we can write "dwarf man" or "gnome woman."

### GENDER-SPECIFIC SUFFIXES

Avoid gender-specific suffixes whenever possible. For example, we write "priest" or "actor" whether the person is male or female. Use a word like "priestess" or "actress" only if it's part of a person's title or an in-world organizations' titles.

Another example: use "god" whether the deity is male or female. Again, in-world uses of "goddess" are fine.

See *Chicago* 5.257 for more on this matter.

### PRONOUN PREFERENCE

Short Version: In running text, use a person's preferred pronoun: he, she, or they. Whatever pronoun you use, ensure that its antecedent is clear. In rules text, use "it."

## PRONOUNS FOR GENERIC CREATURES

In rules text for generic creatures, use “it” for clarity.

In descriptive text (such as in the lore sections of bestiary entries):

- Use they/them pronouns for Humanoids and other sapient creatures that have gender identity, but when we don’t know their gender identity (e.g., dwarf guards generally but not for a women-only guard unit; a creature seen at a great distance).
- Use “it” otherwise (animals, cosmic horrors, extraplanar creatures, etc.)
- If using they/them pronouns would be ambiguous, reword to avoid using pronouns.

### “They/them” in Descriptive Text.

*Creature Types:* Humanoids, Fey, Giants, most Dragons, many Monstrosities

*Specific Species:* centaurs, gold dragons, merfolk, quicklings, trolls

*But Also...* vampires (Undead that retain their identity)

A troll needs to eat constantly to fuel their regeneration.  
If a goblin has no one to play tricks on, they’ll play tricks on themselves.

Far above the mountains, a dragon soared, their wings angled to catch the morning breeze.

**Avoid Ambiguity.** Avoid using pronouns in contexts where “they” would be ambiguous.

*Ambiguous:* When a merfolk encounters an elf, they immediately attack.

*Clear:* When a merfolk encounters an elf, the merfolk immediately attacks.

*OR* “Merfolk attack elves on sight.

### “It” in Descriptive Text.

*Creature Types:* Aberrations; Beasts; Constructs; Oozes; most Celestials, Fiends, Plants, and Undead; many monstrosities

*Specific Species:* Chimeras, couatls, mephits, mind flayers, modrons, skeletons, wolves

*But Also...* wyverns (non-sapient Dragons)

If you feed a skeleton, the food falls right through it.  
A beholder never keeps its promises.

## PRONOUNS FOR SPECIFIC INDIVIDUALS

These guidelines apply to both rules and descriptive text.

- For a new character, if you’d use “they/them” for the character’s species, use they/them or gendered pronouns, as appropriate for the character’s identity.
- For a character in canon (famous hero, demon lord, powerful celestial, etc.), use the established pronouns for their identity, regardless of their species or type.

*He/Him:* Baphomet, Strahd

*She/Her:* Lolth, Tasha

*They/Them:* [insert examples]

## WHEN IN DOUBT

**Sidestep Edge Cases.** If a creature is on the borderline, tweak the wording to so you don’t need to choose pronouns.

A blorvent is a Construct imbued with a Humanoid soul. (Uh oh, an edge case!)

Blorvents are friendly, but they rust easily. (switching to plural to avoid choosing between “they” and “it”)

If you can’t avoid choosing pronouns, get a second opinion from your lead.

**Consider the Context.** A Construct with fragmentary memories from a Humanoid is probably an “it”; a Humanoid soul temporarily embodied in a Construct, complete with personality and memories, would use that Humanoid’s pronouns.

**Limited Exceptions.** On occasion, we might make exceptions to the guidelines above to achieve a specific effect. For example, characters might use gendered pronouns to talk about an animated doll, or we might use “it” to emphasize the inhumanity of a horrible monster (example). Such exceptions should be rare.

## HEADINGS

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We expect headings to be used logically and consistently throughout a manuscript. Work your way down the heading hierarchy without skipping steps (each heading has an associated style in our Word and InDesign templates):

Chapter Title

Heading 1

Heading 2

Heading 3

Inline Subhead [aka Heading 4]

Use a heading for a structural reason, not an aesthetic one. Moreover, don’t use a bunch of inline subheads out of a desire to avoid having more than one Heading 1–3 on the page. If you aren’t happy with the headings in your manuscript, restructure the text. Don’t misuse headings.

## INLINE SUBHEADS

The lowest level of our heading hierarchy is the inline subhead. It functions as our heading 4. Contrary to past D&D usage, this subhead should be followed by terminal punctuation, not a colon. Use a period, an exclamation point, or a question mark.

If you’re using our styles in Word or InDesign, apply the Inline Subhead style to the subhead (including the terminal punctuation). If you don’t have access to the style, set the subhead in bold italics to distinguish it from text that is simply bold.

Here’s an example of doing it correctly:

***Keen Senses.*** You have proficiency in the Perception skill.

Here's an example of doing it incorrectly, with the Bold Serif style:

**Keen Senses:** You have proficiency in the Perception skill.

Don't confuse an inline subhead with the bolded title of a stat block entry or other stat block data field. Such an entry rarely contains a complete sentence. The entry takes the form of a bolded variable name—sometimes followed by a colon—and then the variable's value. Here are examples:

**Speed** 30 ft.

**Child Names:** Ara, Bryn, Del, Eryn, Faen, Innil, Lael, Mella

**Range:** 60 ft.

Finally, don't use an inline subhead when you simply want to emphasize a word or phrase. Use bold for such emphasis, unless the emphasized term or phrase appears in the section's heading. Then, no emphasis is required. For example, if a Heading 3 says "Ki Points," don't bold "ki points" in the associated running text.

## EXCEPTIONS IN THE RPG

One thing in the RPG defies the heading hierarchy: the **name of a spell** at the top of a spell description always uses the Heading 3 style, even if preceded by Heading 1 or Chapter Title. Given this fact, a section of spells shouldn't be introduced by a Heading 3.

Some adventures contain other exceptions to the heading hierarchy, but such exceptions are nonstandard and shouldn't be mimicked without the managing editor's approval.

## SIDEBARS

Avoid overusing sidebars. If a sidebar must follow a particular section of text to be intelligible, it probably shouldn't be a sidebar. The best sidebars can appear anywhere on a page and still make sense.

## SPELLING AND PUNCTUATION

We use American style for spelling and punctuation. The word list later in this guide lists unusual words and variant spellings that appear in D&D products.

When *Webster's* and *Chicago* provide no guidance on how to spell something, we refer to the *New Oxford American Dictionary* (installed on all recent Macs) as a backup resource.

### PUNCTUATION, BOLDFACE, AND ITALICS

Refer to *Chicago* 6.2 and 6.3 for how to deal with punctuation that follows bold or italics.

The following examples follow our style:

***The Glory of Style.*** The previous period is bold italics because the entire inline subhead is bold italics. The room is home to three **hobgoblins**, each of whom loves to collect books on editorial style.

The wizard has prepared *burning hands*, *magic missile*, and *shield*.

The following examples don't follow our style:

Inside the hovel lurk five **goblins**, who have no regard for typographic tidiness.

The cleric prepared *cure wounds*, *shield of faith*, and *flurry of italics*.

## THE SERIAL COMMA

We require the serial comma. Here's an example: "The apprentice expressed gratitude to his parents, Mystra, and Elminster." We don't write, "The apprentice expressed gratitude to his parents, Mystra and Elminster," unless Mystra and Elminster are the apprentice's parents.

## VARIANT SPELLINGS

Many words have variant spellings. If a word has variants in *Webster's*, we use the one printed first (regardless of alphabetical order), except as noted in the D&D word list. For example, we use "toward," not "towards," and we use "backward," not "backwards."

## COMPOUNDS AND HYPHENATION

See *Chicago* 7.81–89 for extensive guidance on using compounds—open, closed, or hyphenated. When in doubt, lean on the multipage table in 7.89, an especially valuable resource.

**Use of "Non-."** Although *Chicago* says that "compounds formed with prefixes are normally closed," our use of "non-" is often an exception to this rule. The prefix is hyphenated in front of many of our fantasy races: non-elf, non-dwarf, non-orc, non-drow (but nonhuman, as in *Webster's*).

**Numbers and Abbreviations.** A rule that's easy to miss in 7.89 is that we don't hyphenate a compound composed of a numeral and an abbreviation. So, it's a "100 gp treasure," not a "100-gp treasure."

## CONTRACTIONS

We encourage the use of contractions formed with "not," such as "don't," "can't," and "wasn't" (see *Chicago* 5.105). Use other contractions with care, especially any contraction that can be misread. For example, "who's" can be read as "who is" or "who has."

## POSSESSIVES

*Chicago* has given different recommendations over the years on how to treat possessives, particularly those that involve words that end with an unpronounced *s*, as in "Descartes." We follow the approach in the seventeenth edition (see *Chicago* 7.16–29).

## WORDS USED AS WORDS

Our style for words used as words is to enclose them in quotes if the words are English (see *Chicago* 7.63). For example, "The alchemist's favorite word was 'pumpkin,' so he knew exactly what to name his golem: Pumpkin."

A non-English word, whether from the real world or a D&D world, is italicized when used as a word. For example, “She whispered the word *ebrath*, Elvish for ‘friend.’”

In contrast, a letter used as a letter is set in italics (see *Chicago* 7.64–68).

## BULLETED LISTS

When you create a bulleted list—or any other vertical list, such as a numbered one—introduce it with a complete sentence ending with a colon (see *Chicago* 6.130).

We begin each list item with a capital letter. Use closing punctuation in an item only if the list is composed of complete sentences.

## NUMBERS AND MATH

### NUMERALS VERSUS WORDS

We follow the general rule for numerals that is presented in *Chicago* 9.2. In short, we spell out whole numbers from zero to one hundred, as well as numbers that are formed by adding “hundred,” “thousand,” or “hundred thousand” to one of those numbers.

**Exceptions to the Rule.** Chapter 9 of *Chicago* spells out many exceptions to this rule, instances when numerals are used even when a number is less than 101. The exceptions that are most relevant to our work are summarized here:

- Percentages {45 percent, 53%}
- Abbreviations and symbols used as units of measure {6’3”, 5 gp, 3 lb.}
- Parts of a book or other work {chapter 2, part 3, page 34, scene 6, table 9, encounter 9, area 4}
- Volume and issue numbers {volume 3, *Dragon* 125, *Dungeon* 75}
- Currency {\$15, £4}
- Dates {1299 DR; Marpenoth 12, 1113; October 31}
- Times {10:15 a.m., 12:30 p.m.}, but use “noon” and “midnight”

**Numerals in Rules.** In rules writing, we use numerals more often. See “Numerals in Rules Text” later in this guide.

### MATHEMATICAL SYMBOLS

When a mathematical symbol appears, we expect the correct mathematical character to be used.

- + Plus sign
- Minus sign (Unicode 2212, not a hyphen or an en dash)
- ÷ Division sign
- × Multiplication sign (Unicode 00D7, not the letter x)
- = Equals sign

### FRACTIONS

Spell out a simple fraction, such as two-thirds, but when you combine a simple fraction with a numeral, use the appropriate fraction symbol, as in  $4\frac{2}{3}$ .

- $\frac{1}{4}$  One-fourth
- $\frac{1}{3}$  One-third
- $\frac{1}{2}$  One-half

- $\frac{2}{3}$  Two-thirds
- $\frac{3}{4}$  Three-fourths

When a fraction stands on its own in numeral form, as in a table, don’t use the fraction’s symbol. For example, write “1/2,” not “ $\frac{1}{2}$ .” But do write “ $1\frac{1}{2}$ .”

### PERCENTAGES

Use the word “percent,” rather than the symbol %, to express a percentage (“5 percent,” for example). You can break this rule in a table, as well as in a list where space is tight.

Also, the abbreviation we use for percentile dice is d100, not d%.

### “HALF” VS. “ONE-HALF”

When halving a quantity or game statistic, write “half,” not “one-half.” So, you would write “half your level,” not “one-half your level.”

## CROSS-REFERENCES

Use cross-references judiciously. They are useful tools that can be easily overused.

### CHAPTER REFERENCES

When you refer to a chapter, use its number. If referencing a chapter’s title would increase clarity, include the title in quotation marks. But chapter number alone usually suffices. Here are examples:

- See chapter 2 for how to make your character.
- Chapter 8, “The Rules of Magic,” explains how spellcasting works.
- Consult chapter 3 of the *Dungeon Master’s Guide* for further advice on adventure creation.

### APPENDIX REFERENCES

We use letters, not numbers, for appendices. References to appendices should follow the same principles that we follow for chapter references. Here are examples:

- See appendix A for definition of each condition.
- The game statistics for each creature are provided in appendix C.

### SUBSECTION/TABLE REFERENCES

When you refer to a subsection, including a sidebar, use its title in quotes. A table title is not enclosed in quotes. Here are examples:

- The “Roleplaying the Dragon” sidebar gives tips on how to bring the dragon fully to life in the story.
- See the “Actions in Combat” section for more examples of things you can do in battle.
- The Cleric table lists the features your cleric gains at each level.

As in those examples, make sure a reference is clear about what it's referring to—whether it's referring to a sidebar, a section, or a table, for instance.

## PAGE REFERENCES

We avoid page references as much as possible. They are labor-intensive (they must be added by hand during galley review), and they invite error.

A page reference is usually superfluous if it points to text in an alphabetized section (a monster in the *Monster Manual*, for instance).

Referencing a particular page in another product is especially ill-advised; that product's pagination could change in a reprint or a new edition.

Use a page reference only if the text you want to reference doesn't appear in a product's index and can't be referred to by chapter or subsection.

Before galley review, write a page reference as "page xx."

## UNSPOKEN DISCOURSE

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In D&D fiction, authors are free to use italics, quotation marks, or no distinguishing typography to present a character's thoughts or psionic communication (see *Chicago* 13.43). Aesthetics and clarity should dictate appropriate usage. (This is a change from our previous policy.)

## PLANES OF EXISTENCE

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A character is **on** a plane of existence. For example, "He was trapped on the Plane of Fire." But a character is **in** a plane when it is referred to by name without the word "plane." For example, "She is in Elysium."

## STYLE RULES FOR THE RPG

The following style rules apply to the tabletop roleplaying game and to products based on it.

When it comes to familiarizing yourself with the game's terms and customs of wording, there is no substitute for reading the rules of the game themselves.

## FORMATTING GAME TERMS

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In the RPG, certain terms receive special typographic treatment. Examples here are given in curly brackets.

### Terms to Capitalize

Ability scores {Strength, Intelligence}

Action names {the Attack action, the Dash action}

Armor Class

Artifacts {*Axe of the Dwarvish Lords*}

Class features {Sneak Attack, Rage}

Creature type (Humanoid, Fey, Undead)

Difficulty Class

Dungeon Master

Feats {Loremaster}

Languages {Common, Dwarvish, Elvish}

Planes of existence {the Abyss, the Nine Hells, the

Ethereal Plane, the Plane of Air}

Skills {Arcana, Perception}

Traits in races and monsters {Aquatic, Keen Senses}

### Terms to Set in Bold

Bold stat block names in running text to indicate what stat block to use for an encounter—this indicates the term is a game object.

### Correct Use of Bold for Stat Blocks

In room 3, three **vampire spawn** created by Strahd attack anyone who enters.

A **commoner** named Jessan attacks.

OR An angry gardener charges out of the gazebo (use the statistics for a **commoner**).

### Roman

Strahd likes to make vampire spawn in his free time.

Jessan mentions that they saw some hobgoblins climbing the mountain.

**First Appearance Only.** Set a monster's name in bold only the first time it appears in an encounter area or other subsection.

In room 2, two **hobgoblins** guard a chest. The hobgoblins are susceptible to bribes.

**Source.** By default, a bold stat block name refers to a stat block in the *Monster Manual*. If you're referring to a stat block in your manuscript, instead of in the *Monster Manual*, use a parenthetical to make that fact clear.

Correct: "Four **air elemental myrmidons** (see chapter 7) lurk here."

**Formatting.** Make sure no text gets between the number of monsters appearing and the name of the stat block. For example, write "four **goblins**," not "four loud **goblins**"; that adjective needs to go somewhere else in the sentence.

### Terms to Italicize

Artifacts {*Axe of the Dwarvish Lords*}

Magic items {*flame tongue*}

Spells {*magic missile*}

The italicized terms are treated as titles, even when they don't use title capitalization. Don't confuse one of these titles with an effect it creates (see *Chicago* 8.174). For example, the *wall of fire* spell produces a wall of fire, not a *wall of fire* (the latter would imply an infinite loop).

## NUMERALS IN RULES TEXT

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Use numerals for points, scores, damage expressions, and any game trait with a numerical value.

- Anyone who touches the orb regains 3 hit points.
- Someone with a speed of 25 feet will not be able to keep up.
- A character must have an Intelligence of at least 13 to understand the script.
- The cursed glyph deals 10 necrotic damage to anyone who touches it.
- You gain 1 level of exhaustion.

Use numerals for units of time that quantify the duration of a game effect, a condition, or a state of affairs in a tactical situation.

- The spell lasts for 1 round.
- No one can use the door for 10 minutes.

But:

- After winning the fight, the characters slept for six hours.
- For three days, they wandered aimlessly in the forest.

Use numerals for units of distance that quantify the size or extent of game effects.

- The attack has a range of 30 feet.
- The protective circle extends 5 feet beyond the doorway.

Use numerals for dimensions and distances in the game world on a tactical scale, including height and weight.

- The room is 20 feet square.
- She stands 6 feet tall and weighs 150 pounds.

But:

- The two cities are fifty miles apart.
- The tower is nearly three hundred feet tall.

## VERB USAGE

You **cast** a spell.

You **deal** damage.

You **drop** to 0 hit points.

You **finish** a short or long rest.

You **gain** temporary hit points.

You **make** an ability check, and it **succeeds** or **fails**.

You **make** a saving throw, and it **succeeds** or **fails**.

You **make** an attack (or you **attack**), and your attack **hits** or **misses** (it doesn't succeed or fail).

You **reduce** a target to 0 hit points.

You **regain** hit points.

You **restore** hit points to a target.

You **score** a critical hit.

You **take** an action, or you **use** your action to do something.

You **take** damage.

You **use** a feature.

## COMMON PITFALLS

### MAKING A ROLL VS. SUCCEEDING ON ONE

Don't mistake making an ability check, a saving throw, or other roll with succeeding on it. The following sentence gets it right: "You must succeed on a DC 15 Strength check to clamber up the wall." Don't write, "You must make a DC 15 Strength check to clamber up the wall," unless that sentence is immediately followed by a description of what happens on a success or failure.

### ATTACK VS. ATTACK ROLL

When an effect is triggered by an attack roll hitting or missing, use the term "attack roll" in the effect's text, not just "attack." The word "attack" confuses many of our readers, who often read it with its English meaning instead of as a rules term.

For example, there are readers who think *fireball* hits targets, even though we know the spell involves no attack roll and no hit. There's similar confusion about grappling, which doesn't trigger effects based on hitting or missing because it works off an ability check instead of an attack roll.

An attack roll is a concrete game operation that hits or misses, and it rarely confuses readers.

Write like this: "When you hit a creature with an attack roll, . . ."

Don't write like this: "When you hit a creature with an attack, . . ."

### SAVING THROWS

**Save.** "Save" can be used as a synonym for "saving throw," but use it sparingly, preferably only in a stat block or when preceded by "saving throw." In 4E, we used "save" as a synonym for "successful saving throw." We have abandoned that practice.

**"Must Make . . ."** When a creature is subjected to an effect that requires a saving throw, we prefer "the target **must make** a saving throw . . ." over "the target **makes** a saving throw . . ."

**Rolling a Saving Throw.** Writing "roll a saving throw" is redundant, since a saving throw, by definition, involves a throw of a die. You make a saving throw.

### PASSIVE PERCEPTION

Use passive Wisdom (Perception) when the check is made passively, but use regular Wisdom (Perception) when the check is made actively.

### ADVANTAGE AND DISADVANTAGE

You make a roll **with** advantage or disadvantage, or you have advantage or disadvantage **on** a roll.

Also, an **attack roll**, not an attack, has advantage or disadvantage.

### "RESULT" AND DIE ROLLS

In 3E and 4E, the word "result" was sometimes used as a synonym for "the number rolled on a die." We have abandoned that practice.

When you need to refer to the number rolled on a die, do so idiomatically. Here are examples: “If you roll at least a 10, you succeed,” “You score a critical hit if you roll a 20,” and “Add the number you roll to any bonuses or penalties.”

“Result” can legitimately refer to the sum of a die roll and any modifiers. “Compare the result to the DC to determine whether you succeed,” for example. We often prefer the word “total” in such a context.

### “WITHIN X FEET”

If you write that something happens “within X feet,” that literally means the effect reaches anything within that area, even if there’s total cover in the way. If you want to limit the reach of such an effect, require that the target be able to see or hear the effect’s source or that the target can’t be behind total cover. Alternatively, use one of our official areas of effect: cone, cube, cylinder, line, or sphere. See “Areas of Effect” in the Player’s Handbook (page 204) for all the ins and outs of the AoE rules.

### “MAGIC” VS. “MAGICAL”

We use “magic” as an adjective to describe an object that has magical qualities (a magic item, a magic sword, a magic trap).

The adjective can be used for other things, but we use “magical” more often than “magic” for them. And “magic item” and its variants should never be “magical item.”

### POINTS OF DAMAGE

Avoid referring to points of damage. For example, write, “The spell deals 10 fire damage,” not “The spell deals 10 points of fire damage.”

### EXTRA DAMAGE

We write “an extra 1d4 fire damage,” not “1d4 extra fire damage.” We like to keep the die expression with the damage type.

### HIT POINT MAXIMUM

When you write about a creature’s hit point maximum, avoid “maximum hit points.”

Writing in the singular allows for natural, precise wording, such as “If the target’s hit point maximum is 25 or more . . .” or “If the target’s hit point maximum is less than 50 . . .”

### PROFICIENCY

Here are the rules of thumb for using the right preposition with the words “proficient” and “proficiency”:

- You are proficient, or have proficiency, **in** a skill, language, or other activity that is learnable and repeatable.
- You are proficient, or have proficiency, **with** a tool, weapon, type of armor, or other object.

For example, you might be proficient in Elvish and Arcana, and you might be proficient with longswords and heavy armor.

### “AT WILL” VS. “AT-WILL”

This compound is open. For example, “You can cast this spell at will.” The compound takes a hyphen only when it appears before a word that it modifies. For example, “That character has three at-will spells.”

### “DUNGEON MASTER” ISN’T A VERB

This term is a noun, not a verb. A person is a Dungeon Master. The person doesn’t Dungeon Master. This rule can be broken in an informal context, such as in a blog or a web article that has a conversational tone.

### AVOID “WEEK” AND “MONTH”

The lengths of weeks and months vary in different D&D worlds. A week is ten days long in the Forgotten Realms, for instance, and is called a tenday.

Because of this fact, don’t express durations or other lengths of time in weeks or months when you’re writing rules. For example, say a game effect lasts for 7 days, not 1 week.

The length of the year varies as well, but you may use years for durations and the like.

### MISUSING “HUMAN” AND “HUMANOID”

Beware of using “human” as a synonym for “mortal.” Many of the people in the mortal world of D&D aren’t human. Similarly, be cautious when using the word “humanoid,” given the fact that it refers to a creature type. For example, a giant has humanlike features, but it isn’t a humanoid in the game.

### “STATISTICS” VS. “STAT BLOCK”

When referring to a monster’s stat block, call it a stat block. Don’t call it the creature’s statistics. Writing “game statistics” is acceptable if you’re referring to the monster’s crunch, rather than its story material, but use “stat block” when you mean that box of game information about the monster.

## WORD LIST

aarakocra (singular and plural)

aasimar (singular and plural)

### ADVENTURING PARTIES

The word “fellowship” has strong connections with *The Lord of the Rings* and doesn’t represent the typical D&D adventuring party well. “Fellowship” might be used in-world in the name of an adventuring band (the Fellowship of the Griffon), and a group of adventurers who appeared to be good friends might be referred to as a fellowship by someone speaking of them. However, D&D adventuring companies are often fractious or more mercenary than the word “fellowship” implies. In most in-world contexts and all other contexts, use “group,” “band,” “company,” or, especially, “party.”



adamantine (a noun and an adjective that refers to a special material in the worlds of D&D)  
a.m. (not AM or A.M.)  
arcanist  
axe (sec. var.)  
Bladesinger  
blood red (contra Merriam-Websters; we're matching CMOS 7.89)  
bosun  
copyeditor  
councilor (sec. var.)  
cyclopes (plural of cyclops)  
dao (singular and plural)  
djinni (singular; plural djinn)  
doppelganger  
dragonfire (fire produced by a dragon's breath weapon)  
dragonkind  
drow (singular and plural)  
dryly (sec. var.)  
duergar (singular and plural)  
dwarven (adjective)  
dwarves (not dwarfs)  
Dwarvish (language)  
ebook  
efreeti (singular; plural efreet)  
eladrin (singular and plural)  
elven (adjective)  
Elvish (language)  
email  
erinyes (singular and plural)  
extradimensional (adjective)  
extraplanar (adjective)  
firbolg (singular; plural firbolgs)  
foulspawn (singular and plural)  
galeb duhr (singular and plural)  
genasi (singular and plural)  
giantkind  
Gnomish (language)  
goblinkin  
goblinoid  
gold (made of gold)  
golden (the color of gold)  
hell-spawned (adjective)  
hellspawn (noun)  
insectile (not insectoid)  
interplanar (adjective)  
kenku (singular and plural)  
larva (singular; plural larvae)  
lizardfolk (singular and plural)  
lock pick (noun)  
lorekeeper (by extension from gamekeeper, bookkeeper, goalkeeper, etc.)  
magic-user  
merfolk (singular and plural)

merrow (singular and plural)  
mithral (not mithril)  
multiverse (not capped)  
oni (singular and plural)  
packmate  
parlay (exploit or transform)  
parley (confer or negotiate)  
pickaxe  
p.m. (not PM or P.M.)  
roleplay/roleplaying  
rulebook  
sahuagin (singular and plural)  
scry/scries/scried/scrying/scrier (one who scries)  
sellsword  
shapechange/shapechanger  
shapeshifter (avoid "shapeshift")  
slaad (singular; plural slaadi)  
spell duel  
spell scroll  
spell trap  
spell ward  
spell-shield  
spellbook  
spellcaster/spellcasting (but not "spellcast")  
spellcraft (noun)  
spellfire  
stabledmaster  
staves (not staves)  
sunrod  
svirfneblin (singular and plural)  
swordmaster  
swordsmith  
tabaxi (singular and plural)  
tavernkeeper  
tenant  
tenet  
thri-kreen (singular and plural)  
timeline  
war band (not warband)  
weaponsmith  
worshiped/worshiper/worshipping (secondary variant in Webster's)  
xorn (singular and plural)  
yuan-ti (singular and plural)

## Forgotten Realms Terms

Goodman/Goodwoman (a title or form of address, usu. capped)  
godsforsaken (established in the Realms, but not necessary in other polytheistic settings; "godforsaken" has no necessary connection to monotheism)  
goodsir (a form of address, not capped)  
magecraft (noun)  
magelight

magelord  
magesight  
the Realms (should be preceded by “the Forgotten Realms”)

## Editions of the Tabletop RPG (AD&D)

first edition  
second edition  
third edition  
third edition (v.3.5)  
fourth edition  
fifth edition

## Abbreviations

Abbrev.	Brand or Product
D&D	DUNGEONS & DRAGONS
PH	<i>Player's Handbook</i>
DMG	<i>Dungeon Master's Guide</i>
MM	<i>Monster Manual</i>
v.3.5	version 3.5
Abbrev.	Ability Score
Str	Strength
Dex	Dexterity
Con	Constitution
Int	Intelligence
Wis	Wisdom
Cha	Charisma
Abbrev.	Coin
gp	gold piece(s)
ep	electrum piece(s)
cp	copper piece(s)
sp	silver piece(s)
pp	platinum piece(s)
Abbrev.	Die
d4	four-sided die
d6	six-sided die
d8	eight-sided die
d10	ten-sided die
d12	twelve-sided die
d20	twenty-sided die
d100	percentile dice
Abbrev.	Other Term
AC	Armor Class
DC	Difficulty Class
DM	Dungeon Master
XP	experience points
HD	Hit Die/Dice
hp	hit points
NPC	nonplayer character

## TRADEMARKS

The titles of most recent publications are trademarked. Refer to a product to see if it was trademarked. In addition, refer to this list.

AD&D®  
Advanced Dungeons & Dragons™  
Alternity®  
Blackmoor  
*Castle Ravenloft*®  
*Chainmail*®  
D&D®

D&D Encounters™  
D&D Insider™  
D&D Miniatures®  
D&D Dungeon Tiles®  
d20 Modern™  
d20 System™  
Dark Sun®  
DCI®  
*Dragon*®  
Dragonlance®  
*Dungeon*®  
DUNGEONS & DRAGONS®  
Eberron®  
Forgotten Realms®  
Gamma World™  
Greyhawk®  
*Lords of Waterdeep*®  
Neverwinter™  
Planescape™  
Ravenloft®  
RPGA®

## Armor

chain mail  
dragon leather  
dragon scale  
hide armor  
leather armor  
mithral plate  
mithral scale  
mithral shirt  
padded armor  
ring mail  
scale mail  
studded dragon leather  
studded leather armor

## Weapons

battleaxe  
blowgun  
greataxe  
greatclub  
greatsword  
hand crossbow  
handaxe  
heavy crossbow  
light crossbow  
light hammer  
longbow  
longsword  
morningstar  
polearm  
quarterstaff (pl. quarterstaves)  
shortbow  
shortsword  
unarmed strike  
war pick  
warhammer