

Essential House Rules

for D&D 3.x Edition

I run my game with a couple assumptions that differ from what the game writers intended:

A character's class defines what he is, not who he is. Not all barbarians are angry illiterate morons from tribal cultures. Not all paladins are copies of a single overly-narrow chivalric ideal. I could go on, but I think you get the idea -- class is divorced from personality and background.

Traditionalism for its own sake is no fun. When tradition gets in the way of simplicity and customization, tradition goes out the window.

It's worth mentioning that this document could easily have been 100 pages, with all the minor glitches and restrictions that I'd be happy to forget. Nobody would read that document though, so instead I have a free request policy. Make a request, and I'll consider it. I might grant your request just for the asking!

Character Creation & Advancement

Use **32 point buy** to assign stats, because randomness has no place in character creation. Characters get **maximum starting gold** at 1st level, and they get **maximum hit points** at every level.

I don't give **XP**. Characters level up at appropriate moments.

Innate Bonuses

D&D assumes that characters have certain items -- or rather, certain bonuses. So rather than play the Diablo loot minigame, I give characters the bonuses they need:

Strike Bonus: This is an enhancement bonus to your weapon and unarmed attacks. (Attack and damage rolls.)

Guard Bonus: If you don't wear armor, this is your armor bonus. If you wear armor, this is an enhancement to your armor bonus. If you wield a shield, enhance it with this bonus too.

Deflection Bonus: AC.

Resistance: Saves.

Natural: AC.

Ability Boost: Add a +2 enhancement bonus to one ability score. Stacking these bonuses is limited by your level:

Level 1-4: Maximum +2 per Ability

Level 5-8: Maximum +4 per Ability

Level 9-12: Maximum +6 per Ability

Level 13-16: Maximum +8 per Ability

Level 17-20: Maximum +10 per Ability

Special Mention: Inherent bonuses don't exist.

Innate Bonuses

Level 1: Strike +1, Guard +1

Level 2: Deflection +1, Ability Boost

Level 3: Resistance +1, Ability Boost

Level 4: Natural +1, Ability Boost

Level 5: Strike +2, Guard +2

Level 6: Deflection +2, Ability Boost

Level 7: Resistance +2, Ability Boost

Level 8: Natural +2, Ability Boost

Level 9: Strike +3, Guard +3

Level 10: Deflection +3, Ability Boost

Level 11: Resistance +3, Ability Boost

Level 12: Natural +3, Ability Boost

Level 13: Strike +4, Guard +4

Level 14: Deflection +4, Ability Boost

Level 15: Resistance +4, Ability Boost

Level 16: Natural +4, Ability Boost

Level 17: Strike +5, Guard +5

Level 18: Deflection +5, Ability Boost

Level 19: Resistance +5, Ability Boost

Level 20: Natural +5, Ability Boost

All these bonuses might seem excessive, but the game expects PCs to have them. DMs should give them to NPCs too.

Races

Elves lose their passive ability to notice secret doors. Why? Because this holdover from previous editions adds yet another detail for a DM to remember, and because it makes no sense.

Small PCs get a +1 bonus to attack rolls and AC, a +2 bonus to Perception and Stealth, and a -1 penalty to combat maneuvers. Overall size modifiers look like this:

	Attack & AC	Perc. & Stealth	Combat Maneuvers
Fine	+4	+8	-4
Diminutive	+3	+6	-3
Tiny	+2	+4	-2
Small	+1	+2	-1
Medium	+0	+0	+0
Large	-1	-2	+1
Huge	-2	-4	+2
Gargantuan	-3	-6	+3
Colossal	-4	-8	+4

Level adjustments don't exist. If a player wants to play a powerful race, power it down instead. (With possible racial levels, if appropriate.)

Classes

Codes of conduct, alignment restrictions and **multiclassing restrictions** are ignored in the spirit of divorcing class from personality and background. Divine spells and powers ultimately come from a character's own innate divinity, so gods can't revoke them for any reason. A paladin might be Lawful Neutral, for example, though such a paladin would smite Chaos rather than Evil.

Other restrictions derived from a class' traditional image are also ignored. Examples include illiteracy and things a barbarian can't do while raging.

Pets of all kinds are discouraged because they create extra bookkeeping. Some classes have alternative features in various splat books. Additionally I offer other goodies to anyone willing to give up a pet: extra skills, feats, or hit points for example.

Spontaneous casters begin play with the Eschew Materials feat, and don't require full-round actions to use metamagic feats.

Classes

Multiclassing penalties are ignored.

Power-dip features are limited by multiclassing, though.

Power-dips are features that power gamers often get by taking one or two levels of a class, before moving on to the class they really want to play. Examples include save bonuses, a barbarian's fast movement and rage, a monk's AC bonus, and a paladin's smite and divine grace.

So here's the deal: Until a character multiclasses, everything works normally. But as soon as a character takes a second class, he loses focus. This means that his power-dip features become capped by his class level. For example a 1st level barbarian who takes his second level as a fighter only gets +1 Fort from each class, for a total of +2. He only gets +2 Str/Con during a rage and +5 speed. As another example a 1st level monk who takes his second level as a druid only gets +1 Will from each class, and a +1 AC bonus, no matter how high his Wis is.

Divine casters must use the spontaneous variant. (www.d20srd.org) To determine how many spells of a particular spell level that a paladin or ranger knows, simply add 1 to the number that appears on his Spells per Day chart.

Martial adepts ignore maneuver prerequisites.

Iterative attacks don't exist. Instead, add an extra damage die whenever a character would make an extra attack due to high BAB.

Classes

Clerics must use the undead turning variant from Complete Divine.

Druids must use the shape shifting variant from Player's Handbook 2.

Fighters get a bonus feat every level, plus the warblade's Weapon Aptitude feature.

Monks get the good BAB advancement. This applies to Flurry of Blows too.

Paladins must use the undead turning variant from Complete Divine.

Rogues don't get trapfinding, because it's a non-ability. (Anyone can attempt to find and disable any trap.) The Penetrating Strike feature from Dungeonscape is highly recommended.

Scouts don't get trapfinding, because it's a non-ability. (Anyone can attempt to find and disable any trap.)

Shadowcasters ignore mystery prerequisites.

Truespeakers suffer from a truly horrendous design flaw. So here's the deal: truespeaking is a truespeaker level check with an Int bonus, rather than a skill check. Truespeak DCs are 10 + the target's CR or level. Halve all truespeak modifiers.

Skills

Cross-class skills don't exist. Anyone can buy ranks in any skill at the 1-for-1 rate.

Opposed rolls don't happen. The initiator rolls against the target's DC.

Skill synergies don't exist. Too much goddamn bookkeeping.

Skill points are retroactive; calculate them as if each character began play with his best class and current Int. For example, a 1st level halfling fighter of Int 11 who takes his second level as a rogue gains 26 skill points rather than 2. If the halfling takes a second rogue level and then a second fighter level, and raises his Int to 12 at 4th level, he gains 9 skill points rather than 3.

Skills

Autohypnosis is folded into Concentration.

Balance, jump and **tumble** are combined into Acrobatics.

Decipher script, forgery and **speak language** are combined into Linguistics.

Gather information is folded into Diplomacy.

Hide and **move silently** are combined into Stealth.

Knowledge (psionics) is folded into Knowledge (arcana).

Listen, search and **spot** are combined into Perception.

Open lock is folded into Disable Device.

Psicraft is folded into Spellcraft.

Use psionic device is folded into Use Magic Device.

Feats

Craft staff is folded into Craft Wand. Items don't cost XP to craft, but they do cost full market price.

Free Feats: Heighten spell, weapon finesse.

Banned Feats: Leadership. Natural spell is effectively banned due to the mandatory shape shifting variant.

Improved and **greater two-weapon fighting** don't exist. A character with a high BAB gains extra damage dice to both attacks, as I mentioned earlier.

Weapon Focus and **Specialization** are both fighter-only feats. A fighter with Focus increases the bonus to +2 and +3 at 8th and 16th level, respectively. A fighter with Specialization increases the bonus to +4 and +6 at 12th and 20th level, respectively.

Improved and **greater weapon focus** and **specialization** don't exist.

Combat

Full attack is a standard action.

Reckless attack is a new option for weapon and unarmed attacks. When you use it, subtract a number from the attacks you make this round. If you hit, add that number to your damage. The number can be anything from 1 to your base attack bonus.

Opposed rolls don't happen. The attacker rolls against the target's DC.

The various **combat maneuvers** operate using a Maneuver Bonus (BAB + Str + size) and a Maneuver DC (10 + BAB + Str + size).

Death occurs at -10 - Con score, rather than -10.

Death from massive damage doesn't happen.

Spells

Spells with **XP costs** instead require material components worth five times the listed XP cost.

Alignment tags are ignored, except in extreme cases like the creation of undead. (Even mindless undead are motivated by pain and bloodlust, as are most undead.) Most spells, like any tool, can be used for Good or Evil.

Area spells can be reduced in area at the time of casting.

The **Cure** and **Inflict** line of spells are extended to 9th level. Further, these spells can be cast by any caster at minimum level. (With the exception of specialist casters, like warmages and beguilers.)

Summon Monster and **Summon Nature's Ally** work as written, but for chrissake have the summoned creature's stat block written out on your own paper before summoning it. If you slow down play to reference the Monster Manual, the spell fails.

Raise Dead and similar spells don't drain levels or Con. Further, these spells can be cast by any caster at minimum level. (With the exception of specialist casters, like warmages and beguilers.)

Spells

Banned spells include, but are not limited to: alter self, discern location, find the path, gate, greater planar ally, greater planar binding, greater scrying, greater shadow conjuration, greater shadow evocation, greater teleport, legend lore, lesser planar ally, lesser planar binding, limited wish, miracle, mordenkainen's magnificent mansion, planar ally, planar binding, plane shift, polymorph, polymorph any object, rope trick, scrying, shadow conjuration, shadow evocation, shapechange, teleport, vision, wish.

Nerfed spells include, but are not limited to:

Creation spells are never instantaneous. If one is listed as such, it has a duration of 1 day per level.

Charm and **Compulsion spells** never last longer than 10 minutes per level.

Celerity spells work as written, with the addendum that there is absolutely no way to avoid the dazed condition.

There are twelve dozen other ban-worthy and nerf-worthy spells, but I don't have the patience. So I reserve the right to retro-nerf or ban something if it becomes a problem.