

In this segment, we'll be going through the very basics of creating and playing a Dungeons and Dragons character. Dungeons and Dragons is a huge game spanning over more than 30 years so we'll just be scratching the surface, but it will be what you need to get started.

The documents below will be referenced throughout.

First things first, let's go over some common abbreviations you'll come across in the D&D world. There's a lot of writing in D&D and even more talking so these abbreviations will really help to cut down time and I'll be using a lot of them throughout this segment.

**AC:** Armor Class (defense against normal attacks)

**DM:** Dungeon Master (the person “running” the game)

**DMG:** Dungeon Master’s Guide (a book that explains how to be a DM)

**D&D or Dnd:** Dungeons and Dragons

**HP:** Hit Points (how much damage a creature or player can take before dying)

**Mini:** Miniature (a small statue in real life that represents a character or monster)

**NPC:** Non-Player Character (in-game characters controlled by the DM eg: townsfolk and shop keeps, quest givers, etc.)

**PC:** Player Character (the in-game character that a player controls – this is you!)

**PHB:** Player’s Handbook (a book that explains the rules of D&D for players)

**RPG:** Role-Playing Game (such as D&D)

**TPK:** Total Party Kill (when all of the characters are wiped out in a battle)

**XP:** Experience Points (the reward for progressing in D&D; when players earn enough, they level up) **d4, d6, d8, d10, d12, d20:** a die with that many sides

Now that we've gotten the lingo down, we can continue on and it won't all sound like gibberish. Let's start with the things you'll need before you even start to build or play a character. First and foremost, you're going to need a Player's Handbook. Your PHB is going to be your lifeline. It has everything you need to know as a player. It tells you all information on your race, class, gear, abilities and spells. Once you have gotten your PHB, you can flip through and choose a race and class to play. You' don't need to read it cover to cover, only what is relevant to your character. In the back of your PHB, brings us to the next thing on your checklist. In the last few pages of the PHB is a blank character sheet that you can photocopy but I have also included a link to download one to the right of the link you clicked to download this PDF. This is going to be a complete snapshot of your character; everything they can do in and out of combat, all of their gear, their spells, their skills and a bit of their story. The next thing you can't go without is your dice set. For D&D you'll need a 7 piece dice set that includes one of each d4, d6, d8, d10, d12, and d20 and one percentile. You might want to consider buying one extra d20 as there are times you will need to roll 2d20 and it's easier to have two than to roll one twice. Make sure you always come to a session with a pencil and eraser (NEVER use pen on your character sheets as they are ever changing!) and lots of note paper. Graph paper is also handy for when you need to map a dungeon you're exploring. You can't game without snacks, just make sure to bring enough to share with your DM!

Let's spotlight this little guy for a moment – your d20. This will be the die you'll be rolling more often than any other. It decided your skill checks like Animal Handling, Acrobatics, Performance as well as your attack rolls, and saving throws (meaning your ability to dodge a surprise event). A high roll indicates you've done that particular task well, whereas a low roll means you probably did a pretty poor job of it. Let's go over some example of situations where your DM will instruct you to roll your d20:

### **SKILL CHECKS:**

You: I'm a bard so I would like to play my lute and collect some tips.

DM: Give me a Performance check.

You: \*roll your d20 and add your modifiers. You roll a 3 and your modifier is +5\* I got an 8.

DM: Hmm....unfortunately you're a bit off your game today and not playing super well. You're only able to collect 2 copper pieces in tips.

### **ATTACK ROLLS:**

You: I want to fire an arrow with my longbow at that Goblin.

DM: Okay, give me an attack roll to see if you hit.

You: \*roll your d20 and add your attack bonus. You roll a 12 and your bonus is +4\* I got a 16.

DM: That hits him! Roll your damage. (The DM has stats on all baddies you battle against that have their own AC and HP, just like you, that you have to meet or succeed to hit them)

### **SAVING THROWS:**

DM: You're travelling down the dungeon hallway. Give me a Perception check.

You: \*roll your d20 and add your modifier. You roll a 9 and your modifier is +3\* I got 12.

DM: Hmm. Give me a Dexterity Saving Throw.

You: \*roll your d20 and add your modifier. You roll a 15 and you have a -1 modifier\* I got 14.

DM: Okay, you manage to just leap out of the way as you feel a wire catch on your ankle. You leap forward as a huge, steel blade swings out from a hidden slot in the wall, narrowly missing you. You didn't see the tripwire or slot at all! Luckily you were quick on your feet!

You can also Critically Fail on your d20 if you roll and that blasted 1 is staring up at you. Alternatively, you can roll a Natural Twenty if you roll and see that sweet, sweet 20 smiling back at you! Each DM may rule this differently, but if it's an attack roll or skill check, I add extra flare to the results of the roll. For example, if one of my players rolls a Natural Twenty on an attack roll, I have them roll double the dice they would deal for damage. On the flip side, if they Critically Fail an attack roll, I may have them hit one of their party members or accidentally disarm themselves by dropping their weapon. It's up to your DM to decide how those rolls will play out.

I mentioned that you may need two d20s and that's because there is a mechanic in the game called Advantage and Disadvantage which indicated if you have a particular bonus or drawback to the attack

roll or skill check. For example, let's look at bargaining with a shopkeeper:

You: I want to haggle the price of that shield down.

DM: Well, you've been pretty friendly to him so far and you helped his neighbour find their lost daughter. You can roll Persuasion at Advantage.

You: \*roll two d20s, choose whichever is HIGHER and add your modifier. You roll a 4 and a 17 and you have a +2 modifier\* I got 19!

DM: Great! He's more than willing to reduce the price by 25% because you've been so kind to his town.

Now let's look at a more negative situation...

You: I want to haggle the price of that shield down.

DM: Well, you haven't been very friendly so far, in fact, you told the shopkeeper he looked raggedy. In addition to that, he's pretty sure he caught the rogue trying to pocket some of his goods earlier. You can try to haggle but you'll have to make the Persuasion check at Disadvantage.

You: \*roll two d20s and choose whichever is LOWER and add your modifier. You roll a 4 and a 17 and you have a +2 modifier\* I got 6.

DM: No, sorry. He is not willing to haggle with you and you'll have to purchase the shield at full price.

This is why your d20 can be your best friend or your worst enemy. It has the potential to turn a good situation better...or make a bad situation even worse. Ultimately, it is up to your DM to decide when you roll with Advantage or Disadvantage but clever thinking or colourful role playing on your part might sway the DM to grant you bonuses.

Now that you have all the supplies you need, you're ready to start building your character. It doesn't really matter where you start, be it your back story, your class, your race, types of weapons, spells or skills you'd like to use, but in this instance we're going to start with picking a race and class. There are 9 races to choose from out of your PHB: Human, Elf, Half-Elf, Gnome, Dwarf, Tiefling, Dragonborn, Half-Orc and Halfling. Each of these races bring a unique set of skills and personality to the table. Your PHB will provide you with some sample names and a typical personality of a race, but you're free to name and play your character however you please. The next thing you'll have to choose is a class. You have 12 classes to choose from out of your PHB: Fighter, Barbarian, Cleric, Paladin, Ranger, Rogue, Wizard, Sorcerer, Warlock, Druid, Monk and Bard. Your class will determine what type of skills you bring to the adventure. Do you cast powerful fireballs at range like a Wizard or charge into melee range, great sword blazing like a Barbarian? Do you heal and support your companions like a Cleric or sneak into restricted areas to learn information like a Rogue? Some races and classes pair better (for example, half-orcs make excellent fighters and Barbarians, and Halflings make good Rogues) but you're free to mix and match however you please.

Your character is starting to take shape, but now we're going to work on your back story. The biggest, most important question you need to ask yourself when creating a character is WHY they are

adventuring. You can come up with your own, completely unique story for this or chat with your DM and make it tie into the story they will be telling throughout the campaign. Once you've answered that question you can move on to more questions to flesh out your character. What are their strengths and weaknesses? What are their bonds, flaws, ideals and traits? How do they interact with magic (do they use magic or do they not understand it and shy away?). Who are their enemies? Who are their allies? What is your character's biggest fear? There aren't specific places on your character sheets for most of this kind of information but it's still good stuff to know heading into a game, and to share with your group so they better understand their companion so I have provided you with an In Depth Character Profile below.

Now that your character has a story, we need to put a face to the name. Again, your PHB will give you a very loose idea of what your character might look like based on their race, but all creative license goes to you. You'll want to think about basic physical traits like their hair, eye and skin colour, their general fashion sense and any distinguishing features they may have like scars, a long pointy nose or tattoos and piercings. You can then think about more personality based traits like an accent or a strange way they word things, mannerisms they consistently demonstrate and their general attitude towards others. You can even think about a unique item they may have brought along with them (AS LONG AS YOU DISCUSS THIS WITH YOUR DM FIRST) such as a shield constructed of bits of armour of their fallen companions, a mysterious ruby necklace handed down to them from their parents, or dagger made from a drake's tooth.

Your character now has skills, a face, a story and a personality. Now you need to assign them an alignment. Your alignment represents your actions and the intention behind them. There are 9 alignments, all falling under a combination of 3 different traits. They are, Lawful Good, Neutral Good, Chaotic Good, Lawful Neutral, True Neutral, Chaotic Neutral, Lawful Evil, Neutral Evil, and finally Chaotic Evil. An alignment will either grant you permission or prevent you from committing certain acts. You must ALWAYS role play within your alignment or else your DM might consider changing your character's alignment given the circumstances. So, let's start with the average person like you or I. We would most likely be considered Neutral Good; We do our best to follow rules and do well by others, but we're not crazy staunch about it. Each of the alignments have their own specific traits but there's still a bit of grey area between each, as people are complex beings. To make understanding alignments easier, we're going to make some comparisons to the X-Men movie characters. An example of a Lawful Good character would be someone like Cyclops. This person always follows the rules, brings justice to wrong doers and typically belongs to some sort of organization. A Neutral good character would be someone like Professor X. This person does their best to follow rules but under the right circumstances may break them for the greater good. They stand up for what they believe in and try help others to the best of their ability. Wolverine would be a good example of a Chaotic Good character. Their intentions are good but they will result to extreme measures to do what they believe is right. They typically don't align well with organized groups and prefer to work alone. A Lawful Neutral character is someone like Beast. They believe that rules are meant to be followed, period. They tend not to be swayed either good or evil and at times can come across rather unfeeling or robotic. An example of a True neutral character would be Emma Frost. They indifferent to most laws and governments and will act only when timing and conditions are in their favour. Gambit is our example of the Chaotic Neutral alignment. These characters will do pretty much whatever they want or need to with little regard for the consequences. Sometimes they will even stir up drama for their own entertainment. Now we move into the Evil alignments starting with Lawful Evil. An example of this alignment would be Magneto. They are fiercely loyal to an evil corporation or group. They always have an agenda and those plans can easily include eliminating anyone who stands in their way. A Neutral Evil character would be someone like Sebastian King. These types of people are self serving and have little to no regard for the well being of others. They typically don't align with organizations but will if it is

favourable to them. Our last and most daunting alignment is Chaotic Evil. These are the true villains like Apocalypse. These types of characters will do bad things simply for fun, has absolutely no regard for others and follows no one, they are their own leaders. Most alignments will fight against this type of character; even Lawful Evil and Neutral Evil characters will fight against Chaotic Evil characters if they feel they are not following the right set of rules or that they threaten their way of life. There are a couple questions you can ask yourself to determine your character's alignment: Who do they work or fight for? How do they feel towards authority figures? Who are the innocent in their eyes? You can also refer to the flaws, bonds and ideals you've chosen to help determine which alignment suits your character best.

Now.....your character is FINALLY done and you're ready to sit at the table and begin playing your first game of Dungeons and Dragons! Because D&D is a group role playing game where emotions can run high, there are some things you'll want to be aware of while playing that will make not only your gaming experience more comfortable, but also a better experience for your teammates and DM.

The first thing is pretty well common sense; Participate and pay attention. Offer your ideas, suggestions and input to every situation. Your DM needs every player to weigh in on a situation before continuing so rather than wait to be asked your opinion, pipe in! Give positive feedback and constructive criticism to your teammates and your DM. Be careful not to offend other players, be polite when offering suggestions; they worked just as hard on their character concept as you did. Definitely give feedback to your DM. Knowing how your players are feeling about each other and the game in general is absolutely invaluable information for a DM. DMing is A LOT of work so thanking your DM for running the game is also a very appreciated gesture. During the game, take notes if you don't have an excellent memory. You're going to hear a lot of names, location, pieces of stories and quest lines and it's a real pain in your DM's butt to keep reminding you. Your phone is a great tool for D&D. You can use it to look up information, queue music, show pictures of your character and everything in between....but pleeeaaase don't be sitting there Face Timing with your friend during combat. We live in an age where phone alerts going off is very common place, and sending a quick message to your friend is okay, but be respectful and pay attention to the people you're with.

A big thing that seems pretty obvious but is often forgotten is that this is "OUR game" not "YOUR game". Although it's easy to get really into the role playing and have a clear plan of what your character will do next in the adventure, remember you're playing with other living, breathing, unpredictable humans, not preset villagers like in a video game. Be patient, be flexible and be mature. Those other people at the table have their own plans, just like you do, so make sure you don't get too upset if things don't go exactly the way you planned.

Which brings me to our next point; work with your DM and party, not against them. When discussing what the party should do in a situation, emotions can certainly run pretty high, but it's important to remember to communicate properly and maturely. Discuss topics, don't argue. Make your point clear, but be respectful. Don't EVER say "I don't care". Your DM worked for hours between sessions to bring you that week's adventure. To say you don't care about something really belittles the work they do for you FOR FREE.

In my opinion, D&D is one of the most therapeutic escapes from real life you can have. Let's be real for a second. Life is hard. We have work, school, responsibilities and all other kinds of stress we have to deal with on a regular basis. When you play D&D, you get to be the hero, you can be rich, strong, smart and most of all, you get to succeed (which is something a lot of us feel we are missing in real life). For D&D to be that happy escape for you, you have to leave your stressful world behind for a few hours. If you're having a bad day, don't bring that to the table and take it out on your teammates. Appreciate the fun you're about to have and clear your emotions before sitting down. D&D is an escape, so make it that.

The same goes for leaving the table at the end of the night. If you have a conflict with another player's character because of something they did in game or perhaps even the DM for doing something “mean”, leave those emotions at the table. As much as we can get into D&D, it is still a game. What happens in game, stays in game. Your CHARACTER can be mad at that CHARACTER as much as they want, but don't be mad at that player outside of the game. A make believe scenario is not worth losing a friendship. If you have issues with how the game is going, talk to your DM and come up with a solution together.

If you would like more tips on how to be a better player for teammates as well as your DM, you can read the document titled “Being a Good Player” below.

Now, you are 100% ready to start playing D&D and kicking butt!

# D&D Abbreviations

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## Dungeons and Dragons: Being a Good Player

- Your 20 sided die (d20) is your best friend as well as your worst enemy. Anytime you roll a saving throw (eg: Dexterity if you were trying to dodge a trap that had just sprung in front of you), a skill check (eg: using your Medicine skill to determine the cause of death of a body you just found) or an attack roll (eg: swinging to hit an enemy with your great sword) you will roll your d20. If you roll a 1, that is called a CRITICAL FAIL. Regardless of the bonuses you may add to saves, skills, or attack rolls you may fail AND something bad will happen ( it's up to the DM to decide your fate as well...). If you roll a 20 on any one of these checks it is called a NATURAL TWENTY. You not only automatically succeed regardless of any bonuses you may add, but succeed so well you put everyone else to shame (again, DM can decide if any additional things happen).  
\*\*\*Some DMs will allow you to critically fail and succeed on both attack and skill rolls so make sure to ask during the Session Zero!\*\*\*

- When you roll your d20 for any reason you MUST tell your DM the number (after bonuses and modifiers). Even if you are 100000000% sure you have succeeded or failed, the DM must be told what you rolled. If you roll either CRITICAL FAILURE or a NATURAL 20 you MUST tell the DM just that. For example: You are rolling to attack a Goblin with your short sword. You have a +3 to attack. You roll your D20 and it lands on a 1. You DO NOT tell the DM you rolled 4 (1 on the die + 3 to attack), you tell the DM "I critically failed!". Same goes for rolling a 20; "I rolled a natural 20!" \*high fives all around\*

Role playing is a personal preference type of thing. If you would like to talk in character most or all of the time, that is completely up to you. If you prefer to just describe your actions and do very little actual role playing, that is absolutely fine as well. For example, let's say you wish to get information from the bar maid. A heavy role player would approach the situation like this:

***I approach the bar maid in a calm and friendly manner. "Excuse me, miss? My group of adventurers and I would like more information about the recent events in Velkenvelve (the name of the town). We will repay the favour with a piece of silver, if it's worth your time."***

A player who prefers a lighter style of role playing may approach the situation like this:

***I ask the bar maid if she knows much about the recent events in the town. I'll offer her a silver in return.***

Both styles of play are perfectly acceptable. Do whatever you will have more fun doing!

- PLAN AHEAD. When in combat, it's easy to get caught up in the excitement of what

the other players are doing and by all means, you should be paying attention to what's happening around you. However, you should also be planning what you're going to do BEFORE your next turn arrives. This helps to speed up game play and not leave everyone waiting on each other. Look up any spells you plan on casting or abilities you wish to use on your turn at least one person ahead of you and have the Players Handbook open to the page you need to reference.

- BE SPECIFIC. Your DM is there to paint the picture of your surroundings but each player will imagine them slightly different. When describing something you plan on doing, make sure to be as specific as possible so everyone is roughly on the same page. If you need more details from either the DM or another player, don't be afraid to ask. Sometimes the DM will deliberately give you limited information. If that's the case, you must work with the knowledge you're given.

- Stay in character. That doesn't mean you have to talk in a funny accent and role play everything to the maximum. It means that you should only do things that your character would do based on their BACKGROUND and ALIGNMENT. For example: If a Lawful Good character needed to get a key from a guard, they WOULD NOT try to steal it! They would try to convince the guard that giving them the key was helping the greater good. Lawful good characters do not lie, cheat, steal or murder unless it is COMPLETELY justified! A Chaotic Neutral character however does whatever they please whenever they please. Role playing is the point of playing D&D but be warned; evil and good alignments often clash so be sure that if players choose alignments that clash, they still must retain a reason to get along and adventure together, otherwise what's the point of playing?

- Metagaming is the worst possible thing you could do in D&D as a player. Metagaming is when your character acts on information YOU AS A PLAYER HAVE but the character DOES NOT KNOW. For example: Over the weekend you read somewhere in the Players Handbook that undead can't be charmed. You AS A PLAYER know this, but unless your character has reason to know this (someone has specifically told them or they learned it some other way) they cannot act on this information. So, the Bard in your group begins their turn and says they wish to try to charm the zombie the group is fighting. You are not allowed to tell the bard undead can't be charmed. This knowledge not only is giving yourself an unfair advantage over the other players but it also lessens the game play by shattering the illusion of the game. Metagaming can also be in game information. Let's say that the Rogue in the group sneaked into the back room of the tavern while you and the rest of the group were chatting with the bar maid. In the back room they discover a bloody dagger and muddy boots that seem out of place. Until the rogue chooses to SHARE THE INFORMATION with the whole group, you must continue to interact with the bar maid without suspicion or disdain. Once the Rogue explains their findings, you're welcome to act upon the information.

– Most importantly, DO NOT ANGER THE DM. They are there for you so you can have

fun so BE NICE and DON'T ARGUE. Making jokes and having a good time is all part of group gaming, but remember: your DM is not only responsible for all the same amount of paperwork that you are, but is responsible for eeeeeveryone else in the group. DMing is a lot of work. What the DM says goes. If you're about to do something dumb, remember that the DM could instantly kill your character with a nicely placed lightning bolt or hungry dragon....