

## Session One: What Is D&D?

We're all here today because you are interested in playing Dungeons and Dragons for the first time or maybe just for the first time in a very long time. What exactly is D&D anyways and what is all the hype about? Hands up how many of you used to play out in the woods, find a nice, big stick and pretend it was a gleaming sword? You'd whack at bushes and branches pretending to cut your way through a dense forest. Draw it at the ready when you heard a strange noise in the foliage ahead. And of course, use it to fell the mighty dragon that was in fact just a giant, gnarled stump. Now hands up how many of you wish you could run around like that now but not face any ridicule or judgment? Believe it or not, you were basically playing D&D while running about the woods pretending. If we get right down to the bare bones of D&D, all it really is is a group of people playing pretend together. But because it's a grown up game, we made a whooooooole lot of rules for it because rules make things more fun! Over the course of these next 4 weeks we're going to talk about a lot of rules, but the main thing you need to keep in mind is that this is just a big game a pretend and the object of that game is to just have fun and enjoy yourself.

The first thing you're going to want to do when playing D&D is create the character you will play. To start getting into the head space to create a character, think of this as if you were writing an adventure novel with your 5 closest friends. Five of you are in charge of creating and controlling one main character in the story. You decide everything about them including what they look like, what they sound like, where they came from and how they would react to different situations. Your last friend is in charge of literally everything else. They decide the setting, the situations to put your characters in, all of the other people and places in the story and of course, the ending. In D&D, the five of you in charge of a character become the Player Characters and the one friend in charge of everything else is called the Dungeon Master. As you can imagine, being a DM is a huge job and takes a special person to handle all of that work so for right now, we are only going to focus on you being a Player Character. Once you have learned more, you can think about playing the role of a Dungeon Master.

So, we need to create a character for you to play. For right now, we're not going to focus on what they look like or what kind of weapons or magic they use, we are just going to think about a general story for this character. Think specifically about why they are on this adventure. Maybe they're out for revenge and they are typically a cold and removed character. Maybe they are your classic white knight but have a dark secret. Maybe they're a chef wanting to explore the world and its wide variety of dishes and ingredients. Maybe they're a fun loving person who genuinely just wants to go on an adventure with no real purpose. The possibilities are endless and can sometimes feel a bit overwhelming. If you're having trouble coming up with a character concept, don't be afraid to use one of your favourite people (real or fictional) as a template. Say you wanted to do the chef but you don't really know what their personality would be like. Why not just base your character on an existing chef like Gordon Ramsey? Or say you know exactly what your character will act like but don't have a good story for them, you can choose a story from a book or movie you really like. Say we do Harry Potter's story. Your character led a normal, boring life until one day when they realized they possess magical powers. Whatever story you come up with, talk about it with the Dungeon Master of your game so they know how to fit your character into the story.

It can be really hard to come up with a fitting story and character concept so if you find yourself really struggling, try surrounding yourself with fuel for creative inspiration. Listen to music, read books, look at artwork, create artwork yourself, watch movies and talk with other fantasy fans to try and spark an idea.

Let's table the character concepts for the time being and we'll come back to that later. Let's talk about how D&D is actually played so you know what you're up against and how you will be acting as this character you're building. Once your character is completely built, your Dungeon Master will begin telling the story you and your friends will play in. Let's say in this particular story, your DM describes a world that has been split in two by a mysterious rift that has opened up in the middle of the kingdom. Emanating a strange magic, the rift has released all sorts of peculiar beasts into the land that now needs defending. You have been called into audience of the King who has gathered a group of people he believes can find the source of the Magic and seal the rift. This group of heroes will of course be you and your friends. Once the story has been opened, you are now free to interact with people, objects and the other Player Characters as your character would. You can start by introducing yourself to your fellow party members. You can choose to share with them as little or as much of your story as you like. From this point forward, you and your party will tell the DM what you would like to do and they will explain effects of your actions as they happen. Your DM will also play the part of any and all other characters in the story you meet which are called Non-Players Characters or NPCs. Let's set up a quick scene to show how this is done. I will be the DM and Sarah will be one of the players in the party.

Me: After the King explained your quest, you are escorted out of the castle by the guards and now stand on the cobblestone street in town. What would you like to do?

Sarah: Well, we should probably try to gather some more information about the magical beasts that have appeared. Is there a market or tavern or somewhere we could maybe find travelers who have seen these things?

Me: Yes, there is a tavern a few blocks away called The Full Cup and there is also a market in the center of town that is open every day.

Sarah: Okay, well since the tavern is so close, we'll start there.

Me: Alright, you travel through the streets of town, passing friendly villagers as you go. The day is sunny, warm and comfortable. Before long, you come upon a stone building with a large bay window. A wooden sign above the door depicting an overflowing tankard reads "The Full Cup".

Sarah: Okay, we would like to go inside.

Me: You push open the heavy door and as it creaks open, the smell of stale alcohol and greasy, savoury food fills your nose. The tavern is dimly lit and a slight, smoky haze fills the air. A long bar sits across the far wall while a few wooden tables and chairs dot about the dining room. On the east wall, a large fireplace flanked by heavy armchairs crackles away. There are a few patrons in the tavern but since it is mid day, it's pretty quiet. A hefty half-orc male greets you from behind the counter. He stands about 6 and half feet tall with ruddy green skin. Two large bottom teeth protrude upwards over his upper lip.

*What can I get ya today?*

Sarah: Hello sir, we were looking for some travelers to speak to.

Me: The half-orc points towards a cloaked figure sitting in one of the armchairs by the fire.

*That lady just came into town yesterday. Didn't say where she was from but she looked like she'd been on the road for a while.*

Sarah: Great, let's approach the lady and see what she knows.

Me: As you approach the hooded figure, she looks to you and you are taken aback by her appearance. She looks to be a human woman in about her forties but a massive pink scar runs diagonally across her face, completely obliterating one eye and twisting her mouth into a permanent snarl. The wound alone is startling but the fact that the edges of the scar glow with a faint green hue is even more unsettling. She speaks to you in a surprisingly pleasant tone.

*Can I help you with something?*

So that's how the general role playing in D&D goes. It's all just story telling and playing pretend.

Depending on the Dungeon Master's preferences or your comfort level, you can choose to make the role playing as heavy or light as you like. If you're uncomfortable speaking as your character at first, you could try this style instead:

Me: A hefty half-orc male greets you from behind the counter. He stands about 6 and half feet tall with ruddy green skin. He asks what he can do for you today.

Sarah: I would like to ask him if there are any travelers in the tavern we could talk to.

Me: He points at a woman sitting in one of the armchairs by the fire and explains that she just came into town yesterday looking like she has been on the road for a while but he doesn't know where she is from.

If you and your friends are comfortable with role playing and each other, you can even try using different voices or accents for each character. This helps the DM distinguish different characters for the players and helps for you to show them when you are speaking as your character or just speaking as yourself out of character. But not everyone is comfortable with that and that is absolutely okay. No one should ever force you to heavily role play if you're uncomfortable or embarrassed. As you become more comfortable with the game, your character and your companions, you will find that the role playing will come a bit easier each session but it will take time, and that's okay.

Now that we have seen how the storytelling develops in D&D, we'll touch a little more on the rules and mechanics. As you saw, the Player Characters get to decide what they do with the information given but the DM decides if they are successful in whatever they attempt based on how they roll. Whenever you try to do basically anything in D&D, you need to roll a 20 sided die to determine how well you end up doing that thing. Different characters are better at different things so it's good to have a balanced party where everyone is good at something different. Rogues are good at picking locks, Bards are good at talking to people and barbarians are good at smashing down doors, but all of those actions also require a roll. No matter how good you think you are, your dice roll can still prove otherwise. Let's try another scenario here:

Me: You ask the woman about the creatures coming out of the rift and her eyes widen before she pulls her mouth into a frown.

*I'm not saying anything. You have no business meddling with magic you can't understand.*

Sarah: Please, miss. We have been sent on a quest by the king and are only trying to help the people of the land.

Me: Give me a Persuasion check.

Sarah is trying to squeeze information out of a character who is deliberately withholding it. She's going to have to rely on her skills to proceed. Now Sarah will roll her d20 and add any bonuses she gets to the Persuasion skill (again, we'll go over all the number details later). If Sarah rolls well, the lady will likely give more information, but if she rolls poorly, she will be unable to get information from her and will have to try something else. Rolls also determine physical actions, not just role playing responses. For example:

Me: The hooded lady takes offense to your pleading and quickly hurls her tankard of ale right at your head. Give me a Dexterity saving throw.

Sarah will roll her d20 again and add any bonuses she gets. If Sarah rolls well, she will dodge out of the way and not be hit by the cup. If she rolls poorly, she risks getting hit with the cup and maybe even

taking damage from it. Your d20 will be the die you use more often than any other one in your set. The DM will also be making plenty of d20 rolls but they can choose to not let you see anything they roll. Your d20 will be your best friend and your worst enemy as it truly decides your fate. You'll also use your d20 in combat while fighting enemies. It determines what order you take turns and if you hit your targets with your weapons or spells. We'll get into the details of combat a little bit later.

So now that you know the basics of how we're going to play D&D, let's talk about everything you'll need before you sit down at the table for your first game. 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. You don't need to read it cover to cover, in fact I would not advise that. Only read 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 one in your folder for this workshop. 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. We'll talk about those double d20 instances later. 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!

Once you have everything you need to start playing, you'll need to find yourself a group! That may be a little harder than it sounds. With school, work, family and other obligations, it can be really hard to find a group that everyone's schedules mesh. Ideally, a D&D group meets once a week for anywhere between 2-4 hours. If you find a group that chooses a time within our store hours, you are absolutely welcome to use our space at the store free of charge. When choosing who to play with, try to play with people you know you will get along with or at least don't choose people you already have an existing beef. It's very hard for people to leave their real life out of the game and I have found in my experience that those beefs always end up coming the surface at the table. If you can play with people you get along with, everyone will have an easier time. If you don't have enough friends wanting to play to make up a ground and need to find a group, you can contact us at the store and we will try to fit you into a group. We have more players than DMs at the moment so you may be on a waiting list for a while, but we do our best to find everyone a group as soon as we can.

There's obviously so so much more to discuss about D&D but for today, we'll end the session here, a little early so you have an opportunity to ask me any questions you have about the game.