

CHAPTER 8: RUNNING THE GAME

RULES ENABLE YOU AND YOUR PLAYERS TO HAVE fun at the table. The rules serve you, not vice versa. There are the rules of the game, and there are table rules for how the game is played. For instance, players need to know what happens when one of them misses a session. They need to know whether to bring miniatures, any special rules you've decided to use, and how to treat a cocked die (a die that lands so that its face can't be clearly read). These topics and more are covered in this chapter.

TABLE RULES

Ideally, players come to the gaming table with the same goal: to have a fun time together. This section gives recommendations for table rules you can establish to help meet that goal. Here are some fundamentals:

Foster respect. Don't bring personal conflicts to the table or let disagreements escalate into bad feelings. Don't touch others' dice if they're sensitive about it.

Avoid distractions. Turn off the television and video games. If you have young children, hire a babysitter. Reducing distractions helps players stay in character and enjoy the story. It might be fine to have players wandering away from the table and back, but some players prefer planned breaks.

Have snacks. Decide before a session who will bring food and drink. This is often something the players can handle.

TABLE TALK

Set expectations about how players talk at the table:

- Make it clear who's speaking: the character or the player (out of character).
- Decide how you feel about a player sharing information that his or her character wouldn't know or that the character is incapable of sharing as a result of being unconscious, dead, or far away.
- Are you all right with players retracting what they just said their characters did?

DICE ROLLING

Establish expectations about rolling dice. Rolling in full view of everyone is a good starting point. If you see a player rolling and scooping the dice up before anyone else can see, encourage that player to be less secretive.

When a die falls on the floor, do you count it or reroll it? When it lands cocked against a book, do you pull the book away and see where it lands, or reroll it?

What about you, the DM? Do you make your rolls in the open or hide them behind a DM screen? Consider the following:

- If you roll dice where the players can see, they know you're playing impartially and not fudging rolls.
- Rolling behind a screen keeps the players guessing about the strength of their opposition. When a

monster hits all the time, is it of a much higher level than the characters, or are you rolling high numbers?

- Rolling behind a screen lets you fudge the results if you want to. If two critical hits in a row would kill a character, you could change the second critical hit into a normal hit, or even a miss. Don't distort die rolls too often, though, and don't let on that you're doing it. Otherwise, your players might think they don't face any real risks—or worse, that you're playing favorites.
- A roll behind a screen can help preserve mystery. For example, if a player thinks there might be someone invisible nearby and makes a Wisdom (Perception) check, consider rolling a die behind the screen even if no one is there, making the player think someone is, indeed, hiding. Try not to overuse this trick.
- You might choose to make a roll for a player because you don't want the player to know how good the check total is. For example, if a player suspects a baroness might be charmed and wants to make a Wisdom (Insight) check, you could make the roll in secret for the player. If the player rolled and got a high number but didn't sense anything amiss, the player would be confident that the baroness wasn't charmed. With a low roll, a negative answer wouldn't mean much. A hidden roll allows uncertainty.

ROLLING ATTACKS AND DAMAGE

Players are accustomed to rolling an attack roll first and then a damage roll. If players make attack rolls and damage rolls at the same time, the action moves a little faster around the table.

RULES DISCUSSIONS

You might need to set a policy on rules discussions at the table. Some groups don't mind putting the game on hold while they hash out different interpretations of a rule. Others prefer to let the DM make a call and continue with the action. If you gloss over a rules issue in play, make a note of it (a good task to delegate to a player) and return to the issue later.

METAGAME THINKING

Metagame thinking means thinking about the game as a *game*. It's like when a character in a movie knows it's a movie and acts accordingly. For example, a player might say, "The DM wouldn't throw such a powerful monster at us!" or you might hear, "The read-aloud text spent a lot of time describing that door—let's search it again!"

Discourage metagame thinking by giving players a gentle reminder: "What do your *characters* think?" You can curb metagame thinking by setting up situations that will be difficult for the characters and that might require negotiation or retreat to survive.

MISSING PLAYERS

How should you deal with the characters of missing players? Consider these options:

- Have another player run the missing player's character. The player running the extra character should strive to keep the character alive and use resources wisely.
- Run the character yourself. It's an extra burden for you, but it can work.
- Decide the character isn't there. Invent a good reason for the character to miss the adventure, perhaps by having him or her linger in town or continue a downtime activity. Leave a way for the character to rejoin the party when the player returns.
- Have the character fade into the background. This solution requires everyone to step out of the game world a bit and suspend disbelief, but might be the easiest solution. You act as if the character's not there, but don't try to come up with any in-game explanation for this absence. Monsters don't attack the character, who returns the favor. On returning, the player resumes playing as if he or she was never gone.

SMALL GROUPS

Most of the time, each player runs one character. The game plays best that way, without overwhelming anyone. But if your group is small, players can control more than one character. Or you can fill out the group with NPC followers, using the guidelines in chapter 4, "Creating Nonplayer Characters." You can also make the characters more resilient by using the healing surge option in chapter 9, "Dungeon Master's Workshop."

Don't force a reluctant player to take on multiple characters, and don't show favoritism by allowing only one player to do so. If one character is the mentor of the other, the player can focus on roleplaying just one character. Otherwise, players can end up awkwardly talking to themselves in character, or avoiding roleplaying altogether.

Multiple characters can be a good idea in a game that features nonstop peril and a high rate of character death. If your group agrees to the premise, have each player keep one or two additional characters on hand, ready to jump in whenever the current character dies. Each time the main character gains a level, the backup characters do as well.

NEW PLAYERS

When a new player joins the group, allow the new player to create a character of a level equal to the lowest-level member of the party. The only exception to this guideline is when the new player is completely unfamiliar with the D&D game. In that case, have that player start with a 1st-level character. If the rest of the party is significantly higher in level, consider taking a short break from the campaign and having everyone play a 1st-level character for a few sessions while the new player learns the ropes.

Integrating a new character into the group can be difficult if the party is in the middle of an adventure. The following approaches can help make it easier:

- The new character is a friend or relative of one of the adventurers who has been searching for the group.
- The new character is a prisoner of the foes the other characters are fighting. When rescued, this character joins their group.
- The new character is the sole survivor of another adventuring group.

THE ROLE OF DICE

Dice are neutral arbiters. They can determine the outcome of an action without assigning any motivation to the DM and without playing favorites. The extent to which you use them is entirely up to you.

ROLLING WITH IT

Some DMs rely on die rolls for almost everything. When a character attempts a task, the DM calls for a check and picks a DC. As a DM using this style, you can't rely on the characters succeeding or failing on any one check to move the action in a specific direction. You must be ready to improvise and react to a changing situation.

Relying on dice also gives the players the sense that anything is possible. Sure, it might seem unlikely that the party's halfling can leap on the ogre's back, pull a sack over its head, and then dive to safety, but with a lucky enough roll it just might work.

A drawback of this approach is that roleplaying can diminish if players feel that their die rolls, rather than their decisions and characterizations, always determine success.

IGNORING THE DICE

One approach is to use dice as rarely as possible. Some DMs use them only during combat, and determine success or failure as they like in other situations.

With this approach, the DM decides whether an action or a plan succeeds or fails based on how well the players make their case, how thorough or creative they are, or other factors. For example, the players might describe how they search for a secret door, detailing how they tap on a wall or twist a torch sconce to find its trigger. That could be enough to convince the DM that they find the secret door without having to make an ability check to do so.

This approach rewards creativity by encouraging players to look to the situation you've described for an answer, rather than looking to their character sheet or their character's special abilities. A downside is that no DM is completely neutral. A DM might come to favor certain players or approaches, or even work against good ideas if they send the game in a direction he or she doesn't like. This approach can also slow the game if the DM focuses on one "correct" action that the characters must describe to overcome an obstacle.

THE MIDDLE PATH

Many DMs find that using a combination of the two approaches works best. By balancing the use of dice against deciding on success, you can encourage your players to strike a balance between relying on their

bonuses and abilities and paying attention to the game and immersing themselves in its world.

Remember that dice don't run your game—you do. Dice are like rules. They're tools to help keep the action moving. At any time, you can decide that a player's action is automatically successful. You can also grant the player advantage on any ability check, reducing the chance of a bad die roll foiling the character's plans. By the same token, a bad plan or unfortunate circumstances can transform the easiest task into an impossibility, or at least impose disadvantage.

USING ABILITY SCORES

When a player wants to do something, it's often appropriate to let the attempt succeed without a roll or a reference to the character's ability scores. For example, 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. Only call for a roll if there is a meaningful consequence for failure.

When deciding whether to use a roll, ask yourself two questions:

- Is a task so easy and so free of conflict and stress that there should be no chance of failure?
- Is a task so inappropriate or impossible—such as hitting the moon with an arrow—that it can't work?

If the answer to both of these questions is no, some kind of roll is appropriate. The following sections provide guidance on determining whether to call for an ability check, attack roll, or saving throw; how to assign DCs; when to use advantage and disadvantage; and other related topics.

ABILITY CHECKS

An ability check is a test to see whether a character succeeds at a task that he or she has decided to attempt. The *Player's Handbook* includes examples of what each ability score is used for. The Ability Checks table summarizes that material for easy reference.

MULTIPLE ABILITY CHECKS

Sometimes a character fails an ability check and wants to try again. In some cases, a character is free to do so; the only real cost is the time it takes. With enough attempts and enough time, a character should

eventually succeed at the task. To speed things up, assume that a character spending ten times the normal amount of time needed to complete a task automatically succeeds at that task. However, no amount of repeating the check allows a character to turn an impossible task into a successful one.

In other cases, failing an ability check makes it impossible to make the same check to do the same thing again. For example, a rogue might try to trick a town guard into thinking the adventurers are undercover agents of the king. If the rogue loses a contest of Charisma (Deception) against the guard's Wisdom (Insight), the same lie told again won't work. The characters can come up with a different way to get past the guard or try the check again against another guard at a different gate. But you might decide that the initial failure makes those checks more difficult to pull off.



ABILITY CHECKS

Ability	Used for ...	Example Uses
Strength	Physical force and athleticism	Smash down a door, move a boulder, use a spike to wedge a door shut
Dexterity	Agility, reflexes, and balance	Sneak past a guard, walk along a narrow ledge, wriggle free from chains
Constitution	Stamina and health	Endure a marathon, grasp hot metal without flinching, win a drinking contest
Intelligence	Memory and reason	Recall a bit of lore, recognize a clue's significance, decode an encrypted message
Wisdom	Perceptiveness and willpower	Spot a hidden creature, sense that someone is lying
Charisma	Social influence and confidence	Persuade a creature to do something, cow a crowd, lie to someone convincingly

CONTESTS

A contest is a kind of ability check that matches two creatures against each other. Use a contest if a character attempts something that either directly foils or is directly opposed by another creature's efforts. In a contest, the ability checks are compared to each other, rather than to a target number.

When you call for a contest, you pick the ability that each side must use, deciding whether both sides use the same ability or whether different abilities should counter each other. 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 use Strength.

ATTACK ROLLS

Call for an attack roll when a character tries to hit a creature or an object with an attack, especially when the attack could be foiled by the target's armor or shield or by another object providing cover. You can also use attack rolls to resolve noncombat activities such as archery contests or a game of darts.

SAVING THROWS

A saving throw is an instant response to a harmful effect and is almost never done by choice. A save makes the most sense when something bad happens to a character and the character has a chance to avoid that effect. An ability check is something a character actively attempts to accomplish, whereas a saving throw is a split-second response to the activity of someone or something else.

Most of the time, a saving throw comes into play when an effect—such as a spell, monster ability, or trap—calls for it, telling you what kind of saving throw is involved and providing a DC for it.

Other times, a situation arises that clearly calls for a saving throw, especially when a character is subjected to a harmful effect that can't be hedged out by armor or a shield. It's up to you to decide which ability score is involved. The Saving Throws table offers suggestions.

INTELLIGENCE CHECK VS. WISDOM CHECK

If you have trouble deciding whether to call for an Intelligence or a Wisdom check to determine whether a character notices something, think of it in terms of what a very high or low score in those two abilities might mean.

A character with a high Wisdom but low Intelligence is aware of the surroundings but is bad at interpreting what things mean. The character might spot that one section of a wall is clean and dusty compared to the others, but he or she wouldn't necessarily make the deduction that a secret door is there.

In contrast, a character with high Intelligence and low Wisdom is probably oblivious but clever. The character might not spot the clean section of wall but, if asked about it, could immediately deduce why it's clean.

Wisdom checks allow characters to perceive what is around them (the wall is clean here), while Intelligence checks answer why things are that way (there's probably a secret door).

SAVING THROWS

Ability	Used For ...
Strength	Opposing a force that would physically move or bind you
Dexterity	Dodging out of harm's way
Constitution	Enduring a disease, poison, or other hazard that saps vitality
Intelligence	Disbelieving certain illusions and resisting mental assaults that can be refuted with logic, sharp memory, or both
Wisdom	Resisting effects that charm, frighten, or otherwise assault your willpower
Charisma	Withstanding effects, such as possession, that would subsume your personality or hurl you to another plane of existence

DIFFICULTY CLASS

It's your job to establish the Difficulty Class for an ability check or a saving throw when a rule or an adventure doesn't give you one. Sometimes you'll even want to change such established DCs. When you do so, think of how difficult a task is and then pick the associated DC from the Typical DCs table.

TYPICAL DCs

Task	DC	Task	DC
Very easy	5	Hard	20
Easy	10	Very hard	25
Moderate	15	Nearly impossible	30

The numbers associated with these categories of difficulty are meant to be easy to keep in your head, so that you don't have to refer to this book every time you decide on a DC. Here are some tips for using DC categories at the gaming table.

If you've decided that an ability check is called for, then most likely the task at hand isn't a **very easy** one. Most people can accomplish a DC 5 task with little chance of failure. Unless circumstances are unusual, let characters succeed at such a task without making a check.

Then ask yourself, "Is this task's difficulty easy, moderate, or hard?" If the only DCs you ever use are 10, 15, and 20, your game will run just fine. Keep in mind that a character with a 10 in the associated ability and no proficiency will succeed at an **easy** task around 50 percent of the time. A **moderate** task requires a higher score or proficiency for success, whereas a **hard** task typically requires both. A big dose of luck with the d20 also doesn't hurt.

If you find yourself thinking, "This task is especially hard," you can use a higher DC, but do so with caution and consider the level of the characters. A DC 25 task is **very hard** for low-level characters to accomplish, but it becomes more reasonable after 10th level or so. A DC 30 check is **nearly impossible** for most low-level characters. A 20th-level character with proficiency and a relevant ability score of 20 still needs a 19 or 20 on the die roll to succeed at a task of this difficulty.

VARIANT: AUTOMATIC SUCCESS

Sometimes the randomness of a d20 roll leads to ludicrous results. Let's say a door requires a successful DC 15 Strength check to be battered down. A fighter with a Strength of 20 might helplessly flail against the door because of bad die rolls. Meanwhile, the rogue with a Strength of 10 rolls a 20 and knocks the door from its hinges.

If such results bother you, consider allowing automatic success on certain checks. Under this optional rule, a character automatically succeeds on any ability check with a DC less than or equal to the relevant ability score minus 5. So in the example above, the fighter would automatically kick in the door. This rule doesn't apply to contests, saving throws, or attack rolls.

Having proficiency with a skill or tool can also grant automatic success. If a character's proficiency bonus applies to his or her ability check, the character automatically succeeds if the DC is 10 or less. If that character is 11th level or higher, the check succeeds if the DC is 15 or less.

The downside of this whole approach is its predictability. For example, once a character's ability score reaches 20, checks of DC 15 and lower using that ability become automatic successes. Smart players will then always match the character with the highest ability score against any given check. If you want some risk of failure, you need to set higher DCs. Doing this, though, can aggravate the problem you're trying to solve: higher DCs require higher die rolls, and thus rely even more on luck.

PROFICIENCY

When you ask a player to make an ability check, consider whether a skill or tool proficiency might apply to it. The player might also ask you if a particular proficiency applies.

One way to think about this question is to consider whether a character could become better at a particular task through training and practice. If the answer is no, it's fine to say that no proficiency applies. But if the answer is yes, assign an appropriate skill or tool proficiency to reflect that training and practice.

SKILLS

As described in the *Player's Handbook*, a skill proficiency represents a character's focus on one aspect of an ability. Among all the things a character's Dexterity score describes, the character might be particularly skilled at sneaking around, reflected in proficiency in the Stealth skill. When that skill is used for an ability check, it is usually used with Dexterity.

Under certain circumstances, you can decide a character's proficiency in a skill can be applied to a different ability check. For example, you might decide that a character forced to swim from an island to the mainland must succeed on a Constitution check (as opposed to a Strength check) because of the distance involved. The character is proficient in the Athletics skill, which covers swimming, so you allow the character's proficiency bonus to apply to this ability

check. In effect, you're asking for a Constitution (Athletics) check, instead of a Strength (Athletics) check.

Often, players ask whether they can apply a skill proficiency to an ability check. If a player can provide a good justification for why a character's training and aptitude in a skill should apply to the check, go ahead and allow it, rewarding the player's creative thinking.

TOOLS

Having proficiency with a tool allows you to apply your proficiency bonus to an ability check you make using that tool. For example, a character proficient with carpenter's tools can apply his or her proficiency bonus to a Dexterity check to craft a wooden flute, an Intelligence check to craft a wooden secret door, or a Strength check to build a working trebuchet. However, the proficiency bonus wouldn't apply to an ability check made to identify unsafe wooden construction or to discern the origin of a crafted item, since neither check requires tool use.

SAVING THROWS AND ATTACK ROLLS

Characters are either proficient with a saving throw or attack, or they aren't. The bonus always applies if a character is proficient.

ADVANTAGE AND DISADVANTAGE

Advantage and disadvantage are among the most useful tools in your DM's toolbox. They reflect temporary circumstances that might affect the chances of a character succeeding or failing at a task. Advantage is also a great way to reward a player who shows exceptional creativity in play.

Characters often gain advantage or disadvantage through the use of special abilities, actions, spells, or other features of their classes or backgrounds. In other cases, you decide whether a circumstance influences a roll in one direction or another, and you grant advantage or impose disadvantage as a result.

Consider granting **advantage** when ...

- Circumstances not related to a creature's inherent capabilities provide it with an edge.
- Some aspect of the environment contributes to the character's chance of success.
- A player shows exceptional creativity or cunning in attempting or describing a task.
- Previous actions (whether taken by the character making the attempt or some other creature) improve the chances of success.

Consider imposing **disadvantage** when ...

- Circumstances hinder success in some way.
- Some aspect of the environment makes success less likely (assuming that aspect doesn't already impose a penalty to the roll being made).
- An element of the plan or description of an action makes success less likely.

Because advantage and disadvantage cancel each other out, there's no need to keep track of how many circumstances weigh on both sides.

For example, imagine a wizard is running down a dungeon corridor to escape from a beholder. Around the corner ahead, two ogres lie in wait. Does the wizard hear the ogres readying their ambush? You look at the wizard's passive Wisdom (Perception) score and consider all the factors weighing on it.

The wizard is running, not paying attention to what's ahead of him. This imposes disadvantage on the wizard's ability check. However, the ogres are readying a portcullis trap and making a lot of noise with a winch, which could grant the wizard advantage on the check. As a result, the character has neither advantage nor disadvantage on the Wisdom check, and you don't need to consider any additional factors. Past encounters with an ogre ambush, the fact that the wizard's ears are still ringing from the *thunderwave* spell he cast at the beholder, the overall noise level of the dungeon—none of that matters any more. They all cancel out.

INSPIRATION

Awarding inspiration is an effective way to encourage roleplaying and risk-taking. As explained in the *Player's Handbook*, having inspiration gives a character an obvious benefit: being able to gain advantage on one ability check, attack roll, or saving throw. Remember that a character can have no more than one inspiration at a time.



AWARDING INSPIRATION

Think of inspiration as a spice that you can use to enhance your campaign. Some DMs forgo using inspiration, while others embrace it as a key part of the game. If you take away anything from this section, remember this golden rule: inspiration should make the game more enjoyable for everyone. Award inspiration when players take actions that make the game more exciting, amusing, or memorable.

As a rule of thumb, aim to award inspiration to each character about once per session of play. Over time, you might want to award inspiration more or less often, at a rate that works best for your table. You might use the same rate for your entire DMing career, or you might change it with each campaign.

Offering inspiration as a reward encourages certain types of behavior in your players. Think of your style as a DM and your group's preferences. What helps make the game more fun for your group? What type of actions fit in with your campaign's style or genre? Your answers to those questions help determine when you award inspiration.

Roleplaying. Using inspiration to reward roleplaying is a good place to start for most groups. Reward a player with inspiration when that player causes his or her character to do something that is consistent with the character's personality trait, flaw, or bond. The character's action should be notable in some way. It might drive the story forward, push the adventurers into danger, or make everyone at the table laugh. In essence, you reward the player for roleplaying in a way that makes the game more enjoyable for everyone else.

Take into account each player's roleplaying style, and try not to favor one style over another. For example, Allison might be comfortable speaking in an accent and adopting her character's mannerisms, but Paul feels self-conscious when trying to act and prefers to describe his character's attitude and actions. Neither style is better than the other. Inspiration encourages players to take part and make a good effort, and awarding it fairly makes the game better for everyone.

Heroism. You can use inspiration to encourage player characters to take risks. A fighter might not normally hurl himself over a balcony to land in the midst of a pack of hungry ghouls, but you can reward the character's daring maneuver with inspiration. Such a reward tells the players that you want them to embrace swashbuckling action.

This approach is great for campaigns that emphasize action-packed heroics. For such campaigns, consider allowing inspiration to be spent after a d20 roll, rather than before. This approach turns inspiration into a cushion against failure—and a guarantee that it comes into play only when a player is faced directly by failure. Such an assurance makes risky tactics less daunting.

A Reward for Victory. Some DMs prefer to play an impartial role in their campaigns. Inspiration normally requires a DM's judgment to award, which might run against your style if you like a campaign where you let dice determine most outcomes. If that's your

style, consider using inspiration as a reward when the characters achieve an important goal or victory, representing a surge of confidence and energy.

Under this model, give everyone in the party inspiration if the characters manage to defeat a powerful foe, execute a cunning plan to achieve a goal, or otherwise overcome a daunting obstacle in the campaign.

Genre Emulation. Inspiration is a handy tool for reinforcing the conventions of a particular genre. Under this approach, think of the motifs of a genre as personality traits, flaws, and bonds that can apply to any of the adventurers. For example, in a campaign inspired by film noir, characters could have an additional flaw: "I can't resist helping a person I find alluring despite warnings that he or she is nothing but trouble." If the characters agree to help a suspicious but seductive noble and thereby become entangled in a web of intrigue and betrayal, reward them with inspiration.

Similarly, characters in a horror story typically can't help but spend a night in a haunted house to learn its secrets. They probably also go off alone when they shouldn't. If the party splits up, consider giving each character inspiration.

A sensible person would avoid the noble's intrigues and the haunted house, but in film noir or horror, we're not dealing with sensible people; we're dealing with protagonists in a particular type of story. For this approach to work, create a list of your genre's main conventions and share it with your players. Before the campaign begins, talk about the list to make sure your group is on board for embracing those conventions.

Players and Inspiration. Remember that a player with inspiration can award it to another player. Some groups even like to treat inspiration as a group resource, deciding collectively when to spend it on a roll. It's best to let players award their inspiration as they see fit, but feel free to talk to them about following certain guidelines, particularly if you're trying to reinforce conventions of a certain genre.

WHEN DO YOU AWARD INSPIRATION?

Consider the timing of your inspiration rewards. Some DMs like to award inspiration in response to an action. Other DMs like to encourage specific actions by offering inspiration while a player is considering options. Both approaches have their strengths and weaknesses.

Waiting until after an action preserves the flow of play, but it also means players don't know whether their decisions will earn them inspiration. It also means the player can't spend the inspiration on the act that earned it, unless you allow a player to retroactively spend it or are quick enough to award it before any rolls. This approach works best for groups that want to focus on immersion and player agency, where the DM steps back and gives the players more freedom to do what they want.

Telling a player that an action will earn inspiration provides clarity, but it can make it feel like you are

manipulating the players or making choices for them. Offering inspiration before an action works great with groups that are comfortable with an emphasis on genre emulation and group storytelling, where character freedom isn't as important as weaving a compelling tale together.

Start with awarding inspiration after an action, especially for your first campaign or when playing with a new group. That approach is the least disruptive to the flow of play and avoids making the players feel as if you are being manipulative.

TRACKING INSPIRATION

A player typically notes on a character sheet whether he or she has inspiration, or you can use poker chips or some other token. Alternatively, you can hand out special d20s to represent inspiration. When a player spends inspiration, he or she rolls the die and then hands it back to you. If the player instead gives the inspiration to someone else, the d20 can go to that other person.

IGNORING INSPIRATION

Inspiration might not work for your campaign. Some DMs feel it adds a layer of metagame thinking, and others feel that heroism, roleplaying, and other parts of the game are their own rewards that don't need incentives like inspiration.

If you choose to ignore inspiration, you're telling the players that your campaign is one where you let the dice fall where they may. It's a good option for gritty campaigns or ones where the DM focuses on playing an impartial role as a rules arbiter.

VARIANT: ONLY PLAYERS AWARD INSPIRATION

As a DM, you have a lot to track during the game. Sometimes you can lose track of inspiration and forget to award it. As a variant rule, you can allow the players to handle awarding inspiration entirely. During every session, each player can award inspiration to another player. A player follows whatever guidelines the group has agreed on for awarding inspiration.

This approach makes your life easier and also gives players the chance to recognize each other for good play. You still need to make sure that inspiration is being awarded fairly.

This approach works best with groups that are focused on the story. It falls flat if the players merely manipulate it to gain advantage in key situations, without earning inspiration by way of good roleplaying or whatever other criteria the group has established.

In this variant, you can allow each player to award inspiration more than once per session. If you do so, the first time that a player awards inspiration in a session is free. Whenever that player awards it later in the same session, you gain inspiration that you can spend to give advantage to any foe of the player characters. There's no limit to the number of inspirations you can gain in this way, and unspent inspiration carries over from one session to the next.

RESOLUTION AND CONSEQUENCES

You determine the consequences of attack rolls, ability checks, and saving throws. In most cases, doing so is straightforward. When an attack hits, it deals damage. When a creature fails a saving throw, the creature suffers a harmful effect. When an ability check equals or exceeds the DC, the check succeeds.

As a DM, you have a variety of flourishes and approaches you can take when adjudicating success and failure to make things a little less black-and-white.

SUCCESS AT A COST

Failure can be tough, but the agony is compounded when a character fails by the barest margin. When a character fails a roll by only 1 or 2, you can allow the character to succeed at the cost of a complication or hindrance. Such complications can run along any of the following lines:

- A character manages to get her sword past a hobgoblin's defenses and turn a near miss into a hit, but the hobgoblin twists its shield and disarms her.
- A character narrowly escapes the full brunt of a *fireball* but ends up prone.
- A character fails to intimidate a kobold prisoner, but the kobold reveals its secrets anyway while shrieking at the top of its lungs, alerting other nearby monsters.
- A character manages to finish an arduous climb to the top of a cliff despite slipping, only to realize that the rope on which his companions dangle below him is close to breaking.

When you introduce costs such as these, try to make them obstacles and setbacks that change the nature of the adventuring situation. In exchange for success, players must consider new ways of facing the challenge.

You can also use this technique when a character succeeds on a roll by hitting the DC exactly, complicating marginal success in interesting ways.

DEGREES OF FAILURE

Sometimes a failed ability check has different consequences depending on the degree of failure. For example, a character who fails to disarm a trapped chest might accidentally spring the trap if the check fails by 5 or more, whereas a lesser failure means that the trap wasn't triggered during the botched disarm attempt. Consider adding similar distinctions to other checks. Perhaps a failed Charisma (Persuasion) check means a queen won't help, whereas a failure of 5 or more means she throws you in the dungeon for your impudence.

CRITICAL SUCCESS OR FAILURE

Rolling a 20 or a 1 on an ability check or a saving throw doesn't normally have any special effect. However, you can choose to take such an exceptional roll into account when adjudicating the outcome. It's up to you to determine how this manifests in the game. An easy approach is to increase the impact of the success or failure. For example, rolling a 1 on a failed attempt to pick a lock might break the thieves' tools being used, and rolling a 20 on a successful Intelligence (Investigation) check might reveal an extra clue.

EXPLORATION

This section provides guidance for running exploration, especially travel, tracking, and visibility.

USING A MAP

Whatever environment the adventurers are exploring, you can use a map to follow their progress as you relate the details of their travels. In a dungeon, tracking movement on a map lets you describe the branching passages, doors, chambers, and other features the adventurers encounter as they go, and gives the players the opportunity to choose their own path. Similarly, a wilderness map can show roads, rivers, terrain, and other features that might guide the characters on their travels—or lead them astray.

The Map Travel Pace table helps you track travel on maps of different scales. The table shows how much distance on a map the adventurers can cover on foot in minutes, hours, or days. The table uses the travel paces—slow, normal, and fast—described in the *Player's Handbook*. Characters moving at a normal pace can walk about 24 miles in a day.

MAP TRAVEL PACE

Map Scale	Slow Pace	Normal Pace	Fast Pace
Dungeon (1 sq. = 10 ft.)	20 sq./min.	30 sq./min.	40 sq./min.
City (1 sq. = 100 ft.)	2 sq./min.	3 sq./min.	4 sq./min.
Province (1 hex = 1 mi.)	2 hexes/hr., 18 hexes/day	3 hexes/hr., 24 hexes/day	4 hexes/hr., 30 hexes/day
Kingdom (1 hex = 6 mi.)	1 hex/3 hr., 3 hexes/day	1 hex/2 hr., 4 hexes/day	1 hex/1½ hr., 5 hexes/day

SPECIAL TRAVEL PACE

The rules on travel pace in the *Player's Handbook* assume that a group of travelers adopts a pace that, over time, is unaffected by the individual members' walking speeds. The difference between walking speeds can be significant during combat, but during an overland journey, the difference vanishes as travelers pause to catch their breath, the faster ones wait for the slower ones, and one traveler's quickness is matched by another traveler's endurance.

A character bestride a phantom steed, soaring through the air on a *carpet of flying*, or riding a sailboat or a steam-powered gnomish contraption doesn't travel at a normal rate, since the magic, engine, or wind doesn't tire the way a creature does and the air doesn't contain the types of obstructions found on land. When a creature is traveling with a flying speed or with a speed granted by magic, an engine, or a natural force (such as wind or a water current), translate that speed into travel rates using the following rules:

- In 1 minute, you can move a number of feet equal to your speed times 10.
- In 1 hour, you can move a number of miles equal to your speed divided by 10.