

Building Encounters

Determining Encounter Difficulty

Once you've designed your adventure and placed monsters and other opponents as you like, you can determine how challenging the adventure is likely to be by examining the difficulty of the encounters. There are four categories of potential difficulty: easy, medium, hard, and deadly.

Easy. The adventurers should quickly and decisively overcome the encounter. They might take a few lumps and lose a few hit points, but a good plan or a cunning use of resources might make the encounter little more than a brief pause in the adventure.

Medium. The encounter presents some difficulty, but in the end the adventurers should emerge victorious. Medium encounters might require the characters to expend some resources or heal up a bit after the fight.

Hard. A hard encounter is tough, and it could potentially go very badly for the adventurers with a few unlucky die rolls or bad circumstances. Weaker characters might get taken out of the fight, leaving a few adventurers to deal with the threat. Hard encounters have a small chance of killing PCs if things go awry.

Deadly. The encounter is potentially lethal for one or more player characters. Survival often requires good tactics and quick thinking, and the party risks defeat. A difficult encounter causes serious injury, with a substantial chance of character death.

Challenge Rating

Much of the advice in this section focuses on the XP values of monsters and encounters, as opposed to their challenge rating. Challenge rating is only a guidepost that indicates at what level that monster becomes an appropriate challenge. When putting together an encounter or adventure, especially at lower levels, exercise caution when using monsters whose challenge rating is higher than the party's level. Such a creature might deal enough damage with a single action to overwhelm PCs of a lower level; even though an ogre

has a challenge rating of 2, if it lands a blow, it can kill a 1st-level wizard or sorcerer outright.

Often these monsters have special traits or features that might be difficult or impossible for characters of a lower level to deal with. For example, a rakshasa has a challenge rating of 13 and is immune to spells of 6th level and lower. Facing off against one before reaching 13th level—and, thus, gaining access to 7th-level spells—means that spellcasters won't be able to affect the rakshasa directly, putting the party at a serious disadvantage. Even though the XP value of a fight against a lone rakshasa is well within the range of a medium or hard challenge for a party of six 10th-level PCs, such an encounter would be significantly tougher for them than XP alone would suggest.

Simple Encounters

For many encounters, especially when the player characters face off against a single opponent, you can use challenge rating as a simple guide. (See the *Monster Manual* for more about challenge ratings.) In general, a monster whose challenge rating is equal to the party's average level presents a medium to hard encounter, depending on circumstances and resources available to the party.

Complex Encounters

Complex encounters feature many opponents or different types of creatures. Use the following method to gauge the difficulty of such an encounter.

1. Count the Number of Enemies. This part is pretty easy: just tally the number of enemies in the encounter and note that number. You'll use this number again in step 4.

2. Add Up Challenge XP. Every creature in the *Monster Manual* has a challenge rating and an accompanying XP value. Total the XP values of every enemy creature in the encounter to get the encounter's XP value. You'll use this number to determine how difficult the encounter is.

3. Adjust Challenge XP Value Based on the Number of Monsters. Based on the number of monsters in the encounter, multiply the encounter's XP value by the matching multiplier from the Encounter XP Multipliers table. Thus, if you have an encounter with 4 monsters in it, multiply the total XP value of the encounter by 2

for the purposes of determining how difficult the encounter is.

Encounter XP Multipliers

Number of Monsters	XP Multiplier
Single Monster	—
Pair (2 monsters)	[ts]1.5
Group (3-6 monsters)	[ts]2
Gang (7-10 monsters)	[ts]2.5
Mob (11-14 monsters)	[ts]3
Horde (15 or more monsters)	[ts]4

4. Figure Out Party Encounter Difficulties.

For each of the four difficulty categories, find the player characters' level on the Encounter Difficulty XP per Character table below, and multiply that by the number of characters in the party. If the party contains characters of varying levels, add the XP values for each difficulty together separately for each player character.

Encounter Difficulty XP per Character

Level	Easy	Medium	Hard	Deadly
1	25	50	75	100
2	75	100	150	200
3	100	150	300	400
4	150	200	375	500
5	300	400	825	1,100
6	375	500	1,050	1,400
7	450	600	1,200	1,700
8	575	750	1,500	2,100
9	675	900	1,800	2,400
10	775	1,050	2,100	2,800
11	1,000	1,350	2,700	3,600
12	1,250	1,650	3,375	4,500
13	1,400	1,850	3,750	5,100
14	1,575	2,100	4,200	5,700
15	1,775	2,350	4,725	6,400
16	2,000	2,700	5,400	7,200
17	2,450	3,300	6,525	8,800
18	2,625	3,500	6,975	9,500
19	3,025	4,050	8,100	10,900
20	3,550	4,700	9,450	12,700

5. Compare the Encounter XP Value to Party Encounter Difficulties. Compare your encounter's XP value to the party's difficulty XP values. This should give you an idea of how difficult the encounter is, allowing you to adjust accordingly.

Example: Encounter Difficulty

You've designed an encounter for four player characters and want to find out how difficult it's going to be. Three of the four players have 3rd-level characters and one has a character at 2nd level (due to missing a session). Your encounter is a fight with four hobgoblins. Each hobgoblin has an XP value of 100, so the total XP is 400. Since there are four hobgoblins, you double the XP value of the encounter; the encounter's XP value, for the purposes of figuring out its difficulty, is 800 XP.

For each category on the Encounter Difficulty XP per Player Character table, you add three times the XP value for 3rd level (for three 3rd-level characters) plus the value on the 2nd-level row once (for the one 2nd-level character). You end up with the following difficulty break points: 375 XP (easy), 550 XP (medium), 1,050 XP (hard), and 1,400 XP (deadly). That means this encounter, with a value of 800 XP, falls between the medium and hard break points, making it a medium-to-hard encounter.

If you had chosen bugbears instead of hobgoblins, you would have had an encounter XP total of 1,600, since bugbears have an XP value of 200 apiece (800 XP) and there are four of them (1,600 XP for the encounter). In this case, your encounter would have been deadly, since 1,600 XP falls above the threshold for deadly encounters for your party.

Multipart Encounters

Sometimes the adventures and encounters that you design feature many enemies, but the party does not face them all at once. Perhaps the enemies come at the party in waves, or a single encounter takes place over multiple locations. For these multipart encounters, treat each discrete part of the encounter—each wave of enemies, each location, and so forth—as a separate encounter for the purpose of determining its difficulty.

Remember that the party can't benefit from a short rest between parts of such an encounter, so they won't be able to spend Hit Dice to regain hit points or recover any abilities that require a short rest to regain. In general, if the combined XP total of a multipart encounter is higher than one-third of the party's expected XP total for the adventuring day (see "The Adventuring Day," below), the encounter is going to be tougher than the sum of its component parts.

The Adventuring Day

Assuming typical adventuring conditions and that the dice don't turn against your players, most player characters can handle about six to eight medium or hard encounters in a day, depending on how those encounters play out. If the adventure has more easy encounters, then the party can get through more; if it has more deadly or very deadly encounters, they can handle fewer.

Although you can never be certain when players will choose to take a short or long rest, you can build in natural break points to guide the flow of the adventure. Let's say you're designing a dungeon and would like a resting point for the players before they move from the first level down to the second. You can stock the first level of the dungeon with encounters of the right challenge so that, around the time they finish exploring that level, the characters' resources are depleted to the point where they need a long rest. Thus, the adventuring day would naturally end at around the time the party finishes exploring the first level of the dungeon.

In the same way you figure out the difficulty of an encounter, you can use the XP values of monsters and other opponents in an adventure as a guideline for how far the party is likely to progress. For each character in the party, consult the XP per Adventuring Day per Player Character table, and add the XP for that character's level to get a total for the party's adventuring day. This total provides a rough estimate of the total XP for encounters the party can handle before needing to take a long rest.

XP per Adventuring Day per Player Character

PC Level	XP
1	300
2	600
3	1,200
4	1,700
5	3,500
6	4,000
7	5,000
8	6,000
9	7,500
10	9,000
11	10,500

12	11,500
13	13,500
14	15,000
15	18,000
16	20,000
17	25,000
18	27,000
19	30,000
20	40,000

Short Rests

In general, over the course of a full adventuring day, the party will likely need to take two short rests, about one-third and two-thirds of the way through the day. If your adventure is location-based (for example, in a dungeon), you can use that frequency to guide you when placing relatively safe locations to rest. If it is a more event-based adventure, short rests serve as natural break points in the action. Several hours might pass before the next event begins.