

Adventures in English

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Playing Dungeons and Dragons

The Dungeon Master: *You are in a dark forest. It's night, but there's a full moon, and you are walking along a path. Up ahead, you see a fallen tree blocking the way. What do you want to do?*

This [encounter](#) (or situation) was created in advance. The [Dungeon Master](#) (DM) has detailed information about the encounter, such as a map and information about that encounter. Only the [DM](#) has information about the encounter, so the DM is responsible for telling the player what their [character](#) sees, hears, etc. After the DM has described the encounter, the player can do something.

The player: *I want to move the tree out of the way. I want to lift it and move it off the path.*

The player has made a character in advance. On the player's [character sheet](#) is all the information the player needs to play ([abilities](#), [skills](#), background, appearance, etc.)

The DM considers the player's action. Moving the tree out of the way requires strength, so the DM asks the player to make a [strength check](#). That means that the player rolls [dice](#) to see if they are successful. The stronger a character is, the more chance they have of being successful. The player rolls a 16, and the DM checks the information about this situation. According to the DM's information about this encounter, the player needs to throw a 15 or higher. The player's character lifts the fallen tree and moves it out of the way.

Of course, it is also possible that the character is very weak or that the player throws less than the number required, and they are not able to move the tree out of the way. There are many ways to resolve this problem. Some are obvious (jump over the fallen tree, go around, chop the tree in half with an ax,) but there are also unusual solutions (use a rope to lift the tree, use magic to levitate the tree, change into a bird and fly over the fallen tree.) The possibilities and chance of success depend on the abilities and skills of your character. The DM listens to the player's idea and decides which rules are used. For example, if a player wants to jump over the fallen tree, the character's acrobatic skill is tested.

This is an example of a simple encounter, a problem that can be resolved, but it's also possible that it's an ambush and that fighting is involved. The DM controls the environment and also the creatures in that environment.

A Different Kind of Game

Dungeons and Dragons is different than most games. Most games have a clear set of rules, and the players work toward a goal. Normally, the first person to achieve the goal is the winner. Dungeons and Dragons has many rules, more than in a normal board game, like Settlers of Catan. The game leader is called a Dungeon Master, and one of the most important tasks is to interpret (decide how to use) the rules.

D&D is known as a fantasy role-playing game, and the goal is to make an exciting story. Players play a role (their character) and interact with the environment. Together with the DM, the player makes an adventure story. The goal is to make an interesting story and have fun.

A D&D session is normally 2 or 3 hours, but a campaign (full story) can take much longer. Some groups meet regularly and have been playing for years. Dungeons and Dragons gives you the opportunity to use your fantasy and play a hero in a fantasy world.

There are several [rulebooks](#), but the most important is the [Player's Handbook](#). The Player's Handbook contains all the rules about creating and playing a character. As a player, you don't need to know the rules, but the DM should!

You need good communication skills (and a little bit of fantasy) to play D&D.

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Start Your Adventure

You live in [Faerûn](#), also known as the Forgotten Realms. It is a world of magic and adventure. Until this time, you have only heard of the wonders of this world, stories told by strangers, but now it is time for you to discover the world and make your own adventure!

Race and Background

First, you must choose your [race](#) and think up some background. Unless you have a specific idea of a race you want to play (for example, dwarf or elf), it's easiest to play a human. It's certainly the best choice if you're learning to play D&D.

The most common races in D&D are human, elf, dwarf, gnome, halfling, but there are more.

After you choose your race, you must create your background. What did you do before you decided to go on an adventure? Were you a soldier or a scholar? Are your parents rich or poor? Here are some examples.

Johene is a young man, and he's quite strong. He works on a farm but has also learned how to read and write. Johene dreams of adventure.

Idela is an elf and an excellent hunter. Her parents taught her how to use a longbow. Idela loves nature and traveling.

Gulfnor, the dwarf, is a hardworking miner, but he is also interested in religion. His father is a cleric and taught him about the gods. Gulfnor wants to become a holy fighter (paladin.)

Your background should be realistic (within the world of fantasy.) "*I have unlimited power, and my family is the richest and most influential in the world*" is NOT a valid background! It's fine to use your fantasy and create an unusual character, but it should also fit in the world that the DM is using. That's why it's important to discuss your background with the DM.

Class and Abilities

After choosing your race and background, it's time to choose your [class](#). There are many classes in D&D, such as fighter, wizard, monk, druid, bard, etc. Each class has its abilities and talents, as stated in the [Player's Handbook](#), but some are easier to play than others. Playing a wizard is more complicated than a fighter because you use magic. That means that you need to know how to use spells effectively. Everybody knows that a fighter takes a weapon and attacks. Playing a 'difficult' class can be fun, but if you're learning how to play, it's better to choose a fighter or rogue. Here is a list of the most common classes in D&D and an extremely short description.

Barbarian – is a fighter who can go into a rage.

Bard – sings songs to inspire and enchant.*

Cleric – uses the power of the gods to heal and help.*

Druid – worships nature and can change into an animal.*

Fighter – is equipped with armor and sword, ready to do combat.

Monk – is a martial arts expert, able to fight with or without weapons.

Paladin – is like a knight, fighting for a holy cause.

Ranger – is a hunter, often with a bow, who knows nature well.

Rogue – can open locks and are good at hiding and surprising enemies.

Sorcerer – uses magic and can change the effects of their spells.*

Warlock – uses magic to control demons and other dark forces.*

Wizard – casts spells from a spellbook.*

** The classes marked with an asterisk rely mainly on spells and magic, so they are more difficult to play as a beginner.*

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Ability Scores

It's time to start rolling dice. Several types of [dice](#) are used for playing D&D. For the ability scores you will throw 5d6 but only count the highest three. That means throw 5 dice with six sides (common dice), and the 2 lowest dice are not counted (so that you have a chance to have higher scores.) In the end, you will have a number between 3 and 18. Repeat this 5 more times until you have 6 numbers between 3 and 18. With these 6 numbers, you are going to create your character.

In D&D, creatures have 6 basic abilities.

Strength – physical power (lifting heavy objects, forcing open a door)

Dexterity – agility (moving silently, jumping over things)

Constitution – endurance and health (running far, surviving in extreme conditions)

Intelligence – mental power (knowing what something is, understanding a foreign language)

Wisdom – understanding and insight (knowing the correct way, training an animal)

Charisma – the power of personality (how people react to you, convincing people)

The most important abilities per class;

Barbarian – strength and constitution

Bard – charisma and dexterity

Cleric – wisdom and strength or constitution

Druid – wisdom and constitution

Fighter – strength or dexterity and constitution

Monk – dexterity and wisdom

Paladin – strength and charisma

Ranger – dexterity and wisdom

Rogue – dexterity and intelligence

Sorcerer – charisma and constitution

Warlock – charisma and constitution

Wizard – intelligence and constitution or dexterity

Use the six numbers you rolled and choose a number for each ability. The higher the number is, the better the ability. Using these 6 dice rolls (for example, 16, 14, 13, 13, 10, 8) and the 3 characters described earlier, these are realistic combinations.

*Johene wants to be a fighter, so he chooses to use his dice rolls like this; **Strength 16**, **Dexterity 13**, **Constitution 14**, **Intelligence 13**, **Wisdom 10**, **Charisma 8***

*Idela wants to be a ranger, so she chooses to use her dice rolls like this; **Strength 13**, **Dexterity 16**, **Constitution 10**, **Intelligence 8**, **Wisdom 14**, **Charisma 13***

*Gulfnor wants to be a paladin, so he chooses to use his dice rolls like this; **Strength 16**, **Dexterity 8**, **Constitution 13**, **Intelligence 10**, **Wisdom 13**, **Charisma 14***

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Creating a Character Sheet

Once you have a name, race, background, class, and ability scores, the DM can create your [character sheet](#). There is a lot of information on a character sheet, but there are only a few things that you use regularly.

Hit Points (HP) – This is your health. When you get hurt, your hit points go down. When you have zero hit points, you fall unconscious and are in danger of dying.

Armor Class (AC) – This number signifies how much protection you have from armor, clothing, etc.

Ability Scores – are strength, dexterity, constitution, intelligence, wisdom, and charisma.

Skills – there are several different skills, such as perception, stealth, acrobatics, etc. The DM will often ask you to check a skill. That means you roll dice to determine the success of an action.

Initiative – Initiative determines who goes first. When your character is in an encounter, the DM will normally ask for an initiative roll to determine the turn order.

Attacks – using weapons or spells to attack an enemy.

Saving throws – When something bad happens (for example, falling out of a tree), there's a chance that you 'save' yourself. Saving throws generally mean taking less (or no) damage.

There is a lot more information on your character sheet, and as you play more, you'll understand better how to use your different skills and abilities. The best way to learn is to play a practice encounter.

There are 3 main features of encounters: problem-solving, role-playing, and combat. Problem-solving and role-playing are more dynamic and spontaneous, but combat is quite structured.

Combat

During combat, a turn takes approximately 6 seconds. Each creature involved in combat can do one action during their turn. The order of turns is decided by initiative.

1. Surprise

If a creature is surprised, they are not able to do something for 6 seconds.

2. Initiative

At the beginning of the combat, initiative is rolled. The highest number goes first.

3. Action

During a 6-second combat turn, a character can do one action. Actions are:

- attack
- cast a spell
- dash (run very fast)
- disengage (don't provoke an attack)
- dodge (avoid an attack)
- help
- hide
- ready (prepare)
- search
- use an object

4. Bonus Action

Some characters can make a bonus action. Details about this kind of action can be found in the character description in the Player's Handbook.

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Glossary

Ability: Abilities represent the physical and mental capacities of a character. There are 6 abilities in D&D: strength, dexterity, constitution, intelligence, wisdom, charisma. These abilities determine what a character can do and are represented by a number between 3 and 18. The higher the score, the better the ability.

Ability Check: An ability check (such as a strength check) is done by rolling dice. The higher an ability is, the more chance the character has of doing something difficult. Lifting 100kg is difficult, but the stronger your character is, the more chance they will lift the weight.

Character: A character is like a role in a movie. A player creates a character to interact with the environment that the DM has created. The information about your character is on a [character sheet](#) (either on paper or digitally.)

Character Sheet: A collection of information about your character. A character sheet can be either printed or digital.

Class: The kind of hero you are. There are several classes in D&D (see the [list](#) in the main text.)

Dice: Different kinds of dice (d) are used in D&D – d4 (four-sided) d6 (six-sided) d8 (eight-sided) d10 (ten-sided) d12 (twelve-sided) d20 (twenty-sided) and d100 or percentile dice (normally 2 ten-sided dice are used.) For example, 3d8+2 mean the player rolls 3 eight-sided dice and adds 2 to the result.

Dungeon Master: The Dungeon Master (DM) leads the game. The DM has two main functions. As a narrator, the DM tells the players about the environment. As a referee, the DM decides how to interpret the rules.

Encounter: In D&D, an encounter refers to a meeting or situation. It's like the scene of a movie.

Player's Handbook: All the rules needed for creating and playing a character are in the PHB. All the abilities, classes, skills are explained as they are used in D&D. The DM has to know the Player's Handbook very well, but it is not as important for a player. Of course, the more you know about your character, the better you can play. You can find a print-friendly version of the Player's Handbook [here](#). Click [here](#) for a downloadable PDF of the basic rules.

Race: A group of creatures with similar features. The most common races in D&D are human, elf, dwarf, and halfling. These races are more or less identical to how they are portrayed in Lord of the Rings.

Rulebooks: Official rules are published by the Wizards on the Coast. Many books can be used in D&D, but the most important are the Player's Handbook, the Monster Manual, and the Dungeon Master's Guide. The Monster Manual has information about monsters, from the flying Aarakocra to undead Zombies. The Dungeon Masters Guide contains all the information needed for creating a world and running a campaign. Click [here](#) for a downloadable PDF of the basic rules.

Skill: Something at which a character is good. A skill depends on an ability. For example, strength is an ability. Athletics is a skill that depends on strength.