

# A Blast From the Past: Wizarding 101

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## **Why Another Wizard's Guide?**

So D&D 5e has been out for a bit now, and we've seen some excellent wizards guides already circulating (particularly this one from [TheBigHouse](#) which, admittedly, is very influential to my own thinking.) Does humanity need another D&D wizard's guide the way it needs world peace, hoverboards, or a new kind of super glue that sticks to other things better than your own fingers? Well no. But I've always liked playing wizards, reading guides like this are always helpful for me and I just felt like it. So there. This guide is mainly for me! Don't like it, don't read it!

Actually I've just been thinking a lot about these things (yes, which means I'm a bit of a geek. Perhaps there was enough processing power somewhere in my brain to cure some disease, engineer a spacecraft that could travel to Mars without smacking into it like a dart, or figure out a way to put papercut-free rounded edges onto paper but, alas...my brain produced this instead.) At any rate for wizard players new and old, I hope there's something here of value. Or at least some interesting stuff to debate (please be kind!)

## **Wizarding Across Editions**

First, it's kind of interesting to consider how the wizard (or mage/magic user, etc.) has evolved over the various editions of D&D. For most of its existence in D&D, wizards have kind of combined Vancian book-learning with a witch-like obsession with eyes of newts, bat guano and various other "components" that help explain why wizards spend so many of their Friday nights in the library rather than with more passionate pursuits. Compare this to the more spontaneous spellcasting that seems to be portrayed in many fictional portrayals of wizards and mages, whether *Lord of the Rings* or *The Wheel of Time*. But this Vancian system became a useful platform for the wizard and, let's be frank, one of the few limitations on their power, particularly at high level.

Through the first three editions of D&D (1e, 2e, 3e, and all the various Basics and Expert editions), the progression of the wizard was pretty similar. They effectively spent 4 levels of utter uselessness, before bursting on the scene with Fireball or Lightning Bolt and increasingly dominating from that point forward. Early career wizards spent a lot of time tossing daggers or, later, crossbow bolts, husbanding their few spells for when they might be useful. Sure, the occasional sleep spell could end a battle, but for the most part it was embarrassing they even got a full share of the party spoils. Once fireball kicked in (and sometimes lightning bolt depending

on how useful the edition made that spell), things changed. The balance between wizard and, essentially, everybody else sort of maintained between levels 5-10, maybe, but once double digit levels came along, the wizard could sling death pretty reliably, and the rest of the party often felt like the guys and gals who held the wizard's bags.

This, of course, was one of the biggest controversies of the wizard class. This power curve left a lot of people unhappy. Wizard players felt useless at low levels, whereas everybody else resented becoming little more than arrow-catchers by the high levels. Oddly enough, 3e's efforts to address likeability problems with the cleric class (many players hated being big band-aids which could get pretty dull), made the cleric overpowered as well. Lots of players claimed that the cleric could do the fighter's job better than the fighter, and with spells like Destruction and Harm, clerics became killers. At high levels a party of clerics and mages could do just fine on their own, perhaps with a rogue to occasionally hold a door open for them.

This changed with 4e, an edition I'd say had lots of great ideas, but ultimately came undone through poor strategic planning, failure to close exploits, and rigidity over the "role" system. The addition of Essentials to 4e ultimately created a lot of confusion with variants of the same class existing side-by-side. 4e just never seemed to know where it was going, although it's good to see that 5e has carried forward some of the best ideas from 4e, such as at-will attack cantrips.

But, for the wizard, 4e felt like kind of a bust. Sure, this is a personal opinion. But 4e's obsession with class roles put the wizard as a controller. To be sure, the wizard *can* be an effective controller. But for a lot of folks (your kindly author included), blasting is one of the main joys of the wizard. Coupled with the loss of the Vancian system (all classes used the same at-will, encounter, daily power system), the wizard just didn't feel like the wizard anymore. That's not to say some people didn't love playing the new wizard, just that it was a disappointing step away from the classic wizard. Sure, Fireball was still there but *eh*. Wizards just weren't meant to blow things up anymore...that was the Sorcerer's job now. Some of the wizard's flexibility felt lost, at least in the sense of being able to pick between different roles. Now you were kind of shoehorned into a particular role.

The addition of at-will attack spells was a boon, however, one of 4e's best ideas. No more running around with crossbows or daggers. You could do useful stuff, magic stuff, consistently right from first level. 4e fiddled with various wizard subclasses...there was an evoker that tried to bring some blasting back to the wizard. Most other subclasses felt substandard...I tried the awful necromancer briefly, and the poor witch subclass didn't even look worth trying (as a side note I've always been a fan of the 1e witch from the original Dragon Magazine #114. That D&D has never successfully replicated this class in subsequent editions seems like a remarkable oversight. Even Pathfinder has a decent witch class.) Bladesinger was the one standout. Sure, it wasn't a typical wizard anyway, but wizard as melee striker was a lot of fun.

Thus, enter 5e. In designing 5e, WotC seemed intent on addressing the concerns of previous editions, regarding balance, while returning the overall “feel” of the wizard that was lost in 4e. Overall, I’d say they’ve done a nice job with a few goofs (like a remarkably ungenerous number of higher level spell slots). Early playtest versions of the wizard appeared to go too far in nerfing the class, but from what I’ve seen the final version gets the balance close to just about right. There’s still some of that power curve, from low level to high, but it appears to be smoothed out compared to previous editions. The old Vancian system of picking all spells for the day in advance has been replaced with a kind of pseudo-Vancian system, in which the wizard picks a limited number of spells each day, but can cast them through spell slots spontaneously. This new flexibility compared to the old Vancian system (where all spell slots had to be filled in advance, inevitably wasting some) appears to be a trade-off for fewer spell slots overall. 5e also carried forward at-will cantrips, avoiding the need for daggers and crossbows to feel even remotely useful in most combats. Most of the classic spells are back. I think players who liked the old-school wizards will like what 5e came up with.

### **The Role of a Wizard in a Group**

The most basic and obvious answer is that the wizard is the guy who pours magic on any problem to (hopefully) make it go away. That and being good with the knowledge skills usually rank as the biggest contributions of the typical wizard. Sure the party’s front line combat sorts will be flexing their muscles and getting all the girls (or boys), but we know who’s really most important to getting the job done.

That having been said, the wizard is actually fairly flexible and can fulfill different roles in the group. Indeed, it’s possible to have two wizards with different builds and spell selections perform rather different roles. Want to blast things with Fireballs? We’ve got that. Want to be a seductive enchanter/enchantress who uses charm to manipulate politics? We’ve got that too. Prefer to be a spy, using illusions and disguises to infiltrate? This we also have. Battlefield control? Check. Party buffing? Check. Enemy debuffing? Check. Raise hordes of minions, undead or otherwise? Check and check. That’s really one of the biggest benefits of the wizard (and hence my beef with 4e) is that it can be molded to multiple play styles.

Aside from bladesinger, though, or the various shape changing spells, your role in battle is as artillery. NOT GETTING HIT is going to be a large part of the strategy for most wizards. While the guys with armor go bruising with the enemy, the wizard fires away from afar.

### **Wizards v Sorcerers v Warlocks**

So you think you want to play something arcane that blasts stuff (hence leaving the bard out. The bard is probably different enough from the other arcane casters to be left out here) but aren’t sure what the difference in play is between the sorc, wizard and warlock? Here are a few thoughts on this.

The warlock is probably the easiest to differentiate. The 5e warlock is actually rather nicely developed, taking some of the best ideas from the 3e and 4e warlocks, while also giving the option to develop them into a hexblade-like melee warlock (update: a hexblade, of course, not exists in Unearthed Arcana (UA)). Aside from those “bladelocks” most warlocks will focus their damage around their eldritch blast cantrip, which is the best damage cantrip in the game, particularly once enhanced with invocations. So, for damage, the warlock can feel a bit like a one-trick pony, although it’s a pretty good trick. Aside from eldritch blast, warlocks do get spells and invocations (which are spell-like abilities, usually non-damaging). Unless you pick the Fiend patron which gets you Fireball and Flame-Strike, most of the warlock spells are non-damage types. These range from things like dispel, to dream, to plane shift. The 4th level spell, Banishment is probably a good example of a typical warlock spell. It’s a damned good spell, but not damage oriented. Some of the warlock spells are very good, but the warlock has a narrower range to choose from than either wizard or sorc. The warlock has a very neat feel to it, and is enjoyable to play, but if you’re going for the traditional wizard feel, this isn’t quite it.

This brings us to the wizard and sorcerer, the two arcane classes that probably compete to the greatest degree for role in the group. Both have advantages and disadvantages. I’ve seen other debates about which is “better” but honestly both are good, and it really depends on what you’re going for. Sorcerer is CHA-based, whereas wizard is INT-based. This will affect things like skills. Sorcs being bad at Arcana has always felt weird. The two classes have nearly identical spell lists, and the same spell slots per day. The wizard’s big advantages are the sheer range of spells they can access, and they have far and away the best flexibility in the game for arcane casters. The wizard’s access to arcane spells is effectively limitless if you have the time and gold to expand the spellbook. The wizard is also able to use rituals, which provides a nice boon in utility spells the wizard does not need to bother preparing or spending spell slots on. This is good. By contrast the sorcerer gets sorcery points and meta-magic. The sorcerers also get the various Draconic/Wild Magic/Storm bloodlines, whereas wizards have arcane traditions. Overall, I’d say the bloodlines are a little better than arcane traditions. Meta-magic can be amazing...the sorcerer will certainly look smug when he/she tosses a twinned Disintegrate into combat.

Nonetheless, the sorcerer has a much more limited spell selection, and between arcane recovery and ritual magic, the wizard probably ends up with effectively more spells per day. With an expanded and flexible spell selection, the wizard is also much better on the utility side, able to have access to spells that are useful but situational that the sorc would likely not bother with. So basically if you want a small selection of spells that you are particularly good at, go for the sorc. If you prefer more flexibility and range of casting while still being good (although no twinning, sadly), go wizard. The bloodlines and arcane traditions will give you a range of other perks, but overall I’d say the two main arcane caster/blaster classes are very nearly evenly matched. Both are fun and well-designed.

## Color Coding of Options

What follows is, I believe, the standard color code for recommendations for options. If it's not, blame TheBigHouse as I swiped it from him:

**Gold.** Gold is good. You want gold. You will want this option. This will be an option almost any wizard would benefit from. Sure, you might be the weird exception, and if so more power to you. Don't say I didn't tell you so...

**Sky Blue.** An optimal choice. Not must have maybe, but you could do a lot worse.

**Blue.** Still a decent choice although it may have a few minor drawbacks.

**Black.** Black is ok. By this point, unless you know what you're doing, there are probably better options. Of course you might have a particularly reason for dipping this low and God bless ye if you do, but you might want to take a closer look at the, you know, gold, blue and sky blue options?

**Purple.** Purple is not good. Hey it's my favorite color (followed, oddly, by red), but here, no, sorry. If you insist on taking one of these options I'm assuming you liked a previous edition's version of this option and can't let it go.

**Red.** Have you simply gone mad?

## Races

Ok, so of course, play what you want, whatever matches your concept. Want to play a half-orc wizard, you know what? Go for it and my hat's off to you. Surely dwarves must have wizards, but I imagine those dwarf wizards must curse the racist gods that made them the special projects of their wizarding schools.

Of course the main things for the races are, primarily to buff intelligence, secondarily, perhaps dexterity or constitution. Races that don't buff any of these three at all are going to be your worst choices. Other races may have some cool stuff. but watch those stats bonuses. So here are your options as they stand.

**Aarakocra:** Birds, huh? Well I suppose if this character doesn't work out for the party, they can always eat him/her. No int bonus, but what were you expecting (bird brained and all that). Still, the dex bonus is nice and the wis bonus may give you a little elevation on your primary save. The flying is a big boon and will save you the effort of having to pick or get those spells down the road. Oh, and, yay, you can attack people with your talons. But if you're getting your wizard purposefully that far into combat to use them you're a, you guessed it, bird brain. Sorry, I'll stop now.

**Aasimar:** These are the 5e version of 4e's devas and look pretty similar overall. Major drawback here is the lack of useful stats bonuses. Some useful secondary abilities, but really these are better for sorcs I think. I like Aasimar overall, just not for wizard.

**Changeling:** Small dex bonus, but eh. I found the 5e changeling to be underwhelming altogether, but definitely not right for wizard.

**Dragonborn:** Awesome race, just not for wizards. Do you see any lizards hanging around your local library? Me either.

**Dwarf:** I really like the idea of a dwarf wizard just because it's so against stereotype. Unfortunately, dwarves just weren't built with wizards in mind. The con bonus is nice, but I'd put that third down your list of stat priorities (behind int and dex). The toughness and armor proficiencies of various dwarf subtypes have potential. But all told this isn't a great choice, practically.

**Elf:** The utility of elves vary a bit from one subtype to the next. Dex bonus, darkvision, and fey ancestry provide a nice overall platform. Trance can also be curiously useful if you need to cram some spell scribing into an otherwise full day. High elves are **sky blue** with an int bonus and extra cantrip.

**Genasi:** The big boon here is the con bonus. Of the subtypes, fire gives a +1 int bonus, which with fire resistance, raises that to **blue**. Air, is next best, with a +1 dex, but, overall, these are choices mainly if you just want to play a genasi, no matter what.

**Gnome:** +2 to int make gnome a great pick for wizard. Advantage on saving throws against magic, darkvision, decent options among the subtypes. Admittedly I've never cared much to play gnomes (I just can't get around the Garden variety). You could do a lot worse though.

**Goliath:** You want to play a goliath wizard just to be funny? Go for it.

**Half Elf:** Not a bad option, particularly if you're looking to add charisma into the build. +1 int, with extra skills (wizards always seem to feel a bit skill starved), fey ancestry and darkvision.

**Half Orc:** Like goliath, this is the choice you make if you're inclined to punk the other players.

**Halfling:** The +2 dex keeps this from being awful, but there's otherwise not much here for the wizard.

**Human variant:** I'm sort of assuming most groups are allowing the variant human. Non-variant humans are "eh", but variants will get a +1 int, +1 dex (or con if you prefer), along with extra skill and a feat. The feat at level 1 can be huge. Granted, wizards don't seem quite so feat dependent as other builds, but grabbing resilience for con or dex could be nice.

**Minotaur:** The +1 int keeps this in the black, but otherwise minotaur, predictably, isn't really built for artillery casters. If you have a particularly build in mind this could work well but for the "typical" wizard there are better choices.

**Shifter:** Possibility to get a +2 dex with some subtypes isn't bad. Like the minotaur, this could work if you have a particular build in mind. For standard wizards, clearly better options out there.

**Tiefling:** Although they seem built with the sorc in mind, Tiefs have a lot to offer wizards, particularly if you want to bring charisma into the build. +1 int isn't bad, with fire resistance, darkvision and access to the fine hellish rebuke reaction spell. For people planning to MC wizard with sorcerer this could be [sky blue](#), although I'm not sure I'd recommend that path.

**Warforged:** Overall I was underwhelmed with the warforged. Definitely not much here for the wizard. The +1AC is nice, but otherwise "eh."

## Stats

**Intelligence:** This should be rather obvious and require little explanation.

**Dexterity:** I think there's an interesting debate to be had about dex versus con...if you can only pump one, which should you pump? I'd say dex. Generally, NOT GETTING HIT is your goal, and dex helps with this plus being caught in the occasional blast spell. This should generally be your next priority after int.

**Constitution:** More hps are good.

**Charisma:** Honestly, whether charisma or wisdom comes next kind of depends on the build you have in mind. Enchanters will probably want to boost charisma more, but other builds may as well. Charisma opens up some different skill options, particularly for a game high in social interactions. Charisma also gives bonuses against spells that save v charisma. They're few, granted, but often pretty awful to fail a save on.

**Wisdom:** Helps boost your best save, which is the main benefit here. Still, odds are good, unless you're going for a wizard/cleric MC that this score will be fairly low, so bonuses to perception and insight skills may be low. Those are great skills to have, but honestly, there's so much drain on skills for wizards, it might be ok to let those go...

**Strength:** Unless you've got some particular Minotaur grappling build in mind, you don't need strength. Safe dump stat.

## Skills

**Acrobatics:** You'll likely have the dex bonus for this, but seriously are you planning to do cartwheels while you cast spells? There's too much demand on your skills for this unless you have a particular build in mind.

**Animal Handling:** Eh, no. Save this for the druid or ranger. Why are you bringing animals into the library? Didn't you see the sign?

**Arcana:** Seriously, if you're not taking this, you're just trying to punk your group again.

**Athletics:** You were supposed to dump strength, remember?



**Deception:** If you went with a build that boosted charisma, this is a good choice, especially for socially heavy games. If you didn't pump charisma at all, obviously avoid.

**History:** A strong skill option for you, but how much use it will come in will vary between games. Still, knowledge skills are usually the proclivity of the mage, so this is a strong option. If your game is more hack and slash, it may be a less necessary choice.

**Insight:** A great skill to have but unless you pumped wis, you're going to be bad at it.

**Intimidation:** Nah, even if you pumped charisma, you're better going with deception or persuasion. Are you really scared of the skinny guy with glasses?

**Investigation:** Tempted to go gold. It's a great skill that comes into play fairly often, and plays off intelligence, so this one should be for you.

**Medicine:** You're supposed to be blasting things, not healing them. Unless you pumped wis you'll probably be doing more damage than good anyway.

**Nature:** It's an int ability, but seems better for the ranger or druid. Granted, you might actually be better at this since int is your primary stat. But with so much drain on your skills, if you can let someone else take this, let them.

**Perception:** Probably one of the most often used skills in the game. Unfortunately with a low wis you're going to be bad at it. If you've got room in your skill choices for this I'd say grab it, but odds are good others in your group will already have this and be better at it.

**Performance:** There's no particular need to have this unless you're doing it for fluff.

**Persuasion:** If you've boosted charisma at all and you're playing a reasonably social game, this is worth picking up. Comes in handy fairly often.

**Religion:** Although you'd think this would go to the cleric or paladin, this is int based and, thus clearly in your territory. Feels a little more relevant than nature although, honestly, these two knowledge skills have the same issue: feel like they belong to another party member, but you're probably better at it than them.

**Sleight of Hand:** Even though you've got a good dex, this is probably a trap choice unless you know what you're doing. For most builds this will come into play never. And trying to mess with it and failing often brings severe social consequences. However, if you're trying to build some kind of arcane spy, that changes things and this could be a **really good** choice for a purposeful build. But, unless you know what you're doing, avoid.

**Stealth:** Builds off your dex and very useful for keeping out of trouble. Should be a priority after the knowledge skills. Indeed you might sacrifice a knowledge skill to make sure you have this.

**Survival:** Eh you'll be bad at this and even if you insist on dipping into a wis skill it should be perception.

## Feats

Unless you're picking up a 1st level feat from the variant human, feats come at a significant cost, namely reduced ability to pump your primary stat. For most wizard builds, pumping intelligence to 20 as early as possible is always going to be a good idea. It controls your save DCs and the number of spells you prepare each day (and if you're an evoker, added damage to your spells). Wizards also don't depend on feats quite as much as some builds might. That having been said there definitely are some feats worth considering...and plenty of traps.

There are some feats that are clearly physical combat oriented, so I'm going to ignore those here and focus on feats you're more likely to consider as a wizard.

**Alert:** The big draw here is really the +5 to initiative. Being able to unload a blast spell on the bad guys while they're still clustered at the beginning of a fight (and the party's oaf tank hasn't blundered straight into the middle of them complicating your AoE placement) is a good thing. Overall this is a solid feat. Not absolutely necessary, but a good choice if you're looking for one.

**Athlete:** If your dex is on an odd number and you're looking to boost it by 1 and pick up a few other things, then maybe, but honestly you should just pick up resilient to boost your dex. For a bladesinger this is a little better, probably **black**.

**Actor:** Ok, so first off, why does actor come after alert and athlete in the PHB? Doesn't WotC have copy editors? But whatever. So, in a way this obviously isn't a huge priority feat because it boosts charisma. However, particularly if you're building an enchanter, or if you have a spy build, this is a pretty good feat. Definitely not for all builds, or even most, but for a charisma heavy build, you could do worse.

**Charger:** I'm trying to consider feats that might be useful for bladesingers and this feat is certainly only for them. For most other wizard builds this is clearly **awful**. Getting better damage on a charge is not a bad thing though for gish builds.

**Defensive Duelist:** This is another bladesinger/gish only feat. Essentially like shield, but without needing to cast it (the bonus to AC is your proficiency bonus). For non-bladesingers this is a **trap** choice.

**Dragonmark:** Meant for Eberron games. Get a few extra spells that don't count against your daily allotment. Watch the relevant ability to make sure it's worth it for you. I wouldn't bother with most of them, but adding a little **healing** in could be a good way to give your wizard a witchy feel if you've got the wisdom for it.

**Dungeon Delver:** Lots of bonuses for secret doors and traps but, eh, the rogue should be doing this, not you.

**Durable:** Bonus to con is nice but resilient is better.

**Elemental Adept:** Not awful, particularly if you really intend to build a wizard around a single damage type (presumably fire). But if you try this, I think it will cause more problems than anything else. Just diversify damage types in your spellbook.

**Healer:** Not a bad feat, but you're not the one to take it. Too many better options. Leave this to the cleric or paladin.

**Inspiring Leader:** Same basic issue as healer. Not bad, particularly if you've got a charisma build, but there are too many other better options.

**Keen Mind:** Eh, of all the ability benefiting feats, intelligence really lost out compared to some of the other abilities. When, after a TPK, have you ever found yourselves lamenting, "If only one of us knew which way was North..."

**Lightly armored:** Nah, trap choice. I get that casting mage armor is a spell tax, but blowing a feat is worse. You'd do better sucking up a MC to get medium or heavy armor, but this is too much cost for the benefit.

**Linguist:** How do you say "meh" in three different languages?

**Lucky:** Now this is a feat potentially worth putting off some int bonuses for a bit. Three free rerolls per LR, for most d20 rolls you might make or for attacking enemy d20 rolls. This can, indeed, change fate. Keep in mind too that this is separate from disadvantage and advantage. So if a critter has advantage on the attack roll, you can force a reroll after it's made two advantage rolls and it still takes the lowest roll of three. If you are a diviner and combine this with portent to be able to manipulate fate five separate times per LR, I think this is an **incredible** way to control a lot of fate for you and your group.

**Mage Slayer:** Another interesting option for bladesingers. Just **awful** for all other mages. Bladesingers don't really want to be going after the other side's tanks, so using them to move in on softer, squishier, arcane casting targets is not a bad idea.

**Magic Initiate:** For the right build maybe. Mainly going to work if you're looking to add a little cleric into your casting. Probably not worth it for other classes.

**Martial Adept:** Bladesingers may rub their chin looking at this, but it's a trap choice for them. One d6 superiority dice? Pfft. Already an awesomely bad choice for all other wizard builds. Is there a color worse than red?

**Mobile:** Bladesingers only once again. This looks to be an absurdly good boost to the bladesong...movement speed will be 50...50! And you can use that movement to move in, hit a critter, then run away behind the tank without taking a OA from your target. That's really, really not bad. **Not good at all** for most other wizard builds.

**Observant:** Clearly the best of the +1 int feats. Take this one, not those other lemons, unless you have a particular scheme in mind. +5 bonus to passive perception and investigation makes it worth it (although I agree with TheBigHouse that the idea of passive investigation just seems weird. 'Oh look, I just solved a murder without meaning to...')

**Resilient:** One of the best feat choices for wizard. Get proficiency on those awful dex and con saves. Wizards have the worst save options in the game, so this is the best way to fix that. For bladesingers, picking up con resiliency may be close to **gold**.

**Ritual Caster:** So you're already a ritual caster, remember. You can use this to grab 2 1st level rituals from another class, but is that really worth a feat? True, you might pick up more down the line that happen to be on scrolls...but which class tends to have the most spells written down on stuff? You guessed it...wizard. Nobody else really bothers to write stuff down which is really annoying...

**Sentinel:** A possibility for bladesingers, but bladesingers should probably focus more on mobility rather than being a block. As usual, **awful** for most other wizard builds.

**Skilled:** Not a great use of a feat for most games. True, you can always use more skills, but I think there are better feat options.

**Spell Sniper:** Very nearly a trap choice for wizard. You're not very dependent on ranged attack roll spells which is mainly what this benefits.

**Tough:** 2xlevel hps is not bad, but mainly you should be trying not to get hit in the first place. Maybe **better** for bladesingers, but overall, meh.

**War caster:** For most wizards, this is a surprisingly meh choice. Advantage on con saves for concentration is nice, but resilience for con would be better, and most of these effects won't come into play much. For **bladesingers** though, this is a lot better.

## **Multiclassing/Prestige Classes**

Multiclassing for arcane classes has always been difficult to the degree that multiclassing delays spell progression. 5e tries to remedy this somewhat by allowing spell slots to continue to advance by combining caster levels for casting classes. That's better than previous editions, but you still take a hit in spells known. So, for instance, if you're a wizard 4/cleric 1, you have the spell slots of a 5th level caster, including two 3rd level spell slots. However, you don't know any third level spells, nor can you prepare them. Which means you can only use those third level slots to elevate 2nd level spells, while your 5th level straight wizards are casting fireball.

So multiclassing still comes with significant delay costs in spells known, and, of course, other class features such as those from your arcane tradition. The difficult thing is, if you were to build a 20th level character, adding in 2 levels of multiclass isn't a bad idea (trading away 1 round of ability score improvements and signature spell could very well be worth it). The trick is, however, when to put in those 2 levels? At almost any point in your advancement to that point, you're going to delay stuff you want...those precious 3rd level spells, the later arcane tradition benefits...the wish spell!

The other thing to keep in mind is which classes do you want to come first? In terms of proficiencies, particular for armor and saves, a lot of classes have things much better than the wizards. Medium or heavy armor and con saves could be very tempting. By contrast, starting with wizard doesn't give you a lot you wouldn't get from just multiclassing in it at level 2. Wisdom saves, sure, but they seem to come into play less than con and dex.

To tell the truth, multiclassing still doesn't feel great for casters unless you have a real specific build in mind. A 20th level wizard, straight up, looks good. Adding MC in will tend to leave you behind the curve a bit until those last levels. As a further note, bladesingers in some aspects might actually be harder to MC as they don't get armor benefits. But if you've got a scheme in mind and don't mind putting off some higher level spells, go for it.

Now the Unearthed Arcana is hinting there may be prestige classes in the future. That may be a different story should those prestige classes add levels of known spells in the primary casting class as many 3e prestige classes did. At the moment we only have Rune Caster which doesn't do this, so we'll have to see. Here are a few thoughts on MC options:

**Cleric:** Medium armor, so you can dip in this at any level and there are no particular advantages for starting at level 1. Adds spell levels, and you'll get the level 1 cleric spells that you can cast at higher spell levels as you advance in wizard. A nice choice to add a little "witchy" flavor except you'll be running around in armor.

**Barbarian:** Not as bad as you might think, particularly for bladesinger. Unarmored defense and bladesong appear to stack so you'd be pulling armor defense from three stats. Assuming they were your best three, say an 18, 16 and 14, you'd be looking at Mage armor + 9 = 22AC. Con saves too if you take at first level, but rage will likely be useless...one stat too far...

**Bard:** Not blown away by this as an option. You end up accessing mainly the same spells while delaying later spell levels. Dex saves might be nice to grab at first level, but nah.

**Druid:** Same awful saves? Wood armor and shields? What are you thinking?

**Fighter:** Solid choice, but you'll do best by taking this at level 1 to get the con save and heavy armor. A second level dip to get action surge could also be amazing...basically producing a quickened spell on steroids.

**Monk:** There's kind of a similar opportunity to boost unarmored AC here as with barbarian, but just as with rage, unarmed attacks feels wasted.

**Mystic:** If you're going to do a one-level dip at 1st level to get medium armor, you could do worse than mystic. Strength of mind would give you the game's best saves, bar none. This would be [sky blue](#) possibly if your DM lets you pool psi points and spell points (RAW as I understand do not allow this). However, given psi and spells are on different tracks, I'd only consider this to get better defenses at level 1.

**Paladin:** For what you're likely going for, fighter is a better option than paladin.

**Ranger:** Not a great mix, and doesn't seem to gel well. I'd skip and look for better options.

**Rogue:** Rogue is a nice option for the right build, quite possibly for bladesingers in particular...a couple skills, dex saves if you take at level 1, sneak attack, cunning action if you take a second level...some nice options.

**Rune Caster:** If you want this for some reason, I guess you already know why. Adds to spell levels but not known spells. Abilities are interesting, but unless you just have to have it,

there's not much here to dissuade you from the wizarding path. I'm hoping there'll be some better wizard friendly prestige classes of the sort 3e had.

**Sorcerer:** Not much to be gained here. Sure, I know you have your eye on metamagic, but just let it go...

**Warlock:** You're probably going after those invocations but they're not worth a 2-level dip.

## Class Features

**Base Features.** So let's just admit that base class features have got you set up to die. There's nothing to recommend you other than what you do with magic. Remember, unless you are a bladesinger, your strategy is to NOT GET HIT. With anything. Your hit points are terrible. Your saves are the worst options for both the "good" save and "bad" save...sure wisdom can be useful...being dominated sucks, but being roasted in dragon breath is even worse. And unless you're playing in a Dark Sun type setting with tons of psionics, intelligence saves will almost never come into play (although if you are in Dark Sun then they could absolutely rule...). So that means your best attribute is wasted as far as saves go, whereas your best save probably isn't benefiting from one of your higher attributes. And I never understood why wizards are supposed to be so intelligent, yet get so few skill choices. I could see requiring the majority of skills to come from knowledge areas, sure, but only two?

**Spellcasting:** This is where you excel. Sorcerer gives you a run for your money, but aside from that you're the best in the game I'd say. Certainly the best range of spells and utility, ritual casting, etc. The only thing that tempers this is the sorcerer swiping meta-magic.

**Cantrips:** For some ungodly reason the sorcerer actually has more cantrips than you. Insult to injury and all that I guess. And you don't have the game's single best attack cantrip, eldritch blast. 3 cantrips to start feels weak but overall you're fine.

**Spellbook:** Given that you can learn an endless number of spells, it's too bad you have to stick them in a spellbook. Arguably this is the wizard's Achilles heel. This depends on how nasty your DM is about setting up circumstances for you to lose your spell book. Losing it doesn't mean you can't cast...you're just stuck with your prepared spells. With a new spellbook, you can scribe your prepared spells, but you'll need to redo the hard (and expensive) work of rescribing all the rest. So make a backup, or find ways to protect your spellbook.

**Ritual Casting:** Ritual casting is where you stick it to the sorc for taking meta-magic. Cast utility spells without spending a spell slot (granted it takes 10 minutes). Having played other caster classes, trust me, this is annoying not to have.

**Arcane Recovery:** Recover spell slots on a short rest? Sweet.

**Spell Mastery:** This is one of the reasons you don't want to dip too far into a MC. Pick a 1st and 2nd level spell and become able to cast them AT WILL. Shield at will...think about it...your AC just got boosted by 5. Some nice 2nd level spell choices as well.

**Signature Spells:** Not bad, but not as good as spell mastery. These spells are cast without expending a spell slot, but need a recovery between castings. Still, there are some decent options at 3rd level for this...

## **Arcane Traditions**

**Abjuration.** This is the school of defense. It provides some nice boosts to survivability, not surprisingly, but the main boon is the boost it gives to spells like counterspell or dispel magic. These are arguably some of the game's best defensive spells, so making them more powerful is a good thing.

**Arcane Ward:** Nice boost to hitpoints. Need to cast an abjuration spell. Since you'll likely be casting Mage Armor before adventuring, that should take care of it.

**Projected Ward:** Reaction to let someone else in the group borrow your ward when they get hit. Ok, so honestly, you're so squishy you'll be tempted not to do this a lot. But staving off a blow that could bring the party tank down and keep him in the fight instead? That could be worth it.

**Improved Abjuration.** Adding proficiency bonus to abjuration checks makes you a counterspelling fiend. You will be the most proficient at dispel magic as well, better than most clerics. These now become your territory.

**Spell Resistance.** Honestly, does this tradition have a single underpowered boon?

**Artificer.** So artificers, the folks making potions and scrolls, just seems kinda phoned in. There's no flavor or fun in this tradition. No doubt having lots of potions and scrolls on hand adds to one's range of magical options, but...eh.

**Infuse Potions.** If you didn't have to burn the spell slot continuously until the potion is imbibed this would have been a lot better. I get this removes the need for concentration from some spells but this still feels weak compared to other tradition options.

**Infuse Scrolls.** Spend arcane recovery to make scrolls rather than recover spells. This adds a bit more flexibility and isn't terrible.

**Infuse Weapons and Armor:** Are you going to spend a level 6 spell slot to give someone temporary +2 armor? No, you are not going to do this.

**Superior Artificer:** Now you can waste both a 6th and 5th level spell at the same time.

**Master Artificer:** I'm still thinking "eh" with this...I'd rather just find stuff.



**Bladesinger.** So I was a big fan of the 4e bladesinger, so I'm glad to see so much of it here. I'm not aware of any of 4e's absurd exploits for the bladesinger (remember The Generator?) carrying forward to 5e, but perhaps give it time. Bladesinger is really the opposite of Eldritch Knight...a wizard who happens to do a little fighting as opposed to a fighter who happens to do a little wizarding. This option gives you some decent flexibility for wading into combat. Although I get the fluff, it's too bad it's limited to elves and half-elves, as this would work just insanely well with the variant human and the ability to pick up a bonus feat. Bladesinger can have one of the better ACs in the game, but remember, your hit points, con and dex save still all blow, so you're not the party tank and you'll want to be judicious about what combats you wade into.

**Training in War and Song:** Already off to a solid start here. Light armor means no more mage armor spell tax.

**Bladesong:** If you're going bladesinger, this is why. Nice features make you truly viable in combat, including a nice bonus to concentration saves. Add the mobility feat to this and you could slip in and out of combat rather nicely.

**Extra attack:** Keeps you in line with most of the other melee combatants.

**Song of Defense:** \*blink, blink.\* This negates much of the bladesinger's weaknesses. I have to say this is one of the best designed traditions.

**Song of Victory:** Nice boost to melee damage.

**Conjuration.** Truth be told, conjuration as a school will probably be the choice of people who have a specific design behind it. It doesn't seem like a typical default choice, more for folks whose strategy is built around conjurations as opposed to a more generalist approach. Or put more simply (and perhaps less Captain Obvious)...if you're not quite sure what tradition is calling to you...conjuration probably won't be it. Abjuration, divination, evocation are probably the generalist/default traditions. That's not to say this is bad, however. Here's the breakdown.

**Minor Conjuration.** Forgot to bring that grappling hook along? Here go. This is the fix for all the party's planning errors. But it's not really the thing that gets you excited about an arcane tradition. At 2nd level the bladesinger is slicing enemies to ribbons and the diviner is changing fate...and you're kind of like the party's mobile dollar store...

**Benign Transportation.** Action teleport with option to swap places with willing creatures. Not bad, although it would have been stellar had the basic teleport cost a move rather than action.

**Focused Conjuration.** Honestly, this tradition would have been better had this benefit come earlier since this is probably what you're going for...concentration on conjurations can't be broken due to damage. Pretty critical for a conjurer specialist.



**Durable Summons.** Critters you call up are stronger than for other casters. Nothing wrong with this.

**Divination.** Ok so the school of divination has always had a bit of a PR problem. Divination spells can be useful, but they seem a little situational, maybe better as rituals. And dull. It's hard to consider giving up an evocation or conjuration spell for divination. Diviners seem to just kind of sit around and *know stuff* but you're a wizard because you want to blow stuff up. Well, the 5e answer to this is the diviner tradition which, along with abjurer and bladesinger (and lore master if your DM allows UA), is one of the most badass traditions available. In part because they made it a lot easier to cast divination spells, but mainly because diviners can outright twist fate, bring auto-successes to their own and auto-fails to their enemies' efforts. It's an amazing tradition and gets started with a bang.

**Portent.** If you're taking diviner, this is why and it kicks right in at level 2. Roll 2 20s and substitute these in for your or any other creature's d20 rolls. Need to pass that last death save...sub in one of your high rolls. Want to auto-fail the target of your disintegration spell? Sub in a low roll. Portent is only weakened by two issues...first, you of course have to work with the rolls you have, and second you have to substitute the roll before you know what the roll is. So you probably waste some of these over time, but they're good when you ABSOLUTELY NEED a particular outcome.

**Expert Divination.** The problem with casting non-ritual divination spells is the feeling you should be casting something better. Sure, Arcane Eye could be helpful...but are you blowing a slot that could be used for wreaking havoc? Not so much anymore. Cast a divination spell and instantly recover a lower level spell slot (5th level maximum). A nice idea to keep divination spells appealing.

**The Third Eye.** Alright, so you likely already have darkvision, and comprehend languages isn't typically critical. But seeing ethereal or invisible...that's pretty handy.

**Greater Portent.** So this isn't exactly creative...so what? An extra use of portent? I'll take it.

**Enchantment.** Enchantment is a school with a lot of flavor and potential for fun. Somehow it seems like it deserved a little better than this though.

**Hypnotic Gaze.** What are you doing 5 feet from something so awful you want to incapacitate it? Incapacitate is great, but this is kind of a mutual prison sentence since you have to use your action to maintain it round by round and you can't move more than 5 feet away. Probably has it's moments when this saves you being smashed into jam, I'll grant, but feels kind of limited.

**Instinctive Charm.** This is not bad, although some ducks need to be lined up for this to work best. Probably works best against ranged attackers who have their own allies between you and them.

**Split Enchantment.** Basically twinning for charm/dominate/hold spells. Finally getting some good action out of the enchantment school.

**Alter Memories:** Fixes the biggest limitation of the enchantment school: folks getting rather pissed at you for messing with their brains. Not bad, although mainly to cover up the consequences for social situations.

**Evocation.** First, let's admit the obvious, namely that if you're dead set on picking this school you're going to do so no matter what I say, even if I told this was specifically constructed by the Communist Party. Overall, though I think the tradition of evocation has gotten some unfair criticism, fueled by some weak early level boons. It's not the best tradition, but it does what you probably want it to do, particularly at later levels and is a decent choice for those with no particular attachments to the other schools.

**Sculpt Spell.** Don't you hate it when combat starts and you line up exactly where your aoe spell is going to go...then the party's damned barbarian rushes into the middle of the bad guys and messes up your targeting? This is the fix for that. Granted, this ability is probably emblematic of the tradition's design flaws in that this ability really becomes useful at higher levels as the aoes get bigger. But it's a good boon overall.

**Potent Cantrip.** When a power's name is something of an oxymoron it had better be good. This one ain't. First, why does it come at level 6 when its biggest advantages would have been at lower level? Since, by higher levels, you'll be hoping to rely on cantrips less, it becomes less useful, making it the rare tradition ability for which scalability is an issue. Locked you into some of the lesser cantrips too until Frostbite came along. If 5e had stuck with the concept of 1 hps mooks like 4e, this could have been a lot more useful. But, hey, maybe if you're being swarmed by rabid chickens this will come in handy...

**Empowered Evocation.** Ok, now we're getting into the stuff you came for. The errata weakens this somewhat for spells that get multiple rolls...not sure what the reasoning behind that was, but this remains a nice boost for those aoe spells.

**Overchannel.** Maximize damage on a 5th level spell? Why not?

**Illusion.** Since 1e there has been a dedicated subgroup of players who just loooove playing illusionists (when it was it's own class if I remember correctly). Do I get it? No. But if it toots your horn, who cares?

**Improved Minor Illusion.** Free cantrip? Eh. The big deal here is being able to combine sight and sound into a single illusion. Nice, but feels weak compared to some level 2 abilities.

**Malleable Illusions.** Grants your illusions more flexibility. For most casters this will probably seem “eh.” But if your strategy is build around illusions this admittedly is a helpful feature.

**Illusory Self.** Basically a single-use get out of jail card. Useful, but just not quite awesome.

**Illusory Reality.** Make an inanimate part of your illusion real for 1 minute. Obviously this begs for some creative use. For those inclined to find ways to abuse illusions they are likely salivating over this.

**Necromancy.** Players regularly giggle to themselves at the thought of playing a necromancer. Given this, it’s amazing how frequently this school/tradition disappoints. We had some nice takes on the necromancer, but beyond that I’ve never seen a lot to recommend it. Most of the attacks spells feel underpowered and so much of this school seems to revolve around keeping heaps of bones and gore following around with you. Which raises the question: Where exactly do you live where it’s ok to do this? You could burn through a lot of spell slots trying to maintain a significant force of undead, but I suppose that’s rather the point.

**Grim Harvest:** Nice little boon to your hps when you kill stuff. Would have been better in some respects, had the boon come in the form of thps, since regaining hps requires you to have lost some, but permanent healing is also a good thing of course.

**Undead Thralls:** Well at least this tradition knows why you’re here. Make your zombies and skeletons better. Too bad it doesn’t also work some magic for create undead. There are lots of threads in various places about how making undead armies can be effective. Not my thing, and it seems to take some degree of planning, but if that’s your game this will certainly help some.

**Inured to Undead:** So, granted, if you’re in a Ravenloft game this looks a lot better. Max hp loss certainly blows (and con saves, ugh). So the utility of this depends on how often you expect to come in direct contact with these types of effects.

**Command Undead:** Nice way to grab control of an undead. Intelligent undead will eventually break free, but a good way to add to your undead army of thralls.

**Transmutation.** The idea of this tradition has a lot of appeal but, overall, the application falls flat. Polymorph is such a great spell, it’s too bad this tradition didn’t do something more interesting with it. Unless you just hafta have it, I’d look at some other schools.

**Minor Alchemy:** Turn wood into iron, iron into copper, all these things into silver, but just for a little bit (you have to maintain concentration for Chrissakes!). I suppose the main appeal here is being able to turn stuff into silver. Might be useful to...eh, I dunno...I'm struggling. Changing an iron weapon into pure silver is going to create a weapon that will break pretty quick (RAW suggests the whole thing changes, not just a peppering around the blade). I guess you could turn sticks into silver in order to bilk people, but just pay your damned bills.

**Transmuter Stone:** Ok, I'll give this tradition credit for having this. Prof on con saves is big, and resistances aren't bad either.

**Shapechanger.** What. Have. You. Done. To. Polymorph? First, if you're a transmuter and don't have polymorph by level 10...then I don't know what you're doing. Second, this is the most nerfed version of polymorph. At level 10 changing into a CR1 critter is kind of eh. Wow I'm a lion! Sure, it's basically a free encounter (short rest) spell...but, eh.

**Master Transmuter:** This isn't bad, for the Panacea and Restore Life options. Wizards that can raise dead without the wish spell, why not.

**War Magic:** This "School" is pretty straightforward. A pretty solid choice overall, particularly for the defensive abilities. A bit of a boost to offense as well. Here's the breakdown:

**Arcane Deflection:** So as your reaction, you get to spam a +2 to AC and +4 to saves any round you want. This is absurdly good. The rider that you can only cast cantrips the following round is a bummer. At low levels, I suspect you'll barely notice that, as you'll be relying on attack cantrips a lot anyway. At higher levels, that might sting, but you probably won't be needing this every round.

**Tactical Wit:** Int bonus to initiative rolls? Coupled with Arcane Deflection this is a great set of starting abilities.

**Power Surge:** This is ok. You can gain power surges by successful uses of dispel magic or counterspell which generally don't come up enough to make that a great way to boost them. You get at least 1 every short or LR though (they reset to 1 every LR, so use 'em). They can be spent to add half your wizard level in damage to one target of a damage spell. That's not great at low levels but becomes pretty good at higher levels (better than adding your spellcasting modifier.) So it's a good scaling ability.

**Durable Magic:** +2 to AC and saves (including con saves for concentration) while concentrating on a spell? Nice.

**Deflecting Shroud:** Now when you use arcane deflection you can pick up to 3 targets within 60 feet and do half your wizard level in force damage to them. A sweet pickup for a reaction defensive ability.

**Lore Master.** I don't usually bother with the UA classes, but this one got so much attention I figured it was worth it. For me it also brought up the wizard v sorcerer debate again, so figured I'd give that a bit more discussion. The big controversy over this was whether Loremaster is overpowered. I've seen it play and the gist I got was that this is a \*very good\* damage output variant on the wizard. Did I see it break a game? No. But, I imagine where the OP complaints might originate is that this school definitely upends the uncertainty of whether wizards or sorcerers are better blasters in favor of wizards. Here's that discussion:

### **Sorcerers v Wizards (again!)**

So the issue at least as I've experienced it seems to boil down to which class, sorcs or wizards are "better" blasters. The vibe I've sometimes gotten (and maybe this is just my impression) is that sorcerers should be put up front as artillery, with wizards relegated to support/utility roles. Given that wizards are better at the latter, this makes some sense, but let's stick to whether sorcerers are inherently better at blasting.

A lot of this comes down to metamagic which, admittedly is really good. After all, otherwise, the spells are the same whoever is casting them. Metamagic, though, does allow for extending range, duration, making some spells bonus action, increasing damage, twinning, etc. I don't think the difference here is such that there need be a clear job-role distinction between sorcerers and wizards, as the wizard schools add their own very different boosts to spellcasting (some better than others, admittedly). I think both classes serve well as blasters if players want to design them as such (which they needn't do of course). But I can also understand from sorcerers why they feel that their range of casting is limited, and their metamagic helps them pound away pretty good, so maybe that sphere should be left to them. Again, I don't agree with this, but I get it. Probably it only comes up mainly when there is both a wizard and sorcerer in the party (blame Wizards for creating this dual class-role function back in 3e).

So Lore Master comes along and upends this whole conversation by being insanely good at blasting, better by far than the evoker. That would be fine if the Lore Master was simply the best wizard for blasting but, arguably, it finally tips the scales fully in favor of wizards by being even better than metamagic. Of course, it's just UA, so DMs don't have any particular incentive to include it. And, in fairness, I'm sure some folks don't like Lore Master for reasons other than the one I'm focusing on. I just suspect it's one source of the particular vitriol Lore Master has come under. But let's take a look at its features.

**Lore Mastery:** This isn't the bit that gets people's ire so much, but it is damned good. Proficiency bonus doubled on all knowledge checks (Arcana, Religion, etc.) and intelligence as the stat for initiative. That's great stuff!

**Spell Secrets:** Ok, now we're into the abilities that piss some folks off. Once per casting you can swap the damage type of one attack spell. Lightning ball? Cone of radiance? This is great stuff. Even better, you can, once per SR, change the SAVE of a spell. Sickening Radiance seems limited by it being a CON save? Well, make it an intelligence save instead. Yes, this, admittedly, is very, very good. And we're only at level 2!

**Alchemical Casting:** You can burn first, second or third level spell slots to add 2d10 force damage, increase range or increase spell DC by 2. You can burn through spell slots pretty quick this way, so it is self-limiting, but this is a great ability.

**Prodigious Memory:** Realize that you REALLY need some other spell in your book that you didn't prepare? Once per SR you can just swap em out as a bonus action. Fantastic ability.

**Master of Magic:** Once per LR basically just grab a spell off of ANY spell list and use a spell slot of the appropriate level to cast it. Your buddy in the party dies and you need to revivify them real quick? Now you can if you've got a 3rd level slot (presumably the monetary requirement/component still stands, of course.) This is sweet.

So yeah, there are NO abilities for this school that are anything short of amazing. I can see why, honestly, it will probably never make it out of UA in this form. I expect to see some disappointing, nerfed version down the line, if we see any other version at all. But my impression is, if a party has only a single arcane caster, having a Lore Master is going to seem like a great artillery asset and isn't going to break the game. If you've got one player excited about playing a sorcerer (or non Lore Master wizard) and someone playing a Lore Master, I'd say there's at least the potential for tension to arise. That would probably be the main circumstance under which, as DM, I'd hesitate to consider Lore Master.

## Spells

**Balancing Spell Selection.** Part of the fun of the wizard is balancing and preparing your spell lists. Granted, things are a bit more flexible and less strategic than under the old Vancian system, but this is still an essential part of the process for wizards. Here are a few thoughts on this.

First, how you're going to use spell slots is going to shift over time as you level. This is something you'll want to keep some eye on. So low level slots, in particular, are likely to shift away from combat offensive actions, to utilities as you scale upward in level. Sleep is a great example of this as a spell...it's a great offensive spell at level 1, but quickly loses effectiveness. So those level 1 slots will gradually become more attractive for utility and defensive slots rather than offensive. Granted, lower level spells are probably easier to find in scrolls and spellbooks and such, but you may want to plan to have some spells in lower level slots that will be useful across your career (shield is an excellent example at level 1). A lot more utility spells remain

useful across all character levels in the original level spell slot than do the damaging inflicting spells for which scaling is an issue.

Second, rituals...this has been covered amply elsewhere, but certainly grab these when you can. They are, basically, free spells since you won't need to prepare them (although they do take 10 mins to cast as rituals). They're a good deal that boost the utility side of the wizard.

Third, watch out for concentration spells. Since you can only have 1 active at a time, you don't want to go too heavy on these. I'm not saying to avoid them, just keep them in balance with plenty of other spell options that don't require concentration.

Fourth, at each spell level you'll want to balance out offensive, defensive and utility spell choices. For example, at level 5, when you get to pick your two "freebee" spells, you don't need fireball AND lightning bolt...vary things up a bit. Fireball and fly, say, is a better combination. Aim for flexibility rather than hammering at the same thing. Also with energy damage spells, try to vary them up rather than putting everything into fire (I have not always lived up to my own advice as the fire spells tend to be pretty good).

Fifth, those 2 freebee spells you get each time you level are like gold...spend them wisely...use these for spells you MUST have. How likely you are to be able to pick up other spells through scrolls, spellbooks or exchanges with other mages is going to be up to your DM. But don't assume it will be easy to pick up a spell you really want down the line without using one of your freebies. If you realize that a lower level spell than your maximum spell level is a must have, then grab it, although it may hurt to give up a higher level spell so try to do this as infrequently as possible.

**Cantrips.** 5e does not seem very generous with the cantrips for wizards, so be sure to pick these carefully. Apparently these are like some kind of innate tricks you've learned...unlike spells of 1st level or higher, you can't learn any more via spellbooks and such. So cantrips oddly feel like one of the more limited areas for wizards. But alas...these are your at will abilities...generally you'll want to grab one offensive cantrip, with the rest utilities.

**Acid Splash (Conjuration):** Either one or two adjacent targets, dex save for 1d6 scaling as cantrips do to hit max 4d6 damage at level 17. Acid damage and the opportunity to hit 2 targets sometimes make it an ok choice.

**Blade Ward (Abjuration):** Eh, you've got relatively few cantrip choices so this is a pretty weak choice overall. There are better cantrips to take.

**Booming Blade (Evocation):** Decent option for bladesingers and other gish builds. Main issue will be deciding when and where this improves upon taking two attacks.

**Chill Touch (Necromancy):** I kind of wish the necromancy tradition did more with stuff like this. But chill touch is a solid combat option cantrip...good range, with an interesting shutdown on regaining hit points. If you're going up against a lot of critters with resistance to necromancy this may be a weaker choice.



**Create Bonfire (Conjuration):** What is with WoTC and spelling? Yes, I am putting these here in the order they appear in the source material. R comes AFTER O...but I digress...this cantrip can be compared against the go-to damage cantrip, fire bolt. Still fire damage, so a wash there, but less damage and only half the range. On the other hand, with concentration can be used as a minor battlefield obstacle. Could be useful in closing a choke point or gap.

**Control Flames (Transmutation):** Basically like a kind of souped up Prestidigitation that works only for fire. A few situation benefits, but there are too many better options. Pass.

**Dancing Lights (Evocation):** Make four crappy torches that, granted, you can move around. In most cases you could just light four torches. Eh, move along folks, nothing to see here.

**Firebolt (Evocation):** Unless you have some idea of what you're doing, this is probably the go-to damage cantrip for wizards. Good range, best damage from a cantrip, although it's fire. This is the closest you'll come to the warlock's Eldritch Blast, although frankly if you're trying to match that with this, you're doing wizard all wrong.

**Friends (Enchantment).** Poor man's charm person. Not bad, but when it wears off and the target realizes you charmed them, you won't be friends for long.

**Frostbite (Evocation):** If you really don't want firebolt, this is probably your best secondary option, mainly for the benefits of it being cold rather than fire, and having a decent control benefit in giving disadvantage on the next attack. That's actually not bad. Low damage and con save, and less range did make me hesitate on going sky blue on this...those aren't trivial disadvantages, but I do think this stands out against some of the other damage cantrips.

**Green Flame Blade (Evocation):** Great option for bladesingers and other gish types. The ability to auto-damage a second target is what makes this particularly nice.

**Gust (Transmutation):** Pick between three options some other spells can do better. Pass.

**Infestation (Conjuration):** Basically you give the target fleas (seriously). Damage is pretty bad, range is bad, con save and secondary effect is "meh." Frostbite is the fairly equivalent spell for damage and otherwise beats this spell in every way.

**Light (Evocation):** So you went into the dungeon and forgot your torch? Well at least you can make pretty torches of any color. Tossing the light onto a bad guy (pending dex save) could be situationally interesting I suppose.

**Lightning Lure (Evocation):** More love for the gish types. Forced movement with damage. Granted, I'm not sure even bladesingers want to be pulling bad guys TO them often, but if you picked this you know what you're doing.



**Mage Hand (Conjuration):** A solid utility cantrip. Good base choice if you don't have other, specific cantrips in mind.

**Mending (Transmutation):** You could just learn to sew. Or be less clumsy. This probably does have some situations where it's useful, but too few not to be a trap choice even over other options and so few cantrip slots.

**Message (Transmutation):** Why is this a transmutation cantrip you ask? I have no idea, but who cares? This is a great spell. This is essentially a short-ranged walky-talky...useful for group coordination or just when you want to send a message a bit under the radar. Kind of like texting for your PCs...and who doesn't see the value in texting?

**Minor Illusion (Illusion):** If illusion was only going to show up once on the cantrip list, they did it right. Great spell with lots of utility particularly if you're clever in using it.

**Mold Earth (Transmutation):** Dammit, dude, just get a shovel.

**Poison Spray (Conjuration):** Oh boy, oh boy, I get to do d12 damage on a cantrip...take that warlock! Yeah, d12 from TEN FUCKING FEET AWAY. Whether you're a regular mage or a bladesinger, there's no good reason for you to be hanging out ten feet away from a target rather than doing something else like hitting them or running.

**Prestidigitation (Transmutation):** Apparently if you can't figure out what school a spell should go in, you just stick it in Transmutation. Probably you're just getting this so when you're DM tosses you in poo (and he/she will at some point) you can clean up nice. Broad range of uses, but none of them stronger than what specific cantrips could do. Still, not an awful choice by any means.

**Ray of Frost (Evocation):** Probably most comparable to the frostbite spell above. Better damage, but the control effect is far weaker.

**Shape Water (Transmutation):** So water is scary and being able to do stuff with it can sometimes be useful. But overall this is pretty situational.

**Shocking Grasp (Evocation):** The temptation here is the ability to remove OAs when moving away from an enemy who has closed with you. Hopefully your strategy is to prevent this in the first place which means its use should be pretty infrequent...too infrequent to use on your few cantrip slots.

**Sword Burst (Conjuration):** For most folks, getting into the situation where you'd be likely to use this means you failed at some other basic strategy. That includes bladesingers, so mostly you can pass on this one.

**Thunderclap (Evocation):** You make a thunderous sound which can be heard...wow...100 feet away. An explosion they can hear all the way down the block. Effect is generally the same as sword burst, but con save instead of dex which makes this a trap choice for most casters. Might be a little better for

evokers with potent cantrip but...eh. You shouldn't have let yourself get mobbed like this.

**Toll the Dead (Necromancy):** Great spell with great flavor. Range is only half that of Fire Bolt, but better damage (d12 if the target is wounded!) and wisdom save. An amazing spell for necromancers.

**True Strike (Divination):** Divination's one entry among the cantrips is a total lemon. Too bad. Blows an action to give you a better chance to hit next turn on the first attack. Maaaaaybe if you could set this up \*just before\* combat started, but eh. I've never seen anyone argue for why this is useful, and I'm not going to be the one to start.

**1st Level:** Get ready to underwhelm, kids! So here's where you start things off.

Honestly, the first level spells have some decent defensive and utility options that will remain useful throughout your career, even in that first level slot. But in combat, with a few exceptions that don't scale well, you're struggling to be truly impressive. This is just a taste so far...eyes on those third level spells!

**Absorb Elements (Abjuration):** Abjuration as a school has a lot of great stuff, and this is a classic example. Reaction resistance to one energy type. Failing dex saves on aoe attacks is one scourge of the wizard, so this is a great pick up, particularly later in the game. This will keep you alive. Even better for bladesingers and other gishes with that rider allowing you to channel some of the damage in melee. But even without that, this is good to have. This is one of the spells that may be worth blowing a "free" spell later on at higher level to make sure you have this if you don't already.

**Alarm (Abjuration, Ritual):** A decent warning effect while you're resting. It's a ritual, so no need to ever prepare it.

**Burning Hands (Evocation):** One of your better options for doing damage at low level, but it's fire and close range which limit it somewhat. Damage is good for 1st level, dex saves, and it scales well against 2nd level spells (but not so much after that).

**Catapult (Transmutation):** Decent damage and range, but only single target and no damage on a save (dex save though). Eh,...you've got better options even at this level.

**Cause Fear (Necromancy):** Essentially a weak version of the 3rd level "Fear" spell with a single target. Concentration is a bummer as is the fact that, unlike "Fear" there's no mention of the target taking a dash action to move away from you. This is a strange spell in the sense that it's actually a bad option at low levels (when you should take sleep) but actually remains it's (limited) utility a little better at higher levels (since it still does basically the same thing.) Tasha's

Laughter is arguably still a better spell to hold as a low level attack fallback for higher level casters although Cause Fear's range is admittedly better.

**Charm Person (Enchantment):** Kind of a mainstay D&D spell, but in some ways rather hard to use. Not great for combat since the target gets advantage on save and only sees *you* as an ally, not your comrades (who it can still attack). More useful in social situations but the fact the target knows you charmed them after the hour is up it is a big downside.

**Chromatic Orb (Evocation):** This is the dumbest spell not because the effects are weak (although there's that) but rather because the material focus includes a 50gp diamond, something most 1st level casters won't have the money for, and the spell isn't worth worrying over by the time you can afford the diamond. If this is the effect you want, just get catapult which does the same thing at better range and without the diamond.

**Color Spray (Illusion):** This spell is like a tax on people who didn't read the PHB thoroughly to see that sleep was an option at this spell level.

**Comprehend Languages (Divination, Ritual):** You probably won't want to spend one of your level freebies on this, but it's a ritual and a decent pickup if you can grab it from another spellbook or something.

**Detect Magic (Divination, Ritual):** Yeah, you need this. Kinda weird if you don't have it. Granted there will be moments when you'll think "Dammit, I need detect magic right this second" but you'll have to be like, "Hold on, let me get my ritual stuff out..."

**Disguise Self (Illusion):** Not bad with the right build. Good for stealth/spy types with good deception, and can also be used with charm spells to avoid the ramifications that come once the spell is over.

**Earth Tremor (Evocation):** There seems to be a general trend for me that wizard spells with earth/dirt themes tend to underwhelm me. This is no exception. Awful range and meh all or nothing effect is really bad strategy for most casters. Might be ok for melee builds, bladesingers and such who get cornered and into trouble, which is why I'm rating it black.

**Expeditious Retreat (Transmutation):** Run away! Run away! Bonus action to dash. Not bad, although it requires concentration.

**False Life (Necromancy):** THPs. Not awful if you can't seem to avoid getting hit. **Better** for gish builds/bladesingers.

**Feather Fall (Transmutation):** Nice, because you can cast it on others as well as yourself as a reaction (up to 5). Situational...but pretty damned good when that situation comes up!

**Find Familiar (Conjuration, Ritual):** Well, the bad news first, mainly that 5e familiars aren't as good as they were in 3e or 4e...no passive or active bonuses for

the caster. But, within the limits of the actions they can perform, they can aid another, deliver touch spells, act as scouts, etc. Not absolutely essential this edition, but not horrible either. There are options for better familiars, pseudodragons and quasits (although why someone would want one of those foul, spiteful creatures is beyond me), but those require working with the DM.

**Fog Cloud (Conjuration):** Missing those London mornings? This spell is for you. In the end it is just fog though...

**Grease (Conjuration):** Grease has its fans and maintains utility in the 1st level slot across all levels of play, hence I'm giving it blue. Can be quite useful under the right circumstances. Enemies rushing down the stairs to get you? Good time...

**Earth Tremor (Evocation):** Low damage and prone, but at close range. Better for gish types.

**Ice Knife (Conjuration):** Not bad at low level, but scales poorly. The range makes it a decent option for aoe, cold damage and focuses a bit more damage onto the primary target.

**Identify (Divination, Ritual):** For some reason I got inspired to reread the old 1e version of this spell...can you believe that to cast this back then you not only burned a 100gp pearl, but also had to swallow a miniature live carp? What was that, Fear Factor? Who runs around with lots of miniature live carp? Magic user stores were weird places back then. And wow has the typeface in D&D books gotten better since the old TSR days...anyway the 100gp pearl is still a thing, but at least they ditched the carp. For the most part, this spell is no longer as necessary as back in those 1e days (I have vague memories of getting out tubs of water to test whether rings might have been rings of water walking...yeah...we were idiots). Unless your DM is really a hard ass about the mystery of magic items, you can usually just spend time with them and, like a new lover, learn their properties. The second use of identify, to gain knowledge about spells affecting someone might have situational use.

**Illusory Script (Illusion, Ritual):** Just what it sounds like. Neat for social games, but situational overall.

**Jump (Transmutation):** Creature you touch becomes a giant cricket. Nah.

**Longstrider (Transmutation):** For the right build this isn't bad. Particularly for bladesingers, with mobile feat...your speed becomes 60...60!

**Mage Armor (Abjuration):** Honestly, unless you've got a build that gives you access to decent armor, you're going to need this. It kind of blows as it's basically a spell slot tax to not get hit. You might risk skipping on it at the low levels, but things are going to shoot at you and get by your defenders (to use 4e terms) eventually. Aside from the spell slot tax, it's honestly a good spell.

**Magic Missile (Evocation):** Can you believe way back in 1e, a first level caster could only fire off a single 1d4+1 bolt with this spell? That's kind of like shooting at enemies with the paper wrapper around a straw. Low level 1e casters were the suck. At least now you get 3. Damage isn't bad at low levels but doesn't scale great past the 2nd level slot. Autohit and force damage, though, make this a decent early career damage spell.

**Protection From Good and Evil (Abjuration):** Situational, but damned good in those situations. Makes it hard for undead, fiends and certain other creatures to hit or affect you. One of those spells you'll want to keep in the 1st level slot as a useful utility even into high levels. Does burn concentration though. Note, the material components don't specify the amount of silver or holy water (it does not say a flask) so amounts are probably trivial.

**Ray of Sickness (necromancy):** Weaker than some of the other damage options this level. Can save to poison after a successful hit. Nah, better options available.

**Shield (Abjuration):** More evidence for why abjuration is one of the strongest schools. +5 AC reaction on a hit. No idea why they toss the magic missile thing in but, hey, why not? This is an amazing spell your whole career. You don't do a lot of reactions, so this is a great pick up spell. If you're not taking this one, honestly, you must have a very good reason.

**Silent Image (Illusion):** Kind of a souped up version of minor illusion. It's such an unimpressive improvement on the cantrip, you can probably hold off on this one.

**Sleep (Enchantment):** This is kind of the 1st level fireball. This can be a combat changer at low levels, but doesn't really scale well into higher levels. By level 3 spells you'll want to replace with Hypnotic Pattern. Watch out too, it is party unfriendly (5e is not big on party friendly arcane spells).

**Snare (Abjuration):** If you're dying for your caster to emulate those Spy v Spy games from the Commodore 64 wherein you could snare your opponent and hang them embarrassingly upside down, this is for you. For everybody else this is a trap choice. Cute idea, but super situational. Plus probably the group rogue or ranger could design a snare trap almost as good without blowing a memorized 1st level spell slot. If this were a ritual, the rating would be a LOT higher (though in that case it might admittedly come close to being broken as you could set dozens of these damned things around the group's camp.)

**Tasha's Hideous Laughter (Enchantment):** Weaker than sleep at level 1 since it's single target, but stays useful from the level 1 slot throughout your career which gets it the sky blue rating. Whenever you actually can find a permanently useful combat spell for low level slots, grab them. Plus the stuff about the tarts is classic...

**Tensor's Floating Disc (Conjuration, Ritual):** Since it's a ritual it's worth getting if you can. Perhaps not on one of your freebie picks, but worth spending some gold to copy. Mainly useful if you end up with big hauls that are difficult to carry.

**Thunderwave (Evocation):** These first level spells sure do think you ought to get in close to do aoe. Less damage than burning hands, but the push can be situationally useful. But again, why are you in this close? Better for gish types.

**Unseen Servant (Conjuration, Ritual):** You could, you know, just hire an actual servant. Isn't this kinda outsourcing jobs? (Update): A reader pointed out that the unseen servant actually can be used, cheaply and efficiently as a non-concentration trap springer and general interacter-with things that are potentially dangerous. That's a fair point I somehow didn't consider, much to my own chagrin. I've updated the rating accordingly.

**Witch bolt (Evocation):** Aside from the old 1e witch from Dragon 114 which was excellent, D&D has absolutely refused to do anything useful with the concept of witches. This seems to be just yet another example. Had this been a cantrip it would have been good...as a first level spell the damage is a bit weak, and given the range requirement for subsequent auto-damage, unlikely to see if become a game changer.

**2nd Levels Spells.** 2nd level spells are kind of a placeholder level. They're incrementally better than 1st level spells but not so much you're going to be blown away. You sorta feel like you're advancing, but the party's melee types still mostly sigh at your efforts to help in combat. Some of the attack spells like scorching ray or Agannazar's Scorchers are going to give you a taste of what's to come, but fireball is still a spell level away. Still, some good utility in here with the potential for use throughout your career.

**Agannazar's Scorchers (Evocation):** Aside from having to try to remember how to spell this, scorcher is a solid pick for your 2nd level aoe slot. Good damage on a dex save. Like most 2nd level spells, doesn't scale so well that you'll want to pass up 3rd level spells, but that's a widespread problem for spells at this level. 3rd level attack spells get a big bump and that's just the way it is. Still, this is a solid pick for the 2nd level aoe. Effect areas haven't gotten so large yet that a line spell is unmanageable. That comes with the absurd 100' line of lightning bolt, but more on that later...

**Alter Self (Transmutation):** A decent utility pick. Since it's transmutation, not illusion, doesn't have the obvious drawbacks of disguise self.

**Arcane Lock (Abjuration):** Why is this spell a.) not a ritual, b.) 2nd level and c.) worth 25gp every time you cast it...?

**Blindness/Deafness (Necromancy):** Con save may limit this a bit, but it's a decent way to take out the senses of an opponent.

**Blur (Illusion):** Concentration is a major drawback here when you could just take mirror image instead.

**Cloud of Daggers (Conjuration):** Decent damage option. Basically single target since 5' cube and all. Concentration to maintain adds a little battlefield control. Damage scales ok.

**Continual Flame (Evocation):** Eh...50gp permanent torch...could be situationally useful, but not an essential pick up. Makes me want to break out into that Bangles tune...

**Crown of Madness (Enchantment):** This spell has a great name and cool fluff, but ultimately will likely fail more often than not. The target has to take an attack action BEFORE moving for this to work, which means your opponents have to be idiots. Would YOU stand next to the dude with the jagged thorn crown and madness in his/her eyes?

**Darkness (Evocation):** Concentration and party-unfriendly weaken this choice. However, if you've got some means for seeing through magic darkness (like the warlock) this becomes a better option. Also can cast it on something near bad guys and run for it if you're making an escape. Unfortunately, language in the spell suggests you can't cast it on something the bad guys are holding.

**Detect Thoughts (Divination):** Too bad it's not a ritual, but still a potentially useful spell. Some of the wording is wonky, but this is worth picking up if you can.

**Dragon's Breath (Transmutation):** I feel like I should like this spell more than I do. Flavor is good, but execution doesn't impress me. I'm not big on using wizards as buffers, and concentration feels like a trap here. You shouldn't be within 15' of anything, and anybody else in the group who wants to get close enough to enemies in order to blow their guts on them for 3d6 damage probably has a better way to do damage anyway. Might be ok, like literally at levels 3 and 4, but quickly becomes obsolete under even the most generous of circumstances.

**Dust Devil (Conjuration):** This a bit more of a battlefield control spell than it is damage. Damage is low and only hits critters that end their turn in a particular spot. Concentration to maintain, but can be moved as a bonus action. Doesn't scale well.

**Earthbind (Transmutation):** Situationally useful if you know you're going up against flyers.

**Enlarge/Reduce (Transmutation):** I guess if providing buffs to your party tanks is part of your strategy, this is one of your first opportunities to do so. If strength checks are a thing for your group, this could be good. Otherwise...eh. Mainly situational if you want to do some Alice Through the Looking Glass stuff.



**Flaming Sphere (Conjuration):** So back in 1e, 2nd level spells really blew, particularly if you actually wanted to damage anything. As I recall, flaming sphere was kind of the 2e answer to this, to try to give casters some kind of damage option at 2nd level spells. Eventually we got scorcher and snowball swarm, but this came first. It's always been something of a disappointment. I guess it's sort of nice because, with concentration, you can select a new target each round and you can get a bit of action economy with that. But, honestly, the damage isn't much better than fire bolt, and for all intents and purposes, it only is likely to damage a single target each round. Other than maybe setting up a battlefield obstacle, there's not much this can do that you couldn't do with firebolt.

**Gentle Repose (Necromancy, Ritual):** Eh, only really necessary if your group doesn't have a cleric.

**Gust of Wind (Evocation):** Annoy birds! Make lanterns dance wildly! Eh...too many better options at this level. Situational use if you really are stymied by some kind of gas cloud, but aside from that...

**Hold Person (Enchantment):** Great control spell. Paralyze is always nice and wis save means you'll get decent use out of this. If you're disappointed with the damage spells this level, this is a good way to go.

**Invisibility (Illusion):** This is a great utility spell at any level. Not for combat, but great for scouting, spying and staying out of trouble. Has the advantage of lasting longer than the greater invisibility you may pick up later, so retains its use.

**Knock (Transmutation):** Well at least you don't have to toss gold at this spell every time you cast it (unlike its opposite, arcane lock). Situationally useful, maybe more so at later levels. At lower levels it's going to hurt blowing a 2nd level slot to open stuff. Would have been better as a ritual.

**Levitate (Transmutation):** That this spell is flexible gets it a decent rating. Can be used defensively or offensively, with con save granted. It's not fly by any means, but it's a start.

**Locate Object (Divination):** You can locate plants and animals as a ritual, but not objects? Probably comes in handy once in awhile, but not terribly often.

**Magic Mouth (Illusion, Ritual):** This is best for when you're setting up your own dungeon. Kind of fun, if not THE most useful of things...

**Magic Weapon (Transmutation):** More useful if your DM is stingy on the magic items. But, overall, doesn't seem to keep up with what you'd likely be getting anyway at similar levels. Since it doesn't maintain use in the 2nd level slot at higher PC levels, I'd say pass.

**Maximillian's Earthen Grasp (Transmutation):** Same damage as flaming sphere but the restrained condition gives this a bit more value.



**Melf's Acid Arrow (Evocation):** Do you see what mages had to rely on in 2e if they wanted to do damage with 2nd level spells? This and flaming sphere. Weak damage for this level. Acid damage is nice, but there are better options, honestly.

**Mind Spike (Divination):** I like the idea of divination attack spells, just wish this one wasn't a trap. 3d8 damage is good for this level as is wisdom save, but only one target makes it worse than either Aggy's Scorcher or Shatter. The secondary effect of knowing where the target is at all times is so difficult to set up it won't come into play much. Given you'd need to see the target to cast this spell in the first place, you have to a.) anticipate the target will use invisibility in advance, and b.) go before them in the initiative order to cast this spell. I won't say that won't ever happen but the rarity of that alignment makes this spell a bad choice. Also typo in the scaling makes this go up d6 each additional spell level rather than d8 (which I suspect is what was intended.)

**Mirror Image (Illusion):** Great for defense, **better** for bladesingers and gish types. Stays useful in that 2nd level slot and no concentration. Requires an action to cast which is a bit rough, but excellent if you have time to set it up before combat begins.

**Misty Step (Conjuration):** Bonus action get out of jail card. Great defensive option, and teleportation, even short range, has lots of utility. Great pick.

**Nystul's Magic Aura (Illusion):** This seems like a better tool for DMs, honestly. Probably has some situation value, but you won't use this a lot.

**Phantasmal Force (Illusion):** This is a cool option for 2nd level, particularly as it's a rare spell that targets intelligence (mainly the realm of psionics). Takes some creativity to use well, but this can effectively take a dumber creature out of combat and maybe even get it some damage.

**Pyrotechnics (Transmutation):** This spell can be situationally good on ambush if you find a bunch of bad guys sitting around a campfire. Blinding as an effect is nice. The need for a flame makes it a bit situational though. Feels like there are better options at this level.

**Ray of Enfeeblement (Necromancy):** Control spell, target does only half weapon damage until it passes a con save. Requires concentration to maintain. For lockdown spells, there are better options at this level.

**Rope Trick (Transmutation):** Not terrible, as it can give you short rests when they are otherwise hard to come by. If you have a lot of party members who benefit from short rests this can be good, but for wizards themselves blowing a 2nd level slot on this, particularly at lower levels, feels like a steep price. Plus this assumes that the lack of short rests has nothing to do with the urgency of a situation, as time still does pass...sorta surprised this isn't a ritual which would have made it a lot better.

**Scorching Ray (Evocation):** Scorching ray is another great damage option at this level, and relies on direct targeting rather than aoe. Scales remarkably well for a 2nd level spell. Damage output on this spell is pretty set (that is to say, limited by the number of rays), so how it compares to some of the aoes ultimately depends on how lucky you are in setting up those aoe spells.

**See Invisibility: (Divination):** Situational, but good when you need it. Probably something you'll just want to add into the spellbook later for later levels when this will come up more.

**Shadow Blade (Illusion):** This is for gish builds only, but not a bad option. Basically doubles the damage you'd expect from using a longsword or rapier and scales nicely. Advantage when used in dim light or darkness makes it great for dungeon crawling. Would be sky blue if it didn't require concentration.

**Shatter (Evocation):** Aside from Scorching Ray (which isn't an aoe), I'd say Shatter and Ag's Scorchers are competing for the best aoes at this level. Shatter has the advantage of being a blast rather than a line, and better damage type (thunder). But the con save loses it some points. And the aoe for second level spells is still pretty tight meaning that the advantage of blast over line spells isn't quite so pronounced yet. But it's a decent pick. Like most 2nd level damage spells, quickly gets outpaced by fireball at 3rd level.

**Skywrite (Transmutation, Ritual):** This is pretty much just like those airplanes writing "Jesus Saves" or "Chachi Loves Joanie" in the sky. Romantic, I suppose, but otherwise...pass. Because it's a ritual maybe...nah, pass.

**Snillloc's Snowball Swarm:** I'd say this is one of the losers of the aoe battle which is a shame because there's great fluff potential here. Weak damage and lousy 5 foot radius blast limits you to four targets for most part. Dex save and cold damage keep it from being awful, but compared to some other options, this underwhelms. Not sure what they were thinking here because this has the potential to be a great spell.

**Spider Climb (Transmutation):** Obviously adds a lot of movement flexibility, but overall not a must have I'd say.

**Suggestion (Enchantment):** Granted, a lot in this spell hinges upon how you word the suggestion, but this is a great lockdown spell, with out of combat applications as well. It's main limitation is the language understanding requirement...otherwise it's pretty damn near a "dominate" spell.

**Web (Conjuration):** Good option for battlefield control, although party unfriendly makes it a bit unwieldy. Seems like one of those spells that's actually more effective when used by the DM against the party, but alas...

**Warding Wind (Evocation):** Downsides are concentration and deafening yourself. Biggest benefits are making yourself harder to hit with arrows and

dispersing annoying or harmful gasses (fog cloud, stinking cloud, etc.) Probably too situational to be a regular part of your memorized spells.

**3rd Level Spells:** Now here's the milkshake that brought the boys to the yard. 3rd level spells are what most wizards are waiting for. The gap between 2nd and 3rd level spells is probably greater than any other in the game (well other than maybe 8th to 9th). 3rd level has tons of great options, for combat, for defense, for utility, for rituals, you name it. And from this point on, all the spell levels are going to have juicy, eye-watering options. You will be able to just shut down some combats with your spells now. Granted, this are not so out of control as in early editions of the game, but this is still the level when you become a powerhouse. Even compared to previous editions, 3rd level spells are really good...

**Animate Dead (Necromancy):** I suspect most often, necromancers will be near about the only casters that use this much, but it's got a lot of potential. Oddly necromancers get this free at level 6, which means it's to their advantage to hold off a level to get it for the free spell.

**Bestow Curse (Necromancy):** Touch spell with concentration? Totally pass. For a third level spell this ought to be doing a lot more. All the various Disney witches would be a lot less impressive if, after their big speeches, they had to run around trying to poke their victims to get their curses to work.

**Blink (Transmutation):** Blink is an amazing defensive spell that maintains usefulness in this 3rd level slot. Decent candidate for signature spell. No concentration for the win!

**Catnap (Enchantment):** Again, I'm not a fan of using wizards to buff others without getting much of a benefit themselves (that's what bards are for.) Getting a short nap in 10 minutes can allow arcane recovery, granted, but you just blew a level 3 spell to get there so....eh.... Maybe if you're in a party of warlocks and monks or something, but for the most part this is a waste of a level 3 spot you should be using for fireball.

**Clairvoyance (Divination):** We're not quite at arcane eye yet, but this is a good scrying spell. Focus is a bit expensive, but aside from that can switch between seeing and hearing.

**Counterspell vs. Dispel Magic.** These tabs aren't going to go much further to the right. So a little diversion to discuss the relative merits of Counterspell and Dispel Magic. I'm surprised there's not more on this. And the essence of this conversation is, basically, if you had to pick one for your freebie, which should you choose? It's one of the tragedies of 5e that these spells got split apart, but their action is so great they're still both worth taking. But which is better? Well, unfortunately that's kind of like asking which is better, Halloween or Christmas? Or a long weekend that

starts on Friday or ends with Monday? The two spells basically work the same, their main difference being whether they stop a spell as it's being cast (Counterspell) or end a spell or other magic effect after it's in place (Dispel Magic). Both spells auto-succeed at removing any spells at the level they are cast or lower (that is to say 3rd, unless you bump them up to higher spell slots), and you can roll for higher level spells. Since magic is fairly common in most games, both spells will see a fair amount of use, despite being a bit situational. Further, if you've got ways to influence rolls such as portent, the lucky feat, or are an abjurer, you'll be better at these than anyone else in the game including warlocks or clerics. So the answer to this is that they're both worth trying to pick up. Dispel Magic probably sees a wider range of use since it can apply to a lot more after-the-fact types of issues. But stopping a spell midstream is just so damned satisfying. So...this is one decision on which you really can't go wrong.

**Counterspell (Abjuration):** So, as the above discussion suggests, this is a great spell to pick up. Stop a spell midstream. Particularly great for abjurers, diviners and folks with the lucky feat or other ways to auto-succeed the rolls for higher level spells.

**Dispel Magic (Abjuration):** Ditto above except spell after the fact instead of midstream.

**Enemies Abound (Enchantment):** Basically a kind of single-target confusion spell. Int save makes it potentially worthwhile, although the confusion effect is a bit unreliable. Better if there are more enemy combatants than allies, pretty much useless when fighting a single opponent.

**Erupting Earth (Transmutation):** A decent option that scales pretty well, although there are so many good higher level spells I'm not sure how much an issue scaling necessarily is. Smaller effect and less damage than the "big two" (fireball and lightning bolt) of this level, but creates difficult terrain. And look, I rated an "Earth" spell pretty positively.

**Fear (Necromancy):** Fear is a great non-damage spell for this level. Wisdom is a tough save, and there's no save end so long as you're still in sight. This is a great backup for situations where your main damage spells won't work well (like underwater). Also great for crowd control, should you need it, when you want to move targets but not kill them. Good to add some fluff as to what frightens your target. Shout "President Palin!" and watch your foes scatter before you!

**Feign Death (Necromancy, Ritual):** Probably every now and again, particularly if you're playing a political game, you might find some use for this. But mainly it's a poor pick among so many other, better, options.

**A Word on Fireball v Lightning Bolt.** Fireball and Lightning Bolt are the two iconic damage spells at level 3, probably the most iconic damage spells in the game, really. Thus, both see considerably ramped up damage against lower level spells and even scale fairly well into subsequent levels. But they're not exactly the same...and you probably don't need both. So which is better? Lightning Bolt has the advantage of being lightning, a better damage source than fire. But here's where area of effect issues really come into play. Aganazzar's Scorching could hold its own against Shatter, because the tactical advantage of a 10' radius sphere over a 30' line isn't overwhelming. In some cases a 30' line might actually have more precision and be easier to place. But Lightning Bolt has a...cough, blink, blink...100' line. Unless you're hoping to take out a parade, you're going to have a lot of wasted area in that. LB still has better precision than FB (although check with your DM how she/he rules about the LB reacting when it comes up against hard surfaces), but overall you're going to be hitting more targets and placing FB better than LB. This is the point where line spells really start to show their weaknesses. Older editions gave LB some flexibility, such as allowing you to shorten the distance to fatten the bolt (I seem to remember a 20x40 option from one of the editions)...that flexibility made LB really good (better maybe than fireball!)...unfortunately that's no longer an option in 5e. So LB is still a good spell, don't get me wrong...if you can come across an easy pickup of this spell I'd say grab it...but FB is the clear winner of this competition.

**Fireball (Evocation):** Unless you are going hardcore down some other school build you're going to grab this, let's just admit that now and be done with it. For most of you, it's the reason you're playing a wizard.

**Flame Arrow (Transmutation):** Some version of this spell has been around since 1e and it has always sucked, without fail.

**Fly (Transmutation):** Fly is a great spell with lots of utility. Concentration weakens it a bit, but this should still be high on your list.

**Gaseous Form (Transmutation):** Good escape spell or way to get quietly through keyholes and cracks. Not a must have, but worth picking up if you can.

**Glyph of Warding (Abjuration):** Another spell where the absence of a ritual tag must be a typo. The spell glyph option actually gives this some neat flexibility to be creative with beyond the usual blowing up book (scroll "I cast glyph of warding today. Haha." Boom!...yeah, funny, no one has thought of that one before). 200gp cost per cast makes this prohibitive at low levels though.

**Haste (Transmutation):** Eh, ok so I'm a bit down on haste, not because it doesn't have it's value...it does...it just doesn't have much value for you unless you're a

bladesinger or other gish type in which case it becomes quite **good**. It's also a spell that feels right to keep in the level 3 slot once you've moved most of your damage doing to higher levels. But when you're first getting level 3 spells...I dunno, using one of your top slot spells to make someone else look good? It's a playstyle thing, but that sounds like you wanted to play a bard or cleric. So I'm rating this one lower.

**Hypnotic Pattern (Illusion)**: The Illusion school's fireball. Wis save is great, and no save ends. But concentration, and critters immune to illusions and charm weaken this a bit.

**Leomund's Tiny Hut (Evocation, Ritual)**: Great ritual to pick up for this level. Basically creates a big magic tent that's impervious for 8 hours. Sure, the critters can pile up outside the tent and wait, but at least you'll be rested up!

**Life Transference (Necromancy)**: Nonononononono. Take damage and heal an ally?...4d8 damage?...nonononononono.

**Lightning Bolt (Evocation)**: Ah, poor lightning bolt...there will always be 6th edition! Can't quite contend with FB, but if you can grab this, why not...decent backup for when fire won't do. That's really the main benefit (and I've been there!)

**Magic Circle (Abjuration)**: One minute cast time, stationary location and 100gp per cast cost make this situational. Not bad if you have a place for this, but takes a lot of planning to get good use of this.

**Major Image (Illusion)**: Illusionists are probably salivating over this, but until illusory reality kicks in, the fact objects travel through the illusion seems like a major weakness.

**Melf's Minute Meteors (Evocation)**: Bonus action to get 4d6 damage each round after the first (6 meteors total). The possibility to use this as a bonus action makes it worthwhile. Best if you can cast this in preparation for combat but...concentration.

**Nondetection (Abjuration)**: Hide a person or small place from divination magic. Good for games with intrigue. Another would-have-been-better-as-a-ritual spell though.

**Phantom Steed (Illusion, Ritual)**: A horse is a horse, of course of course, unless it's, well, this. Just buy a horse. At least this is a ritual.

**Protection from Energy (Abjuration)**: With absorb elements in play, at a 1st level slot, the need for this is reduced. Plus, concentration. Situationally useful if you are expecting to sustain continuous attacks from a single energy source. in which case it outranks absorb elements.

**Remove Curse (Abjuration)**: Not glaringly essential, but a decent pickup to have just in case. You'll probably never actually prepare it, so it's kind of too bad



it's not a ritual. But when someone has turned the rogue's head into that of a donkey (he/she probably deserved it) and the cleric's on vacation, all eyes will be on you.

**Sending (Evocation):** I know I'm getting repetitive, but *why is this not a ritual?* This is basically message, across any distance. You won't prepare this in advance, which means you'll have to wait a day whenever this becomes necessary.

**Sleet Storm (Conjuration):** Basically you summon forth a slice of Seattle for a bit. It was probably spells like this that convinced the 4e designers that it would be just fine to make wizards all battlefield control, all the time. This is all control, with the prone effect in a pretty generous radius, granted, but party unfriendly and concentration.

**Slow (Transmutation):** Would be better without the save ends. This would have been a decent 2nd level control spell, but has trouble competing at 3rd level.

**Stinking Cloud (Conjuration):** Eh, release a big fart on the battlefield. I don't see any good reason to take this while Hypnotic pattern is an option. Con save, poison effect and save ends all make this a far weaker option.

**Summon Lesser Demons (Conjuration):** Hahahahaha. Ok, I like this spell despite some obvious drawbacks and here's why. First, this spell has awesome flavor. But second, despite its drawbacks, when used strategically, it's got good potential for disrupting enemy ranks with little downside to your own group. Ok, here are the negatives for this spell: Basically you summon up a small horde of annoying screaming little gnats of demons that are hostile to everyone including you (kinda feels like you basically summon up a kindergarten class.) That hostility, plus the fact the demons you summon are basically random, are the obvious drawbacks. So you don't want to summon them right in the middle of your front liners' melee as the demons could attack them as often as they attack your original enemies (you're protected from being attacked by a magic circle.) But call them up in your enemies' back row, archers and spellcasters (the demons always attack the nearest non-demons, so even with a 60' range you should be able to place this nicely) and you can disrupt their efforts significantly. The demons are pretty weak, so basically you're having your enemies battle each other for a few rounds (demons vs. original enemies) then you mop up whatever tattered remains are left. If it's between this and fireball, take fireball, but this is an interesting backup option.

**Thunder Step (Conjuration):** Basically a souped-up Misty Step with better range and you do damage when you abscond. However it's an action instead of a bonus and you really need to let your enemies have gathered within 10' of you to get the damage effect. Probably a better option for a gish build or bladesinger

when you need to get out of a tight spot than anything regular wizards should take.

**Tidal Wave (Conjuration):** You're trading some of the damage of fireball here for non-fire damage and knocked prone. It's not a terrible trade, honestly. The spell doesn't say anything about scaling which is odd, but eh...just get a higher level damage spell.

**Tiny Servant (Transmutation):** My god, how lazy can you get? You can animate some stupid object like a tea kettle to do errands for you like stack books, fetch things or stand guard. It does have blindsight which makes it a pretty good guard, but...eh...you've got better uses for the 3rd level slot.

**Tongues (Divination):** Meh, stuff like this is what tended to get people bored with the divination school (hence, portent to the rescue). Usually there are creative and fun ways to communicate with other critters besides this. Rarely is language worth burning a 3rd level spell on and since it's not a ritual, you often won't have it prepared when it would come in handy.

**Vampiric Touch (Necromancy):** For all the great flavor of the school, necromancy has always struggled to keep up with evocation with respect to being useful in combat. Be less helpful than the evoker, but be less helpful in a creepy way! Regular mages will want to avoid this like the plague...melee attack, weak damage that scales poorly and concentration. Maybe better for gishes and bladesingers (hence I gave it black), but even for them not a choice that blows me away.

**Wall of Sand (Evocation):** Ok, here come the wall spells, but we're off to disappointment. Blocking line of sight has it's uses, but without blocking movement it's a pretty weak option.

**Wall of Water (Evocation):** As with wall of sand, just doesn't feel like you quite get enough bang for buck here. Combine with wall of sand to make instant beach. The good wall spells begin to come soon...

**Water Breathing (Transmutation, Ritual):** So water breathing is obviously situational, but it's also curiously broken. It's a ritual, doesn't cost anything and lasts for 24 hours, not interfering with normal breathing. There's no good reason not to just cast this each morning before you start your day...

**4th Level Spells:** So once you're at 3rd level spells and beyond, things just get better and better. The spells now all, to differing degrees, feel like you're doing something special and useful. The 4th spell level in particular just seems amaaaaazing (jazz hands!) 4th level doesn't quite have a stand out spell like Fireball, it's more that there are so many solid picks at this level it's difficult to choose between them. One other thought at this point. Once you've played a wizard to the point you're looking at 4th level spells, you might want to keep an eye on the long



game. As you level, spells get more powerful but at the top, you also get fewer of them. Which means you still may be depending on some of those 3rd and 4th level slots for some combat firepower. So you'll want to be looking for good options that stay useful in those slots such as Fear and Hypnotic Pattern. 4th level has several excellent options for single-target take outs, while also having decent damage options as well. 4th level is around that cut-off where the damage spells may even retain some basic utility for when you're looking to take out some mooks. 4th level also has one of the single best spells in the game for it's level...Polymorph. This is one reason why multiclassing is difficult for wizards still...why would you want to put off 4th level spells? Or 5th...or 6th...

**Arcane Eye (Divination):** So right off the bat we start with an absurdly good divination spell. This is basically 1 hour of free battlefield/dungeon reconnaissance with darkvision. Can travel any distance. Great spell, particularly for diviners who can cast it, then recover a lower level spell.

**Banishment (Abjuration):** Banishment and polymorph vie for the best single-target shut down spell at this level. Polymorph is the overall better spell with considerable flexibility in use. But banishment, targeting cha saves and the potential to kick out extra planar bad guys for good (rather than temporarily take them out of combat) probably wins for this purpose. An excellent spell that stays useful in the 4th level slot, but scales well also, with one extra target for each spell level. Even better if you can cause save auto-fails.

**Blight (Necromancy):** I would have liked the tradition of necromancy more if it had focused on this kinda stuff. Works great with grim harvest, so a nice spell for necromancers. Damage is good but single target and con save. Really good on plants. Pretty awesome if you're playing some kind of Against the Evil Garden adventure or something...

**Charm Monster (Enchantment):** Not useful for combat (critter gets advantage on the wis save if you're fighting) but possibly helpful if you're trying to avoid a specific combat. Probably situationally useful if you know you're going to parlay with a single critter you'd rather just move past than fight (but it's going to be pissed, presumably, once the charm wears off.)

**Confusion (Enchantment):** Ok, even 4th spell level has lemons and this is one of them. Not great economy compared to the 3rd level spell Hypnotic Pattern.

**Conjure Minor Elementals (Conjuration):** If you're leaning toward the conjuration school, this is what you're waiting for. DM technically gets to pick what kind of elementals you get, although this won't usually be a big deal unless he/she is a total fucktard and gives you rock elementals when you're fighting paper golems instead of the scissor elementals you wanted.

**Control Water (Transmutation):** So you want to play Moses? Pretty situational unless you're playing a water-based campaign. Too many good choice here otherwise.

**Dimension Door (Conjuration):** Short range teleport. Situationally useful, but requiring an action hurts. Just use Misty Step for most situations.

**Elemental Bane (Transmutation):** Possibly quite useful for the right build, particularly if you focus on a single damage type. Avoids resistance and extra damage. Not bad.

**Evard's Black Tentacles (Conjuration):** Decent battlefield control spell. Damage is low, but the restrained condition with auto-damage is nice.

**Fabricate (Transmutation):** Make a bridge from a bunch of sticks or whatever. Situationally useful, but eh...not for 4th level. Besides, you still need the raw materials handy.

**Greater Invisibility (Illusion):** Invisibility that doesn't end when you attack or cast a spell? Amazing. Much shorter duration than the 2nd level invisibility spell, so you still may want both.

**Hallucinatory Terrain (Illusion):** Just what it sounds like. Has its uses, but pretty situational overall.

**Ice Storm (Evocation):** After the wow factor of Fireball, Ice Storm at 4th level feels a bit disappointing, as damage is kind of low compared to a fireball cast at 4th level. But it's cold and bludgeoning, causes difficult terrain, hits fliers, and has better range, so it definitely has its uses.

**Leomund's Secret Chest (Conjuration):** Presumably this is where you'd want to stick your spellbook for safekeeping. The expense is rather prohibitive but the bigger problem is having to carry a smaller replica chest. Odds are good that any situation that would cause you to lose your spellbook will also cause you to lose the replica chest...which means you still lose your spellbook AND that expensive frigging real chest. Just make copies of your spellbook.

**Locate Creature (Divination):** Probably a bit situational, but useful nonetheless.

**Mordenkainen's Faithful Hound (Abjuration):** Basically the alarm spell, just with a watchdog. Absence of this being a ritual gets it a lower rating, otherwise this simply would have replaced alarm entirely.

**Mordenkainen's Private Sanctum (Abjuration):** Upgrades the 3rd level tiny hut. In most circumstances the tiny hut probably works fine though.

**Otiluke's Resilient Sphere (Evocation):** 4th level has a lot of options for taking critters out of combat for a minute. Since most combats won't last that long, it's effectively a save or die. Dex save isn't bad, but considering the other options attack charisma or wisdom, this is the weakest of the three main options (the other

two being banishment and polymorph). With a 30' range it also has the worst range of the three.

**Phantasmal Killer (Illusion):** Frightened with ongoing 4d10 damage with concentration and further failed saves. It's ok, but feels like there are better options at this level.

**Polymorph (Transmutation):** Polymorph is another one of those spells that, for it's level, is one of the best spells of the game. A lot of this has to do with the enormous flexibility of this spell. Here are a few thoughts. First, polymorph obviously has enormous utility...need to fly, burrow, swim, have tremorsense, whatever? This is your catch all spell. Second, yes you can turn into a T-rex (at 8th level, but even giant apes aren't bad at level 7) and wade into combat yourself. Since you'll have the con saves of a T-rex (or whatever) this may not be entirely unviable an option. Although do watch out...lose that con save and you'll be just some dumb wizard stuck on the front line. The free hit point aspect of polymorph is amazing though. Lastly, polymorph is the third and last of this level's single target, effectively save-or-die spells (the others being banishment and Otiluke's Freezing Sphere). It's not literally save-or-die, but being able to turn an enemy into a sheep for a minute while you kill its comrades pretty much accomplishes the same thing. Even more amazing if you can auto-fail saves. The incredible flexibility in use of this spell gets it the top rating. The utility and save-or-die aspects of the spell remain useful in the 4th level slot across your career.

**Sickening Radiance (Evocation):** I actually really like this spell and have used it and find it pretty effective. The flavor of it...radiance that's awful...also is pretty cool and counterintuitive. Although an evocation spell, the real comparison here is to Evard's Black Tentacles, which has the same basic function of battlefield denial. Sickening radiance has better range and AoE, and does...well, obviously...radiant damage. Sickening radiance also does considerably more damage. Both require concentration and have a save or nothing effect. Evard's secondary effect of restraining is, admittedly, difficult to beat. The exhaustion effect for Sickening Radiance can't beat that (most critters won't be dumb enough to stay in it to go beyond the first level of exhaustion). However, two other things recommend Sickening Radiance. First, it goes around corners, making it great for flushing out defenders. Second, the anti-invisibility effect is pretty awesome for singling out invisible and stealthed opponents. If you've got some way to alter the save to something other than con (like the loremaster's ability), this spell arguably becomes gold.

**Stone Shape (Transmutation):** Kind of situational, but useful nonetheless.

**Stoneskin (Abjuration):** I have vague memories of this spell being outright broken in 2e, but maybe people were abusing it. Lots of craziness about being immune to

a certain number of hits, then enemies retaliating by tossing handfuls of pebbles at the caster (technically hitting them multiple times.) Looking back I suspect we were all just idiots. This version is reasonable, but still useful aside from the expensive casting cost and concentration.

**Storm Sphere (Evocation):** This is basically Melf's Minute Meteors with a little battlefield denial added in. It's not bad but there are definitely better options this level.

**Summon Greater Demon (Conjuration):** This spell basically fixes the problems of Summon Lesser Demon. For an hour you get an admittedly pretty annoyed demon minion who has to follow your commands. The demon gets charisma saves to break free of your control (so pick a demon with lousy charisma saves like the barlgura and make sure it tells you its true name straightaway, which gives it disadvantage on the saves.) No, you can't summon a Balor with this thing, even at higher levels slots, but the demons are actually not unreasonable. Basically, it's like adding an extra party member.

**Vitriolic Sphere (Evocation):** Probably the 4th level damage spell that best keeps pace with a fireball cast at the same level, but with acid damage and better scaling. Good spell if you want to grab a damage spell this level.

**Wall of Fire (Evocation):** Now the wall spells begin to show their worth. This is a great spell for combining decent damage with battlefield control. Some of the later wall spells get better on the control side, granted, but this is a fantastic spell for this level.

**Watery Sphere (Conjuration):** Mobile ball of restraining. Not bad but better picks this level.

**5th Level Spells.** By 5th level spells you're used to getting a lot of great and impressive options and that continues here. 5th level does seem to branch out a bit into some weird spells (like Dream) but overall there's good stuff to pick between here. No "knock it out of the park" options like shield, fireball or polymorph, but overall solid stuff.

**Animate Objects (Transmutation):** Turn the bric-a-brac in your pockets into a horde of killer widgets. Honestly, this is an insanely good spell.

**Bigby's Hand (Evocation):** I like that they combined the Bigby's Hand spells into one. That was a long time coming. Damage from the swat feels a little low, but the bonus action and flexibility in what it can do makes it worth looking at. Damage actually scales nicely.

**Cloudkill (Conjuration):** Rolling patch of yuk. Damage is ok, but more battlefield denial than anything. It's ok, but better options this level.

**Cone of Cold (Evocation):** Con save may be a bit of a disappointment here, but good damage, good area of effect and cold. Plus you can smash the bodies of your victims to frozen pieces if you like. What's not cool about that?

**Conjure Elementals (Conjuration):** Whip up some decent size elementals. You have to conjure them up out of handy elements (bonfires, ponds, etc) which could limit your choices particularly on the fire/water elemental side of things. Biggest limitation of this spell is losing concentration which results in some pissed off elementals on hand...

**Contact Other Plane (Divination, Ritual):** Drop a dime on a demigod. The whole DC 15 int save not to go insane is rather a bummer, but not end of the world (the insanity thing wears off after a long rest). Get one word answers to five questions. Kind of like magic eight ball only the answers presumably aren't random. Usefulness probably depends on how much your DM enjoys messing with you.

**Control Winds (Transmutation):** Some decent effects, but a bit situational perhaps. Being able to take down fliers with this could be cool.

**Creation (Illusion):** Make temporary stuff. Eh, just buy it by this level. Cheapskate.

**Dance Macabre (Necromancy):** Pretty good way to create some undead cannon fodder, though mainly best for necromancers who can take full advantage of this.

**Dawn (Evocation):** Ultimately a weak spell for 5th level. Good for dispelling darkness, but weak damage and con save make it a weak damage-doing option for 5th level, despite use of radiant damage. The ability to move it as a bonus action is kind of cool, but mostly makes the spell an annoyance. It only does damage if critters are dumb enough to stay in the circle of radiance until the end of their turn.

**Dominate Person (Enchantment):** Dominate is an awesome condition to toss onto one of the bad guys. Concentration but no save ends unless the dominated party takes damage from any source (which, granted may happen once it turns on its comrades).

**Dream (Illusion):** This spell has some great fluff. Probably a bit situational in useage. The nightmare function is an interesting denial of long rests if you know you have a particular enemy you're going up against.

**Enervation (Necromancy):** Oh, this is such a worse deal than just casting fireball in so many ways. Poor school of necromancy really needs some good, eerie, damage spells, but this is not it. Lousy range, lousy damage, lousy damage on the save (2d8!), eats up your concentration AND your action each turn. It would take you 2 turns of this, ignoring the concentration and spent action issues, just to

roughly equal the damage done by casting fireball or lightning bolt as a 5th level spell. And this is \*single target\*. Hard pass. Poor necromancy.

**Far Step (Conjuration):** Misty step is a great spell. Efforts to improve it at higher levels are less impressive. Bonus action to travel 60 feet and can be repeated each turn with concentration. Eating up concentration hurts this and 5th level spell slots are precious. Better just to burn through 2nd level slots as needed with misty step.

**Geas (Enchantment):** Long duration charm, where a creature is set upon some course of action. The 1 minute casting time is the major limitation, so you'll need to figure out some way to set this up. A little of the language about the 5d10 psychic damage for going off course is a little unclear (how would they even be able to if they are charmed?)

**Hold Monster (Enchantment):** Single target with concentration and save ends oddly enough feels a little weak up here at 5th level, but it's still not a bad option.

**Immolation (Evocation):** Surprisingly weak pick for this level. Damage is weak and save ends, and eats up your concentration. Perhaps some nice fluff to set something on fire, but there are far better aoe options by this level.

**Infernal Calling (Conjuration):** This is an oddly bad spell for something that should have improved on Summon Greater Demon which is actually a rather good 4th level spell. The CR of the summoned critter isn't better than just bumping Summon Greater Demon up a level. But your control over it is much, much worse. Gets a lot better if you have the devil's talisman, but it's not like they have blue light specials on those at the local Adventurer's Mart.

**Legend Lore (Divination):** Should be a ritual and rather expensive for what you get from it. Seems like mainly a backup for poor history or arcana checks. There are moments when something like this could be situationally useful though. Mainly just don't let your library card run out.

**Mislead (Illusion):** A bit situational but potentially useful, particularly if you're making a ransom drop and expect the cops to swarm you. You get the idea.

**Modify Memory (Enchantment):** Too bad creatures in combat get advantage on the save otherwise, aside from the lousy range, it would be better than hold monster for dropping a creature out of combat. No save ends condition, but because of that advantage thing it's a better social than combat spell. The stuff about changing its memory is a bit situational but also rather cool. Depending on the game you're playing, you'll know how useful this is to you.

**Negative Energy Flood (Necromancy):** Still REALLY rooting for necromancy here. Sadly, single target spell, can save with "meh" damage for this level. If you manage to kill the target it comes back as a zombie, but a.) so what, and b.) you probably won't kill the target anyway.

**Passwall (Transmutation):** This seems like it could be super useful but I've yet to see a situation where this spell saved the day. It being a game, even the most diabolical dungeons are typically designed with outs for the group.

**Planar Binding (Abjuration):** Eeeehhhh...yeah, there's a lot of potential here to create more problems than you solve with this, so you better know what you're doing. Most critters aren't going to be hunky-dorey that you bound them so expect hostility. Still, in the right situation, this could be pretty cool...

**Rary's Telepathic Bond (Divination, Ritual):** This gets sky blue because it's a ritual. I may be forgetting my history, but I seem to recall that in WWII the Germans on the Eastern front always had higher kill ratios for their tanks because the Russians, despite having the excellent T-34, had poorer functioning communication equipment. So good coms make for good tactics. One hour duration and no max distance make this a decent ritual to cast when you can prior to a planned combat operation.

**Scrying (Divination):** Expensive focus, but if you can afford it a pretty useful spell overall. Keep in mind BBEGs by this level probably have means to try to detect scrying (detect invisibility is all that's technically required).

**Seeming (Illusion):** Mass disguise self that can be hostile (with cha save). Probably the big use here is the sow confusion in mass combats.

**Skill Empowerment (Transmutation):** Sometimes you have to wonder who assigns spell levels to spells. This actually isn't a bad idea for a spell, but 5th level?!! Would be awesome at 2nd level, and pretty good at 3rd, but that's as high as I'd go.

**Steal Wind Strike (Conjuration):** This is a neat idea for a spell, and one of the few party friendly multi-target spells. Damage is ok, not stellar, but force damage, the ability to pinpoint the attacks and the teleport rider all make it an interesting option. That last bit suggests it's probably better for bladesingers or other gishes (you need to teleport next to one of the targets of the spell). So keep that in mind. You don't want to be a squish teleporting next to an irritated balor.

**Synaptic Static (Enchantment):** I like the idea of an enchantment damage spell. If it didn't do the same exact damage as a level 3 fireball, I'd like it more. That said, it targets int saves, does psychic damage and has a nifty rider in reductions to attack rolls, ability checks and con checks to maintain concentration. Overall, worth considering.

**Telekinesis (Transmutation):** Mage hand on steroids. I tend to give extra props for multiple use spells and this spell definitely could see a lot of flexibility. Some pretty clear utility here, but also combat potential in moving enemies around with the restrained condition. Checks for combat use are your spellcasting check (Int) v str.



**Teleportation Circle (Conjuration):** Get back home quick. Useful for returning to home base in a hurry. Not a general teleport anywhere you want to go spell. Yet another spell I think should be a ritual.

**Transmute Rock (Transmutation):** Good battlefield control spell with some flexibility in use. Make rock mud, make mud rock. Pretty straightforward stuff.

**Wall of Force (Evocation):** My god this is a good spell. Use the dome to remove multiple combatants from combat with no save, or use the wall the just cut a combat in two. Awesome force denial for your opponents. Mike Mearls has apparently ruled that spells don't pass through the wall, and dispel magic doesn't dispel it. That's absurdly good. The only hitch is the concentration and if your enemies are smart and know what you did, you'll become a magnet for attacks from those on your side of the wall to bring that wall down.

**Wall of Light (Evocation):** This is another of those spells I really wanted to like, but just can't. It's not really a wall spell, just blocks line of sight, not critters walking through it (without taking damage so long as it doesn't end it's turn within the wall). Damage is lousy for this level and, as an action, you can keep doing lousy damage on subsequent rounds while maintaining concentration.

**Wall of Stone (Evocation):** This poor spell has to compete with Wall of Force at the same level. But it's not a bad spell. In fact it's more flexible than Wall of Force in some respects. Make yourself a temporary castle with battlements or a bridge if you need it, etc. That's all stuff Wall of Force won't do. But for sheer battlefield control Wall of Force takes the cake.

**6th Level Spells.** By about the 6th spell level, you've really entered a new tier of spells once again. Half casters don't get access to these spells ever. There are some real dominating choices here. At this point too you're going to have some interesting options like Contingency that will let you scheme out some clever ideas.

**Arcane Gate (Conjuration):** Decent movement spell, particularly if you can set it up in advance. Still, with the competition at this level it feels a bit weak. Had it been a bonus action like Misty Step it would have rocked.

**Chain Lightning (Evocation):** This is a great spell. Decent damage, and party friendly (a rarity), with a decent damage type. You could do worse.

**Circle of Death (Necromancy):** This spell is decent if you need to take down a huge group of low level noobs. Essentially it's for use against armies. It's area of effect is massive although that may make it unwieldy and damage is low compared to other spells by this level (the same as a 3rd level fireball).

**Contingency (Evocation):** Not sure why this is evocation and not divination but whatever. Set up a 5th level spell to be cast on yourself under some set of preconditions. It's expensive requiring a Donald Trump worthy ego-stroke

1500gp statuette of yourself, but at least it's not consumed by the spell. I'd hide that somewhere before you bring a date over, though. You need a down day to set all this up, but it's worth doing.

**Create Homunculus (Transmutation):** If you know you want a homunculus then you know why you want it. Otherwise this is a waste of 1000gp and a level 6 slot. I guess they're sort of cool in a mustache twirling sort of way, but really, do you need one of these? No, you do not.

**Create Undead (Necromancy):** People dedicated to playing necromancers will make this work for them. Other casters, just avoid bothering with it.

**Disintegrate (Transmutation):** This is your killer single target damage spell. If you have a way of auto-failing saves this becomes solid gold.

**Drawmij's Instant Summons (Conjuration, Ritual):** Ehhh...you know you're a high level PC when you're smashing 1000gp sapphires in order to figure out where you put your wallet. This will have some situational uses, but it's expensive and I don't see it as being great protection for your spellbook.

**Eyebite (Illusion):** Concentration to make single target disable attacks each round, choose between sleep, fear and sickened. Eh.

**Flesh to Stone (Transmutation):** Ok, so the effect is cool, all medusa right? It's got no effect for a successful save, which hurts for a level 6 spell. And disintegrate feels like it gives more punch under those circumstances...why restrain/petrify when you can kill outright? And because of the weird 3 save thing, it's harder to auto-fail an opponent with this. So, overall, I'd say it's a weaker option than disintegrate to try to get you, more or less, to the same point.

**Globe of Invulnerability (Abjuration):** Pretty useful, overall, even better if you can fire it up in anticipation before combat begins. Nice that it works even for spells bumped into higher spell slots, and it scales well.

**Guards and Wards (Abjuration):** I think some version of this spell has been around since maybe 2e? I have yet to see anyone ever actually cast it.

**Investiture of Flame (Transmutation):** I remember back in the late days of 3e some pretty cool all-day abjuration spells got introduced for wizards. They kind of sucked up slots but they were worth it. Unfortunate these investiture spells are not quite like that. I miss those old spells. This one might be ok for a gish build, but eh. Situationally useful if in a fire zone.

**Investiture of Ice (Transmutation):** All the investiture spells have the same limitation, namely situational to environments where you really need the immunity.

**Investiture of Stone (Transmutation):** The resistance to weapon damage might make this ok for bladesingers which is why I'm rating it a bit higher

**Investiture of Wind (Transmutation):** Fly plus some other stuff. Eh. Ok, disadvantage on ranged attacks against you is nice, but still feels “eh” for a 6th level spell.

**Magic Jar (Necromancy):** A spell isn’t really a 6th level spell unless you have to read the description seven times to figure out what it actually does, right? Well here’s the spell for you. If you really just HAVE to be a particular other person, this is the spell for that. But it feels rather complicated and sketchy to be terribly useful.

**Mass Suggestion (Enchantment):** Suggestion x 12. Why not?

**Mental Prison (Illusion):** Other than the psychic damage, this spell mainly accomplishes what banishment did two spell levels ago. Intelligence save, and that damage on a successful save moves it into the acceptable range.

**Move Earth (Transmutation):** No big mystery here. Basically a backhoe spell. Want lots of dirt that’s one place to be someplace else? Bingo. Or you could just hire a crew. Someone, somewhere has figured out a brilliant use of this spell. I just don’t know what it is.

**Otiluke’s Freezing Sphere (Evocation):** Damage is ok, but massive area of effect and good range. This does mesh well with Time Stop at level 9 though for setting up some interesting nova rounds (Time Stop only ends when you cast a spell affecting another creature...with OFS, you can cast it but restrain it, put the little ball down where you want it and walk away.)

**Otto’s Irresistible Dance (Enchantment):** Dance, dance, dance the night away! This is a fantastic enchantment spell, with no immediate save. Target has to spend an action to even attempt a save. Great fluff too.

**Programmed Illusion (Illusion):** This is pretty much what it sounds like. Create a kind of illusory play that pops into being under circumstances you set. Last indefinitely (that is to say, it lasts for a certain time, disappears and can be reactivated). Feels situational and underpowered for this level.

**Scatter (Conjuration):** Mildly inconvenient some of your foes for a level 6 slot? Eeehhhhh....ok, you can move them up to 120 feet which, admittedly means they may need to take 2 rounds to get back to you at full steam. Still, I’m not seeing this as great. Can be used on the party themselves as an escape perhaps, which is a better use.

**Soul Cage (Necromancy):** Jesus, ok, well this is an interesting option. Grab the soul of something as it dies then get 6 tries to manipulate it in various ways. Really useful as an interrogation agent but once you’re done with that you’ll probably hang onto it to squeeze healing out of it. Overall, not a bad spell.

**Sunbeam (Evocation):** Overall, I rather like sunbeam. Were this a single round effect it would be kind of “eh.” The damage isn’t huge, but a 60’ line means

you'll probably get some decent AoE out of this. But the radiant damage and blinding effect are both nice. What pops this into the light blue for me is being able to repeat this attack round after round...that's kind of like having a super potent firebolt for a whole combat. Decent spell slot economy on this one.

**Tenser's Transformation (Transmutation, what else?):** I seem to remember this was a much-hated spell in previous editions because it allowed the wizard to steal the fighter's thunder. It still kinda does, but melee types are now much more well-rounded so it's not as bad in that sense. Casting this deprives you of the ability to cast spells, but makes you really good (advantage, 2 attacks a round, extra force damage) at thumping things. But, of course, you should already have party members who thump things, so the question really is why you want to cast this spell in the first place?

**True Seeing (Divination):** I feel like I'm going nuts on the light blue this level, but this is a good pick. A bit situational perhaps, but see through all the DM's naughty tricks!

**Wall of Ice (Evocation):** It feels like the wall spells have peaked by this point. For a wall spell, this does pretty good damage so, sure, I guess so? The ability to weave the sections of the wall very specifically means this could be a remarkably precise party-friendly AoE type effect with some battlefield control.

**7th Level.** The big downside to level 7 spells (and level 6 for that matter) is for most of your career you'll only get to cast one a day (2 at level 20). There are some decent downtime picks like Simulacrum, but you'll want to strategize your use of these higher levels spells carefully. Overall, the 7th level options feel a bit weaker for level than 6th level spells.

**Crown of Stars (Evocation):** On the plus side, you cast this, then get bonus action 4d12 attacks. That's...ok...except for how I think of how rare 7th level spells are and somehow this doesn't get up and over the bar for me. Obviously best if you know exactly what hour you'll be wading into combat and can precast it. Otherwise, with your luck, everybody you'll meet will want to talk.

**Delayed Blast Fireball (Evocation):** Ok, so admittedly yet another fireball spell is beginning to feel a bit repetitive by this point. The key to this one is being able to delay it in order to bring it up in damage, but this can be situational. Mixes well with Time Stop, but I suppose at 9th level you might ask why not just Meteor Storm the heck out of the battlefield if you want a nova round.

**Etherealness (Transmutation):** This is obviously a good spell for getting about undetected, 8 hours and no concentration. Scales well to include other folks, although may be painful to use those higher level slots.

**Finger of Death (Necromancy):** I feel like necromancy needed more of this stuff along along. This is a decent spell. Damage is obviously weaker than

disintegrate but half damage on a save. A good option if you can't auto-fail disintegrate saves. If you can, you might want to save the level 7 slot for something else.

**Forcecage (Evocation):** Good force divider. Trap some bad guys and deal with them later.

**Mirage Arcane (Illusion):** Make a square mile of terrain into, basically, any other terrain you want including structures. Like a lot of illusion spells, the utility of this will be directly related to the creativity of the player in using it. Potentially powerful, particularly on a grand scale, but will take some thought into making this work right. For the illusionist players, this probably looks great as it fits in well with that playing style.

**Mordenkainen's Magnificent Mansion (Conjuration):** Another free, safe long-rest spell, this one obviously with a mansion. Would have been better as a ritual...burning your 7th level on this is going to feel painful unless you've got a specific reason for it.

**Mordenkainen's Sword (Evocation):** Bonus action 3d10 attack after the first round (which requires an attack). Eh. For concentration at level 7, this feels weak. Better options out there.

**Plane Shift (Conjuration):** Great spell, especially if planar travel becomes a thing for your campaign. Good for escaping tough spots, good just for getting around. And if you're playing a gish type and can use the offensive option for this, it arguably becomes gold.

**Power Word Pain: (Enchantment):** Same problem as every other "power word" spell with trying to guess how many hit points your target has. What a dumb mechanism for a group of spells.

**Prismatic Spray (Evocation):** A fun little spell with variable effects, some of which are interesting. Damage, overall, is low though compared to other options (although 1 out of 8 targets will get hit twice). It's not bad but still feels like you might have better options at level 7.

**Project Image (Illusion):** Think you're being set up for an ambush...send in an illusion version of yourself as well. Like a lot of illusion spells, I think this will be most popular with illusionist types. With creativity, I could see this having some decent value though.

**Reverse Gravity (Transmutation):** I admit, I prefer damage to control, but as control spells go, this one's a doozy. 50' radius effect and no save for most targets (unless they're near a fixed object they can hold onto, but even that restricts movement). Fall damage once you release it.

**Sequester (Transmutation):** Hide a willing critter away for indefinite amount of time. Very situational, but kind of a cool option to have. It's stuff like this that

people come to wizards for. Don't take this as your daily pick, but to have it in the spellbook? Why not. Probably should have been a ritual like a lot of stuff...

**Simulacrum (Illusion):** Need to be in two places at once? Well here you go.

Make a copy of yourself. This spell is mainly limited by the 12 hour casting time and the cost (1500 gp per). But you can effectively double up your spells per day by having another you. Think of it like a small-scale mirror image with doubled spells. It's not bad if you've got the time to cast it.

**Symbol (Abjuration):** There are clever uses for this since you can cast it in advance of a planned encounter as part of an ambush. The ability to pick between several save abilities makes this particularly potent. But it's going to be situational, so it probably won't be your default daily pick.

**Teleport (Conjuration):** Competing with plane shift at the same level this feels like a weak choice, particularly given the potential for mishaps...

**Whirlwind (Evocation):** This is a good damage option for this level. True, the range is smaller than fireball, and the damage less, but the ability to repeat round after round, and move it gives this a lot of interesting battlefield control as well.

And pulling bad guys up into the whirlwind is going to be fun...

**8th Level.** Ok, let's admit by this point we're really just biding our time until those 9th level spells. Don't get me wrong, there are some good 8th level options, but spells from 6-8th level feel a bit incremental in gain. By contrast, there's a massive jump again at 9th level. The stinginess of spell slots at this point (only 1 eighth level spell a day...EVER!) also is painful. So you'll probably want to focus on a default combat spell, and have options for other non-combat scenarios that might pop up...keeping in mind those would be it for the whole day.

**Abi-Dalzim's Horrid Wilting (Necromancy):** Draw moisture from everything in a 30 foot cube for 10d8 damage. This is ok, again nice to see necromancy getting some damage options.

**Antimagic Field (Abjuration):** There are probably some specific builds that can make use of this, but for most casters this would be very situation. Suppressing magic can be useful, but this also suppresses your own magic and spellcasting. There are probably some situations where this would be brilliant, no doubt...but again, with only one 8th level slot, this doesn't feel like a good choice unless you specifically know in advance you need it.

**Antipathy/Sympathy (Enchantment):** This is a great spell, mainly because you can set it up 10 days in advance. If you know you're about to face a particular creature type you can set up an aura of fear on yourself...or use sympathy to control their movements. This is a potentially awesome control spell, and the ability to set it up in advance, thus preserving that precious 8th level slot for combat, makes this an excellent pick.



**Clone (Necromancy):** Love your PC? Want them to cheat death? Then this is for you. Another excellent out-of-combat spell pick. Make a backup you so you can hit that reset button should you die in a tough combat. Doesn't save your stuff, granted, but still...this is the pick for the beloved PC.

**Control Weather (Transmutation):** Boy could I have used this when I lived in New England. Pretty much what it sounds like. Probably got some interesting effects when used creatively, but situational overall, and not a great pick for this level. Would have make more sense as a level 6 or 7 spell or a ritual.

**Demiplane (Conjuration):** Another out of combat option. This spell seems designed as a kind of trap for critters but, as others have pointed out, combined with plane shift, this is a pretty good repository for all the stuff you don't want to lose...your clone, copy of spellbook, etc...

**Dominate Monster (Enchantment):** Dominate is nice, and you can dominate most anything not immune to charm with this. However, the critter gets a wis save every time it takes damage (not just from your allies) meaning it's effectively going to get a lot of saves. That weakens it as an 8th level pick.

**Feeblemind (Enchantment):** Target takes 4d6 psychic damage and int and cha get reduced to 1. Intelligence save means less useful for wizards than sorcs or bards or warlocks...but if you've got a way to auto-fail, this can hit wizards hard too. A bit situational, though, hence I can't rate it sky blue.

**Illusory Dragon (Illusion):** This is, all around, a pretty good spell. Wis save to avoid frightened condition which lasts until enemies leave line of sight of the dragon (when they get another save.) Bonus action to move the dragon and make it breathe for 7d8 damage. This will also eat up a lot of enemy attacks and requires an Investigation check and an action to disbelieve. Wonderful way to draw a lot of enemy actions and do a bit of damage too!

**Incendiary Cloud (Conjuration):** Same damage as horrid wilting, but smaller area. Nonetheless, the ability to use concentrate to maintain and move it makes it an ok choice for a little battlefield control.

**Maddening Darkness (Evocation):** Huge AoE, with 8d8 continuous damage as a rider. Hard darkness to dispel too, given it's level 8. This, like Circle of Death, is mainly helpful if you want to wipe out an army. For most combats, the party-unfriendly damage and relatively low damage aren't going to be what you need.

**Maze (Conjuration):** Solid battle option. Auto-hits to dismiss a single target, then they need to burn rounds making an int check DC 20 to return. Good way to take a single big bad guy out of a fight to even some odds. Particularly a bad guy who's an idiot.



**Mighty Fortress (Conjuration):** Pretty much what it says on the box: instant fortress, just add a 500gp diamond. If you need one of these, you'll know it I guess. Probably doesn't come up a ton.

**Mind Blank (Abjuration):** Immunity from charm, psychic damage and similar stuff. In the situation where this is useful it's very useful, but they won't come up a lot.

**Power Word Stun (Enchantment):** Maze accomplishes what you'd want to accomplish from this and much better. Those whole thing about hp cut-offs make this hard to use unless the DM tells you how many hps critters have left.

**Sunburst (Evocation):** Yes, yes, take this one as your default combat spell. Good area, good damage type (radiant), damage is 12d6 which is ok, but with blinding too.

**Telepathy (Evocation):** Share thoughts with another critter for 24 hours. Sure, it's a neat effect but for that level 8 slot? Nah. And why is this Evocation?

**9th Level.** This is what you've been waiting for all along. Too bad you only ever get 1 9th level spell slot per day. Which means most days you're going to pick wish, admit it. This spell list almost should have only bothered having 1 spell on it. Ok, if you know some big fighting is ahead Meteor Storm is probably the better pick. And some of the other spells like Shapechange and such are also excellent options. But in most cases, you'll be weighing any other pick at this level against wish. More than any other spell in the game, wish dominates its level. The trick here is balancing flexibility against power. Wish is absurdly flexible...allowing you to use any 8th level or lower spell in the game. But some of the 9th level spells are, naturally, better than anything 8th level or lower. Hence, the level 9 conundrum!

**Astral Projection (Necromancy):** There are probably situations where you want this instead of plane shift, but other casters have access to this so leave it to them.

**Foresight (Divination):** For a bladesinger or other gish character this could be **solid gold**. But for most casters all these advantages for melee combat are a waste. If you're the sort to blow your 9th level spell slot to make another PC amazing, then you're a better person than I.

**Gate (Conjuration):** Ok, I'm probably lacking imagination but I don't see why this is so wonderful. The actual gate just seems like a more accurate plane shift. The ability to pull another critter through the gate seems a bit situational. There are probably some moments where you could use this to trap something, or maybe call upon some other planar ally, but for a typical pick this seems weak compared to other options at this level. Now, had it been a ritual...

**Imprisonment (Abjuration):** Well now we know all the wicked queens from the Disney movies were able to cast 9th level spells. Given that, you'd think they'd lose less. So this spell is basically the "Sleeping Beauty" type trick...it's neat, and could make for good story, but I'm not sure it's the greatest pick for 9th level.

Basically a “save or die” spell (although technically the target isn’t dead.) But by this point, I suspect a lot of big targets will have a decent chance to have good wisdom saves. Granted, this is another spell that benefits nicely from being able to auto-fail saves.

**Invulnerability (Abjuration):** Immune to all damage for 10 minutes, requiring concentration and costing 500gp. Yeah, this is good.

**Mass Polymorph (Transmutation):** By the time you’re casting 9th level spells, polymorph feels a little dated. Being able to do it to 10 folks doesn’t really improve it. OTOH, 10 hostile targets polymorphed into bunnies, with a will save...some of those are going to hit, and you’ll take those out at least some of them. That’s the reason to take this spell.

**Meteor Swarm (Evocation):** By far the game’s most damaging AoE spell (actually, the most damaging spell at all, I think...) Fantastic range and area, and mass damage. Only downside is being party unfriendly of course. But if you’re looking to impress with blasting stuff, this is the good shit...

**Power Word: Kill (Enchantment):** First, why on earth is this enchantment? Second, this is only even remotely useful if your DM lets you know what critters are below 100hps. Most stuff you’ll be facing by the time you grab this will have twice to three times that to start. Granted this is a no-save autokill, but either Imprisonment or Meteor Swarm look like better choices this level to get to the same goal...

**Prismatic Wall (Abjuration):** Great control spell, with mass damage (and interesting effects) for anything that tries to get through it. Can’t be targeted against creatures on casting though and its form is more rigid than some of the other wall spells. Given most critters aren’t going to be dumb enough to go striding through this (unless you can force move them through it somehow) you’ll get nearly all the benefit from a wall of force.

**Psychic Scream (Enchantment):** Alright, so the head exploding thing is pretty cool. Intelligence save or target takes 14d6 and is stunned. 10 targets. This is nice for tactical placement of the attack, but the damage is underwhelming for this level.

**Shapechange (Transmutation):** Want to be a dragon for an hour? Here you go. The big daddy spell of the polymorph chain. Pretty amazing. Become a big ass monster and beat the crap out of stuff until you get reduced to 0 hps...then revert to being a mage again with your regular hps still ready to go...

**Time Stop (Transmutation):** Get 1d4+1 extra turns which can’t be used to target any creatures other than yourself. So you can’t hit 5 blast spells or something while your foes stand around helpless...but...with some strategy you can use this spell to pump up delayed blast fireball or Otiluke’s Freezing Sphere while also

buffing yourself a bit. There are probably times where this comes in handy although, granted, you're better off just casting Meteor Swarm if pumping damage is your goal.

**True Polymorph (Transmutation):** Change a creature into another creature, an object into a creature (mostly useless since this is limited to CR 9) or creature into an object. The main benefit here over shapechange is being able to target other creatures. Unwilling critters get a wis save, so I'm not sure it's a ton better than a variety of other pseudo-save-or-die spells at lower levels. Pretty flexible as an option, overall though.

**Weird (Illusion):** There's a reason it's called 'weird' and not 'useful' I guess. Crowd control isn't a lot better than you'd see from Hypnotic Pattern (a 3rd level spell), just a bit more area of effect and a damage rider on failed saves (which occur each turn). Too weak for 9th level.

**Wish (Conjuration):** The basic function is to emulate any other spell of level 8 or lower...this is particularly amazing as you don't need the components of those spells which can save you a ton in resources even during down time. But this is also great for the flexibility...now you can rez, for instance. The other abilities of this spell come at some considerable risks/costs, so I'd be careful in using them. The big issue for wish comes in that you're looking to balance flexibility versus power. Wish gives you tons and tons of flexibility, but there's a massive jump in power from level 8 spells to level 9...so if you want something truly impressive, you'll be better off with Meteor Swarm or Shapechange.