

# **Basics of Dungeons & Dragons**

## **For Beginners**

The basic idea of Dungeons & Dragons (or any tabletop roleplaying game) is a group of people coming together to tell a story. Each player controls a player character (PC) who will be one of the heroes of the story. The Dungeon Master (DM) plays the part of all of the other characters in the story. The shopkeeper, the barmaid, the king of the realm, and even the villains of the story are all considered non-player characters (NPCs). The general flow of the game is that the DM will describe the setting and the events that are going on, while the players will describe the actions their characters will take to react to the situations presented by the DM. During many roleplaying situations, this is simply a conversation taking place among all of the people involved. However, whenever the success or failure of an action is in question or is important to the story, we will need to roll dice to determine the results of the characters' decisions. The following information is intended to help anyone who is new to the game get used to some of the terms you will hear while building your character or making important decisions in the heat of battle.

## **Difficulty Class (DC)**

Difficulty class is a set number that you are trying to roll equal to or higher than when making a skill check or saving throw.

## **Armor Class (AC)**

You character's AC, or Armor Class, is the target number that an enemy must roll in order to hit you. The basic calculation for AC is  $10 + \text{your Dexterity modifier}$ . Wearing armor, carrying a shield, and using certain class abilities or spells can also increase your AC, making you harder to hit.

## **Hit Points (HP)**

Hit Points are how much damage your character can take before they are out of the fight. Each attack that hits you will do damage and reduce your current HP. When HP reaches 0 you are knocked out. If you are damaged beyond 0 HP then your character is considered dying. Unless another character stabilizes them, they will need to make Death Saving Throws on each of their turns to determine if they will stabilize on their own or if they will actually die.

## **Saving Throws**

Saving Throws are special die rolls that are made to avoid the effects of certain types of spells, attacks, traps, and other dangers in the game.

## **Proficiency / Proficiency Bonus**

Proficiency means being good at something. In game terms, when you have proficiency with a skill, you get to add your proficiency bonus to your dice rolls when using the skill. Choosing proficiencies during character creation will determine which skills your character will be good at and will continue to get better at as they level up. In the case of rogues, you get to choose some skills to have double proficiency. This means you add 2x your proficiency bonus when using those skills. Proficiency bonus is also added to attack rolls when casting spells or using weapons with which you are proficient.

## Simple Weapons vs Martial Weapons

The basic types of weapons proficiencies are simple weapons and martial weapons. Pretty much anyone can handle simple weapons, while martial weapons are considered to be more serious weapons that require more training. Some races, classes, or backgrounds may give individual weapon proficiencies (such as Elf weapon training that gives proficiency with bows and swords).

## Light / Medium / Heavy Armor

Like weapons, you will want to have proficiency with the armor that you use. All armor falls into the 3 basic categories of light, medium, or heavy. Lighter armor offers less protection while offering more freedom of movement. Heavier armor gives more protection while also being more restrictive.

## Ability Scores

Your character has 6 ability scores: Strength, Dexterity, Constitution, Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma. Each score is a number from 1 to 20, and those numbers are used to generate modifiers that are added to or subtracted from certain die rolls. Refer to the table below:

| Ability Score | Modifier | Ability Score | Modifier |
|---------------|----------|---------------|----------|
| 1             | -5       | 12 or 13      | +1       |
| 2 or 3        | -4       | 14 or 15      | +2       |
| 4 or 5        | -3       | 16 or 17      | +3       |
| 6 or 7        | -2       | 18 or 19      | +4       |
| 8 or 9        | -1       | 20            | +5       |
| 10 or 11      | +0       |               |          |

### Strength

Strength affects the amount of weight you can lift, and how effective you are with strength-based weapons (most melee weapons and thrown weapons).

### Dexterity

Dexterity affects your ability to dodge hits, as well as how effective you are with dexterity-based weapons (finesse melee weapons and bows).

### Constitution

Constitution is your endurance or ability to roll with the punches. It affects your resistance to poison and disease, and how much HP you have.

### Intelligence

Intelligence affects your ability to recall information, and it is also the spellcasting ability for artificers, wizards, rogues who become arcane tricksters, and fighters who become eldritch knights.

### Wisdom

Wisdom affects your ability to understand the world around you and to notice things that others might miss. It is also the spellcasting ability for clerics, druids, and rangers.

## Charisma

Charisma affects your ability to influence the people around you. It is a measure of your personality, as well as the spellcasting ability for bards, paladins, sorcerers, and warlocks.

## Spellcasting

D&D's system for magic use may appear complicated on the surface and there are a lot of terms involved that sound like big words. I'll break it down for you here:

### Casting Time

This is the amount of time it takes to cast the spell. Sometimes this is an actual amount of time, such as 1 minute or 1 hour. Most times, it is a portion of a turn such as 1 action or 1 bonus action.

### Spell Components

Spells often list components as V, S, M. These are short for Verbal, Somatic, and Material. If a spell has **verbal** components, this means the caster must be able to speak the words of the spell. If your character has been gagged or otherwise silenced, they will not be able to cast a spell with verbal components.

**Somatic** components are gestures. The character should have their hands free to make the necessary movements. If your hands are bound, you will not be able to cast spells with somatic components.

**Material** components are specific objects the character must have when casting the spell. If your character has a spell focus, such as a cleric's holy symbol or a druid's staff, then the spell focus can take the place of most material components. The exception to this rule is when the spell lists a monetary cost for the spell component (500 gp worth of diamonds, for example). These types of components must be present in order to cast the spell.

### Range

Some spells are touch spells. They require you to be next to the target and to physically touch them. Other times, there is a specific range such as 30 feet. This is the maximum distance away from the caster that the spell's target can be.

### Duration

This is how long the spell can last once it has been cast. Many spells are instantaneous, meaning that the spell immediately has an effect and then it is done. Other spells will list a time like 10 minutes. If you see the word concentration in the spell's duration, this means that the caster must concentrate on the spell in order to keep the spell's effects going for the duration. A character may only concentrate on one spell at a time, and any time they get hurt, there is a chance that they will lose their concentration.

### Spell Levels and Spell Slots

Every spell you cast has a level. Your character has a set number of spell slots, and each of those spell slots has a level. Every time you cast a spell, it uses a spell slot of the spell's level. This is how we determine how much magic our characters can use in any given day of adventuring.

### Cantrips

Cantrips are level 0 spells. They are minor magic that does not require the use of spell slots and they can be used any number of times in a day. Most casters who do not have access to powerful weapons will want to know at least one good attack cantrip so that they can always contribute in a fight, even after they have used up all of their spell slots for the day.

### **Spell Attack Roll**

If a spell requires you to make an attack roll, you will add your proficiency bonus and your spellcasting ability to the die roll and compare it to the defender's Armor Class (AC). If your roll is equal to or higher than the defender's AC, then the spell hits its target.

### **Spell Save DC**

If a spell requires the target to make a saving throw, then their die roll will be compared to your Spell Save DC. This is a number provided by your spellcasting class and is enhanced by your spellcasting ability.

## **How Does Battle Work?**

When you can't sneak by the guards, talk your way out of a situation, or otherwise avoid confrontation, it is time to fight. Some groups like to fight their way through everything while others like to do more roleplaying, sneaking, negotiation, etc. Whichever type of gamer you are, battle will be inevitable, and it is essential that you learn the basic combat rules when playing D&D.

### **Starting a Battle / Rolling Initiative**

At the beginning of a battle, each character rolls a 20-sided die (d20) and adds their Initiative Modifier. For most characters, Initiative Modifier will be the same as their Dexterity Modifier, although there are ways to increase it. Characters take turns acting in battle, based on the initiative rolls, in order of highest to lowest.

### **Your Turn**

When it's your turn, you have a number of things you can do. Each turn, you have a move, an action, a bonus action, and a free item interaction. You can do these things in any order, and you can even break up your movement into parts, moving a small amount, taking action, and then making the rest of your movement. You also get one reaction per round of combat – this is something you can do when it's not your turn, that is triggered by the actions or movements of another character.

### **Free Item Interaction**

Each turn you may pick up, draw, or sheathe one item such as a weapon, shield, or spell focus for free. Dropping an item on the ground does not count as an interaction, so you could technically drop on weapon on the ground to draw another one. However, you would not want to forget to go back and pick up your dropped item later on.

### **Movement**

Each turn, your character can move up to its movement speed (5 or 6 squares for most characters). As mentioned before, the movement can be broken up to different moment during your turn.

### **Bonus Action**

Some spells and class abilities count as a bonus action, rather than a full action. You get one bonus action per turn. If you cast a spell as a bonus action, then you may not cast another spell as an action (unless it is a cantrip, the lowest-powered type of spell).

### **Action**

As an action, you may attack another character with your weapon, cast a spell, dash, disengage, dodge, help, hide, search, or use an object.

### **Attack Action**

When you attack another character or creature, you roll a d20, add your ability modifier (Dexterity or Strength depending on the weapon) and your proficiency bonus. If the total number is equal to or higher than the AC of your target, then you hit them. Roll the damage dice listed for your weapon and add your ability modifier to the damage roll. This is the number of hit points the target loses.

### **Dash Action**

Using the Dash Action means you get to double your movement speed during the turn, but can take no other action.

### **Disengage Action**

You can use your action to disengage from an opponent. This allows you to move away from them without provoking an attack of opportunity.

### **Dodge Action**

You focus fully on defense for this turn, until the start of your next turn all attacks against you have disadvantage (they make 2 rolls and take the lowest score), and you have advantage on all Dexterity Saving Throws (you make 2 rolls and take the highest score).

### **Help Action**

You help one of your allies perform a specific task. On their next skill check or attack roll, they get advantage.

### **Hide Action**

Make a Stealth Check (roll a d20, add your Dexterity Modifier and your proficiency bonus if you're proficient with the Stealth skill) to attempt to hide from your opponents.

### **Ready an Action**

Choose an action, such as casting a spell or making an attack, that you will hold as a reaction. You choose the trigger that will cause you to act, such as "enemy comes within 5 feet" or "enemy steps through the doorway." The action is held throughout the next round until it is triggered, and it counts as both your action for the current turn and your reaction when it occurs.

### **Search Action**

Spend your turn searching for something. The DM may have you make a Perception Check or an Investigation Check.

### **Use an Object**

Interacting with any item beyond your free item interaction counts as an action. This could be pulling a lever, opening a door, drawing a second weapon, etc.

### **Reaction**

Reactions happen when it is not your turn. The most common reactions are using your readied action, casting a reaction spell, or making an attack of opportunity. You get one reaction per round of combat (the time between one of your turns and your next turn).

### **Attack of Opportunity**

When an enemy moves through and out of your threatened space (any squares on the map that touch the square your character is on), you may use your reaction to make a melee attack against that enemy.

## What can I do on my turn?

| 1 Action                                                                                                                   | 1 Movement                                         | 1 Bonus Action                                         | 1 Free Item Interaction                                                                                                |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Attack with a weapon you are holding, or draw an additional weapon after you have already used your free item interaction. | Move up to your movement speed                     | Cast a spell with a casting time of "Bonus Action"     | Draw or holster a weapon, shield, or other held item.                                                                  |
| Cast a spell with a casting time of "1 Action"                                                                             | Use any character feature that requires a movement | Use any character feature that requires a bonus action | Dropping an item doesn't count. You can drop a weapon and still use your free item interaction to draw another weapon. |
| Use any character feature that takes an action                                                                             |                                                    |                                                        | Some feats or character features may allow a second item interaction.                                                  |
| Interact with the environment, such as throwing a switch, opening a door, etc.                                             |                                                    |                                                        |                                                                                                                        |
| Dash Action allows you to move your movement speed a second time during your turn.                                         |                                                    |                                                        |                                                                                                                        |