

MASS EFFECT: THE TABLETOP GAME

(The one [Dagda](#)'s making)

SECTION _ : COMBAT

1: AGGRESSIVE VS. DEFENSIVE

For the most part, these rules are meant to be a direct translation of the combat gameplay seen in the Mass Effect video games, including the central choice at the beating heart of any good "cover shooter": Do I keep on shooting for a few more seconds, or duck back down now?

To represent this, every character is always in 1 of 3 modes during combat: Unready, Aggressive or Defensive. "Unready" has no particular benefits and means going last in combat; characters begin each skirmish in the Unready state unless staging an ambush or similar scenario. "Defensive" triples the benefit you receive from being in cover, significantly reducing your chances of getting hit. "Aggressive" lets you go first each round and is the only mode in which you can attack or use offensive combat powers. *(Many effects can "Stagger" a target during combat; this causes them to become Unready, i.e. briefly interrupts their attack if Aggressive & nudges them partly out of cover if they were Defensive. If the target's already Unready, Stagger Disables them instead.)*

2: TURN ORDER

Combat is divided into rounds, which follow a simple sequence of phases: The round starts, Aggressive characters act, Defensive characters act, Unready characters act, round ends. Turn order within a phase is determined by character's initiative scores, which are static. Tied initiative scores should usually be resolved by letting players go first, GM discretion; when the ties are against an opposed PC or significant NPC enemy, opposed agility checks can be made on a round-by-round basis to determine who gets to act first. *(Most characters' initiative scores will just be their Agility attribute, though some can use other attributes and combat specialists can improve the score via cybernetic augmentation. Attribute checks are always 1d6+attribute.)*

Allied characters can choose to act as a group. This reduces the Initiative of everyone in the group to the lowest score among them, but when the group's collective turn arrives the members may freely choose who among them goes first that phase. Once combat has started, entering or leaving a group costs 1 half action & doesn't take effect till the end of the round. *(Leadership abilities can improve the group's shared initiative score and provide other benefits)*

3: COMBAT ACTIONS

Each round represents approximately 1-2 in-game seconds. You can take 2 actions during your turn, 1 of which can be Major. Sprint, Move, and Evasive Move can all accomplish more than just changing position; 1 meter's worth of movement can be spent to take cover, vault

over a waist-high obstacle, stand up from prone, or perform some other simple interaction with your environment (i.e. pressing a button).

Actions that grant movement do not stack- if you've taken an Evasive Move (3m) and then decide to Sprint (8m), that only grants 5 more meters of movement since you've already spent 3 this turn.

Major Actions:

-Attack: Make an attack against the target of your choice. You must be in Aggressive mode.

-Equip Weapon: You equip a new weapon, and may also holster any current one. *(Grade II combat specialists may equip small arms as a half action)*

-Reload: You eject the thermal clip from your weapon & load a fully cooled one. *(Grade III combat specialists may reload as a half action.)*

-Sprint: You get 8 meters of movement.

-Use Power: Use a combat power. You must be in Aggressive mode to use offensive powers.

Half Actions:

-Aim: You get +3 on your next attack roll this turn.

-Enter/Leave Group: At the end of this round, you leave your current group or join a new one. Your initiative changes accordingly.

-Evasive Move: You get 3 meters of movement, and get +1 to defense until the start of your next turn. If Aggressive, you become Unready.

--Reactive Evasive Move: Whenever someone declares an attack against you and your turn hasn't come yet, you can try to do an Evasive Move as a preemptive action. Make an opposed Agility check vs. the attacker's relevant score (If tech power then Intellect, if biotic power then Focus, otherwise Perception). If your result meets or exceeds theirs, your action resolves first.

-Melee Attack: Make a standard melee attack against an adjacent target of your choice. You must be in Aggressive mode.

-Move: You get 4 meters of movement.

-Recover: When Disabled, this is the only action you can take. In most cases, this automatically removes the Disabled status.

-Switch Mode: Choose Aggressive or Defensive. You enter that mode at the end of this round.

4: ATTACKS AND DEFENSE

To hit an enemy with a ranged attack, you must roll 3d6 and get a result greater than their base defense, which for a normal humanoid target is 8. (For reference, a 3d6 rolls 3-8 a quarter of the time, 9-12 half the time, and 13-18 the remaining quarter). Attacks against concealed targets (due to smoke grenades, cloak, or other methods for baffling senses) only roll 2d6 to hit. Melee attacks roll 2d6+Fitness.

There are plenty of ways to increase how much damage a character can take or dish out, but virtually no upgrades affect whether an attack hits in the first place. The factors that influence that outcome are all tactical:

-Aiming: Spending an action to Aim gives +3 on the attack.

-Distance: Ranged attack rolls have a penalty equal to the distance to the target divided by the weapon's Range, rounding down.

-Evasive Move: Gives +1 to defense until the start of your next turn. *(Done reactively, Evasive Move's real benefit is the 3 meters of movement; you can dive for cover vs. ranged attacks, shift out of melee & area effects, and avoid "homing" powers that would otherwise automatically hit)*

-Cover: Taking cover grants a +2 bonus to defense, or +1 if the cover isn't ideal. Defensive mode triples this bonus, to +6/+3. *(The d20 equivalent would be for cover to give +10 defense when Defensive and +4 otherwise)*

Semiautomatic and automatic weapons have an extra option, **Sustained Fire**. Every time you shoot at a target, make a note of what the die result was & any bonus it got from having aimed (I suggest using a d20). When your major action for the turn is to continue shooting at the same target with the same weapon, you can reuse the last turn's attack result instead of having to make a new roll. This can continue for multiple turns so long as you don't move, reload, or ever completely lose line of sight. Changing targets, weapons, or just not firing for a round all mean you've gotta make a fresh roll instead.

Automatic weapons have an additional pro and con. Each time you attack, their effective Range gets a cumulative -1 Recoil penalty, which lasts until the weapon stops firing for a round. However, they can also continue to Aim while using Sustained Fire, improving the base Attack Value by +3 every turn as they "zero in" on the target.

Sustained Fire can be used regardless of whether you'll hit the target. This means the target protect themselves by increasing their effective defense beyond your saved Attack Value. It also naturally creates the option for suppressive fire, in cases where your attack's not quite high enough to hit THIS round but will be enough if the target switches out of Defensive.

5: DAMAGE

All weapons deal $XdY+A$ damage. "X" is larger for the weapons that fire more bullets, "A" roughly correlates with the weapon's caliber. **Three conditions** you need to know about:

-You can't apply more damage dice than the amount by which your attack exceeds their defense. If you roll 1 higher than the result needed to hit, then you beat their defense by 2 and can roll 2 damage dice.

-The flat Caliber bonus to damage cannot be applied to Shields.

-Dice applied to Armor automatically roll a 1.

Damage from dice doesn't overflow from one defense to the next, but you can apply it in pieces- roll dice 1 at a time until the shields are gone, then apply Caliber damage to the armor before anything else.

While optional, I recommend tracking damage to Shields, Armor and Health using “**Increments**”. One increment = 10% of the relevant score, rounding down; account for the remainder by adding +1 to as many increments as necessary. For example, Joshua’s Krogan has 56 health, so he starts by having each Health increment be worth 5 and then increases the value of the last 6 increments by 1. On his character’s combat reference sheet are 3 rows, which he’s filled out accordingly for all 3 defense meters:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	!
5	10	15	20	26	32	38	44	50	56
3	6	9	12	15	18	21	24	28	32
1	3	5	7	9	11	13	15	17	19

The first time his Krogan is hit during combat, it deals a total of 14 damage to his Shields. So he looks at the shield meter and rounds down to the nearest increment, 13. He puts a token on the blue pip for 13, that’s how much damage his shields have taken right now.

At the end of the round, he moves the token half a pip to the left, i.e. in between the 11 and the 13. His shields are still at 13 damage, this just notes that his shields have begun **priming** to recharge. If he’s taken no further damage at the end of the next round (i.e. his token is still on the left side of the pip), his shields begin to regenerate by the standard amount, **4 increments (40%) per round**- he moves the token to between 3 and 5, representing that his shields are now at 5 damage and are primed for further recharging.

If his shields take a total of 19 damage and are maxed out, he puts the damage token on the far right, halfway off the edge of the last pip- it takes an extra turn for shields to start recharging if they’ve been knocked out completely. Characters whose abilities give Armor or Health regeneration follow the same system: 1 full round without damage before healing starts, 2 full rounds if it was overloaded completely.

6: HAVE SOME GUNS

(This isn’t actually where the gun stats would go, but I’ll throw them in since they’re basically the only other big thing you need to run a basic skirmish. The rest can be ad-hocced. Probably. [Swim.god dammit!](#) And feel free to send any questions, comments, or feedback to [brooks.dagdamor@gmail.com](#), any playtest impressions you can give will be hugely valuable.)

-Weapon: Damage (Average vs. Health/Armor/Shields), Fire Type, Range Increment, # of Attacks before Overheat

Small Arms:

-Pistol: 3d4+6 (13.5/9/7.5) Semi, range 4m, 3 rounds

- Heavy Pistol:** 2d6+10 (17/12/7), Timed, range 5m, 4 rounds
- SMG:** 3d6+3 (13.5/6/10.5), Timed, range 4m, 5 rounds
- Intense SMG:** 4d6 (14/4/14), Auto, range 4m, 3 rounds

Long Arms:

- Sniper:** 1d8+14 (18.5/15/4.5), Timed, range 10m, 1 round
- Fast Sniper:** 2d4+10 (15/12/5), Semi, range 8m, 3 rounds
- Assault Rifle:** 3d4+6 (13.5/9/7.5), Auto, range 6m, 5 rounds
- Burst Assault Rifle:** 2d6+8 (15/10/7), Timed, range 6m, 8 rounds
- Shotgun:** 5d4+5 (17.5/10/12.5), Timed, range 2m, 5 rounds
- Fast Shotgun:** 4d4+4 (14/8/10), Semi, range 2m, 3 rounds