

SAGE ADVICE COMPENDIUM

Questions and answers about the rules of fifth edition DUNGEONS & DRAGONS appear in Sage Advice, a monthly column on the D&D website (dnd.wizards.com). This document compiles most of them and organizes them by topic, after first noting what the game's official rules references are.

If you have a question that you'd like addressed in Sage Advice, please email it to sageadvice@wizards.com.

RULES REFERENCES

The fifth edition of D&D has three official rulebooks, each of which was first published in 2014:

- *Player's Handbook* (abbreviated *PH*)
- *Monster Manual* (abbreviated *MM*)
- *Dungeon Master's Guide* (abbreviated *DMG*)

The free *Basic Rules* contains portions of those three books and can be downloaded here:

<http://dnd.wizards.com/articles/features/basicrules>

Play in the Adventurers' League, the D&D organized play program, is also governed by the Adventurers League Player's Guide.

ERRATA

In June of 2015, a modest number of corrections were issued for the first two printings of the *Player's Handbook* and can be downloaded here:

http://dnd.wizards.com/articles/features/ph_errata

The corrections have been incorporated into more recent printings of the book, as well as into the *Basic Rules*. A corrected version of the book includes the following text toward the bottom of its credits page:

This printing includes corrections to the first printing.

OFFICIAL RULINGS

Official rulings on how to interpret unclear rules are made in Sage Advice. The public statements of the D&D team, or anyone else at Wizards of the Coast, are not official rulings; they are advice. One exception: the game's rules manager, Jeremy Crawford (@JeremyECrawford), can make official rulings and usually does so in Sage Advice.

COMPILED ANSWERS

Sage Advice answers that are relevant to the current state of the rules are compiled here. In other words, an answer that has become obsolete isn't included in this compilation.

THE ROLE OF RULES

Why even have a column like Sage Advice when a DM can just make a ruling? Rules are a big part of what makes D&D a game, rather than simply improvised storytelling. The game's rules are meant to help organize, and even inspire, the action of a D&D campaign. The rules are a tool, and we want our tools to be as effective as possible. No matter how good those tools might be, they need a group of players to bring them to life and a DM to guide their use.

The DM is key. Many unexpected things can happen in a D&D campaign, and no set of rules could reasonably account for every contingency. If the rules tried to do so, the game would become unplayable. An alternative would be for the rules to severely limit what characters can do, which would be counter to the open-endedness of D&D. The direction we chose for the current edition was to lay a foundation of rules that a DM could build on, and we embraced the DM's role as the bridge between the things the rules address and the things they don't.

In a typical D&D session, a DM makes numerous rules decisions—some barely noticeable and others quite obvious. Players also interpret the rules, and the whole group keeps the game running. There are times, though, when the design intent of a rule isn't clear or when one rule seems to contradict another.

Dealing with those situations is where Sage Advice comes in. This column doesn't replace a DM's adjudication. Just as the rules do, the column is meant to give DMs, as well as players, tools for tuning the game according to their tastes. The column should also reveal some perspectives that help you see parts of the game in a new light and that aid you in fine-tuning your D&D experience.

When I answer rules questions, I often come at them from one to three different perspectives.

RAW. "Rules as written"—that's what RAW stands for. When I dwell on the RAW interpretation of a rule, I'm studying what the text says in context, without regard to the designers' intent. The text is forced to stand on its own.

Whenever I consider a rule, I start with this perspective; it's important for me to see what you see, not what I wished we'd published or thought we published.

RAI. Some of you are especially interested in knowing the intent behind a rule. That's where RAI comes in: "rules as intended." This approach is all about what the designers meant when they wrote something. In a perfect world, RAW and RAI align perfectly, but sometimes the words on the page don't succeed at communicating the designers' intent. Or perhaps the words succeed with one group of players but fail with another.

When I write about the RAI interpretation of a rule, I'll be pulling back the curtain and letting you know what the D&D team meant when we wrote a certain rule.

RAF. Regardless of what's on the page or what the designers intended, D&D is meant to be fun, and the DM is the ringmaster at each game table. The best DMs shape the game on the fly to bring the most delight to his or her players. Such DMs aim for RAF, "rules as fun."

We expect DMs to depart from the rules when running a particular campaign or when seeking the greatest happiness for a certain group of players. Sometimes my rules answers will include advice on achieving the RAF interpretation of a rule for your group.

I recommend a healthy mix of RAW, RAI, and RAF!

Will there be errata for the core books? Yes. We've been studying Twitter, forums, emails, and our play experiences to find out where the core books need correction. We've started with corrections for the *Player's Handbook* and will then move on to the other books.

Don't expect any dramatic rules changes to show up in the forthcoming errata. We're focusing on straightforward corrections: cutting extraneous words, adding missing ones, and clarifying things that are unclear.

Fifth edition now belongs to the thousands of groups playing it. It would be inappropriate for the design team to use errata as a way to redesign the game. When we come across something that is more of a redesign than a correction, we put it into a queue of things to playtest and possibly publish at a later date. We'll let you know if a redesign is around the corner!

Why does the *Player's Handbook* errata change X and not Y? The errata for the first printing of the *Player's Handbook* sparked a number of questions. Why did we make the changes we made? Why didn't we make other changes? Did we change certain things, such as Empowered Evocation, because they were overpowered?

The answer to such questions is straightforward: we fixed mistakes in the text. The errata fixes text that was incomplete or off the mark in the original printing of the book. In the new edition, the errata process is strictly for the correction of such things. Rebalancing and redesigning game elements is the domain of playtesting, Unearthed Arcana articles, new design, and possible revision later in the edition's lifespan.

We play the game often, and we regularly review Twitter posts, Reddit discussions, website forums, survey results, emails, and customer service reports about the game. You have concerns about the *contagion* spell? We know about them. You feel the Beastmaster is underpowered? We've had our eye on that subclass for a while. In fact, we have a long list of things in the game that we keep an eye on and that we expect to experiment with in the months and years ahead.

But that experimentation is unrelated to errata. Corrections—that's what errata is about. If you read the errata document and think, "We were already playing Empowered Evocation the way it appears in the errata," then the errata process is working as intended. It's not intended to be filled with new design surprises. It's meant to repair spots where we forgot to tell you something, where we inadvertently told you the wrong thing, or where some of you grasped our design intent and others didn't, as a result of the text not being clear enough.

Some monsters have resistance or immunity to damage from nonmagical weapons. How is that affected by the change to unarmed strikes in the PH errata? The change to unarmed strikes is related to a correction coming in the *Monster Manual*. As corrected, unarmed strikes aren't weapons, but a character can use them to make melee weapon attacks. Such strikes aren't meant to bypass a creature's resistance or immunity to bludgeoning damage from nonmagical weapons.

Here's a simple fix to use until the *Monster Manual* errata is released: whenever a stat block refers to resistance or immunity to bludgeoning damage from nonmagical weapons, read that last part as "nonmagical weapon attacks."

ABILITY CHECKS

Are attack rolls and saving throws basically specialized ability checks? They aren't. It's easy to mistake the three rolls as three faces of the same thing, because they each involve rolling a d20, adding any modifiers, and com-

paring the total to a Difficulty Class, and they're all subject to advantage and disadvantage. In short, they share the same procedure for determining success or failure.

Despite this common procedure, the three rolls are separate from each other. If something in the game, like the *guidance* spell, affects one of them, the other two aren't affected unless the rules specifically say so. The next few questions touch on this point again.

If you cast the *hex* spell and choose *Strength* as the affected ability, does the target also have disadvantage on attack rolls and saving throws that use *Strength*? No, the *hex* spell's description says it affects ability checks that use the chosen ability. The description says nothing about affecting attack rolls or saving throws. This means, for example, that if you choose Constitution, the spell's target doesn't suffer disadvantage when trying to maintain concentration on a spell, since concentration requires a Constitution saving throw, not a Constitution check.

Curious about the spell's intent? The spell is meant to be a classic jinx—the sort seen in folklore—that is useful in and out of combat. In combat, the spell provides some extra necrotic damage. Outside combat, you could foil a cunning diplomat, for example, by casting the spell and imposing disadvantage on his or her Charisma checks.

Does the bard's *Jack of All Trades* feature apply to attack rolls and saving throws that don't use the bard's proficiency bonus? Nope. The feature benefits only ability checks. Don't forget that initiative rolls are Dexterity checks, so *Jack of All Trades* can benefit a bard's initiative, assuming the bard isn't already adding his or her proficiency bonus to it.

When you make a *Strength (Athletics)* check to grapple or shove someone, are you making an attack roll? Again, the answer is no. That check is an ability check, so game effects tied to attack rolls don't apply to it. Going back to an earlier question, the *hex* spell could be used to diminish a grappler's effectiveness. And if the grappler's target is under the effect of the Dodge action, that action doesn't inhibit the grapple, since Dodge doesn't affect ability checks.

FEATS

CROSSBOW EXPERT

Is it intentional that the second benefit of *Crossbow Expert* helps ranged spell attacks? Yes, it's intentional. When you make a ranged attack roll within 5 feet of an enemy, you normally suffer disadvantage (*PH*, 195). The second benefit of *Crossbow Expert* prevents you from suffering that disadvantage, whether or not the ranged attack is with a crossbow.

When designing a feat with a narrow use, we consider adding at least one element that can benefit a character more broadly—a bit of mastery that your character brings from one situation to another. The second benefit of *Crossbow Expert* is such an element, as is the first benefit of *Great Weapon Master*. That element in *Crossbow Expert* shows that some of the character's expertise with one type of thing—crossbows, in this case—transfers to other things.

Do the first and third benefits of *Crossbow Expert* turn a hand crossbow into a semiautomatic weapon? The short answer is no.

The first benefit of the feat lets you ignore the loading property (*PH*, 147) of the hand crossbow if you're proficient with that weapon. The upshot is that you can fire it more than once if you have a feature like Extra Attack. You're still limited, however, by the fact that the weapon has the ammunition property (*PH*, 146). The latter property requires you to have a bolt to fire from the hand crossbow, and the hand crossbow isn't going to load itself (unless it's magical or a gnomish invention). You need to load each bolt into the weapon, and doing so requires a hand.

To dig deeper into this point, take a look at the following sentence in the definition of the ammunition property: "Drawing the ammunition from a quiver, case, or other container is part of the attack." The sentence tells us two important things. First, you're assumed to be drawing—that is, extracting with your hand—the ammunition from a container. Second, the act of drawing the ammunition is included in the attack and therefore doesn't require its own action and doesn't use up your free interaction with an object on your turn.

What does that all mean for a hand crossbow? It means Crossbow Expert makes it possible to fire a hand crossbow more than once with a feature like Extra Attack, provided that you have enough ammunition and you have a hand free to load it for each shot.

Does Crossbow Expert let you fire a hand crossbow and then fire it again as a bonus action? It does! Take a look at the feat's third benefit. It says you can attack with a hand crossbow as a bonus action when you use the Attack action to attack with a one-handed weapon. A hand crossbow is a one-handed weapon, so it can, indeed, be used for both attacks, assuming you have a hand free to load the hand crossbow between the two attacks.

LUCKY

How does the Lucky feat interact with advantage and disadvantage? The Lucky feat lets you spend a luck point; roll an extra d20 for an attack roll, ability check, or saving throw; and then choose which d20 to use. This is true no matter how many d20s are in the mix. For example, if you have disadvantage on your attack roll, you could spend a luck point, roll a third d20, and then decide which of the three dice to use. You still have disadvantage, since the feat doesn't say it gets rid of it, but you do get to pick the die.

The Lucky feat is a great example of an exception to a general rule. The general rule I have in mind is the one that tells us how advantage and disadvantage work (*PH*, 173). The specific rule is the Lucky feat, and we know that a specific rule trumps a general rule if they conflict with each other (*PH*, 7).

MAGIC INITIATE

If you're a spellcaster, can you pick your own class when you gain the Magic Initiate feat? Yes, the feat doesn't say you can't. For example, if you're a wizard and gain the Magic Initiate feat, you can choose wizard and thereby learn two more wizard cantrips and another 1st-level wizard spell.

If you have spell slots, can you use them to cast the 1st-level spell you learn with the Magic Initiate feat? Yes, but only if the class you pick for the feat is one of your classes. For example, if you pick sorcerer and you are a sorcerer, the Spellcasting feature for that class tells you that you can use

your spell slots to cast the sorcerer spells you know, so you can use your spell slots to cast the 1st-level sorcerer spell you learn from Magic Initiate. Similarly, if you are a wizard and pick that class for the feat, you learn a 1st-level wizard spell, which you could add to your spellbook and subsequently prepare.

In short, you must follow your character's normal spellcasting rules, which determine whether you can expend spell slots on the 1st-level spell you learn from Magic Initiate.

POLEARM MASTER

Can I add my Strength modifier to the damage of the bonus attack that Polearm Master gives me? Yep! If you have the feat and use the Attack action to attack with a glaive, halberd, or quarterstaff, you can also strike with the weapon's opposite end as a bonus action. For that bonus attack, you add your ability modifier to the attack roll, as you do whenever you attack with that weapon, and if you hit, you add the same ability modifier to the damage roll, which is normal for weapon damage rolls (*PH*, 196).

A specific rule, such as the rule for two-weapon fighting (*PH*, 195), might break the general rule by telling you not to add your ability modifier to the damage. Polearm Master doesn't do that.

SPELLCASTING

SPELL ATTACKS

Can a spell with an attack roll be used as the attack in the Attack action or as part of the Extra Attack feature? The short answer is no.

As explained in the *Player's Handbook*, you can take one action on your turn in combat, in addition to moving. You choose your action from the options available to everyone—options such as Attack, Cast a Spell, and Dash—or you choose from among the special actions you've gained from a class, a feat, or another source.

If you want to cast a spell on your turn, you take the Cast a Spell action. Doing so means you're not taking the Attack action or any other action. It is true that a number of spells, such as *fire bolt* and *ray of frost*, involve making an attack, but you can't make such an attack without first casting the spell that delivers it. In other words, just because something involves an attack doesn't mean the Attack action is being used.

By extension, the Extra Attack feature (given by several classes, including the fighter and paladin) doesn't let you cast extra attack spells. That feature specifically relies on the Attack action, not the Cast a Spell action or any other action.

In summary, to make a spell attack, you have to first cast a spell or use a feature that creates the spell's effect. A game feature, such as Extra Attack, that lets you make an attack doesn't let you cast a spell unless it says it does.

Can you use a melee spell attack to make an opportunity attack? You can't if the spell attack is created by casting a spell. When a creature triggers an opportunity attack from you, you can use your reaction to make a melee attack against it. The opportunity attack doesn't suddenly give you the ability to cast a spell, such as *shocking grasp*.

Each spell has a casting time. A game feature, such as an opportunity attack, doesn't let you bypass that casting

time, unless the feature says otherwise. The War Caster feat is an example of a feature that does let you bypass a 1-action casting time to cast a spell in place of an opportunity attack.

A few monsters can make opportunity attacks with melee spell attacks. Here's how: certain monsters—including the banshee, lich, and specter—have a melee spell attack that isn't delivered by a spell. For example, the banshee's Corrupting Touch action is a melee spell attack but no spell is cast to make it. The banshee can, therefore, make opportunity attacks with Corrupting Touch.

SPELL LEVEL

What level is a spell if you cast it without a spell slot?

Such a spell is cast at its lowest possible level, which is the level that appears near the top of its description. Unless you have a special ability that says otherwise, the only way to increase the level of a spell is to expend a higher-level spell slot when you cast it.

Here are some examples:

- The warlock's Chains of Carceri feature lets a warlock cast *hold monster* without a spell slot. That casting of *hold monster* is, therefore, 5th level, which is the lowest possible level for that spell.
- The warlock's Thief of Five Fates feature lets a warlock cast *bane* with a spell slot, which means the spell is 1st level or higher, depending on the slot that the warlock expends to cast it.
- The monk's Disciple of the Elements feature lets the monk spend ki points, rather than a spell slot, to increase the level of a spell.

This rule is true for player characters and monsters alike, which is why the innate spellcasters in the *Monster Manual* must cast an innate spell at its lowest possible level.

CANTRIPS

If a character has levels in more than one class, do the character's cantrips scale with character level or with the level in a spellcasting class? Cantrips scale with character level. For example, a barbarian 2 / cleric 3 casts *sacred flame* as a 5th-level character.

CASTING TIME

Is there a limit on the number of spells you can cast on your turn? There's no rule that says you can cast only X number of spells on your turn, but there are some practical limits. The main limiting factor is your action. Most spells require an action to cast, and unless you use a feature like the fighter's Action Surge, you have only one action on your turn.

If you cast a spell, such as *healing word*, with a bonus action, you can cast another spell with your action, but that other spell must be a cantrip. Keep in mind that this particular limit is specific to spells that use a bonus action. For instance, if you cast a second spell using Action Surge, you aren't limited to casting a cantrip with it.

Can you also cast a reaction spell on your turn? You sure can! Here's a common way for it to happen: Cornelius the wizard is casting *fireball* on his turn, and his foe casts *counterspell* on him. Cornelius has *counterspell* prepared, so he uses his reaction to cast it and break his foe's *counterspell* before it can stop *fireball*.

COMPONENTS

Does a spell consume its material components? A spell doesn't consume its material components unless its description says it does. For example, the pearl required by the *identify* spell isn't consumed, whereas the diamond required by *raise dead* is used up when you cast the spell.

If a spell's material components are consumed, can a spellcasting focus still be used in place of the consumed component? Nope. A spellcasting focus can be used in place of a material component only if that component has no cost noted in the spell's description and if that component isn't consumed.

What's the amount of interaction needed to use a spellcasting focus? Does it have to be included in the somatic component? If a spell has a material component, you need to handle that component when you cast the spell (*PH*, 203). The same rule applies if you're using a spellcasting focus as the material component.

If a spell has a somatic component, you can use the hand that performs the somatic component to also handle the material component. For example, a wizard who uses an orb as a spellcasting focus could hold a quarterstaff in one hand and the orb in the other, and he could cast *lightning bolt* by using the orb as the spell's material component and the orb hand to perform the spell's somatic component.

Another example: a cleric's holy symbol is emblazoned on her shield. She likes to wade into melee combat with a mace in one hand and a shield in the other. She uses the holy symbol as her spellcasting focus, so she needs to have the shield in hand when she casts a cleric spell that has a material component. If the spell, such as *aid*, also has a somatic component, she can perform that component with the shield hand and keep holding the mace in the other.

If the same cleric casts *cure wounds*, she needs to put the mace or the shield away, because that spell doesn't have a material component but does have a somatic component. She's going to need a free hand to make the spell's gestures. If she had the War Caster feat, she could ignore this restriction.

DURATION

If you're concentrating on a spell, do you need to maintain line of sight with the spell's target or the spell's effect? You don't need to be within line of sight or within range to maintain concentration on a spell, unless a spell's description or other game feature says otherwise.

Can a spellcaster dismiss a spell after casting it? You can't normally dismiss a spell that you cast unless (a) its description says you can or (b) it requires concentration and you decide to end your concentration on it. Otherwise, a spell's magic is unleashed on the environment, and if you want to end it, you need to cast *dispel magic* on it.