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DM Guidelines

As the Dungeon Master, you should familiarize yourself with the "How to Play" document, as well as this document. Here you'll find guidance and DM-specific rules useful for running the game.

In the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® game, a Dungeon Master must take a number of roles, all at the same time. A DM serves as a referee, interpreting the rules and resolving any conflicts that arise because of them. The DM builds the world, creates adventures, and places monsters and treasure. The DM is the characters' eyes and ears, describing what the characters can see and hear to the players.

The first rule of being a good DM is to remember that the rules are a tool that you and the players use to have a good time. The rules aren't in charge. You, the DM, are the one in charge of the game. Guide the play experience and the use of the rules so that as many of your players have a good time as possible. There will be setbacks, such as a character being slain by an unlucky die roll, but look for ways to turn setbacks into interesting complications in the game's story.

The second rule is to remember that the DM's power comes with responsibility. Be fair and impartial with the players. Don't force your story upon them or give them a game where their choices don't matter. By the same token, challenge their characters with deadly monsters, fiendish traps, and vexing puzzles. A good DM is no pushover, but a good DM is also never simply out to slaughter the characters.

Resolving Tasks

The rules for ability checks, saving throws, and attacks form the basis of the D&D® game. As a DM, your most important responsibility when it comes to these rules is determining how to use them and, just as important, when to use them.

When to Use Dice

Characters in the D&D game frequently attempt a tremendous variety of tasks, from running across a swinging rope bridge to talking their way out of a sticky spot with an orc chieftain. All these tasks are resolved in an interaction between you (the DM) and the player whose character is attempting the task.

When a player wants to take an action, it's often appropriate to just let the action succeed. A character doesn't normally need to make a Dexterity check to walk across an empty room, or a Charisma check to order a mug of ale in a tavern. Only call for a roll if you think it's worth taking the time for the rules to come into the flow of the game. Ask yourself two questions to aid your decision.

Is the action being taken so easy, so free of stress or conflict, or so appropriate to the situation that there should be no chance of failure? "So easy" should take into account the ability score associated with the intended action. It's easy for someone with a Strength score of 18 to flip over a table, though not easy for someone with a Strength score of 9.

Is the action being taken so inappropriate or impossible that it would never work? Hitting the moon with an arrow is, for instance, impossible in almost any circumstance.

If the answer to both of these questions is no, some kind of roll is appropriate.

Ignoring the Dice

If you're an experienced gamer, you have seen the following situation happen before. Rachel, playing her halfling cleric, delivers a perfect speech rallying the barbarian tribes to aid a besieged city. When she's done, everyone erupts in spontaneous applause. When she rolls her Charisma check, though, the die comes up a natural 1 and points to failure.

As a DM, remember that the dice are like the rules. They're a tool to help keep the action moving. At any time, you can decide that a player's action is automatically successful, even if the Difficulty Class, or DC, would normally be somewhere above 20. By the

same token, a bad plan or unfortunate circumstances can transform even the easiest task into an impossibility.

The dice are neutral arbiters. They come into play when success and failure are far from clear. Think of them as impartial judges, ready to dispense a yes or no answer based on a character's bonus and the DC you have selected. The dice don't run the game. You do.

As a DM, you should think about the role the dice play in your game. Do you prefer the vagaries of fate, or do you prefer to reward a good effort with success and a poor one with failure? Use your style to help guide when you call for rolls and when you simply declare success or failure.

Ability Checks

An ability check is a test to see if a character succeeds. If a character attempts an action that has a significant chance of failure, have the player make an ability check.

Ability checks are the most commonly used mechanic in the game. Attacks, contests, and saving throws are, in essence, specialized forms of ability checks.

When in doubt, call for an ability check.

Contests

A contest is a kind of ability check that matches two creatures against each other. Use a contest if a character attempts an action that either directly foils or is directly opposed by another creature's actions.

When you call for a contest, you pick the ability that each side must use. In most contests, both sides use the same ability, but that is not always the case. For example, when a creature tries to hide, it engages in a contest of Dexterity against Wisdom. But if two creatures arm wrestle, or if one creature is holding a door closed against another's attempt to push it open, both would probably use Strength.

When you call for a contest, keep in mind what's at stake. What are the intentions of each side? Use that intent to determine which abilities are involved in the contest and the consequences of the contest.

Call for a contest when . . .

- a character wants to do something that another creature could prevent with an action of its own.
- success requires a character to overcome another creature.
- two creatures attempt the same thing at the same time, and only one can succeed.

Saving Throws

Saving throws are quick reactions, and they take the form of rolls made in response to someone else's actions or an event. You can think of a saving throw as a reactive ability check.

A saving throw makes the most sense when something bad happens to a character and the character has a chance to avoid that effect.

Call for a saving throw when . . .

- a character's armor is of no use in avoiding an attack.
- an attacker's skill has no bearing on the outcome of an attack.
- an effect requires a character to make an effort to resist something when it is not that character's turn.

An ability check is something a character actively attempts to accomplish, whereas a saving throw is usually a split-second response to something.

Attacks

An attack is perhaps the easiest rule to resolve. In essence, an attack is a check to see if one character can hit the other with a weapon or a spell. The Difficulty Class, or DC, for an attack is the target's Armor Class, or AC.

Call for an attack when a character tries to hit another creature with a physical or a magical attack, and the target's armor or shield could foil that attempt.

Ability Checks as a DM Tool

Ability checks are an incredibly flexible tool you can use to adjudicate almost any possible task a character could attempt in the world of D&D. You can decide which ability score is most relevant to the attempted task, set a Difficulty Class based on how hard you think the task should be, and apply a variety of modifiers to the check to reflect the particular circumstances. This section helps you set the parameters of an

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ability check to resolve a character's acts in the world.

Setting a DC

A Difficulty Class is a numerical rating that measures a task's difficulty. The higher the DC, the more difficult the task. As a DM, it is up to you to set most DCs. In some cases, such as a character's special ability or a task in a published adventure, a DC is provided for you.

Trivial (DC 5): In normal circumstances, a DC of 5 or lower represents a task that is so easy that it is not worth an ability check. An adventurer can almost always succeed automatically on a trivial task.

Easy (DC 10): An easy task requires a minimum level of competence or a modicum of luck to accomplish.

Moderate (DC 15): A moderate task requires a slightly higher level of competence to accomplish. A character with a combination of natural aptitude and specialized training can accomplish a moderate task more often than not.

Hard (DC 20): Hard tasks include any effort that is beyond the capabilities of most people without aid or exceptional ability. Even with aptitude and training, a character needs some amount of luck—or a lot of specialized training—to pull off a hard task.

Very Hard (DC 25): Only especially talented individuals need even try their hand at very hard tasks.

Formidable (DC 30): Only the most highly trained, experienced, and talented individuals have a chance at success at a formidable task, and even they probably need mundane equipment or magic items to aid them.

Nearly Impossible (DC 35): Tasks of this difficulty are so challenging that only demigods and their peers can succeed without assistance.

Using These DCs

These numbers are pretty easy to keep in your head, because we really don't want you to have to look at a table every time you have to decide on a DC. Here are some tips for using them at the table.

If you have decided that an ability check is called for, then clearly it's not a trivial task—you can eliminate DC 5.

Then ask yourself: "Is it easy, moderate, or hard?" If the only DCs you ever use are 10, 15, and 20, your game will run just fine.

If you find yourself thinking, "Well, it's *really* hard," then you can go up to the higher DCs, but do so with caution and consider the level of the characters. A DC 25 task is extremely hard for low-level characters to accomplish, but it becomes more reasonable after 10th level. A 1st-level character can hardly ever hit DC 30, so use that very sparingly. If you think the task really is next to impossible, then 35 is your DC, but bear in mind that even a 20th-level character who is skilled at the task in question needs some luck to accomplish such a task.

Here's another secret: You don't actually have to set the DC before the player rolls the ability check. Decide whether the character succeeds based on the check result. You'll probably find that your gut feeling (and the player's) squares pretty well with the set DCs presented here. A number below 10 is never going to make it unless the task is trivially simple. A number in the low teens is good enough for an easy task. A number in the high teens will succeed at a moderate task. And when a player rolls a 20 or better, there's usually little question that the character succeeds.

Your players will never know.

Hazards

Is there a chance that failing a task might lead to a disastrous outcome for the character? You decide whether a hazard applies to a particular check and when the hazard applies.

A hazard might affect a character who fails a check. For example, a character who attempts and fails a Strength check to jump across a pit that he or she couldn't normally clear probably falls into the pit. Sometimes, though, a hazard kicks in only if the character misses the check's DC (or loses a contest) by a significant margin, such as 5 or 10. Examples of hazards can be found in the "Tasks and Skills" section.

Requirements

A task might require a specific tool or circumstance for a character to have any chance of success. For example, you might need a magnifying glass to accurately appraise a gem.

A character who cannot meet the requirements for a task automatically fails. One who meets them can attempt an ability check as normal for the task.

You can decide to waive this requirement, but the task should be hard to complete without it. You might give the character disadvantage on the ability check, or set the DC higher than you would for a character who met the requirement.

Otherwise, requirements should come up only rarely. Use them to encourage the players to come up with clever solutions, not to punish them for trying to do interesting things.

Engaging the Players

As a DM, you could memorize these guidelines, apply them flawlessly, and still miss out on the point of D&D. Unlike some other games, D&D is a flexible set of guidelines, not a rigid set of laws.

When you ask a player to make an ability check, an attack, or a saving throw, you first should focus on engaging the players' imaginations. Describe the scene to them, and pull in details such as sights, sounds, and even smells to make the action vivid.

More important, you want the players to become fully engaged in the game. Reward inventive players who look beyond game options to describe their characters' actions. Roleplaying games stand out from other types of games because they allow for this type of creativity. Encourage it whenever you can.

The easiest way to do so is to make imaginative solutions the easiest path to success for the adventurers. Consider the following options.

Ability Checks: When a player makes an ability check, invite him or her to describe the character's action. If the player makes clever use of the situation in the description, consider either granting an automatic success or advantage on the ability check.

Contests: In a contest, an ingenious description that points to a key advantage that a character might gain could lead you to grant the character advantage on the check.

Attacks and Saving Throws: A colorful description is nice for attacks and saving throws, but should rarely be the avenue to gaining a concrete game benefit, since it is too easy to abuse such an approach. You might have players endlessly describing how they resist a mind flayer's *mind blast* or trying to narrate every detail of a sword blow. In most cases, spells and special abilities serve to grant characters advantage on their attacks and saving throws.

That said, if the situation warrants it, use advantage to grant a character an edge.

Disadvantage: Not every idea is a good one. A character might try to win the prince's favor by bragging about all the bandits he or she slew, not realizing that the prince is an avowed pacifist. If an idea backfires on a player, apply disadvantage to the ability check or attack.

Talking about Ability Checks and Skills

Ability checks are the primary rules element of the game. Much of the time, when a player's character tries to do something, your response is, "Make a ____ check."

You can qualify that by specifying a particular use of that ability check: "Make me a ____ check to ____." That's the language used throughout these rules.

So, for example, if a player says, "I want to try to slip the amulet into my pouch without anyone noticing," you might say, "OK, make a Dexterity check to conceal the amulet." Specifying the nature of the task lets the player know that the Conceal an Object skill applies to this check, and it reinforces the way the rules work: this is a Dexterity check, but a skill die might come into play.

Multiple Ability Checks

Sometimes a character fails an ability check and wants to try again. You have a couple of options in this case.

In most cases, the character can simply try again. The only real cost is the time it takes. The character keeps trying and, after enough time passes, eventually succeeds. To speed things up, you can assume that a character can automatically succeed at a task if he or she spends twenty times the normal amount of time needed to complete it. This exception does not allow a character to turn an impossible task into a successful one.

In other cases, the first failure renders subsequent checks impossible. For instance, a rogue tries to trick a town guard into thinking that the group members are undercover agents of the king. The rogue loses the contest of Charisma against Wisdom. The same lie told again clearly won't work.

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Tasks and Skills

This section provides an overview of the sorts of things that characters typically attempt in D&D, as a guide to some of the most common ways that ability checks can be used in the game. For each of the six ability scores and the common tasks associated with them (see "How to Play"), this section offers guidelines for how difficult various tasks might be. Some examples of tasks a character might improvise are also included. As always, use your good judgment when applying these guidelines. They are meant to provide storytelling and adjudication options to you, not to tie your hands creatively.

A skill gives a character a bonus on ability checks made to perform a specific kind of task, such as a Charisma check to bluff. The skills in the game match to the common tasks outlined here. It's up to you to decide whether a skill applies to a particular task that a character might undertake.

Strength

Strength measures a creature's physical power. Use a Strength check for any attempt to lift, push, pull, or break something, to force one's body through space, or to otherwise apply brute force to a situation.

The most common Strength checks are used to break an object, to climb, to jump, or to swim. Certain combat actions, including disarm, grapple, knock down, and push, also call for Strength checks, usually as a contest.

Break an Object

- **Easy (DC 10):** Force open a stuck wooden door
- **Hard (DC 20):** Break open a solid door held by a lock
- **Hard (DC 20):** Break free of rope bonds
- **Very Hard (DC 25):** Break open a solid door held by a wooden bar or elaborate lock
- **Formidable (DC 30):** Break chains or manacles
- **Formidable (DC 30):** Break open a heavy door held by a metal bar or a masterwork lock
- **Contest:** Push a door open when someone else is holding it closed (against Strength)

Climb

- **Easy (DC 10):** Scale a cliff with plenty of handholds
- **Moderate (DC 15):** Climb a rough stone wall
- **Hard (DC 20):** Climb a sheer surface with scant handholds
- **Formidable (DC 30):** Climb an oiled rope

Jump

- **Easy (DC 10):** Jump a few feet farther than you normally could
- **Hard (DC 20):** Throw a grappling hook in the middle of a long jump

Swim

- **Easy (DC 10):** Tread water in rough conditions
- **Hard (DC 20):** Swim in stormy waters
- **Formidable (DC 30):** Swim free of a vortex

Improvised Tasks

- **Moderate (DC 15):** Push through an earthen tunnel that is too small
- **Hard (DC 20):** Hang on to a wagon while being dragged behind it
- **Very Hard (DC 25):** Tip over a large stone statue
- **Very Hard (DC 25):** Keep a boulder from rolling

Hazards: Climbing or swimming in dangerous conditions can present hazards (falling or sinking, respectively) for failed checks. A very heavy object could fall on top of the character who's trying to lift or push it. A character might get stuck halfway in a tunnel while trying to force his or her way through.

Requirements: You might decide that a character can't attempt a Strength check without having some amount of leverage or a solid foothold.

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Dexterity

Dexterity represents a creature's hand-eye coordination, agility, reflexes, and balance. Use a Dexterity check for tasks that require physical finesse or agility.

The most common Dexterity checks are used to balance, to conceal an object, to disable a trap, to drive a vehicle, to open a lock, to pick a pocket, to ride a mount, to sneak, or to tumble. Certain combat actions involve Dexterity checks, often as a defense against another maneuver such as grapple, disarm, or push.

Balance

- **Easy (DC 10):** Walk across an icy surface
- **Moderate (DC 15):** Walk on a narrow ledge
- **Hard (DC 20):** Cross a wildly swaying rope bridge
- **Very Hard (DC 25):** Walk across a tightrope
- **Very Hard (DC 25):** Slide down a staircase while standing on a shield

Conceal an Object

- **Easy (DC 10):** Perform simple feats of sleight of hand
- **Contest:** Palm an object while under close observation (against Wisdom)

Disarm a Trap (requires proficiency with thieves' tools)

- **Easy (DC 10):** Keep a pit trap from opening when it's triggered
- **Moderate (DC 15):** Keep a scything blade trap from triggering
- **Hard (DC 20):** Prevent a poison needle or gas trap from springing
- **Very Hard (DC 25):** Disarm an intricate trap
- **Formidable (DC 30):** Disarm a magic trap

Drive

- **Moderate (DC 15):** Control a heavily laden cart on a steep descent
- **Hard (DC 20):** Steer a chariot around a tight turn or around an obstacle in your path

Open a Lock (requires proficiency with thieves' tools)

- **Moderate (DC 15):** Pick a simple lock
- **Hard (DC 20):** Pick a typical lock
- **Very Hard (DC 25):** Pick an elaborate lock
- **Formidable (DC 30):** Pick a masterwork lock
- **Formidable (DC 30):** Pick a magical lock (requires feat)

Pick a Pocket (requires feat)

- **Contest:** Pick someone's pocket (against Wisdom)

Ride

- **Easy (DC 10):** Keep your seat on a rearing horse

Sneak

- **Contest:** Hide in an obscured area (against Wisdom)

Tumble

- **Moderate (DC 15):** Swing from a chandelier
- **Very Hard (DC 25):** Somersault over a creature of the same size

Improvised Tasks

- **Easy (DC 10):** Securely tie up a prisoner
- **Hard (DC 20):** Wriggle free of rope bonds
- **Very Hard (DC 25):** Slip out of manacles
- **Contest:** Wriggle free of a grapple (against Strength)

Hazards: Balancing on a narrow surface and other acrobatic feats present the very real danger of falling. When attempting to disarm a trap, a bungled check often causes the trap to trigger. A hazard while picking someone's pocket is that the target notices the attempt.

Requirements: The Pick Pockets feat allows characters to attempt a Dexterity-related task they otherwise couldn't perform. Proficiency with thieves' tools allows a character to attempt a Dexterity check to disable a trap or open a lock. Some acrobatic feats might require a certain amount of movement, or require the character to be wearing light or no armor.

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Constitution

Constitution represents a creature's health, stamina, and vital force. Constitution saving throws are far more common than Constitution checks, because the endurance this ability represents typically comes into play in reaction to external events, not as an effort a character is making. If a character attempts a task that clearly relies on physical resilience and fortitude, use a Constitution check.

There are no common tasks that require Constitution checks. Use the following guidelines if characters attempt something that warrants a test of their endurance.

Improvised Tasks

- **Easy (DC 10):** Quaff an entire stein of ale in one go
- **Moderate (DC 15):** March overland for twelve hours in a day
- **Moderate (DC 15):** Roll down a steep slope without taking damage
- **Hard (DC 20):** Stay awake for forty hours
- **Hard (DC 20):** Swim for an hour straight
- **Very Hard (DC 25):** March overland for eighteen hours in a day
- **Very Hard (DC 25):** Swim for three hours straight
- **Formidable (DC 30):** March overland for twenty-four hours

Hazards: A badly failed Constitution check can mean taking damage. A swimming character might suffer a cramp that makes further swimming impossible, or a character attempting a forced march might sustain an injury.

Requirements: You might rule that some Constitution checks are impossible unless the character removes heavy armor.

Intelligence

Intelligence measures how well a creature learns and reasons. Use an Intelligence check when a character needs to draw on logic, education, or deductive reasoning.

The most common Intelligence checks are used to recall lore or to search.

Recall Lore

- **Easy (DC 10):** Recall commonly-known facts
- **Easy (DC 10):** Identify a common symbol
- **Moderate (DC 15):** Recall specific details about commonly-known facts, or vague information about slightly obscure facts
- **Moderate (DC 15):** Identify an uncommon monster
- **Hard (DC 20):** Recall specific details about obscure facts, or vague information about truly esoteric facts
- **Hard (DC 20):** Identify a spell as it is being cast (higher-level spells might be harder)
- **Hard (DC 20):** Understand a dialect of a known language
- **Very Hard (DC 25):** Recall specific details about truly esoteric facts known only to a few
- **Very Hard (DC 25):** Identify an especially rare monster
- **Very Hard (DC 25):** Decipher a simple message in an unfamiliar language
- **Very Hard (DC 25):** Identify the persistent effects of a spell
- **Formidable (DC 30):** Identify a unique monster

Search

- **Easy (DC 10):** Find a simple tripwire or a pit covered with branches and leaves (when searching)
- **Moderate (DC 15):** Find the signs of a creature passing across dry ground and deduce its nature and the direction of its travel
- **Moderate (DC 15):** Find a hidden compartment in a chest
- **Hard (DC 20):** Find a secret door
- **Hard (DC 20):** Find a pressure plate in the floor or locate a transparent tripwire
- **Very Hard (DC 25):** Find a particularly well-hidden secret door
- **Very Hard (DC 25):** Find a well-disguised pressure plate

Improvised Tasks

- **Easy (DC 10):** Communicate a simple idea to a creature that doesn't share your language

- **Moderate (DC 15):** Deduce what kind of weapon caused an injury
- **Moderate (DC 15):** Estimate the value of a piece of jewelry
- **Moderate (DC 15):** Pull together a disguise to help an ally pass as a city guard
- **Hard (DC 20):** Determine how to cause part of a tunnel to collapse
- **Hard (DC 20):** Estimate the value of a gemstone
- **Very Hard (DC 25):** Estimate the value of a rare, antique, or exotic item
- **Contest:** Pass off a forged document as real (against Intelligence)

Hazards: An attempt to recall information presents the chance of recalling false information. A character might make dangerous mistakes about a monster's resistances or capabilities, collapse a tunnel in the wrong place, or discard a precious item after believing that it is worthless. A character searching for a trap runs the risk of finding it the hard way: by accidentally triggering the trap.

Requirements: The Use Magic Device feat allows characters to attempt an Intelligence-related task they normally couldn't perform. You might require that a character have a magnifying glass to appraise gems or jewelry. For truly obscure information, sometimes the best knowledge is where to find the information, but actually unearthing the facts might require access to a specific tome or library.

Wisdom

Wisdom measures a creature's common sense, perception, self-discipline, and empathy. Use a Wisdom check in situations that call for intuition, gut feelings, or sensitivity to the environment.

The most common Wisdom checks are used to administer first aid, to handle an animal, to listen, to sense motive, to spot, or to track creatures.

Administer First Aid

- **Easy (DC 10):** Identify a common ailment or poison from its symptoms
- **Moderate (DC 15):** Stabilize a dying creature
- **Moderate (DC 15):** Identify an uncommon ailment or poison
- **Hard (DC 20):** Identify a rare ailment or poison

Handle an Animal

- **Moderate (DC 15):** Get an animal to keep moving while tired
- **Hard (DC 20):** Train an animal for a specific task
- **Hard (DC 20):** Calm an aggressive wild animal
- **Very Hard (DC 25):** Calm a panicked animal
- **Very Hard (DC 25):** Rear a wild animal
- **Formidable (DC 30):** Tame a wild animal

Listen

- **Moderate (DC 15):** Eavesdrop on a conversation through a door
- **Contest:** Hear someone who's trying to be silent (against Dexterity)

Sense Motive

- **Moderate (DC 15):** Discern who among a cagey group is the leader
- **Moderate (DC 15):** Read a person's motives or attitude
- **Hard (DC 20):** Interpret enemies' hand signs
- **Very Hard (DC 25):** Sense an outside influence on a person, such as an enchantment spell
- **Very Hard (DC 25):** Eavesdrop on a whispered conversation through a door
- **Contest:** Recognize a lie (against Charisma)
- **Contest:** See through a disguise (against Charisma)

Spot

- **Hard (DC 20):** Find a tiny item such as a gem in the midst of a lot of other items
- **Contest:** Spot a creature that is hiding (against Dexterity)

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Track Creatures (requires feat)

- **Easy (DC 10):** Track a creature through snow or mud
- **Moderate (DC 15):** Track a creature through a forest.
- **Hard (DC 20):** Track a creature across dirt or grass
- **Very Hard (DC 25):** Track a creature across bare stone
- **Formidable (DC 30):** Track a creature across dirt or grass after a rainfall

Improvised Tasks

- **Easy (DC 10):** Hunt and forage for food while traveling in the wilderness
- **Moderate (DC 15):** Avoid natural hazards, such as quicksand
- **Hard (DC 20):** Keep from getting lost while traveling in the wilderness

Hazards: Judging a person's motives presents the risk of dreadfully misreading those motives. A character might end up following the wrong set of tracks.

Requirements: The Track feat allows characters to attempt a Wisdom-related task they normally couldn't perform. Otherwise, it's rare for Wisdom checks to have requirements.

Charisma

Charisma measures a person's force of personality, persuasiveness, and leadership. Use Charisma checks in situations that require social skills and the ability to influence others.

The most common Charisma checks are used to bluff, to gather rumors, to intimidate, to perform, or to persuade.

Bluff

- **Contest:** Fast-talk or con someone (against Wisdom)
- **Contest:** Adopt a disguise (against Wisdom)
- **Contest:** Impersonate someone's voice (against Wisdom)
- **Contest:** Give false assurance to dull suspicion (against Wisdom)
- **Contest:** Tell a convincing lie (against Wisdom)

Gather Rumors

- **Easy (DC 10):** Gather the common gossip in a town or neighborhood
- **Easy (DC 10):** Learn about the local power figures
- **Moderate (DC 15):** Find what you need in an unfamiliar city
- **Moderate (DC 15):** Find out who's really in power
- **Hard (DC 20):** Weasel out local information only a few other people know
- **Very Hard (DC 25):** Dig up obscure news or lore from a community

Intimidate

- **Hard (DC 20):** Get an unruly crowd to move out of the way
- **Hard (DC 20):** Badger allied soldiers into a fighting mood
- **Hard (DC 20):** Goad a person into action
- **Contest:** Pry information out of a prisoner (against Wisdom)

Perform

- **Easy (DC 10):** Entertain a crowd with a tall tale
- **Easy (DC 10):** Give a pleasing speech
- **Moderate (DC 15):** Give a rousing or inspiring speech

Persuade

- **Moderate (DC 15):** Calm and comfort a distraught person
- **Contest:** Persuade someone to do something (against Wisdom)
- **Contest:** Convince someone to back down from a confrontation (against Wisdom)

Hazards: The most likely hazards associated with a Charisma check are attracting unwanted attention, arousing suspicion, or angering someone.

Requirements: You might decide that a Charisma check requires bribes of some sort,

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from slipping an official some gold to buying an informant a drink.

Ability Checks and Interaction

Fighting monsters and navigating hazardous environments are only part of an adventurer's career. Characters will often find that words are a better resource than swords, spells, or brute force.

There are several schools of thought when it comes to handling interactions in a roleplaying game. Some DMs prefer to speak in character and adopt the mannerisms of a nonplayer character in the same way that an actor depicts a character.

Other DMs prefer to describe an NPC's dialogue, giving a basic outline of what an NPC has to say, rather than narrating the exact dialogue.

Players fall into similar camps. Don't try to force the players into one approach or the other. Just as some people like to play fighters and others prefer rogues, so too do different players take different approaches to portraying their characters.

No matter which approach you use, an interaction should be driven by the back-and-forth between an NPC and the characters. Dice should come into play only when you are unsure about a conversation's outcome.

Players who shy away from roleplaying prefer to let the dice do the talking for them. For such players, it's probably best to rely on the dice, rather than force that player to go against his or her preferences.

Calling for Ability Checks

Adventurers don't need to make ability checks or enter into lengthy interactions when they buy supplies or order food in a tavern. Significant interactions in an adventure involve challenges and obstacles—persuading someone (or something) to do something he or she is not initially inclined to do, or not do something he or she wants to do. A significant interaction has objectives (things the characters want to accomplish) and obstacles (reasons why the NPCs don't want to acquiesce to the PCs).

When a character makes a firm argument, whether it's in support of an objective or an attempt to negate an obstacle, that's the time to ask for an ability check. Typically, the player characters and NPCs will exchange several lines of dialogue around each ability check.

Ability Check or Contest? In most cases, you use ability checks for social interactions. Contests should come into play only if two parties are in direct conflict, such as in an argument, a debate, or a negotiation.

Determining DCs

Picking a DC for an interaction check follows the normal guidelines for determining a DC, and it is important to consider the context of the check. A conversation is a fluid thing. Base the DC on what is happening in the moment. How has the conversation ebbed and flowed? What does an NPC think of the characters? A stilted, awkward exchange can turn a simple request into a high DC.

Think of whom the speaker is trying to sway or impress. You can do worse than start with an NPC's Wisdom score or Charisma score as a base DC. Use the target's Wisdom score for attempts to bluff or intimidate someone, while the Charisma score is a good choice in most other situations.

With that as a starting point, consider the NPC's attitude toward the speaker. A positive attitude can grant advantage, whereas a negative attitude or a faux pas can impose disadvantage.

Miscellaneous Rules

These rules cover a variety of situations that might come up as characters delve into ancient tombs, sneak into merchants' mansions, walk the ruined streets of ancient cities, strive in battle against fearsome dragons, broker peace between warring cities, and all the other things adventurers do.

Incidental Tasks

The basic rules for the game allow a creature to move and take an action on its turn. An

adventurer is likely to do many things that are not described in the rules as an action: picking up a gem, readying a bow, and the like. The game assumes that such incidental tasks are so simple that they don't require actions of their own.

Most often, incidental tasks occur in the process of doing something else, such as opening an unsecured door while moving or removing a piece of equipment from a pack in order to use it. For example, a fighter draws a sword and attacks an orc. Drawing a sword typically takes no action, since it takes only a moment to complete and is usually part of a more complex activity.

That said, imagine the same fighter trying to draw a sword while tied up. In this situation, the task is more complex and requires focus and effort. Drawing a sword would require an action in this case, and the fighter might need to make a check as well to see if he or she can wiggle out of the rope. That's why incidental tasks are under your control.

A task that meets one or more of the following criteria is probably not an action under most circumstances.

- It doesn't require a die roll or any other rules.
- It is effortless.
- It is part of or enables an action or a move.

Here are examples of tasks that are usually too incidental to require an action.

- Speaking
- Drawing a weapon
- Withdrawing a potion, a rope, or other piece of equipment from a pack
- Pushing open an unsecured and unstuck door
- Pulling a door closed while passing through it
- Picking up a small item
- Dropping an item
- Tipping over a flimsy piece of furniture

Always Round Down

Whenever you divide a number in the game, round down if you end up with a fraction. Do so even if the fraction is 0.5 or more.

Creature Size

During a battle, creatures take up different amounts of space on the battlefield. A lone ogre can block off a 10-foot-wide bridge, while over a dozen goblins could surround a storm giant. A creature's size determines how much space it takes up, how far its attacks can reach, and how many enemies can gang up on it.

Size	Space	Surround	Fills
Tiny	2.5 × 2.5 ft.	8	1
Small	5 × 5 ft.	8	1
Medium	5 × 5 ft.	8	1
Large	10 × 10 ft.	12	1.5
Huge	15 × 15 ft.	16	2
Gargantuan	20 × 20 ft.*	20	2.5

* or larger

Space: This is the area in feet that a creature occupies. A creature's space is not an expression of its actual physical dimensions, but the area it effectively owns in the game. A human isn't 5 feet wide, but it does own a space that wide, particularly in combat. If a human stands in a 5-foot-wide doorway, other creatures can't get through the doorway unless the human lets them.

A creature can squeeze through a space large enough for a creature one size category smaller than itself. When squeezing through such a space, every 5 feet of movement costs 5 extra feet of movement. While squeezing, a creature has disadvantage on attacks and on Dexterity saving throws, and attacks against it have advantage.

Surround: This column represents the number of Medium creatures that can fit in a 5-foot radius around the creature.

Fills: When creatures of different size surround one opponent, a creature counts as this many Medium size creatures when determining how many can fit in the threatened area.

For example, eight Medium creatures can surround a fellow Medium creature. A pair of Gargantuan creatures (worth two and a half Medium each) and two Large creatures (worth one and a half each) could also surround a Medium creature.

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Illumination

Characters face three broad categories of illumination in a typical D&D game.

Bright Light

Bright light is also called normal light. Even gloomy days provide bright light, as do torches, lanterns, fires, and other sources of illumination within a specific radius.

Effect: Most creatures can see normally in bright light.

Dim Light

Dim light is also called shadows. An area of dim light is usually a boundary between a source of bright light, such as a torch, and surrounding darkness. Dim light is also common at twilight and just before dawn. A particularly brilliant full moon may cover the land beneath in dim light.

Effect: Creatures can see in dim light, but creatures and objects are lightly obscured within it.

Darkness

Darkness is common at night under an overcast sky or within the confines of an unlit dungeon or subterranean vault. Sometimes magic can create regions of darkness.

Effect: Normal creatures can't see anything in darkness and are effectively blinded. Someone in darkness is heavily obscured from creatures that don't have enhanced senses.

Holding Your Breath and Drowning

If a character is swimming underwater intentionally (not as a result of a failed check), the character can hold his or her breath for a number of minutes equal to his or her Constitution modifier (minimum 30 seconds).

A character who runs out of breath while underwater (usually as a hazard of a failed check) is drowning. While drowning, the character is restrained. As an action, a drowning character can make a Strength check to stop drowning. The DC to do so is at least 13, possibly higher if the water conditions warrant a more difficult check. The drowning character must breathe before a number of rounds pass equal to his or her Constitution modifier (minimum 1) or fall unconscious. Once unconscious, the drowning character loses all his or her remaining hit points. The character is dying and cannot be stabilized or recover hit points until he or she can breathe (either by being brought to the surface or by gaining the magical ability to breathe underwater). Once the character can breathe, normal means of restoring lost hit points can revive the character.

Encounters and Rewards

Creating adventures is one of the great joys of being a Dungeon Master. It's your way to express yourself through imaginative elements of your own design. When you design an adventure, you call the shots.

At the same time, you'll usually want to design adventures that aren't too easy, or too deadly, for your players. When you decide on the locations your players will explore, the NPCs they will encounter, and the monsters they will fight, it's best to do so with a plan of what you want to accomplish.

Building Combat Encounters

Building a combat encounter is a matter of choosing threats appropriate to the characters—generally monsters and other dangerous creatures—and combining them in interesting and challenging ways. Encounter building is a mixture of art and science as you combine these threats together.

When you set out to create a combat encounter, first decide how challenging you want it to be. Easy encounters are speed bumps on the characters' path as they make their way through adventures, while tough encounters often form the climactic moment of an adventure. The bulk of the encounters in an adventure should fall in the average range.

The difficulty you choose for the encounter, combined with the number of characters in the

party and their level, gives you a target experience point (XP) value for the encounter. The sum of the XP values of all the threats in the encounter should fall in the neighborhood of this target, so you can select threats until you reach that target number.

You can think of this process as spending XP against a budget. The difficulty you choose gives you an XP budget, and you "buy" individual monsters or other threats to build your encounter until you've exhausted your budget.

To find your total XP budget, multiply the number of characters in the party by the XP value shown on the table below. For example, if you want to create an average encounter for four 3rd-level characters, use about 240 XP (60 × 4) for the encounter.

Level	Easy	Average	Tough
1	10	20	40
2	20	40	70
3	40	60	120
4	80	130	250
5	150	250	500
6	200	300	600
7	250	350	700
8	350	550	1,050
9	400	700	1,300
10	600	900	1,700
11	900	1,300	2,600
12	1,400	2,100	4,100
13	1,700	2,600	5,100
14	2,000	3,000	5,500
15	2,500	5,500	7,000
16	3,500	6,000	10,500
17	4,000	7,000	12,000
18	4,500	7,500	14,000
19	5,000	7,500	15,000
20	6,000	9,000	17,500

If the characters in your party are of different levels, you can either use their average level or choose the appropriate number for each character and add them together, as you please. So, if your party has two 3rd-level characters, one 4th-level character, and a 1st-level character, an average encounter for them would have about 270 XP (60 + 60 + 130 + 20).

Large Numbers of Monsters: If you want to build an encounter using a lot of monsters, bear in mind that the encounter might be more difficult than the table above indicates. If the characters are outnumbered 2 to 1, an easy encounter becomes average, and an average encounter becomes tough. If the characters are outnumbered 3 to 1, what looks like an easy encounter is probably tough. Use such large numbers of monsters with caution.

The Adventuring Day

When you're designing an adventure, you rarely have the ability to predict how much or how little the player characters will accomplish in any given stretch of time. As a rule of thumb, you can figure that the characters will probably get through four average encounters, six or seven easy encounters, or two tough encounters before they have to take a long rest.

Since you can't predict the path your players will choose through an adventure, you can't really design an adventure around this daily target. But it might be helpful to bear it in mind, so you don't force the characters into three tough fights in a row or send monsters to close off the dungeon behind them after they've already fought their way through four average encounters. Keep the adventurers' need to rest in mind as you set up your adventures.

Rewards

Experience points, treasure, and more intangible rewards keep characters moving on from encounter to encounter, level to level, and adventure to adventure. Small rewards come frequently, while large rewards provide a big boost once in a while. Both are important.

Without frequent small rewards, players begin to feel like their efforts aren't paying off. They're doing a lot of work with nothing to show for it. Without occasional large rewards, encounters feel like pushing a button to get a morsel of food—a repetitive grind with no meaningful variation.

Experience Points

Experience points are the fundamental reward of the game, just as encounters are the building blocks of adventures and campaigns. Every

encounter comes with an experience reward to match its difficulty.

Every monster has its own XP value, specified with the rest of its statistics. An encounter is worth XP equal to the sum of all the monsters and other threats that make up the encounter. When characters overcome an encounter—typically by killing, routing, or capturing the opponents in a combat encounter—they divide the total XP value of the encounter evenly among them.

XP for Noncombat Encounters: It's up to you to decide whether to award XP to characters for overcoming challenges outside of combat. If characters successfully complete a tense negotiation with a baron, forge a trade agreement with the surly dwarves, or navigate their way across the Chasm of a Thousand Deeps, you might decide that's an encounter worth an XP reward. Don't award XP, though, unless there was a meaningful risk of failure.

As a rule of thumb, gauge the difficulty of the encounter (easy, average, or tough) and award the characters XP as if it had been a combat encounter of the same difficulty.

You can also award XP when characters complete significant adventure objectives. You can treat major objectives as average encounters, and minor objectives as easy encounters.

Treasure

There's no assumed amount of gold, jewels, magic items, and other treasure for D&D adventures. You can give out as many or as few rewards as you like, though you might want to adjust the adventure difficulty to compensate for the level of the rewards you provide. You can also use the following guidelines for a more "middle of the road" amount of treasure offered.

You can think of treasure on an encounter-by-encounter basis. By this way of thinking, a good target is 12.5 gp per character per level for an average encounter. (So a party of four 3rd-level characters who overcome an average encounter might expect about 150 gp as a reward.) For an easy encounter, use about 7.5 gp per character per level. For a tough encounter, you can give out about 25 gp per character per level.

Alternatively, you can think about treasure spread out over an adventuring day, using the abstract measurement of a day discussed earlier. A good target for an adventuring day is about 50 gp per character per level. You can spread that treasure out over combat encounters as well as secret vaults, ancient chests, and the bottoms of spiked pits.

Whichever approach you choose, break up the treasure value into coins, gemstones, art objects, and other valuable but nonmagic items. Here are some suggested items to fill out your treasure hoards.

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GEMS

d%	Value	Average	Examples
01–25	4d4 gp	10 gp	Banded, eye, or moss agate; azurite; blue quartz; hematite; lapis lazuli; malachite; obsidian; rhodochrosite; tiger eye; turquoise; freshwater (irregular) pearl
26–50	2d4 × 10 gp	50 gp	Bloodstone; carnelian; chalcedony; chrysoprase; citrine; iolite; jasper; moonstone; onyx; peridot; rock crystal (clear quartz); sard; sardonyx; rose, smoky, or star rose quartz; zircon
51–70	4d4 × 10 gp	100 gp	Amber; amethyst; chrysoberyl; coral; red or brown-green garnet; jade; jet; white, golden, pink, or silver pearl; red, red-brown or deep green spinel; tourmaline
71–90	2d4 × 100 gp	500 gp	Alexandrite; aquamarine; violet garnet; black pearl; deep blue spinel; golden yellow topaz
91–99	4d4 × 100 gp	1,000 gp	Emerald; white, black, or fire opal; blue sapphire; fiery yellow or rich purple corundum; blue or black star sapphire; star ruby
100	2d4 × 1,000 gp	5,000 gp	Clearest bright green emerald; blue-white, canary, pink, brown, or blue diamond; jacinth

ART OBJECTS

d%	Value	Average	Examples
01–10	1d10 × 10 gp	55 gp	Silver ewer; carved bone or ivory statuette; finely wrought small gold bracelet
11–25	3d6 × 10 gp	105 gp	Cloth-of-gold vestments; black velvet mask with numerous citrines; silver chalice with lapis lazuli gems
26–40	1d6 × 100 gp	350 gp	Large well-done wool tapestry; brass mug with jade inlays
41–50	1d10 × 100 gp	550 gp	Silver comb with moonstones; silver-plated steel long sword with jet jewel in hilt
51–60	2d6 × 100 gp	700 gp	Carved harp of exotic wood with ivory inlay and zircon gems; solid gold idol (10 lb.)
61–70	3d6 × 100 gp	1,050 gp	Gold dragon comb with red garnet eye; gold and topaz bottle stopper cork; ceremonial electrum dagger with a star ruby in the pommel
71–80	4d6 × 100 gp	1,400 gp	Eye patch with mock eye of sapphire and moonstone; fire opal pendant on a fine gold chain; old masterpiece painting
81–85	5d6 × 100 gp	1,750 gp	Embroidered silk and velvet mantle with numerous moonstones; sapphire pendant on gold chain
86–90	1d4 × 1,000 gp	2,500 gp	Embroidered and bejeweled glove; jeweled anklet; gold music box
91–95	1d6 × 1,000 gp	3,500 gp	Golden circlet with four aquamarines; a string of small pink pearls (necklace)
96–99	2d4 × 1,000 gp	5,000 gp	Jeweled gold crown; jeweled electrum ring
100	2d6 × 1,000 gp	7,000 gp	Gold and ruby ring; gold cup set with emeralds

Magic Items

You determine how many magic items characters can find in your adventures. The game does not assume that characters need them to succeed. Magic items, when found at all, simply make PCs better.

Thus, you can add or withhold magic items in your adventures as you see fit. Being somewhat stingy with magic item placement, especially at lower levels, means that players will appreciate such items all the more when they find some.

If you populate your tougher dungeon levels and adventures with more magic items, then players can influence the kind of magic items they obtain by accepting greater risks.

You can find more information on using and awarding magic items in the “Magic Item” playtest document.

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Exploration in Detail

Sometimes in a D&D adventure, exploration is purely a matter of description. Players describe where their characters are headed, and you narrate what happens on the way. At other times, the journey is as important to the adventure as its destination, and these exploration rules will come into play.

This section provides a turn-based system for exploring ruins, dungeons, wilderness areas, and other parts of the fantasy world. The rules include the basics of how to move through and investigate an area, the tasks that characters can undertake while exploring, and how those tasks work.

Using These Rules

These rules are intended for episodes of long-distance travel and exploration, when you expect the characters to cover a lot of ground or when travel is a key part of the adventure. Some parts of these rules are better suited to different phases of the game.

Dungeon Exploration: You can use these rules as a guide to determine how far the characters can move in 5 minutes, for mapping the dungeon, and for determining surprise. Otherwise, the amount of abstraction in these rules is a little too great for movement described on a minute-by-minute basis.

Hourly and Daily Travel: These rules are at their best when the characters are planning on spending at least an hour moving from one place to another. That journey could cross a forest, follow a road, or traverse a series of huge caverns. In such a situation, the abstraction of these rules works, since characters are covering a lot of time and distance in a short amount of game time.

Ignoring These Rules: As with any rules that provide more detail, use these only if they improve your game. In this case, these rules aim to give more structure to travel and exploration, keeping the events of the adventure organized and clear. If you are the type of DM who glosses over travel or exploration, don't use them.

The Exploration Turn

This is the sequence of play for an exploration turn.

1. You determine the length of the turn.
2. The players decide what direction their characters will move in, then choose their group's travel pace and exploration tasks. The players should also determine their formation: who is in the front, the middle, and the back of the group.
3. You resolve the exploration turn, calling for checks and other actions from the characters as appropriate. Determine the distance and the direction the characters traveled, taking into account their travel pace and whether or not they lost their way.
4. You check for wandering monsters and, if any are encountered, resolve any interaction between the monsters and the characters.

If exploration continues, go back to the first step and repeat the sequence for another turn.

Turn Length

When an adventuring party explores a location of any size—whether it's the ruins of three buildings, a forgotten valley that is miles wide, or an island the size of Ireland—you determine how much time each exploration turn takes. This determination is based generally on the circumstances of the adventure, and might also take the wishes of the characters into account. There are three basic lengths for such turns.

The **5-minute turn** is most useful in dungeons, ruins, and other areas where many interesting locations are close together. This turn length breaks a journey into small pieces, giving the characters a chance to carefully examine each area they pass through.

The **1-hour turn** is useful for outdoor adventures, travel in the Underdark, and exploring dungeons or ruins in which each chamber or location is separated from others by a considerable distance. This turn length assumes that the characters spend most of their time traveling from one significant location to

another, rather than examining every nook and cranny along the way.

The **1-day turn** is best for travel over long distances, with the characters following a path, a road, or a map to a specific location. This turn length assumes that the characters are mainly concerned with getting to their destination and that that they will come across no more than one or two obstacles or points of interest during the day. During a 1-day turn, the characters spend 8 to 12 hours traveling and at least 8 hours resting.

Travel Pace

The travel pace that the characters choose determines the chance that monsters and other threats surprise them, how much distance they can cover during an exploration turn, and what tasks they can perform as they travel.

Explain to the players what their choices are for their characters' travel pace: Do they want to get through the next area quickly, without much care for possible dangers, or are they determined to move slowly and keep a close watch for anything along their path? When the group decides on a travel pace, use the line on the Travel Pace table that best corresponds to their intent. If the party splits up, each smaller group chooses its own pace.

The travel pace of an exploring group helps determine its readiness. This quality is expressed as a DC that you can use for several circumstances, such as when a character makes a Wisdom check at the start of a battle to avoid being surprised or when the characters are in danger of becoming lost.

Travel pace also determines the greatest distance a group can cover during an exploration turn of a given length, as shown on the table.

TRAVEL PACE

	Readiness	— Max. Distance per Turn —		
Pace	**DC**	**5 min.**	**1 hour**	**1 day**
Rushed	15	1,800 ft.	3 miles	25 miles
Fast	10	900 ft.	2 miles	15 miles
Moderate	5	450 ft.	1 mile	10 miles
Cautious	0	200 ft.	0.5 mile	5 miles

At a rushed pace, explorers are moving pell-mell. They are focused on making progress rather than on watching for dangers. At this pace, the characters cannot perform any exploration tasks, and the likelihood of their being surprised by wandering monsters is high.

At a fast pace, characters are still moving briskly, and typically they can perform only one exploration task: navigating. Being able to navigate means they are less likely than a rushed group to lose their way, but they aren't moving slowly enough to undertake other tasks such as keeping watch and sneaking.

Characters are traveling at a moderate pace when they take frequent breaks to rest, look around, or perform exploration tasks. There is a chance that monsters might surprise them, but not as great as if they were traveling more quickly.

At a cautious pace, characters move deliberately, taking heed of their surroundings at all times and effectively having no chance of being surprised.

Your Outdoor Map

Before the characters can explore a wilderness or other outdoor area, you need to have a map that outlines its key geographic features and terrain. This section provides some advice on how to create such maps and what sort of scale to use with them.

The outdoor environment you're mapping might be an expanse of wilderness or a vast subterranean location, such as the great caverns and passages of the Underdark. Either way, it's better to use a hex grid than a square grid, because a hex grid enables more precise calculation of the distance between two points.

The scale of your outdoor map depends on whether you're using 1-hour or 1-day turns as the characters travel across it. For a 1-hour turn, each hex or square represents ½ mile. For a 1-day turn, each hex or square represents 5 miles. This scale gives you enough detail to manage each turn while also allowing precise tracking if the characters become lost.

Just as you would do in a dungeon, track the characters' movement on your outdoor map to determine what sort of terrain they encounter, monster lairs, settlements, or other noteworthy spots they might stumble across, and so on. To

keep things simple, assume that the characters find a noteworthy location when they enter its hex or square, unless the site is specifically hidden. The characters might not walk directly up to the front door of a ruined castle in the hex they just entered, but they can find old paths, outlying ruins, and such signs of its presence in the area with ease.

Visibility: When traveling outdoors, the characters can see about 2 miles in any direction on a clear day, assuming that trees, hills, and other obstructions don't block their view. Rain cuts visibility down to 1 mile, and fog cuts it down to a few hundred feet.

Multiply the distance the characters can see by 20 if they are atop a mountain or a tall hill, or are otherwise able to look down upon the area around them from a lofty height.

Exploration Tasks

An exploration task is a duty a character assumes for the duration of an exploration turn, a duty that usually contributes to the group's overall disposition and preparedness.

After the group has agreed on its pace, explain to the players what their choices are for exploration tasks and ask what task each character will undertake. (Most tasks can be performed only if the group's travel pace is moderate or cautious.)

When each character has chosen a task, have the players roll checks to determine the outcome of their characters' tasks, then resolve any situations that arise from the success or failure of those checks.

A character can perform up to three tasks during an exploration turn, but dividing one's attention and energy is risky. To take on a second task in the same turn, a character must succeed on a Constitution check against the group's readiness DC + 5. If that check succeeds, the character can try to perform a third task, but the DC for this Constitution check is the group's readiness DC + 10.

Activities that require an action during a combat round, such as casting a spell, don't count as exploration tasks. During a 1-hour or 1-day exploration turn, there's no hard limit on the number of such activities a character can perform. During a 5-minute turn, a character can take up to five actions, in addition to attempting one or more exploration tasks.

Keeping Watch

It helps to keep an eye and an ear open for danger. When a character chooses keeping watch as an exploration task, the character makes a single Wisdom check to detect hidden creatures as the group travels during the current exploration turn. Anyone who chooses this task has advantage on this check if the group's travel pace is cautious. A character's check result is used to contest the checks of any creatures that are attempting to hide from the explorers. If someone keeping watch detects a creature, it cannot surprise the group.

Characters can choose keeping watch only if their travel pace is moderate or cautious.

Navigating

Traveling in the wilderness or a large, unfamiliar city carries the risk of becoming lost. A character can reduce this risk by navigating for the group, keeping a careful eye out for landmarks and the position of the sun, the moon, and stars.

When a character chooses navigating as an exploration task, the character makes a single Wisdom check to prevent the group from losing its way during the current exploration turn. If more than one member of the group chooses this task, each navigator makes a check, and you use the best result to determine if the group becomes lost.

Characters can't choose navigating if their travel pace is rushed.

Explorers don't normally need to navigate during a 5-minute turn, since the distance traveled is too small for them to have lost their way. Even in such a short time, though, a group might become lost if a door locks behind them, a trap teleports them elsewhere, and so forth. In that sort of situation, navigation is of no help.

Mapmaking

Making an accurate map is vital to ensuring that explorers have the best sense of their surroundings. It can also help keep them from becoming lost.

When a character chooses mapmaking as an exploration task, the character must have a writing instrument and some surface (such as paper or parchment) on which to record the map.

The map a character creates might be similar to your actual map of the area, but not as complete. When you give out information to a player whose character is mapping, restrict that information to only what the character would perceive while "actually" performing the task.

If more than one character chooses this task, those who do so simply create multiple maps of the area. (This strategy can prove useful if one character's map is lost or destroyed later in the adventure.)

Characters can choose mapmaking only if their travel pace is moderate or cautious.

Searching

Searching allows an explorer to uncover hidden pathways, secret doors, forgotten objects, and traps. It's a good option when a group is exploring a dungeon or ruin.

When a character chooses searching as an exploration task, the character makes a single Intelligence check to notice any hidden items that you might come across. Anyone who chooses this task has advantage on this check if the group's travel pace is cautious. You compare the result of that check to the DCs of hidden items the group is passing by.

Characters can choose searching only if their travel pace is moderate or cautious.

Sneaking

Keeping a low profile is often the best option in a dangerous area. When a character chooses sneaking as an exploration task, the character makes a single Dexterity check to hide as the group travels. Anyone who chooses this task has advantage on this check if the group's travel pace is cautious. To notice a sneaking character, a creature must contest the character's check, using Wisdom or Intelligence, and win.

Characters can choose sneaking only if their travel pace is moderate or cautious.

Improvised Tasks

A character might think of some way to contribute to an exploring group that isn't covered by the tasks described here. If so, you can allow the use of an improvised exploration task, but only if its performance requires no more than one-third of the time encompassed by an exploration turn. Also, an improvised task can be undertaken only if the group's travel pace is moderate or cautious.

Wandering Monsters

If the adventurers are journeying through a region where monsters wander, you check at the end of each exploration turn to see whether a monster crosses the adventurers' path or vice versa.

The monster population density of the region determines the likelihood of coming across monsters (see the table). You check for wandering monsters by rolling a d20. If an encounter occurs, roll on the appropriate wandering monster table to determine what the heroes meet.

Region	Encounter Chance (d20)
Desolate	19–20
Sparsely inhabited	17–20
Typical region	15–20
Thickly inhabited	13–20
Densely inhabited	11–20

Resolving Exploration Events

After the characters have chosen their exploration tasks, you narrate what the characters experience during the exploration turn. You might also ask for directions, such as which way the group wants to turn at an intersection, and so forth, allowing the characters to move up to the distance indicated by their pace. When the characters' tasks are complete, update the group's location on your map to account for the distance and direction traveled during the current turn.

Encountering Creatures

If the exploring group encounters creatures (which might be wandering monsters or might be specific participants in the adventure), the

characters can try to attack them, avoid them, or interact with them in some other way.

Stealth: Before asking the players what they want to do, you determine if either group notices the other. One group or the other can avoid detection completely only if all its members are sneaking. Otherwise, contests occur as necessary to determine if anyone sneaking on either side is detected.

Surprise: If one group is hidden from the other, that group has surprise, as described in the combat rules. Otherwise, each creature and character makes a Wisdom saving throw against a DC that corresponds to its readiness. The characters' readiness DC is determined by their travel pace. For the monsters, you pick a readiness DC based on their degree of alertness. Below are sample DCs to guide this decision.

Alertness	Readiness DC
Distracted	20
Unfocused	15
Disinterested	10
Vigilant	5
Paranoid	0

Encounter Distance: Typically, the terrain or layout of the area determines how far the characters are from creatures when they first detect them. If this distance isn't predetermined, you roll 1d20 + 20. That result is multiplied by 10 if the area is in clear terrain (such as a grassy field, barren tundra, or a frozen lake) or by 5 if the terrain is mostly clear (such as rolling hills, or a meadow with occasional trees and shrubs). The resulting number is the distance in feet between the two groups.

Finding Locations and Objects

When the characters come across a location or an object of special note during the performance of their tasks, describe the discovery to them and allow them to take actions as appropriate.

Getting Lost

The characters might become lost, but only if the current turn length is 1 hour or 1 day and they are traveling through the wilderness. Explorers who are following a road or some other form of path or trail can't become lost in normal circumstances.

If the characters might become lost, make note of the Wisdom check result of any character who chose navigating during the current exploration turn (or the highest result, if more than one character performed this task). If no one did so, treat the check result as 0. The DC for this check corresponds to the readiness of the group, as determined by its travel pace, plus a modifier based on the terrain (see the table).

If any character performed mapmaking as a task during the current exploration turn, the DC is reduced by 5.

Terrain	DC Modifier
Forest, swamp, jungle, mountains	+5
Light forest jungle, hills, desert, tundra	0
Plains, prairie	–5

Success: If the navigator's Wisdom check succeeds, the characters successfully travel the distance and in the direction they want.

Failure: If the check fails, the characters inadvertently travel in the wrong direction. Halfway through their travel in the current turn, you roll a d4 to determine how the group has deviated from its intended course.

d4	Deviation
1	90 degrees left
2	45 degrees left
3	45 degrees right
4	90 degrees right

For example, for a group intending to move north, a roll of 1 indicates that the characters are now actually heading west; a roll of 3 means that their course has (unknown to them) shifted to the northeast.

This change of direction applies only to the characters' travel during the last half of the current turn. On the next turn, if the chance of getting lost still exists, the characters make another check. If that check fails, they continue to be unaware of their change in heading. On a successful check, the characters realize they have moved off course and in what direction.

The characters might not realize they are lost unless they encounter an obstacle that indicates they are heading in the wrong direction. If the

characters realize they have lost their way, you stop rolling for deviation in their course until they fail another check to avoid becoming lost.

Examples of Play

5-Minute Turn

Four brave adventurers—Krago the dwarf fighter, Estra the human rogue, Ralt the human wizard, and Wilberd the halfling cleric—are exploring the halls of a dungeon. Having confronted and defeated a group of dragon cult berserkers just inside the dungeon's entrance, they prepare to travel onward.

Since the action takes place in a dungeon, the DM opts for 5-minute turns.

DM: OK, what's next? The passage continues to the north.

Estra: There might be more guards. Let's move slowly and keep our guard up.

DM: That's a cautious pace. You can move about 200 feet every 5 minutes. What tasks does everyone want to do while moving? You can map, search for traps, sneak, or keep watch.

Estra: I'll sneak and take point.

Ralt: I have ink and parchment, so I'll make our map.

Krago: I'll carry a torch and keep watch, behind Estra and in front of Ralt.

Wilberd: I guess I'll bring up the rear and search for traps, but shouldn't Estra do that?

Estra: Can I try both?

DM: You'll need to make a DC 15 Constitution check to do both tasks at once. Otherwise, you'll fail both.

Wilberd: OK, I'll search for traps, then. I have a half-decent Intelligence.

The DM tracks the characters' progress. The characters make their checks, and the DM records the results. Estra, Wilberd, and Krago have advantage on their checks because of the group's cautious pace. That pace makes it easier to succeed on checks to hide, detect traps, or spot creatures, but since the characters are moving slowly, they will face more checks for random encounters as they traverse the dungeon.

DM: OK, you move 60 feet and come to an intersection. Which way do you want to go? The east and west passages both extend 30 feet before turning south. To the north, there are doors on both sides of the passage within 10 feet of you, a side passage to the west, and a side passage to the east, plus the corridor keeps going north.

Estra: Let's go east.

DM: The passage goes 30 feet east and then about 60 feet south. You come to another intersection. The area to the west is a 10-by-10-foot niche. The passages to the east and south continue on into darkness.

(There is a secret door in this area, but the DM notes that Wilberd's check is too low for him to become aware of it.)

Estra: We'll head to the east.

DM: You come across a side passage heading to the north, or you can continue east.

Estra: East again.

At this point, the characters have moved 200 feet at a cautious pace and 5 minutes have passed. It's time for the DM to check for random encounters. The monster population density of the dungeon is typical, and a d20 roll of 15 indicates a random encounter. The DM rolls on the appropriate table for the adventure, and determines that the party will meet a group of cultists. The cultists will approach from the side passage and will attack on sight, because they hold this place as sacred ground.

Since the party is carrying a light source, the DM decides that the cultists can't be surprised and that the light is what drew their attention. The characters are moving at a cautious pace, so they can't be surprised, either. (If the cultists had been hiding, they could have surprised the characters if Krago failed the Wisdom check he made as part of keeping watch. But, since the cultists have a light source of their own, the DM rules that hiding would have been impossible for them.)

Estra did choose to sneak, however, so the DM contests the cultists' Wisdom against her check result for sneaking. The five cultists fail the check, so she is hidden from all of them at the start of the fight.

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DM: You hear the clatter of weapons and armor behind you. Half a dozen humans clad in crimson robes and carrying clubs come around the corner. One snarls at you and shrieks, "Heretics! Defilers!" Everyone, roll for initiative. Estra, it doesn't look like these people have noticed you at the back of the party.

Combat begins now. Krago needs to hand his torch to Ralt if he wants to wield both his shield and flail. Meanwhile, Ralt is carrying the parchment and ink. These rules encourage the players to think about their mundane gear, travel formation, and light-source management. If that sounds like a fun wrinkle to add to the game, these rules are definitely for you.

1-Hour Turn

Later on, the characters have succeeded in defeating the cult and looting its treasure. Their next destination is a keep several miles away through a forest. As they prepare to leave the dungeon, the DM shifts to 1-hour exploration turns. She could have opted for a 1-day turn if the terrain was relatively safe or the characters had a trail to follow, but neither of those facts is true: The forest between the dungeon and the keep is infested with an invading gnoll army, and no trail through the forest exists, making it likely that the characters will lose their way at some point during the next day's travel. She decides that tracking events in more detail, hour by hour, is the way to go.

DM: It's early morning as you exit the dungeon. It's cloudy and chilly, a typical early spring day. You have about 15 miles of thick forest to traverse between you and the keep.

Krago: We'll need to hustle to make it there, unless we want to spend the night in the woods.

Estra: Let's not do that with those gnoll raiders on the loose.

DM: OK, I'm assuming you want to move at a fast pace. That will put you at the keep in about 8 hours.

Estra: Sounds good. I'll take point and sneak, Krago will keep watch, Wilberd will navigate, and Ralt will map.

DM: What direction are you headed?

Wilberd: We'll strike westward for the first six miles, then turn north for eight miles once we cross the Running Brook. That will bring us to the main trade road.

The DM has the characters make their checks as appropriate for their tasks. She uses Wilberd's check to navigate to see if the party becomes lost. The base DC is 10 for the party's pace, +5 for the forest terrain, –5 because Ralt is mapping, for a total DC of 10.

The DM has the characters make checks each hour. The first four checks for each character are successful, allowing the group to reach the Running Brook and turn north without incident. During that next leg of the journey, the DM rolled for wandering monsters and determined that the characters were spotted by a blood hawk, the pet of a gnoll druid active in the area. Krago's check to keep watch failed to take note of the creature as it wheeled overhead, then turned to warn its master.

Compounding the characters' bad luck, Wilbert fails his next navigation check. The DM rolls a d4 and determines that the characters have accidentally veered 45 degrees to the left from the westward course they wanted to follow. Checking her map, she sees that they are venturing deeper into gnoll territory. Fortunately for them, the characters' next navigation check is successful.

DM: It's been a few hours since you forded the brook, and you realize that you wandered off course a while ago. Checking Ralt's map, you see that you have accidentally veered to the southwest.

Krago: That's gnoll country. Does that put us farther from the trade road?

Ralt: We should head east for one mile, then turn to the north. If we keep going west from here, we'll come closer to that gnoll outpost the castellan warned us about.

At this point, the characters will move for half a turn in one direction (moving a mile takes half an hour), then strike out in another. They succeed on their navigation check in the middle of the turn and remain on their desired course.

Unfortunately for them, the DM has determined that the gnolls have sent a patrol to search the area near the trade road for them. The gnolls attempt to ambush the party, but this time Krago's check is good enough to spot them. Furthermore, the gnolls fail to notice Estra.

DM: You're finally back on track when Krago hears the sound of blades being drawn from their scabbards just ahead of you. You catch sight of a gnoll as it tries to peek at you from behind a tree ahead. Roll for initiative.

The fight takes several rounds, but is not long enough to have a real impact on the characters' travel for the hour. Encounters, strange sites, and other things the characters come across should qualify for a pause in the turn, as the characters fight, investigate, and so forth. Unless an interruption of this sort lasts for more than 30 minutes, the distance the characters cover during their current turn is not affected.

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