

Syllabus

Welcome and Syllabus Overview

- Who am I and why I'm teaching this class?
- I'm opinionated... but there's no wrong way to role play so long as people have fun.
- What's the goal of this class? - to turn players into DMs
- What isn't the goal of this class? – to teach the individual mechanics of D&D 5e

Demo: Minimalist D&D

Discussion: Vocabulary Primer

- Terms: one-shot, campaign, game/campaign setting, game system, character options, random tables, source book, module, scene/encounter, Wizards of the Coast (WotC), Hasbro, open game license (OGL), Systems Reference Document (SRD), Open RPG Creative (ORC) license, Paizo, Pathfinder
- Intro to other game systems
- Check, Difficulty Check (DC) – most RPGs are founded on these two concepts. Everything else in a game system is just gravy.

Self-Graded Quiz – “Find the Checks: Part 1 & 2”

Discussion: Pro tips for running combat

- Adjust Monster Stat Blocks on the fly
- Initiative tracking system
- Fudging numbers
- 6 second rounds
- End of a round actions - Lair Actions - Add more minions – Shake things up!

Discussion: Adventure Design

- One-shot structure template
- What makes a good hook?
- Modular setting development
- How much pre-planning is actually necessary?
- 1-2 details and let the audience fill in the rest – Don't be a Greedy Narrator
- Merchants and shopping – Don't enumerate all the options, just roll for it
- Overcoming creative block - where to get ideas
- Abstract monster template (lvl 3)

Mini-Project 1: NPC development

Mini-Project 2: Level 3 Monster development

Discussion: Soft Skills – Table Management

- Introduction template
- Consider your Audience - Content to avoid
- Intermission (bathroom breaks)
- Table dynamics
- Share the Spot-light
- Encourage Failure
- Let players narrate sometimes
- Min-Maxers
- Don't interrupt the DM!

Masterclass Packet: How to be a Dungeon Master (D&D 5E)

Mini-Project 3: Scene development

Mini-Project 4: Adventure Outline development

Discussion: Group Formation (for a campaign)

- Run one-shots as try-outs
- Time commitment expectations
- Your DMing style - % combat to % roleplay
- A typical LFG posting template
- Observations of on-line vs offline
- Red Flags indicating a poor fit with the group
- Character Alignment

Mini-Project 5: LFG posting

Discussion: Gaming Materials

- Levels of detail - theater of the mind, whiteboard, grid, minis,... props,... VTT
- “Simple” props make “flexible” and “affordable” stories
- Abstract tokens instead of minis
- Legos instead of minis
- Household items as condition trackers
- Whiteboards vs Fancy Maps
- 3rd Party Materials

Discussion: Dungeon Mastering Roadmap

- One-shots to campaigns
- Build up your mental library of modular NPCs, Quests, and scenes you can drop into a campaign on demand
- Meetup
 - Venue selection
- Discord
- roll20
- <https://startplaying.games>
- Dealing with creative self-doubt
- The biggest/truest compliment a player can give... is to return for a second game

Mini-Project 6: Run a short combat scenario – *Time Permitting*

Packet Contents

- Self-Graded Quiz (and grading sheet)
- Mini-Project 1: Template
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 - Example one-shot write-ups
 - Fishy Business
 - A Rude Awakening
 - Snow Angels

Self-Graded Quiz – Find the Checks (and grading sheet)

Part 1

Below are two possible snippets of D&D game play. In both cases, the players rolled successfully for EVERY ROLL!

Draw a slash wherever you think the DM should have stopped the players and asked for a “Check” along the way.

Note: you only do “Check”s when there’s a possibility of failure and negative tangible consequences. Sometimes, a player can retry a “Check” but there should be a real consequence they had to suffer due to each failure.

1. *(Hint: I found 8) The party snuck into the orc encampment. They setup an ambush with several trip-vine traps and a covered pit. Then they hid while one member of the party walked out to bait the orcs into the traps. The orcs chased the bait into the trapped area. The orcs fell into the traps. The party opened fire from their hiding places. After the fight, the party looted the orc bodies for valuables. They found a Magic Gold Tooth in the mouth of one orc.*
2. *(Hint: I found 5) The paladin went to the merchant’s stand. She asked if the merchant had any rope. The merchant had 50ft of rope for sale and asked for 10 gold in return. The paladin asked for a discount. They agreed to 8 gold for the rope. Meanwhile, the rogue slipped in the back behind the merchant. The rogue took a bite out of the merchant’s sandwich. Then the rogue left before the merchant finished with the paladin.*

Part 2

For each “Check” you identified:

- What Difficulty Class (DC) would you assign for the players to meet or beat?
- What D&D 5E skill or attribute modifier would you allow the player to use?
- What would be the consequence of failure?
- Would you allow multiple attempts?
- Would the DC or consequences increase on subsequent attempts?

Grading Sheet

There's no wrong answer! There's no wrong way to D&D so long as people are having fun.

But if you'd like to see how pedantic you are as a DM, you can compare your finds against mine below.

1. *The party **snuck** into the orc encampment. They **setup** an ambush with several trip-vine traps and a covered pit. Then they **hid** while one member of the party walked out to **bait** the orcs into the traps. The orcs ~~chased the bait~~ into the trapped area. The orcs **fell** into the traps. The party **opened fire** from their hiding places. After the fight, the party looted the orc bodies for valuables. They **found** a Magic Gold Tooth in the mouth of one orc.*
2. *The paladin went to the merchant's stand. She asked if the merchant had any **rope**. The merchant had 50ft of rope for sale and asked for 10 gold in return. The paladin asked for a **discount**. They agreed to 8 gold for the rope. Meanwhile, the rogue **slipped** in the back behind the merchant. The rogue **took** a bite out of the merchant's sandwich. Then the rogue **left** before the merchant finished with the paladin.*

1.
 - a. Snuck
 - i. Stealth, DC=15, Failure=Orcs sound an alarm, Repeatable=No
 - b. Setup
 - i. Survival, DC=8, Failure=Accidentally fall in the pit trap and suffer 1d6 fall damage, Repeatable=Yes, Increasing difficulty/consequences=No
 - c. Hid
 - i. Stealth, DC=10, Failure=Orcs see you later on and you're omitted from an ambush round of combat, Repeatable=No
 - d. Bait (got their attention from a distance)
 - i. Performance, DC=8, Failure=Orcs keep their distance while throwing ranged weapons at you, Repeatable=Yes, Increasing difficulty/consequences=Yes
 - e. Chased (ran from)
 - i. Athletics, DC=15, Failure=Orcs start combat against you before you reach the traps(ie orcs get a round of turns against the bait unless their party leaves their hiding places), Repeatable=No
 - f. Fell
 - i. Roll Dexterity for the Orcs, DC=12, Failure=Orc falls into or trips over the trap and is prone. May take 1d6 fall damage in pit trap, Repeatable=No
 - g. Opened fire
 - i. Roll for Hit, DC=AC of the target, Failure=Miss and loss of combat action that turn, Repeatable=Maybe with a class feature (such as a Fighter's Action Surge or a Monk's Flurry of Blows)
 - h. Found
 - i. Investigation, DC=17, Failure=They'll never know they missed the Magic Gold Tooth, Repeatable=No
2.
 - a. Rope
 - i. Roll a d20 to see if rope is in stock, DC=<depends on the type of merchant>, Failure=No Rope for sale, Repeatable=No (but maybe tomorrow?)
 - b. Discount
 - i. Persuasion, DC=16 (this merchant is a tough haggler), Failure=No Discount and the Merchant is low on patience with you, Repeatable=No (but maybe if you come back another day under a different context?)
 - c. Slipped
 - i. Stealth, DC=14 (with advantage due to the paladin's distraction), Failure=Merchant calls the city guards and won't sell to you or the paladin anymore, Repeatable=No
 - d. Took
 - i. Slight of Hand, DC=16 (with advantage due to the paladin's distraction), Failure=Merchant calls the city guards and won't sell to you or the paladin anymore, Repeatable=No
 - e. Left
 - i. Stealth, DC=14 (with advantage due to the paladin's distraction), Failure=Merchant calls the city guards and won't sell to you or the paladin anymore, Repeatable=No

Mini-Project 1: Template

Craft four interesting NPCs to use in your future games.

Who are they and what do they want? Keep it Simple! Let your players' imaginations fill in the gaps. Build a few of these and you can drop them into stories on-demand.

Example

*You see a <Race> Dwarf <Obvious Identifier such as Class/Profession/Age> Baker.
Their distinguishing/memorable visual characteristic is <Something visual> a Monocle.
Their typical mannerism is <Their base modus operadi> highly-stressed.
Their name is <name> Jeff Bakesalot.*

(Optional) The quest they might send the party on is <what does this NPC want?> He's run out of a special moss that he uses in his bread recipe. He's got to bake for a big party in 2 days time. The moss only grows in a monster infested swamp.

You see a <Race>_____ <Obvious Identifier such as Class/Profession/Age>_____.
Their distinguishing/memorable visual characteristic is <Something visual>_____.
Their typical mannerism is <Their base modus operadi>_____.
Their name is <name>_____.
(Optional) The quest they might send the party on is <what does this NPC want?>_____
_____.

You see a <Race>_____ <Obvious Identifier such as Class/Profession/Age>_____.
Their distinguishing/memorable visual characteristic is <Something visual>_____.
Their typical mannerism is <Their base modus operadi>_____.
Their name is <name>_____.
(Optional) The quest they might send the party on is <what does this NPC want?>_____
_____.

You see a <Race>_____ <Obvious Identifier such as Class/Profession/Age>_____.
Their distinguishing/memorable visual characteristic is <Something visual>_____.
Their typical mannerism is <Their base modus operadi>_____.
Their name is <name>_____.
(Optional) The quest they might send the party on is <what does this NPC want?>_____
_____.

You see a <Race>_____ <Obvious Identifier such as Class/Profession/Age>_____.
Their distinguishing/memorable visual characteristic is <Something visual>_____.
Their typical mannerism is <Their base modus operadi>_____.
Their name is <name>_____.
(Optional) The quest they might send the party on is <what does this NPC want?>_____
_____.

Mini-Project 2: Template

Craft a homebrew monster (suitable for combat against a group of level 3 players) from scratch. Use the template provided.

Example

Name: Animated Flying Sock

Creature Type: Construct

Size: Tiny

HP: 15

AC: 14

Weapon Attack: Face Slap, melee (+4 hit), (1d6+1) damage on hit

(Optional) Special: Appear in groups of 3 times the number of players. Players must pass a CON DC=12 save at the end of every round or take the poisoned condition due to the smell.

Template

Name: _____

Creature Type: (Aberration, Beast, Celestial, Construct, Dragon, Elemental, Fey, Fiend, Giant, Humanoid, Monstrosity, Ooze, Plant, or Undead)

Size: (Tiny, Small, Medium, Large, Huge, Gargantuan)

HP: (15 to 30 for individuals in a group) (60-100 for single boss monsters)

AC: (14 to 18)

Weapon Attack: _____ (ranged or melee) (+2 to +4 hit), (1d6+1 to 1d12+3) damage on hit

(Optional) Special: (something extra to make this monster special) (examples: target must pass a save check to avoid a condition when hit, Monster makes 2-3 attacks per turn, Monster doesn't incur opportunity attacks when moving away, Monster can only take damage while in the water, Monster heals 1d20 HP at the end of every round)

Now you try

Name: _____

Creature Type: _____

Size: _____

HP: _____

AC: _____

Weapon Attack: _____, _____ damage on hit

(Optional) Special:

Mini-Project 3: Template

Craft two scenes from scratch.

Template

Time of day: (early, midday, evening, night) _____

Simple Location Description: (Examples: Alley, Market, Shop, Forest, Jungle, Airship, Desert)

What NPCs are there: _____

What Monsters are there: _____

What Quest Hooks are there: _____

Environmental Features: (Examples: Traps? Weather? Physical Obstacles? Plants? Animals?)

Example

Time of day: Midday

Simple Location Description: A busy Alchemist Shop

What NPCs are there: Proprietor Alchemist Finik Bottlesworth, a dozen random customers

What Monsters are there: Finik's Evil Cat (who will soon drink a growth potion and attack)

What Quest Hooks are there: Defend the people from the cat. Check in on a late shipment of glass vials along the main road

Environmental Features: Magical Bunsen Burners on the counters. A vaporous wild magic potion is spilled during any combat and fills the air

Now you try

Time of day: _____

Simple Location Description: _____

What NPCs are there: _____

What Monsters are there: _____

What Quest Hooks are there: _____

Environmental Features: _____

Time of day: _____

Simple Location Description: _____

What NPCs are there: _____

What Monsters are there: _____

What Quest Hooks are there: _____

Environmental Features: _____

Mini-Project 4: Template

Craft an adventure outline

Example

See the 3 example one-shot write-ups in the appendix at the end of this packet

Template

Theme: _____

Adventure Hook/Quest: _____

Quest Reward or Motivation: _____

First Scene Introduction: _____

Important NPCs: _____

List/Sequence of Scenes: _____

Secrets and Clues: _____

Mini-Project 5: Template

Below is a template commonly used for announcing online games. Whether you are playing online or in-person, it's good to cover all of these details in your announcement.

Try penciling in some answers for a future game you might run.

Dungeon Master: _____

When: _____ at _____

Duration: ____ hours

Newbie Friendly: _____

Requirements: _____

Characters: _____

Ages: _____

Mature Content: _____

Number of Openings: ____

Description:

Below is one of my previous Discord Game Announcements as an example

Dungeon Master: @David

When: Saturday, <month> the <day>, 2024 7:00 PM

Duration: 3 hours

Newbie Friendly: Yes

Requirements: Computer, Mic, Discord

Characters: Pregens will be provided

Ages: 18+

Mature Content: Yes

Number of Openings: 5

Description: An introductory one-shot using the Cypher system

(<https://cypher-system.com/what-is-the-cypher-system/>) running in the Numenera setting

(<https://numenera.com/>). There will be heavy theater of the mind. I'll give you some characters to pick from. I'll likely use Discord Screensharing to bring up visuals as needed. All you'll need are basic role playing dice,... or an app to roll dice on. I'll be explaining the rules as we go along.

Appendix

Introductions Template

I always start my pickup games with the following intro format. It helps establish that I'm the host of the event and manages some expectations for the night. It also helps players to get out of their shells a bit. Feel free to steal and modify this for your own use in your future pickup games.

Hi everyone. My name is <your name>. I am the host and dungeon master of our game tonight. By day, I'm a <your day job/profession> and by night I like playing roleplay games because <reason you like role playing>. I will be roleplaying all the character whom you are not tonight.

What you can expect for tonight is that we'll go from <start time> right up to <end time>. We'll go right up till <end time> and simply close things off with a "And they lived happily ever after". This is a one-shot. We're here to simply enjoy the journey, ... so I'd rather give players the freedom to roam about in the story without worrying about bringing the plot of the story to a natural conclusion by a certain time. Somewhere in the middle of the game I'll call for an intermission/bathroom break (at least for my own needs). If any of you need to get up for whatever reason (bathroom, smoke, phone call, anxiety, etc...) at any time, feel free to do so. However, ideally you'd time things so you're at least present when it's your turn during any combat encounters.

If you have any questions, feel free to ask them. I always cater to the newest newbie. Sometimes I may even pause the game to explain a concept that I think is important to know; even if nobody asked.

I have one home rule for all my pickup games. That is that "everyone starts with 1 additional basic healing potion (which heals for 2d4+2)". Characters can drink their own for a bonus action or force feed it to someone else for an action during combat moments. This is to make it so we don't need to worry about having a full-time healer in our group composition.

Now, ... I'd like to ask that each of you introduce yourselves. I suggest a format similar to how I introduced myself a minute ago. That's name, what you do for a living, and what excites you about roleplaying.

Once you've introduced yourself, let's introduce your character for tonight. We're starting under the assumption that your characters are all part of an adventuring party. You unlikely know each other's full backstory. But, you'd at least know the basics such as name, race, and class. Let's go around the table starting with <pick a player that's done this before>.

Example one-shot write-ups

I wanted to send you home with a few polished adventures you can start with immediately. These three adventures are from a book called One-shot Wonders by Roll and Play Press (a book of over 100 one-shot ideas in a similar format).

If you like these and want more, I suggest you support the author and purchase the book or pdf here: <https://rollandplaypress.com/products/one-shot-wonders>

You can download these three adventures as PDFs for free from their shop here: <https://rollandplaypress.com/collections/free-content>

Attached PDFs: Snow Angels, Fishy Business, A Rude Awakening