



For this approach to work, it's a good idea to establish some shared assumptions about the campaign so that DMs aren't duplicating efforts or trampling on each other's plans.

## COMBAT OPTIONS

The options in this section provide alternative ways to handle combat. The main risk of adding some of these rules is slowing down play.

### INITIATIVE VARIANTS

This section offers different ways to handle initiative.

#### INITIATIVE SCORE

With this optional rule, creatures don't roll initiative at the start of combat. Instead, each creature has an initiative score, which is a passive Dexterity check:  $10 + \text{Dexterity modifier}$ .

By cutting down on die rolls, math done on the fly, and the process of asking for and recording totals, you can speed your game up considerably—at the cost of an initiative order that is often predictable.

#### SIDE INITIATIVE

Recording initiative for each PC and monster, arranging everyone in the correct order, and remembering where you are in the list can bog the game down. If you want quicker combats, at the risk of those combats becoming unbalanced, try using the side initiative rule.

Under this variant, the players roll a d20 for their initiative as a group, or side. You also roll a d20. Neither roll receives any modifiers. Whoever rolls highest wins initiative. In case of a tie, keep rerolling until the tie is broken.

When it's a side's turn, the members of that side can act in any order they choose. Once everyone on the side has taken a turn, the other side goes. A round ends when both sides have completed their turns.

If more than two sides take part in a battle, each side rolls for initiative. Sides act from the highest roll to lowest. Combat continues in the initiative order until the battle is complete.

This variant encourages teamwork and makes your life as a DM easier, since you can more easily coordinate monsters. On the downside, the side that wins initiative can gang up on enemies and take them out before they have a chance to act.

#### SPEED FACTOR

Some DMs find the regular progression of initiative too predictable and prone to abuse. Players can use their knowledge of the initiative order to influence their decisions. For example, a badly wounded fighter might charge a troll because he knows that the cleric goes before the monster and can heal him.

Speed factor is an option for initiative that introduces more uncertainty into combat, at the cost of speed of play. Under this variant, the participants in a battle roll initiative each round. Before rolling, each character or monster must choose an action.

**Initiative Modifiers.** Modifiers might apply to a creature's initiative depending on its size and the action it takes. For example, a creature that fights with a light weapon or casts a simple spell is more likely to act before a creature armed with a heavy or slow weapon. See the Speed Factor Initiative Modifiers table for details. If an action has no modifier listed, the action has no effect on initiative. If more than one modifier applies (such as wielding a two-handed, heavy melee weapon), apply them all to the initiative roll.

### SPEED FACTOR INITIATIVE MODIFIERS

Factor	Initiative Modifier
Spellcasting	Subtract the spell's level
Melee, heavy weapon	-2
Melee, light or finesse weapon	+2
Melee, two-handed weapon	-2
Ranged, loading weapon	-5
Creature Size	Initiative Modifier
Tiny	+5
Small	+2
Medium	+0
Large	-2
Huge	-5
Gargantuan	-8

Don't apply the same modifier more than once on a creature's turn. For example, a rogue fighting with two daggers gains the +2 bonus for using a light or finesse weapon only once. In the case of spellcasting, apply only the modifier from the highest-level spell.

Apply any modifiers for bonus actions to that creature's turn, remembering never to apply the same modifier twice. For instance, a paladin casts a 2nd-level spell as a bonus action and then attacks with a shortsword. The paladin takes a -2 penalty for the spell and gains a +2 bonus for using a light weapon, for a total modifier of +0.

The table is only a starting point. You can refer to it when adjudicating any actions a character takes that you think should be faster or slower. Quick, easy actions should grant a bonus, while slow, difficult ones should incur a penalty. As a rule of thumb, apply a bonus or penalty of 2 or 5 for an action.

For example, a fighter wants to turn a winch to raise a portcullis. This is a complex, difficult action. You could rule that it incurs a -5 initiative penalty.

**Rolling Initiative.** After deciding on an action, everyone rolls initiative and applies modifiers, keeping the result secret. You then announce an initiative number, starting with 30 and working down (it helps to call out ranges of numbers at the start). Break any ties by having the combatant with the highest Dexterity act first. Otherwise, roll to determine who goes first.

**Turns.** On its turn, a creature moves as normal but must take the action it selected or take no action at all.

Once everyone has acted, the process repeats. Everyone in the battle selects an action, rolls initiative, and takes turns in order.

## ACTION OPTIONS

This section provides new action options for combat. They can be added as a group or individually to your game.

### CLIMB ONTO A BIGGER CREATURE

If one creature wants to jump onto another creature, it can do so by grappling. A Small or Medium creature has little chance of making a successful grapple against a Huge or Gargantuan creature, however, unless magic has granted the grappler supernatural might.

As an alternative, a suitably large opponent can be treated as terrain for the purpose of jumping onto its back or clinging to a limb. After making any ability checks necessary to get into position and onto the larger creature, the smaller creature uses its action to make a Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check contested by the target's Dexterity (Acrobatics) check. If it wins the contest, the smaller creature successfully moves into the target creature's space and clings to its body. While in the target's space, the smaller creature moves with the target and has advantage on attack rolls against it.

The smaller creature can move around within the larger creature's space, treating the space as difficult terrain. The larger creature's ability to attack the smaller creature depends on the smaller creature's location, and is left to your discretion. The larger creature can dislodge the smaller creature as an action—knocking it off, scraping it against a wall, or grabbing and throwing it—by making a Strength (Athletics) check contested by the smaller creature's Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check. The smaller creature chooses which ability to use.

### DISARM

A creature can use a weapon attack to knock a weapon or another item from a target's grasp. The attacker makes an attack roll contested by the target's Strength (Athletics) check or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check. If the attacker wins the contest, the attack causes no damage or other ill effect, but the defender drops the item.

The attacker has disadvantage on its attack roll if the target is holding the item with two or more hands. The target has advantage on its ability check if it is larger than the attacking creature, or disadvantage if it is smaller.

### MARK

This option makes it easier for melee combatants to harry each other with opportunity attacks.

When a creature makes a melee attack, it can also mark its target. Until the end of the attacker's next turn, any opportunity attack it makes against the marked target has advantage. The opportunity attack doesn't expend the attacker's reaction, but the attacker can't make the attack if anything, such as the incapacitated condition or the *shocking grasp* spell, is preventing it from taking reactions. The attacker is limited to one opportunity attack per turn.

## OVERRUN

When a creature tries to move through a hostile creature's space, the mover can try to force its way through by overrunning the hostile creature. As an action or a bonus action, the mover makes a Strength (Athletics) check contested by the hostile creature's Strength (Athletics) check. The creature attempting the overrun has advantage on this check if it is larger than the hostile creature, or disadvantage if it is smaller. If the mover wins the contest, it can move through the hostile creature's space once this turn.

## SHOVE ASIDE

With this option, a creature uses the special shove attack from the *Player's Handbook* to force a target to the side, rather than away. The attacker has disadvantage on its Strength (Athletics) check when it does so. If that check is successful, the attacker moves the target 5 feet to a different space within its reach.

## TUMBLE

A creature can try to tumble through a hostile creature's space, ducking and weaving past the opponent. As an action or a bonus action, the tumbler makes a Dexterity (Acrobatics) check contested by the hostile creature's Dexterity (Acrobatics) check. If the tumbler wins the contest, it can move through the hostile creature's space once this turn.

## HITTING COVER

When a ranged attack misses a target that has cover, you can use this optional rule to determine whether the cover was struck by the attack.

First, determine whether the attack roll would have hit the protected target without the cover. If the attack roll falls within a range low enough to miss the target but high enough to strike the target if there had been no cover, the object used for cover is struck. If a creature is providing cover for the missed creature and the attack roll exceeds the AC of the covering creature, the covering creature is hit.

## CLEAVING THROUGH CREATURES

If your player characters regularly fight hordes of lower-level monsters, consider using this optional rule to help speed up such fights.

When a melee attack reduces an undamaged creature to 0 hit points, any excess damage from that attack might carry over to another creature nearby. The attacker targets another creature within reach and, if the original attack roll can hit it, applies any remaining damage to it. If that creature was undamaged and is likewise reduced to 0 hit points, repeat this process, carrying over the remaining damage until there are no valid targets, or until the damage carried over fails to reduce an undamaged creature to 0 hit points.

## INJURIES

Damage normally leaves no lingering effects. This option introduces the potential for long-term injuries.

It's up to you to decide when to check for a lingering injury. A creature might sustain a lingering injury under the following circumstances:

- When it takes a critical hit
- When it drops to 0 hit points but isn't killed outright
- When it fails a death saving throw by 5 or more

To determine the nature of the injury, roll on the Lingering Injuries table. This table assumes a typical humanoid physiology, but you can adapt the results for creatures with different body types.

## LINGERING INJURIES

d20	Injury
1	<b>Lose an Eye.</b> You have disadvantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight and on ranged attack rolls. Magic such as the <i>regenerate</i> spell can restore the lost eye. If you have no eyes left after sustaining this injury, you're blinded.
2	<b>Lose an Arm or a Hand.</b> You can no longer hold anything with two hands, and you can hold only a single object at a time. Magic such as the <i>regenerate</i> spell can restore the lost appendage.
3	<b>Lose a Foot or Leg.</b> Your speed on foot is halved, and you must use a cane or crutch to move unless you have a peg leg or other prosthesis. You fall prone after using the Dash action. You have disadvantage on Dexterity checks made to balance. Magic such as the <i>regenerate</i> spell can restore the lost appendage.
4	<b>Limp.</b> Your speed on foot is reduced by 5 feet. You must make a DC 10 Dexterity saving throw after using the Dash action. If you fail the save, you fall prone. Magical healing removes the limp.
5–7	<b>Internal Injury.</b> Whenever you attempt an action in combat, you must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, you lose your action and can't use reactions until the start of your next turn. The injury heals if you receive magical healing or if you spend ten days doing nothing but resting.
8–10	<b>Broken Ribs.</b> This has the same effect as Internal Injury above, except that the save DC is 10.
11–13	<b>Horrible Scar.</b> You are disfigured to the extent that the wound can't be easily concealed. You have disadvantage on Charisma (Persuasion) checks and advantage on Charisma (Intimidation) checks. Magical healing of 6th level or higher, such as <i>heal</i> and <i>regenerate</i> , removes the scar.
14–16	<b>Festering Wound.</b> Your hit point maximum is reduced by 1 every 24 hours the wound persists. If your hit point maximum drops to 0, you die. The wound heals if you receive magical healing. Alternatively, someone can tend to the wound and make a DC 15 Wisdom (Medicine) check once every 24 hours. After ten successes, the wound heals.
17–20	<b>Minor Scar.</b> The scar doesn't have any adverse effect. Magical healing of 6th level or higher, such as <i>heal</i> and <i>regenerate</i> , removes the scar.

Instead of using the effect described in the table, you can put the responsibility of representing a character's lingering injury in the hands of the player. Roll on the Lingering Injuries table as usual, but instead of suffering the effect described for that result, that character gains a new flaw with the same name. It's up to the player to express the lingering injury during play, just like any other flaw, with the potential to gain inspiration when the injury affects the character in a meaningful way.

## MASSIVE DAMAGE

This optional rule makes it easier for a creature to be felled by massive damage.

When a creature takes damage from a single source equal to or greater than half its hit point maximum, it must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or suffer a random effect determined by a roll on the System Shock table. For example, a creature that has a hit point maximum of 30 must make that Constitution save if it takes 15 damage or more from a single source.

### SYSTEM SHOCK

d10	Effect
1	The creature drops to 0 hit points.
2–3	The creature drops to 0 hit points but is stable.
4–5	The creature is stunned until the end of its next turn.
6–7	The creature can't take reactions and has disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks until the end of its next turn.
8–10	The creature can't take reactions until the end of its next turn.

## MORALE

Some combatants might run away when a fight turns against them. You can use this optional rule to help determine when monsters and NPCs flee.

A creature might flee under any of the following circumstances:

- The creature is surprised.
- The creature is reduced to half its hit points or fewer for the first time in the battle.
- The creature has no way to harm the opposing side on its turn.

A group of creatures might flee under any of the following circumstances:

- All the creatures in the group are surprised.
- The group's leader is reduced to 0 hit points, incapacitated, taken prisoner, or removed from battle.
- The group is reduced to half its original size with no losses on the opposing side.

To determine whether a creature or group of creatures flees, make a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw for the creature or the group's leader. If the opposition is overwhelming, the saving throw is made with disadvantage, or you can decide that the save fails automatically. If a group's leader can't make the saving throw for whatever reason, have the creature in the group with the next highest Charisma score make the saving throw instead.

On a failed save, the affected creature or group flees by the most expeditious route. If escape is impossible, the creature or group surrenders. If a creature or group that surrenders is attacked by its conquerors, the battle might resume, and it's unlikely that further attempts to flee or surrender will be made.

A failed saving throw isn't always to the adventurers' benefit. For example, an ogre that flees from combat might put the rest of the dungeon on alert or run off with treasure that the characters had hoped to plunder.

## CREATING A MONSTER

The *Monster Manual* contains hundreds of ready-to-play monsters, but it doesn't include every monster that you can imagine. Part of the D&D experience is the simple joy of creating new monsters and customizing existing ones, if for no other reason than to surprise and delight your players with something they've never faced before.

The first step in the process is coming up with the concept for your monster. What makes it unique? Where does it live? What role do you want it to serve in your adventure, your campaign, or your world? What does it look like? Does it have any weird abilities? Once you have the answers to these questions, you can start figuring out how to represent your monster in the game.

## MODIFYING A MONSTER

Once you have an idea for a monster, you'll need statistics to represent it. The first question you should ask yourself is: Can I use statistics that already exist?

A stat block in the *Monster Manual* might make a good starting point for your monster. Imagine, for example, that you want to create an intelligent arboreal predator that hunts elves. There is no such monster in the *Monster Manual*, but the quaggoth is a savage humanoid predator with a climbing speed. You could borrow the quaggoth stat block for your new monster, changing nothing but the creature's name. You can also make minor tweaks, such as replacing the quaggoth's language, Undercommon, with one that's more appropriate, such as Elvish or Sylvan.

Need a fiery phoenix? Take the giant eagle or roc, give it immunity to fire, and allow it to deal fire damage with its attacks. Need a flying monkey? Consider a baboon with wings and a flying speed. Almost any monster you can imagine can be built using one that already exists.

Adapting a stat block is far less time-consuming than creating one from scratch, and there are changes you can make to an existing monster that have no effect on its challenge rating, such as swapping languages, changing its alignment, or adding special senses. However, once you change the creature's offensive or defensive ability, such as its hit points or damage, its challenge rating might need to change, as shown later.

## SWITCHING WEAPONS

If a monster wields a manufactured weapon, you can replace that weapon with a different one. For example, you could replace a hobgoblin's longsword with a halberd. Don't forget to change the damage and the attack's reach where appropriate. Also be aware of the