

The Core Mechanic

At its heart, the D&D game uses a core game mechanic. Once you master this, you know how to play the game. It all revolves around task resolution. How do you know if your sword swing hits the nasty owlbear? If your outrageous bluff tricks the guards? If your fireblast spell hits the charging kobolds? It all depends on these basic rules:

- Decide what you want your character to do and tell the Dungeon Master.
- Roll a d20 (the higher you roll, the better).
- Add any relevant modifiers (as shown on your character sheet).
- Compare your total result to a target number. If your result is equal to or higher than the target number, you succeed at whatever task you were attempting to do. If your result is lower than the target number, you fail.

There's a little more to it than that, but the core mechanic governs all D&D game play. Everything else in the game is an extension or refinement of the core mechanic. Key examples of the core mechanic in play follow.

Skill Checks

When you use a skill, you make a skill check.

- Roll a d20 and add your skill modifier (as shown on your character sheet).
- Add any situational modifiers, usually from powers affecting you.
- The total is your check result.

Attack Rolls

When you make an attack, either using a basic attack or a power, you make an attack roll.

- Choose the attack type you want to use.
- Choose a target for your attack that is within range of the attack type you selected (Some attacks can be made against multiple targets).
- Roll a d20 and your attack modifier (as shown on your character sheet).
- The total is your attack roll result.

The higher the result, the better. Your result is compared against the target's defense score. Different attack types are compared against different defense scores. Characters and monsters have four different defenses: Armor Class (AC), Fortitude, Reflex, and Will.

Three Basic Rules

Along with the core mechanic, three basic principles should always be remembered. Other rules in the game are based on these assumptions.

Simple Rules, Many Exceptions: Every class, race, feat, power, and monster in the D&D game breaks the rules in some way. From minor to significant, the game is built upon exception-based rules design. For example, a normal melee attack always deals a few points of damage, but every class has powers that ramp up the damage when they get used.

Specific Beats General: If a specific rule contradicts a general rule, the specific rule, the specific rule wins. For example, you normally can't move as part of a regular attack. But if you have a power that allows you to move and attack, that specific rule trumps the general rule when you use that power.

Always Round Down: When the game asks you to divide a number, such as when you add half your level to your attack roll, you always round down to the next lower whole number.

Encounters

The action of a D&D game takes place in encounters. In encounters, all characters have something to do and it's important for them to work together to overcome whatever challenge is before them. Outside of encounters, characters explore their environment and engage in social interactions. When exploration or social interaction involves serious consequences for success or failure, it becomes an earlier encounter.

Encounters come in two basic forms: combat encounters and noncombat encounters.

Combat Encounters

Fighting monsters. What D&D adventure would be complete without combat encounters where characters rely on attack powers, skills, feats, and magic items to battle hordes of ravenous creatures or evil villains?

Noncombat Encounters

Noncombat encounters focus on skill use, utility powers, your wits, and your roleplaying skills. These encounters include dealing with traps and hazards, solving puzzles, and overcoming skill challenges.

Combat

Combat encounters break out when the player characters run into opposing force. That force could be a powerful solo monster, a group of terrifying creatures, or a gang of villainous nonplayer characters. The chaos of combat is organized into a cycle of rounds and turns.

Round: In a round, every combatant takes a turn. A round represents about 6 seconds in the game world.

Turn: On your turn, you take actions in any order you wish (see “Actions” below).

Combat Sequence

A combat encounter follows this sequence:

Establish Positions: The DM decides where combatants start out on the battle grid. The DM shows the players where they can set up their characters and then places the monsters.

Roll Initiative: Everyone involved in the encounter rolls initiative (roll a d20 and add your initiative modifier, as shown on your character sheet).

Take Surprise Round Actions: If any combatants gained a surprise round, they act in initiative order, each takes a single action.

Take Turns: In initiative order, highest result starting first, every combatant takes a turn.

Repeat: Start a new round and repeat the initiative order. Continue until one side or the other flees or is defeated.

End the Encounter: After one side or the other flees or is defeated, the encounter ends when the remaining side takes a short or an extended rest.

Actions

Combat rounds consist of characters using actions. The main action types include:

Standard Action: You can normally take one standard action on your turn. Most attack powers require the use of a standard action.

Move Action: You can normally take one move action on your turn. Walking your speed requires the use of a move action.

Minor Action: A minor actions enables you to do something more exciting. You can normally take them only on your turn. Drawing a weapon or opening a chest requires a minor action.

Free Action: Free actions take almost no time or effort. You can take as many free actions as you want during your or another combatant’s turn, as allowed by the DM. Free actions include talking and dropping a held item.

There are two additional action types that require triggers before you can use them - an action, event, or condition that takes place on another combatant’s turn.

Opportunity Action: When an enemy lets its guard down, you can take an opportunity action. You can only take one opportunity action on each combatant’s turn (if available). An opportunity interrupts the action that triggered it.

The most common opportunity action is an opportunity attack. When an enemy leaves a square adjacent to you, or when an adjacent enemy makes a ranged or an area attack, you can make an opportunity attack against that enemy.

Immediate Action: Interrupts and reactions are immediate actions. Specific powers define the trigger for these actions. You can take only one immediate action per round, and you can’t take an immediate action on your turn.

An interrupt lets you act before the triggering action is resolved. If the interrupt invalidates the triggering action, that action is lost.

A reaction lets you act immediately in response to a triggering action. The triggering action is completely resolved before you take your reaction.

Taking Your Turn

On your initiative order, you take your turn. Your turn has three parts: the start of your turn, actions on your turn, and the end of your turn.

The Start of Your Turn: Before you act, use the start of your turn to keep track of any effects.

- **Ongoing Damage.** If you’re suffering ongoing damage, you take damage now.
- **Regeneration.** If you have regeneration, you regain hit points now.
- **Other Effects.** Deal with any other effects that occur at the start on your turn.
- **No Actions.** You can’t take any actions at the start of your turn.

Actions on Your Turn: You get three actions to preform on your turn: Standard action, move action, and minor action.

- **Free Actions.** You can take as many free actions as you want on your turn, within reason and as allowed by the DM.
- **Any Order.** You can take your actions in any order, and you can skip any of them.
- **Substitute Actions:** You can take a move action or a minor action instead of a standard action, and you can take a minor action instead of a move action.
- **Extra Action.** You can take an extra standard action by spending an action point (see “Action Points”).
- **Other Combatants’ Actions,** Other combatants can take free actions on your turn, and you might take actions that trigger immediate actions or opportunity actions from other combatants.

The End of Your Turn: After you act, use the end of your turn to keep track of any effects.

- **Saving Throws.** You now make a saving throw against each effect that can be ended with a save. Roll a d20. If you roll lower than 10, the effect continues. If you roll 10 or higher, the effect ends.
- **End Effects.** Some effects end automatically at the of your turn.
- **No Actions.** You can’t take any actions at the end of your turn.

Attacks and Damage

If you successfully attack an enemy with a basic attack or power, you deal damage. Roll the damage dice as specified on your character sheet. Damage reduces a character’s hit points.

Critical Hits

When you roll a 20 on the die when making an attack roll, you score a critical hit. Instead of rolling damage, you deal the maximum amount of damage possible for the attack when you score a critical hit.

Flanking

Flanking provides a simple combat tactic for you and an ally to use against an enemy. To flank an enemy, you and an ally must be adjacent to the enemy and on opposite

sides of the enemy’s space. You and your ally must be able to attack the enemy (with a melee or ranged weapon, or with an unarmed attack). If there’s a barrier between your enemy and either you or your ally, you don’t flank. If you are affected by a condition that prevents you from taking actions, you don’t flank.

You have combat advantage against an enemy you flank (see below).

Combat Advantage

When a defender can’t give full attention to defense, it grants combat advantage to its attacker. This usually occurs when a defender is flanked, stunned, or otherwise caught off guard.

- **+2 Bonus to Attack Rolls:** You gain this bonus when you have combat advantage against the target of your attack.
- **Able to See Target:** You must be able to see a target to gain combat advantage against it.

Other Actions in Combat

This section describes how to preform some of the most common actions on your turn.

Basic Attack: As a standard action, you can make a melee basic attack or a ranged basic attack.

Charge: As a standard action, you can launch yourself forward and make a melee basic attack. Move your speed as part of the charge. At the end of your move, you make a melee basic attack with a +1 bonus to your attack roll. You must move at least two squares from your starting position and you must charge to the nearest unoccupied square from which you can attack the enemy. Charging provokes opportunity attacks. After a charge, you can’t take any other actions unless you spend an action point.

Second Wind: As a standard action, you can spend a healing surge to regain hit points (see below). When you do, you also gain a +2 bonus to all defenses until the start of your next turn. You can use your second wind once per encounter.

Use a Power: Most powers are standard actions. Refer to your character sheet to see what powers you have access to.

Movement

You can use a move action to walk your speed in a turn. If you use two move actions (substituting a move for a standard action), you can walk twice on your turn.

Move Actions

These activities require the use of a move action.

- **Walk:** Move up to your speed.
- **Shift:** Move 1 square without provoking opportunity attacks. You can't normally shift into difficult terrain.
- **Run:** Move up to your speed +2 and grant combat advantage.

Forced Movement

Certain powers and effects allow you to pull, push, or slide a target.

Pull: When you pull a creature, each square you move it must bring it nearer to you.

Push: When you push a creature, each square you move it must place it farther away from you.

Slide: When you slide a creature, there's no restriction on the direction you can move it.

The following rules govern all forced movement:

- **Distance:** The power specifies how many squares you can move a target. You can choose to move the target fewer squares or not to move the target at all.
- **Specify Destination:** Some powers instead specify a destination, such as any square adjacent to you.
- **No Opportunity Attacks:** Forced movement does not provoke opportunity attacks.
- **Difficult Terrain:** Forced movement isn't hindered by difficult terrain (see "Movement").
- **Not a Move:** Forced movement doesn't count against a target's ability to move on its turn.
- **Valid Space:** Forced movement can't move a target into a space it couldn't enter by walking.

Distance and Movement

To measure distance on a battle grid, simply count squares. You can move your speed in squares as a move action, in any direction.

Occupied Squares

In general, you can't move through an occupied square.

- **Ally:** You can move through a square occupied by an ally.
- **Enemy:** You can't move through an enemy's square unless that enemy is helpless.
- **Ending Movement:** You can't end your movement in an occupied square unless it's an ally's square and the ally is prone, or it's an enemy's square and the enemy is helpless.

Difficult Terrain

Rubble, undergrowth, shallow bogs, steep stairs, and other types of difficult terrain hamper movement. It costs 1 additional square of movement to enter a square of difficult terrain. If you don't have enough movement remaining, you can't enter a square of difficult terrain. You can't shift into a square of difficult terrain unless you have a power that allows you to do so.

Obstacles

You can't enter a square with an obstacle that fills the square, such as a wall or pillar. When an obstacle fills a square, you can't move diagonally across the corner of that square.

Action Points

Once per encounter, you can spend an action point. When you spend an action point, it's gone. You earn more action points by adventuring.

- You start with 1 action point.
- You gain 1 action point when you reach a milestone in your adventure (the DM will tell you when this occurs).
- After an extended rest (see below), you lose any unspent action points, but you start fresh with 1 action point.

- Most often, you spend an action point to take an extra action during your turn. You decide if the extra action is a standard action, a move action, or a minor action.

Hit Points, Healing, and Dying

Over the course of a battle, your character takes damage from attacks. Damage reduces your hit points.

- **Maximum Hit Points:** You have a maximum number of hit points, as determined by your class, level, and Constitution score. Your current hit points can't exceed this number.
- **Bloodied:** When your current hit points drop to one-half your maximum hit points or lower, you are bloodied. Certain powers work only (or work better) against a bloodied target.
- **Dying:** When your current hit points drop to 0 or lower, you fall unconscious and are dying. Any damage you take continues to reduce your current hit points until you character dies.
Death Saving Throw: When you are dying, you make a saving throw at the end of your turn each round. If you succeed (roll a 10 or higher), there is no change in your condition. If you fail the save, you slip one step closer to death. If you fail three times, your character dies.
- **Death:** When you take damage that reduces your hit points to a negative number that's the same as your bloodied number, or if you fail your death save three times, your character dies.

Healing in Combat

Even as the battle rages around you, you can heal. You can even heal yourself by using your second wind (see "Other Actions in Combat"). An ally can use the Heal Skill on you (see below). An ally can use a healing power on you.

When a power heals you, you don't have to take an action to spend a healing surge. Even if you're unconscious, the power restores hit points. Some powers don't require you to spend a healing surge at all.

Healing the Dying

When you are dying, any healing restores you to at least 1 hit point. If someone stabilized you using the Heal skill but you receive no healing, you regain hit points after an extended rest.

Rest and Recovery

Outside of encounters, you can take one of two types of rest: a short rest or an extended rest.

Short Rest: A short rest allows you to renew your encounter powers and use healing surges to regain hit points. It lasts about 5 minutes. You can take as many short rests as you want. During a short rest, you have to rest; no strenuous activity, no interruptions.

Extended Rest: Once per day, you can take an extended rest. It must last at least 6 hours to gain the benefits. You have to rest or sleep during this period. At the end of the rest, you regain any hit points you lost and healing surges you spent, your daily powers are renewed, and you lose any unspent action points and gain 1 fresh action point.

Skills

Your Dungeon Master has more details on skill use. The following is a quick overview so you have an idea what your skills can be used for. In general at 1st-3rd level, easy tasks have a DC of 15, moderate tasks have a DC of 20, and difficult tasks have a DC of 25 or higher. Your DM has the DCs for skill challenges.

Acrobatics: Use this skill to test your balance on narrow or unstable surfaces, to escape from a grab or from restraints, and (if you're trained) to reduce your damage when you fall.

Arcana: You have knowledge about magic and magical effects, and (if you're trained) you know how to detect persistent magical effects.

Athletics: Use this skill to climb, swim, or jump.

Bluff: Use this skill to make what's false appear to be true, fast-talk a guard, con a merchant, or tell lies.

Diplomacy: Use this skill influence others with tact and social grace, change opinions, inspire good will, and to negotiate a deal in good faith.

Dungeoneering: You have knowledge about forging a path through a dungeon complex, recognizing dungeon hazards, and finding food in the underdark.

Endurance: Use this skill to stave off ill effects and to push beyond normal physical limits.

Heal: Use this skill to administer first aid, stabilize a dying character, grant a saving throw, or treat a disease.

History: You have knowledge about history, including significant events, legends, customs, and traditions.

Insight: Use this skill to discern intent and decipher body language, making a best guess as to a target's motives, attitudes, and truthfulness.

Intimidate: Use this skill to influence others through hostile actions and overt threats.

Nature: You have knowledge related to finding your way through the wilderness, recognizing natural hazards, and living off the land.

Perception: Use this skill to notice clues, spot imminent dangers, and locate hidden objects.

Religion: You have knowledge of religious traditions.

Stealth: Use this skill to hide and move silently.

Streetwise: You know how to get the lay of the land in an urban setting.

Thievery: Use this skill to disable traps, open locks, pick pockets, and perform other sleights of hand.