DYNAMIC INITIATIVE

Dodge, Loaded weapon 1st round, Power Word spell	**1**
Movement (includes Dash or Disengage)	**+2**

Cast Spell (add +1 per level of spell, Cantrip +0)

Unarmed Strike attack

Weapon attack, LIGHT

Any action not listed

Weapon attack, normal

Weapon attack, HEAVY, LOADING, OVERSIZED

Incapacitated (earliest you can act, lose all ties)

Declare Action. Choose the **type** of Action you will take (PHB 192) each round and roll the die for that action. Spells and item interaction must be specific. Bonus actions are not declared. The DM counts up from 1 until all have taken a turn. Ties are broken by highest Dexterity or Intelligence score, and if still tied, a d20 roll. On your turn you may swap your Action freely for Dash, Disengage, or Dodge.

Modifiers. Each feature that improves or penalizes initiative modifies the die a step up or down. The worst a die can be is d20 and the best d3. Advantage and disadvantage operate normally.

Duration. "Your turn" effects are tracked from the initiative number on which they occurred.

DETAILED RULES

Initiative is no longer an "ability check." Any features such as a Bard's Jack of All Trades do not affect initiative rolls.

Monsters. Monsters, no matter the action, roll their Hit Die for initiative. They do not use player rules.

Declare Action: Actions must be specific as to what is being interacted with or used, but not how it will be carried out. For example, a weapon must be named (I will attack with my dagger). If retrieving an object, one must state from where (my backpack, the sack on the table). If casting a spell, the specific spell must be named and the level it is cast at (*magic missile* in a 3rd level slot).

Substitute Actions such as Grapple, Shove or Ready need not be declared. Subject to DM discretion, other unlisted Actions might be substituted on one's turn, such as being grappled by animated vines and using one's weapon, to assist in the Escape on your turn.

The DM counts up from 1 until all have a turn.

Tip: count in groups (e.g. 1-3, 4-6, 7 or higher) to speed up play.

Ties: Highest Dexterity or Intelligence <u>score</u> (not ability modifier) breaks a tie. Otherwise, roll a d20 to break ties.

Modifiers: features can stack. Thus, a character with the Alertness Feat (improves initiative) and a Sentinel Shield (advantage) using a dagger (d4 weapon) rolls a d3 with advantage and chooses the better of the two.

Your Turn: You determine where to Move, if applicable, and carry out your Action, as well as decide any bonus actions. Resources with limited uses, such as spell slots, ammunition, and item charges are only consumed if the Action is actually carried out.

On your turn, you may always freely substitute Dash, Disengage, or Dodge in lieu of your Action. However, if the Action requires movement (Dash, Disengage) and you did not add +2 to move, you cannot take that Action. This also applies to such features as the Rogue "Cunning Action."

You cannot Declare a quicker action and attempt to "substitute" another action. For example, you could not declare use of a d4 dagger to get the quicker die roll then announce you are "dropping" the dagger and drawing out your great axe. In such case, your turn would be over because you "used" your dagger.

Durations: "Your turn" effects are tracked from the initiative number on which they occurred as they are intended by design to last 1 round. *For example, the advantage feature for a guiding bolt spell cast on Initiative 3 would last until the "end of Initiative 3 next round."* However, features that cease to end when you take another Action, such as Dodge or casting another Concentration spell, end as stated.

Incapacitated: You still declare an Action in the hypothetical that if freed from the status, you will take the Action. The d12 roll is the *earliest* a player can act. If you roll a 3 but are not restored until Initiative 6, you act on Initiative 6 and go last (you lose all ties). In the unlikely event two incapacitated creatures are freed on the same initiative, roll a d20 to break the tie. **Tip:** if a player knows his team lacks ability to end the incapacity, there is little need to roll this initiative die.

This system has been play-tested with 2 different D&D groups over a period of 4 years (2016-2019, and 2019-current) with players varying from experienced to brand new to D&D. All had prior experience with the d20 system.

It is inspired by a combination of Mike Mearls, Matt Colville, and a decade of AD&D play using a "declaration" system, along with player feedback. It is meant to (1) make combat more interesting by introducing variable turns, (2) make initiative meaningful by putting the choice in the players' hands, (3) speed up play, and (4) stay simple, a 5E staple.

(1) **Unpredictability makes combat more interesting.** This goes without saying. In the d20 system, everyone somehow omnisciently knows when the monsters and other players will act, leading to illogical decisions (abandoning healing or protecting an ally because you know the cleric will act before the troll does).

(2) **Player choice matters.** In a d20 system, player choice has zero affect. We're changing that, and this adds a huge strategic element to the game. Dexterity, which already dominates the stage, is mostly removed from the equation, in favor of choice.

(3) **Speed up play.** Having used 3rd and 5th edition's d20 system for over a decade, I can compare and hands-down gameplay goes much quicker. Why? Because 90% of decision-making for players and the DM is occurring at the **same time** rather than one at a time. After a few sessions, players don't say anything at all to one another when declaring because most actions don't require in-depth discussion. At times, players will advise things like "stay together, I'm going to cast *bless*," but largely it's up to player honesty to let the DM know they've rolled their die and are ready to go. *It saves a TON of time, and my gameplay tends to rapid-pace, bullet-fire. The time it takes for all players and the DM to declare actions is about the same as it previously took for 1 player to pick spells, or agonize over whether to give a comrade a healing potion or attack.*

(4) **Stay Simple.** We need to keep this at 1 die. That's simple.

Changes and Fixes:

- **Bonus actions.** Originally we had these declared and the highest die of all actions rolled, but that slowed play (e.g. a rogue attacks with a light weapon, d4, but wants to use Cunning Action to disengage, originally a d6 action). In gameplay, most players had a good idea what bonus actions they would take with their character. So, we switched to only declaring the Action.

- **Spells.** This has gone through several edits. Ultimately, a 9th level spell has the capacity to change the world relative to a 1st level spell, so the rationale is that they shouldn't go on a 1. The previous version had spells go on a 1d10 and cantrips on 1d6. Also, original design had players locked into a specific spell.

- **Natural attacks and Monster initiative.** This has been subject to several revisions. Originally, we tracked initiative by damage die. However, we reasoned that a creature's natural attack speeds have little do with how deadly the attack is but rather on the creature's size.

   In most battles, monsters ran fine. However, using the same rules as players could get burdensome. For example, under a prior version, I ran a battle with 4 enemies with different

Actions. Like a madman, I was tracking monster #1 with a d8 weapon (d8), monster #2 with a racial feature (d6), monster #3 with a spell (d10), and monster #4 with multiple actions, the highest a d12 axe (d12).

Colville proposed to make life simpler, have monsters use their own system. No matter what they do, they roll their Hit Die. Since nearly all monsters have far less abilities to figure out than players, this has been extremely appealing and simple.

- **Loaded Weapons, Power Words.** It's an extra feature that probably could be considered an optional rule. But it really makes a lot more sense to me that you are never going to cross 30' to engage me in melee before I can fire my loaded crossbow or say 1 word. We also discussed longer weapons and the advantage they grant in combat, but this was too tricky and time-consuming a mechanism to incorporate into Initiative (the *Hackmaster* system does this but is extraordinarily complex). *As a middle ground, I homebrew the 3rd edition rule that if you have at least 10' Reach or a weapon from the Polearm Master feat and your opponent does not when entering your threat zone, it triggers an Attack of Opportunity. To make the Feat relevant, its first use does not consume a Reaction.*

DM Notes:

My long-running D&D group jointly concluded the d20 initiative system slowed play (mostly due to "analysis paralysis" and making decisions on what to do 1 at a time). We had 1 gamer who, at times, fell asleep at the table waiting for his turn. We had played 3rd edition and Pathfinder where, in many battles in high level play, it had taken over 5 minutes to get from 1 player's turn to another with a 4-5 person group! Unacceptable!

Some were familiar with AD&D, which had "weapon speed" initiative, so we tried the DMG's weapon speed option as, anecdotally, this felt like a quicker style of play to declare actions in advance. However, it ended up largely inconsequential (a 10% variance on the d20 roll), even if we were speeding up play by having everyone at once decide what to do at once. Then, we saw Mike Mearls's Greyhawk Initiative. It was a step in the right direction, but too many dice. The system needed to be simpler yet meaningful.

So, we homebrewed an alternative version, and then we played it, and we revised it. Then, a new job took me to another state, where I started with another great group. Like my prior group, they liked the concept, and they provided some fresh insights, such as why should natural attacks of a wolf be slower simply because it was more lethal.

Finally, I'll comment on the #1 theoretical forum complaint to a Declaration system (largely from people who had never tried it):

I don't like to miss my turn, is this a problem? No, it's actually been a rarity over the last 4 years. I surmise this is because players tend to pay attention to the battlefield and pick actions accordingly.