

D&D IP Guide

Use the *Player's Handbook*, *Monster Manual*, and *Dungeon Master's Guide* as an authoritative source on matters of lore.

Here are some broad guidelines for using the D&D IP:

1. Rules *aren't* meant to be broken! Don't do it. You weaken the IP by breaking through its boundaries.
2. Don't overdo your take on the IP. Keep the essence front and center.
3. Stay experiential. Don't attempt to use exposition to explain everything in the IP, but do inform the players about the world. Don't assume they come to the IP with complete knowledge.
4. Localize and contain your service to diehard fans. Don't let serving them dominate the product.
5. Don't rely on the Internet for sources of lore, and be cautious of relying on older material. The D&D IP is a snarl of contradictory material, and when in doubt, it's best to check with the administrators.

Important aspects of the D&D IP are stack ranked here:

Fantasy

At its heart, D&D is a fantasy game. Certain rare elements of D&D in the past have touched on science fiction (Barrier Peaks is Exhibit A), but D&D is first and foremost a fantasy brand.

Strong Narrative

D&D and the Forgotten Realms are synonymous among fantasy brands for conveying rich, compelling, and interesting story-driven experiences. The narrative of a D&D RPG is not simply its story—this is the story expressed through every component of the game, from environments, characters, music, and individual player choices.

Player Choice

Autonomy is a cornerstone of the D&D tabletop RPG, and has become synonymous with the brand as a whole. Giving players choice—whether in character creation or as they help drive the narrative forward—should be a key part of a D&D experience.

Heroes and Villains

As with other strong fantasy and science fiction brands, D&D is an IP of dynamic heroes and twisted villains. Heroes are mostly adventurers: tough, prepared, and doing the work no one else in the world is ready to do. Villains stand in opposition and should pose a threat to either the heroes or something they care about. In addition, D&D is an IP that can support dark heroes or antiheroes, as well as misguided villains doing wrong for the right reasons. Difficult moral choices can and

should be part of the D&D experience. A strong narrative takes precedence, and D&D's history is certainly full of such stories (and why this section isn't called Good vs. Evil).

Magic

As a fantasy IP, D&D features two primary types of magic. Arcane magic is practiced by wizards. Divine magic is practiced by the most devoted followers of D&D's gods: clerics and paladins. All magic in the Forgotten Realms comes from the Weave. Divine magic comes from the Weave but is bestowed by deities.

Monsters

D&D's list of iconic and unique monsters is unmatched but often copied. Consult the *Monster Manual* for the complete list of monsters. Monsters should be the bulk of combat foes players face. They can also occasionally play non-combat roles opposing or aiding the players (the helpful kobold, the hobgoblin informant, the doppelganger spy), but such instances are out of character for D&D and require explanation. Mostly, monsters are for killing, and their stuff is for taking.

Exploration

No D&D RPG experience would be complete without venturing into some dark, unexplored, dangerous locations. As a fantasy IP, this is a primary vehicle for communicating the exotic foundation of the Forgotten Realms, the Planes, and any other worlds explored in the course of the game. In D&D, the journey is always as important as the destination. Exploration is the vehicle by which the most important aspects of player autonomy are delivered, through compelling narratives, directional decisions, and meaningful interactions. This is why this element of the RPG is listed higher than the prototypical D&D destination: the dungeon.

Interaction

Whether interacting with other players or colorful, well-defined NPCs, this is a vital piece of the D&D experience. Players should not only regularly encounter and interact with other denizens of the world—over time, they should be able to identify them by their dress, accent, or personality.

Magic Items

A D&D RPG should have magic items. Naming should follow classic D&D magic item conventions as much as possible. The complete list of the most well known magic items can be found in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. In addition, iconic magic items have a standardized appearance (as depicted or described in the DMG).

Dungeons

Dungeons signify the most prototypical adventuring destination in a D&D RPG. Dungeons are not always dank tombs underground or hidden temples in remote parts of the world (although those are certainly viable dungeons). "Dungeon" can be a term used to describe any destination location that comprises a combination of combat, puzzle, trap, and roleplaying/social encounters. A dungeon might be the

king's palace during a palace ball or a corrupted forest filled with dark fey monsters. Dungeons constitute end points that embody the climax of the exploration process.

Autonomy

A critical part of the D&D RPG experience is player autonomy, along with exploration. This RPG element touches on the principal way a player becomes emotionally attached to an RPG: his or her character.

Metallic and Chromatic Dragons

Dragons are an iconic component of many fantasy properties, but for Dungeons & Dragons, they are part of the essence of the IP. While D&D has introduced many varieties of dragon in the past, two groups stand out as the most iconic. Not incorporating these monsters into a D&D RPG in some level (even if they are merely acknowledged as being a formidable part of the world) would be odd at best. Dragons are ancient, powerful creatures. They see empires rise and fall. As a result, they should often take the long view, and be presented to the PCs as nearly alien creatures of immense power and intelligence, whose motives are nigh inscrutable.

Dragons are complex monsters, and should be used with care and respect.

Metallic Dragons: Mostly the “good” dragons of the world, these sometimes benevolent dragons come in five classic types. These dragons should most commonly be encountered in a benevolent role, as benefactors or as the origin of a narrative hook, but they are also sometimes interesting when they act against the characters as an opposing force for good. Metallic dragons, in descending order of power:

- Gold
- Silver
- Copper
- Bronze
- Brass

Chromatic Dragons: Definitively evil, chromatic are some of the most recognizable villains in D&D. As with metallic dragons, they should be used only when their impact can be maximized. Chromatic dragons also appear in five classic varieties, in descending order of power:

- Red
- Blue
- Black
- Green
- White

Other dragon types occasionally used to good effect in the Forgotten Realms include:

- Shadow dragons

In D&D, the size of a dragon directly correlates to its age and power. Older dragons are larger and more powerful than younger dragons. Dragons are not typically encountered at low levels (below level 5 in D&D TRPG 20-level terms), but a mid-sized dragons might be encounters in the mid-level range, and ancient dragons should mostly be reserved for late-level, climactic encounters.

Gods

Faerûn is a pantheistic world, home to many religions serving a very large number of deities. For more information on specific deities consult the D&D R&D team.

Most gods in the Realms take a backseat to the action, preferring to act through their mortal representatives. In general, it's a bad idea for a deity to show up in person, even in the form of an avatar. Gods cannot be summoned by any but the most powerful mortals, and even then, it's much more likely that an avatar or powerful servitor of the deity would appear.

As villains, the mortal agents of deities are great choices, but rarely should a deity be fought directly. Only a select few would deign to combat a mortal.

The temples of deities almost never look like modern churches (with pews and an altar in the front) and shouldn't be depicted or described as such.

Conflict

A D&D RPG is, in essence, a player-driven narrative describing the journey of several heroes. Conflict is nearly always required, or the heroes wouldn't be heroes. But conflict can take the form of combat, the environment (traps or natural hazards), tricky social situations, or even conflict within the adventuring party. In an RPG experience, all types of conflict are on the table.

Multiple Planes of Existence

While Faerûn is where most of the action should take place in a D&D RPG, the world exists as one within multiple planes. These planes classically form a cosmology known as The Great Wheel. See the *Dungeon Master's Guide* for more information on the Great Wheel. The most important concept to remember is that even if the players never visit another plane, the fact that multiple planes exist is knowledge that many adventurers and sages share. Common folk might not commonly know or think about the planes but their influence may be felt over the course of a D&D adventure. Elementals from the elemental planes, for example, demons originate from the Abyss, and devils from the Nine Hells.

Portraying Races & Classes

If you're creating an NPC that is based on a character class, here are some broad concepts to keep in mind about how the NPC behaves and what they can do.

Fighter

- Typically the frontline combatants.
- Wear heavy armor made of metal.

- They wield weapons (most often melee, but bows or crossbows, as well) and often shields. This includes most all the weapons of D&D, with the potential for rare weapon types (fighters know how to use polearms, for example, even if doing so isn't how they are commonly depicted).
- They are trained and often (but not always) come from the ranks of soldiery.
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Wizard:

- They wear robes or other non-restrictive clothing (armor inhibits their ability to cast arcane spells).
- They are trained spellcasters—meaning a mentor or school recognized a spark of magical ability and they were able to nurture that through rigorous learning.
- Wizards cast spells through a combination of verbal intonation, physical hand gestures, and physical materials (the classic example is the use of bat guano to cast a *fireball* spell, for example).

Necromancers:

- Necromancers aren't good. Trifling with the undead is considered an evil act in most parts of the world. This does not mean all necromancers are evil, but it does mean they're suspect, at best.

Illusionists:

- Illusionists are often tricksters, using magic to mislead or confuse. They often have a sense of humor about their craft.

Evokers:

- Evokers are combat mages. This is not subtle magic, and the most compelling evokers either play to or against this type.

Enchanters:

- Enchanters don't fool your senses like illusionists. Rather, they manipulate your mind and bend it to their own will. Enchanters are puppetmasters.

Conjurer:

- Conjurers manipulate reality, and are the unique among wizards in that their chosen school can actively make something out of nothing.

Diviner:

- Diviners are seekers of truth and information, investigators and lore-seekers.

Transmuter:

- Transmuters see a state of being as transient, as they focus on changing the state of any creature or object to something more useful.

Abjurer:

- Abjurers seek to protect and defend from harm.

Cleric:

- Clerics are the principle divine spellcasters of D&D. This primarily means they're the foremost experts on healing and protective magic, although they also offer an amount of buffing spells comparable to wizards.
- Clerics are conduits of divine power that originates from a broad pantheon of deities, so they come in a vast dogmatic array. See the list of deities in the D&D Style Guide for specific varieties of the most common gods in the Forgotten Realms pantheon.
- Clerics should represent their deity visually and thematically, but certain key elements tie all clerics together. They all wear mid-weight armor made of metal (typically chainmail) and wear or wield a holy symbol emblematic of the appropriate deity.
- Clerics can be chosen by a deity or they can choose their faith, but either way, their faith (dogma, belief structure, moral code, and how they act out all these things) plays a major role in their day to day lives.

Rogue:

- Rogues are the stealthy, skillful backstabbers of D&D classes.
- Like fighters and wizards, they learn their craft through diligence and practice. Unlike these other classes, however, rogues are often self-taught.
- Many classic D&D rogues are cast as the smartest, craftiest creatures of the dangerous streets, learning their trade through trial and error, but outsmarting bigger and tougher opponents.
- Rogues rely on cunning, stealth, natural quickness, and an extensive knowledge of the shadier sides of the world.
- They are also the most likely to have unexpected knowledge or skills picked up in their various nefarious dealings. Rogue origins can be complex, however—they might be spies or assassins working for powerful (and even good) organizations, as well as being burglars or cutpurses who have elevated their game to adventurer status.
- They are not simple or one-dimensional characters.
- Rogues typically wear leather armor and wield smaller, lighter weapons (short swords, daggers, and shortbows are favorites). They tend to dress in dark clothing when on the job.

Ranger:

- Rangers are most commonly portrayed as the warriors of the wild places in a D&D RPG. Like fighters or rogues, they rely on training and hours of practice to hone their skills, which consist primarily of tracking, knowledge of the natural world, and stealth.

- They use weapons and wear armor. However, rangers can sometimes call upon the magic of the natural world to supplement their martial abilities.
- Ranger have most of the same weapon training as fighters, but are most often presented as two-weapon fighters (like the famous Drizzt Do'Urden) or archers.
- The armor they wear is mostly of the leather varieties, and rangers are often nearly as skilled as rogues.

Paladin:

- Paladins are the holy warriors of D&D. Like clerics, they serve a deity and channel divine power to achieve their goals (or the goals of the temple or holy order they serve). Unlike clerics, they don't do so by casting spells.
- Paladins, like fighters, wear heavy armor (typically plate) and wield weapons in combat.
- They have some access to divine magic, but only a fraction of that possessed by clerics.
- Paladins carry holy symbols devoted to their deity of choice.
- Paladins are nearly always of the lawful good alignment: they follow a strict code of conduct to uphold the law, protect the innocent, and prevent evil in any form.

Barbarian:

- Barbarians are the fierce, wild, savage, and unpredictable warriors of D&D.
- They typically come from remote, rural parts of the world. Like fighters and rogues, they are trained to fight, but they have also frequently had to adapt quickly to harsh environments to survive. Their "training," such as it is, is at least partly a trial by fire.
- Barbarians rely on berserker fury to shrug off injuries that would injure lesser folks, as well as to deal copious amounts of extra damage.
- Barbarians wear lighter armor than fighters, as they rely on speed and overwhelming ferocity in battle.
- But they wield weapons in combat.
- Barbarians might commonly be depicted as brutish or crude, but they are not stupid or prone to being foolish any more than another character. Like Conan, the character on which they're based, they might often be misjudged as such by other denizens of the world.

Druid:

- Druids could be considered the priests of nature. They are keepers and guardians of the untouched, uncivilized parts of the world. They stand in opposition to those who seek to despoil or corrupt the natural order.
- Druids should nearly always come from the rural, remote parts of the world. A druid in a city or town has a reason to be there.
- Druids are spellcasters, and cast divine spells like clerics or paladins.

- Druids wear armor and can wield some weapons, but they avoid the use of metal.
- Druids have often been displayed as reclusive or uncomfortable in urban environments, and these are useful tropes, but they are not exclusive depictions of druids.

Bard:

- Bards are storytellers and performers, musicians and scoundrels.
- Bards are part rogue, part spellcaster, and part charmer. They're one of the few classes in D&D that make their living on force of personality.
- Bards are natural adventurers, and live as much to tell the tales of others as they do to experience them themselves.
- Bards embody the idea that words—language, music, or written text—have power. They are knowledgeable about many things, collectors or obscure facts or knowledge they've picked up in their travels. And they sing or play an instrument to channel their magic.
- Bards can wear armor along the lines of rogues, and can wield similar weapons.

Sorcerers:

- Sorcerers are natural spellcasters, born with an innate ability to cast arcane spells.
- Sorcerers inherited their spellcasting ability, possibly from an ancestor or parent with innate spellcasting ability. Some iconic examples of such an ancestor include a dragon, yuan-ti, or even a demon or devil.
- Sorcerers often learn from experience, through trial and error. They might have a mentor, but likely didn't attend a school or undergo the sort of academic study wizards are known for.
- Sorcerers, like wizards, wear robes or non-restrictive clothing (armor inhibits their ability to cast arcane spells).
- Sorcerers, like wizards, cast spells through a combination of verbal intonation, physical hand gestures, and physical materials (the classic example is the use of bat guano to cast a *fireball* spell, for example).
- Sorcerers are primarily noted for their differences from wizards.

Monks:

- Monks are the hand-to-hand specialists of D&D. Monks fight primarily unarmed, but can also use a range of exotic, Asian-style weaponry.
- Monks in the Forgotten Realms are not the exclusive province of the eastern part of the continent (Shou Lung, for example). Monasteries can be found all over Faerûn, each with different traditions that define them uniquely. These traditions are narrative elements similar to those for many other classes (religions for clerics or paladins, for example).

- Despite many different martial arts traditions, monks are lawful—they follow the rules, both theirs and the rules of others (provided those rules don't conflict with their traditions).
- Monks do not wear armor, but rely on quickness and their martial arts abilities to protect themselves.
- Monks are trained, not born. The vast majority likely spent time learning in a monastery, but some might have had private mentors.
- *Key Ability Scores:* Wisdom, Dexterity.

Warlock:

- Warlocks are spellcasters similar in concept to wizards. The fundamental difference is narrative: A warlock has made a pact with a powerful non-deity power that enables him or her access to ever-more-powerful types of magic.
- They wear robes or light armor, most commonly. Unlike wizards and sorcerers, warlocks might be found in leather armor.
- Warlocks are innate spellcasters, meaning they do not require the sort of training wizards do to learn their craft. Rather, like sorcerers, they spend time in communion with their patrons, learning the secrets necessary to unlock their power.

Races

As with classes, D&D has been a brand associated with a variety of races over the years. Those races most commonly associated with the brand include:

- **Elf:** Elves are an ancient and powerful people, whose years are long and whose passions run deep. Elves are the beautiful, fey-like, mysterious, almost alien race of the D&D core. They should embody grace, intelligence, and the wonder and mystery of the natural world.
 - Elves of the Forgotten Realms come in several subraces: Wood elves, wild elves, moon elves, and sun elves.
 - See the D&D Style Guide for more on elves and elven subraces.
- **Dwarf:** They fight neither recklessly nor timidly, but with measured courage and tenacity. Their sense of justice is strong, but at its worst it can become a thirst for vengeance.
 - Dwarves of the Forgotten Realms come in two subraces: shield dwarves and gold dwarves.
 - See the D&D Style Guide for more on dwarves and dwarven subraces.
- **Halfling:** The diminutive halflings survive in a world full of larger creatures by avoiding notice or, barring that, avoiding offense.
 - Halflings of the Forgotten Realms come in two subraces: strongheart and lightfoot halflings.
 - See the D&D Style Guide for more on halfling and halfling subraces.
- **Human:** Short-lived but influential far beyond their years, humans have rapidly spread across the worlds of D&D.
 - While humans don't have particular subraces, their cultures are as varied as the landscapes and regions of the Forgotten Realms.

- See the D&D Style Guide for more on humans and human subcultures by region.
- **Half-Elf:** Half-elves are the offspring of one human and one elven parent. They are mostly well-liked and respected by other races across the world.
 - Half-elves do not have subraces, but like humans, would adopt the cultures of the regions they inhabit.
- **Half-Orc:** Half-orcs are the offspring of one human and one orc parent. Often the product of a violent encounter, this is a subject that should mostly be implied unless a particular narrative tackles the issue of half-orc parenthood in an adult and respectful manner. Half-orcs are often outcasts in D&D, viewed as weaker than their orc kin and too bestial for most civilized regions.
 - Half-orcs do not have subraces, but like humans, would adopt the cultures of the regions they inhabit.
- **Gnome:** Gnomes, like halflings, are one of D&D's small races. Gnomes are tricksters (commonly associated with illusion magic) and inventors. Gnomes do not have common subraces.

Other Important Stuff

Holy Symbols: Holy symbols can conceptually be bound up directly in a cleric's ability to cast spells.

Spellbooks: Like holy symbols, spellbooks can exist in a D&D world without explicit ties to a character. Wizards often keep the spellbooks with them or in their libraries, laboratories, workshops, and homes.

Alignment: Alignment is a system used to help players guide character actions in world, as well as form moral connections to a narrative that might not naturally occur to them. Alignment is best implemented as a guidance system, not something with significant mechanical weight. It can be especially useful in non-combat encounters: influencing dialog options from NPCs or options offered to the player. The classic D&D alignments are formed along two axes: law and chaos, and good and evil. This forms nine alignments, plus one alignment for those beasts and plants and constructs that lack the intelligence to have an alignment:

Lawful good
 Neutral good
 Chaotic good
 Lawful neutral
 Neutral
 Chaotic neutral
 Lawful evil
 Neutral evil
 Chaotic evil
 Unaligned

The Planes: While acknowledgement of a multi-planar cosmology in a D&D RPG is critical (even if the characters never actually venture to those planes), the specific cosmology varies from expression to expression. Different tabletop editions of the D&D TRPG and different campaign settings have espoused various versions of a planar cosmology. The most familiar and popular is known as the Great Wheel. However, character knowledge about the specifics of the cosmology are rare enough to warrant little attention or detail. What's important in an RPG featuring planar travel is the execution of the planes themselves. The most well known planes are:

Elemental Planes (Fire, Air, Water, Earth)

Plane of Shadow

Astral Plane

The Abyss

The Nine Hells

Ethereal Plane

Less iconic planes include:

Ysgard

Limbo

Pandemonium

Carceri

Hades

Gehenna

Acheron

Mechanus

Arcadia

Celestia

Bytopia

Elysium

Beastlands

Arborea

Outlands

Linking all planes together is the city of Sigil, characters should not be traveling there.

Schools of Magic: The nine schools of magic are a classic element of the D&D IP, but their specific acknowledgement or presence can be implied, rather than explicit. The schools of magic are:

Abjuration: Abjuration is the school associated with protective magic. These spells create temporary buffs that elevate a character's defenses or remove negative effects like curses. Iconic Abjuration spells include shield, protection from evil, or sanctuary.

Conjuration: Unlike most other schools of magic, conjurations can actively create something permanent out of nothing. Summoning spells, which call forth creatures to act on behalf of the spellcasters, are also conjurations. Such creatures are often extraplanar in origin. Conjurations can create new items, summon monsters, or conjure physically present materials and spell effects. Cloudkill is a conjuration, for example, and the mist is both real and deadly (even if it eventually disperses).

Divination: Divination spells allow the spellcaster to learn information more easily. This is the school of spying magic, discovering lost lore, and penetrating deception. Scrying, speak with animals, and true seeing are all classic divination spells.

Enchantment: Enchantment spells focus on manipulating the mind. Enchantments charm, confuse, and dominate the weak willed. Enchantments can prevent you from withholding the truth, make you instantly like someone, or possibly even force you to act against your nature. Charm person, confusion, and zone of truth are classic Enchantment spells.

Evocation: Evocation magic manipulates the raw, elemental forces of the world. Some of D&D's most iconic spells—magic missile, fireball, lightning bolt—are evocation spells, because they're visually compelling and easily describable. Evocation spells can also create temporary non-damaging effects. Tenser's floating disc is a classic Evocation spell that creates a disc of force a caster can use to carry heavy objects.

Illusion: Illusion magic involves creating false realities or false perceptions of reality in the world. While higher-level illusions might be able to kill an enemy, it's not through traditional damage accrual. It would be akin to frightening someone to death.

Necromancy: Necromancy is, in large part, a school that deals with creating and animating the dead, but it also has a great deal to do with the manipulation of life forces (both the caster's and the life forces of others). Classic necromancy spells include animate dead, chill touch, and astral projection. Necromancy spells allow a caster to drain the lives of others, as well as sometimes replenish their own hit points.

Transmutation: Transmutation spells fundamentally alter the state of a creature or object. They always begin with something and turn it into something else (as opposed to Conjuration magic, which can create something from nothing). Transmutation magic is key in magic item creation, and classic Transmutation spells include polymorph, flesh to stone, or disintegrate.

Universal: This is the catch-all school of magic for any spells that do not fit into one of the other categories. No wizards specialize in this school. Iconic Universal spells include detect magic and dispel magic.

Spell Components: Traditionally, cast spells feature a mix of verbal (spoken), somatic (hand gestures), and material (some physical good that is consumed or used as a focus) components. Material components can be used periodically as narrative devices, rewards, or setting dress.

Rituals: Ritual magic is a great plot device for villains. It's also a way to add depth and complexity to magic-using classes, along the lines of creating magic items. Ritual magic has historically been presented as magic more powerful and complex than a typical spell, requiring hours, if not days, to complete.