DM Guidelines

As the Dungeon Master, you should familiarize yourself with the "How to Play" document, as well as this document. Here you'll find guidance as well as DM-specific rules useful for running the game.

In the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® game, a Dungeon Master must take a number of roles, all at the same time. A DM serves as a referee, interpreting the rules and resolving any conflicts that arise because of them. The DM builds the world, creates adventures, and places monsters and treasure. The DM serves as the characters' eyes and ears, describing what the characters can see and hear to the players.

The first rule of being a good DM is to remember that the rules are a tool that you and the players use to have a good time. The rules aren't in charge. You, the DM, are the one in charge of the game. Guide the play experience and the use of the rules so that as many of your players have a good time as possible. There will be setbacks, such as a character being slain by an unlucky die roll, but look for ways to turn setbacks into interesting complications in the game's story.

The second rule is to remember that the DM's power comes with responsibility. Be fair and impartial with the players. Don't force your story upon them or give them a game where their choices don't matter. By the same token, challenge their characters with deadly monsters, fiendish traps, and vexing puzzles. A good DM is no pushover, but a good DM is also never simply out to slaughter the characters.

Resolving Tasks

The rules for checks, saving throws, and attacks form the basis of D&D. As a DM, your most important responsibility when it comes to these rules is determining how to use them and, just as important, when to use them.

When to Use the Dice

Characters in the D&D® game frequently attempt a tremendous variety of tasks, from running across a swinging rope bridge to talking their way out of a sticky spot with an orc chieftain. All these tasks are resolved in an interaction between you (the DM) and the player whose character is attempting the task.

When a player wants to take an action, it's often appropriate to just let the action succeed. A character doesn't normally need to make a Dexterity check to walk across an empty room, or a Charisma check to order a mug of ale in a tavern. Only call for a roll if you think it's worth taking the time for the rules to come into the flow of the game. Ask yourself two questions to aid your decision.

Is the action being taken so easy, so free of stress or conflict, or so appropriate to the situation that there should be no chance of failure? "So easy" should take into account the ability score associated with the intended action. It's easy for someone with a Strength score of 18 to flip over a table, though not easy for someone with a Strength score of 9.

Is the action being taken so inappropriate or impossible that it would never work? Hitting the moon with an arrow is, for instance, impossible in almost any circumstance.

If the answer to both of these questions is no, some kind of roll is appropriate.

Checks

A check is a test to see if a character succeeds. If a character attempts an action that has a significant chance of failure, have the player make a check.

Checks are the most commonly used mechanic in the game. Attacks, contests, and saving throws are, in essence, specialized forms of checks.

When in doubt, call for a check.

Contests

A contest is a kind of check that matches two creatures against each other. Use a contest if a character attempts an action that either directly foils or is directly opposed by another creature's actions.

When you call for a contest, you pick the ability that each side must use. In most contests, both sides use the same ability, but that is not always the case. For example, when a creature tries to hide, it engages in a contest of Dexterity against Wisdom. But if two creatures arm wrestle, or if one creature is holding a door closed against another's attempt to push it open, both would probably use Strength.

When you call for a contest, keep in mind what's at stake. What are the intentions of each side? Use that intent to determine which abilities are involved in the contest and the consequences of the contest.

Call for a contest when . . .
- a character wants to do something that another creature could prevent with an action of its own.
- success requires a character to overcome another creature.
- two creatures attempt the same thing at the same time, and only one can succeed.

Saving Throws

Saving throws are quick reactions, and they take the form of rolls made in response to someone else's actions or an event. You can think of a saving throw as a reactive check.

A saving throw makes the most sense when something bad happens to a character and the character has a chance to avoid that effect.

Call for a saving throw when . . .
- a character's armor is of no use in avoiding an attack.
- an attacker's skill has no bearing on the outcome of an attack.
- an effect requires a character to make an effort to resist something when it is not that character's turn.

A check is something a character actively attempts to accomplish, whereas a saving throw is usually a split-second response to something.

Attacks

An attack is perhaps the easiest rule to resolve. In essence, an attack is a check to see if one character can hit the other with a weapon or a spell. The DC for an attack is the target's Armor Class.

Call for an attack when a character tries to hit another creature with a physical or a magical attack, and the target's armor or shield could foil that attempt.

Checks as a DM Tool

Checks are an incredibly flexible tool you can use to adjudicate almost any possible task a character could attempt in the world of D&D. You can decide which ability score is most relevant to the attempted task, set a Difficulty Class based on how hard you think the task should be, and apply a variety of modifiers to the check to reflect the particular circumstances. This section helps you set the parameters of a check to resolve a character's acts in the world.

Setting a DC

A Difficulty Class is a numerical rating that measures a task's difficulty. The higher the DC, the more difficult the task. As a DM, it is up to you to set most DCs. In some cases, such as a character's special ability or a task in a published adventure, a DC is provided for you.

Trivial (DC 7): In normal circumstances, a DC of 7 or lower represents a task that is so easy that it is not worth a check. An adventurer can almost always succeed automatically on a trivial task.

Easy (DC 10): An easy task requires a minimum level of competence to accomplish. Examples include treading water in rough conditions, climbing a tree with plenty of low branches or a cliff with plenty of handholds, walking across an icy floor, breaking open a stuck wooden door, trying to communicate a

simple idea to a creature that doesn't share your language, or picking a cheap lock.

Moderate (DC 13): A moderate task requires a slightly higher level of competence to accomplish. Climbing a rough wall, identifying an uncommon monster, and trying to befriend someone who doesn't like you are all examples of moderately difficult tasks.

Hard (DC 16): Hard tasks include any effort that is beyond the capabilities of most people without aid or exceptional ability. Such tasks include battering down a heavy wooden door that is locked, swimming in stormy waters, ascending a sheer surface with scant handholds, balancing on a very narrow ledge, or picking a typical lock.

Very Hard (DC 19): Only especially talented individuals need even try their hand at very hard tasks. Examples include identifying especially rare monsters, recalling esoteric information known only to a few, physically powering out of manacles, or disarming a dwarven trap.

Formidable (DC 22): Only the most highly trained, experienced, and talented individuals have a chance at success at a formidable task, and even then they probably need mundane equipment or magic items. Examples include bashing open a heavy iron door that is locked or barred, climbing an oiled rope, identifying unique monsters, recalling esoteric information known to no one else alive, or disarming a magical trap.

Nearly Impossible (DC 25): Tasks of this difficulty are so challenging that only demigods and their peers can succeed without assistance.

Using These DCs

Nobody expects you to keep these numbers in your head, but we really don't want you to have to look at a table every time you have to decide on a DC. So here are some tips.

If you have decided that a check is called for, then clearly it's not a trivial task—you can eliminate DC 7.

Then ask yourself: "Is it easy, moderate, or hard?" If the only DCs you ever use are 10, 13, and 16, your game will run just fine.

If you find yourself thinking, "Well, it's *really* hard," then you can go up to the higher DCs. If it's

a bit harder than hard, add +3, to 19 (very hard). If it's still harder than that, add another +3, to 22 (formidable). If you think the task is next to impossible, then 25 is your DC.

Here's another secret: You don't actually have to set the DC before the player rolls the check. Decide whether the character succeeds based on the check result. You'll probably find that your gut feeling (and the player's) squares pretty well with the set DCs presented here. A number below 10 is never going to make it. A number in the low teens is good enough for an easy task. A number in the middle teens will succeed at a moderate task. And when a player rolls a 16 or better, there's usually little question that the character succeeds.

Your players will never know.

Options for Checks

These four options apply only to checks.

Hazards: Is there a chance that failing the task might lead to a disastrous outcome for the character? If so, consider assigning a hazard to the check.

If a character fails a check, and the total of the check is at least 10 less than the DC, the character suffers the hazard's effects.

For example, a character who fails a check to climb a wall of ice might fall.

Requirements: A check might require a specific tool, and the training needed to use that tool, to complete it. For example, you need thieves' tools to have any chance of picking most locks, or a healer's kit to tend to a badly wounded comrade.

A character who cannot meet the requirements for a check automatically fails. One who meets them can attempt a check as normal.

A character might be able to improvise something to replace a requirement. For example, lacking a healer's kit, a cleric might tear strips from his tabard to bandage a gravely injured wizard.

Use common sense to apply this rule. When in doubt, waive the requirement. Apart from special items such as thieves' tools and a healer's kit, this step should come up only rarely.

Skills: Characters can sometimes use skills to improve an ability check. For example, a character can apply his or her Bluff skill to a Charisma check made to pass off a falsehood as truth.

Use your own judgment to decide whether a skill applies to a particular check.

Engaging the Players

As a DM, you could memorize these guidelines, apply them flawlessly, and still miss out on the point of D&D. Unlike other games, D&D is a flexible set of guidelines, not a rigid set of laws.

When you ask a player to make a check, an attack, or a saving throw, you first should focus on engaging the players' imaginations. Describe the scene to them, and pull in details such as sights, sounds, and even smells to make the action vivid.

More important, you want the players to become fully engaged in the game. Reward inventive players who look beyond game options to describe their characters' actions. Roleplaying games stand out from other types of games because they allow for this type of creativity. Encourage it whenever you can.

The easiest way to do so is to make imaginative solutions the easiest path to success for the adventurers. Consider the following options.

Checks: When a player makes a check, invite him or her to describe the character's action. If the player makes clever use of the situation in the description, consider either granting an automatic success or advantage on the check.

Contests: In a contest, an ingenious description that points to a key advantage that a character might gain could lead you to grant the character advantage on the check.

Attacks and Saving Throws: A colorful description is nice for attacks and saving throws, but should rarely be the avenue to gaining a concrete game benefit, since it is too easy to abuse such an approach. You might have players endlessly describing how they resist a mind flayer's *mind blast* or trying to narrate every detail of a sword blow. In most cases, spells and special abilities serve to grant characters advantage on their attacks and saving throws.

That said, if you feel the situation warrants it, use advantage to grant a character a well-earned edge.

Disadvantage: Not every idea is a good one. A character might try to win the prince's favor by bragging about all the bandits he slew, not realizing that the prince is an avowed pacifist. If an idea backfires on a player, apply disadvantage to the check or attack.

Ignoring the Dice

If you're an experienced gamer, you have seen the following situation happen before. Rachel, playing her halfling cleric, delivers a perfect speech rallying the barbarian tribes to aid a besieged city. When she's done, everyone erupts in spontaneous applause. When she rolls her Charisma check, though, the die comes up a natural 1 and points to failure.

As a DM, remember that the dice are like the rules. They're a tool to help keep the action moving. At any time, you can decide that a player's action is automatically successful, even if the DC would normally be somewhere above 20. By the same token, a bad plan or unfortunate circumstances can transform even the easiest task into an impossibility.

The dice are neutral arbiters. They come into play when success and failure are far from clear. Think of them as impartial judges, ready to dispense a yes or no answer based on a character's bonus and the DC you have selected. The dice don't run the game. You do.

As a DM, you should think about the role the dice play in your game. Do you prefer the vagaries of fate, or do you prefer to reward a good effort with success and a poor one with failure? Use your style to help guide when you call for rolls and when you simply declare success or failure.

Multiple Checks

Sometimes a character fails a check and wants to try again. You have a couple of options in this case.

In most cases, the character can simply try again. The only real cost is the time it takes. The character keeps trying and, after enough time passes, eventually succeeds. To speed things up, you can assume that a character can

automatically succeed at a task if he or she spends twenty times the normal amount of time needed to complete it. This exception does not allow a character to turn an impossible task into a successful one.

In other cases, the first failure renders subsequent checks impossible. For instance, a rogue tries to trick a town guard into thinking that he is an undercover agent of the king. The rogue loses the contest of Charisma against Wisdom. The same lie told again clearly won't work.

Tasks and Skills

This section provides an overview of the sorts of things that characters typically attempt in D&D, as a guide to some of the most common ways that checks can be used in the game. For each of the six ability scores, this section describes in general terms what sorts of tasks might warrant a check using that ability and how difficult those tasks might be. As always, use your good judgment when applying these guidelines. They are meant to provide storytelling and adjudication options to you, not to tie your hands creatively.

Many of the tasks described here match skills that player characters might possess (usually because of their backgrounds). When a character has a certain skill, it means that the character is better at checks relating to that skill than his or her ability score would indicate. A character can apply the bonus granted by training in a skill to an ability check if you decide the skill applies. So a character with the Bluff skill can apply his or her Bluff skill to a Charisma check made to pass a lie off as the truth.

Strength

Strength measures a creature's physical power. Use a Strength check for any attempt to lift, push, pull, or break something, or to otherwise apply brute force to a situation.

Easy Tasks (DC 10)
- Force open a stuck wooden door
- Climb a tree with plenty of low branches or a cliff with plenty of handholds

- Tread water in rough conditions

Moderate Tasks (DC 13)
- Climb a rough stone wall
- Push through an earthen tunnel that is too small

Hard Tasks (DC 16)
- Break open a door held by a lock
- Climb a sheer surface with scant handholds
- Swim in stormy waters
- Break free of rope bonds
- Hang on to a wagon while being dragged behind it
- Fly into a headwind

Very Hard Tasks (DC 19)
- Break chains or manacles
- Break open a door held by a wooden bar or elaborate lock
- Tip over a large stone statue
- Keep a boulder from rolling

Formidable Tasks (DC 22)
- Climb an oiled rope
- Break open a heavy door held by a metal bar or a dwarven lock
- Swim free of a vortex or fly out of a tornado

Contests
- Push a door open when someone else is holding it closed (against Strength)
- Wrench an object out of someone's hands (against Strength)
- Restrain someone (against Strength or Dexterity)
- Push someone off a ledge (against Strength or Dexterity)

Hazards: Climbing or swimming in dangerous conditions can present hazards (falling or sinking, respectively) for failed checks. A very heavy object could fall on top of the character who's trying to lift or push it. A character might get stuck halfway in the tunnel.

Requirements: You might decide that a character can't attempt a Strength check without having some amount of leverage or a solid foothold.

Skills: Characters might use Climb, Escape Artist, or Swim to modify certain Strength checks.

Dexterity

Dexterity represents a creature's hand-eye coordination, agility, reflexes, and balance. Use a Dexterity check for tasks that require physical finesse or agility.

Easy Tasks (DC 10)
- Walk across an icy surface
- Perform simple feats of sleight of hand
- Tie a secure rope for climbing

Moderate Tasks (DC 13)
- Walk on a narrow ledge
- Pick a simple lock
- Swing from a chandelier
- Impress onlookers with an acrobatic performance or an intricate musical piece
- Control a heavily laden cart on a steep descent
- Keep your seat on a rearing horse
- Securely tie up a prisoner

Hard Tasks (DC 16)
- Cross a wildly swaying rope bridge
- Wriggle free of rope bonds
- Pick a typical lock
- Pick someone's pocket
- Steer a chariot around a tight turn or around an obstacle in your path
- Guide your mount across a crucial jump

Very Hard Tasks (DC 19)
- Walk across a tightrope
- Slip out of manacles
- Pick an elaborate lock
- Somersault over a creature of the same size
- Slide down a staircase while standing on a shield

Formidable Tasks (DC 22)
- Pick a dwarven lock

Contests
- Wriggle free of a grab (against Strength)
- Palm an object while under close observation (against Wisdom)
- Hide in an obscured area (against Wisdom)

Hazards: Balancing on a narrow surface and other acrobatic feats present the very real danger of falling. When attempting to disarm a trap, a bungled check often causes the trap to trigger. A hazard while picking someone's pocket is that the target notices the attempt.

Requirements: Picking locks typically requires thieves' tools. Some acrobatic feats might require a certain amount of movement, or require the character to be wearing light or no armor.

Skills: Many skills can modify Dexterity checks. Characters might use Balance, Climb, Disable Device, Drive, Escape Artist, Perform, Ride, Sleight of Hand, Sneak, Tumble, or Use Rope to modify Dexterity checks.

Constitution

Constitution represents a creature's health, stamina, and vital force. Constitution saving throws are far more common than Constitution checks, because the endurance this ability represents typically comes into play in reaction to external events, not as an effort a character is making. If a character attempts a task that clearly relies on physical resilience and fortitude, use a Constitution check.

Easy Tasks (DC 10)
- Cast an arcane spell while disrupted from damage or other circumstances
- Quaff an entire stein of ale in one go

Moderate Tasks (DC 13)
- March overland for twelve hours in a day
- Roll down a steep slope without taking damage

Hard Tasks (DC 16)
- Stay awake for forty hours
- Swim for an hour straight

Very Hard Tasks (DC 19)
- March overland for eighteen hours in a day
- Swim for three hours straight

Formidable Tasks (DC 22)
- March overland for twenty-four hours

Hazards: A badly failed Constitution check can mean taking damage. A swimming character might suffer a cramp that makes further swimming impossible, or a character attempting a forced march might sustain an injury.

Requirements: You might rule that some Constitution checks are impossible unless the character removes heavy armor.

Intelligence

Intelligence measures how well a creature learns and reasons. Use an Intelligence check when a character needs to draw on logic, education, or deductive reasoning.

Easy Tasks (DC 10)
- Recall vague information about commonly-known facts
- Identify a common symbol
- Communicate a simple idea to a creature that doesn't share your language
- Find a pit covered with branches and leaves (when searching)
- Keep a pit trap from opening

Moderate Tasks (DC 13)
- Recall vague information about slightly obscure facts
- Identify an uncommon monster
- Deduce what kind of weapon caused an injury
- Estimate the value of a piece of jewelry
- Find a simple tripwire
- Keep a scything blade trap from triggering
- Pull together a disguise to help an ally pass as a city guard
- Find the signs of a creature passing across dry ground and deduce its nature and the direction of its travel

Hard Tasks (DC 16)
- Recall specific details about commonly-known facts, or vague information about truly esoteric facts
- Determine how to cause part of a tunnel to collapse
- Pick up a dialect of a known language
- Estimate the value of a gemstone
- Identify a spell as it is being cast
- Find a pressure plate in the floor or locate a transparent tripwire

- Prevent a poison needle or gas trap from springing

Very Hard Tasks (DC 19)
- Recall specific details about truly esoteric facts known only to a few
- Identify an especially rare monster
- Estimate the value of a rare, antique, or exotic item
- Decipher a simple message in an unfamiliar language
- Identify the persistent effects of a spell
- Figure out how to activate a magic item
- Find a well-disguised pressure plate
- Disarm a dwarven trap

Formidable Tasks (DC 22)
- Disarm a magic trap
- Identify a unique monster
- Recall information known to no one else alive

Contests
- Pass off a forged document as real (against Intelligence)

Hazards: An attempt to recall information presents the chance of recalling false information. A character might make dangerous mistakes about a monster's resistances or capabilities, collapse a tunnel in the wrong place, or discard a precious item after believing that it is worthless.

Requirements: Disarming traps typically requires thieves' tools. You might require that a character have a magnifying glass to appraise gems or jewelry. For truly obscure information, sometimes the best knowledge is where to find the information, but actually unearthing the facts might require access to a specific tome or library.

Skills: Characters can use Knowledge, Heal, or Profession to modify an Intelligence check that deals with their specific field of knowledge. Disguise, Disable Device, Search, and Track can also modify an Intelligence check.

Wisdom

Wisdom measures a creature's common sense, perception, self-discipline, and empathy. Use a Wisdom check in situations that call for

intuition, gut feelings, or sensitivity to the environment.

Easy Tasks (DC 10)
- Track a creature through snow or mud
- Read the mood of a crowd
- Hunt and forage for food to sustain one person while traveling in the wilderness

Moderate Tasks (DC 13)
- Find a hidden compartment in a chest
- Read a person's motives or attitude
- Eavesdrop on a conversation through a door
- Discern who among a cagey group is the leader

Hard Tasks (DC 16)
- Find a tiny item such as a gem in the midst of a lot of other items
- Track a creature across dirt or grass
- Find a secret door
- Interpret enemies' hand signs
- Keep from getting lost while traveling in the wilderness
- Avoid natural hazards, such as quicksand

Very Hard Tasks (DC 19)
- Find a dwarven secret door
- Track a creature across bare stone
- Sense an outside influence on a person, such as an enchantment spell
- Eavesdrop on a whispered conversation through a door
- Hunt and forage for enough food to feed a party of five while traveling through the wilderness

Formidable Tasks (DC 22)
- Find a magic secret door
- Track a creature across dirt or grass after a rainfall

Contests
- Spot a creature that is hiding (against Dexterity)
- Hear someone who's trying to be silent (against Dexterity)
- Recognize a lie (against Charisma)
- See through a disguise (against Charisma)

Hazards: Judging a person's motives presents the risk of dreadfully misreading those motives. A character might end up following the wrong set of tracks. A character searching for a trap runs the risk of finding it the hard way: by accidentally triggering the trap.

   Requirements: It's rare for Wisdom checks to have requirements.

   Skills: Characters can use Gather Rumors, Heal, Listen, Sense Motive, Spot, or Survival to modify certain Wisdom checks.

Charisma

Charisma measures a person's force of personality, persuasiveness, and leadership. Use Charisma checks in situations that require social skills and the ability to influence others.

Easy Tasks (DC 10)
- Entertain a crowd with a tall tale
- Give a pleasing speech
- Gather the common gossip in a town or neighborhood
- Learn about the local power figures

Moderate Tasks (DC 13)
- Give a rousing or inspiring speech
- Calm and comfort a distraught person
- Find what you need in an unfamiliar city
- Find out who's really in power
- Get an animal to keep moving while tired

Hard Tasks (DC 16)
- Get an unruly crowd to move out of the way
- Badger allied soldiers into a fighting mood
- Goad a person into action
- Train an animal for a specific task
- Calm an aggressive wild animal
- Weasel out local information only a few other people know

Very Hard Tasks (DC 19)
- Calm a panicked animal
- Rear a wild animal
- Dig up obscure news or lore from a community

Formidable Tasks (DC 22)
- Tame a wild animal

Contests

- Fast-talk or con someone (against Wisdom)
- Adopt a disguise (against Wisdom)
- Impersonate someone's voice (against Wisdom)
- Give false assurance to dull suspicion (against Wisdom)
- Tell a convincing lie (against Wisdom)
- Persuade someone to do something (against Wisdom)
- Pry information out of a prisoner (against Wisdom)
- Convince someone to back down from a confrontation (against Wisdom)

Hazards: The most likely hazards associated with a Charisma check are attracting unwanted attention, arousing suspicion, or angering someone.

Requirements: You might decide that a Charisma check requires bribes of some sort, from slipping an official some gold to buying an informant a drink.

Skills: Characters can use Bluff, Disguise, Gather Rumors, Handle Animal, Intimidate, Perform, or Persuade to modify certain Charisma checks.

Checks and Interaction

Fighting monsters and navigating hazardous environments are only part of an adventurer's career. Characters will often find that words are a better resource than swords, spells, or brute force.

There are several schools of thought when it comes to handling interactions in a roleplaying game. Some DMs prefer to speak in character and adopt the mannerisms of a nonplayer character in the same way that an actor depicts a character.

Other DMs prefer to describe an NPC's dialogue, giving a basic outline of what an NPC has to say, rather than narrating the exact dialogue.

Players fall into similar camps. Don't try to force the players into one approach or the other. Just as some people like to play fighters and others prefer rogues, so too do different players take different approaches to portraying their characters.

No matter which approach you use, an interaction should be driven by the back-and-forth between an NPC and the characters. Dice should come into play only when you are unsure about a conversation's outcome.

Players who shy away from roleplaying prefer to let the dice do the talking for them. For such players, it's probably best to rely on the dice, rather than force that player to go against his or her preferences.

Calling for Checks

Adventurers don't need to make checks or enter into lengthy interactions when they buy supplies or order food in a tavern. Significant interactions in an adventure involve challenges and obstacles—persuading someone (or something) to do something he or she is not initially inclined to do, or not do something he or she wants to do. A significant interaction has objectives (things the characters want to accomplish) and obstacles (reasons why the NPCs don't want to acquiesce to the PCs).

When a character makes a firm argument, whether it's in support of an objective or an attempt to negate an obstacle, that's the time to ask for a check. Typically, the player characters and NPCs will exchange several lines of dialogue around each check.

Check or Contest? In most cases, you use checks for social interactions. Contests should come into play only if two parties are in direct conflict, such as in an argument, a debate, or a negotiation.

Determining DCs

Picking a DC for an interaction check follows the normal guidelines for determining a DC, and it is important to consider the context of the check. A conversation is a fluid thing. Base the DC on what is happening in the moment. How has the conversation ebbed and flowed? What does an NPC think of the characters? A stilted, awkward exchange can turn a simple request into a high DC.

Think of whom the speaker is trying to sway or impress. You can do worse than start with an NPC's Wisdom score or Charisma score as a base DC. Use the target's Wisdom score for attempts to bluff or intimidate someone, while

the Charisma score is a good choice in most other situations.

With that as a starting point, consider the NPC's attitude toward the speaker. A positive attitude can grant advantage, whereas a negative attitude or a faux pas can impose disadvantage.

Miscellaneous Rules

These rules cover a variety of situations that might come up as characters delve into ancient tombs, sneak into merchants' mansions, walk the ruined streets of ancient cities, strive in battle against fearsome dragons, broker peace between warring cities, and all the other things adventurers do.

Incidental Tasks

The basic rules for the game allow a creature to move and take an action on its turn. An adventurer is likely to do many things that are not described in the rules as an action: picking up a gem, readying a bow, and the like. The game assumes that such incidental tasks are so simple that they don't require actions of their own.

Most often, incidental tasks occur in the process of doing something else, such as opening an unsecured door while moving or removing a piece of equipment from a pack in order to use it. For example, a fighter draws a sword and attacks an orc. Drawing a sword typically takes no action, since it takes only a moment to complete and is usually part of a more complex activity.

That said, imagine the same fighter trying to draw a sword while tied up. In this situation, the task is more complex and requires focus and effort. Drawing a sword would require an action in this case, and the fighter might need to make a check as well to see if he or she can wiggle out of the rope. That's why incidental tasks are under your control.

A task that meets one or more of the following criteria is probably not an action under most circumstances.

- It doesn't require a die roll or any other rules.
- It is effortless.
- It is part of or enables an action or a move.

Here are examples of tasks that are usually too incidental to require an action.

- Speaking
- Drawing a weapon
- Withdrawing a potion, a rope, or other piece of equipment from a pack
- Pushing open an unsecured and unstuck door
- Pulling a door closed while passing through it
- Picking up a small item
- Dropping an item
- Tipping over a flimsy piece of furniture

Always Round Down

Whenever you divide a number in the game, round down if you end up with a fraction. Do so even if the fraction is 0.5 or more.

Creature Size

During a battle, creatures take up different amounts of space on the battlefield. A lone ogre can block off a 10-foot-wide bridge, while over a dozen goblins could surround a storm giant. A creature's size determines how much space it takes up, how far its attacks can reach, and how many enemies can gang up on it.

Size	Space	Surround	Fills
Tiny	2.5 x 2.5 ft.	8	1
Small	5 x 5 ft.	8	1
Medium	5 x 5 ft.	8	1
Large	10 x 10 ft.	12	1.5
Huge	15 x 15 ft.	16	2
Gargantuan	20 x 20 ft.*	20	2.5

* or larger

Space: This is the area in feet that a creature occupies. A creature's space is not an expression of its actual physical dimensions, but the area it effectively owns in the game. A

human isn't 5 feet wide, but it does own a space that wide, particularly in combat. If a human stands in a 5-foot-wide doorway, other creatures can't get through the doorway unless the human lets them.

A creature can squeeze through a space large enough for a creature one size category smaller than itself. When squeezing through such a space, every 5 feet of movement costs 5 extra feet of movement. While squeezing, a creature has disadvantage on attacks and on Dexterity saving throws, and attacks against it have advantage.

Surround: This column represents the number of Medium creatures that can fit in a 5-foot radius around the creature.

Fills: When creatures of different size surround one opponent, a creature counts as this many Medium size creatures when determining how many can fit in the threatened area.

For example, eight Medium creatures can surround a fellow Medium creature. A pair of Gargantuan creatures (worth two and a half Medium each) and two Large creatures (worth one and a half each) could also surround a Medium creature.

Illumination

Characters face three broad categories of illumination in a typical D&D game.

Bright Light

Bright light is also called normal light. Even gloomy days provide bright light, as do torches, lanterns, fires, and other sources of illumination within a specific radius.

Effect: Most creatures can see normally in bright light.

Dim Light

Dim light is also called shadows. An area of dim light is usually a boundary between a source of bright light, such as a torch, and surrounding darkness. Dim light is also common at twilight and just before dawn. A particularly brilliant full moon may cover the land beneath in dim light.

Effect: Creatures can see in dim light, but creatures and objects are lightly obscured within it.

Darkness

Darkness is common at night under an overcast sky or within the confines of an unlit dungeon or subterranean vault. Sometimes magic can create regions of darkness.

Effect: Normal creatures can't see anything in darkness and are effectively blinded. Someone in darkness is heavily obscured from creatures that don't have enhanced senses.

Holding Your Breath and Drowning

If a character is swimming underwater intentionally (not as a result of a failed check), the character can hold his or her breath for a number of minutes equal to his or her Constitution modifier (minimum 30 seconds).

A character who runs out of breath while underwater (usually as a hazard of a failed check) is drowning. While drowning, the character is restrained. As an action, a drowning character can make a Strength check to stop drowning. The DC to do so is at least 13, possibly higher if the water conditions warrant a more difficult check. The drowning character must breathe before a number of rounds pass equal to his or her Constitution modifier (minimum 1) or fall unconscious. Once unconscious, the drowning character loses all his or her remaining hit points. The character is dying and cannot be stabilized or recover hit points until he or she can breathe (either by being brought to the surface or by gaining the magical ability to breathe underwater). Once the character can breathe, normal means of restoring lost hit points can revive the character.

Encounters and Rewards

Creating adventures is one of the great joys of being a Dungeon Master. It's your way to express yourself through imaginative elements of your own design. When you design an adventure, you call the shots.

At the same time, you'll usually want to design adventures that aren't too easy, or too deadly, for your players. When you decide on the locations your players will explore, the NPCs they will encounter, and the monsters they will fight, it's best to do so with a plan of what you want to accomplish.

Building Combat Encounters

Building a combat encounter is a matter of choosing threats appropriate to the characters—generally monsters and other dangerous creatures—and combining them in interesting and challenging ways. Encounter building is a mixture of art and science as you combine these threats together.

When you set out to create a combat encounter, first decide how challenging you want it to be. Easy encounters are speed bumps on the characters' path as they make their way through adventures, while tough encounters often form the climactic moment of an adventure. The bulk of the encounters in an adventure should fall in the average range.

The difficulty you choose for the encounter, combined with the number of characters in the party and their level, gives you a target experience point (XP) value for the encounter. The sum of the XP values of all the threats in the encounter should fall in the neighborhood of this target, so you can select threats until you reach that target number.

You can think of this process as spending XP against a budget. The difficulty you choose gives you an XP budget, and you "buy" individual monsters or other threats to build your encounter until you've exhausted your budget.

To find your total XP budget, multiply the number of characters in the party by the XP value shown on the table below. For example, if you want to create an average encounter for four 3rd-level characters, use about 280 XP (70 × 4) for the encounter.

Level	Easy	Average	Tough
1	10	20	40
2	30	40	80
3	40	70	130
4	110	160	320
5	170	260	520
6	230	340	680
7	410	620	1,230
8	560	840	1,670
9	730	1,100	2,200
10	1,040	1,560	3,110

If the characters in your party are of different levels, you can either use their average level or choose the appropriate number for each character and add them together, as you please. So, if your party has two 3rd-level characters, one 4th-level character, and a 1st-level character, an average encounter for them would have about 320 XP (70 + 70 + 160 + 20).

Spending Your XP Budget

As with a financial budget, be wary of spending your entire XP budget at once. A budget of 520 XP gives a fine tough encounter for your 3rd-level characters, but a single troll worth 550 XP might be too difficult for them to face. Compare the characters' level to the level of the monsters and other threats in the encounter to make sure you're not overbalancing the encounter in either direction.

Easy Encounters: Use monsters whose average level is equal to or lower than the characters' average level.

Average Encounters: Use monsters whose average level is the same as the characters' average level.

Tough Encounters: Use monsters whose average level is no more than 2 levels higher than the characters' average level.

Single Monster Limit: A single monster whose XP value is greater than the XP target for a tough encounter has a pretty good chance of killing every character in the party. Steer

clear of these monsters when designing normal combat encounters.

The Adventuring Day

When you're designing an adventure, you rarely have the ability to predict how much or how little the player characters will accomplish in any given stretch of time. As a rule of thumb, you can figure that the characters will probably get through four average encounters, six or seven easy encounters, or two tough encounters before they have to take a long rest.

Since you can't predict the path your players will choose through an adventure, you can't really design an adventure around this daily target. But it might be helpful to bear it in mind, so you don't force the characters into three tough fights in a row or send monsters to close off the dungeon behind them after they've already fought their way through four average encounters. Keep the adventurers' need to rest in mind as you set up your adventures.

Rewards

Experience points, treasure, and more intangible rewards keep characters moving on from encounter to encounter, level to level, and adventure to adventure. Small rewards come frequently, while large rewards provide a big boost once in a while. Both are important.

Without frequent small rewards, players begin to feel like their efforts aren't paying off. They're doing a lot of work with nothing to show for it. Without occasional large rewards, encounters feel like pushing a button to get a morsel of food—a repetitive grind with no meaningful variation.

Experience Points

Experience points are the fundamental reward of the game, just as encounters are the building blocks of adventures and campaigns. Every encounter comes with an experience reward to match its difficulty.

Every monster has its own XP value, specified with the rest of its statistics. An encounter is worth XP equal to the sum of all the monsters and other threats that make up the encounter. When characters overcome an encounter—typically by killing, routing, or capturing the opponents in a combat encounter—they divide the total XP value of the encounter evenly among them.

XP for Noncombat Encounters: It's up to you to decide whether to award XP to characters for overcoming challenges outside of combat. If characters successfully complete a tense negotiation with a baron, forge a trade agreement with the surly dwarves, or navigate their way across the Chasm of a Thousand Deeps, you might decide that's an encounter worth an XP reward. Don't award XP, though, unless there was a meaningful risk of failure.

As a rule of thumb, gauge the difficulty of the encounter (easy, average, or tough) and award the characters XP as if it had been a combat encounter of the same difficulty.

You can also award XP when characters complete significant adventure objectives. You can treat major objectives as average encounters, and minor objectives as easy encounters.

Treasure

There's no assumed amount of gold, jewels, magic items, and other treasure for D&D adventures. You can give out as many or as few rewards as you like, though you might want to adjust the adventure difficulty to compensate for the level of the rewards you provide. You can also use the following guidelines for a more "middle of the road" amount of treasure offered.

You can think of treasure on an encounter-by-encounter basis. By this way of thinking, a good target is 12.5 gp per character per level for an average encounter. (So a party of four 3rd-level characters who overcome an average encounter might expect about 150 gp as a reward.) For an easy encounter, use about 7.5 gp per character per level. For a tough encounter, you can give out about 25 gp per character per level.

Alternatively, you can think about treasure spread out over an adventuring day, using the abstract measurement of a day discussed earlier. A good target for an adventuring day is about 50 gp per character per level. You can spread that treasure out over combat

encounters as well as secret vaults, ancient chests, and the bottoms of spiked pits.

Whichever approach you choose, break up the treasure value into coins, gemstones, art objects, and other valuable but nonmagic items. Here are some suggested items to fill out your treasure hoards.

GEMS

d%	Value	Average	Examples
01–25	4d4 gp	10 gp	Banded, eye, or moss agate; azurite; blue quartz; hematite; lapis lazuli; malachite; obsidian; rhodochrosite; tiger eye; turquoise; freshwater (irregular) pearl
26–50	2d4×10 gp	50 gp	Bloodstone; carnelian; chalcedony; chrysoprase; citrine; iolite; jasper; moonstone; onyx; peridot; rock crystal (clear quartz); sard; sardonyx; rose, smoky, or star rose quartz; zircon
51–70	4d4×10 gp	100 gp	Amber; amethyst; chrysoberyl; coral; red or brown-green garnet; jade; jet; white, golden, pink, or silver pearl; red, red-brown or deep green spinel; tourmaline
71–90	2d4×100 gp	500 gp	Alexandrite; aquamarine; violet garnet; black pearl; deep blue spinel; golden yellow topaz
91–99	4d4×100 gp	1,000 gp	Emerald; white, black, or fire opal; blue sapphire; fiery yellow or rich purple corundum; blue or black star sapphire; star ruby
100	2d4×1,000 gp	5,000 gp	Clearest bright green emerald; blue-white, canary, pink, brown, or blue diamond; jacinth

ART OBJECTS

d%	Value	Average	Examples
01–10	1d10×10 gp	55 gp	Silver ewer; carved bone or ivory statuette; finely wrought small gold bracelet
11–25	3d6×10 gp	105 gp	Cloth-of-gold vestments; black velvet mask with numerous citrines; silver chalice with lapis lazuli gems
26–40	1d6×100 gp	350 gp	Large well-done wool tapestry; brass mug with jade inlays
41–50	1d10×100 gp	550 gp	Silver comb with moonstones; silver-plated steel longsword with jet jewel in hilt
51–60	2d6×100 gp	700 gp	Carved harp of exotic wood with ivory inlay and zircon gems; solid gold idol (10 lb.)
61–70	3d6×100 gp	1,050 gp	Gold dragon comb with red garnet eye; gold and topaz bottle stopper cork; ceremonial electrum dagger with a star ruby in the pommel
71–80	4d6×100 gp	1,400 gp	Eye patch with mock eye of sapphire and moonstone; fire opal pendant on a fine gold chain; old masterpiece painting
81–85	5d6×100 gp	1,750 gp	Embroidered silk and velvet mantle with numerous moonstones; sapphire pendant on gold chain
86–90	1d4×1,000 gp	2,500 gp	Embroidered and bejeweled glove; jeweled anklet; gold music box
91–95	1d6×1,000 gp	3,500 gp	Golden circlet with four aquamarines; a string of small pink pearls (necklace)
96–99	2d4×1,000 gp	5,000 gp	Jeweled gold crown; jeweled electrum ring
100	2d6×1,000 gp	7,000 gp	Gold and ruby ring; gold cup set with emeralds

Magic Items

You determine how many magic items characters can find in your adventures. The game does not assume that characters need them to succeed. Magic items, when found at all, simply make PCs better.

Thus, you can add or withhold magic items in your adventures as you see fit. Being somewhat stingy with magic item placement, especially at lower levels, means that players will appreciate such items all the more when they find some.

If you populate your tougher dungeon levels and adventures with more magic items, then players can influence the kind of magic items they obtain by accepting greater risks.

You can find more information on using and awarding magic items in the "Magic Item" playtest document.